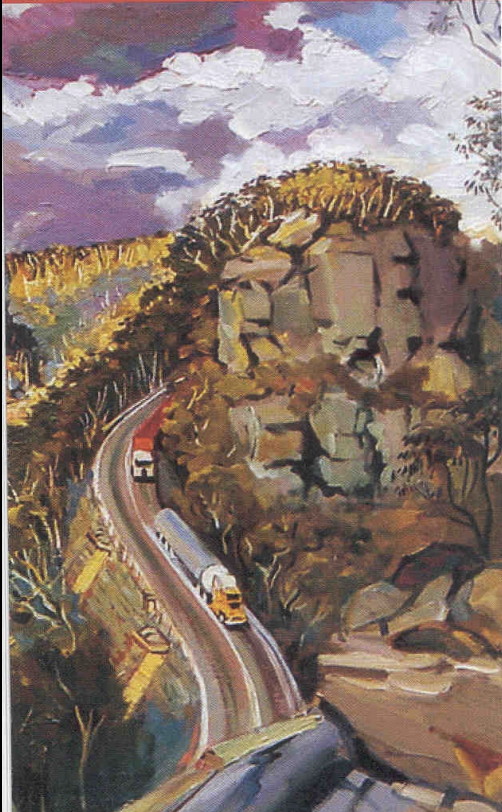


Self-guided tour

Crossing The Blue Mountains The Great Western Road



Roads and Traffic Authority
www.rta.nsw.gov.au

The Great Western Highway is today the major route for access to Central and Western NSW as well as providing local access for residents of the Blue Mountains. The RTA is upgrading the Great Western Highway between Emu Plains and Bathurst. The objective of the upgrading is to improve local access, road safety, to provide a four lane divided roadway between Emu Plains and Katoomba and to provide improved overtaking opportunities west of Katoomba.



Above: *Norman Lindsay Gallery*
Cover: *Victoria Pass Roadway*

Roads and bridges noted in this guide are used for traffic. You should only view them from safe locations.

Artwork by Ulf Kaiser
Historic research: RTA Environmental and Heritage Site Locations Group Operations Parramatta
Map and information design by Survey Drafting Operations, Goulburn

Brochures available from: Glenbrook, Katoomba and Lithgow
Visitor Information Centres
National Trust and Historic Societies
RTA Information and Reference Centre
The Octagon, Parramatta 88370198

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The Institution of Engineers,
Australia



Roads and Traffic Authority
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The Great Western Road A Self Guided Tour

This self guided heritage tour has been devoped by the Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW (RTA) in support of the National Trust Heritage Festival for 2002 with the theme "Bridging the Divide". The Institution of Engineers, Australia has plaqued historic engineering landmarks at Mitchell's Ridge Lookout for the Victoria Pass Roadway and at McKanes Bridge on the Cox's River which are included in this tour.

The tour visits key historic sites throughout the Blue Mountains and features transportation history while including National Trust and some historic society premises.

The Great Western Highway from Parramatta across the Blue Mountains to Bathurst is Australia's most historic road. Across it flowed a stream of settlers to the vast areas of the slopes and plains in the western inland. Explorers, soldiers, convicts and gold diggers have trudged and driven along it, across the harsh and rocky ridges of the mountain barrier. In the early days of the colony of New South Wales, it was probably the construction of the road over the Blue Mountains that saved the small settlement around Port Jackson from abandonment.



Gregory Blaxland

In 1813 **Gregory Blaxland**, **William Charles Wentworth** and **William Lawson** finally crossed the mountain range and returned to Sydney after ascending Mt Blaxland near present day Lithgow. Their route was mapped by surveyor George Evans and the first road was built in six months from the Nepean River near Penrith to the site of Bathurst by William Cox and a party of convicts.

The road was realigned and improved in the 1830s by **Surveyor General Thomas Livingstone Mitchell**. His improvements meant that the road was now a safe and easy way to "bridge the divide".



William Charles Wentworth

Today, the Great Western Highway remains the gateway to the heartland of Australia. It still holds the romance and spirit of the early explorers who blazed a route for others to follow.

Departing from Sydney follow either the M4 Motorway or Great Western Highway to the base of the Blue Mountains on the Nepean River near Lapstone. Use the map as a guide to visit the sites which generally occur to the left on the outgoing and return journey.



1. The Knapsack Bridge: Designed by railway engineer John Whitton and opened in 1867. Built of sandstone quarried in nearby Mitchell's Pass, the bridge is 118 metres in length and 38 metres above the creek. The railway line was abandoned in 1913 and the bridge was acquired for road use in the 1920s. The bridge was bypassed in the 1990s when the Western Freeway was extended up Lapstone Hill. To view this bridge follow the historic sign postings.

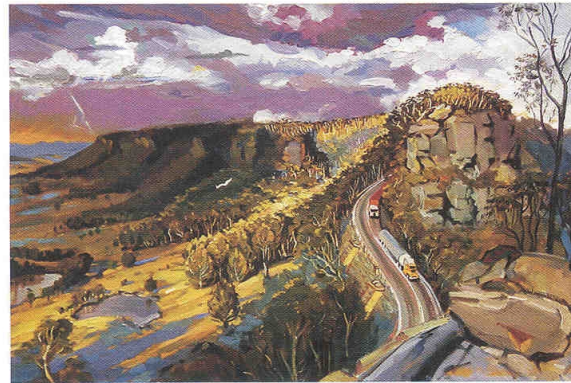
Mitchell's alignment was slightly improved over the next 150 years, but the highway always followed the same ridge line to the west. It has only been in the past 20 or so years that major changes have taken place to provide a safer passage over the mountains and to the vast areas beyond.



William Lawson

2. Everglades: Everglades Gardens were first opened to the public in 1936. The gardens were designed and built by Danish landscape designer Paul Sorenson and are now owned by the National Trust. Very popular for functions and weddings, the gardens are a wonder of colour in Autumn and Spring.

3. Mitchell's Ridge Lookout: Recently a plaque commemorating the engineering excellence of Victoria Pass Roadway was laid by the Institution of Engineers, Australia. Access may be gained by turning left soon after passing through the town of Mt Victoria.



4. Victoria Pass Roadway: Built by convicts under the supervision of Thomas Mitchell in 1832 and opened by Governor Sir Richard Bourke on 23 October 1832. To build the "Pass of Victoria" Mitchell had his convict gangs cut down parts of the cliff face and use the material to fill the rift between the two mountains. The material was then supported by huge masonry walls and buttresses. This pass is one of the oldest and most significant engineered works in Australia still in use today.

The Pass has been in almost continuous use since its construction, although from 1912 to about 1920 it was partly bypassed by the winding but less steep **Berghofer's Pass** to the north. However, when motor cars became powerful enough to scale the original ascent, Victoria Pass was fully reopened. The two roads still exist side by side, a physical record of the road building of different periods, and of the development of road transport in the region.

5. Historic Town of Hartley: After Surveyor General Thomas Mitchell finished the Victoria Pass in 1832, the way was made easier for travellers to the west. Roads were developed and farms established. The need for a police centre led to the building of the Hartley Court House in 1837. Over the next 50 years a bustling village grew around the court house. The village included churches, accommodation, a post office and staging facilities serving the travelers and settlers west of the Blue Mountains. The village was bypassed by the Great Western Railway in 1887. It enjoyed a brief revival in the early motor transport era when it became a stopover for travelers to Jenolan Caves. This 1830s town is one of the finest collections of historic buildings in Australia. The village is managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and is generally open 7 days a week.



6. McKanes Bridge: In 1884 John A. McDonald, one of the first bridge design specialists, introduced the timber truss design which bears his name and which was a significant technical improvement on earlier designs. McDonald's bridges were easier to build and maintain, carried more load and allowed for some future increase in loads. This 1893 bridge is an excellent example of its type. Of the 91 built, only 5 remain in 2002. McDonald truss bridges played a significant part in the development of the colonial road network and this bridge made an important contribution to transport links within the Lithgow region. (Quotation from the McKanes Bridge Historic Engineering Plaque.)

7. Zig Zag Railway: This railway was built between 1866 and 1869 to bring the Great Western Railway Line from the top of the Blue Mountains down the steep mountainside into the Lithgow Valley. Although no longer part of the Lithgow Railway Line, visitors can experience the past on a steam train which operates on the restored Zig Zag track.

8. Cox's Road, Mt York: This section of the original 1813 road is the original descent down to the valley floor from Mt York. The descent of Mt York was rather terrifying. Logs were tied behind carts to steady them down the steep grade. At the bottom the logs were unhitched and left strewn over the road. To bring a loaded cart up the pass was a laborious process. Heavy staples were fastened into the rocks at the steepest points with iron rings attached, which acted as anchors. With the aid of pulleys and ropes bullocks driven down the hill could assist laden vehicles up the worst pinches. It is still possible to walk this section of the road and feel what it was like to travel across the Blue Mountains. At the bottom it is possible to visit the "Comet Inn" and the old shale mining town of Hartley Vale. Further on, visits can be made to the recently restored "Collits Inn". The explorers Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson camped at the foot of Mt York on their way over the Blue Mountains in 1813.

9. Mount Victoria and District Historical Society:

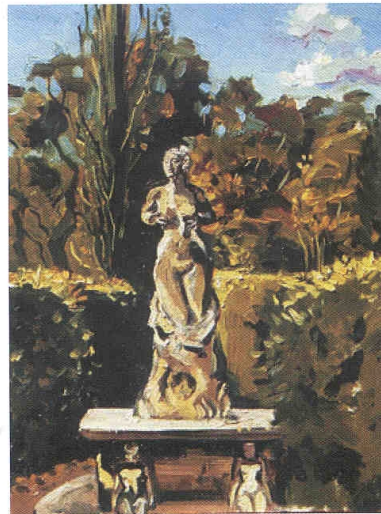
Established in 1966, the Society keeps a museum at Mount Victoria Railway Station which is open on Saturdays, Sundays, Public and School Holidays between 2 and 5 pm. The museum houses an historic collection of memorabilia from the local districts and is very popular with visitors.



10. Blue Mountains Historical Society: 99 Blaxland Road Wentworth Falls. Blaxland Road is part of the original alignment of Cox's Road over the Blue Mountains. The cottage "Tarella" was the holiday home of John McLaughlin and his family and was built in 1887. The land and cottage were left to the society by Beryl McLaughlin, his daughter, in 1988. The society meets every Tuesday at "Tarella" and inspections of the cottage may be arranged by appointment.



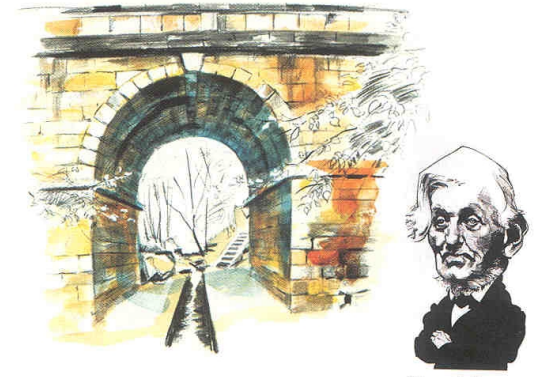
11. Woodford Academy: Originally built as Buss's Inn in the 1830s. The Woodford Academy is situated beside the Great Western Highway at Woodford. Once a private day and boarding school run by Mr John McManamy, the complex has undergone many changes since its inception. Recently restored, it is the oldest group of buildings in the Blue Mountains. The property is owned by the National Trust and is available for inspection. The cemetery, located at the far rear of the property, contains several unmarked graves.



12. Norman Lindsay Gallery:

Situated at 14 Norman Lindsay Cres.

Faulconbridge, the former home of the famous Australian artist is now a National Trust Property. Open to the public from 10am to 4pm including public holidays, this property houses many of Lindsay's paintings and other works including ship models.



David Lennox

13. Lennox Bridge: Designed and built by David Lennox, this bridge was the first scientifically constructed stone arch bridge of any magnitude on the Australian mainland. This bridge carried all traffic on the Western Road up until 1926 when the Knapsack rail bridge was acquired to take road traffic. This reduced the volume of motor vehicle and horse drawn traffic on this section of the Western Road. The bridge was extensively restored and strengthened by the RTA in the 1980s. This bridge is accessible from Layton Avenue Blaxland and is then only one way traffic to Emu Plains.

Tribute To Sir Thomas Livingstone Mitchell (1792 - 1855)

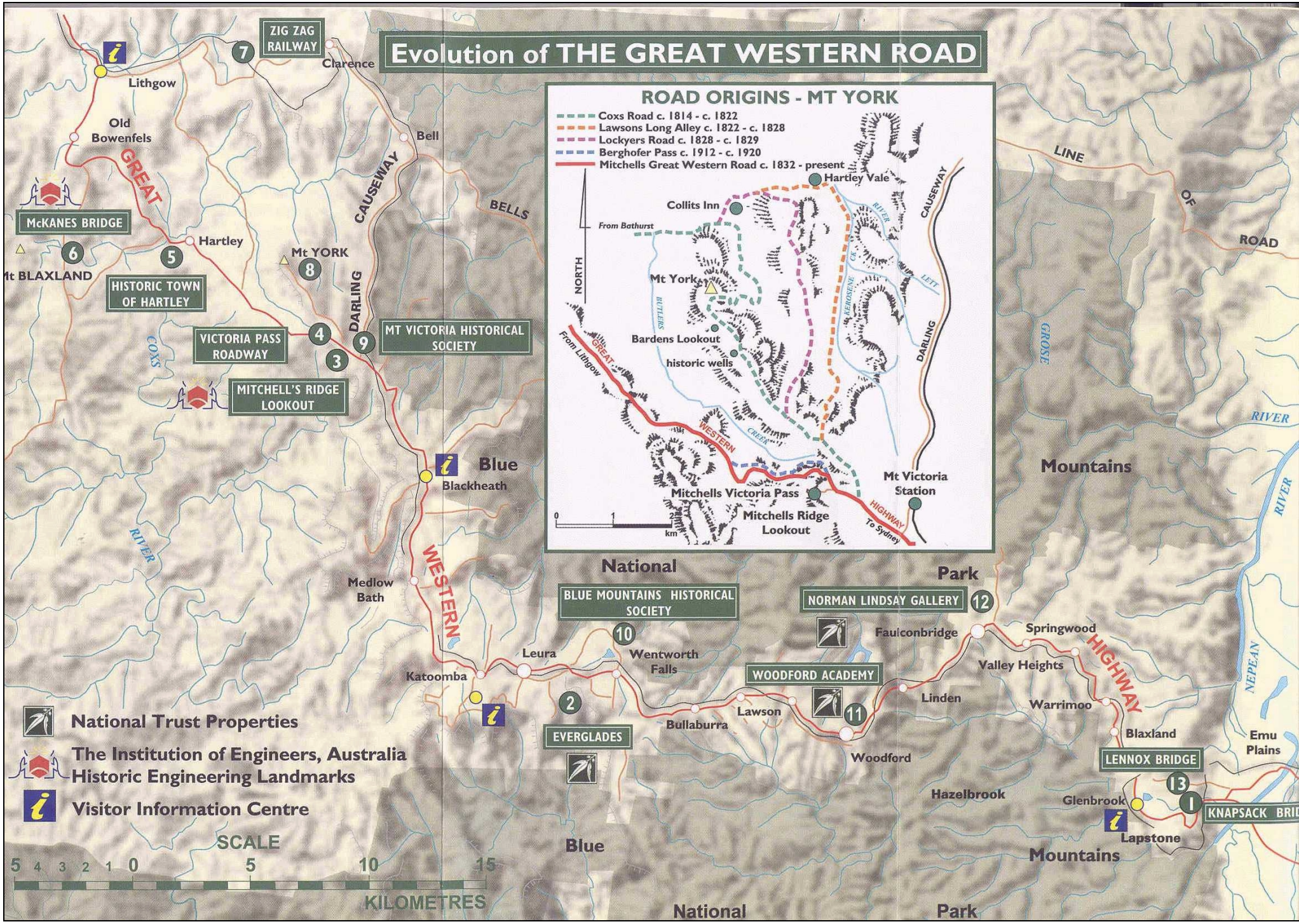
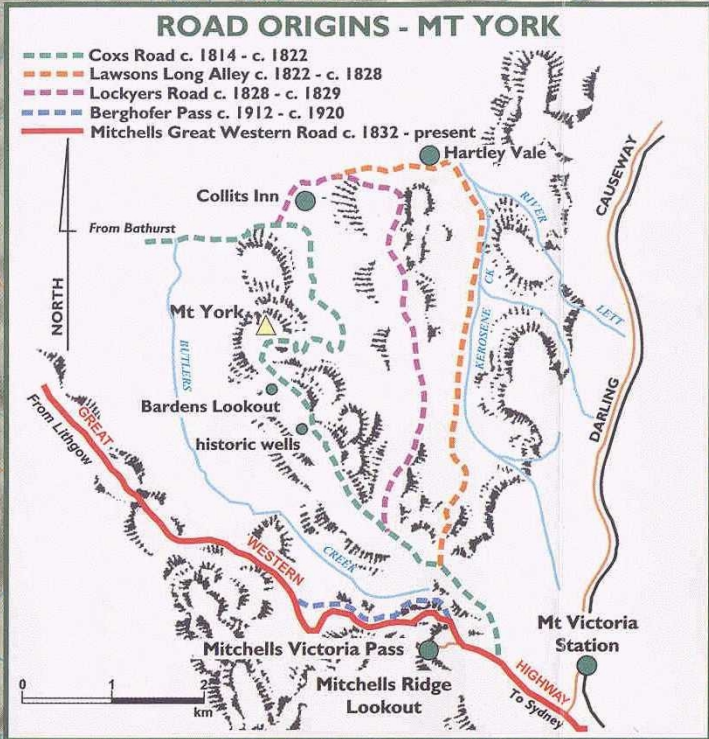
With the arrival of Major Thomas Mitchell in 1827, a detailed survey of the colonies began. Mitchell divided the colony into 19 counties using the transit stones in Parramatta Park as the base point.

In 1833 Mitchell reported on the existing road system and recommended improving and extending it to the Hunter River, Goulburn and Bathurst. He surveyed the routes for the new highways: The Great North Road, the Great Southern Road (now Hume Highway) and the Great Western Road (now the Great Western Highway).



Sir Thomas Livingstone Mitchell

Evolution of THE GREAT WESTERN ROAD



- National Trust Properties
- The Institution of Engineers, Australia Historic Engineering Landmarks
- Visitor Information Centre

