

The Neil Lewis Stuart Archive User Guidelines Booklet



“Our valley needs your care”

~ Neil Stuart, c.1994¹

This document was compiled by Steven Ridd and Des Barrett between June 2022 and March 2026.

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1. Introduction

This Archive represents the complete collection of records that belonged to **The Friends of Katoomba Falls Creek Valley Incorporated**. (‘The Friends’) a local not-for-profit community environmental group dedicated to caring for a special natural place, the **Katoomba Falls Creek Valley** (affectionately known by members just as ‘The Valley’) which was repeatedly coming under recurring threat of land use development from Blue Mountains Council and other developers.

The archive covers the period from 1989 to 2016. The Friends were founded in November 1989 by Katoomba local resident Neil Stuart (1937-2016) and the group had a volunteer lifespan of 27 years. Over this period, membership levels reached a maximum of seventy local residents. These records were originally organised and kept in safe custody by Neil Stuart at his home in Katoomba throughout the life of The Friends. In memory of Neil, former members of The Friends agreed to name this record collection of 130 plus Lever Arch folders (the physical archive), as **The Neil Lewis Stuart Archive** ('This Archive').

In 2016, Neil sadly and untimely passed away on 26th May 2016 at aged 79 years after battling cancer. Later that same year, The Friends members came around to decide to wind up the organisation.

Since the winding up of The Friends in November 2016, this Archive has been re-sorted in toto from its original functional/operational order (that is 'most recent records at front') into an archival chronological order so as to facilitate research into the work and considerable tenacity and achievements of this community group to more logically provide a sequential flow of events for the benefit of those unfamiliar with the considerable multifaceted efforts of The Friends over the 27 years. It is a project of respect, one to achieve closure and to celebrate the legacy of The Friends achievements to fight for, save and restore the natural integrity of The Valley they so cherished.

Continuing in a similar, but much scaled-down vein as The Friends, two of its active Working Group members, Steven Ridd and Des Barrett, out of respect for the legacy of The Friends, have since 2017 dedicated further considerable personal volunteering time (1200 hours) and effort into this archive. This has included comprehensively re-sorting, compiling and documenting this large record collection into a professionally organised and research-friendly archive. This project commenced in 2017 and continued on and off into 2026. This archival project has been made possible by an unusually timely combination of our joint keen interest, skills, resources and available time. We reckon Neil would be pleased with these follow up contributions.

2. Location and Description of The Valley

The Valley Location

Katoomba Falls Creek is one of several creeks which arise on the southern aspect of the Central Blue Mountains plateau ridge in the Katoomba area, situated 100km west of Sydney, Australia, contiguous with, and upstream of, the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. The Valley's geology formed around this particular creek as a natural water catchment.

The Valley is situated on the western fringe of the township of Katoomba, with its headwaters emanating from the Cox's watershed in the north adjacent to the Great Western Highway at what was 'North's (railway) Siding' (est.1882) then 'Shell (fuel depot and fuel station) Corner' (est. 1925). To the south The Valley ends at the top of the escarpment cliff line where the creek tumbles over Katoomba Falls. In fact, Katoomba's township name is derived from Katoomba Falls, which is a local aboriginal word meaning "*all shiny falling waters*" in reference to these very cascading waterfalls. ²



Katoomba Falls in 'full flight' after heavy rains upstream in Katoomba Falls Creek Valley water subcatchment. ³

The Valley Dimensions

“Katoomba Falls Creek is one of the several creeks which rise on the southern side of the plateau ridge in the Katoomba-Leura area, flow to the escarpment, then plunge down into the deep valleys. Katoomba Falls is where this creek plunges into the valley.

The valley is bounded to the north by the highway ridge, to the east by the ridge along which Katoomba goes, and to the west by the ridge along which Narrow Neck Rd goes.”

- Neil Stuart, circa 1989

'The Gully Water Subcatchment' comprises the upland creek valley sub-catchment of some (290 hectares/2.9 km²) above Katoomba Falls. With a southerly aspect, the topographical catchment of this creek valley is about 2km long and 2 km wide. Its northern end is characterised as a natural 'dead-end' amphitheatre immediately below the east-west ridgeline of the Cox's Watershed.

Geographically, Katoomba Falls Creek Valley is in fact one of six identified small southern-aspect, 'dead end' valleys that are situated in a west-east sequence along the Central Blue Mountains plateau which is juxtaposed above the northern escarpment of the Jamison Valley. From west to east these creeks are:

- 1) Katoomba Falls Creek
- 2) Kingsford Smith Memorial Park
- 3) Leura Falls Creek
- 4) Gordon Creek Valley
- 5) Valley of the Waters Creek
- 6) Jamison Creek Valley (Darwins Walk)

Katoomba Falls Creek Valley's sub-catchment shape is that of an irregular oval. However, the true water catchment dimensions of Katoomba Falls Creek Valley will not be really apparent to an uninformed visitor/researcher. This is because considerable housing development has encroached over time from around the surrounding ridgetops down into The Valley, all with local Blue Mountains Council approval.

The remnant natural forest of The Valley has been decimated since colonial settlement times - from the mid-1870s. Much destruction has occurred in The Valley, all with Council approval – commencing initially with widespread deforestation, a shale coal rail line, more than half The Valley has been subdivided and sold off for housing development, Council's land appropriation for recreation (Catalina Park and damming the creek, a tourist kiosk, sports centre, multiple car parks, two sports fields, a tourist van park, twin picnic reserves, and the Skyway infrastructure), Council-built motor car racing circuit from 1957, an 18-hole golf course, two fire station complexes and the entire Valley excavated for a sewage network to provide for the ongoing housing developments.

Such that currently what remains of The Valley's native vegetation is (1) The Gully Aboriginal Place in the northern amphitheatre where the racing circuit was, following 26 years of volunteer bushcare rehabilitation by the Friends (1990-2016), (2) the narrowed wetland strip of McRae's Paddock (reduced to just 200m wide from encroached housing approvals), and (3) otherwise island pockets of remnant bushland southward to the top of Katoomba Falls.

The Friends considered this to have become a sad state of affairs for The Valley in and around which they lived.

Overleaf: Boundary of Katoomba Falls Creek (sub)catchment map, prepared by Archaeologist Dr Val Attenborough for The Bell Report on The Valley, circa 1993. ⁴

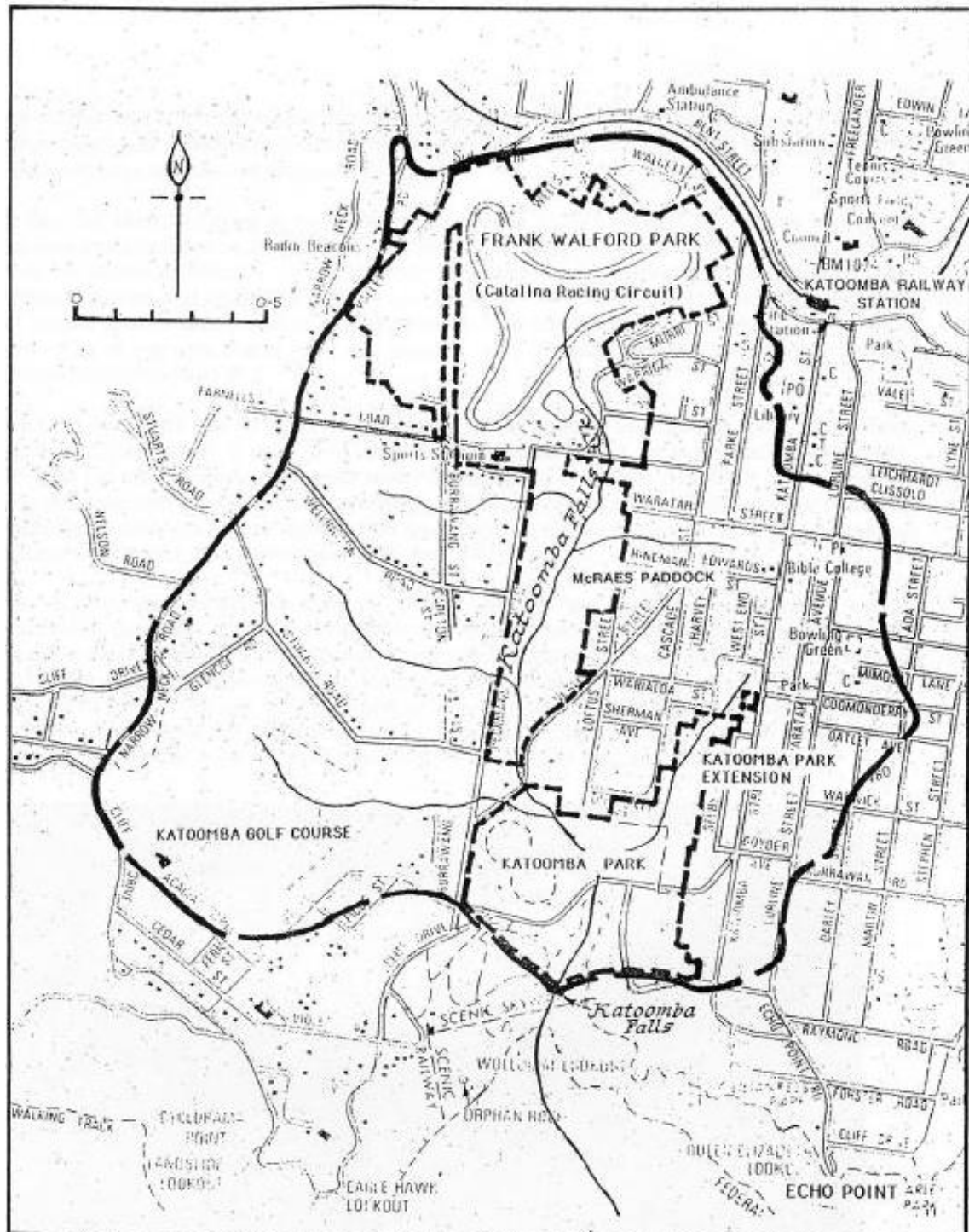


FIGURE 1

THE STUDY AREA

Boundary of Katoomba Falls Creek catchment.....

Boundary of public land

The Valley Characteristics

Situated on the western fringe of Katoomba, we continue to be closely connected with a small creek valley just below us observed outside our windows, referred to as Katoomba Falls Creek Valley, or by former residents simply as 'The Gully'.

“Most of the main creek flows through lands which are still public lands, owned by the people of the Blue Mountains in the name of the Council. Parts of some of the side creeks in the Valley also run through public lands.

These public lands within the Valley - open space and much covered with natural bush – and the creek system itself, for the largest remaining open space within the urban area of Katoomba. They form a natural corridor, linking the national park to the south and protected lands to the north. They contain important hanging swamps. They are a refuge for many birds of the plateau.”

- Neil Stuart, circa 1989

“They contain hanging swamps which are essential for the continued flow of Katoomba Falls Creek. The swamps act as a natural filter for the water. They act as a significant habitat for the fauna of the valley, especially many of the species of birds which live in or use the Valley.

There is proven pre-European and post- contact aboriginal heritage of the area, some aboriginal people still living in or near the Valley. The Valley was one of the earliest sites occupied and changed by white settlers after the invasion. It had a close association with the coal mining operations to the south of the Valley.”

- Neil Stuart, circa 1990

Katoomba Falls Creek Valley is situated within what we term 'The Gully Water Catchment'. It is geographically less than 50 metres away from us, uphill on a spur from the Carrington. We observe the amphitheatre-shaped natural valley below and hear it within earshot and we greatly respect where we live and appreciate this area's complex heritage.

The Valley is characterised as a natural water subcatchment and by the central south flowing small creek line that is fed by groundwater and a number of upstream and side tributaries. The Valley is mostly naturally forested around the periphery and centrally dominated by interconnected wetlands. The creek flows to Katoomba Falls, which then continues to the Kedumba River below through the deep Jamison Valley and beyond.

'The Gully Water Catchment' comprises the upland creek valley catchment of some (290 hectares/2.9 km²) above Katoomba Falls in the Blue Mountains. Over time since the 1870s it has been divided up for various human uses and abuses.

Ecologically, this creek valley is importantly and fundamentally a hydrological environmental system. The natural geography of this creek valley is characterised as an upper course riverscape, which takes the form of a south-facing naturally steep bushland amphitheatre shape in the northern portion of this valley. The Valley lies about a thousand metres above sea level.

This area is defined as the entire water catchment area of 290 hectares/2.9 km². The water catchment's geographical boundaries comprise the Cox's Watershed (Bathurst Road) to the north, Valley Road to the Jamison clifftop escarpment to the west, a meandering watershed through central Katoomba to the east and Katoomba Falls to the south.



The Valley Naming

Katoomba Falls Creek Valley was the pre-existing gazetted and mapped name of The Valley at the time The Friends formed in 1989. So, this is the continuing name that The Friends used and referred to throughout.

The Valley is also referred to by its former residents and their descendants affectionately as 'The Gully' and as 'Garguree' – which translates as local aboriginal Gundungurra for 'Gully'.

Since various others refer to this creek valley and its many portions by other titles, and given various re-namings by Blue Mountains City Council over the years, for clarity we begin by listing the various namings and their meanings as follows:

In summary, the portions of land of The Gully Water Subcatchment historically, and their relative sizes are:

- The Gully Water Subcatchment (290 hectares/2.9 km²)
- The Gully (northern section pre-1957) (50 hectares/0.5 km²)
- Katoomba Falls Creek Valley (50 hectares/0.5 km²)
- Upper Kedumba River Valley (50 hectares/0.5 km²)
- McRaes Paddock (17 hectares/0.17 km²)
- Catalina (amusement) Park (2 hectares/0.2 km²)
- Catalina Park (motor) Raceway (50 hectares/0.5 km²)
- Frank Walford Park (50 hectares/0.5 km²)
- Katoomba Park and Katoomba Park Extension (8 hectares/0.8 km²)
- Katoomba Falls Reserve - Cascades Section (8 hectares/0.8 km²)
- Selby Street Reserve (8 hectares/0.8 km²)
- Katoomba Golf Course (30 hectares/0.3 km²) (since renamed by council as the Blue Mountains Planetary Centre of Health)
- Built Up Residential Katoomba (within The Gully Water Catchment) (158 hectares/1.58km²)
- 21 Stuarts Road (single private land holding - a mixture of pasture and intact sedge swamp (12 hectares/0.12 km²)
- The Gully - Aboriginal Place, version 2004 Plan (66 hectares/0.66 km²)
- The Gully - Aboriginal Place, version 2021 Plan (73 hectares/0.73 km²)
- Garguree' (a Gundungurra word for gully) (73 hectares/0.73 km²)

Why so many place-descriptive names for one little sub-catchment? The Blue Mountains City Council introduced these place names over time.

The Valley Values

The Friends adopted an informal custodial responsibility for The Valley and this involved caring for its ecology, monitoring and opposing the many dozens of external threats to The Valley over the decades, as well as forming a voluntary bushcare group of the same name from the early 1990s: weeding, rehabilitating, removal of illegally dumped rubbish on numerous working bees over the years as well as Streamwatch water quality monitoring of the creek and its watercourses.

Important Social Bond Around The Valley

The Friends were connected socially. We held a close friendship with many local residents who lived around the hilltop fringes surrounding this small creek valley.

The Friends were connected personally. We heard and saw the activities down there daily and we walked around it weekly.

[Refer to Item 6: The Friends Vision for the Valley]

The Valley Pre-History

There is a deep traditional spiritual connection by local aboriginal peoples to The Gully, as previous residents and their descendants. The residents were evicted by local Council in 1957, to impose and build a racing circuit through their homes.

But although we consider The Gully to now be our home after two decades, we are not so family or spiritually connected to The Gully as those who have come before us, who were here long before us but forcibly evicted by authorities. It was simply because they were too poor to protest and fight against powerful and wealthy outsiders who usurped The Gully for their own selfish ends.

The family and spiritual connection to The Gully by those who have come before The Friends, extend back generations. Indeed, their stories and archaeological evidence goes back 14,000 years to this special place.

Katoomba Falls Creek is one of the several creeks which arise on the southern side of the plateau ridge in the Katoomba-Leura area, flow to the escarpment, then plunge down into the deep valleys. Katoomba Falls is where this creek plunges into the Jamison Valley.

The Valley is bounded to the north by the Great Western Highway ridge, and to the east by the ridge along which Katoomba Street runs, and to the west by the ridge along, which Narrow Neck Road is located.

Most of the main creek flows through lands which are still public lands, owned by the people of the Blue Mountains in the name of the Council. Parts of some of the side creeks in The Valley also run through public lands – Katoomba Golf Course is located within one of these side gullies and remains public lands, at the time of writing.

These public lands within The Valley - open space and much covered with natural bush - and the creek system itself, form the largest remaining open space within the urban area of Katoomba. They form a natural corridor, linking the National Park to the south and protected lands to the north. They contain hanging swamps which are essential for the continued flow of Katoomba Falls Creek. The swamps act as a natural filter for the water. They act as a significant habitat for the fauna of The Valley, especially many of the species of birds which live in or use The Valley.

There is proven pre-European and post-contact aboriginal heritage of the area. Aboriginal people lived in or near The Valley.

The Valley was one of the earliest sites occupied and changed by white settlers after colonisation. It had a close association with the coal mining operations to the south of The Valley.

The Valley History

The Valley's history forms a valuable part of the story of the Blue Mountains and of Australia's settlement history. Over time since the 1870s the Valley has been divided up for various human uses and abuses.

A Microcosm of Australia's Social History

For the Friends, the historical and ancestral story of The Valley is a microcosm of the greater story of Australia's colonial settlement history.

Australia's colonial settlement began in 1788 at Botany Bay, then shifted to a fresh water source at Sydney Cove. The European history of The Valley perhaps can be dated from the days when the Cox's Road was first built adjacent to it from 1815. Subsequently, then came land acquisition, deforestation, housing subdivision followed by coal mining by John Britty North (1831-1917) from 1876.

The stories of the past and present are vital so as to prevent a repeat of history, that comprised environmental damage.

3. The Neil Lewis Stuart Archive - Statement of Heritage Significance

The archive comprises a complete and substantial record of the origin, development, continuity, and demise of a Katoomba based group of residents who, for twenty-seven continuous years (1989-2016), argued for the environmental values for a place known as the Valley or Gully, which is located on the western side of the town of Katoomba. The archive is named after the founder of the group Neil Lewis Stuart (1937-2016), a resident of Katoomba. The residents formed a group known as the Friends of Katoomba Falls Creek Valley (The Friends). There were, throughout the many years of the Friend's existence, between thirty and seventy members.

The archive is significant at a local level, as it is a meticulous record of a local group who challenged a large number of threats to the Valley. The archive demonstrates how local residents were established and functioned at an organisational level, their modus operandi when dealing with the Blue Mountains City Council, developers, how an environmental philosophy was established and developed, how legal jurisdictions were engaged and challenged, how the financial stability of the organisation was maintained and the involvement of the Friends with the local aboriginal people in the process of declaring the Valley/Gully as the first Aboriginal Place in the state of New South Wales.

From the late 1950s, the central portion of the Valley was developed, to much acclaim, as the Catalina Racetrack. At the time, and through the 1960s and early 1970s, and sporadically throughout the 1980s, the racetrack was originally a major facility in New South Wales for motor racing, and as such, and in-

itself, was of State significance. The archive documents the role of local residents, both aboriginal and non-aboriginal who were members of the Friends, and who in their daily encounter, were for and against the motor racing, as it affected their lives.

The archive comprises a substantial minute record of the Friends, which details many of the challenges that were confronted during the twenty-seven years of the Friends. As such, the archive is a significant research document that may be utilized by students of environmental and culture studies, and local government and legal studies.

Des Barrett and Steven Ridd jointly and voluntarily compiled The Neil Lewis Stuart Archive on and off between December 2016 and December 2023. They also jointly compiled this User Guidelines Booklet on and off between 14th June 2022 and 25th February 2026. Des Barrett was a continual member of The Friends (1990 – 2016) serving in active voluntary roles as Public Officer, Secretary and Acting President at various times and as an active member of the Working Group. Steven Ridd was an active member on the Working Group and also established The Friends participation in Sydney Catchment Authority's volunteer Streamwatch water quality monitoring of Katoomba Falls Creek Valley (2002-2008).

4. Introduction to The Friends

"This group formed on (Sunday 10th) December 1989 after a series of meetings. In June 1994 the group became incorporated as an Association.

With the assistance of a Heritage Grant and with assistance from Blue Mountains Council, the group carried out an environmental study of the valley. The study, prepared by Dr. Fred Bell, was completed in June 1993. The study is the basis for planning the protection of the public lands and the Creek and the Falls. It is also the basis for developing a long- term plan of management."

- Neil Stuart, circa late-1990s

5. Objects of The Friends⁵

1. “To ensure that the natural environment of Katoomba Falls Creek Valley is protected from damaging development;
2. To ensure that the public lands in the Katoomba Falls Creek Valley remain public lands in perpetuity and are managed in such a way that the natural environment of The Valley is protected from damaging development;
3. To ensure that the Katoomba Falls Creek, feeder creeks and associated hanging swamps and Valley swamps be unpolluted;
4. To ensure the public lands in the Katoomba Falls Creek Valley be given environmental protection zoning, especially the Frank Walford Park section and the middle section known as McRae’s Paddock and the lower section known as Katoomba Falls Reserve, and be included in the LEPs covering the Blue Mountains, as environmentally sensitive lands and as community lands;
5. To ensure the rehabilitation of scoured (*sic*), eroded and damaged areas of the Katoomba Falls Creek Valley, especially in the Frank Walford Park and middle sections of The Valley, and especially the swamps, with special attention to elimination of exotic weeds and plant pests and to promote revegetation;
6. To ensure that no forms of motor vehicle [or bike] racing are held in the Frank Walford Park section of Katoomba Falls Creek Valley, and that recreation[a]l uses of The Valley be consistent with protecting the natural environment of The Valley.”

6. The Friends’ Vision for the Valley

The Friends formulated a vision document for The Valley. This was in 1991, just two years after forming and then this was elaborated upon in 1992. We provide exact replicas of both as follows:

1991 Vision:

- (a) *bushland open space in the midst of/and urban Blue Mountains.*
- (b) *maintenance of water quality and flow feeding Katoomba Creek, Katoomba Cascades and Falls .*
- (c) *a passive recreation amenity accessible to residents and visitors.*
- (d) *preservation of a significant part of our Aboriginal and European settlement heritage.*
- (e) *environmental protection for all the public lands in this Valley .*

Neil Stuart, 26/2/91.

1992 Vision:

“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 Comer, 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 fauna! 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, 22nd May, 1992.

7. The Friends’ Aims for the Valley

“The Aims of the Friends are:

(1) to ensure that the natural environment of the Katoomba Falls Creek Valley is protected from damaging development.

(2) to ensure that the public lands in the Valley remain public lands in perpetuity and are managed in such a way that the natural environment of the Valley is protected from damaging development.

(3) to ensure that the Katoomba Falls Creek, feeder creeks and associated hanging swamps and Valley swamps be unpolluted.

(4) to ensure the public lands in the Valley be given environmental protection zoning, especially the Frank Walford Park section, and the middle section known as Katoomba Falls Reserve, be included in the Stage 1 Environmental Management Plan, as environmentally sensitive lands

(5) to ensure the rehabilitation of scoured, eroded, and damaged areas, especially in the Frank Walford Park and middle sections of the Valley, and especially the swamps, with special attention to the elimination of exotic weeds and plant pests and to revegetation.

- Neil Stuart, 26/2/91.”

8. Archive Background

The Friends of Katoomba Falls Creek Valley Inc. (affectionately known by its members as 'The Friends') was a Katoomba based community group of neighbours around Katoomba Falls Creek Valley in Katoomba who voluntarily banded together to protect The Valley from various forms of abuse, threats and neglect inflicted upon it by self-interested others.

The Friends started off as an informal group of concerned locals in 1989 driven by Neil Stuart, and by 1994 had formally become an incorporated not-for profit charity surviving until 2016. Over the twenty-seven-year life of The Friends, members who came and went, undertook many thousands of hours of bushcare rehabilitation, cleaning up of dumped rubbish, ran street stalls to fundraise and fought many environment battles against various groups all under the tireless leadership, stewardship, participatory activism and fundraising co-ordination of Neil.

Neil sadly passed away on 26th May 2016 at age 79. The remaining members of The Friends later in 2016 agreed to wind up the organisation. It was then agreed that the archives of The Friends that had been held by Neil at his home, be handed over initially to the Blue Mountains Historical Society for safekeeping and as a researchable archive as part of an historical record of grassroots environmentalism in the Blue Mountains. However, a decision was made, after considerable difficulties with the Society, to retain the archive with members of The Friends, so that the archive could be developed into a professional record of the Friends. The archive is referred to as **The Neil Lewis Stuart Archive** as a tribute to Neil in honour of his selfless dedication to caring for and defending the natural integrity of The Valley for 27 years.

Former member of The Friends (2002-2007) Steven Ridd in 2016 offered to index and organise the archive from being a hurriedly transferred jumbled collection of records of various formats, into an organised archive suitable for ongoing research and reference. A key motivator was out of respect for Neil's 27 years of dedication (and the voluntary contributions of the many members over the years). It is also part of Steven's desire to write a documentary book about the work of The Friends over those 27 years. The book's title is '**On the Receiving End**'.

These guidelines form the key record of **The Neil Lewis Stuart Archive** and of its re-organising and compilation.



Some members of the Friends of Katoomba Falls Creek Valley Inc. circa 2004.
Left to Right: Des Barrett, Steven Ridd, Les Petö, Rosemary Bristler, Linda Thomas, Lyn Stanger, Shirley Davis, and Neil Stuart.

9. The First Resident Meeting about the plight of The Valley

As mentioned above, The Friends started off as an informal group of concerned locals in 1989 driven by Neil Stuart.

Neil and his partner John Rule decided to consult with local residents about the ongoing invasive and noisy problem of the race track in the Valley as well as other threats concerning land use development and about local council's neglect of the natural values of the Valley and the abuse of residential amenity impacting the immediate area around the Valley.

In around **September 1989**, Neil and John drafted their first broadcast letter to surrounding residents of the Valley and undertook a letterbox drop to introduce and highlight their concerns and to invite local residents to an informal meeting at their place on **Sunday 15th October 1989**.

From the archive this is that letter (see below, redacting the senders' address and phone details). Readers should be mindful that this is dated 1989 – so now an historical era, with an older fashioned approach to contemporary times, no computers then, just typewriters, no Internet or mobile phones. More poignantly Neil and John faced a Goliath adversarial socio-political culture prevailing 'might is right', 'money speaks', and 'dodgy politics' by those on Blue Mountains Council who wielded political influence and financial power from local ratepayers and NSW taxpayers.

It happened to be Neil's second foray into such a challenge, as with other members of The Friends. It so much resonates with this author (Steven Ridd) from having a comparable experience of invasive high-rise development in 2000 adjoining the rear of 10 Frenchmans Road in Randwick having rented there 1994-2000. Prior to the development the rear site had been vacant historical Defence land, so immensely quiet for years.

[Neil and John's letter to local residents...\(overleaf\)](#)

We ask you to come to a meeting, at our place, of residents who are concerned about Frank Walford Park and Katoomba Falls Creek Reserve. We're concerned about these areas.

The meeting is at 3 o'clock on Sunday, October 15. Our place is on the corner of Waratah Street and Cascade Street. We suggest the meeting at our place, since if there is going to be a group of residents actively concerned about Frank Walford Park and the Katoomba Falls Creek Reserve then we need to start somewhere.

Please don't be offended by us asking you. There's nothing sinister about it. There's no catch. We don't have any hidden motives, political or otherwise. If you don't want to come, or if no-one wants to come, that's O.K. If you do come, please feel easy and informal about it.

We have our own concerns about these areas and about what might happen to them. So do you. We see this meeting as a chance to share our ideas. Maybe we're crazy, maybe not. You're probably wondering just what we're on about. Just to give you an idea what our concerns are, here are some of them:

- . most of Frank Walford Park is at risk, under its zoning, of being turned into something which brings benefits to a private developer who can get tourists to whatever he/she/they dream up for the area - 12 months ago there was talk about this sort of thing - we can be sure people who live in this area will not be consulted, will be the last to be informed, and will be on the wrong foot from the beginning;

- . if that happens, we will have lost a beautiful bushland amenity for those of us who live here now and for generations to come;

- . if that happens, Katoomba Falls Creek, which starts up in Frank Walford Park, will quickly become more fouled up, more silted up, and more an open drain than it is now:

- . if that happens, residents living around the valley of Katoomba Falls Creek will be constantly afflicted by whatever tourist-attracting development may be put there;

- . the Environmental Management Plan is being finalised NOW - that is a very big chance to change the zoning which puts the Frank Walford Park and the whole Creek valley at risk;

(2)

. continuing to use the old racing circuit on Frank Wal-
ford Park is no longer appropriate to an area which is now
heavily built up by residents living around the valley sides
and prevents the area being managed in the best interests of
this bushland; it deserves better and has already made a great
comeback from harmful development;

. the areas can be cared for and better used for the
benefit of residents than they are now.

Anyway, you're welcome to come to our place to share your
concerns and ideas.

Yours sincerely,



Neil Stuart,
John Rile.

A subsequent brochure was similarly letterbox dropped circa September 1989:

PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

- * an opportunity for residents of the valley to share in protecting the environment of the valley, especially the public lands
- * sharing information about the public lands
- * sharing ideas about the best uses of Frank Walford Park and other public lands, for residents and also for visitors
- * discuss current uses of Frank Walford Park and other public lands and the concerns of residents
- * decide on goals for the public lands in the Katoomba Falls Creek valley and how to achieve these goals

SKETCH MAP OF THE AREA

COME TO A MEETING

OF

RESIDENTS

OF

THE VALLEY OF

KATOOMBA FALLS CREEK

(from Frank Walford Park to
Katoomba Falls cascades)

Meeting called by:

Andrea Clark, Maria Kriesler, Clive and
Margaret Gunning, Joe Murolo, Glenda
Host, Grace and Tom Tooth, Susan Barrett,
John Rule, Neil Stuart

WHEN?

Sunday, November 19th
2.00pm to 4.00pm

WHERE?

In the large shed in the backyard of 19 Waratah St (corner of Waratah St and Cascade Streets - side entrance off Cascade St)

Note: No chairs are provided - bring your own chair or cushion or stand or sit on floor

WHY THIS MEETING?

A group of 11 residents met on October 15 to share their concerns. They agreed to work together to get car racing, motor-bike racing, go-cart racing stopped from Frank Walford Park, to have Frank Walford Park protected as a bushland reserve, preferably with Open Space Environmental Protection zoning, perhaps with walking trails, functioning as a native plant botanic garden, and for the whole valley to be managed as an entire system protecting the natural environment of the valley. They agreed to have another meeting involving other interested residents in the valley.

THE VALLEY OF KATOOMBA FALLS CREEK

In the Katoomba-Leura area there are several creeks which rise on the southern side of the plateau ridge, flow to the escarpment, then plunge down into the Jamieson or Megalong Valleys. Katoomba Falls Creek is one of these.

Most of the main creek flows through the public lands, owned by the people of the Blue Mountains in the name of Council. It starts in the Frank Walford Park and ends at the Cascades. Parts of some of the side creeks also run through these public lands.

What are the public lands?

- * Frank Walford Park
- * Katoomba Falls Reserve - between Farnell's Rd, Peckman's Rd and Loftus St and Neale St
- * Park - cnr Duihunly and Cascade Sts
- * Katoomba Falls Reserve also known as Katoomba Park - between Peckman's Rd., the escarpment and the ridgetop at the end of Cascade St

These public lands within the valley, and the creek system itself, form the largest remaining open space still with much bushland, within the urban area of Katoomba.

Present Uses of Lands within the Valley

We all have a fairly good idea what the public lands in the valley are being used for now. We all know some of the lands are being used for residences. Some lands are vacant, partly cleared or not cleared - are these public lands or not? We need to know.

The lands are also a wildlife corridor, especially for birds. They are a refuge for many birds of the plateau.

The lands contain hanging swamps, important plant communities. They are necessary.

What Might The Public Lands Be Used For?

One of the main purposes of this meeting is to get our answer to this question. Legally, the uses permitted are decided by zoning. All the information about current zoning, zoning intended by the draft Environmental Management Plan, will be shared at the meeting. We will discuss and decide the zoning preferred by the meeting.

10. Location of 'User Guidelines Booklet'

This booklet serves as the introductory document to 'The Neil Lewis Stuart Archive'.

As such, it is an integral part of the Archive which has three collections, as follows:

- A. **Physical Collection:** The Habitat Advocate (Katoomba base) - currently
- B. **Digital Collection:** TROVE, National Library of Australia (T.B.A.)
- C. **Internet Collection:** TheFriendsofKatoombaFallsCreekValley.org (W.I.P.)

For each of these three collections, this same booklet is located as the very start of the Archive.

11. Archive Locations

Location ID	Collection Version (Physical/Digital/Internet)	Archive Location	Research Search Access Method
A	Physical Collection <i>(current, temporary – in 19 sealed nylon tubs in a dehumidified atmosphere, locked securely under onsite manning and alarm monitoring).</i>	(To Be Advised)	(To Be Advised)

Location ID	Collection Version (Physical/Digital/Internet)	Archive Location	Research Search Access Method
C	Internet Collection	(To Be Advised)	(To Be Advised)
D	Digital Collection (On computer server hard drive)	(To Be Advised)	(To Be Advised)

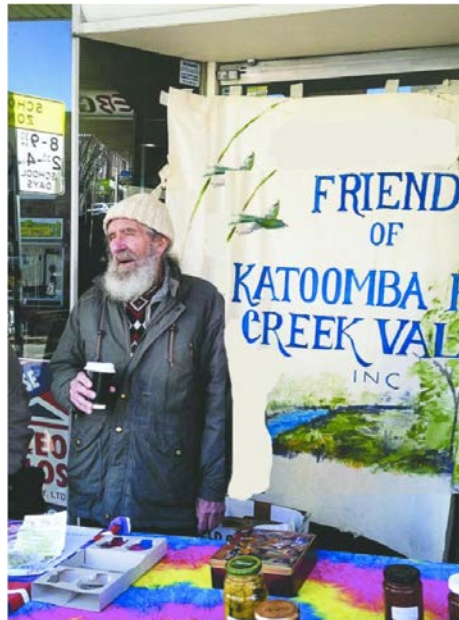


PROPOSED: An Archive Compactus Unit, being a state-of-the-art, large capacity, secure storage unit ⁶

12. Archive Inventory - Series Contents

The Neil Lewis Stuart Archive is comprised of three complete identical collections – a **‘Physical Collection’**, a joint **‘Digital Collection’**, plus a backup **‘Internet Collection’**. The purpose of having three collections is to preserve the archive’s integrity in perpetuity and to facilitate public access also in perpetuity.

All records content is included in the Physical Collection Version. In the case of the Digitised Collection, please note that certain physical content has not been digitised due to the difficult characteristics of some included ephemerae, for example The Friends banner has dimension about 2 metres x 1.5 metres in size.



Neil at one of the environment group stalls in the Blue Mountains Photo: John Hale

Neil Stuart in front of the Friends banner, at a Katoomba Street fundraising stall.

Both the Physical Collection and the Digitised Collection are jointly yet to be found a permanent home. In the case of the Internet Collection, this is intended to serve as a backup online replica of the Physical Collection/Digitised Collection. Voluntary work has commenced to create a dedicated website to host the Internet Collection version at <https://friendsofkatoombafallscreekvalley.org/>

This sizeable archive is organised in a logical categorisation by Topic Group intended to follow archival standards, to be representative of the activities of The Friends and also to facilitate research endeavours. The following table summary lists the Topic Grouping of the archival content. Outline details of explanations of each are provided in the Archive Directory, which forms part of the archive.

Topic Grouping Code	Series Title
A	The Friends – Organisation
B	The Friends - Membership
C	The Valley's Values
D	Committee Ordinary Business
E	The Valley's Rehabilitation
F	The Valley Threats
G	The Gully Guardians
H	Blue Mountains City Council's Mismanagement of The Valley
I	Reports and Plans
J	Maps

Topic Grouping Code	Series Title
K	Photos
L	Other References
M	Audio and Digital Records
N	The Friends Ephemera
O	Gully Traditional Owners Usurpation of The Valley
P	Neil Stuart's Non-Valley Community Involvements <i>[NOTE: This grouping is no longer part of this archive. It comprises Neil's personal records.]</i>
Q	Neil's records on his involvement with the Coalition of Residents for the Environment (C.O.R.E.) <i>[NOTE: This grouping is no longer part of this archive]</i>
R	Archive Manual – includes The Archive Directory 1
S	Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute Usurpation of The Valley
T	Archive Digitation (Current Project 6)

Topic Grouping Code	Series Title
U	Archive Publicity (Future Project 7)

13. Archive Integrity Protocols

Goal: To preserve the integrity of the Physical Archive in perpetuity

Integrity Standards: Compliance with the **NSW State Records Act 1998 No 17** ⁷

- (i) Archive Storage Conditions
- (ii) Archive Security

14. Archive Access Protocol

- Supervision of all access is to comply with the **NSW State Records Act 1998 No 17**
- To safeguard and ensure that the integrity of the archive is maintained (that is every record is kept intact, the exact order of the records are preserved, to avoid the possible risk of pilfering or damage occurring to any record/page, the Archive Controller is to mandatorily ensure that the following access protocol is rigorously adhered to at all times:
 - (i) Staff mandatory direct and constantly supervise each visitor/researcher viewing, handling, Post-It tab labelling of records for copying purposes

- (ii) Staff ONLY to temporarily remove a record for photocopy/scanning of selected records one at a time and replace one at a time.
No visitor/researcher is permitted to do this.
- (iii) Archive to include range of Post-it Notes as a complementary service to facilitate the research task

- What roles does The Habitat Advocate play?
 - Lead Archivist
 - Custodian
 - Archive Digitiser
 - Consultant to the Archive

- What role does Owner of the Archive play?
 - Protocol enforcement

15. Access to Sensitive Records of this Archive

- Limited and Special Access Protocols to **Physical Archive Version**
- Such material is NOT to be digitised, being:

A. Aboriginal Records

- family history
- archaeological records
- people who have passed away
- native title

B. Personal Records

- home addresses and phone numbers
- ancestral family records – photos

C. Legal Records

D. Documents labelled as ‘Not for Public View/Dissemination’

E. Copyright Material

- Eg. Friends of Catalina
- Aboriginal records

16. References

1. **'Motto'**, sourced from (This Archive), from a letterbox distribution leaflet ' The Valley of Katoomba Falls Creek', circa 1994, by Neil Stuart, the Friends of Katoomba Falls Creek Valley Inc.,
2. **'Katoomba'** meaning - *"Harry Peckman recalls James Neal MLA at picnic near Katoomba Falls asking Princess Betsey of the Kanimbla Tribe of aborigines where the name came from [and] she answered". "It means all shiny falling waters". Harry was the coach driver. (Ref: Harry Peckman's obituary (in) The Katoomba Daily 4th October 1934."* [Source: Blue Mountains Geographical Encyclopaedia, 2001, 2nd Ed, by Brian Fox, page 91, entry #725]
3. **'Katoomba Falls'** photo, from **The Gully Water Subcatchment**, The Habitat Advocate website, [^https://habitatadvocate.com.au/the-gully-water-catchment/](https://habitatadvocate.com.au/the-gully-water-catchment/)
4. **'The Gully Water Catchment' Map**, by Dr Val Attenbrow, 1993 as 'The Study Area', in Katoomba Falls Creek Valley Environmental Study, Draft Report and Management Plan prepared for Blue Mountains City Council, by F.& J. Bell & Associates, June 1993, page 3.
5. **'Objects of The Friends'**, Constitution (Friends of Katoomba Falls Creek Valley), p.1, 15th July 1990, plus subsequent variations later adopted.
6. **'Archive Compactus Unit'** is a state-of-the-art, high volume storage unit, Parchive Compactus Units, by Specfurn Commercial Furniture, website: [^https://specfurn.com.au/products/parchive-compactus-units/](https://specfurn.com.au/products/parchive-compactus-units/), address: Unit 2, 460 Bilsen Road, Geebung QLD 4034, Tel: 07-3268 4848;
7. **NSW State Records Act 1998**, No 17, State Government of New South Wales, [^https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/act-1998-017#statusinformation](https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/act-1998-017#statusinformation)