

BURRAGORANG VALLEY MINERS MEMORIAL

Steve Robinson (2001)

“The Majestic cliffs rimming this valley stand silent sentinel of respect to those families who lived out their lives beneath their shadow as keepers of the soil, before their valley was flooded in 1958.



The same cliffs carved and etched by the long hands of time are a fitting monument to the miners of silver-lead at Yerranderie and the miners of the coal beds beneath these ramparts who toiled and gave their lives dedicated to a worthy cause”

This inscription on the memorial at Burragorang Valley Lookout, to the families and miners of The Valley, has never seemed more fitting.

Take a drive from Camden along Burragorang Road today, through The Oaks, Oakdale and Nattai to the Lookout, and if you haven't been out there for a few years, you will find the trip very different. Gone are the coalmines, the coal trucks and the coal miners.

With the closing of Brimstone No.1 Colliery in 2000 and when the last shift was worked at Wollondilly Washery on 15th June 2001, the coal-mining era in the Burragorang Valley came to a sad end.

Since the first coal was mined in 1878, when the Nattai Mining Company was established, and more so since the 1930's, when the Clinton and Fox families pioneered and established their mines, the whole district has been touched in some way by the mining industry.

In time, all that will remain of the once proud and prosperous coal mining industry in the Valley will be the monuments dedicated to the men who laboured to make their industry one that we can all be proud of. In time, gone will be all that was part of the every day life and being of each pit, the mine buildings and pitheads, bulldozed unceremoniously into piles of rubble and the land returned to nature. The old miners will pass on and with them their stories and memories, memories that only coalminers would probably understand.



Although some history can be forgotten by the passing of time, the Burragorang Valley coalminers will never be forgotten. The legacy to generations to come, from a proud and dedicated group of retired miners, in the form of a memorial proudly standing by the side of the road at Oakdale, where almost everyone who ever worked in the Valley would have passed by on their way to work at the pit, will stand the test of time.

(Gordon 'Bud' Laing recalls how the monument came into being.)

“At a meeting of the Burragorang-Camden Retired Miners Association in 2000, Harold Angilly suggested that with the closure of Brimstone Colliery, the last to close in the Valley, something should be done in the way of a monument to the mining industry in the district. The meeting was told that Mick Bardsley had already started the ball rolling and had approached the Oakdale Workers Club to see what could be done about a piece of land for a monument.

From there a committee of seven was formed; Mick Bardsley, Ralph Sharpe, Ian Brand, Lance Ditton, David Goldfinch, Len English and Gordon Laing. They have at times been referred to as the 'Magnificent Seven'.

Mick Bardsley was the organizer and Ian Brand the designer and brains behind the Monument, without them we would have had a difficult job.

A couple of old skips were obtained, but they were in pretty poor condition. Ian Brand suggested if we wanted we could use his workshop, and as it turned out he took over the building of the skips with a couple of us giving him a hand. It was great that he did, he knew what had to be done, he is a boilermaker and with his knowledge and equipment the job was made so much easier.

We copied the skips we had using the wheels and axils to build on. Ian gave us the measurements and we cut the timber, as they went together Ian did the welding of the frames and straps.

Committee members then approached Brimstone Colliery and after a bit of haggling we got the gin wheel from the Dolly Car rope. The frame for the wheel was an old belt roller frame; it came from Brimstone also and was taken to Phil Hughes' workshop to be modified. Phil did this for us in his spare time as he was travelling to Wollongong to work at the time.

The wheel and frame then went to Nepean Engineering to be assembled and plates put on to take the plaques to be displayed.

Mick Bardsley organised for the plaques to be made and the sign writing to indicate what the Monument was all about.

We approached Wollondilly Council for permission to place the Monument in the Club grounds, and the Club then told us they would pay for the concrete slab for the Monument to stand on.

Ian Brand then designed the layout of and made up the frames to go in the concrete to anchor the wheel, frame and skips after the concrete was poured.

Brian Rideout's experience in concrete work was most welcome, he organised the digging out, forming and pouring of the concrete slab.

Skips built and ready, concrete poured, now waiting for the wheel and frame.

Dave Fuller of Nepean Engineering wasn't happy with the finish of the wheel and frame so he sent them to Newcastle to be galvanised before we took delivery of it.

The figures of the coalminers were originally planned to be carved out of wood, but when this couldn't be done Mick, after a lot of enquiries found Robin Yates at San Soussi, he had done the horses at the old Clutha White House in Camden and the entrance to El Cabalo Blanco.

Mick Bardsley, Ian Brand and Bud Laing went to see Robin to give him an idea of what we were looking for. We took with us a Falcon roof bolter, cap lamp, rescuer, helmet and a pair of overalls. Bud dressed in the gear and Yates sketched him in the stances the miner models are in.



When we received the statues some minor alterations had to be made before they were stood in place.

The Monument was now ready for the second stage dedication that took place on 15th September with many ex Burragorang Valley miners and their families witnessing the unveiling of the statues and two other plaques.

The complete memorial contains many plaques. Foremost on the wheel; "IN MEMORIUM. This plaque is dedicated to the men who lost their lives in the coal mining and associated industries in the Burragorang Valley". and,

"This monument commemorates the contribution of the people in the

coal mining industry in the Burragorang Valley”.

At the top of the wheel, “This plaque is in honour of the Clinton and Fox families, Pioneers of coal mining in the Burragorang Valley”.

Ten other plaques on the wheel name the Mines and the years they were in service.

Old Wollondilly 1930–1980



Nattai Bulli 1932-1992

Wollondilly Extended 1935-1973

Nattai North 1974-1988

Oakdale 1948-1999

Wollondilly Washery 1960-2001

Valley 1 1959-1974

Valley 2 1960-1982

Valley 3 1971-1984

Brimstone 1 1968-2000

Brimstone 2 1970-1984

A plaque donated by the Clinton family, “The Clinton family 1930 – 1962.

Dedicated to the Mothers and wives of all miners and truck drivers for their full

support under such primitive conditions as well as raising young families”.

Donated by the Phippen family, “In memory of the Jack Phippen Family, the first bus company to transport miners to work in the Burragorang Valley during the early 40’s”.

Two more plaques thank various people and organisations for their contributions to the industry and the monument; “The Burragorang miners acknowledge and thank the following organisations for their part in the mining industry: *The Administrative Services (Glass House) *All truck drivers *Glenlee Washery *Narellan Workshops and Stores *The Road Gang” and,

“The miners would like to acknowledge the generous donations which have made this monument possible; *Brimstone Lodge *Camden Signes *CPE Tree Service *Dunbier Transport *Joint Coal Board *Macarthur Credit Union *Nepean Engineering *Oakdale Workers Club”.

Many have been involved in this project and they should be very proud and satisfied with the result of their donations of time, money, equipment and materials and work carried out.

The Burragorang-Camden Retired Miners Association would like to also thank those who worked on the Monument;

Mick Bardsley, Ian Brand, Bud Laing, Ralph Sharp, Harold Angilly, Dave Goldfinch, Brian Rideout, Wayne Thomas and Pat Cook.

To all who have contributed to the coal mining industry in the Burragorang Valley, we dip our helmets.