



Convict Trail Project July & August 2023 Newsletter

As in 2022, this newsletter covers July and August. The next newsletter will come out in early September.

A VIRTUAL WALK UP THE GNR: The Dam Wall Fire Trail & Sampsons Pass Bridge. [Contributed by Elizabeth Roberts]

Today on our virtual trip along the Great North Road we will travel the over the dam wall fire trail to the locked gate just north of the runs of Sampsons Pass bridge. This is a short but interesting section of the road described by Grace Karskens in her 1983 MA Thesis as the most degraded section of the road. Since Grace wrote that it has only become more degraded and washed out.

Leaving the fire trail, the road climbs gently to Sampsons Pass, here is an open area with tracks leading off to the west to Mt Lockyer and to the east above Mangrove Dam. The Road heading north rapidly, descends downhill to where it crosses a water course and then gently rises to the locked gate. Here at Sampsons Pass the Shire and Electoral boundaries leave the road and travel to the east along the ridge line or water shed, putting this bridge in the Hawkesbury Council area.



Previous page: Looking south uphill, standing where bridge decking should be
Below: Overview of Sampsons Pass



This section was discovered by Thomas Mitchell when he was surveying the route of the Road in 1829, and he made his usual underestimation of the amount of work required. Most of the work in this section was carried out by Iron Gang 8 in 1830 with the damaged bridge built by Clares Bridge Party, part of Road Party 25. There is nearly 1 kilometre of side walling supporting various sections of the road, the quality of this stone work varies greatly improving as it approaches the small bridge at the lowest point.



Above: Overall view of Sampsons Pass Bridge remains, taken on the western side, below the wall.

Although very little of the bridge infrastructure is visible it appears this bridge is similar to that just south of Hawkins Lookout on the descent to Wisemans Ferry. But it is not possible to be sure as when workmen were coming in this way to work on Mangrove Dam, they could not by pass the collapsed bridge, as they did at Circuit Flat, but overcame the problem by grading or bull-dozing whatever was lying on the road and enough road surface as was necessary to fill the gap, a space of about 2.4 metres deep, 8 metres from side to side and 3.5 metres between the abutments.



The north western external corner of the abutments has collapsed with stones lying scattered on the hillside below, part of the wall leading to the corner is free standing and in danger of collapsing as the material behind it has been washed out. The area has not been inspected since last year's heavy rains so further damage may have occurred. In the past 25 years, the only conservation work carried out here has been the cutting and poisoning of trees growing out of the abutments and wall.



Above: Southern abutment and collapsed northern abutment and filled space between washed out, taken from below base of walling.



Above: Shows collapsed northern abutment and washed out area behind wall, can see dozed-in fill including timber and shaped stones.

With continual water flowing into the bridge precinct the top stones of the abutments have become exposed and will be damaged if used as a fire trail, if not covered by some protective material. For instance, open rubber matting has been used to protect Aboriginal art sites from vehicular damage.

This bridge is a member of the highly significant group of surviving on the Great North Road bridges which are the oldest known stone bridges (with wooden decking) bridges on the Australian mainland, built in 1830.

Sampsons Pass Bridge is 3 kilometres south of Circuit Flat Bridge. In dry weather it is possible to drive to Circuit Flat in a good clearance 2-wheel-drive vehicle. In the next newsletter we will walk the 3 kilometres between the two bridges.

CTP NEWS:

Thomas James Bridge.

Work is due to commence shortly on the reconstruction of Thomas James Bridge on Settlers Road, and the stabilisation on the adjacent rock face.

Council has appointed a contractor – Delaney Civil – to undertake both the reconstruction of the bridge and stabilisation of the rock face. Early works including clearing of the landslide are anticipated to commence in the coming weeks. There is not anticipated to be any impact on access beyond the current restrictions and arrangements. Work on Thomas James Bridge is anticipated to start in late August.

As part of our commitment to keeping the community informed, Council has scheduled two community meetings – one in-person and one on-line, on Monday 31 July 2023. At both meetings we will be introducing the contractor and discussing when works will begin and any expected changes to access. Community members are welcome to attend one or both of these meetings.

<https://www.hawkesbury.nsw.gov.au/emergency/renewing-hawkesburys-roads/major-road-projects>

Delaney Civic have undertaken a number of road works for Hawkesbury City Council including work on the ferry landing place at Wisemans Ferry. <https://delaneycivil.com.au/>

News from other Newsletters

The Monthly newsletter of the Royal Australian Historical Society carried the following announcement which some readers may be interested in:-

Convict Lives: "The Australian Journal of Biography and History has just published a special issue on the theme of 'Convict Lives'. It features research articles by leading academics through to early career researchers. The journal is open-access and can be viewed here: <http://doi.org/10.22459/AJBH.07.2023>"

Webinar: The Court of Claims from Collections eNews, July 2023

Online, Friday 25 August, 10.30am–11.30am, free but registration is essential

The Court of Claims was established to resolve the claims of people who had been promised land grants but were not in possession of the titles, or where the land was in the possession of others claiming to have lawful right to it.

This webinar will explore the fascinating records of this court, how to find them, and what they can tell you about land ownership in NSW in the 19th century. Contact State Records Museums of History NSW Western Sydney Records Centre, 161 O'Connell Street Kingswood, NSW 2747 Australia website: mhnsw.au to register

And in closing Work on **The Pick 11** is progressing so if you still have not sent Elizabeth Roberts your article on one of the other roads associated with the GNR, please contact her quickly. [. earoberts@bigpond.com]

The Pick 11 will be ready for distribution at the AGM later this year.