

Please See note at end

OUR VISION FOR THE VALLEY

Development Impact

Since white settlement the valley has been used for many purposes. Some of these have persisted to the present time and some have not. Those which haven't continued, have nevertheless, left their mark or impact on the valley, e.g. the coal rail line across the valley to what was North's siding, or the cleared carparking areas associated with the racetrack.

The accessible ridges and hillsides around the valley have been used for a mix of housing, farming, recreation, industry and commerce over the last hundred or more years. This mix of past and present uses as well as private and public land tenure has today resulted in a central strand of open space lands in public ownership, of variable width, stretching the length of the valley and bounded on the north, west and eastern flanks by privately owned land which is rapidly being developed mainly as residential subdivision.

The importance of the public lands now reside in their alignment as a green corridor and urban bushland close to the centre of Katoomba. The presence of bushland within the valley is significant to the hydrology, flora, fauna recreation needs and town character of this part of the mountains. In addition, the valley possesses a degree of educational and historical significance related to Aboriginal history and the white settlement of Katoomba township.

Consequently, the Friends see the chief values of the valley not in commercial terms but as open bushland space to be enjoyed as it is, easily accessible to residents and visitors alike, and offering a commercial-free alternative to the town centres and the National Park.

Any vision for the future of the valley must be based on a recognition of its public ownership and present significance, its role as habitat for plants and animals of the ridges, and an appreciation of recreational uses which are compatible with its natural values.

Visual values and town character

The valley is presently highly significant to the visual character of Katoomba. Katoomba character relies partly on its being seen as a small town contained on the western side by the bushland valley. While there are residential areas along Narrowneck Road, these remain inconspicuous. Unbroken tree canopy stretches from Katoomba Falls to Shell Corner, and places visual limits on the spread of the Katoomba township. This present green belt should be strengthened to maintain and heighten the sense of town edge and visual containment.

Hydrology

The valley has a collection of creeks, drainage lines, springs and swamps which drain to a major tourist attraction at Katoomba Falls. The importance of water quality and water quantity at the Falls cannot be overestimated. These two things can only be improved if the conservation strategy is catchment based.

Hydrology in the valley is complex and extensive. This is not only one of the underpinning natural systems of the area which has serious implications for the long-term management of the valley, but is also a

community resource. Water seems to come from everywhere, particularly in Catalina Park, and there is water around even during the longest droughts. Local access to swamps (with all their associated biodiversity), streams, and ponds is important to the development of children and the well-being of many adults. All these elements provide a semi-wild place near the centre of the town and in close proximity to residential areas of south Katoomba. Local oral history tells us that local valley springs were used to provide house water in the past, before town water was provided. The deterioration in water quality is a local and regional issue, and our vision for the valley includes an improvement in this, to increase the aquatic life in the local ponds swamps and streams. To see the sign at Katoomba Falls which says "Water unfit for drinking" removed, would indeed be a significant achievement. This can only be done if developments on private land in the valley are considered in the context of the whole valley catchment.

Impacts on the hydrology are incremental, multi-faceted and difficult to manage. The maintenance of a large belt of bushland on the valley sides and floor serves the purpose of buffering the hydrology from direct impact, while simultaneously providing a significant wildlife corridor from the National Park to the highway. For some bird species, the corridor continues with the water catchment area surrounding Cascade Creek.

Fauna

The animal life in the valley is well-known to many of the residents, for apart from the foxes which take local chickens, there are many bird species which provide endless fascination. The diversity of bird species and the number of individuals makes the valley a significant bird habitat. This is possibly due to the range of habitats represented within the public lands. Recognition of this, and of the effect that the shape and extent of the bushland has on fauna is needed to maintain and enhance faunal populations.

Heritage Values.

The Friends believe that the valley has been an important area for aboriginal people and as such an investigation of the early and late aboriginal heritage warrants investigation. We believe also that an investigation on the heritage of the valley should also examine the extent to which European industrial enterprises were established, and when.

Access

Vehicle access to some sections of the valley is difficult and therefore limited. Access is flexible for those who wish to visit by walking, and can be gained through many points around the perimeter of the valley. We believe therefore, that access should be non intrusive.

Restoration of degraded areas

The Friends believe this to be an essential activity under the long term management of the valley and should be recognised by the Blue Mountains City Council so that a long term works programme plan can be implemented. In this context the Friends believe that no development should take place, in any part of the valley, which is likely to add to those areas already degraded or which will contribute to additional degradation of the land in the valley.

Uses

The Friends believe that the strand of open space public lands must be conserved and managed as such. The racetrack in the northern section is presently used for car lap dashes and time trials at the rate of about one meeting a month. The use of the track for this particularly noisy activity in the centre of a residential area is highly inappropriate and counter to the natural values of the bushland sections. The track is suitable for other activities which do not impact so adversely on the residents or fauna.

The grazing of horses in the middle section adjacent to the creek may contribute to the spread of weeds there and downstream, as well as having other detrimental effects on the soils and vegetation on that part of the valley.

We suggest that the following uses may be appropriate and compatible with the significant values of the area: native garden, botanic park, walking trails (particularly as a link from Bathurst Road to the National Park), bicycle activities, sculpture park, centre for environmental education, and so on.

Zoning

Present zonings include 6(e) for the swamps in Catalina Park. The Friends are extremely concerned that this is inappropriate and if development is realised, would impact unfavourably on the watercourse generally. The swamps in the valley are a vital part of the hydrology and must be recognised as such by zoning which affords them full protection. A uniform zoning which gives full environmental protection to all the public lands in the valley, is required in order to protect the public resource which they represent.

The Friends of Katoomba
Falls Creek Valley.

22 May, 1992.

*This is a draft of the submission
we will make to the consultant.*

*Please phone your comments,
alterations, additions to*

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