

The Pulpit Post™

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

Dedicated to community and environment issues specific to Mt Elphinstone (alias Radiata) Plateau,
Pulpit Hill & Nellies Glen environs.

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'Save Radiata Plateau'

Issue# PH91-01

What makes the western escarpments of Pulpit Hill and Katoomba special is that they remain largely in their natural state - undisturbed. While Leura and Wentworth Falls have allowed the Jamison cliff tops to be spoilt and dominated by private housing development, the escarpments west of Katoomba still enable the public to see the Mountains the way they have been for thousands of years.

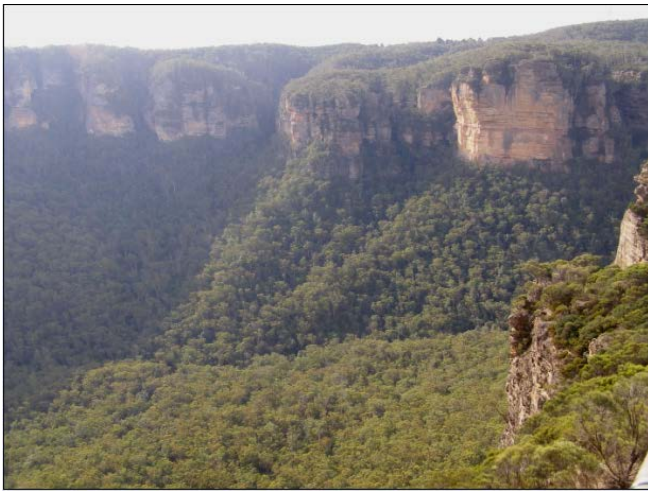


Photo of the southern escarpment of Mt Elphinstone (alias Radiata) Plateau looking into Nellies Glen, taken from Cahill's Lookout on neighbouring Peckman's Plateau.

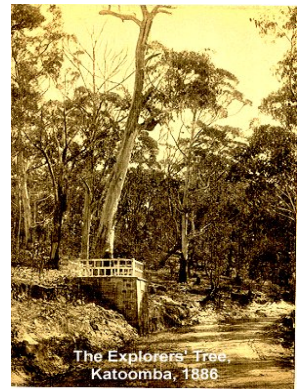
DECC effectively considers this gorge to be part of the Blue Mountains National Park, but the process of formalising this has stalled.

Photograph taken 13-May-07.

The following are extracts from a NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) 1992 report on the natural and heritage values of Mt Elphinstone (alias Radiata) Plateau:

"Radiata Plateau is a mostly undisturbed tableland flanked by undisturbed natural areas to the east and west and generally south below the escarpment.

Adjacent Crown Lands have been previously (1989) identified as having significant natural values and were proposed as additions to the Blue Mountains National Park.



The Explorers' Tree,
Katoomba, 1886

The Explorers' Tree
Pulpit Hill, 1886

The site area is approximately 400 hectares. Radiata Plateau is contiguous with other relatively undisturbed catchments - Nellies Glen and Bonnie Doon.

Some 10% of the site was planted to Radiata Pine over 30 years ago – however, in places the pine plantation is reverting to bushland.

Permanent water is provided by several small catchments, with water quality being equal to that of Bonnie Doon Falls, one of the last unpolluted catchments. The water is considered potable.

Significant vegetation communities which occur include the following:

- Montane heathland
- Sedge heathland (hanging swamp)
- Mature stand of *Eucalyptus oreades*, unburnt since 1926 and relatively pristine.

These stands of *E.oreades* have significant importance for fire research (N.Gellie, FMO, pers.comm.).

The area supports a rich variety and abundance of fauna due to its undisturbed state and variety of habitats (unpublished work of Smith & Jones). Several species of local concern (i.e. potentially under threat in the Blue Mountains) exist in the area:

- Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrines*)
- Chaostola skipper butterfly (*Pseudalmenus chlorinda chloris*)

Several species listed on the current Schedule 12 also occur:

- Squirrel glider (*Petaurus norfolkensis*)
- Sooty owl (*Tyto tenebricosa*)

Other species of interest include:

- Greater glider (*Petauroides volans*)
- Feathertail glider (*Acrobates pygmaeus*)
- Sugar glider (*Petaurus breviceps*)
- Pygmy possum (*Cercartetus nanus*)
- Brushtail possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*)
- Powerful owl (*Ninox strenua*)
- Red necked wallaby (*Macropus rufogriseus*)
- Swamp wallaby (*Wallabia bicolor*)

The area is also expected to support Tiger Quolls (*Dasyurus maculatus*) although at this time no research has occurred to substantiate their occurrence.

Some 19 species of rare, endangered and endemic plants occur (N.Gellie,FMO, pers.comm.) including:

- *Phebalium lachnaeoides*: 2 populations occur on this site including the largest known population. Only 4 sites are known for this plant, which is classified “presumed extinct” (Briggs & Leigh 1988). None of these sites is on land reserved as National Park.
- *Microstrobos fitzgeraldii*: this is the most westerly known population. This plant is considered inadequately reserved – most of the population occurring in polluted catchments.
- *Adenochilus nortonii*: these 10 plants occur in the lower catchment of the building area (proposed TM academy at the time). This species is not adequately conserved.
- *Persoonia acerosa*: this is the most significantly eastern population.
- *Rhizanthella slateri*: this species is poorly known and occurs at few locations.
- and others.

European History

This locality has association with the original crossing of the Blue Mountains. The area is contiguous with Nellies Glen and hence with the Six Foot Track and the access to Jenolan Caves. One of the original descents to the Megalong Valley – Blacks Ladder – exists on this land.”

- Prepared by C. Ireland with assistance from N. Gellie, I. Brown, and G. Mason (NPWS), Blue Mountains District, July 1992. [Archival records courtesy of local Pulpit Hill resident Glenn Humphreys – thanks Glenn].

Besides the obvious natural and cultural values that this report highlighted as far back as 1992, what is particularly poignant is the second paragraph by the NPWS indicating “adjacent Crown Lands have been previously (1989)...proposed as additions to the Blue Mountains National Park.”

So one wonders how the previous NSW Minister for the Environment, Mr Bob Debus, in his reply letter of 19-Jan-05 to council’s previous GM, Michael Willis, could justifiably have claimed the following?

“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.”

Just last month on 27-Apr-07, NPWS became part of the all new DECC – Department of Environment and

Climate Change, dropping the ‘conservation’ from the name. The new department is intended “to provide an integrated approach to natural resource management.”

[www.environment.nsw.gov.au - accessed 24-May-07]



Gate at western end of Pulpit Road leading to Mt Elphinstone (alias Radiata) Plateau. Signage purportedly courtesy of a somewhat ‘zealous’ conservationist (more the merrier).

Photograph taken 3-Mar-07.

Council’s plans to develop Pulpit Hill

Issue# PH97-01

As previously reported, Blue Mountains council at its general meeting in 20-Jun-06, unanimously agreed to allocate \$178,000 to prepare 6 hectares of community land for subdivision and sale under its 2006-2007 Capital Works Programme [Project 70/127302 ‘Pulpit Hill Subdivision’].

At council ordinary meeting on 20-Feb-07, planning staff had included a recommendation to endorse spending a further \$19,000 to engage a consultant to prepare council’s development application. At this meeting a few residents addressed councillors highlighting the threat posed by council’s proposed housing development to the natural and historic heritage values of Pulpit Hill. Councillors McInnes & O’Grady influenced the meeting agreeing that council should seek more information. Council minutes of the meeting confirm the outcome as follows:

1. “That the General Manager’s report together with the accompanying documents titled ‘Quarterly Review Management Plan including Capital Works December 2006 – 2006/2007’ and ‘Quarterly Review Budget September 2006 – 2006-2007’ (both separately enclosed) be noted and endorsed, except for the Pulpit Hill property.
2. That the variations of income and expenditure as identified in the accompanying documents be endorsed and noted.

- 3. *That the Pulpit Hill property, exempt from the report, be referred to the Finance and Assets Working Party for discussion."*

[Source: BMCC Ordinary Meeting 20-Feb-06, Minute 32, File Ref. C01900.]

As a follow up on 15-May-07, one of the residents emailed council requesting a copy of the Finance and Assets Working Party meeting minutes regarding the proposed consolidation and development of public lands at Pulpit Hill, Katoomba. However, at the time of going to press (25-May-07), it is still not clear whether any discussion by this working party has taken place.

Despite residents speaking at the council meeting requesting council to consult with the community before proceeding with its development proposal, the minutes show that councillors ignored this request.

Pulpit Hill's Historical Heritage

Issue# PH07-01

Investigation into local history archives has uncovered a rich pioneering heritage associated with Pulpit Hill. Hours of research by the Editor have revealed a considerable wealth of historical material on Pulpit Hill.

Given the imminent threat of losing a large portion of Pulpit Hill to council's housing development plans, a heritage nomination is currently being prepared for the Pulpit Hill Heritage Precinct to help protect the Hill. The Pulpit Hill Heritage Precinct straddles the old Cox's Road near the Great Western Highway from the old Katoomba Brick and Tile works, past the marked tree and the graves, up over the crest of Pulpit Hill and north to where the old Shepherd and His Flock Inn used to stand at Cherry Tree Flat.

Few will be aware that an original settlement at Pulpit Hill pre-dates any settlement at Katoomba or Medlow Bath. Few will be aware of the reason why Governor Macquarie named Pulpit Hill, of the shooting of Constable Madden during a convict breakout in 1867, or of the association of the old inn with perhaps Australia's most famous poet, Henry Lawson. Over the next several issues, the Pulpit Post will reveal gems of Pulpit Hill's little know history and its folklore.



Historical Walking Tour

There is a rare opportunity for locals to discover first hand the many heritage sites and values of Pulpit Hill.

A one-off historical walking tour has been specially arranged with an experienced historical surveyor next weekend (first weekend of winter). For those interested in attending, you will need to contact the Editor before next weekend on **Mobile: 0407 99 8342**.

What's special about living at Pulpit Hill?

Issue# PH07-02

Locals are invited to share their views and feelings about living at Pulpit Hill and what makes it a special place for them. It could be a paragraph, a story, an account of an event, just a few words or even a poem if you feel inclined.

The Editor has driven and walked around Pulpit Hill many times since settling in Katoomba in 2001. What does Pulpit Hill means to the Editor?

A bush hamlet out from town

*A bush hamlet out from town
Since before Katoomba, before the iron road
Behind that immortal stump, off the highway, out of sight
Where blackbutt and ironstone wrap a defiant escarpment
Off' the focus of February fork lightning
Off' forgot by town*

*Long a rural community, content to be left so
Long gone Macquarie's pulpit & Lawson's ruined inn by the road
Once the rail shifted everything, then everyone
Recall Saywells' days and doing it tough on the farm
The piggeries, orchards, chook pens and aviaries
A mix of folk now – families, renovators, artists, commuters
Recent folk tree-changed, children with nature.
Others exercising hues of semi-retirement*

*The self-made, the making do, or the somewhere in-between
Self-reliant on spring water, the genset, the car for everything
Turn off the highway into home, the blackness and forget
This landscape of extremes befriended
Bush trails to explore to ancient descents to the Megalong
Now they've sealed Explorers Road, what'll it bring?*

*Amongst the sounds of the bush, the Oberon wind
Bird chorus by day, possums and owls primeval at night
They're all still here at Pulpit Hill
With so many stars
So much quiet, so much time*

*This community settled and private
Though quick to rally
This hamlet out from town and off' forgot
Perhaps it matters not.*

Current Development Application for 49 Explorers Road, Katoomba

Issue# PH06/01

At the time of going to print, Council planning decision regarding this development application (DA) is "still under evaluation". The DA was received by Council in July 2006 for a "boundary adjustment" between the

vacant paddock at 49 Explorers Road (SW corner of Saywell Road) and the adjoining bushland to the west, which forms part of Karuna Sanctuary, 418 Great Western Highway. [File Ref: S06/0031]. The boundary adjustment according to a senior planner is expected to be approved, while preserving the integrity of all the protected bushland on the western portion.

Correction to Issue No. 4

In the 1940s, Percival (Perc) Baldry owned land on and adjoining 49 Explorers Road. He established a piggery there and then later sold the property to the Lutterals.

(Thanks for this factual correction to past Pulpit Hill resident, Ron Fletcher, who continues to live in the Mountains).

Coo-ees: The Spirit of our heritage

Issue# PH07/01

[Below is the unedited version of the one that was published in the Blue Mountains Gazette on 18-Apr-07]

On a hot and dusty day at 11am on Friday 5th November 1915, nearly the entire population of Katoomba journeyed to the Explorers' Marked Tree at Pulpit Hill to provide an imposing reception to a band of 190 young men who had marched over 260 miles from the Western Plains. These men were local farmers and workers marching to Sydney to sign up to the Australian Imperial Force.

"Following the disaster of the Gallipoli landings, recruiting figures for enlistment of men in World War I had dwindled. It was at this dark hour that a Gilgandra butcher, Dick Hitchen and his brother Bill, the local plumber, had the idea of organising a route march of volunteers to Sydney, hoping to enlist volunteers along the way." [BMG 3-1-96].

On Sunday 10th October 1915, twenty five (and later another ten) men set out on the march from Gilgandra to Sydney, some 324 miles away. The marchers "were fed, entertained and billeted at each town along the route." [loc cit]. They proceeded up the steep and dusty Berghofers Pass and across the Blue Mountains. Much of the route was on dirt roads which were 'unwatered' and the weather hot and humid. At the iconic Explorers' Marked Tree, Katoomba Mayor, Alderman George James led a heroes' welcome to "the boys from the Western Plains", complete with elaborate and colourful arrangements, the Leura Band, the Fire Brigade and many others along with refreshing drinks. It was estimated more than a thousand people turned up at the Marked Tree on Pulpit Hill. As the mayor pointed out in his welcoming speech, near this spot 102 years prior Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth had camped on their journey to find a way over the Mountains, albeit heading in the opposite direction.

After 33 days on the road the Coo-ees finally marched into Martin Place on 12th November and were greeted by tens of thousands of well-wishers. The march had captured the imagination of the public. The 'Coo-ees', as the volunteers were known, became national heroes. Their ranks had grown to 263, 29 of whom

had joined the march from the Blue Mountains. According to a later account by one of the Coo-ees: "We were 60 short of our aim, which was "a man a mile" for the 320 miles of our march, but we had done our best and could do no more." [Meredith, 1981]

"The Hitchen Brothers originally suggested the march start in May just after the Gallipoli landings. Due to inaction and lack of support from the military and government and Bill Hitchen's decision to go ahead without that support, the march had finally got under way in October after losing many of the early enlistees for the march who became tired of waiting and made their own way to Sydney." [Brian Bywater, Hitchen House & Military Museum, Gilgandra].

The Coo-ees completed basic military training at Liverpool camp and as diggers they embarked for Egypt, where they were broken up to become members of AIF units such as the Australian Artillery Corp, the 13th and 45th Infantry Battalions.

They were then sent to the Western Front in France. Some returned, most didn't.

The Coo-ee historic march is a stirring story of the first and the largest recruiting march in Australia's history. "It was the example they set that was to live in Australian memory". [BM Echo, 6-11-85].

Katoomba resident, Steven Ridd, has been researching the long history of Pulpit Hill. He says "the Coo-ee march is one of a number of significant historic events as well as other rare items and folklore associated with Pulpit Hill. With the support of a number of locals and historians, Mr Ridd is currently preparing a nomination for Pulpit Hill Heritage Precinct to be listed on the State Heritage Register.

It would seem appropriate too, that leading up to the centenary of this historic march, the Blue Mountains community should recognise the Coo-ees as very much a local part of our ANZAC tradition.



In the ANZAC spirit, 'Hitchens Own' (Coo-ees) ascend the Blue Mountains, marching up Berghofers Pass on 3rd November 1915. Photo courtesy of the Blue Mountains Historical Society

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.