

IN SEARCH OF THE NEW MYSTIC LAKE ESTATE

Part Two - Danny Nolan



The New Mystic Lakes Estate was a failed development by Spencer Jackson, an agent who had experience in the area. He tried hard to capitalize on the peaceful and serene location, spectacular views and beauty of the Dandenong Ranges via an impressive advertising campaign in 1952, but along the way left out some important information. If you wished to live here, depending on which lot you chose, it would pay to be a

survivalist or a mountain goat. I can attest to this because when I tried to explore one of the plots, I gave up due to the lack of a grappling hook and a safety net. Those who actually came to inspect the site, obviously the majority, realized the work and expense involved to build there; those who bought off the plan sight unseen as an investment were not so lucky. Despite all this, at least eight people/families decided to make the New Mystic Lake estate their residence in one form or another.

The development was named the New Mystic Lakes because the Mystic Lake name had been used for a former estate further south, near One Tree Hill back in the 1920s. The Mystic Lake derives from the "Lake" that appears on foggy mornings down in the lower reaches of the Basin, and when viewed from the higher points such as the development, gave an impression of a misty ethereal lake.

There would be no "lake" this day as it was a beautiful sunny autumn day when the wife and I headed to the upper level of the old estate, now part of the Dandenong Ranges National Park.

I was going to inspect the other main road associated with the estate, the now Tobruk track or as it was known back then Tobruk Avenue, to see if I could find any trace of the adventurist souls who made this home for a while. The entrance to Tobruk track is just short of half a kilometre further up the Mountain highway (passing the only existing estate house which is on the north side of the highway) and runs roughly in tandem to Alamein track, but about 100 to 150 metres higher depending on the block sizes. The track is also gated these days, but the road is in great condition, though I believe the Alamein track to be marginally better.

Surprisingly enough the track is very even and rises and falls gently over the kilometre we travelled before returning. Luck was on our side as it was mid morning, a beautiful blue sky and the temperature just nudging 20 degrees. To

add a touch of colour to the comfort we were surrounded by hundreds of brown butterflies. (Or Common Brown Butterfly - we spent quite a long time trying to capture pictures of these guys then another long time on the internet trying to identify them). These butterflies basically followed or led us depending on how slow we were, for the entire length of our trek up and back. And if I was going to be surrounded by flies in the bush these are definitely my insect of choice.



I'd read that a couple of families built on this road until they were bought out or burnt out by bush fires. So, with our merry band of butterflies, we began our journey, stopping occasionally to take in the views towards Croydon or up to see the towers nestled on top of the mountain. On the first tight bend, we came across the remains of a driveway, exploring deeper we came upon a rock face and the sound of water. There was a water source in there somewhere, I assumed it ran under the road because opposite the driveway on the downside of the hill, it fell away very steeply to what looked like a gully. Up the driveway and beyond the growth was a levelled out area which may have been the foundation of a structure but no other evidence was visible. So, we followed the butterflies onward. We walked for quite some time thinking that we were too late and mother nature had won, when as we were approaching our predesignated point of return, I noticed a cutting into the bank that arched back down a few metres further, almost like steps. Not seeing any viable path, I looked down the road and saw what could only be the overgrown remains of a driveway. Following the driveway, up the hill, I saw something solid with a square hole. As I approached closer, I could see it was a slab of concrete and beside it was a section of brickwork, and beyond that a level piece of ground. I had found the remains of a house. The



concrete and brickwork looked like it was part of a chimney, probably for a kitchen stove. The levelled area indicated the structure itself may have been quite small. The wife and butterflies had stayed down on the road, so I had to savor the discovery by myself and spent some time looking for anything archaeological. I had no luck in that department. It was great to see

someone had made a red hot go of it up here, and a tiny piece of the legacy remained. Content with the mornings' work, we let the butterflies lead us homeward. I had a feeling they wanted us gone by the end, because I got a few direct headbutts from a couple who didn't swerve as good as they did earlier in the day.

Now comes the weird part. The butterflies all stopped just prior to the descent back down to the gate. The same place where we first encountered them. We surmised the heat of the road or the noise and slipstream of the cars were a hazard. That was until I got home and researched a bit more. That's when I found that near to that very spot where Tobruk Avenue intersects with the Mountain highway lived a former psychiatrist Ms Annie Yoppa, who lived a hermits existence in a tent after retiring from city life. Though from a rich family and by nature of her occupation highly intelligent, her final years seemed to point towards that maybe she was suffering some degree of mental illness. In February 1959 Ms Yoppa was murdered in her home/tent by a man who had sought out her assistance; he then reacted by beating her to death with one of her tent poles. Soon after his arrest, the man was certified insane and committed to an asylum.

Maybe the butterflies sensed the sad places and avoided them for the happy ones. Maybe there's a bit of mystic still happening up there.

References and much thanks to:

Rick Coxhill's history of the Basin and the Trove newspaper website: www.coxhill.com
www.trove.nla.gov.au

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