



Convict Trail Project

February 2024 Newsletter

A VIRTUAL WALK UP THE GNR: Descent of Mt Manning and St Albans Road Ramp

[Contributed by Elizabeth Roberts]

Being February and school and work returned we will resume our virtual trip along the Great North Road. The road emerges from the national park and Mangrove Dam catchment area on to the road that runs from Bucketty to St Albans. Google maps calls the road Great Northern Road where it emerges from the National Park and Wollombi Road for the remaining of the trip to St Albans whilst the locals call it Mogo Creek Road as it follows Mogo Creek. It is one of the few public dirt roads remaining within an hour's drive of Sydney. The midweek, middle day traffic on this road is approximately one vehicle per hour, more over the week end. With so little traffic it is possible to stand on or near the road and imagine you are back in the 1830s. Generally, all you can hear is the wind if any in the trees and the insects and birds and on warm days even they are silent. Travelling east after the road leaves the National Park, east of the Mt Manning intersection with signs, you very soon come to the descent of Mt Manning and the St Albans Road ramp at its base. This is where we concentrate for today. Within this area there is a campsite, unfortunately raided by a person with a metal detector in recent years. What they found and took is not known, they dumped what they did not want and left what looks like a wild pig had been going through the area breaking the surface with its snout looking for roots and grubs. There is a fireplace and the base of an 1820-30 black bottle had previous been found here. There is a large as well as a small quarry site and walling now mostly covered by over graded road topping supporting the descent down the hillside.



Walling at St Albans road ramp looking east along the road



Walling on northern side taken from below showing dead tree stump

About half down the hillside there is a culvert cut into the bed rock for most of the way across the road now filled with a concrete pipe that was replaced by Hawkesbury City Council very carefully 15 to 20 years ago when the pipe that then lined the culvert space was broken on the top. Sometime in the past, probably during the 1950s to 1960s, the top of the culvert had fallen in due to the lack of protective topping. The pick dressing on the cut back rock wall is worth looking at, on one large rock face there was both a left handed and right-handed convict working, at pick mark facing the rock face. You can tell one was left handed and one was right as the pick marking is made in different directions. Near the base of the descent there is a new sign saying quarry site. Here a large amount of stone was cut out. The layering of the stone must have sloped down from the front edge. As over time the area has filled with leaf litter and converted in to soil, enough to support several trees, that have been cut down but some of the stumps remain so be careful when walking here. If you look over the edge you can see the stone masons threw all the stone debris over the side of the cliff face. The road you see below you leads into a privately owned block of land in the middle of the national park that was owned by a group of people who used it as a private camping area. This road has been useful for the local clean up Australia group to drag out dumped cars and more recently a dumped trailer. I am now too old to clamber down the hillside to check there are no bodies in the apparent car accidents. When there is still fresh evidence that they have run off the road and no police tape round them they need to be checked.

St Albans Road Ramp at the bottom of the descent from Mt Manning is an interesting structure, built to fill a hollow at the base of the descent, it has walls on both sides from which stone was stolen about 17 years ago. There are no culverts through the base of the

structure meaning it is built exactly on top on the water divide, with the water on one side draining into Mangrove Dam and the other into the Hawkesbury River via Mogo Creek and the MacDonald River. This section of the road is state heritage listed and there is now a massive fine for stone theft and any damage to the road.

Thomas James Bridge works report:

The following report (in part) was received from Hawkesbury City Council.

Thomas James Bridge Restoration

Works are continuing at the Thomas James Bridge Restoration Project, with the following works being carried out this week:

- Continuation of the stone removal operation with the heritage representative onsite
- Traffic Lights for traffic control outside of working hours.
- Removal of material offsite
- Preparation works for the retaining wall foundation.

The below works are planned for next week:

- Continuation of stone removal on the St Albans side, under the supervision of the heritage representative
- Traffic lights to be used for traffic control outside of working hours.
- Continuation of the preparation of the retaining wall foundation
- Removal of material offsite

These works will continue to take place between the hours of 6:30am to 6pm Monday to Friday, and from 6:30am to 2pm on Saturdays. Please expect continuous truck movements during these hours.

Settlers Road Major Landslip

Work on the landslip has paused while focus is on removing the retaining walls and convict blocks at Thomas James Bridge. Delaney Civil prioritises the safety and well-being of the community. The project is progressing according to the program, however external factors and unexpected circumstances during the landslide repairs can occasionally lead to extended delays. Please do not hesitate to contact Emily Mallon at Delaney Civil if you wish to further discuss any of the above, or have any additional questions, on 0484 267 907 or on email community@delaneycivil.com.au.

When seen two to three weeks ago they were down to bedrock about half way across the road on the ferry side.

Works by Cessnock City Council at Bucketty:

As reported previously, there are three major washouts just north of Bucketty intersection, they are basically within the northern end of planned road widening works listed below but are listed as separate works on the Council Web site.

Cessnock City Council has funds for the widening of George Downs Drive and the Great North Road either side of the intersection with the road to St Albans variously known as the Great Northern Road or Mogo Creek Road. Travellers should note that the works commence 275 metres south of the intersection and continue north for 410 metres north of the intersection. The website says

"Scope of works

- Road widening at the intersection with Great North Road and along George Downes Drive to accommodate guard rail

- Installation of guardrail with motorcycle under run on both sides of George Downes Drive
- Associated signs and line marking

Funding



NSW Safer Roads Program and Council funds making a total of \$1,720,000, planned for completion by 30 June 2024, weather permitting.

"The wash out works are listed as [Great North Road Laguna – Heavy Load Limit](#)

*This notice affects heavy vehicles with a **Combined Mass Load Limit OVER 25 tonne.***

On 27 June 2022 a landslip occurred on Great North Road, Laguna 150m north of the Council boundary. Be advised that a 25 tonne combined mass load limit will apply on Great North Road 150m north of Great Northern Road and George Downes Drive intersection.

Engineers require this to protect the embankment landslips so that reconstruction can proceed. Load limits will be effective from 27 February 2023 until further notice.

Vehicle travel is limited to one lane with traffic lights utilised. Initial investigations and temporary works at this location have commenced."

Fortunately the road widening is occurring mostly is a section where the current road is not overlaying the original Great North Road. But there are a number of cut shaped stones visible in the washed-out material. When one walks up on the Original convict-built road from the Bucketty intersection it would appear that the two roads connect about where the largest washout is. I have not gone down to see if there are shaped rocks in the bottom of the washed-out material. The extent of the main wash out is now visible on a google map.

SIGNAGE Grant: We still have two signs awaiting installation before this grant can be finalised. One is at Thomas James Bridge and one in the vicinity of the wash out at Bucketty. Both Councils are in communication with the CTP and are completing important road repairs before the signs can be installed.

CTP NEWS:

220th Anniversary of the Castle Hill Rebellion

On 2nd March 2024 from 5pm to 7.00 at Heritage Park Castle Hill.

A family fun event is being held at Heritage Park Castle Hill sponsored by the Hills Shire Council, to mark 220th anniversary of the Castle Hill (Vinegar Hill) rebellion. The CTP and

the HDHD will both have tables at this outdoor event with lots of children's games; food vans; Irish music and a performance by the Convict Players at 6pm. All Welcome no entry fee. There is a connection between the 1804 rebellion and the Great North Road, because of the rebellion Newcastle became a place of secondary punishment and no free settlement was allowed till 1822-23 by which time NSW was attracting "gentry" settlers who wanted a good road to get their goods to market in Sydney.

Talk at Hawkesbury Library

On 13 March 2024, at 10am at Hawkesbury Library. The Hawkesbury Family History Group have invited Elizabeth Roberts to talk about the Great North Road convicts and convict life. All welcome

RAHS News: The board of the RAHS have announced that after much discussion they are not going ahead with the plans to rebuild the back modern section of History House. In the last 3 to 4 years buildings costs have doubled and they can no longer afford the alterations. The building is slowly being reopened, the library by appointment and events will commence in April.

And in closing

A productive CTP board meeting was held 7 February 2024 at Hornsby Shire Historical Society Museum.