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A Heritage Study of the Gully
Aboriginal Place, Katoomba, New
South Wales

A document prepared for the Blue Mountains
City Council with the Assistance of the
Department of Environment and Heritage by
Allan Lance Heritage Consulting Australia Pty Ltd
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Forward

This Report was commissioned by Blue Mountains City Council as a step towards the appropriate understanding and management of the Aboriginal values of the Gully Aboriginal Place. The study was undertaken by Allan Lance of HCA. Financial assistance was provided by the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage and support was provided on cultural heritage matters by the Department of Environment and Conservation (New South Wales). A steering committee was formed for the duration of this study and gave valuable input into the study’s direction. The broader Aboriginal Community, particularly past Gully residents and their descendants, participated significantly in the fieldwork and the interpretation of all recorded values. The results of this study will contribute to the Aboriginal community’s understanding of its heritage, to the broader community’s understanding of the Aboriginal significance of the Gully and will assist the Blue Mountains City Council in its management of this very special place.

1. Introduction

The Aboriginal Place found at the headwaters of the Upper Kedumba River Valley, in the heart of Katoomba, is known to past Aboriginal residents simply as ‘The Gully’. This fringe camp has important historical associations for those who lived there and whose families lived there, as it was a resource-rich refuge for those who had no other place to go. The Aboriginal heritage significance of this area has now been formally recognised with its listing as an Aboriginal Place under the National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974.

The significance of the area extends beyond the physical traces of ancient and recent Aboriginal habitation, which are the focus of the present study, and takes in an area deeply imbued with meaning for those who inhabited the locale into the late 1950s; their descendents; and the wider Aboriginal community with connections to those who passed through the Gully. The Gully is also emblematic of Aboriginal disadvantage and dispossession dating into the very recent past. The far-reaching connections with those who once lived in the Gully and the nature of the eviction of Aboriginal Gully residents in the late-1950s, has led to the Gully becoming a rallying point for Aboriginal people in Sydney and the Blue Mountains and throughout Eastern Australia.

The importance of the physical traces of the past Indigenous occupation of this area has been highlighted in a number of studies (including Bell 1993, Attenbrow 1993) and a management plan (BMCC 2004) prepared to provide guidance on the protection of the natural and cultural values of the area. Archaeological studies have revealed that Aboriginal people have been in the Upper Blue Mountains for thousands of years. Traces of that occupation are
found in the Gully. More recent traces, dating from the period following European colonization, are also found. The Gully again became a significant location as Aboriginal people reoccupied the traditional lands from which they had been displaced. Ultimately, it became a refuge for the poor, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, who struggled to eke out an existence on the fringe of mainstream Australian life. Like Aboriginal camps on the outskirts of many Australian towns in the early 20th Century, those who lived there fought for a role in the economy of the town, working in jobs that were available, and sending their children to the local schools. They were accepted as individuals, but their status as outsiders remained, and when it became possible for the respectable citizens of the town to remove the camp by building the Catalina Racing Circuit in the late 1950s, the opportunity was taken and this small community was destroyed (Thomas 2003:179). The scars of that removal remain for those whose families were evicted, and these people react with passion when those wounds are reopened with events judged disrespectful to the significance of the Gully and the memory of those who lived and died there.

More than just an Aboriginal place, this location also has significance for the descendents of the non-Aboriginal families who lived side-by-side with the Aboriginal people, sharing their struggle, often assisting with food and friendship when times were tough.

The present report describes the investigation in search of archaeological traces that remain in the Gully. Despite the near total devastation that resulted from the construction of the racing circuit, meagre traces of the fringe camp and scattered stone artefacts remain. These traces document both the prehistoric life of the Gundungurra and Darug people who frequented the Upper Blue Mountains, exploiting the resources from the rich swap environment and leaving evidence of their tool use; and the more recent history with evidence of the Gully fringe camp.

1.1 The Study Area

The area investigated as part of this study comprises the public land declared as an Aboriginal Place, under Section 84 of the National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974. The Aboriginal Place comprises three areas in the upper Kedumba Valley, and forms a nearly continuous green corridor between the Great Western Highway in the north and the escarpment at Katoomba Falls in the south. The three areas are from north to south: Frank Walford Park, McRaes Paddock and Katoomba Park.

Frank Walford Park comprises approximately 47 hectares of forest, swamp and woodland in the centre of which is the derelict Catalina Park motor racing circuit, Lake Catalina and other public facilities including the swimming pool and leisure centre. The motor racing circuit was built in the late 1950s and was used in the 1960s and 1970s. Within the racetrack, at its northern end, is a large disturbed
swamp covering approximately 5ha. This swamp is an important water source, feeding Katoomba Falls and provides an important bird and wildlife habitat (Bell 1993:4). Before the racing circuit was built, a privately built recreation park, centred on Lake Catalina, had already been in operation. This lake contained a swimming area and moored in the centre was a Catalina flying boat, from which the lake gets its name. Pollution in the pool ultimately led to its closure and replacement by a Council-built aquatic centre.

Of the three portions of the declared Aboriginal place, the northern portion centred on Frank Walford Park is probably the most significant for Aboriginal people and the best studied, containing the traces of both pre-contact and post-contact Aboriginal settlement. Aboriginal families lived in improvised housing in this area throughout the first half of the 20th Century and were only removed in the late 1950s.

On the western side of the Frank Walford Park reserve is a narrow strip of privately owned land. This contained the shale railway used in the late 19th Century to transport coal and oil shale from mines in the Jamieson and Megalong Valleys (Bell 1995:5).

To the south is McRaes Paddock, a 17 hectare strip of land, immediately to the east of Peckmans Road and separated from Frank Walford Park by properties on Farnell Road and Gates Avenue. At its southern end is Neale Street. This land was until recently used as a horse grazing paddock and prior to this for market gardens. The raised plots used for market gardens are clearly visible as wide bands running from the eastern edge of the reserve towards Katoomba Falls Creek, in the valley floor. The western slopes of the valley are covered with dense woodland and a strip of shrub swamp.

Katoomba Falls reserve is located immediately to the south of McRaes Paddock and includes an area of approximately 26 hectares comprising public recreation reserve. The area is mostly in the tourist precinct around Katoomba Falls and includes the picnic area on Katoomba Falls Road and playing fields. A narrow spit of degraded bushland extends up behind Selby Street to the north east of this area.

1.2 Project brief

A comprehensive brief was prepared by the Blue Mountains City Council to direct the activities of the consultant during this investigation. Separate briefs were prepared for the pre- and post-contact studies, which in the end were conducted concurrently.

1.3 Consultation
Consultation commenced with a meeting of the project Steering Committee, appropriately at the Gully, in December 2004. Monthly meetings of the Steering Committee throughout 2005 provided regular feedback on the progress of the fieldwork and provided contacts from whom the archaeologist was able to obtain insights into the nature of post-contact habitation in the Gully fringe camp. Numerous members of the Aboriginal and wider community participated in a field school, at which site identification and recording techniques were taught. Several days were then spent applying those skills in the search for sites in Frank Walford Park and McRaes Paddock.

Some members of the Aboriginal community had previously participated in field surveys as part of the recording of pre-contact sites in the Katoomba district. Bill Hardie, chair of the Gundungurra Tribal Council and member of the Steering Committee, was one such person. Bill spent time with the archaeologist, pointing out areas where he had previously seen stone artefacts in the vicinity of the Catalina Park race circuit. During this joint field investigation several further artefacts were found. He pointed out areas where material had been noted but not previously recorded, and these areas were also inspected.

The investigation of post-contact sites was made possible only with the willing assistance of many members of the Aboriginal community who had an intimate knowledge of the locations in which they had lived and arrangement of dwellings and associated landscape features in The Gully. Several excursions were made to visit house sites, walking tracks, wells and two-up rings. Despite the cold weather, Mr Laurence (Monty) Stubbings travelled from Townsville especially to assist with the field inspection. Two days were spent visiting locations he had known as a boy.

On several separate occasions Mr Ron Fletcher, Lyn Stanger, Joyce Jordan, Jean Murphy and Sharyn Halls assisted by showing the archaeologist important locations known to them, and sharing the importance of the Gully to them.

Mr Merv Cooper, the oldest surviving Gully resident, initially assisted indirectly by providing information on sites of significance to Lyn Stanger and Dr Di Johnston, who were then able to pass on that information to me. Merv later met with me on several occasions, describing important sites and correcting errors that had crept into a draft of this report.
11. Recommendations

This section provides management recommendations to the managers of the Gully as to how best to protect the Aboriginal values that have been recorded in this report.

11.1 Management responsibilities

A unique mixture of legal requirements apply for the management of lands in the Gully. Two pieces of NSW legislation apply to this land as it is both an Aboriginal Place and Council owned community land. Other legislation is also applicable as:

- it is the site and habitat of rare and threatened species,
- Council has a duty of care to protect life and property from potential bushfires,
- It contains noxious and environmental weeds which need to be removed,
- It forms part of the catchment for Sydney’s water supply.

Blue Mountains City Council has legal ownership of the site and is responsible for its management. It must be managed in accordance with the Local Government Act. This Act requires the land to be managed for the benefit of the community. It cannot be alienated and must be kept safe for public visitors. As required by the Act, a Plan of Management was developed for the Gully in 2004. This Plan of Management acknowledges the Aboriginal values and provides a number of measures to protect them. The two primary means of protecting the Aboriginal values, are firstly to undertake an archaeological study to gain greater understanding of the values, and for the Aboriginal community to be consulted over management of Gully. The first of these requirements is being addressed with the present study. The second by an evolving process of consultation involving representatives of the Aboriginal community with the statutory and traditional rights for this area.

Being an Aboriginal Place means that management direction is also given by the National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974 [as amended]. Under this Act, Blue Mountains City Council must take every care to protect and enhance the Aboriginal values. To meet its obligations under the Act, BMCC is required to first obtain a Section 87 permit, prior to any action that may impact upon the Aboriginal values. For a permit to be issued under this section of the National Parks and Wildlife Act, it is first necessary for comprehensive consultation with the Aboriginal community to ensure that its values are being protected.

DEC has produced guidelines for the consultation process required. Any consultation with the Aboriginal community that is to be undertaken prior to the issuing of consent should follows these guidelines.
The other Acts that affect the Gully mean that Council must;

• Seek to reinstate the natural habitat,
• Provide firebreaks and consider control burns,
• clear weeds, and
• address erosion.

Through careful adherence to the legislation and genuine consultation with the Aboriginal community, the obligations for protecting the Aboriginal values of the Gully will be met.

11.2 Use of information recorded in this report

The information recorded in this report is of value to different sections of the community. It recognises the heritage values of the Gully for:

• the local Aboriginal community owing to their traditional and recent historical associations,
• the broader Blue Mountains community as a recreation area that can also educate about recent Aboriginal and non-indigenous history,
• the State of New South Wales as a place of history and reconciliation.

The use of the information in this report needs to reflect these three differing levels and types of importance, but most importantly recognising the pre-eminence of the Indigenous rights over this area.

Recommendation 1 - Local Aboriginal use of the information

The local Aboriginal people should have full access to all information concerning their heritage. The information should be stored in a way that will allow it to be available for present and future generations. It is recommended that a complete record of the sites be stored in at least two independent data-bases. One of these is AHIMS, the database maintained by the DEC. Access should be restricted to Gully residents and their descendants only. It is also recommended that it is entrusted to the descendants of the original Gully residents.

Recommendation 2 - Blue Mountains Community use of information

Blue Mountains visitors and residents should be able to obtain sufficient information about the Gully to appreciate its values. Facts, stories, and examples of artefacts should be available to view. This could be in signs, pamphlets, displays or through talks and presentations. The nature of the information being disseminated to the public must be decided by the relevant Traditional Owners.
This information should not permit the identification of sites which could then be damaged.

**Recommendation 3 - General public access to information**

It is recommended that historical information, and simple stories be generally available through well-known sources such as published material and other appropriate media. This information should be broad and respect the sensitivity of site specific information to the Gully residents and descendants.

**11.3 Protection of sites recorded in this report**

The main means of protecting the significance of the Gully is through ongoing consultation between the Traditional Indigenous Owners and the BMCC, who are required to ensure the protection of the heritage values of the Gully on a day-to-day basis. Consultation with the broader non-aboriginal community will also be required for projects that will significantly alter the land-use in the Gully. There is a need to ensure that the most immediate threats to the Gully: weeds, erosion, vehicle impacts, foraging and collection of historical artefacts are addressed immediately through consultation between the Traditional Owners, DEC and BMCC.

Removal of fences around the racing circuit, revegetation around the rural fire station, appropriate signage and exclusion of vehicles from the area to the west of the fire station were all requested by various Gully people. Further discussions with Gully people will be necessary to fully document these demands.

**Recommendation 4 - Consultation**

It is recommended that all management activities in the Gully are preceded by consultation with the Traditional Owners to ensure that the Aboriginal values are protected. The Traditional Owners identified in ongoing consultation with Gully descendents, BMCC and DEC will encompass broader or more specific groups depending on the extent of impacts that are proposed.

**Recommendation 5 – Further work**

The detection of sites was severely hampered by dense grass cover during the field investigation carried out as part of this study. It is likely that many further sites will be exposed should fire remove this grass cover. In that event, it would be advisable for further survey work to be undertaken in the Gully to record any newly exposed sites.