

# Footprints, Imprints: Seeing Environmentalist and Buddhist Marie Byles as an Eastern Australian.

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### Footprints, Imprints: Seeing Environmentalist and Buddhist Marie Byles as an Eastern Australian

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This paper looks at the Australian author, traveller, conservationist and Buddhist Marie Byles (1900-1979) as “eastern” and Australian at once. It investigates the influence of Buddhist spirituality and travel on her approach to the environment and explores some possibilities arising from looking at her work as part of a broader transnational humanitarian and intellectual identification, moving beyond ethnicity based boundaries. Thinking about eastern Australian identities can encourage consideration of Australia in Asia, Australia as Asian, connections across seas, and links and differences within Australia. The paper explores Marie Byles as an eastern Australian by considering her travel in Sydney and the region (in Australia, China, Vietnam, India and Burma) from the 1930s to the 1960s, the design and use of her home as a hub for early Buddhist meetings, her publication of texts discussing Eastern philosophy, and her environmental activism. Throughout the discussion Byles’s understanding of power relations, derived from an entwining of feminist and socialist ideas, a pacifist and Buddhist/spiritualist revaluation of environments emerges. From these influences she provided challenges to her fellow walkers, environmentalists, and society at large to rethink relationships with nature and each other, insights that have yet to be adequately explored and recognised.

#### **KEYWORDS**

travel writing, Buddhism, environmentalism, feminist history

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