

The Pulpit Post™

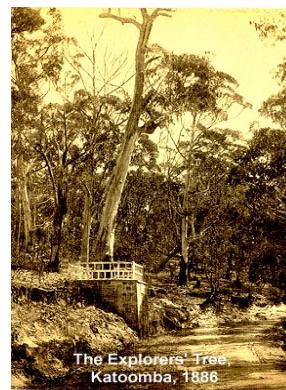
A not-for-profit local independent newsletter by locals on local issues

Dedicated to community and environment issues specific to

Radiata (Mt Elphinstone) Plateau, Pulpit Hill & Nellies Glen environs.

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The Explorers' Tree,
Katoomba, 1886

The Explorers' Tree
Pulpit Hill, 1886

'Save Radiata (Mt Elphinstone) Plateau'

Issue# PH91-01

The Editor has been doing some research.

To those Pulpit Hill locals who recall the 2nd Save Radiata Plateau campaign during 2004-05, some may have read NSW Environment Minister, Hon. Bob Debus' letter finally rejecting appeals from the community and council for the State Government to buy Radiata Plateau from the TM organisation. As part of his justification letter back on 19-Jan-05 to council's GM, Michael Willis, Mr Debus wrote:

"Given the outcome of the Public Land Rationalisation process, 28 Pulpit Hill (Radiata Plateau) will not meet the acquisition criteria as it does not, and will not in the future, border the National Park." [Copies of letter freely available]

Few may be aware that six months later on 25-Jul-05 the boundary of the Blue Mountains National Park was brought a little closer to Radiata Plateau, when Scenic World sold 46.2 hectares comprising "six separate tracts of bushwalking land" to the care of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. This included bushland around Devil's Hole, which effectively placed the National Park just over 1km from Radiata (Mt Elphinstone) Plateau. [BMG 27-Jul-05].

This meant that the only lands then separating Radiata (Mt Elphinstone) Plateau from the National Park were just two public land parcels, described on local council's website mapping as:

'Water Reserve'

45-48 Nellie's Glen Road, MEGALONG NSW 2785
DP 13548 [Area: 105 hectares]

'Vacant Crown Land'

248A & 248B Cliff Drive, KATOOMBA NSW 2780
DP 751657 [Area: 31 hectares]

Both these public land parcels comprise high conservation bushland across Nellie's Glen gorge and along the escarpment cliff face. Viewing them from Cahill's Lookout, one could be mistaken for assuming these land parcels already lie within the national park. The landscape between Devil's Hole and Radiata (Mt Elphinstone) Plateau is quality mature bushland. The Six Foot Track, which passes through Nellie's Glen,

traverses the 'Water Reserve'. Not inconsistently, the Six Foot Track is currently protected under a heritage trust management arrangement controlled by the NSW Department of Lands.

This is where it gets interesting. According to the Public Lands Rationalisation (PLR) Project (2002) jointly between Department of Environment & Conservation (DEC), local council and NSW Department of Lands, 3600 hectares of crown land along the Western Escarpment, including this bushland across Nellies Glen gorge between Radiata Plateau and Peckman's Plateau (ie. the 2 public land parcels), was to be transferred into the Blue Mountains National Park.

This week the Editor renewed contact with a senior DEC spokesperson who re-confirmed that as at February 2007 "The Blue Mountain Public Lands Rationalisation Working Group had reached agreement that approximately 3,060ha of land adjoining Blue Mountains National Park is suitable for addition to the national park" (including the Nellies Glen gorge area).

DEC has for some time considered the bushland across Nellies Glen gorge (the 2 public land parcels) to be part of the Blue Mountains National Park. The DEC spokesperson cautioned however that "while the working group has reached the above agreement, these outcomes have not been formally endorsed by any of the Department of Environment and Conservation, the Department of Lands or Blue Mountains Council. Further, there is no definite timetable for implementing the recommendations of the PLR Working Group."

So the Blue Mountains National Park could now extend from the Jamison Valley to the southern escarpment of Radiata Plateau. Properties along the southern side of Pulpit Hill Road (including #28 owned by the TM Organisation) could have the National Park over their back fence!

This presents fresh opportunities to **Save Radiata Plateau!** Clearly, the goal posts have shifted since Mr Debus' 2005 rejection letter. But without community drive, such national park endorsement could be some years away.

An update on World Heritage:

As many locals will be aware, 'The Greater Blue Mountains Area' (GBMWA) was inscribed as a 'Declared Property' on UNESCO's World Heritage List on 29th November 2000. This included all eight National Parks of the Blue Mountains region that together comprise about 1 million hectares. But few will be aware that of the possible ten criteria for listing, UNESCO's World Heritage Committee only approved natural criteria (ix) and (x):

(ix) "to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals";

(x) "to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation."

Source: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/>

Many supporters of world heritage listing consider that these criteria don't sufficiently protect the conservation values of the Blue Mountains. So as a next step, in 2005, the 'Greater Blue Mountains Area' was nominated for the Australia's National Heritage List with regard to its aesthetic values as well as its cultural values [Place File No: 1/14/006/0061]. World heritage rules state that approval for these values on Australia's National Heritage List must first occur before re-nomination for the World Heritage List can be initiated.

During the second 'Save Radiata Plateau' campaign during 2004 and 2005, many supporters argued that Radiata (Elphinstone) Plateau is an integral part of The Greater Blue Mountains Area. In many ways the plateau satisfies the same listed criteria (ix) and (x) as well as the aesthetic and cultural criteria. "The Blue Mountains City Council identified the plateau in its Environmental Management Plan (1989) as a major and crucial omission from the publicly owned escarpment system." [BM Gazette 15-Dec-04].

One hope for the Plateau:

A NPWS Conservation Agreement for the Plateau

The National Parks and Wildlife Service, part of the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), provides for a Conservation Agreement between a landholder and the Minister for the Environment for the purpose of protecting and conserving nature, Aboriginal heritage and historic heritage in New South Wales.

"The agreement provides permanent protection for the special features of your land and is voluntary. The area under the agreement is registered on the title of the land ensuring that if the land is sold, the agreement and management requirements remain in place."

This option seems particularly relevant for serving to protect the natural and heritage conservation values of Radiata Plateau, especially given that two key justifications offered by NPWS for establishing a conservation agreement are:

- For areas containing scenery, natural environments or natural phenomenon worthy of preservation;
- For the study, preservation, protection, care or propagation of fauna or native plants or other flora."

SOURCE:

http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/npws.nsf/Content/conservation_partners.

The combined allotments comprising the land title of the plateau which are identified on local council's LEP 1991 zoning as:

28 Pulpit Hill Road
KATOOMBA NSW 2780
DP 751657
Area: 50 hectares

It is this land that comprises the plateau which was in 2004 placed on the market for sale by the TM Organisation, which was/is reported keen to have the environmental integrity of the land preserved for the future and for government to buy it.

And another option...

Reported in the Blue Mountains Gazette on 14-Feb-07, the NSW Environment Minister announced a \$2.1 pledge to acquire private land holdings within the world heritage areas of NSW. Surely, the two land parcels previously mentioned as well as Radiata (Mt Elphinstone) Plateau could rightly be deemed land holdings adjoining the World Heritage Area. The combined area would be 186 hectares added to the reserve system, of which just 50 hectares is privately owned. Fifty hectares is well within the 4300 hectares of private land holdings which the State Government in March 2003 promised it would include into the National Park reserve system

What do residents think? Feel free to contact the Editor (see contact details at the end of this newsletter).

Council poised to sell off public-owned land on Pulpit Hill – Update

Issue# PH97-01

Readers may recall being alerted to Blue Mountains Council's plans to develop about 6 hectares of community bushland on the eastern crest of Pulpit Hill and to prepare it for sale for housing development. This plan dates back to Council meeting on 11-Nov-

97, minute #563. In June 2006, councillors unanimously agreed to allocate \$178,000 in their Capital Works Programme (**Project 70/127302 'Pulpit Hill Subdivision'**) to prepare the land for subdivision and sale.

Since the last issue, the Editor received a copy of Council's original business item 18 dated 13-May-97 entitled 'NSW Government Grant for Purchase of Lands for Consolidation'. It states:

"On 10 May 1997 the Hon Bob Debus, Member for Blue Mountains, is scheduled to formally present to Council a grant for \$500,000 to assist with the acquisition of environmentally sensitive land that can subsequently be consolidated with adjoining lots."

Council, in this business item decided to interpret this grant differently. Council used the grant monies to acquire small specific private land holdings, zoned under LEP 1991 as 'Residential Bushland Conservation', which council argued had prevented owners developing or selling the sites. An example of such land included the seven small land parcels on Pulpit Hill making up these 6 hectares. Council argued that instead of using the grant money to directly acquire environmentally sensitive land, Council would instead use the money to acquire nominated lands causing owners "zoning difficulties". Council would then later selling these lands "ultimately for the acquisition of environmentally sensitive areas."

At Council's meeting last Tuesday 20-Feb-07, Item 3 of the Business Paper (p.13) recommended Councillors endorse \$19,000 for a consultant to prepare a development application in order to sell Council owned land on Pulpit Hill."

The Editor and another local resident decided to address Councillors objecting to this proposal and to the land sale. In addition to the environmental concerns the following two points were made:

Point 1:

"The land on and around Pulpit Hill has rare historical heritage of both local and indeed national significance. It is wrong to sell off our heritage for housing development."

Reference was made to the historical symbolism of the Explorers Marked Tree being less than 100m from the site, Cox's Road passing along the western edge of the site, evidence of Lawson's Deviation Road of the 1820s crossing through lot 406 and to other historic relics in the immediate precinct.

"I call upon Councillors to first seek more information on this historic precinct before rushing to commit \$19,000 to prepare this site for sale for housing and that Councillors do not to endorse this expenditure."

"I recommend that Council apply for external funding to undertake an independent historical study to assess the heritage value of the Pulpit Hill site and its immediate precinct."

Point 2:

"Council's process to date has not been transparent and Council has failed to notify the Blue Mountains community and local residents of its plans for this site."

"I call upon Council to properly consult with the local community, to set up a series of at least two public meetings to explain its plans for the site and allow for community participation."

Outcome of Meeting:

Councillors agreed to temporarily defer endorsing this expenditure, to seek more information and refer it to the finance department to review. But Councillors did not agree to have an historical study into the precinct nor to consult with community on Council's proposed sale. A key benefit is that it has bought a little time.



Local retired bushwalker Jack Austin reveals clear remnants of William Lawson's 1820's 'deviation road' at the site of Council's operational land intended for housing development.

Photograph taken 30-Jun-06.

Current Development Application for 49 Explorers Road, Katoomba
Issue# PH06/01

Again, at the time of going to print, the proposed "boundary adjustment" between the vacant paddock

on the corner of Explorers and Saywell Roads and the adjoining bushland to the west on Karuna Sanctuary's property is "*still under assessment*" according to the Council planner considering this application.

According to a past resident, in the post-war years this vacant block on the corner was cleared by Stan & Joyce Lutteral, who built and lived in a two roomed shack on the site and together ran a small piggery.

Those days are long gone. The woodland behind this cleared block is zoned Environmental Protection under Council's Local Environment Plan 1991 and is not permitted to be damaged; irrespective of whether the boundary adjustment is approved or not

Pulpit Hill's heritage precinct Issue# PH07/01

Investigation into local history archives has uncovered a rich pioneering heritage associated with Pulpit Hill.

Details were to be revealed in this summer edition of **The Pulpit Post**. However, due to the pressing issue of Council's proposed land sale, this has been deferred to the autumn and winter editions.

The Editor apologises for the late despatch of the Summer edition.

Up coming in the autumn issue of The Pulpit Post:

- **Insights into some of the rich pioneering heritage associated with Pulpit Hill & environs.**
- **RTA Radar reveals at least one grave is genuine amongst the controversial 'convict' graves**
- **Reminiscing 'Springvale' – a past resident recalls growing up on the piggery in the 1950s**
- **What does Pulpit Hill mean to residents?**

Chainsawed woodland on Pulpit Hill



This is Council's 'Operational' land site on Pulpit Hill looking north alongside the Great Western Highway. This is part of the 6 hectares acquired by Council in 1997 from \$500,000 in State Government funding so that Council could purchase and protect environmentally sensitive land. The source and reasons for the chainsawing are not known.

Photograph taken 30-Jun-06.

Editor's invitation:

For enquiries about any item above, to contribute to this newsletter, or if you are aware of any issues affecting this area please contact the residents below.