

# KNOW YOUR SUBURB COOLBELLUP

By Bill Thomas JP, MLA Member for Cockburn  
ISSUE No. 3

## PERSONAL NOTE

Last year I had great pleasure in launching the Cockburn Local History Project.

Since then I have had great deal of support from residents who wish to know about the history and environment of the district they live in.

The preparation of this booklet has been greatly assisted by material provided by some local residents who prepared a history of the area as part of their higher education studies.

This booklet follows two earlier ones which dealt with the older areas of Hamilton Hill and Spearwood.

BILL THOMAS, MLA



## COOLBELLUP 27 YEARS AGO

Where are these kids now?

This photograph appeared on the front page of the West Australian newspaper on 16 July 1965. The caption underneath stated:

*Coolbellup - just another name on the metropolitan map to most people- is emerging as one of the fastest growing districts in the State. The suburb just north of Bibra Lake and three miles in a direct line from Fremantle is alive with road-making, landscaping and home-building.*

The same front page of the paper, which cost sixpence, reported that the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, had a cold. That article was less prominent than the one about Coolbellup.

Cockburn M.L.A. Bill Thomas has offered to host a reunion lunch at Parliament House for the kids in the picture. Anyone who can identify them should ring Bill's Spearwood office on 418 4114.



*Bush clearing at St Paul's Estate*

## THE LAND

The suburb of Coolbellup is located on what geographers call the Spearwood dune system. These are the limestone ridges running parallel to the coast that stretch from Busselton in the south and past Moore river in the north. The hills of Coolbellup are the ridges of the System formed by the consolidation of dunes originally deposited by the wind along old shorelines.

The System varies in width between two and ten kilometres from the coast. The soils and underlying rocks are porous and as a result there is little surface drainage. Rivers such as the Swan pass through it, often dramatically as at Blackwall Reach, but drainage of the area is largely subsurface. Accordingly there are no creeks in Coolbellup.

Other suburbs on the Spearwood System such as Spearwood itself, Coogee and Hamilton Hill have wetlands which reflect the high water table of subsurface drainage. Coolbellup, which forms a hilly

plateau near the eastern edge of the Spearwood System, is too high for these. North Lake and Bibra Lake lie between the Spearwood System and the low lying grey sands to the east.

When thinking about the formation of the rolling hills of Coolbellup from coastal dunes it is sometimes difficult to imagine that the location of our coastline has varied extensively. Sea levels have risen and fallen and shorelines have been deposited, eroded and sometimes inundated. Cockburn Sound was once an inland lake and both Rottnest Island and Garden Island were part of inland dune lines 10,000 years ago when the coast was thirty kilometres west of where it is now.

As recently as 7,000 years ago, well within the period that Aboriginal people roamed the forests and woodlands of Coolbellup, Rottnest was still connected to the coast. The plains that now lie beneath the sea would have been similar to Coolbellup as we have known it. Fossil pollen found in lake sediments at Rottnest indicates that similar vegetation to that found on the mainland today grew there thousands of years ago, although those plants have not been there in historical times.

The native vegetation of the district is distinctive. In the Coolbellup area the soils are deeper than at Spearwood and Hamilton Hill and once supported a tall open forest of Jarrah and Marri trees. They were extensively cut by timber fellers in the early years so the biggest of the trees that the settlers saw are no longer with us. Nonetheless an idea of the original landscape can be obtained along Forrest Road where uncleared land remains.

The St. Pauls estate development, between Phoenix Road and Forrest Road, is displacing some of the best remaining natural vegetation. Effort will have to be made to ensure that some natural areas are protected.

The areas west of Stock Road were closer to the water table and provided more viable sites for market gardening and fruit growing. The higher and drier land of Coolbellup tended to be used for grazing which was less dependent on cheap plentiful water.

### EARLY YEARS

On January 15, 1830 the Leda commanded by Captain George Robb anchored in Gage Roads while on a passage to the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius from Sydney. He saw the Swan River Colony as a likely place for investment and came prepared to establish a farm before setting off from Fremantle to complete his voyage. Robb and his 25 year old farm manager Sydney Smith applied for a 2,000 acre grant of land which extended from the summit of a small hill near Cockburn Road in Hamilton Hill eastward to North Lake and therefore included the Coolbellup of today.

George Robb never returned to the colony but much credit is bestowed upon him for bringing capital and labour into the area.

In 1854 Charles Manning claimed Robb's original grant of 2,000 acres by alleging it was abandoned land under English land laws. He could ride from North Lake to Coogee without setting foot off his estate. His large property was vulnerable to squatters and it is believed that he once hired a volunteer army of forty to fifty



*Members of the Manning Family at Davilak, 1904*

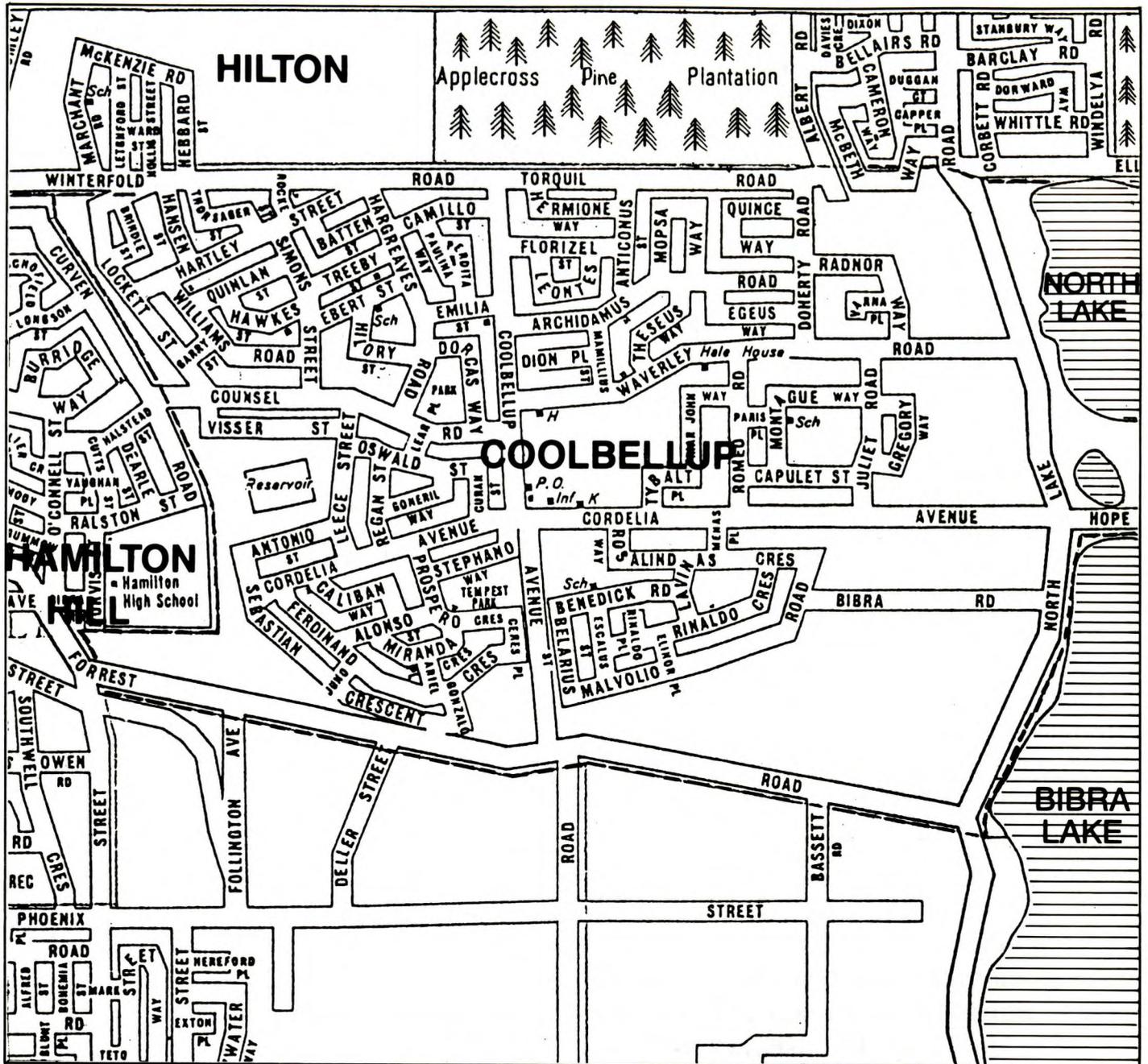
pensioner soldiers to charge into the collection of tents and humpies east of Davilak Lake, clearing them off the land.

Over twenty years later in 1887 the Privy Council in London ruled against Manning's son Lucias A Manning's right to the part of his estate claimed as that abandoned by George Robb. A Bunbury publican John Fielder, had sought to sell that part of Robb's land that he had occupied. Lucius Manning promptly took up the challenge and issued the following warning to intending buyers in the press:

*"CAUTION. The public are hereby warned against purchasing and dealing with any proportion of Cockburn Sound Location No. 10 as advertised for sale on the 19th by John Fielder, he being a trespasser on my land.*

*Lucius A. Manning."*

The West Australian of March 12, 1890, commended the Privy Council's decision on the land, declaring that this attempt to jump land was not acceptable according to the laws of England.



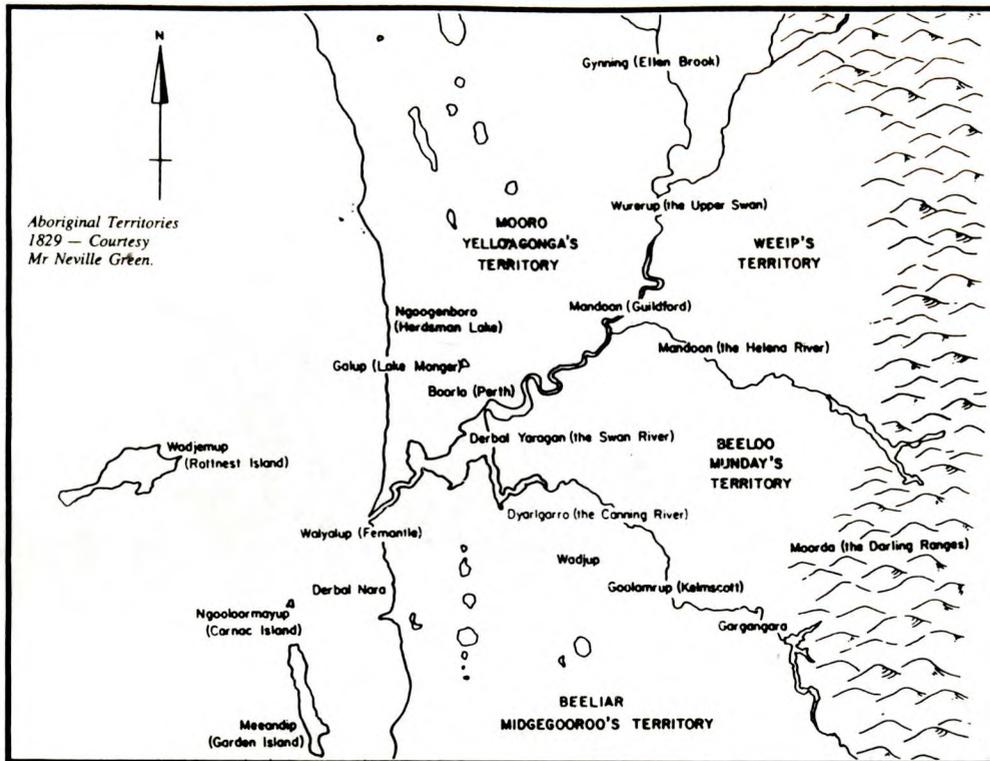
This map is adapted from the metropolitan road directory published by the Lands Department in 1970.

It shows that 20 years ago Coolbellup itself was very much the same as the suburb we know today. The major changes over the last 20 years have been to the surrounding suburbs and the roads which provide access to Coolbellup. Where the suburb of Samson is today was still largely bush and part of Hilton.

Stock Road still had not been put through, so Coolbellup did not have the

barrier separating it from Hamilton Hill. Coolbellup residents had to go down Forrest Road or Winterfield Road to Carrington St if they were trying to get through to Fremantle or Canning Highway.

North Lake Road was then a narrow road that went where Gilbertson Road is today. The suburb of North Lake had not then been built. Access to the Lakes was more convenient than now as Waverly Road and Cordelia Avenue went straight through to the old North Lake Road.



the dairy farm of Fred Powell. Albert Powell recalls taking him to Coogee Beach to wash his hair.

The stockmen spent their Saturday's at the Princess Theatre in Fremantle and would also enjoy competitive boxing matches amongst themselves at "Ugly Land", a side show area near Fremantle Railway Station.

## BEELIAR TERRITORY

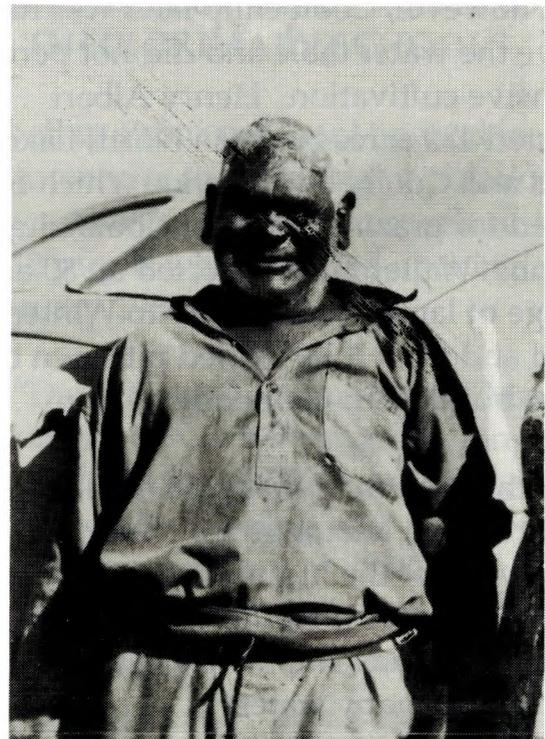
Coolbellup lies in the Aboriginal tribal district of Beeliar. By the time of settlement in Coolbellup many of the tribe had dispersed or died of diseases such as typhoid, influenza and tuberculosis. Areas around the lakes were used as camping grounds, and the lakes were also a widely known source of turtle and wildfowl. Aborigines from Pinjarra, Mandurah and Armadale recall that their parents occasionally camped there for extended periods to harvest these resources.

In the 1920's a number of Aborigines were brought from the North West to work as stockmen at Anchorage Butchers at Robbs Jetty.

The most popular was Wandi "Dixon". It is said that he took the name of the Dixon family of Hamilton Hill who brought him down from the North West. He was a well set man with snowy white hair and was often seen riding his horse alongside

Wandi died at Anchorage Butchers where he had his hut and was later buried at Mogumber, an Aboriginal burial ground in Moora.

The suburb of Wandi near Kwinana is named after him.



Wandi "Dixon"

## COOLBELLUP: LAND OF MANY WATERS

The present day suburb of Coolbellup lies in the eastern region of Robb's original grant.

It takes its name from the Aboriginal name of North Lake situated to the east of the current boundary of the suburb. European settlers referred to Coolbellup 'lake' as North Lake as it was the most northern lake in a system of natural wetlands running parallel and approximately 8km from the coast. The lake system continues as far south as Hope Valley with the last major lake being Banjup Lake located in Wattleup. In this respect, it is easy to see why the aborigines of the Beeliiar group referred to the territory as Coolbellup which means 'land of many waters'.

In 1899 George Robb's original land grant was subdivided into 42 sections. Much of this land was rapidly taken up for cultivation, however, Coolbellup land was high above the water table and did not permit intensive cultivation. Henry Albert selected 470 acres between North Lake Road and Coolbellup Avenue which he fenced for grazing. West of Coolbellup Avenue, Walter Hicks selected an 80 acre wedge of land which ran up to Winterfold Road and from it he carried pit sawn timber to builders in Fremantle.

With the eastern border running less than a quarter of a kilometre from North Lake and a view of the Indian Ocean from near Stock Road across Hamilton Hill, Coolbellup may still be referred to as 'the land of many waters'.



*Suburban Coolbellup*

## A SUBURB EVOLVES

As recently as 1921 there were no more than four houses within the present boundaries of the suburb. The subdivision of a large area west of the lake by George McKay in 1920 was not particularly successful as only thirteen out of sixty lots were dispersed over a period of five years. Much of this land was originally used for cattle and pig farming.

Despite this the number of residents in the area did increase sufficiently to cause land within the subdivision to be reserved for the Bibra Lake School. It was built near the Pioneers Park at Bibra Lake just up from Adventure World.

In 1954 most of the land west of the lake was resumed by the State Housing Commission and an intensive housing scheme was planned.

On January 30, 1957, 1200 acres of the land near North Lake was isolated by the Perth GPO as a new postal region.

Coolbellup was the name chosen for this new suburb even though none of the wetlands were located within its boundaries.

By 1964 the State Housing Commission started building in the area. This began at Stock Road and Forrest Road and moved north and east. Torquil Road and where North Lake Road is now, consisted mainly of bushland. Some of the lots were reserved for private use and war service homes. Most of the houses and duplexes built in Coolbellup at the time were of brick construction. Some blocks of flats were built. Many newly arrived migrant families moved into the area.

The Shire of Cockburn submitted a list of names of early settlers in the district. Some of the street names were selected (Counsel Road, Batten Street, Gregory Street etc) from this list. In 1964 the remaining streets were named after characters in Shakespearian plays to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth. It is interesting to note that most of the street names are derived from the "The Tempest", a mystical play centred upon the supernatural deeds of the sea and of a storm that "drives a vessel from its course and wrecks it upon the coast of an enchanted island..."

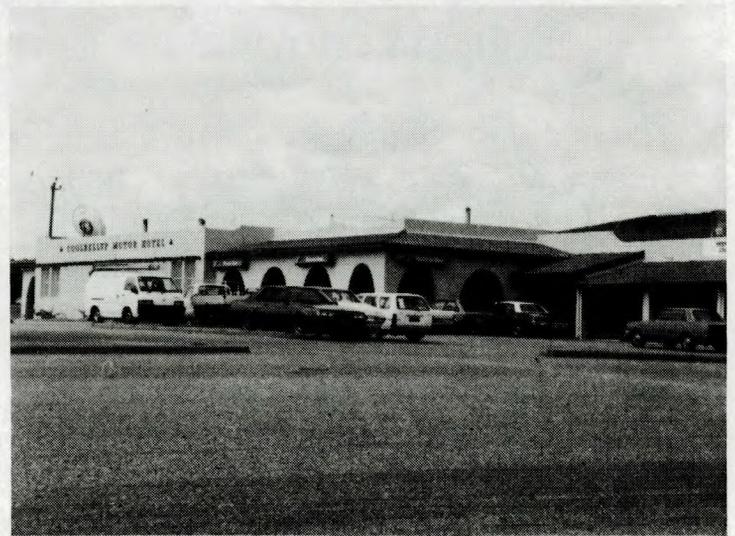
In the late 1960's a mall type Shopping Centre was built. With the rapid expansion of work in surrounding areas residential development increased dramatically. The suburb of North Lake evolved around this time which divided Coolbellup by the realigned North Lake Road in the seventies.

The last stage of the Coolbellup Homes West (State Housing Commission) release came around 1965 when there were sever-

al lots sold. Houses built in that time were of double brick.

The suburb has a large water storage area to build up water pressure for the district. Coolbellup is not on deep sewerage so all houses have septic tanks.

The district has three primary schools and the local high schools are North Lake High and Hamilton Senior High.



*Coolbellup Motor Hotel - Home of the Fremantle and Districts Country Music Club*

## **COOLBELLUP CHILDREN AND THEIR PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

Coolbellup Primary School opened in 1965 to service the growing population. The headmaster Mr L. Barker welcomed the 212 pupils who attended opening day 8 February 1965.

The "Daily News" Wednesday, 11 May 1966 described Coobellup as a 'young suburb of young families, and many houses literally bursting with young children. It has a population of 3800 and with the completion of another 500 homes 1500 to 2000 people will be added in six months.'

East Coolbellup Primary School (now North Lake Primary) opened two years later. The school celebrated its 25th Anniversary this year. For a time senior classes were held in the old Bibra Lake Primary School building near the lake while the younger children were taught in demountables at Coolbellup Primary School. It was renamed in 1969 to avoid confusion as there were going to be three

primary schools in the suburb.

The suburb of Coolbellup expanded so rapidly that a year later Koorilla Primary School opened. A vote was taken to choose its name. The other suggestion was 'Tempest' after Shakespeare's play which is now the name of the park on the other side of Coolbellup Avenue.

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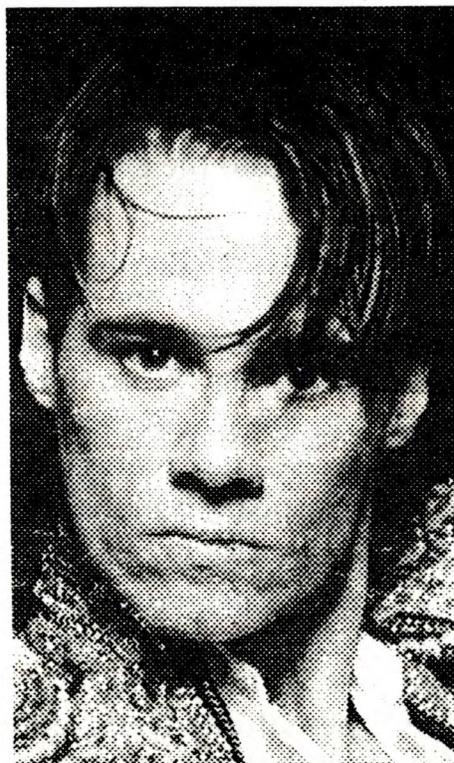
## "STRICTLY COOLBELLUP"

The star of the highly acclaimed Australian movie, "Strictly Ballroom", is local boy, Paul Mercurio. Paul's Father, Gus Mecurio, is a notable actor too.

Paul attended North Lake Primary School and is a credit to all Australians, particularly the residents of Coolbellup.

Recent reports indicate the "Strictly Ballroom" is set to become Australia's most successful film since Paul Hogan's two "Crocodile Dundee" epics.

The film, presently at No. 1 in London, has been sold in 50 countries and has seen a resurgence of ballroom dancing in local dance halls around the country.



*Paul Mercurio*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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