

Coorong National Park *secrets*



Personal Stories Series **Maude Carpenter**

What is your connection with the Coorong?

I used to live at Parnka on the other side of the Coorong - the Hummocks side. I was born here in Meningie at Wadmore House. Mum and Dad shifted to the Coorong in 1934 when Elliot Bascombe had sheep and cattle up there on the Hummocks. Bascombe wanted someone there to make sure there was fresh water for the stock. Dad was there for 17 years all up.

What was school like in those days?

At Parnka we did not have any early schooling. We were supposed to do correspondence school but Mum never went to school so she could not read or write then. Dad was too busy out working and setting traps. One day, when I was about six, the headmaster caught us kids up the street and wondered why we had not sent back our correspondence lessons. We said we had not done them and he told us we better get home and do them.

Later, Mum taught herself to read and write. If you got a letter from Mum, she would underline words she was not sure about. My grandfather had a good education. He went to school somewhere in Adelaide. My great-grandfather had a pub on the old site where Auchendarroch House was later built at Mount Barker.

How did things change for you on the Coorong?

Whenever a house became available in town, Mum would shift us down to Meningie and we would go to school. If the house was sold, we would move back to the Coorong. I think we shifted back and forth about four times. I really liked school but my older brother hated it and did everything he could to get out of it. When Ron Ayres lived with us for a while, he would get up early, make his lunch, set his nets, process some rabbits for selling locally, and then get to school early. However, my elder sister, elder brother and I would tag along the one and a half miles to school and we would get into trouble. The teacher, Mr Murphy, knew Ron was living with us and he would ask 'Why are you three late?' We would say Ron did not have to do anything, but we all had to do the dishes before we could come.

When did your family leave the Coorong?

In 1947 Mum and we kids shifted into a house in Meningie. Dad stayed on the Coorong until about 1949 when Mr Bascombe took his stock off the land. Then Dad visited his brother at Prospect Hill and got a job in a dairy. In 1950 we shifted to Meadows.

What do you remember generally about earlier days on the Coorong?

Being on the Coorong was really good. When stock was down to Parnka there would be two of the Yates men and Jacky Koolmatrie, an Aboriginal man who worked for Mr Bascombe. They would come up on their horses, round up all the stock and take them across near Magrath Flat or Rabbit Island where there is shallow water.

The sheep were taken across on the punt and then walked through to Bascombe's. Ruben Taylor did it until he got too old, then Fred Newson and Allan Macklin.

I cannot remember ever being lonely. We were never inside. We often used to have visitors like the Andrews, the Hayward's and the Ayres. Also, the Mincham's used to come over quite often and go shark fishing. They used to take over a bucket of blood and throw it out to get the sharks.

What was it like working in the area?

For 17 years Dad worked for the Bascombe's - he used to get £6 a month. He also trapped and sold rabbits for a living. When the war was on Dad was told that if we ever saw Japs coming over the sandhills he was to sink the punt and the boat, but I do not know what we were supposed to do.

The big punt at Parnka used to be pulled over by hand - it was only fencing wire. It could carry a car across. Dad would trap rabbits and then take the horse and cart up a couple of miles and gut the rabbits. Then he would put the rabbits in a boat and take them across the water to his car and drive out to the main highway. There a truck would come and pick them up and take them to Meningie.

We used to drive the winter track across to Magrath Flat and a summer track that followed along the Coorong road. The old fellow who owned Magrath Flat decided he did not want Dad using the winter track, so the car would slip and slide along the summer track when it was wet.

What is your favourite place on the Coorong?

Parnka Point is my favourite spot. There was only a big shed when Dad moved there, but he carted timber from across the ocean beach and built on two rooms and a passage. He got the tin for the roof from an old shed that had blown down further up the Coorong. We had kerosene lamps, no power and no ice chest. Dad also made a cubbyhouse and timber fence around the house. In those days, you could collect timber from the beach. People use to say if you had wormwood you would not have snakes but we had wormwood and snakes.

When we lived at Parnka, there was good water and we had two good wells so Mum had a couple of gardens. We also ate rabbits, fish and birds. Mum had cows and made her own butter. In real hot weather, Mum used to put the butter in a bucket and place it in the well to keep cool. I did not like it when Mum would send me to get the butter because a snake often lived in one of the wells.

On a hot day we would open the window and put a record on the old wind-up gramophone. We would usually get through a whole record before you had to wind it up again. Half an hour later we would see a snake outside - they were attracted to the music. Mum or Dad, depending upon who was at home, would shoot the snake.

Are there any other recollections that stand out for you?

When I was about eight years old Mum sent me down on the horse to collect the cows for milking. Dad was coming towards me and started yelling 'Stop! Go back! Go back!' I stopped and waited. He told me, 'Don't go there because its quicksand!'

Another time my Dad went to jump in the boat and he missed and fell into the mud up to his waist. Dad hung on to the boat and Leon Ayres' dad rowed out and dragged him into the boat. Sometimes there was lots of mud at the Parnka Crossing.

One time, Mum had six teal duck's cooking when Dad returned and told her to get rid of them quick because he heard the police were on the way. So we had to sit down and eat them quickly. You were not allowed to take ducks from the sanctuary but people did it to survive.

When I went to Goolwa one time, Mum told me to get some cockles to make soup. I do not know what Mum did, but it was so salty we could not eat it. Our auntie Wynn was one of the best cockle soup cooks in the area.

Another time we had a party because the men were home on leave. My brother and Ron were under the table and helping themselves to the men's beer. The policeman said to Mum, "I think it's time you put those boys to bed".



Produced by Friends of the Coorong with local community support
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