

Grace Karskens

Lost Country: An Environmental History of the Penrith Lakes Scheme and Castlereagh, New South Wales

This book will tell a story of extraordinary landscape destruction and reconstruction: the history of the Penrith Lakes Scheme at Castlereagh in Western Sydney. Conceived in the late 1960s, and now in its final phases, this scheme envisioned huge artificial lakes to fill and rehabilitate a series of vast, open-cut gravel and sand quarries beside the Nepean River to the west of Sydney.

Hailed in the 1970s and 1980s as visionary and environmentally responsible, this Scheme destroyed the rich palimpsest of early settler and Aboriginal landscapes, the archaeological record, and the existing local farming community set on the river flats at Castlereagh. Once a treasured landscape, a place in the heart, by the 1960s this place was invisible, and expendable, seen only as a resource for the rapidly growing city. Today, an entirely new landscape is emerging beside the river.

The culmination of a five year Australian Research Council Discovery Project, this study will make an important and original contribution to urban environmental history in Australia, itself still a relatively new area of research. It will offer a deep time bioregional history, explore the *environmental experience* of Australia's urban and peri-urban people, and critically review the ideas, legislation, practice, and policies that reshape the urban environment so dramatically. The book will demonstrate that a cross-disciplinary approach merging the humanities and sciences provides a much needed, more accurate analysis of current thinking and practice in areas such as environmental impact assessment, landscape rehabilitation, water management, and sustainability.

This is also a human story of loss, memory, and the power of place. It is about people and country, as well as ecology, geology, and industry. It is about the ruthless exploitation of resources and astonishing environmental fantasies. It also takes a good, hard look at New South Wales' environmental protection legislation over the past 40 years, how it actually worked, how such destruction and loss could have occurred here, despite all these laws and requirements, and what the newly minted lakes landscape has in store, for people and for ecologies.

Believing with Donald Worster that landscapes that disappear soon pass out of public memory, I want the book to be a reminder and a record of that old, lost country, so utterly different from the new, especially for those who will come to live there.