

## Blackbutt Reserve Historical Walk

Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2005

Attendance: 22.

*The Macquarie Dictionary defines 'perfect' as  
"Having every excellence."*

It was on a perfect winters morning that twenty two members of our Geological Society were greeted by Head Ranger Paul Metcalfe at Blackbutt's Richley Reserve, Kotara.

Paul gave us some background on the history of the area & offered to take us on a two hour excursion of the old mine sites & animal exhibits.

The tour was quite exhilarating, terminating with a magnificent morning tea organised by the Blackbutt Volunteers & held in the c1848 Slab Timber Pioneers Cottage.

It provided a lovely touch to a '**perfect**' morning.



Head Ranger Paul Metcalfe explaining some background history on Blackbutt.



One of many stops along fire trails to observe old mining sites & to listen to Paul Metcalfe explain its history.

The afternoon was spent exploring the fire trails & geological landforms throughout the reserve. It was extraordinary to observe many native animals in their natural state including Scrub Turkeys (with their huge nests) & a 20,000 plus Fruit Bat colony located in the Southern rainforest area of the park.

Upon returning to Richley Reserve, we enjoyed a late lunch sitting on the grass alongside the lagoon.

The lagoon had held our attention earlier in the day when we watched the professionalism of 'Model Boat Captains' plying their skills to their remote controlled boats on the lagoon.

All in all, what a day. In a word, '**perfect**!'



Radio controlled model ship on the lagoon.

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## History - Mining.

It was in 1824 that representatives of the Australian Agricultural ("AA") Company stumbled across surface coal on the northern ridge of what we now know as Blackbutt Reserve.

In 1825 the first underground mine was sunk and became known as "B" pit.

The "AA" land was subsequently purchased in 1850 by the Scottish-Australian Mining Company who operated two mines in the area from 1850 to 1875.

In 1899 the site again changed hands and was purchased by a private mining company called Borehill Colliery.

Borehill Colliery operated in the Blackbutt valleys using 'pick and shovel' technology until 1966 when mining machinery was brought in which lifted production to 660 tonnes per day.

The pit was closed in 1985 and the land handed over to the residents of Newcastle for residential use.

In 1993 the old mine site was renovated and reopened for public use by Hon. Joy Cummings (Lord Mayor) and named Richley Reserve. This recognised the lifelong efforts the local conservationist Joe Richley had dedicated to the area.

## History - The Land.

During the late 1890's Newcastle was expanding westward at an alarming rate. The Hunter River controlled the northward growth of the city and southern growth was stopped by the steep hills of Merewether, Glenrock and Adamstown.

After the end of the First World War, the Kotara area was subdivided by the Lands Department of NSW into 70 and 80 acre lots. The 70 acre blocks lots sold for the princely sum of 1,400 pounds, while the 80 acre lots were almost given



Richley Reserve and lagoon.

away 1,600 pounds. The great depression arrived and the Lands Department found the lots difficult to sell.

In the mid 1920's, the NSW RSL purchased one 80 acre lot on the southern end of Blackbutt. The thought was that it might be able to be used by the 'shell-shocked' returned soldiers as market gardens to form part of their therapy to return to normal life. For all sorts of reasons the project failed and the RSL sold the 80 acre farm to Lambton Municipal Council for half of the original purchase price.

In 1937, Lambton Council purchased the two adjoining lots of 80 acres giving them 240 acres of connecting land.

An act of Parliament was passed in 1938 (Municipal Amalgamation Act, Part 1) which allowed up to twenty small councils to be merged into one larger authority. So, in 1939, eleven local councils amalgamated into 'The Greater Newcastle City Council.' Subsequently, Newcastle City Council took over the control of Lambton's Blackbutt Reserve.

Over the years, many proposals have been formulated for Blackbutt. Some of the submissions include:

- a) In the 1940's, that the name be changed to "King George Fifth Park," or "The Duke of Windsor Reserve."
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- b) In the 1950's, that the site be used for the construction of a huge public zoo to rival that of Taronga Park.
  - c) In the 1960's, that the site become the home of the Hunter Valley's Botanical Gardens.
  - d) In the 1970's, that the site be occupied by a new privately run High School with playing fields and tennis courts.
  - e) In the 1980's, that the site be split in half by the proposed Motorway 23 and the valleys be used as land fill for Newcastle rubbish.
  - f) In the 1990's, the site be used to build a 60 m high lookout tower (with elevator) with revolving restaurant on top, and that commercial shops be allowed on the reserve to offset costs.

### **In conclusion:**

At this point in time, the reserve covers an area of 375 acres (152 hectares) (even after the subdivision of 227 half acre lots in the 1970's).

The profit from the sale of the blocks at the Northern end of the reserve was used to construct the Newcastle Regional Art Gallery in Layman Street, Cooks Hill.

The park is made up of five deep valleys and four ridges. It is triangular in shape and owned under Torrens Title by the citizens of Newcastle. Fire trails within the reserve cover 37 km while walking trails amount to 53 km.

Geologically, the most conspicuous outcrop is the Charlestown Conglomerate which forms the cliff face beneath the New Lambton Heights Lookout.

Part of the Tickhole Formation, the Charlestown Conglomerate is resistant to erosion and has withstood the elements to provide a sheltered micro-climate for Blackbutts rainforest ecosystem.

Stratigraphically beneath the Tickhole Formation are to be found shales, sandstones and coal seams of the Kahibah, Kotara, Shepherds Hill and Bar Beach Formations.

Moving down Carnley Avenue it is easy to observe how roadside works have exposed the Montrose, Wave Hill and Victoria Tunnel seams in turn.

The major workings of the old Borehill Colliery were in the Victoria Tunnel seam.

Our Blackbutt Reserve is a unique raft in an ocean of suburbia. It's survival depends on many factors, not in least, the generosity of our 'City Fathers' and visitors top the park.

As my grandfather often said,

*"care for mother Earth. If only you knew how much she cares for you."*

*Blackbutt Reserve may not be perfect, but its very close to it!*

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