
Request to be heard?: No

Full Name: Shirley McKenna

Organisation:

Affected property:

Attachment 1: Shirley_McKenna_

Attachment 2:

Attachment 3:

Comments: 25/10/2020 Attention: Inquiry and Planning Committee Dear Minister Wynne, I moved to Glenaladale with my parents in 1932 aged six months. I am now 88 years of age, and Glenaladale has been my home all of that time. If Kalbar Limited builds a mineral sands mine at the fingerboards, as they plan to, my home will be destroyed and I will be forced to leave. I don't see the point of a few short term jobs when so much else will likely be destroyed forever. It is said that when you are young you dress yourself and walk where you want to go, but when you are old, others will carry you where you do not want to go. Kalbar threatens to take me where I do not want to go and show me things I never want to see. I have spent my life on the land and have seen off enough challenges to be left in peace. I don't need the sort of grief Kalbar will cause, no one in Glenaladale does. Please find attached the article that appeared in the Bairnsdale Advertiser Monday 15th April 2018. Regards, Shirley McKenna.

Shirley McKenna is heart and soul Glenaladale

Shirley McKenna (nee Wilson) turns 86 this July and for all but her first four months has lived at the same place – her beloved farm next to Mouton Creek at Glenaladale.

Shirley's father moved his family to the property in November 1932. At the time almost all the landholders at Glenaladale ran mixed farms with sheep, cattle, the occasional pig, some cropping and always a milking cow or two. Shirley recalls there were 500 dairy farms between Glenaladale and Maffra in the early days with a van picking up cream once or twice a week (three times in summer) with the skim milk left behind fed to paddy calves.

Despite the lack of irrigation, most small farmers planted a variety of crops, particularly maize, beans and sugar beet.

She remembers during the World War II 'navy beans' being one of the most important crops. These were a type of haricot bean that doesn't lose its value during processing. The crops were purchased by the American Army.

Shirley has always enjoyed the challenges of farm life. A shrewd and resourceful woman, she grew up knowing the satisfaction and reward of hard work.

Her father was a shearer and worked away for six months of the year leaving Shirley, her mother and her sister, Marjorie, to run the farm.

Like so many other youngsters of the time, the farm income was supplemented by money the girls made from trapping and selling rabbits – money Shirley always banked. These skills and determination served her well when her father died unexpectedly of a stroke at the young age of 54, leaving 21-year-old Shirley to manage the farm with her mother (Marjorie had left some years before to work in Melbourne) – a task they performed admirably and independently, only getting outside help in during shearing times.

At the age of 17, Shirley met her husband to be, John McKenna, at the old Glenaladale Post Office (now owned by artist, Tony Power).

John was several years older and had been away to war from the ages of 19 to 23, including serving in New Guinea for four years.

John's family owned a well-known local property on Beverley Road – 'Larapinta'.

Shirley's own mother had died when he was only 18, and his father, a horse trader who travelled overseas a lot, had bought Larapinta to give his three sons a more stable future.

John and Shirley married when she was 24 and went on to have seven children in 15 years.

A mutual love of farming, hard work and sensible investments saw them increase their holding from the small mixed farm of 175 acres with next to no water to a highly productive 850-acre dairy farm, now being managed by their youngest son, Tim.

Shirley observes it took a long time to build up the farm because land at the Glen rarely comes up for sale – once people are there they very seldom want to leave.

The McKennas' first purchase of extra land in 1959 helped them start the transition to dairy farming. They were still milking by hand until 1961 and it was only in 1977 that they sent their first 'milk' away and could consider themselves dairy farmers.

Farm life was satisfying, but seldom easy, and Tim recalls the impact of several extended droughts on his parents and their gratitude to a neighbour, Gordon Hill, who used to let them bring their stock through his paddocks to the creek twice a day for water when theirs had dried out.

The experiences of drought made John McKenna passionate about conserving water, but it wasn't until 1990 that the family was able to put its first big dam on the farm.

This was followed by another four large dams and a good pivot irrigation system that has made dairying so much easier and more efficient than in the earlier days.

John died 15 years ago of liver cancer, leaving a massive gap in the family's lives, but Shirley and Tim continued to farm the property, with Shirley playing an active part in feeding calves, clearing out the dairy and all sorts of odd jobs until persistent poor health made her slow down last year.

She has the time now to share some of her stories and recollections and spend time with her children and grandchildren. Stories of changing times, of childhood on the farm, school days at Glenaladale, social occasions, droughts and bushfires and transport in the old days.

Though not a keen reader, Shirley is an avid observer of people and can recall almost everyone who has lived in Glenaladale over the past 85 years. Her schooling took place at the Glenaladale School – a tiny, one room weatherboard schoolhouse, set amid the bush further up the Dargo Road and always at risk during fire season.

Most of the children walked to school, although the occasional one was lucky enough to ride a horse.

The school had a history of opening and closing depending on the number of children in the area. The lack of a school bus at the time meant when the school was closed the children had to be taught by correspondence or miss out altogether.

Shirley admits she was never much of a scholar so was not overly upset when the school closed only a few years after she started, when three families left the district, taking their nine children with them.

She was always far happier helping on the farm that stuck in a classroom. Social life at the Top Glen revolved around tennis and excursions to the caves (Den of Nargan).

Shirley recalls there being three tennis courts in the area, at the Higgins property (Meri Meri), at Waller's Post Office and another at the Glenaladale School. She recalls young



Shirley McKenna's father, William Wilson, and legendary bull, 'Willy', are

people such as Mary Banks (Schumann) and Jessie Schrader travelling for miles on horseback from Iguauna Creek to Meri.

After the day's tennis, Mrs Higgins would give them all tea and they'd sit out home again in the dark.

Tennis at the Glen school would often see upwards of 80 people playing and spectating, sharing afternoon tea, a game of cards or the occasional 'top' afterwards with music provided by Jack Davidson on his piano accordion.

The caves were popular outside Glenaladale and many tourists stopped at Shirley's parents' farm for directions – especially during the war years when fear of invasion led to road signs being removed.

Many of the local families had husbands or sons at war who were recognised in an honour book that was proudly displayed in a glass cabinet beside the chimney place of the old school.

The book disappeared when the school closed, much to the dismay of many of the locals.

Shirley says it was nowhere near as hard to make a living in those days because there wasn't much to spend money on – no power, no phones.

The rates were a pittance and most families grew their own vegetables, milked a cow, made their own butter, killed their own meat and baked their own bread.

For those that weren't so self-sufficient there were regular deliveries of bread and meat to the Glenaladale Post Office.

She recalls old Mr Waller at the post office chiding a customer who had commented about his not having a vehicle: "If they all paid like you Mrs xxx, I wouldn't even have a horse and cart!"

Never one for much travel, but none-the-less very independent, Shirley did not get into Bairnsdale often. The family did very well on homegrown meat and vegetables, dairy produce and of course the delicious bread that Shirley continued to make until she was 65.

Very occasionally the family took advantage of the twice weekly deliveries to Waller's Post Office by the Lindenow butcher and baker.

Those who didn't drive the trip to



Shirley McKenna's childhood home, more or less where her current house stands today, is

Bairnsdale depended on getting a ride in a friend's car, or if that wasn't possible, catching Harry Schumann's secondary school bus to Walpa, waiting there while Harry picked up the local children and took them to Bairnsdale, before coming back and collecting the Glenaladale passengers.

It was a short day in town with the process reversed for the afternoon pick up. However, it did give people the chance to catch up on all the latest news while they waited for the bus at Walpa.

The driver of the cream wagon doubled as a local 'shopper' and would often do grocery runs for the Glen people, and according to Shirley, would even be relied on to do such things as buy children's school shoes.

Fire was a constant threat throughout the summer months and Shirley has vivid memories of the 1965 bushfires that started over towards Valencia Creek and tore across East Gippsland before finally being stopped at Bruthen by a change of weather.

Shirley recalls the weeks of anxious waiting after the first fire look off, and then the final holocaust that some say was caused by fire spitting out from a backburn that had been done up towards Cobanah to try to protect the community.

Fire tankers came from everywhere to help the local community out with most meeting at the Fingerboards to work out a strategy for attack.

According to Shirley, one of the ways got a great laugh from the other volunteers when he roundly stated, "To burn or not to burn, that is the question".

The McKennas lost all their fences and pastures but the house was saved by a drier line, the tracks of which can still be seen today.

Although impacted by the ash and debris of the 2006 Alpine fires (the house was covered with ash and all the tanks had to be cleaned out) and some earlier fires, it wasn't until the 2014 Glenaladale-Mount Ray fires that the McKennas' property was burnt again, along with so many other properties at Glenaladale, including Larapinta and Meri Meri.

Shirley has kept rainfall records every day for over 65 years and noted the similarity between conditions

leading up to the 2014 and those of 1965 – lush spring growth followed by no rain to speak of for a couple of months in summer.

Like the '65 fires, the threat of the earlier Mr Ray fire loomed large for a couple of weeks, with locals' anxiety and fear about it not having been put out, being realised when it finally broke loose on February 9.

Fortunately for the McKennas, their irrigated paddocks meant the damage was nowhere near as bad as the 1965 fires. Others were nowhere near so lucky with many of Shirley's friends and neighbours losing houses, sheds, yards, machinery, fences, pasture and stock.

Shirley finds it hard to believe that no one died during the fire – there were certainly a few close calls, including three cars of tourists returning from Dargo, who were fortunate enough to be able to get refuge at the McKenna's dairy while the fire raged all around them.

Shirley has seen a lot of changes in her time at the Glen. The power was connected in 1965, and the Dargo road was sealed 35 years ago. The farm is well watered and a picture of productivity.

The school has gone, there's no butcher in Fernbank or Glenaladale and no store at Walpa. You won't find children riding their horses to school or playing hapscootch on the road.

The lower Glen (Iguauna Creek) is now the hub of the social life. The old timers still with the likes of Tom Morrison was around to throw a match around to reduce fuel, and it's still very hard to buy land at the Glen.

When people get there they just done want to leave.

One thing that hasn't changed over the years is Shirley's keen interest in local issues. She has been keeping abreast of the proposed mineral sands mine and cannot understand how anyone could think it is a good idea.

Water, traffic, dust, damage to pastures, loss of community and many other issues concern her.

"I just can't see how it will be any good at all for the people of this area," she said.

"What's the point of a handful of short-term jobs when so much else is likely to be destroyed forever?"