Science Heritage Place/Item: CROMMELIN BIOLOGICAL RESEARCH STATION, PEARL BEACH, NSW (also known as the Crommelin Field Centre or ‘Warrah’)

Images


The Crommelin Biological Research Station (highlighted), Pearl Beach, which is surrounded on three sides by the Brisbane Waters National Park. Image source: Spatial.

History

The Crommelin Biological Research Station (also known as Crommelin Field Station or ‘Warrah’) is a University of Sydney facility located at Pearl Beach north of Sydney.

Between 1906 and 1910, Miss Minard Fannie Crommelin was acting postmistress at Woy Woy on the NSW Central Coast. She fell in love with the area, became an enthusiastic bushwalker, and developed a keen interest in the local flora and fauna.

Despite her subsequent postings to over 200 different towns, it was this district that she retired to in 1935 when she was left a legacy which enabled her to purchase land at Pearl Beach. She built a house for herself and a cottage that was used by bushwalkers.

Miss Crommelin’s interest in wildlife did not cease with her retirement - she fought hard for the preservation of the local ecosystems, wrote innumerable letters to the authorities, and was at one time or another a member of 154 conservation and natural history societies.

In 1947 she gave the cottages and their contents to the University of Sydney for use as a “natural field station for research into and for the promotion of the study and the improvement and preservation of the native flora and protection of the native fauna...”. A valuable book collection formed part of this gift and many of these books are now housed in the rare book section of the University’s library. Crommelin’s will stated “these to be devoted to the purpose of seeing established thereon in perpetuity a biological and natural field station for research into and for the promotion of the study and the improvement and preservation of the native flora and protection of native fauna.” Crommelin remained an occupant until her death in 1972.

Since that time some thousands of biology students have stayed at ‘Warrah’ and studied the animals and plants of the area. For many it has been their first introduction to “the bush”.

At present, the facility is available to employed research workers and educators from the tertiary education system.

* The above is taken from the two Further Reading sources listed below.
Description of Place *

The Crommelin Biological Research Station is located 60 km north of Sydney at Pearl Beach, and provides access to wet and dry sclerophyll forests, sandy beaches, mangrove swamps and intertidal rock platforms. The station, also known as 'Warrah', is sited on three hectares of land, half of which has been left uncleared, and contains a creek. The property is adjacent to National Park.

Accommodation is basic with 25 beds, mainly in four rooms. There is a fully equipped kitchen, a dining room, a small unequipped laboratory area, and a common room which is suitable for discussion sessions. Surrounding the house is a garden of native plants that includes huge angophoras and eucalypts, turpentines, wattles and lillypillys, xanthorrhoea, grevilleas, banksias, orchids and Geraldton waxplants.

* The above is taken from the two Further Reading sources listed below.

Significance

The Crommelin Biological Research Station is also of heritage value as a scientific educational field station for the University of Sydney School of Biological Sciences from 1972. It has strong social value for the local Central Coast community and for generations of biology students and academics.

The Research Station is of heritage significance because of its association with Minard Crommelin who was an amateur ecologist during her long retirement from the mid-1930s to 1972. Crommelin lobbied successive NSW government for improved protection of natural areas and was instrumental in the foundation of the Brisbane Waters National Park in NSW. Her work inspired the founding of the Crommelin Native Arboretum at Pearl Beach in 1976.

The story of the Research Station demonstrates how passionate communities can make an impact on scientific research, even though they hold no tertiary qualifications in the area.

Current Listing

Provisionally listed as a local heritage item in the Draft Central Coast Consolidated Local Environmental Plan 2019.

Further Reading

http://www.crommelin.org/history/Biographies/1881Minard/1881MinardFannie.htm

Author Information

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