

RE: UPPER HUNTER TOURIST HERITAGE TRAIL CONNECTING THE END OF THE CONVICT TRAIL AT BROKE TO MUSWELLBROOK via Bulga, Warkworth, Jerrys Plains

Helen Sharrock has been a member of the Bulga Coal Community Consultative Committee for fifteen years and is a founding member of Broke Fordwich Wine and Tourism Association. Helen was also a past member of the Greater Blue Mountains Heritage Committee and NPWS Hunter & Central Coast committee member.

Helen initiated the idea of creating a Heritage Trail many years ago. It was to include good interpretative signage and picnic spots for visitors, however this was too big a project for Bulga Coal to undertake at that time.

Bulga Coal agreed to fund a Broke Fordwich History book. Hunter Heritage consultants were employed to interview older local residents and research local history to publish a book. This was completed in two years and was very well received.

Later Bulga Coal also provided funding to publish a Bulga history book.

Helen's original idea was to connect the Convict Trail from Broke village via Milbrodale Road (soldiers settlements 1920's) – Milbrodale (Baime Cave) - Bulga – Warkworth – Jerrys Plains – Muswellbrook to celebrate aboriginal and European history in the region. Visitors often request more historical information and ask where is the closest bushwalking track. The road used to transport bullocks from the Upper Hunter town of Muswellbrook to Sydney via Wisemans Ferry was one of the first roads built out of Sydney using convict labour. Unfortunately, a section of the original road, Wallaby Scrub Road, has been recently taken over by Warkworth mine. There was a lot of local protest and campaigning not to allow this to happen because of the high heritage value for local Aboriginal and European history.

Broke Fordwich Wine Region is a well-established tourist destination, with annual events and many boutique cellar doors, with a multi award winning "paddock-to-plate" restaurant, Margan's.

Many visitors to this area often ask where they can go for a bushwalk and want to learn more about the history of the area, especially the indigenous history.

Bulga Coal has been working with local aboriginal groups for approximately five years to build an aboriginal learning and keeping place on mine land. It will be called "The Minimbah Teaching Place" situated off Charlton Road, Broke, the facility will celebrate Wonnarua culture. There will be bushtucker gardens and walking trails. It will be completed in 2021. At this site there will be a building including an undercover shelter, a carpark, picnic facilities and high-quality interpretative signage with illustrations explaining local aboriginal history, agricultural history and flora and fauna of the area. This will be a particularly important facility for tourists and locals celebrating local aboriginal culture. The area is rich in Aboriginal sites, places and landscapes of spiritual significance to Wonnarua people. The last Bora ceremony held in Bulga was in 1852 with as many as 600 Aboriginal people participating. A video will be produced that tells the local Aboriginal story.

In the village of Bulga NPWS has erected interpretative signage next to the petrol station.

Helen has visited old mining towns around Australia which have installed village walking trails, which have information signs at the original historical sites of old stores, pubs, workshops, mine sites, cemeteries. The signposts have good maps and historical information together with details of a self-drive trail. Artworks like sculptures and murals celebrating local characters etc. are often in the towns.

This proposed heritage trail goes through a major coal mining area in New South Wales which impacts the local environment and people. Mines have rehabilitated areas along the proposed heritage trail route. These areas could have large signage stating it is a rehabilitated area and when it was done. Often the members of the public do not believe that mines are required to do regular rehabilitation of mined out areas, they actually do carry out rehabilitation.

Along this proposed heritage trail there are well known race horse breeding establishments e.g. Coolmore Stud at Jerry's Plains and agricultural properties dating back the beginning of European settlement in New South Wales e.g. Arrowfield, Strowan and Plashett at Jerry's Plains.

P.S. Bulga Coal is a good corporate citizen – some examples are, having regular bi- annual community BBQ's with presentations by managers with a question and answer time, upgraded tennis courts in Broke and Bulga, provision of iPads for each child at Broke school, building a skate board park in Broke village. They also funded the Singleton Youth Centre. Funding is regularly allocated for Broke Fordwich Wine and Tourism Association annual events.

Helen Sharrock

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