



Australian Government
Australian National Botanic Gardens



Albert Morris and his legacy

Greening the Silver City: seeds of bush regeneration

“I dream of a green belt around Broken Hill” Albert Morris, 1938.

Greening the Silver City: seeds of bush regeneration explores the collaboration between community and industry in creating one of the first bush regeneration sites in Australia.

When we think of Broken Hill it conjures images of a mining town on the edge of the outback. Not many have known its significance in environmental history, as a site of one of Australia’s earliest green actions.

In 1936, the Barrier Field Naturalists Club led by Albert Morris enlisted the help of a mining company and through the process of native revegetation, defeated the drifts of sand that were swallowing the outskirts of the famous mining town.

Albert Morris, the Quaker and self taught amateur botanist developed a passionate interest in plants from a young age and founded the Barrier Field Naturalists’ Club, named after the nearby Barrier Ranges. He led this devoted team and his work was far ahead of his time. Continued on by his wife Margaret Morris after his death in 1939, the work of bush revegetation helped make Broken Hill a livable city.

The Broken Hill landscape was seriously affected by settlement; originally the countryside was covered with woody mulga scrub. After the mines opened in 1885 the rapidly growing township required wood for building, fencing, firewood and fuel for the miner’s steam engines. Trees and shrubs disappeared and newly introduced goats, cattle, horses and camels grazed the cleared land, and the landscape soon became denuded and desolate. Without vegetation, big winds blew away the topsoil and major sands drifted to the city outskirts.

Albert Morris believed that the growing problem in Broken Hill could be overcome by establishing regeneration reserves around Broken Hill to the north, west and south. In 1936 an initial area was fenced and planted with trees and vegetation native to the area. Now known as the Albert Morris Park it was highly successful and in 1938 more sections of land were fenced from grazing rabbits and livestock and left to recover.

The Broken Hill revegetation site was the first example of successful bush regeneration in its broadest sense within Australia. It improved the standard of living of residents as well as conserving plant and animal biodiversity. The regeneration reserves are now National-Trust listed.

Albert Morris' legacy does not limit itself to Broken Hill as he amassed a collection of about 7,000 plant specimens, which can now be found in several of Australia's major herbia. More than 1,000 of these are held in the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney. Morris' methods were applied to other mining towns in Australia and the improvement of living conditions in Broken Hill were quoted worldwide.

Morris also photographed the flowers and landscape of the surrounding area. These black and white slides were hand coloured by his wife Margaret Morris and are featured in the touring exhibition.

Greening the Silver City: seeds of bush regeneration is a regional touring exhibition developed by the Powerhouse Museum in collaboration with Broken Hill City Council and community and supported by Movable Heritage NSW.

Greening the Silver City: seeds of bush regeneration opens at the Australian National Botanic Gardens on Wednesday 3 June at 4.00 pm. This travelling Powerhouse exhibition will be open to the public from Thursday 4 June until Wednesday 26 August 2009 in the Visitor Centre Gallery.