



Convict Trail Project

February 2023 Newsletter

A VIRTUAL WALK UP THE GNR: North from Clares Bridge

[Contributed by Elizabeth Roberts]

Before we leave Clares Bridge, in last month's virtual walk I forgot to acknowledge the donation we received from Trasgrid which in part was used to pay for the stones and work needed to fill in the gap at the top of the wall between work done by the NPWS and the CTP. Thanks to Paul Budde for reminding me.

As we leave Clares Bridge, the road travels along the side of the mountain till joined by another short ridge running off to the east on which was built one of the many high voltage power stanchion towers in the V formed by this ridge and the main mountain range enters Donneys Track fire trail that then travels along the GNR towards Clares Bridge for few 100 meters before branching off again uphill into the fire trail behind the Wat.

The section of the GNR from Donneys Track Fire trail to the Blue Door Fire trail intersections has only been travelled over by vehicles about 7 or 8 times in the past 25 years. The last time about 10 years ago and it took about 6 hours to travel the approximately 20 kilometres from Donneys Fire trail to Mt Manning. Because of the law relating to access to private land holdings (the Wat) this is still a locked Public Road and a state heritage listed site supposedly managed by the Councils whose boundary it is. I have been privileged to be a passenger in a number of these trips and will try to recall what we saw.

The first section is to Frog Hollow where Wiseman had a hut; just beyond Frog Hollow is the next major construction, the ascent of Mt Baxter that needs conservation.



Work on the road.



Steps in the road.



Aboriginal grinding groves around waterhole above road

The section of the GNR from Donneys Tack to Frog Hollow which is mostly cut out of the Mountain side was very washed out with several very deep long mud holes which before the road was locked were beloved by larrikin 4WD drivers. In other sections the road was washed away to the bed rock so driving over it was like climbing deep stone steps. In these sections the small stone side walls were still intact.

As it is a state listed public road it is the responsibility of the councils to maintain it under the minimum maintenance provisions of the heritage act. In the state it was and unfortunately still is this was more than difficult and the CTP took on the unachieved aim



Left: Engraving of man on rock face.

Above: The 12 mile marker rock.

of getting the worst sections conserved so the councils could carry out regular maintenance to keep the road open. This would allow strictly regulated guided 4WD tours and supported walking tours. Having a complete wilderness so close to Sydney, Newcastle and the Central Coast such supported limited access would be popular and in demand. With this object the CTP applied for a grant to resurface the first bit north of Donneys Track and was successful. The long water holes were drained with a pump before the worst of the sloppy mud was scraped out and the area filled with 100 minus road base. (100Minus is broken sandstone with a certain % clay content all smaller than 100 millimetres). This road base needs to be rolled many times with a non-vibrating roller to achieve the correct compaction. When I looked before the last years rains this section was still holding. The only major problem encountered in this lot of work was the tadpoles of the endangered Red-crown Toadlets inhabiting the largest water hole. This stopped work for consultation. After consultation with the National Parks, as many as could be were caught in a net and rehoused beside the road in a large waterproof box supplied with the appropriate floats and ramps and weeds. Hopefully some made it to maturity. Tadpoles should not be moved from one area to another due to the possible transportation of disease. Following this success we applied for and got a second grant, but with this grant we ran into one problem after another and did not achieve anywhere near as much as we had intended. One problem was the contractor did not supply the roller as required. I do not know if this work held up or not as when I went to look a tree was across the road long before we got near this second section. We had to reverse all the way back to Donneys

Track.



Another washed out area



Washout below both sides of road

One of the main problems is access. Firstly it is 11 kms from Mangrove Mountain via Dubbo Gully over a weight limited timber bridge and up the, in sections, very steep Donneys Track fire trail to the intersection with the GNR where we had a road base stock pile. Then there is access along the GNR its self. Cut into the side of a mountain nearly 200 years ago debris has built up against the cliff face narrowing the road surface which is furthered narrowed by the wear and tear and washouts lowering the road surface below the outer walling leaving only a narrow track up the middle with very few places where it is possible for small vehicles to pass or turn, meaning all road fill had to be delivered along the road in 1ton tip trucks. Standing on the road all you can see is the hill side falling away below your feet as you look across to more hills and valleys. Close up there is the varying vegetation, the many Illawarra Lilies growing on the hills above the road and only seen when walking many types of fungi including purple mushrooms. Next month we will look at Frog Hollow.



*Above: Two small waterholes on bend in road.
Felicity Barry and Barbara Appleton in foreground.*

RECENT NEWS:

Thomas James Bridge:

Hawkesbury City Council is still waiting for the go-ahead from the Heritage Office.

The Pick:

Work has commenced on the Pick Volume 11 – “Roads Tracks and Trails associated with the GNR”. If there is a road, track or trail associated with the GNR, especially in the Hunter Region, that you would like to write about, please contact Elizabeth Roberts, who is co-ordinating contributions, at earoberts@bigpond.com This will be the last Pick that will be published in hard copy.

The Pick Volume 10 was printed before the start of COVID and before our last paid staff left the CTP. Unfortunately he left a box of the Pick 10, and no list of who had received it. If you are a library, a historical society or family history society who have volumes 1 to 9 in your collection but no volume 10, please let us know so we can organize to get copies to you. We no longer have the funds to post them.

Rex Stubbs Symposium:

On Saturday 4th February, Hawkesbury City Council held the Rex Stubbs Symposium. Three Board Members of the CTP were in attendance wearing different hats and some of ‘the Pick’ were delivered to historical societies and family history groups who were present. One speaker of particular interest to the GNR was talking on the current work in decolonising the Dharug language, working on understanding what Dawes and other were actually hearing when they attempted to record the Dharug language. The speaker talked about

how skilled the first nations people were in multi-lingualism, which was why they so easily picked up English.

Drones and LIDAR Surveys: I was reminded on Saturday that one of our supporters had previously suggested the use of Drones as a way of recording quarry sites etc especially after bushfires. This reminded me of other people talking about the use of LIDAR surveys and how they "saw" through the vegetation and mapped the ground. Several years ago before the advent of LIDAR we tried, not very successfully, to use Aerial photographs to map the repairs needed in the section between Clares Bridge and Mt Manning. Unfortunately there was too much vegetation in the way. Does anyone have a camera equipped Drone and /or experience with LIDAR surveys, how effective are they in areas with heavy vegetation cover and on steep slopes?

And in closing If you missed the CTP Research morning at HSHS Museum on 1 February, there will be another Research morning on Wednesday 15 March. More information in the next newsletter, but please book-mark it now.

