

A Short History of Kangaroo Valley

Aborigines

Early historians have recorded that there were two to three hundred aborigines in the valley, a place, which it was said was used by them as a game reserve. Still today several rock sites of the Wodi-Wodi tribe, can be found showing evidence of places where knives and axes were sharpened.

George Evans

The first written report about the Kangaroo Valley area comes from the surveyor and explorer George Evans. He stood on Cambewarra mountain - not far from the present lookout and recorded that he had a view over the valley that "*no painter could beautify*".

Charles Throsby and Timelong

In 1818 another explorer, Dr. Charles Throsby was commissioned to try to find a way from the southern tablelands to Jervis Bay. With the help of some local aborigines, among them the famous Timelong, he found his way down into the valley. In 1821 Throsby made a second journey to the valley and recorded, while camping at the river near Bendeela, that Captain Brooks had cattle just 3 miles away. From this note we know cattle farming was already established in an area near today's Hampden Bridge.

First Cattlemen

Captain Brooks was soon followed by other landholders who brought cattle in from Berry and Dapto. There was plenty of water and feed for the livestock and the herds were relatively safe from thieves.

Cedar Getters

Kangaroo Valley contained a lot of this beautiful red cedar. When forests near Nowra on the lower Shoalhaven River became exhausted, explorers pushed further on to the Kangaroo Valley area. The trees could be floated down the river to the coastal port from about where the Tallowa Dam (built by the Sydney Water Catchment Authority in the 1970s) is located.

Henry Osborne

This Irishman had probably the greatest influence in the development of Kangaroo Valley in the 19th century. He was the biggest landholder, owning in 1837, over 4000 acres. As he had many more large properties in other parts of the state, he rarely spent time in the valley but operated through his many managers and tenants. In his honour, the Kangaroo Valley Showground is called Osborne Park. In 1870 Alick and Isabel Osborne arrived in the Valley and they were willing to sell small blocks in the centre for churches, schools and businesses to be established. For that reason the township was often referred to as the "Village of Osborne".

Dairy Farmers

Around 1840 dairy farming began in the valley. Charles McCaffrey, another emigrant from Ireland, arrived with wife and children at Barrengarry, not far from today's Museum. At first he worked as a manager for Henry Osborne but later became one of his business partners.

He started the first dairy and produced butter which was "exported" by mules to Wollongong, and from there by ship to Sydney. Other dairies followed and butter making factories followed at Bendeela and Upper River. With the arrival of the dairy industry there came also family life and a

growing population. By 1880 there were probably 1400 adults and children living in the valley, slightly more than today. The main reason for the growth was a new act in 1867 allowing so-called Free Selectors to take up small farming blocks.

Growth

Roads were being built, schools were established and three major churches were built, all within the span of ten years. A real township developed with post office, pubs, sale yards and shops. But of course there was nothing but a dirt road going through its centre, muddy and slippery after every rain. The famous architect - Horbury Hunt - left his mark on the town. He designed four major buildings which are still here today, namely The Anglican Church of the Good Shepard, The Rectory, Barrengarry House where the Osborne family lived and Barrengarry Public School. In 1885 the Agricultural and Horticultural Society was founded and the following year in March the first Kangaroo Valley Show took place and has been a highlight in the years calendar of the Valley ever since.

The Hampden Bridge

The Hampden Suspension Bridge is without doubt the greatest icon of Kangaroo Valley and probably the most photographed bridge in NSW besides the Sydney Harbour Bridge!

The bridge with its four sandstone towers resembling an English castle was opened in 1898 after a two year construction period. It is of great importance to the valley as there is no other way of crossing the Kangaroo River. A few months after its official opening the earlier wooden bridge of 1879 was washed away by floods. It had been just a few steps to the side of the existing bridge.

Museum

An Historical Society was formed in 1953 and the members campaigned long and hard for a piece of land and a museum to house the treasures they had been collecting and preserving. Finally in 1973 the NSW Government agreed to establish a Trust and to hand over nearly 10 hectares of land as a Reserve.

With great effort the Historical Society established the present Museum by transporting several buildings to the present site and re-erecting them. The current Trust and the Historical Society work hand in hand in order to constantly improve the exhibits, the archives and the facilities of the Museum.

Acknowledgments

With such beauty and fascinating settler's history it is no surprise that Kangaroo Valley has 7 National Trust Listings which involve the Landscape, the Bridge, the Cemetery and four Historic Buildings.