



Guidebook 10 – Jenolan Caves to Yaouk

Places of historic or cultural interest

The Jenolan Caves (From a publication by NSW Dept of Lands)

The Cox River tribe which originally inhabited the Jenolan Caves area called the district Binoomea. “Jenolan” is derived from “Genowlan” an aboriginal place name meaning “high mountain”. As early as 1823, Europeans had settled at Bullock Flats and the name of this locality was changed to Oberon on 4th July, 1863.

Cattle duffing flourished in the 1820’s and 1830’s. Infamous figures who frequented the area included James and Leonard Cheetham, Luke White and James Farney. It is possible that cattle duffers or bushrangers may have come across the caves during this period as they would have provided an ideal hiding place.

District property owners James and Charles Whalan, were given the credit for bringing about the re capture of escaped convict James McKeon. It is generally accepted that this event took place in in the area now known as McKeon’s Valley to the west of Jenolan Caves and that James and Charles Whalan discovered the caves in the same year the caves became known as “Fish River Caves” or “Binda Caves” and were not officially named the Jenolan Caves until 1884.

The Arch, Nettle and Elder Caves were discovered in the 1840’s and soon became a popular destination for visitors because of the beauties and curiosities they offered. Initially access to the caves was through McKeon’s Valley with visitors staying overnight at the Whalan property. During the 1850’s the Binda cattle station situated some 13km north of

the caves became the stopover point for visitors who travelled from Mt Victoria following the route of an old cart track. It is assumed that this cart track was later generally followed by the present road through Hampton. This route was taken in July by John Lucas, M.L.A. when he visited the caves. It was necessary to negotiate the final steep descent from Mt George to the caves on horseback or foot. It seems that the final section of the Six Foot Track when constructed in 1884, followed the same route descending from Mt George. This access to the caves became very popular especially after the railway was extended to Mt Victoria in 1868.

The caves, which had been found in the 1840’s began to suffer from vandalism. In 1856, after Mr Jeremiah Wilson explored and penetrated deep into the Elder Cave. Visits increased as did vandalism. In January, 1860, Jeremiah Wilson was in a group that discovered and explored a new cave which was, in 1878, to be named “Lucas Cave” after John Lucas, M.L.A. In later years Wilson was to discover the “Imperial Cave” the “Left Imperial Cave” and the “Mammoth Cave”.

The first Reserve for the Preservation of the Fish River Caves was gazetted on 2nd October, 1866. On 8th March, 1867, the Government Gazette stated that Mr Jeremiah Wilson had been appointed “Keeper of the Caves” at an annual salary of 25 pounds.

Efforts were made to entertain visitors, and a dancing platform was erected under the Grand Archway in 1869. The zig zag road down the hill on the Oberon side of the Caves, which was surveyed by Henry Cambridge in 1878, was completed in 1879, providing travellers with direct access to the area for the first time. The Department of Lands transferred control of the Caves to the department of Mines in 1879.

On 22nd July, 1880, under the direction of Lt Colonel E.C. Cracknell, James Cummings began the installation of equipment to illuminate the “Margherita Cave”. This task was successfully completed and it is thought that this may have been the first use of electricity for cave illumination anywhere in the world. Electric lighting was installed in additional areas in 1884.

In 1884, W.M. Cooper, Surveyor of Public Parks, defined the bridle track known as the Six Foot Track from Katoomba to the Black Range. The route linked with the old cart track which had been improved and was still being used by travellers from Mt Victoria. Surveyor Cooper also instigated action which resulted in the change of name from the Fish River Caves to Jenolan Caves on 19th August, 1884.

The Jenolan Caves are the most spectacular limestone caves in New South Wales. Guided tours of the caves are conducted hourly and chalet/hotel accommodation is available on site. Walking tracks have been constructed in the area to enable visitors to see the many attractions including the almost extinct brush-tailed rock wallaby, (*Petrogale penicilata*) in McKeown’s Valley. Horses are definitely not welcome at the caves but they can be left nearby.

The catchment of the Jenolan River is very closely protected to ensure only the purest water flows through these unique caves. A lowering of water quality would adversely affect the caves.

Mt Werong

Mt Werong was the site of a busy gold and silver mining industry but water entry forced the closure of the mines in the 1930’s. A town of 1500 people in its heyday, Mt Werong now has one resident and the bush has reclaimed virtually all evidence of early settlement.

Limeburners Flat

Limeburners Flat is an inholding in the blue Mountains National Park firmly held onto by the Chalker family of Taralga who were pioneers of this area. A headstone preserves some of the family history of the area.

Taralga

Taralga boasts some of Australia’s earliest history. The district was first reported by white man when, in 1819, the explorer Charles Throsby passed through the area in search of new grazing land. He was on a trek from the cow pastures at Camden to the Campbells river near Bathurst. The early settlers followed and large grants were made to landholders including James Macarthur, Lachlan McAlister and John Hillas. But the real pioneers of the Taralga district were the convicts assigned to these men. Few relics of those days remain.

Taralga was Macarthur’s village and the Richlands estate, just north of the town was one of the properties on which John Macarthur and his family founded Australia’s wool industry. The homestead was built by convict labour about 1830 and is still used as a private residence. Dairying by tenant farmers followed sheep and in 1910 Richlands was subdivided for successful closer settlement. Dairying was a flourishing industry at one time with butter factories at Richlands, Yalbraith, Myrtleville and Taralga. A railway was built to Taralga in 1920, and it hauled produce to Goulburn till 1954. The rail corridor is visible to the route of the National Trail between Taralga and Roslyn.

During those early days of settlement while the big holdings concentrated on sheep, small farmers acquired the poorer land on the outskirts and engaged in making cheese which they transported to market by bullock teams two or three times a year.

Before this period, settlers lived in slab dwellings. An original slab settler’s cottage first built last century is now reconstructed at the historical museum which opens on application.

Of unique historic interest within the village are the solid stone buildings, and fine churches - Catholic, Anglican and Presbyterian. They are all now more than a century old and built from local basalt and sandstone. The first government school opened in 1857- the first Catholic school in 1870. Both schools still function.

Today, Taralga is a small but solid rural community, proud of its heritage and active in its preservation. The district produces fine wool, beef, cattle, fat lambs, potatoes and dairy products. Marble is extracted from the Wombeyan area.

Crookwell

The Crookwell area was first settled in the 1820's by settlers who took advantage of the deep rich soils in the area. The township was not officially named until 1860, previously being known as Brooklands and Kiama. Wheat and oats became the staple crops in the area. Potatoes were used to loosen the soil. There was a steam flour mill operating in Laggan in 1860. Sheep and cattle assumed a greater importance towards the turn of the century with butter factories in a number of localities. The rail came to Crookwell in 1901. Today the area is still known for its potatoes and diverse rural products. The community of about 2000 people is strongly rural in character.

Lake George

Lake George, baffled scientists for years as they tried to determine why the lake fills and empties mysteriously. It was full when discovered by Hume and Hovell, it was full in the 1920's, dry in the 1930's, full again in 1949. Investigations over a number of years by the bureau of Mineral resources concluded that it is simply a very big puddle. It may appear to be just a mat grassy plain in the dry, but abounds with waterfowl when it fills. In the 1960's, when the water level was high the lake was used by Canberra yachtsmen and regattas were held there frequently.

Gundaroo

Gundaroo was once a lot larger and better known than it now is. First settled in 1820, it was primarily a village based on grazing and agriculture on the rich soils of the Yass river flats. Banjo (A.B.) Paterson, one of Australia's celebrated early poets, wrote of Gundaroo and the locals' reputation as cattle duffers (thieves). He described in "the Gundaroo Bullock" how a duffer explained to the police that the meat he had was from "an old man native bear" (Hairy-nosed Wombat). The last line reads "but you mustn't ask for 'bullock' when you go to Gundaroo". Perhaps you might like to do just that when you get there!

Canberra

As capital cities go, Canberra is a newcomer. Following the federation of Australian states in 1901, both Melbourne and Sydney tried to claim national capital status. In 1908, a diplomatic solution was found by selecting a site somewhere in between. Influential in the choice of the final site was north-American born King O'Malley, Minister for Home affairs. Perhaps the climate influenced him. He is quoted as saying "I want to have a climate where men can hope. We cannot have hope in hot countries" A competition to design the new city was won by an American - architect Walter Burley Griffin. The artificial lake that divides the city today bears his name. More than 100 years before Parliament first sat in Canberra in 1927, European settlement began in the region. At first named "Canberry", a version of the local aboriginal word "Kamberra" which meant prophetically "meeting place", there are a number of historic buildings and towns that can give you some idea of what life was like in those early days of European settlement. Other attractions help you look back to even earlier times, or cast light on our more recent history.

Lanyon

South of Canberra, near Tharwa, the Trail passes close to historic Lanyon homestead which dates from the beginning of settlement in this area. Although there were squatters on the open well grassed woodlands before them, James and William Wright and John Lanyon applied for, and were allocated this land in 1834. William was killed in a skirmish and Lanyon returned home shortly after. By 1848, Wright, who had labour problems, was foreclosed by his creditors and Scottish banker Andrew Cunningham bought the property. Cunningham built the current house in 1859 and he and his sons ran a large rural enterprise including some 25,000 sheep on Lanyon. The property remained in the family until after the first world war when Harry Osborne bought it in 1926. Shortly after it was sold to Thomas Field who owned it for the next forty years before it was compulsorily acquired by the Commonwealth Government for future urban development in 1971. Today the buildings are listed for preservation with the National Trust and the homestead is open for inspection. The house and its contents have been beautifully refurbished and the history extensively researched. Paintings donated by Sidney Nolan are hung in a purpose-built gallery nearby. Be sure to see the collection of horse drawn vehicles and the living quarters for the original farm labourers and convicts.

Lambrigg

The property Lambrigg on the Murrumbidgee between Point Hut Crossing and Tharwa was the home of William James Farrer from 1886. Farrer was involved in developing breeds of wheat to withstand disease especially rust and the harsh Australian conditions as well as to produce high yields. His most notable achievement was the breeding and establishment of "Federation" wheat. His achievement extended wheat growing areas especially in NSW and resulted in Australia's becoming a world leader in wheat exports. He is buried on Lambrigg where his grave is marked with a granite column erected by the Commonwealth Government. His work is commemorated by a memorial medal for outstanding service to agricultural science in research, administration and education and the Farrer Memorial Research Scholarship awarded for postgraduate research in agriculture.