

NON-STATUTORY BACKGROUND INFORMATION For JOHN KNIGHT MEMORIAL PARK, BELCONNEN

As of 7 July 2008

IDENTIFICATION OF THE PLACE

- Block 33, Section 65, Belconnen, bounded on the west by Lake Ginninderra, on the north by Townsend Place, on the east by Aikman Drive, and on its southern edge by the footpath running east-west from the underpass at Aikman Drive to the footbridge at Lake Ginninderra.
-

HISTORY OF THE PLACE

The park is associated with the contemporary history of the National Capital and in particular with Belconnen. It was named on Canberra Day 12 March 1982 after the late Senator John Knight (1943-1981) who, as Chairman of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Capital Territory, played a major role in ensuring the preservation of much of the shores of Lake Ginninderra for public recreation.

The park is a central component of Canberra's Y-Plan, developed in the late 1960s/early 1970s, a linear model for city growth with a series of new towns each with its own open space system. The concept for the new town of Belconnen followed adoption of the Y-Plan in 1964 in which four new towns were to be built. As part of the Y-Plan for Canberra's growth the planning and development of Belconnen Town Centre began in the late 1960s, Integral to the planning of the central area of Belconnen was the inclusion in 1967 of a lake (Lake Ginninderra).

The 1968 Belconnen Master Plan provided for two parks adjoining the proposed central lake. One of the parks was to be a town park catering for more active recreation adjacent to the town centre site. Its present location as the Belconnen Town Park was established in 1974, when Lake Ginninderra filled, and when 81.68ha of the surrounding foreshores were designated as open space, the NCDC having proceeded with advanced tree planting (mostly natives) in then grazing land, from the 1960s. In 1981, the park's area was increased to 122ha. The extension of the open space resulted from a Joint Parliamentary Committee Inquiry of 1979 chaired by Senator John Knight.

The park took its present form in the 1980s as a result of a major program of construction arising out of the Parliamentary Joint Committee's considerations about the Lake's foreshores under the leadership of Senator John Knight.

The development of the lake and its foreshores was generally in accordance with the land-use proposals in *Lake Ginninderra – A Landscape Report* prepared in 1974 by consultants Mockridge, Stahle and Mitchell (see Appendix A). Beryl Mann, a respected landscape architect from Melbourne, was a member of the consultant team. In the report the character of the Town Park (John Knight Park) was described as a 'passive recreation space' where the topography had the potential to provide good landscape design potential. Proposals for various topographic zones were:

- Garden of Australian plants with informal pools (northern valley).
- Retention of Eucalyptus grove (from advanced planting) on the central spur.
- Informal parkland of trees with open spaces suitable for fairs etc (southern valley).
- Lakeside beach
- Tree plantings of large scale deciduous trees.

In 1980 the Canberra landscape architecture section of Denton Corker Marshall (DCM) Pty Ltd was appointed to undertake design and supervise construction of the park in a series of stages. The last stage was completed in 1987.

In March 1982 the Town Park was gazetted as the John Knight Memorial Park to commemorate Senator John Knight who died in 1981. It was proposed that a memorial in the park to Senator Knight should be designed and built on a low ridge overlooking the lake. Its intention was to act as a commemorative focus in the park. It consists of a sitting area and pergola over which ornamental vines were planted. A curved stone wall encloses a circular space at the centre of which is a sun dial; the composition is surrounded by groups of fruit and nut trees. A family ceremony for the disposal of Senator Knight's ashes was held on 28 October 1983; these were placed under the base of where the sun dial was fixed. A plaque carries the following inscription:

This park is named in honour of Senator John Knight (1943-1981)

John Knight was elected to the Senate in 1975 when Parliament created two senators for the Australian Capital Territory. In addition to his activities in representing the interests and issues relevant to the residents of the territory, he served with distinction on several Parliamentary and Government Committees.

In his capacity as Chairman of the Joint Committee on the Australian Capital Territory, Senator Knight played a major role in ensuring the preservation of much of these lands on the shores of lake Ginninderra for public recreation.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PLACE

John Knight Memorial Park is the most developed part of the extensive foreshore parklands of Lake Ginninderra adjacent to the Belconnen town centre. This town park for the people of Belconnen is a central green oasis where the lake shore creates a distinctive edge, the whole composition boldly defined by structure planting which skilfully blends Australian native and exotic species.

The park (in memory of Senator John Knight), located in a sheltered embayment of the lake, is a popular family spot with its open grassy areas and planting of groves of trees which house a Fitness Trail and imaginative children's play areas. In the woodland setting the little creek that tumbles and splashes down the slope between large boulders is an obvious favourite with children whilst across the timber bridge is an enchanting small island enclosed with Casuarinas, Paper Barks and gentle earth mounding culminating in a lookout across the lake. There are two particularly interesting trees on the island, Swamp Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) which is a deciduous conifer.

Water has been used in various ways in the park's design. The lakeshore promenade with its island and model boat jetty provides pedestrian and cyclist opportunities for quiet enjoyment at the water's edge. In contrast is the northern valley's lower cascades and waterfalls providing for water play whilst the upper water garden offers a place for quiet contemplation and education.

The central native forest ridge and the southern valley offer views to and across the lake and different park experiences. The former provides opportunities for active recreation with a Woodlands Fitness Trail provided in 1979 by the Rotary Club of Belconnen and an adventure play sculpture; while the latter is the place for large picnic groups.

At the park's centre the memorial to the late Senator Knight comprises a quiet contemplative area overlooking the lake. A sitting area with a pergola for climbing plants has been provided, while a curved stone wall encloses a circular space in which is a large sundial. Groups of fruit and nut trees are planted nearby.

There is no provision for swimming, which is accommodated at the Western Ginninderra Foreshores.

As John Knight Memorial Park matures and the population in its catchment increases, it is becoming more popular particularly at weekends. It has developed into a popular venue for family and large group gatherings. The contemporary design which blends successfully water and vegetation is an appropriate recognition for a person who did so much to achieve an outstanding open space system for Belconnen.

In keeping with the original outline design intent John Knight Park consists of four distinctive zones:

- Southern valley developed as a gently undulating bowl with grassy spaces and large plantings of deciduous trees.
- Island joining onto a lakeside promenade which leads to the timber bridge linking to the town centre.
- Central ridge developed as a Eucalypt forest with the children's play area with timber tree house and snake sculptures
- Northern valley surrounded by native shrubs and ground cover and developed as a water garden and children's water play area designed for active and passive recreation with waterfalls, pools for paddling and wading, water slides, spray jets and bubblers and model boat areas.

REFERENCES

ACT Parks and Conservation Service, *Lake Ginninderra Draft Management Plan*.

Gray, J 1997 *The Historical and Cultural Background of Selected Urban Parks in Canberra*.

Gray, J 1990 *The Management of Lake Ginninderra and its Foreshore Open Space: A Discussion Report*, Internal Report 90/3, ACT Parks and Conservation Service.

<http://parksandplaces.act.gov.au/parkslakesponds/johnknightpark.html>

Mockridge, Stahle and Mitchell 1974 *Lake Ginninderra – A Landscape Report*. Report prepared for NCDC.

NCDC Files:

80/1117/Part 1.

80/1613 Part 1 and Part 2.

83/454.

85/1287/Part 1.

83/454.

Taylor, K, S Marsden, E Martin and C Griffiths 2003 *Beyond FCC: Scoping the Heritage Values of Post-1945 Urban Development in Canberra*; report on behalf of the National Trust of Australia (ACT) for Environment ACT, Heritage Unit.