

The Fairmont Resort
A Blue Mountains Icon

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On behalf of Dr Jerry Schwartz



FAIRMONT
RESORT BLUE MOUNTAINS

A member of the MGallery Collection

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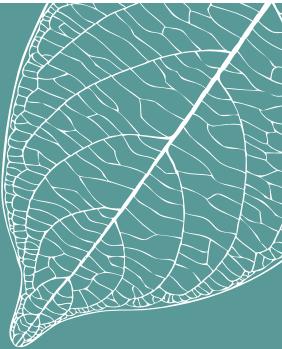
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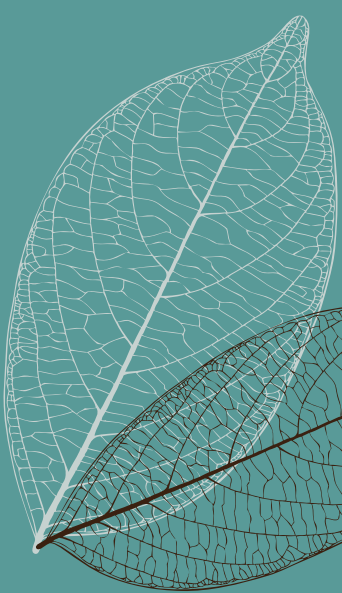
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The unique blue hue of the Blue Mountains with the Three Sisters in the foreground.
(Blue Mountains, Lithgow and Oberon Tourism)



The Greater Blue Mountains

A World Heritage Site

Almost at Sydney’s doorstep lies Australia’s most accessible wilderness. The Blue Mountains region is one of great natural beauty and rich cultural resources consisting of over one million hectares of breathtaking views, rugged tablelands, sheer cliffs, deep valleys, and teeming swamps. The unique plants and animals inhabiting this wilderness have earned it a place on the World Heritage Register.

The Blue Mountains are a series of sandstone plateaux and deep canyons extending 220 kilometres from the Southern Highlands to the Hunter Valley, and from western Sydney to the Bathurst plains. This vast upland is just sixty kilometres from Sydney, Australia’s largest metropolis. It lies east of the Great Dividing Range and is dissected by the Cox, Grose and Nepean rivers. Roughly fifty kilometres in width, it divides the fertile western plains from the coastal fringe.

The Blue Mountains from Lawson to Lithgow – this 1909 map shows topographical features, pleasure resorts and points of interest.

(National Library of Australia)



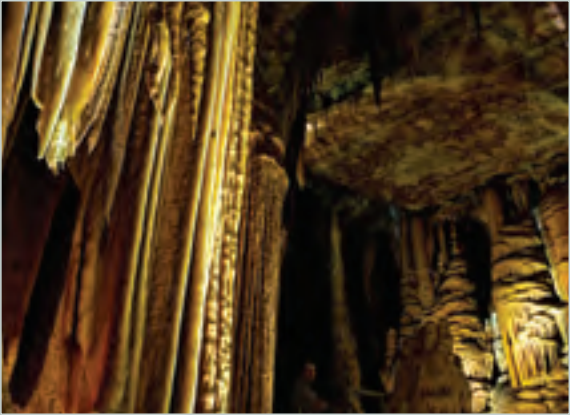
How the Blue Mountains were formed

The Blue Mountains are in fact not mountains at all but a series of horizontal plateaux formed from thick beds of sandstone, shale and coal, deeply incised by steep canyons. It began some 425 million years ago when sedimentary rocks were uplifted to form granite foundations. About 280 million years ago, the soft shale layer was formed from muddy clay. A great forest covered the area some 250 million years ago, eventually turning into coal. From 200

million to about one million years ago, the area was covered in sand and water that became sandstone, raised by a series of earthquakes to become a huge tableland rising to about 1,300 metres at its highest point. Millions of years after the sandstone had taken its present form, the basalt extrusions of Mounts Tomah, Wilson, Hay, Colong and Banks rose above the three tiered plateaux to form the distinctive skyline now clearly visible from Sydney.

The exquisite natural beauty of the delicate formations of the Jenolan Caves.

(Blue Mountains, Lithgow and Oberon Tourism)



For millions of years, swift flowing streams have carved deep gorges and sheer cliffs into the rugged sandstone layers, creating cascading waterfalls like the spectacular drops of Wentworth and Katoomba Falls, the beautiful Bridal Falls at Leura, and the dramatic Kanangra Falls. The formation of limestone outcrops over the millennia has created one of the most extensive cave networks in Australia. Jenolan Caves with its underground rivers and natural archways is a Karst landform, occurring where rock is easily dissolved in natural waters. A slow process of erosion has produced picturesque cave formations (Speleothems) that make it a popular tourist destination. Abercrombie Caves and Wombeyan Caves are more remote but just as spectacular.

Why are the Mountains blue?

The distinctive blue haze of the distant mountains was noted soon after Europeans arrived at Sydney Cove and it wasn't long before the official names of Carmarthen and Lansdowne Hills

were replaced with the more evocative Blue Mountains. Lady Audrey Tennyson, wife of the South Australian Governor, described it in 1900 as 'the most gorgeous real sapphire blue'.

The phenomenon is caused by the thousands of eucalyptus (gum) trees covering the mountain slopes. The blue mist is an optical effect caused by microscopic droplets of oil on their leaves. The trees are constantly dispersing fine oil droplets into an atmosphere of dust particles and water vapour. Scattered rays of sunlight catch these tiny particles and clothe the sandstone plateau in a bluish haze that is clearly visible from Sydney.²

Nature's diversity

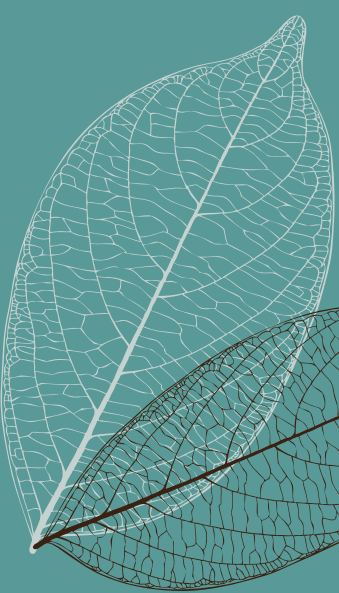
The nooks and crannies of the plateau and the inaccessible areas of wilderness provided refuge from climatic changes during recent geological history, enabling a rich diversity of plant and animal life to survive and evolve. Unique and threatened plants and animals live here in an original ecosystem that has barely changed for millenia. Ancient surviving species form a link with the prehistoric continent of Gondwanaland when Australia, Antarctica, South America, Africa and parts of Asia formed one geographical land mass.

Weather and terrain vary greatly, providing a wide range of environmental conditions and over one thousand species of native plants. Conditions are cold and harsh in the Upper Blue



Stencil art in Wollemi National Park. To Aboriginal people, hand stencils and other motifs have special meaning.

(Ian Brown)



Chapter 2

Blue Mountains Dreaming

The Aboriginal Presence

Australia is a continent of great antiquity and its indigenous people are among the oldest on the planet. For tens of thousands of years, Aboriginal people have lived in the Blue Mountains, creating traditional trading paths that the early European settlers eventually followed from the Sydney basin.

Six Aboriginal language groups have associations with the Greater Blue Mountains. Darug territory extends from Broken Bay in the north to Botany Bay in the south and includes much of the areas first occupied by the British from 1788. This group left an impressive legacy of rock art along the main east-west ridge of the Blue Mountains. Their territory bordered on Dharawal country in the south and Wanaruah and Darkinjung to the north. The Wiradjuri occupied vast areas west of the mountains. The Gundungurra were the main people in the upper Blue Mountains although their territory overlapped with the other groups. Each had their own language, traditions and even appearance.¹

In this 1830 oil painting of Bougainville Falls (also called Prince Regent's Glen and later Wentworth Falls), Augustus Earle depicts Aboriginal men interacting with a group of Europeans.

(National Library of Australia)



A sketch of Aborigines fishing from a canoe made by William Romaine Govett during his surveying expedition to the Blue Mountains, 1830-1835.

(Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales)



When Charles Darwin travelled across the mountains to Bathurst in January 1836, he noted the decreasing numbers of Aboriginal people as did Quaker missionary and naturalist James Backhouse during his trip in September 1835. The pre-contact Aboriginal population of the mountains is unknown, perhaps several hundreds, but their numbers were soon depleted by white incursion as well as inter-tribal hostilities. As settlers moved over the mountains to the Bathurst plains (where they met violent Wiradjuri resistance), tribal life gradually broke down as traditional skills were lost although

corroborees and initiation ceremonies continued into the 1840s.¹¹

Where did the Gundungurra go?

As traditional hunting and gathering lands were supplanted by private property in the mountain valleys, the Gundungurra were dispersed. Small family groups set up a fringe camp near the Glen Shale mine in the Megalong Valley and some held out there after the mine's closure in 1897 until they moved to the Katoomba Falls Creek Valley camp in 1901. Most, however, were moved onto one of the many reserves around



‘The harsh terrain of the Blue Mountains tested early explorers and remains a challenge for contemporary bushwalkers and climbers’.

(Blue Mountains Lithgow & Oberon Tourism)



Chapter 3

‘An Unsurmountable Barrier’

Crossing the Blue Mountains

For thousands of years, Aboriginal groups had been traversing the Blue Mountains. To the British who established a penal settlement at Sydney Cove in January 1788, the distant mountains with their benign English names, Carmarthen Hills to the north and Lansdowne Hills to the south, were a convenient barrier for their gaol without walls. Disorientated convicts with no idea of their geographical location believed China lay over the mountains and some made futile and often fatal attempts to penetrate the mountain wilderness.

Many attempts were made to get over, around or through the Blue Mountains by courageous adventurers or those seeking agricultural country beyond but they remained an impassable barrier for over two decades. Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth are credited with being the first Europeans over the mountains in 1813. It was a momentous event in our national history, opening up the western plains and enabling the little penal settlement to survive and expand. In May 2013, Blue Mountains communities will celebrate two hundred years since the

Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth sight the western plains—as envisaged by the *Sydney Mail* in 1880.
(Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales)



first official crossing, including an authentic re-enactment trek along the original route taken by the explorers.¹

Breaching the barrier

The first white man to penetrate the Blue Mountains was Lieutenant William Dawes of the Marines who set out in 1789 with two companions to reach the knoll called Round Hill (Mount Hay) that was distinctly visible from Sydney. Crossing the Nepean River, they reached Mount Twiss near contemporary Linden before, exhausted and short on provisions, they retraced the ‘line of

march’. In 1793, Captain William Paterson and party navigated the Hawkesbury River by boat and tried to negotiate the shallow waters of the Grose River, named by Paterson in honour of Lieutenant-Governor Francis Grose. They were blocked by fallen rocks and waterfalls plunging over sheer cliffs, ‘leaving the western mountains to be the object of discovery at some future day’. The famous maritime explorer George Bass and his party crossed the Wollondilly River and pushed westwards toward Kanangra Plateau in 1796, reaching as far as Pulpit Hill.

This watercolour by surveyor William Romaine Govett of the gullies of the Grose Valley depicts the harsh terrain encountered by the botanist George Caley in 1804 and by Grose himself in 1836.
(National Library of Australia)

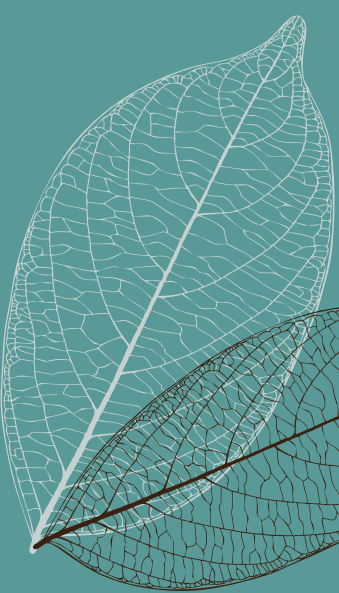


In 1795, First Fleet convict and Hawkesbury settler Matthew Everingham and two companions followed the ridges and were only one day’s trek from completing the crossing when lack of food forced them back. Another ex-convict, John Wilson, was employed by Governor Hunter in 1798 to guide a small party of convicts to the southwest, partly to prove to potential absconders that no utopian settlement lay beyond the mountains. Wilson was a skilled

bushman, having lived with the Aborigines at various times, and easily found his way to fine grassed country near Bowral in the southern highlands. Wilson’s discoveries were never officially acknowledged and he was murdered soon after by the outraged husband of a young Aboriginal woman he tried to abduct. The journal of his companion John Price contains the first written reference to the existence of a lyrebird and a ‘cullawine’ or koala.



The passage over the Blue Mountains was rough and difficult and deterred all but the most intrepid settlers.
(Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales)



Chapter 4

Populating the Mountains

Inns, Railways & Residents

The colony was slowly changing from a purely penal one to a free society and the inland had to be unlocked. Encouraged by pastoralist W.C. Wentworth, graziers began moving their sheep towards the fertile western plains where wool could be produced for the British markets. By the 1840s, the products of the pastoral industry were Australia's major exports but until the advent of the railway, transport from the interior to coastal ports and markets was limited.

To most, the rough mountain journey by wagon or coach was merely something to be endured and they were relieved to reach the other side. The mountain plateau developed slowly and quite separately from the plains beyond. In time, as the beauty of the unfamiliar antipodean environment unfolded, the Blue Mountains became more than a mere corridor to the west.¹

Wayside inns

The earliest European structures in the Blue Mountains were mobile stockades housing convicts labouring on the roads. The first

This 1860 sketch with bullock cart in the foreground is thought to be the Blue Mountain Inn at Lawson.

(Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales)



permanent building was the military post at Springwood, a ‘commodious barrack and guard house for the military guard’ erected in 1816. It was followed by staging depots at Bull’s Camp at Linden, Woodford, Weatherboard (Wentworth Falls), Blackheath, and Mt Victoria that provided facilities for watering and feeding stock. Enterprising pioneers built small inns nearby to cater for the increasing road traffic. Standards ranged from comfortable and basic to dirty and slovenly but travellers had little choice. Hostelries were strategically placed across the mountains, often giving their name to the hamlets that grew up around them.

Occupying a prime position on the eastern escarpment, Barnett Levy’s Pilgrim Inn was the first hostelry encountered by those travelling west from Emu Plains. In 1839, author Louisa Meredith described a smelly wayside public house that could have been this one. Sydney Solicitor William Deane purchased the old Pilgrim Inn in 1873 and it remained in the Deane family until it burned down in the 1968 bushfires. Levy later built another Pilgrim Inn that was bought by John Outrim Wascoe. Until 1914, it became a general store and post office for the township called Wascoe which then officially changed to Blaxland.²

Even for the wife of the Commissioner of Railways, Roads and Bridges, it could be a rugged trip over the mountains. Mary Elizabeth Martindale made this watercolour in 1860.

(Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales)



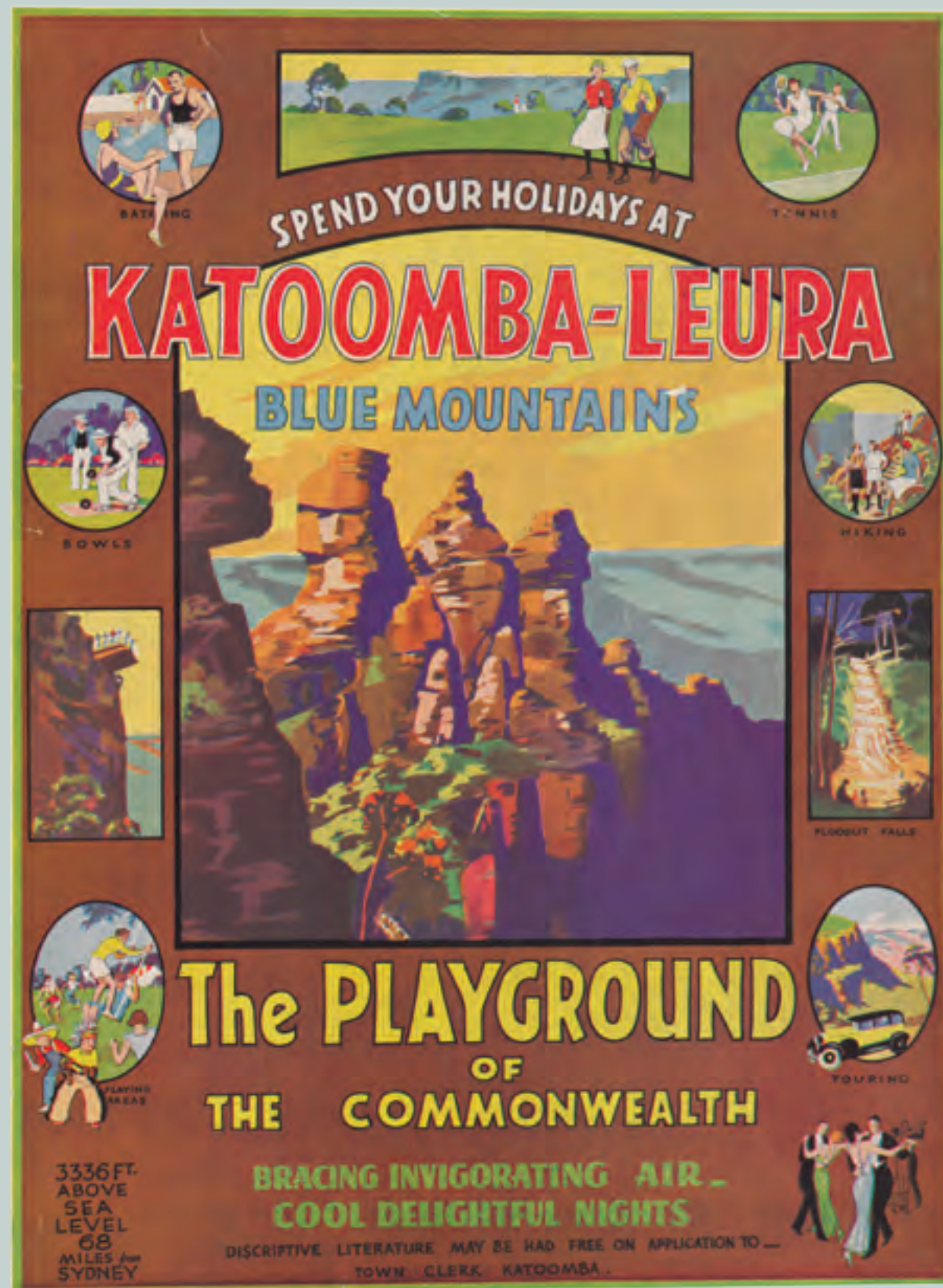
Described as a plain country inn by Quaker James Backhouse in 1835, the Welcome Inn at Valley Heights was built in 1831 and was variously named the Valley Inn, the Woolpack and the Wyoming. Further up the road was the Blue Mountain Inn. Built on his 200 acres by Henry Wilson in 1843, it gave its name to the surrounding area until it was officially renamed Lawson in 1879.

Originally part of William Cox’s military post, the Weatherboard at Wentworth Falls had become an inn by 1829, going through several owners, and hosting the English naturalist Charles Darwin in 1836. By 1839, it included three parlours, seven bedrooms, kitchen, bar, and stabling for seventeen horses. The Weatherboard

gave its name to the first railway station and post office, renamed Wentworth Falls in 1879.

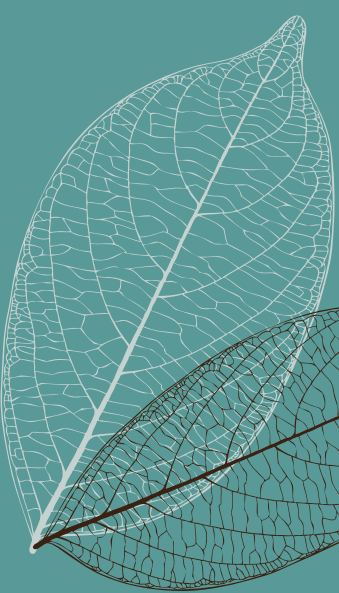
In 1836, Charles Darwin commented on the comfort of The Scotch Thistle and its similarity to ‘the small inns in North Wales’. This was Blackheath’s first inn, opened in 1831 by ex-convict Andrew Gardner. When the railway terminated at Mt Victoria in the 1860s, Blackheath went into a temporary decline but survived due to its proximity to the magnificent Govett’s Leap.

Until Major Mitchell’s road over Victoria Pass opened, the main rest stop between Emu Plains and Bathurst was the Golden Fleece at the foot of Cox’s Pass at Hartley Vale. The genial host



This 1935 Tourist Guide promoted the healthy and invigorating mountain climate of Katoomba and Leura.

(Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales)



Chapter 5

Holidays in the Mountains

The Emergence of Tourism

The railway brought rapid change to the Blue Mountains. No longer regarded as an alien and hostile landscape, unproductive and barren, or as a mere corridor to the west, the mountains came to be valued for their outstanding aesthetic, recreational and therapeutic qualities. They were the first mountains to capture the colonial imagination. The first Railway Guide of New South Wales in 1879 promoted the ‘re-invigoration of mountain air and the refined pleasure afforded by the contemplation of beautiful scenery’.

Affordable rail fares made the region accessible not only to the wealthy patrons of exclusive hotels but also to holiday makers and honeymooners who stayed at the more modest guesthouses that were springing up. The proliferation of these Victorian and Edwardian establishments gave Katoomba and nearby Leura their distinctive architectural character.¹

One of the by-products of commercial tourism was the illustrated and sometimes slightly risqué postcards that began circulating from about 1900.

(Blue Mountains City Library, Local Studies Collection)



Children playing quoits at the Katoomba Coffee Palace in 1906.

(Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales)



from Glenbrook to Mount Victoria, all aimed at the tourist market.¹⁰

Respectable guesthouses

More homely than the grand establishments and more respectable than the cheap hotels with public bars, guesthouses (commonly known as boarding houses) began to appear in the villages of Katoomba, Leura, Blackheath, Wentworth Falls, Springwood and Lawson from the 1890s. In 1905, Katoomba and Leura had a combined total

of forty-one accommodation options. In 1917, there were sixty boarding houses in Katoomba alone, most of them run by women.

The Royal Palace, advertised in 1882, was one of the earliest boarding houses. Two years later it turned into Katoomba College for Boys until about 1900 when it reverted to a guesthouse named Katoomba Coffee Palace, later the Royal Coffee Palace. From 1945, it was used as administration quarters for Blue Mountains



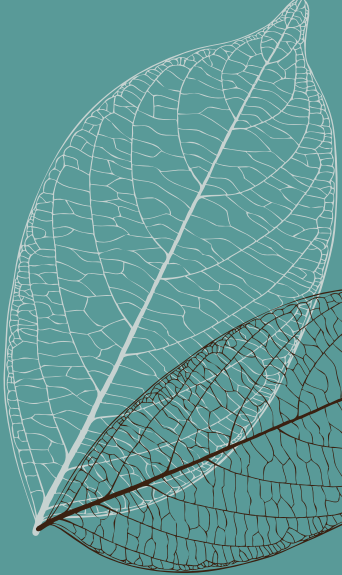
View over Jamison Valley and Kings Tableland from Leura.
(Fairmont Resort MGallery)

Lovely Leura

Jewel Of The Mountains

Leura and Katoomba have a shared history. In February 1912, a press article predicted that they would soon merge as one town. ‘The feeling of the Katoombans and Leuraites to each other is friendly’, said the writer, ‘but their combined attitude to the Blackheathans is hostile’. A land sale in January 1913 proclaimed that Leura ‘will be a second Katoomba in the near future’. In fact, Leura went on to develop its own distinctive style and character.¹

Even today, Katoomba has the slightly gritty edge of a former mining town. Leura on the other hand is a neat town of wide orderly streets and beautiful gardens sloping gently downhill towards the escarpment overlooking the magnificent Jamison Valley. With limited area to expand, it has developed into a picturesque little village.



The first subdivision: Leura Estate was offered for sale by auction on Saturday 17 December 1881 by George Withers & Co. Special trains conveyed purchasers from Sydney to the Estate.

(Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales)



The railway brings residents

Land speculators were selling off parcels of land at Leura in the 1880s with the promise of a railway platform but it took several years to eventuate. Katoomba had acquired a timber platform and station in 1881 but at Leura there was just the obsolete coal company siding and loading ramp that had ceased operating in 1887.

The Eyre family from Sydney were major players in Leura land sales, buying into much of the Leura Estate and other subdivisions. By September 1889, William Eyre was promoting Leura as the New Model Township: ‘Its park-like land, charming scenery and delightful walks will soon claim for it a decided preference for residential purposes.’ He financed a new railway

station to promote his land sales and his shares in the nearby Leura Hotel and Coffee Palace. A temporary railway station opened on 6 December 1890. It closed on 16 July 1890 and re-opened on 22 October 1891 when a purpose-built platform and waiting shed had been completed. The station was unmanned and hopeful passengers had to flag down the train with a painted lollipop device or, if the fog had descended, a lantern. Eyre celebrated the opening of the new train station and promoted sales of his Leura Estate with a grand picnic for Members of Parliament and Sydney’s business elite. ⁴

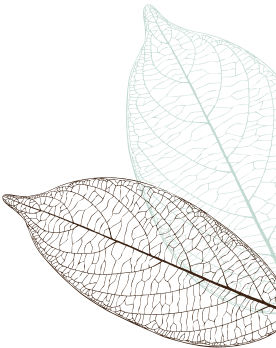
The railway station made Leura more accessible, especially after 1902 when an island platform building was erected. Wealthy gentlemen from Sydney established their architecturally designed mountain retreats in prime positions with expansive views while the less affluent settled closer to the railway line on Megalong and Grose streets.

One such fine home was Leuralla, built on Olympian Parade by the wealthy Harry Andreas about 1903. When the handsome wood panelled building burned to the ground in the bushfires of December 1909, Andreas rebuilt in The Mall, transferring his imported European trees to the new location. Designed by Danish horticulturalist Paul Sorenson, the garden was renowned for its displays of massed tulips, ornamental hedges, and rose trellised walkway. Heritage-listed

Leuralla is now the largest toy and model train museum in the southern hemisphere. It belongs to the Evatt family and features a permanent photographic exhibition on politician Herbert Vere Evatt (1894-1965).⁵

Hillcrest was a finely sited country retreat built above the railway line about 1900 for Thomas Butler, Professor of Latin at the University of Sydney. In 1918, it was acquired as a summer retreat by Scottish shipping magnate William Scott Fell. He sold it in 1929 to reclusive Sydney heiress Edith Smith Hill who renamed it Yallambee. By the 1990s, it was in the hands of a European baroness who converted it into an acclaimed French restaurant, called the Hillcrest Coachman. ⁶

The little village with its neat grid of streets soon acquired the accoutrements of a town, although it remained dependent on Katoomba for many of its services. In 1893, there were only about twenty-four permanent residents but enough apparently for a Postal Receiving Office to be established at the Coffee Palace Hotel until a designated building appeared in 1901, replaced in 1913 by the current post office. The telephone arrived in 1896, followed by a public school in 1905, a reticulated water supply (1905), and electricity (1906). From 1900, grocers, butchers and other shops located themselves in Leura Mall. Many had verandahs providing shade as well as hitching posts for horses. A novel addition



Four women at Sylvia Cascades, Leura, c.1912.
(Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales)



workers levelled the steep rocky ground to carve out reinforced paths and terraces sloping gently down the hillside. It cost Van de Velde a fortune to create a series of formal and informal gardens interspersed with rare ornamental trees, grottos and imported sculptures. In 1936, he erected a two-storey Art Deco summer house. The house and gardens went through several owners after Van de Velde’s death in 1947 before being acquired by the National Trust (NSW) in 1962. Paul

Sorenson, his son Ib and grandson Barry assisted with the garden restoration. Everglades opened to the public on a regular basis in the early 1990s and remains one of Australia’s foremost cold climate gardens.

Everglades was one of four gardens made publicly available in 1965 when the Blue Mountains Hospital Ladies Auxiliary staged the first Leura Garden Festival. It has since become a popular spring event and a registered charity. As well as the colourful floral displays, attractions now include art and music in the gardens and entertainment at the Leura Village Fair in The Mall.¹⁵

Leura’s later history

During World War 11, several of Leura’s large guesthouses, including the Chateau Napier, were converted into boarding schools for evacuated children or families from Sydney. Even the fashionable Ritz was taken over as a convalescent home for returned servicemen. In the post-war years, many guesthouses reopened their doors but the glory days had passed.

Summer bushfires are a fact of life in the heavily timbered mountains but no-one was prepared for the fury of the Leura fires of 1957. Fanned by gale force winds, the fires began about lunchtime on Monday 2 December in temperatures exceeding 38 degrees celsius. As fireballs exploded overhead, terrified residents

Leura Kiosk was a welcome sight for hikers returning from the Leura Falls walk.
(Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales)



fled to safety. Volunteers fought the fire throughout the night but by dawn more than one hundred and thirty homes and shops had been reduced to smouldering ruins, including the landmark Chateau Napier guesthouse. Leura survived other bushfires over the years but ‘Black Monday’ was the most devastating.¹⁶

From the 1960s, pretty little Leura slipped into shabby gentility. The annual New Years Eve procession came to an end, the famous old Ritz closed its doors as did the Leura Theatre. The town was invisible from the main highway and specialist shop owners recall waiting all day for a customer. With the formation of the

Leura Village Association, things improved. The first Leura Village Fair in 1980 brought out all the local craftspeople and began the renewal process. The heritage village now features quaint antique and craft shops, restaurants and cafes plus a disproportionate number of creative residents including actor Reg Livermore, painter John Olsen, poet Kate Llewellyn, novelist Christopher Koch, and writer Mary Moody. And on the outskirts is a huge luxury resort that has assisted in the revitalisation of this quaint heritage village.¹⁷

The ‘new’ clubhouse in 2000, located south-east of its original site, with the Fairmont Resort out of sight to the right.

(Stanley W Croker, Leura Golf Club)



Golfing above the Clouds

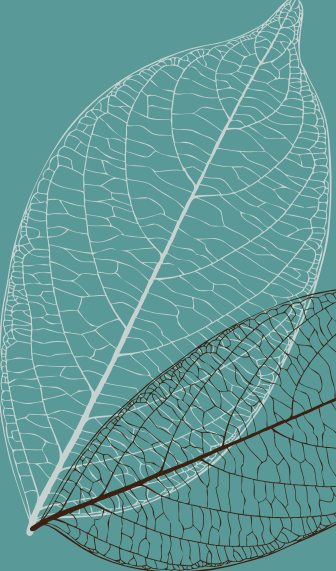
Leura Golf Club

To many, Leura meant leisure and recreation. As well as the many scenic walks in the area, tourists were attracted by sporting activities offered by various boarding houses or local authorities. Advertisements invited guests to enjoy ‘golfing, croquet and tennis above the clouds’.

A major attraction was the Leura Golf Links, with spectacular views over the Jamison Valley. Originally called the Blue Mountains Golf Club, this was the first on the mountains. In the early 1980s, several fairways of the golf course were sold to become the Fairmont Resort.¹

Land for Leura Links

The first recorded game of golf in Australia was played in Tasmania in the 1820s. The game became popular in the 1880s and by 1905 there were thirty-nine clubs in New South Wales. Golf was first played in the Blue Mountains on 8 November 1902 with a demonstration game at Leura by professional golfer Carnegie Clark. Such was the interest that a meeting at Katoomba Council Chambers on 20 November resolved to form a Blue Mountains Golf Club. At the instigation of local doctor Sydney Watkins,



Guests at the opening of the new Katoomba-Leura Clubhouse, 1906
(The Sydney Mail 4 April 1906)



situated links than these, which have been carved out of the heart of the bush’.⁵

In what became a familiar strategy, the company controlling the club began selling off some of its surplus property but land deals failed to save Golf Links Estate Leura from liquidation. On 19 December 1908, a new entity, Leura Golfers and Bowlers Mountains Recreation Company Limited, was incorporated with a capital of £3,500. It rented the course and amenities to the renamed Leura Golf Club and provided financial and administrative support. Another restructure in

1916 formalised the leasing arrangement between company and club that lasted until 1973 when the club took full control and ownership of the land.⁶

Growth of a mountain golf club

Distinguished visitors like the Governor General or Prime Minister occasionally teed off at the picturesque links but the ongoing problem was the lack of a local population to support the club. Maintaining a golf course, even a nine-hole one, is an expensive business and there were early signs of financial struggle. The magnificent location also brought bouts of harsh weather

that stopped play. The first annual report of the renamed Leura Golfers and Bowlers Mountains Recreation Company in February 1919, however, indicated that all was well. The board had earlier acquired land and facilitated street closures to extend the links which, in 1924, were redesigned as a full 18-hole course stretching from the cliff on the east and Sublime Pt Road on the west. With no regular water supply, the perennial problem of sustaining the links was solved by installing a pump and motor in the dam below the links from which 54,553 litres could be pumped up daily to the tees and greens.⁷

During the twenties, a younger generation was attracted to the club’s excellent dance floors and lively orchestra. Major extensions were made to the clubhouse in 1936 including a lounge, office, card room and locker rooms. The remodelled building was designed by Bruce Dellit, the architect who completed the Anzac War Memorial in Sydney’s Hyde Park in 1934, and featured glass walls and a wide unroofed verandah to make the most of extensive views and stimulating mountain air. As well as golf, there were tennis and croquet courts, deck tennis, ping-pong and a proposed bowling green although this didn’t eventuate until the 1950s. The club continued to rely on visitors from Sydney or further afield. In 1935, a group of Japanese gentlemen staying at the Alexandra Hotel spent an enjoyable time at the Leura Links. Years later, when major companies

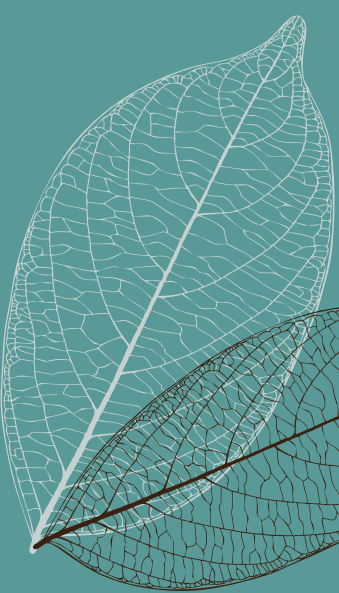
Mitsui, Shimizu and Tobishima had shares in the adjacent resort, Japanese golfers were frequent visitors to the course.⁸

Leura Golf Club emerged from World War Two with grand plans to renovate the course and build bowling greens. Such confidence was not matched by revenue. This was largely derived from liquor sales and poker machines which became legal in registered clubs in New South Wales in 1956. In 1959, expenditure had to be curbed temporarily when the bank refused further loans but the club persevered, celebrating its diamond jubilee in 1967 with weekend festivities and an impressive attendance of local politicians and dignitaries.

Throughout the 1960s and 70s, expansion continued with more than £21,353 being spent on clubhouse extensions, a third bowling green, and a new fairway watering system. In 1968, additional land that was part of the Valley of the Waters Reserve was granted to the golf club by Blue Mountains City Council, enabling a major reconstruction of the lower nine holes. There were protests about land being rezoned from public reserve to private recreation but Council argued that the golf course would act as a barrier against residential expansion to the escarpment.

On 10 May 1970, the new layout was officially opened. It consisted of nine new holes from the 7th to the 15th on the lower section of the

An artistic impression of the completed Fairmont Resort.
(Cann Archives)



Chapter 8

From Dream to Reality Building the Fairmont Resort

In the early 1980s, tourist facilities in the Blue Mountains had become rather faded and even the splendid Carrington and Hydro-Majestic Hotels were run-down. Shops were empty and streets were deserted. There were above-average numbers of single parent families and disadvantaged people, creating a difficult business environment. The region was still dependent on tourism but where were the tourists?

After two years of administration, a new Blue Mountains Council was elected in December 1981 with a mandate to bolster the tourism industry and generate employment opportunities. At the same time, a new State seat of the Blue Mountains was created with former ABC journalist Bob Debus as the first elected representative. He too believed that, with limited space on the mountain ridges for large scale industries, tourism was the only possible source of employment and income.¹

Against a mountain background, workers construct the resort's distinctive A-framed structure for the lobby.

(Cann Archives)



As construction continued, the environmentalists accepted the inevitable but they maintained their vigilance. In the early 1990s, the Coalition of Residents for the Environment [CORE] protested against the Fairmont High Ropes Course and lobbied all relevant government departments with their concerns about serious erosion, silting of nearby streams, weed infestation, and extensive clearing of the undergrowth, particularly near a remnant protected stand of *Eucalyptus oreades*.²⁰

In October 1985, the Labor Council of New South Wales gave cautious approval to the controversial project but said it would halt construction if environmental safeguards were ignored. The workforce began with thirty and peaked at 250. As far as possible, local contractors were used. Site allowances were high because it was difficult to get workers to come up to a dusty unpleasant site at Leura with its unpredictable climate when they could get better money working on the urgent Darling Harbour bicentennial project in Sydney. The project's public exposure and environmental

In November 1985, three protestors dressed as the Three Sisters in wedding outfits picketed Cann's Bridal Wear Salon in Market Street Sydney.

(Fairfax Photos)



sensitivity meant ad hoc industrial action from the militant Builders Workers Industrial Union was predictable. Workers staged many disruptive wildcat strikes on flimsy grounds and there were even instances of deliberate sabotage. On one occasion, work stopped when a spider was found in the partially completed building.

Fairmont Board members in their hard hats were often on site. The property was so large that several roofing teams were brought in. Because

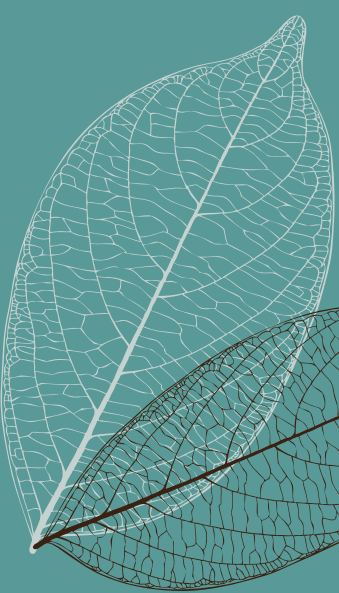
of the speed of construction, drawings were not always available on time and it was a frantic rush to get the fitout done before opening but by January 1987 it was largely completed. The deadline for the original investment allowance was met but costs blew out substantially.

As Jennings recognised at the beginning, the construction of a major hotel in a short time-frame within a pre-determined budget to a high quality standard in a difficult industrial environment is a major challenge. As the



Fairmont Resort is reflected in the ornamental pool in the glow of a mountain sunrise.

(Fairmont Resort MGallery)



Chapter 9

The First Twenty Years Operating the Fairmont Resort

The Fairmont Resort opened with fanfare and great expectations in August 1988. It was the largest hotel on the Blue Mountains and the first to be built in decades. As a five star international hotel, it carried on the tradition of the Carrington and Hydro Majestic of a century earlier. The Fairmont Resort was widely seen as the standard bearer of recovery, heralding a new era for a community eager to recreate the glory days when visitors flocked to the wonders of the Blue Mountains.

Once more, with the revitalisation of Leura and Katoomba, the restoration of Katoomba's famous hotels, the establishment of the Blue Mountains Tourism Authority and the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage listing in 2001, the mountains were poised to capitalise on their huge tourist potential.

For those seeking peace and relaxation, the beautifully landscaped gardens offered seasonal blooms, meandering paths, and three ornamental lakes, joined by waterfalls and white water rapids.

(Cann Archives)



aimed at selling the Blue Mountains as a tourist destination.

The Fairmont Resort became a favoured venue for local debutante balls, graduations, charity and business functions, weddings, and parties. One of the most popular events was Christmas in July, continuing the tradition begun at Garry Crockett’s California Guesthouse in Katoomba where a traditional European atmosphere was recreated. The Yulefest Ball in the Grand Ballroom was the highlight of the resort’s winter festivities.

The splendid Billiards Room with its two full size tables was the focus for the World Professional Billiard Championship in July 1989, the first time the tournament had been played in Australia since 1934. For eight days, overseas and local spectators gathered in the specially constructed internal grandstand to watch the young Englishman Mike Russell defeat Australian champion Eddie Charlton.³

Accomplished technician Robbie Park managed one of the most technologically advanced audio visual facilities in Australia. His

General manager Ulrich Leinichen (left) and reservations manager Waltburg Leinichen with directors Janelle and Robert Cann celebrate the Fairmont’s Resort Award win for the second year running in the 1990 NSW Tourism Awards for Excellence at Darling Harbour.

(Cann Archives)



skilled team provided clients with creative and spectacular events. It was a lot of organisation behind the scenes but as one employee recalled, ‘If the corporation had the money and it was legal, we could do it’.

Any part of the hotel could be transformed into an International Food Bazaar, an Aussie Bush Barbecue, Arabian Nights, an Italian family night, a Greek village, Ancient Rome, or a Caribbean calypso. One of the more dramatic themes was a M.A.S.H. evening, based on a satirical Korean War film. The whole hotel became a battle field with dummy machine guns, pyrotechnics in the bush, dummies dropping out of a helicopter and cadets abseiling down from roof beams to the sandy floor of the lobby – with the live music of Mental as Anything adding to the drama.⁴

Janelle Cann at the celebration of Agatha Christie’s 100th Birthday on 15 September 1990. The Fairmont’s Ballroom was transformed into a film set for a sumptuous dinner, a murder mystery by the Kent Street Theatre and quite a few surprises.

(Cann Archives)



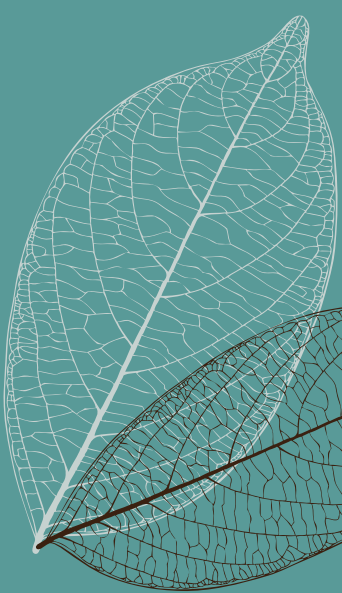
Celebrities at the Fairmont

The Fairmont Resort has hosted many well-known people, including heads of government and royalty who often arrive by helicopter and take over a suite or complete floor with their entourage. Regular visitors have included Barry Humphries, Barry Crocker, Mel Gibson, Jean Kitson and Gary Sweet. Some celebrities are easier to deal with than others with one demanding diva leaving an indelible impression. Some guests, including a former prime minister and a prominent cricketer, have used the resort for discreet liaisons.

It was an exciting time in June and July 1993 when the crew and cast of the Australian feature *Sirens* stayed at the resort. The film is based on four fictitious days in the life of controversial mountain artist Norman Lindsay and features



The superbly sited Fairmont Resort and the Leura Golf Club.
(Fairmont Resort MGallery)



A New Beginning

Reviving the Fairmont Resort

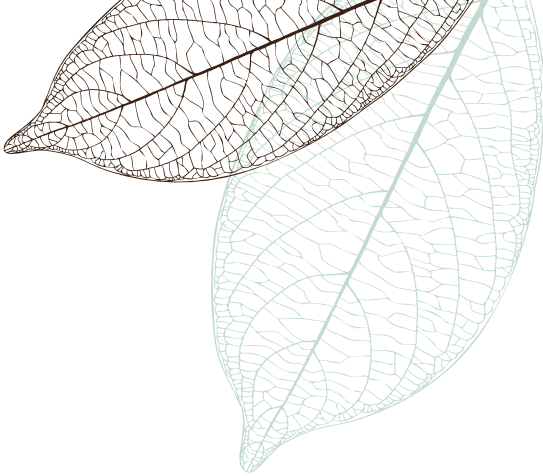
It was the end of 2010 and Blue Mountains tourism was recovering from a big drop in visitors, partly due to the decline of its two largest hotels. The faded Hydro Majestic at Medlow Bath had been closed for refurbishment for two years and the York Fairmont at Leura had gone into decline.

For two decades, the Fairmont Resort had been a favoured destination for luxurious weddings, holidays and conferences but it had been a victim of mismanagement since 2007. Standards might have fallen but the body of the hotel was still sound and all it needed was a serious injection of funds, a functional management structure and a lot of tender loving care. Hopes rose when receivers were appointed to get the resort back into shape so that it could be offered for sale.¹

The dramatically refurbished Sublime Lounge and Embers Bar offer fine food with bush views by day and cosy fires at night.
(Fairmont Resort MGallery)







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