



Convict Trail Project

May 2023 Newsletter

A VIRTUAL WALK UP THE GNR: North along the Blue Door Fire Trail

[Contributed by Elizabeth Roberts]

Today in our virtual trip along the Great North Road we venture north of Mt Baxter and will travel to the Blue Door Fire Trail that joins the Great North Road from the east, off the road into Mangrove Dam. Here the road travels along or just below the ridge line of the Judge Dowling Range. There are no major works in this section but every 100 to 150 meters or so there is either the remains of low sections of walling and or evidence of side cutting, the tallest retaining wall in this section is 1.3 meters high of roughly shaped and stacked rocks with no attempt of coursing or jointing.

Although this 6.2 kilometres long section lay within the McPherson State Forrest before it became part of the National Park it is so precipitous there are no ex-logging tracks marked on the topographical map – they start where this section ends.



This is truly a wilderness area that people only rarely venture into; it is well over 10 years since anyone from the Convict Trail Project has ventured into this section. No road works have been carried out here since the telephone line to Newcastle was removed in 1967-68.

As a State listed Heritage Item, it is the responsibility of Hawkesbury and Central Coast Councils to carry out minimum maintenance here. From memory this section when last inspected was not in bad shape. Inspection could and should be carried out via the Blue Door Fire Trail assuming that fire trail has been maintained.

There is one item of interest to be found in this section, it is an engraving of a man with a hat and pipe. It is located about 23.5 kilometres north of Wisemans Ferry at approximately AMG56 E322000 N6316500 on a boulder on the hillside about 4 meters above the road.

Although this item cannot be securely dated or attributed it is likely to be of Colonial origin. It is a picked not scratched engraving of a man from the waist up wearing a broad brimmed hat, smoking a pipe and wearing a striped vest or shirt. It has historic significance as a memento of past activity involved in the construction and use of the road. If it is of Convict origin it also reflects the problems of close supervision of gangs of men engaged on the time consuming tasks associated with road building. Picking this engraving would have been a diversion and a way of leaving a permanent statement for someone who could not engrave their name.

On Devines Hill there is another engraving of a man's head smoking a pipe, possibly a soldier guarding the Iron Gang. This one, for its protection, is kept covered and out of view.

[References: CTP CMP: RTA Technology Maps of GNR. Appendix to Grace Karskens 1983 MA about the GNR.]

CTP NEWS:

Thomas James Bridge: The date for tenders to the work here was extended for a few days but are now closed and undergoing assessment, as of last Friday no announcement had been made. This will be a very expensive labour intensive job.

CTP Signage: Good news from Michael Young, the CTP Treasurer, who has been managing the CTP Signage Grant and actually installing the signs. All 28 of the CTP signs have been installed except for the two involved in road reconstruction following the 2022 rain events. The sign at Thomas James Bridge cannot be installed until the extensive road reconstruction has been completed. The sign at the southern approach to the Bucketty precinct will be installed when the road there has been rebuilt. Thanks go to Michael for all his hard work and now Elizabeth Roberts will handle the paperwork to acquit this grant. Thanks in advance go to Elizabeth for handling this task.

The Pick 11: Members of the Board continue to work on articles for the Pick Vol 11. The theme of which is Roads associated with the GNR. We have set ourselves the deadline of having it ready for distribution at the AGM later this year. More writers or editors are welcome. We would especially welcome someone who can draw maps or plot maps from early survey notes. We need lots of maps for Volume 11. We have the survey notes of the road from Newcastle to Maitland but many of the survey points are gates to properties or trees. It starts at the Church door from memory. It would be good to know how much the original road deviated from the current road.

The Pick 10: As we still have a large number of copies of the Pick 10 and we know they were not properly distributed to members and supporters. If you are a library or community organization or a paid up private member and do not have a copy of the Pick 10, please let us know so we can try to organize a "no cost" delivery. The Pick 10 and 11 may be delivered together. The Pick 10 is the issue with faded writing on the cover superimposed with a line drawing of a hut on the front and a map on the back. It is about the settlers who owned land in the Hunter Valley prior to 1826 who asked for the GNR to be built.

Research meetings. As the second Wednesday did not suit we have reverted to the first Wednesday of each month. The next meeting will be the first Wednesday in June [7 June] at HSHS Kenley Park, Kenley Road, Normanhurst just a short walk from the station by a right of way path adjacent to the railway line. Contact Elizabeth on 9489 3603 if you are coming.

News from CTP Supporters:

Dharug and Lower Hawkesbury Historical Society, meeting on 27 May 2023 [1.00pm] Guest speaker Marilyn Woods will speak about a project with S.A.G. to research and write about the lives of women who lived during Australia's colonial period. A group of twenty researchers are working on this project which will bring the stories of each researcher's chosen ancestor to life again. The bones of each woman's story will be factual, but their stories will be written in the mode of historical fiction, recreating the sounds, the smells, the atmosphere and the social customs of colonial Australia. Come along and hear for yourself some of the highlights (and low lights) of Ann Stephenson's life in the convict society of Parramatta - a woman described by the press in her day as " not being a person, who was by any means, afraid to open her mouth, and that pretty wide". Furthermore, although being noted as a woman small in stature, she could only be removed from the courthouse by the vigorous intervention of two constables.

As well as Ann's story, and the early history of Parramatta more generally, Marilyn will also talk about another of her extended family's ancestors, Elizabeth Perry. Elizabeth was most famous for her marriage to James Ruse, with whom she co-partnered the pioneering of agriculture in the New South Wales colony. Marilyn will recount how the Ruse's moved from Parramatta to the Hawkesbury district where their domestic life took an unconventional turn - and one whose secrets remained a mystery until two hundred years later.

Cost: \$10 members & \$15 non members.

Address: 6445 Wisemans Ferry Road, Gunderman.

Bookings essential. Call Jan on 0405 321 478 to book or email secretary@dlhhs.org.au by Tuesday 23 May. Please provide contact details when responding.

DLHHS trip to Dubbo gully at the end of April was cancelled on advice from Council due to sections of the road being boggy in wet weather, and rain was forecasted. This trip has been tentatively re-scheduling for Saturday 24 June. If interested you need to re book Call Jan on 0405 321 478 to book or email secretary@dlhhs.org.au Please provide contact details when responding Cost: \$10 members & \$15 non members

And in closing I apologise for this late May newsletter. We have been west of Bendigo in Victoria chasing the elusive gold [and not finding it] in an area that has no internet service and only one bar of 3G on the mobile if you stand in the right spot! [Mari]