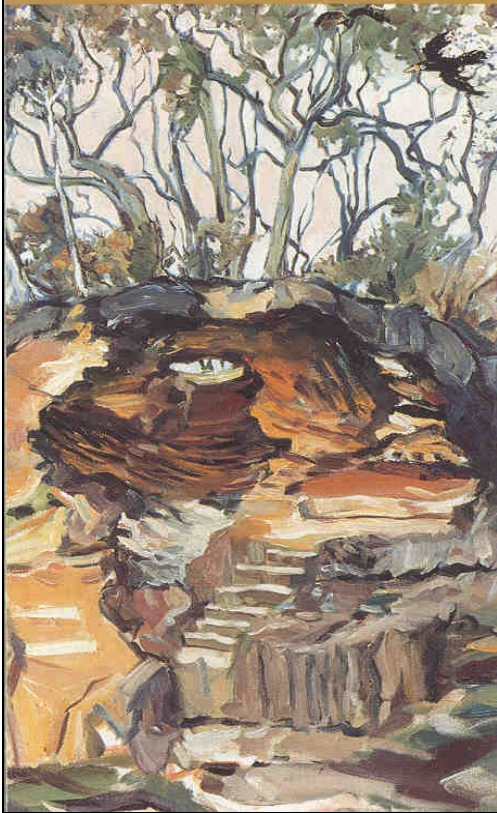


self-guided tour

The Convict Trail

the Great North Road



The Great North Road

A convict-built masterpiece

The 240 km convict-built Great North Road was constructed between 1826 and 1834 to provide an overland route between Sydney and the Hunter Valley. At the time it was the largest public work yet undertaken in the colony and remains one of the major engineering feats of Australia's convict era.

Most of the Road with its original stone culverts, bridges and retaining walls remains in use today, although much of the original surface is well buried under layers of bitumen. Convict-built relics, such as stone retaining walls, culverts, bridges and buttresses can still be seen while driving along the Road, or when walking in Dharug and Yengo National Parks.



Stone buttress, built as a wall stabiliser and drainage outfall.

Why was it built?

By the early 1820s the Colony was expanding rapidly and settlers were taking up land in the fertile Hunter Valley. Sailing ships provided the only means of travel to and from Sydney and to transport stock, produce and goods. The settlers petitioned for a decent road.

The newly appointed Governor Ralph Darling immediately assigned convict road gangs to commence construction of the Great North Road, under the supervision of Surveyor General Thomas Mitchell. By 1833 the Road was almost complete.

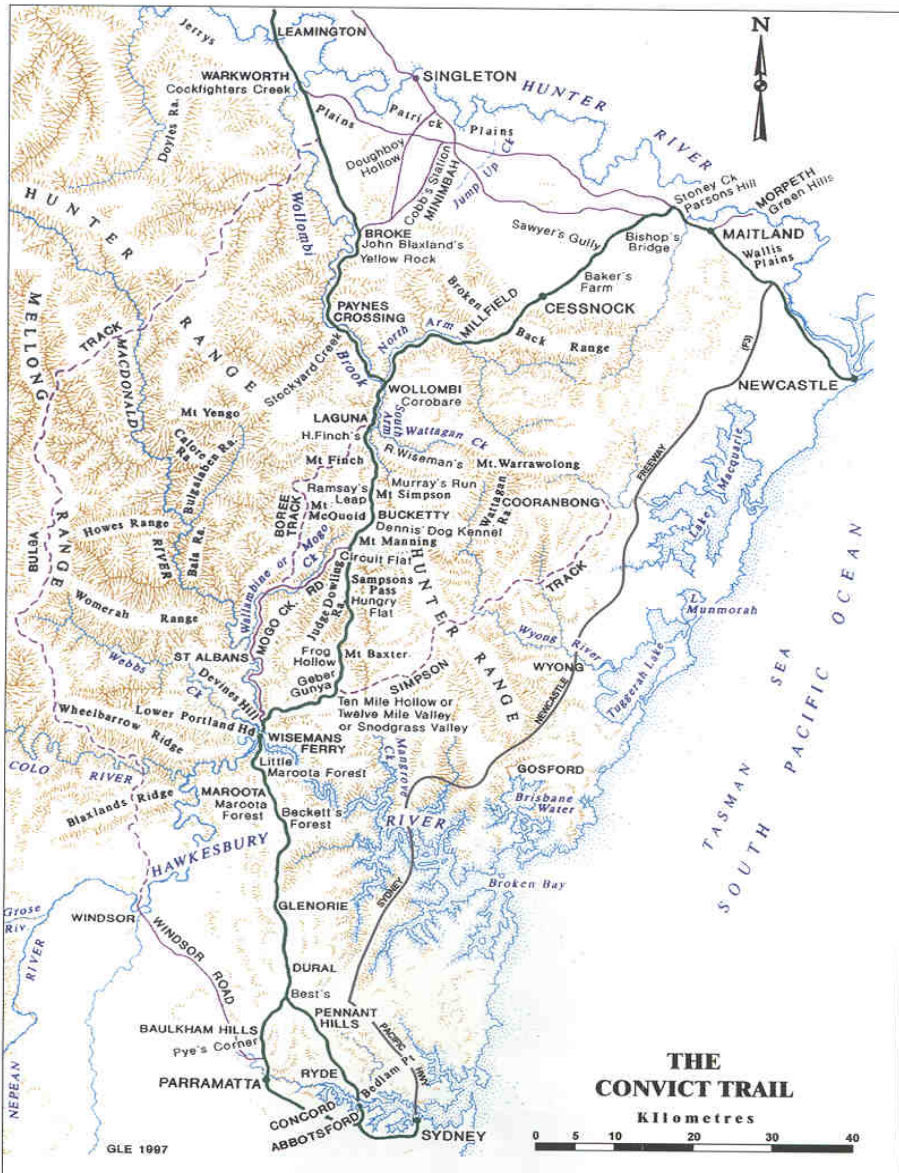
A shorter section was constructed in 1830 from the Parramatta Road at Five Dock, crossing the Parramatta River by ferry at Bedlam Point, then through Gladesville, Ryde and Pennant Hills. The 'New Line' joined the original line at Dural.

The Great North Road and its main branches continued to be the main route north from Sydney until the Hawkesbury road bridge was constructed near Brooklyn in 1945.

Who built it?

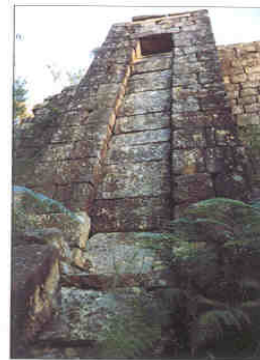
Convicts who had committed another offence after they arrived in the Colony were sentenced to Iron Gangs and placed in leg-irons to work in remote areas building roads. After completing their sentence in a Chain Gang men were often transferred to a Road Party, where they undertook the same work, but without having to wear leg-irons.

Much of the high quality construction in the most difficult sections, the steep descent from the ridges to the ferry crossing the Hawkesbury at Wisemans Ferry was carried out under the supervision of Assistant Surveyor Percy Simpson. Simpson was aware of the latest European road building techniques and much of the work which was done by the unskilled and unwilling convict labour force under his command remains today.



Where is it?

The Great North Road branches from the Windsor Road at Baulkham Hills, and proceeds north through Castle Hill and Dural to Wisemans Ferry, then through rugged country on the north side of the Hawkesbury to Wollombi. Here it branches with one spur going to Maitland and Newcastle and the other to Singleton.



Devines Hill buttress



Drainage culvert under the road on Devines Hill

Techniques and tools

Jumping and blasting

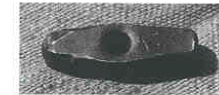
Stone slabs were cut using this method by hand drilling holes using a jumper bar which was hit with a sledge hammer then rotated one quarter turn and hit again. The holes were then filled with gun powder, capped with clay and ignited to blast away the rock face.



jumper bar mark

Wedge pits

A line of steel wedges was hammered into the rock. The wedges were then struck with a heavy maul or heavy hammer until the stone split along the line of the wedge pits.



stone breaking hammer head



grubbing hoe

Picks

Rocks were faced using a short-handled pick. One end was pointed while the other end was chisel-shaped.



pick head



gravel rake



Claire's bridge, on an original section of the Road

Self-guided tour

On this self-guided tour of the historic Great North Road you can:

- see the whole Great North Road by driving and following the overview map, or
- see fine examples of the convict-built heritage by walking the Devines Hill track (an easy one hour walk).

Some sites noted in this guide are used for traffic and may not be readily accessible by foot. You should only view them from accessible and safe locations.

Settlers Road
Wisemans Ferry

Devines Hill Ascent

Devines Hill includes some of the most spectacular and impressive feats of Colonial engineering and construction on the Great North Road.

The buttressed wall section is a particularly spectacular and aesthetically pleasing structure of extremely high quality in its construction.

The ascent also includes numerous areas of benched quarries and the marks of quarrying, drilling and blasting are evident over most of the adjoining rocky hillside.

GRAFFITI



GRAFFITI - JTS

GRAFFITI - HANGMAN

DYKE

GRAFFITI - JB



A stone retaining wall with an example of a drainage outlet

Hangmans Cave or Hanging Rock

This is a naturally formed cave. Folklore tells how convicts stood trial before a magistrate on the bench cut into the floor of the cave. If found guilty the villain was then taken to the top of the cave, hung from a nearby tree and dropped through the hole in the roof of the cave to complete an instantaneous and grisly punishment.

Conjecture is that this cave may have been used as a powder magazine. If so, it demonstrates the lengths to which the builders went to store gunpowder safely and securely while still at a convenient location for the construction works.

CUT OFF DRAIN CARVED OUT OF ROCK

DRINKING INTO



Hangmans Cave or Hanging Rock



For more information about the Convict Trail Project and its achievements and activities, visit the website at: www.budde.com.au/convict.trail/

Or write to:
The Convict Trail project
249 Settlers Road,
Lower MacDonald 2775

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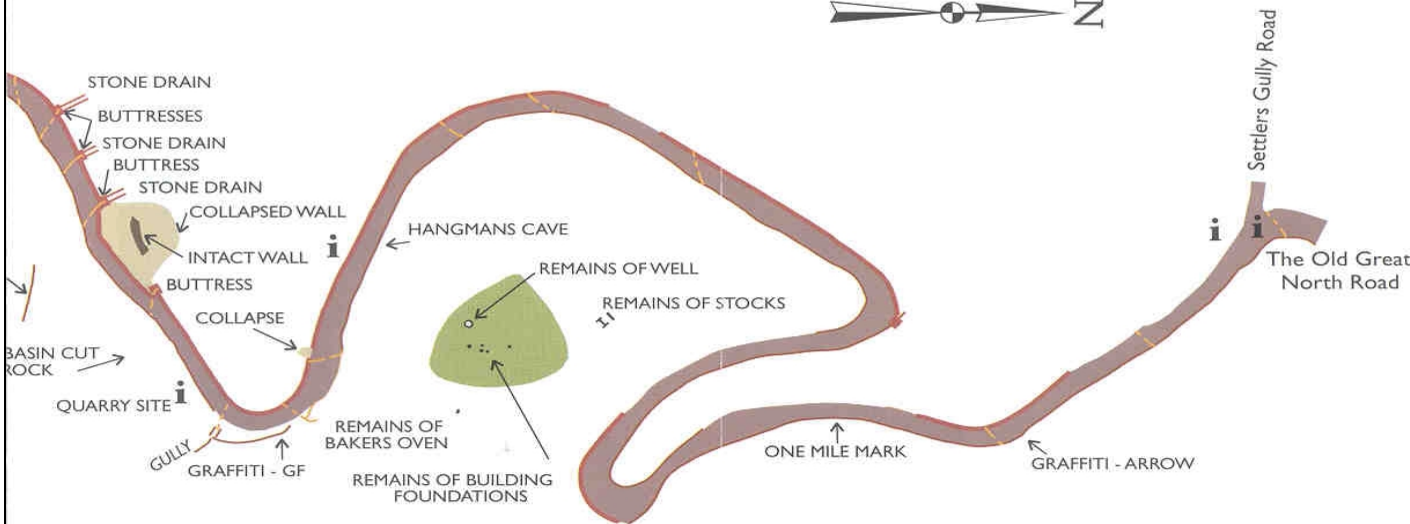
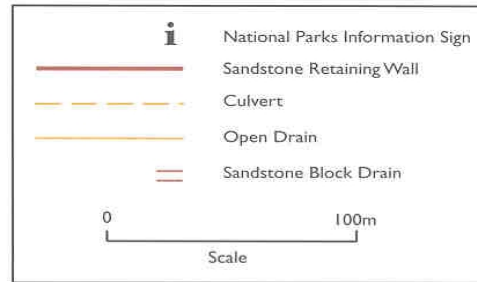
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Devines Hill Convict Stockade Site

Mitchell marked the new line via Devines Hill in 1829, and work commenced immediately. The convict gangs assigned to the Devines Hill ascent and a military guard were housed in a stockade near the summit.

The Devines Hill Stockade Site has important historical associations with the 1820s and 30s road building phase.



Convict stockade sites have been little studied to date and none have been subject to fully comprehensive archaeological investigation. Questions which might be investigated by adequate programs include the lifestyle, living conditions and material culture of roadgang convicts.

The Convict Trail Project

The Convict Trail Project was initiated by the Bucketty and Wollombi communities (population 150 and 300 respectively) because of their concern about the degradation which was occurring to relics of the convict-built Great North Road in their areas.

There are now over 30 groups with membership in the Convict Trail Project, ranging from Councils, community groups, regional tourist organisations, government agencies and academic institutions to heritage organisations.

By bringing together all these organisations with a responsibility for managing the Great North Road, and a range of community groups with an interest in its conservation and promotion the Convict Trail Project provides a unique forum for the long-term management of one of Australia's national treasures.

Devines Hill & surrounds

An easy one hour walk will reveal wonders of the Convict Trail. The walk is described in detail over the page.

The walk is in the Dharug National Park, and begins just up from Wisemans Ferry landing on the northern side of the Hawkesbury.

This area has particularly fine examples of high walling with massive buttresses, drainage systems and quarries.

The oldest bridge in use in mainland Australia is near the base of Devines Hill.

Other fine examples of stone work which can only be seen by walkers and cyclists are Claire's Bridge, near Ten Mile Hollow, and the Circuit Flat Bridge, near Mt Manning.

Further exploration along nearby Finch's Line will reveal contrasting construction styles used in earlier stages of the Road's construction.