

THE BRADLEY METHOD OF BUSH REGENERATION

A method has been developed in Australia for regenerating native bush. It is named The Bradley Method after the two sisters, now deceased, who devised it. **Should it be our wish to bring back the native vegetation that once covered a particular piece of Earth, then, they found, no heroic tree planting measures are called for. Rather, this humble technique requires us only to remove all foreign influences while causing the minimum possible disturbance to whatever native vegetation still exists.**

Thus, the first step may be to fence off the area we have chosen, to keep cows or goats at bay. **It may also be necessary to take steps to prevent fire from invading the land. We must then be able to identify all species of plants that we encounter, both the exotics and those native to the area. We need to recognise them not only in their mature form but also when their seedlings first poke out of the ground. THEN the method is simple: remove the exotics without treading on the natives. Encouraged in this way, the native species begin to come back, growing stronger in each ensuing season.**

There is only one other rule: start from the strength. It may be that in the area we wish to heal there are deep scars, erosion gullies perhaps, that break our heart, and it is our wish to immediately tend to these. In order to succeed however, we must resist this temptation and **start from the strongest expression of native vegetation in our management area.**

If our area is an inner-city park that has been lawn for a century, our beginnings may be from a tiny patch that the mower couldn't reach and where a few native weeds flourish. If there is a forgotten corner where a few pioneer tree seedlings have emerged, we start from there. **Carefully stepping backwards, removing exotics as we go, we invite the bush to follow. It is painstaking work. Each year, the process accelerates as the native intelligence of the place emerges and the life-force quickens.**

More and more species emerge as the conditions necessary for their growth are recreated. As one species of pioneer completes its work in, say, repairing the soil with shade and leaf mulch, it becomes fewer and is succeeded by the next. The microclimate slowly changes and, one day, after perhaps seven years of this patient, rewarding service, we may find to our astonishment, a seedling emerging of a climax species that has not been seen here in the city for 100 years. Was the seed dropped by a bird that alighted in the branches of a pioneer now reaching 100 feet above? Is it possible that the seed lay dormant in the ground since it was first cleared, waiting for this moment when conditions were again suitable for its return? We will never know.

And when the accelerating advance of the native bush finally reaches that erosion gully, it now has the vigor and the necessary species to be able to recolonise and integrate it and slowly bring it back into harmony.

Human is not the hero, proudly planting thousands of trees, reclaiming the desert, healing the Earth. Rather we are humble in the face of the super-human intelligence of Nature, and INVITE the original Nature of the place to return.

There is something very spiritual about the Bradley Method. Encoded within it is a deep trust in the native intelligence of the Earth - She KNOWS what is meant to grow in this place and she also knows, unerringly, the particular stages of succession that will best take us from whatever kind of degradation exists at present back to climax.

In my travels, I have encountered systems akin to the Bradley method in several different countries. I found one example as I travelled around India in 1987 lecturing on rainforest conservation and deep ecology. In Bhopal I visited one of the most enlightened foresters I have ever met. His name was Chaturdevi and he was professor of the new school of forestry that had been established in that city just a few years before. His school had been granted a large area of ground, a couple of thousand acres as I recall, and the first thing he had done, before the first brick was laid for the school buildings, was to fence the land. It was at that time a desolate thorny desert denuded by goats and recurrent fires set by the goat-herders to encourage succulent new growth. Chaturdevi hired armed guards to keep these at bay. The first task he set his students was to inventory the vegetation that grew there. In the beginning, they discovered stunted remnants of a few tree species which had managed to survive the former regime - just a few sticks here and there whose leaves had been chewed back as soon as they emerged.

By the time that I saw the land some four years later, more than 80 species had re-emerged as I recall, and in many places the vegetation was pumping, accelerating back towards its climax status. The armed guards were still there.

In many other places, from Russia to the United States, I have found to my surprise, understandings akin to the Bradley Method emerging independently and unbeknownst to each other. Perhaps it should come as no surprise. Perhaps this phenomenon is ITSELF a manifestation of the Bradley Method, only working here on the level of the human psyche rather than the biology of a landscape. Surely the human psyche is itself a product of the landscape - we ourselves grow from the soil, are made of soil. In this case, the most appropriate metaphors for understanding psyche are biological ones. Techniques that facilitate the return of native vegetation may also help us understand how wild common sense can return to the denuded mind. The spontaneous emergence of "the Bradley Method" in different places around the world can then be seen as an expression of the return of a trust in Nature after centuries and millenia of human arrogance.

What I first learned of by the name "Bradley Method" then, may be one stage in the succession of the return of native wisdom and humility to the clearcut modern mind, when the exotic influences of anthropocentrism are removed. By anthropocentrism I mean the ubiquitous modern idea that the human is the centre of everything and that order comes into the world only through human control and ingenuity. The rejection of anthropocentrism has sometimes been termed "deep ecology".

One of the understandings of deep ecology is that the sense shared by most modern humans, of being isolated, alienated and separate from Nature is illusory. In fact, we are Earthlings, we BELONG here. We have evolved on this planet for 4000 million years of organic life and are made of Earth. Our soul too, our psyche, is Earth-born, emerging from the exquisite biology of this planet, continuous with it. The ubiquitous illusion of separation springs from the false ideas of human "otherness" and superiority that thousands of years of Judeo-Christian and other traditions have created within us.

As we root out these pernicious false ideas of our own grandeur and importance, we "fall in love outwards" (Jeffers) and the truth spontaneously emerges of who we REALLY are, "plain members of the biota" (Leopold). As the exotic influence of the dominant paradigm recedes, we realise (with Commoner) that "Nature knows best" and our native intelligence pops spontaneously from the ground of our being.

When we see the Bradley Method as being equally applicable in the reawakening of native human intelligence as in the re-emergence of a biological ecosystem, several corollaries suggest themselves. Firstly, we don't need to plant new ideas in each others minds. If we can root out the alien ideas, the ecological insight springs forth spontaneously. We need to know ourselves, to create an inventory of our mind, to learn to recognise the ideas, feelings, habits, blockages which prevent us from experiencing our unity with Nature. Which parts of us are harmonious with our larger system? How can we compassionately root out destructive habits and conditioned ideas without unnecessary disturbance and self-hatred?

Secondly, start with the strength: there's nothing wrong with preaching to the choir. In fact it is more important to strengthen the experience of deep ecology among those who already love nature and work for the Earth, than to waste our energy trying to convince the CEO of the EXXON erosion gully about the importance of a biocentric ethic. Strengthening ecological empathy and insights within the conservation community will make it ever stronger and more capable of making inroads into corporate culture, The Vatican and other bastions of anthropocentrism.

BRINGING BACK THE BUSH - THE BRADLEY METHOD OF BUSH REGENERATION by Joan Bradley, published by Lansdowne Press, Sydney 1988

www.rainforestinfo.org.au/deep-eco/bradley.htm