



Convict Trail Project

September 2023 Newsletter

A VIRTUAL WALK UP THE GNR: South from Circuit Flat Bridge to Sampsons Pass. [Contributed by Elizabeth Roberts]

Today in our virtual trip along the Great North Road we are going to reverse the direction we have been travelling and walk from Circuit Flat Bridge to Sampsons Pass instead of the other way around. This is a walk in and back out trip. In our last newsletter in July we got to Sampsons Pass.

I have reversed the order as I am hoping to encourage some of you to make this trip. In dry weather it is possible to drive into Circuit Flat Bridge in a 2-WD vehicle with good ground clearance. There are some slippery patches when wet. By driving into Circuit Flat Bridge it is a pleasant 3 kilometre walk each way into and back from Sampsons Pass. In spring the wild flowers abound and there are always views over the Little Mogo Creek valley. Energetic walkers can make it a 10 kilometre round trip from Mt Manning parking area or Mogo Camping area. Having inspected Circuit Flat Bridge, which we will talk about next month, head south across a large rock platform. On your left-hand side you will notice the top of the platform where you are standing has been lowered by 10 to 15 cms for many meters.



On the platform above the cut area towards where it has been cut, you can find some interesting graffiti of a full scale naked man, inscribed above it MR COLLIER OUT FOR A DIP. This is believed to have been engraved by the telegraph line construction workers. In 1856 Sydney was connected to Newcastle by a telegraph line (for Morse Code messages) that was built along the route of the GNR and maintained for the next 100 years after conversion to telephone. Other evidence of the telegraph/telephone line can be found on this walk. As it is many years since I last walked this section I am not sure of the order in which some of the following occur. On the left hand or Eastern side walking in above the road cut into a rock platform is a hole in which would have been placed a wooden telephone pole.



Photo: Looking back over Circuit Flat Bridge low edge of Road on RHS



On a different rock platform sloping downwards not on where the original road was but where people now drive, sticking up out of the rock platform is about 10 to 20 cms of cut off railway track used as fire proof phone pole at a later stage. If you are in a 4WD vehicle that could negotiate the rocks at Circuit Flat Bridge and have ignored the NPWS "do not enter signs" be careful not to hit this as it would cut your tyres to bits. It is not always easy to see.

Although the road is virtually straight, it follows the land surface gently undulating up and down over a 30 metre rise and fall. For those with a good eye, there are lots of small bits of evidence of the road construction to be found. At one place the road takes a sudden sharp right, then left hand bend avoiding a washed out culvert a meter or so wide and about 2 meters deep fissure in the road surface.

It is awesome to be able to walk in such a wilderness so close to Sydney and Newcastle and to experience the noisy silence of the bush, the bird and bees and rustling leaves or the quiet silence of the midday heat. The great variety of spring flowers and the various varieties of vegetation are an added joy.

Think about how what you are going to experience must have been terrifying to the convicts working there. Probably they were encouraged to be frightened of the Aborigines to discourage absconding while they were stuck in what appeared to be a never-ending wilderness. Think about the Aborigines and their bewilderment at the Europeans cutting this large scar through the land they always passed so gently over.



I encourage you to explore this easy accessible area BUT please remember you are going on a 6 or 10 kilometre hike in a generally waterless wilderness so go prepared and DO NOT venture in on a bushfire danger days. Be very careful anytime with cigarette butts.

If you are driving as soon as the land starts to drop off on your right-hand side, stop and backup to where you can park as you are approaching the locked gate just before Sampsons Pass Bridge remains. At the locked gate it is too narrow to turn easily without damaging the edges of the road and very tricky to reverse out. Following this story, next month we will examine Circuit Flat Bridge.



Photo: Road worn through different stone and clay layers

NOTE: The committee of Dharug and Lower Hawkesbury Historical Society are organising a tour into the Circuit Flat Bridge area for late October 2023 and CTP members will be notified in time to book in for this special event.

CTP NEWS:

Thomas James Bridge

Work is about to start in mid-September at Thomas James Bridge. This will be slow establishment work and will include the removal of the land slippage and vegetation in preparation for preparing the single lane access route and temporary bridge.

The council held two community information meetings on the 31 July to announce the process for the works to be done, one face to face and one via Zoom. The biggest concern of the community was the lack of access for the period the bridge was to be out of action. After many various plans were discussed and costed and assessed for practicality, it was decided that it would be possible to construct a temporary single lane by-pass road and temporary bridge on the cliff face side of the road.

The two major concerns were getting the school children to school and the fact that the Wisemans Ferry Rural Fire Brigade fire station is on Settlers Road just a little way beyond Devines Hills [ie Thomas James Bridge] and there is a worrying fire season approaching. Another issue that had to be resolved, was the funding that had been received for the clearing and stabilization of the land slippage was predicted on the works being as a continuous process and with the installation of the one lane bypass bridge it would be necessary to carry out the works in two parts, clearance, bridge works then stabilization.

As those who know the site realise this is a very small narrow unstable site and there is need for a lot of storage area. The whole of the 1830s works are to be taken down, each stone numbered and stacked, the fill behind removed to bedrock and stored. A large concrete retaining wall is to be built with appropriate drainage then backfilled, then the

1830s stone walls reconstructed with the stones placed in same order they originally were. Some if found to be crushed, may need to be replaced. It may not be possible to sort the exact order of replacement of the fall stones but modern computer technology should allow for a better arrangement than what was achieved in the reconstruction of the collapse at Clares Bridge in the late 1990s.

The full council presentation may be viewed at <https://youtu.be/IFAPQyPUKCO> this included diagrams of what is to happen but not the drainage diagrams.

Road Collapse at Bucketty: As reported earlier, there were two large collapses just north of the Bucketty intersection. This is now operated as a single lane bypass with traffic lights. The council have employed a Contract Project Manager to oversee this project and other road repair projects. The investigative engineering and archaeology and reports to heritage are being carried out by a Newcastle consulting firm Kleinfelder Aust. Kleinfelder is an American Company that expanded into the Pacific Rim in Australia and Gaum in 2010. It is mainly an engineering and environmental impact company with Australian headquarters in Melbourne and an office in Newcastle. It is likely to be late this year that tenders will be let to do this work. Once completed there will be concrete "jersey curb" placed along the edge of this section of road. Jersey curb is what is in place round Ramsays Leap.

CTP AGM: The next newsletter will have information about the 2023 CTP AGM.

And in closing

I am emailing you this newsletter from Perth, Western Australia, where we are waiting for our towing vehicle to be repaired in Kalgoorlie following a serious road accident. Eric and I were physically unscathed by the accident but our trusty caravan, which we were towing, was totally destroyed. We are so grateful to all our West Australian friends and to our family who rallied to help us following this unplanned event. [Mari, CTP Chair]