

BOX VALE WALKING TRACK

This walking track has been designed and constructed by the Nowra Lands Office with assistance being provided members of Toombong Central School, Mt. Alexandra Reserve Committee, Wingecarribee Shire Council and people employed under the Community Employment Programme.

The Trackhead is located about 250 metres off the Hume Highway. Turn-off is located 3.7 km west of Mittagong and .08 km east of the Wombeyan Caves Road.

The Box Vale Walking track follows the formation of an historic railway line and passes through cuttings, along embankments and through a tunnel 84 metres in length. Although much of the surrounding terrain is steep and rocky, the 4.4 km walking track has easy grades and the return walk takes approx. 3 hours.

There is also a 1.8 km spur track through pleasant bushland to Forty Foot Falls. The initial 1.5 km is along a fire trail of easy grade and the return walk takes about 1 hour. However the Falls cannot be seen from the end of the fire trail and a very steep track (dropping 110 metres in elevation) leads to a vantage point below the falls. This section would be quite difficult for a person not accustomed to negotiating such tracks. The return walk along the entire 1.8 km spur track takes about 2 hours.

Picnic tables and BBQ are provided near the trackhead carpark and at the lookout beyond the tunnel

- Stay on the track – help protect bushland by not damaging any tree, shrub or plant.
- Observe fire bans – do not smoke near flammable vegetation.
- Do not carry firearms or other hunting equipment.
- Take your rubbish home.
- Appreciate native animals from a distance.

- Keep noise levels down – appreciate the desire of others for peace and relaxation.
- Conserve water.
- Do not use trail bikes or horses as damage to the tracks will result.
- Move quietly near stock.
- Be Sunwise, use blackout.
- WATER IS NOT PROVIDED .

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This part of the Southern Tablelands was inhabited by Aborigines for many thousands of years until, in the 1870's they moved from the area. There are many significant archaeological sites in the region that provide information on the culture of the Aboriginal communities. Axe grinding or tool sharpening grooves are found on areas of flat, soft rock such as sandstone. These are usually near waterholes or creeks as water was used as a lubricant in the sharpening process. A number of rock shelters and overhangs that were used to provide shelter from rain and sun have been located in the Hawkesbury sandstone sections of the Nattai Gorge. In addition open campsites have been found on the shale areas and where sandstone and shale meet, although some evidence of Aboriginal occupation can be found in almost any level area that is close to a watercourse.

European settlers extended their interest in settlement to the Mittagong region in the late 18th Century. When the Southern Railway was extended into the region in the 1860's, Mittagong was a well established settlement while Bowral & Moss Vale had undergone no development.

This was because as early as 1848 an iron works had been established at Mittagong which was followed in 1873 by a very extensive shale oil works at Joadja. Mittagong had the potential to become a large industrial centre, however it did not eventuate due to various economic problems.

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Part of the natural resources of the area was a coal deposit on the Nattai River discovered in 1851. The first major attempt to exploit this resource was the incorporation of the Nattai Coal Mining Company in 1878. However, lack of capital left the eventual opening of a large working & construction of the railway line to a new company – the Mittagong Coal-Mining Company Ltd.

The line was completed in 1888 at an estimated cost of \$32,000 and was constructed to the standard gauge and specifications of the Southern Railway to enable the Government engines and trucks to run on it. The line left the main line just south of Mittagong Station and followed this walking track for its latter part, terminating at the Nattai River Gorge some 160 metres above the coal mine. The line was over 6km in length. Changes in ownership and a change in name in 1860 to Box Vale Colliery were not sufficient to ensure the successful operation of the mine and in 1896 the mine closed. During the years in which the mine operated an average of about 1000 tons of coal per annum was transported along the railway line. After mining operations ceased all plant & equipment was removed including the railway track sleepers and the timber trestle bridges that spanned the creeks. At Kell's Creek the circular holes that provided the footings for the large vertical timbers can still be seen in the rock bed of the creek.

TOPOGRAPHIC MAP: MITTAGONG 8929-2S

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The information relating to coal mining operations was derived from "Early Industries in the Mittagong District" by Mr. Justice R. Else-Mitchell, C M G

FLORA AND FAUNA

The country through which the track passes is based on a Hawkesbury sandstone formation. The route is generally along a spur to the edge of the Nattai Gorge where deposits of Narrabeen sandstone occur. The surrounding terrain is steep and rocky and often there is very little top soil. In some areas such as at the commencement of the track the trees are stunted and the timber cover is sparse. The vegetation of the area is generally classified as dry sclerophyll forest & during the past 100 years has intermittently been logged for commercial timbers. The principal timber species found close to the track are messmate, mountain ash, ironbark, stringy bark & gum.

In the gullies that drain into the Nattai Gorge where conditions are not as dry, there are patches of wet sclerophyll forest. An example of such an area can be seen at the Forty Foot Falls.

Since the removal of the railway line late last century natural regeneration has occurred along the embankments and in the cuttings. The soil, aspect and drainage in the cutting varies, and as a result different species of vegetation have become dominant, with one cutting supporting casuarinas and another, tree ferns.

The area through which the walking track passes supports a variety of native birdlife. Species that are commonly sighted include crimson rosellas, kookaburras, golden and rufous whistlers, grey thrush, pied currawongs, magpies and a variety of wrens. About fourteen species of mammals are known to inhabit the locality and wombats, wallabies and possums are common. The monotremes, echidna and platypus, were common, however the closer settlement of the adjacent area has resulted in less frequent sightings.

