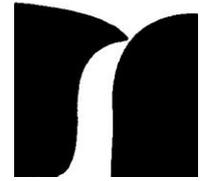


Ginninderra Falls Association

Promoting the Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park



28 March, 2012

Secretary
Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water
sam.salvaneschi@parliament.act.gov.au

Submission to Inquiry into Current and Potential Ecotourism of the ACT and Region

The Ginninderra Falls Association (hereinafter termed the Association) was formed with the aim of promoting and encouraging the development of the Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park in the southern region of Yass Valley Shire where it borders the Australian Capital Territory.

For about 150 years generations of visitors have been coming to this part of NSW to admire the spectacular river systems, rapids and waterfalls. In that time the land area has been developed by the rural industries that have included sand and gravel quarrying. The area is currently under private ownership. There were a few years when the Ginninderra Falls and adjacent Murrumbidgee River corridor were opened to the public as a privately operated recreational park with a small entrance fee. Unfortunately, since 2004, public access has not been possible because of prohibitive increases in the cost of public liability insurance. Some accident victims are currently still in court seeking damages some ten years since that era.

The Association believes that it is now long overdue to re-establish long-term public access for the benefit of present and future generations of Australians. The Australian Capital Region must promote its tourist and regional recreation assets to the maximum extent. The Association believes there are present and future pressures on the proposed national park area for subdivision and private development that will forever compromise the area for public use if nothing is done. It strongly contends that the area should be returned to public ownership.

The ever-increasing population within the borders of the Australian Capital Territory and in the surrounding regions of New South Wales greatly enhances the viability of a fee-paying national park, the Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park, operated by the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service. Attached to this submission is a background document that outlines the boundaries of the proposed national park and various aspects of the natural environment and ecotourism potential within these boundaries.

The Association contends that the area of the proposed Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park is *the premier development that has potential to add considerably to ecotourism in the Yass Valley Shire*, catering for the needs of a large nearby population.

The Association wishes to address a number of matters listed in Attachment A, Inquiry Terms of Reference. The issues are addressed on the following pages. The Association also notes the large area considered as the

Australian Capital Region, an area that includes the Snowy Mountain, the NSW South Coast and the shires north to Young, Boorawa and Upper Lachlan.

a) The extent to which organisations currently deliver ecotourism activities in the Region.

Within the Australian Capital Region there are a large number of Government and non-Government organisations involved in ecotourism. At a State/Territory Government level these would include the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service and the ACT Parks and Wildlife Service. Local Government agencies manage public lands within the shire boundaries. In the non-Government sector, ski field proprietors manage significant land areas under strict guidelines and contribute to the public interest in national parks and wilderness area.

The Ginninderra Falls Association contends that grassroots community-based groups also contribute very significantly to the wide interest in ecotourism. Groups such as the National Parks Association, Friends of Aranda Bushland, and many other such organisations, including our own Association, are instrumental in spreading community interest in the natural environment and the pleasures and satisfaction that are derived from visiting well-managed public parklands.

Community-based groups richly deserve the encouragement and support of Governments at the Federal, State/Territory and Local Government levels in the development of ecotourism.

b) The extent to which these organisations' ecotourism activities demonstrably contribute to, and detract from, conservation and restoration of ecosystems throughout the Region.

Organisations such as the National Parks Association within the ACT and NSW contribute very significantly towards the reservation and development of public lands as areas that are valuable ecotourism destinations. One only has to consider the community push over many years to develop the Namadgi National Park and the neighbouring Australian Alps National Park stretching from Victoria to the ACT. This year the NSW Government reservation of lands within the Sydney Basin to protect from coal mining activities is a more recent example.

Within the ACT the National Parks Association has played a major part in restoring the former pine forest areas of Namadgi National Park to native bushland. Recreational fishing groups plays a significant part in the maintenance of healthy river systems and the monitoring of discharges from sewage and industrial sites into creeks and rivers. The clearing of willow trees along waterways is a significant contribution to maintaining healthy waterways.

The Association also contends that there are threats to national parks and public lands from illegal vehicle use and the degradation of managed public lands. One can think of deliberate destruction of parklands by 4WD vehicles in remote areas such as the Deua National Park. The illegal release of pigs into wilderness areas for sports shooting is also to be condemned.

Feral animals and livestock certainly damage fragile environments. There are those who contend that such feral animals and livestock are part of the Australian "tradition". This association contends otherwise. It does not take many years for the breeding of such animals in the wild to alter a landscape for the worse. The proliferation of wild buffalo, goats and camels in northern and central Australia are extreme examples.

It is this Association's contention that community-based groups play a significant part in promoting and contributing towards ecotourism goals. Maintaining the health of wilderness areas and national parks is driven by community demand. Ecotourism cannot be sustained in degraded public lands resulting from poor promotion, management and funding. Guidelines set out by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

Category II areas – National Parks, are attached. Management of these areas needs to reflect these guidelines, and ecotourism needs to be carefully managed so that it doesn't impact adversely on sensitive, high conservation value areas. Bearing in mind this caveat, however, ecotourism can provide both revenue and public awareness and engagement that can play an important role in the management of high conservation value ecosystems and the restoration of more degraded ones.

c) The extent to which these activities contribute to the Region's economy.

Tourism is a competitive business. One only has to consider the attractions of Australia's coastlines and reefs to the domestic and international traveller to realise that the Region cannot take the tourist revenue for granted. Tourist destinations must be attractive and be promoted widely within the wider Australian communities.

Even within the Region the attractions of the NSW South Coast are a magnet not just for tourists and local residents but also for lifestyle changes on retirement. Nearer to Canberra, tourists will be attracted to national institutions and monuments within the city but beyond that the major inland tourist destination is the Snowy Mountains for summer and winter recreation.

The lesser tourist destinations must, to a significant extent, depend on the Region's own population centres for patrons. Thus intra-Regional ecotourism should be promoted and encouraged. The Region must make the effort to develop and promote its own tourist destinations and this includes wilderness areas, national parks and public lands of various types. Activities of various types and special events must be encouraged and promoted. There are niche markets out there like canoeing, bike riding and orienteering that bring in dollars.

This Association contends that a recreational facility such as the proposed Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park can be a focus of significant tourist potential and economic development. There are not too many widely recognised attractive recreational destinations around the major population centre of Canberra – Queanbeyan but the area of the proposed park is certainly one of them. However, such areas do need to be in public ownership to be a success and not under threat from encroaching private developments.

There are examples elsewhere around Australia. In Victoria the Shire Council around the Hanging Rock National Park operates the successfully with an entrance fee and gated car access. The Victorian parks service operates the Tower Hill National Park in a similar manner. The Queensland Government parks service operates at the internationally promoted Carnarvon Gorge National Park. And there are many other examples. A visit to New Zealand also provides many examples of industries associated with wilderness and national park areas and the significant value of the international visitor and backpacker dollar (helicopters, scenic flights, mini-bus tours, climbing schools, ski schools, rafting, cycle tours, wilderness camping, bungee jumping, etc).

However, it should again be emphasised that the primary value of a National Park (as an IUCN category II reserve) is for biodiversity conservation, rather than economic gain. Well-managed ecotourism, if compatible with protecting high conservation value areas and sensitive species, can generate significant revenue which will benefit society and can contribute to protecting and maintaining the natural values of the reserve, as well as providing opportunities for people to enjoy and gain appreciation of beautiful natural areas."

Ecotourism is an aspect of the general tourist industry that requires a sustained effort by National, State/Territory and Local Governments to create environments and landscapes that visitors will spend significant sums of money to experience. This Association believes the proposed Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park stands out as a potential popular intra-Region tourist destination with high conservation values that will greatly encourage associated private enterprises.

d) The industry self-regulation and government regulation, including, but not limited to, accreditation and licensing, which is most likely to incentivise ecotourism activities that assist in the protection and enhancement of the Region's ecosystems.

Governments at the National, State/Territory and Local levels are ultimately responsible for all land use. These governments cannot abrogate responsibility for the parks and landscapes that attract ecotourism enterprises. By its very nature ecotourism requires natural landscapes to be well managed and is difficult to imagine this happening when land is in private ownership and where public liability insurance is such a large recurring budget item. There must be buffer zones where developments are regulated. If this requires the buyback of private lands for the long term sustainability of national parks then the ways and means must be found to do this.

Governments must identify and set aside areas attractive to ecotourists and regulate the activities of those private enterprises using such areas and appropriate buffer zones. This does not mean that there cannot be market competition within such public lands but it does mean that operating licenses can be revoked for poor management of activities that have an adverse effect on landscapes and parks. Governments can also greatly help the promotion of ecotourist destinations nationally and internationally and with the provision of appropriate infrastructure.

e) The industry and government measures that are most likely to promote understanding of the biodiversity and other benefits of ecotourism organisations explicitly basing their processes and outcomes on principles of ecological sustainability.

As populations grow there will inevitably be pressures on land use. Wilderness areas and other public lands, once damaged can rarely be restored. Such areas must be identified and set aside in perpetuity for the all Australians communities near and far and for visitors from further afield now and in the future.

In the area of the proposed Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park there are significant tracts of land that are completely unspoilt by rural industry land use even though they are owned privately. Only weed plants like blackberries and willows propagated by the Molonglo River are a serious problem in places. The biodiversity of the proposed national park has yet to be studied fully but there are hints of unique ecosystems. Connections with the Woodstock Nature Reserve in the ACT and the upstream Murrumbidgee and Molonglo River corridors should be closely monitored for urban discharges and pollutants.

Public education and promotion are vital elements of any long term management of landscapes and parks for future generations of Australians. All levels of Government and the tourist industry itself must promote a product that is attractive and sustainable in the long term. The management of public lands must be robust over the budget cycles of governments. Community organisations and ecotourism enterprises under strict guidelines should be encouraged and supported.

Members of the Association committee would welcome an opportunity to speak directly to the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water on matters related to this inquiry. You may contact me by phone to propose a suitable time and place or else email Dr. Doug Finlayson at treasurer@ginninderra.org.au

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Chris Watson
President
Ginninderra Falls Association



Murrumbidgee-Ginninderra Gorges National Park

A Proposal

Compiled by the
Ginninderra Falls
Association

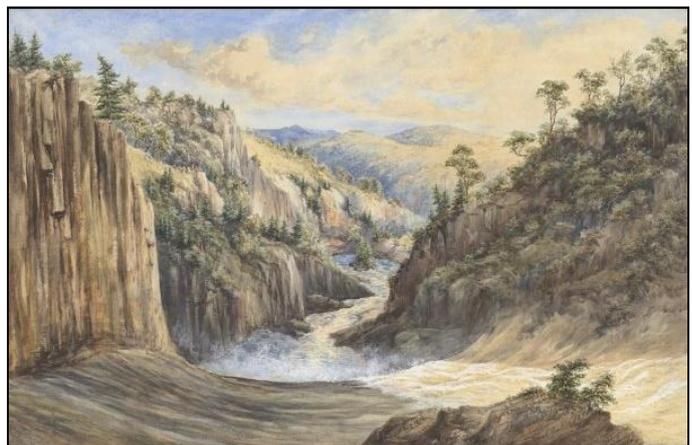
Lower Ginninderra Falls
(Photo - John Baker)



Summary

- The natural beauty of the landscape around the confluence of Ginninderra Creek with the Murrumbidgee River make the area stand out as being very suitable for the establishment of a national park, the **proposed Murrumbidgee-Ginninderra Gorges National Park**.
- This document contains **brief descriptions of features** of the area which will be attractive to the public and make the proposed national park popular as both a tourist and educational destination.
- In years gone by the Ginninderra Falls have been **an attractive tourist destination** for the large population centre just across the border in the Australian Capital Territory. The stretch of the Murrumbidgee River from the ACT border downstream to the river bend at Willow Tree Waterhole flows through a gorge of outstanding interest and beauty and has been attractive to visitors with diverse interests.
- Over the years there has been **progressively restricted public access** to the area. The rural land in the area is traditionally grazing country. Increasingly there has been diversification into vineyards, small farming, hobby farms, horse breeding, and quarrying of gravel deposits near Ginninderra Falls.
- However, there is now a recognition that the value of the area to the wider NSW and ACT communities can be increased enormously. The inherent beauty and amenity offered by the proposed Murrumbidgee-Ginninderra Gorges National Park strongly supports **a change in land use** from private to public ownership.
- Within an easy short drive there is a large population willing and able to contribute year-round to the **viability of such a proposed national park**. It will be, by far, the closest national park to the large population centres in northern ACT and the rural population centres around Murrumbateman with enormous potential for recreational and educational purposes.
- The proponents of this development recommend the national park concept to the Yass Shire Council, the NSW Government and the communities to the immediate north of the ACT. This opportunity is too good to miss and let languish. A **business plan** should be prepared to outline potential for revenue generation.
- Regional demographics clearly show there is already a widespread use of the cross-border amenities and facilities available to various communities along the corridor between ACT and Yass. Let us recognise **the strengths offered by measured development of cross-border public amenities** and the potential for further enhancing this, quite natural, cross-border fertilisation of ideas and population growth.
- For about 150 years generations of visitors have been coming to this part of NSW to admire the river systems, rapids and waterfalls. Let us establish long-term public access. **Future generations will certainly appreciate our foresight.**

"The Ginindarra (Ginninderra) Creek looking to Murrumbidgee hills, County Murray, N.S.Wales" -painting by Gordon Cumming, 1875 (National Library of Australia)



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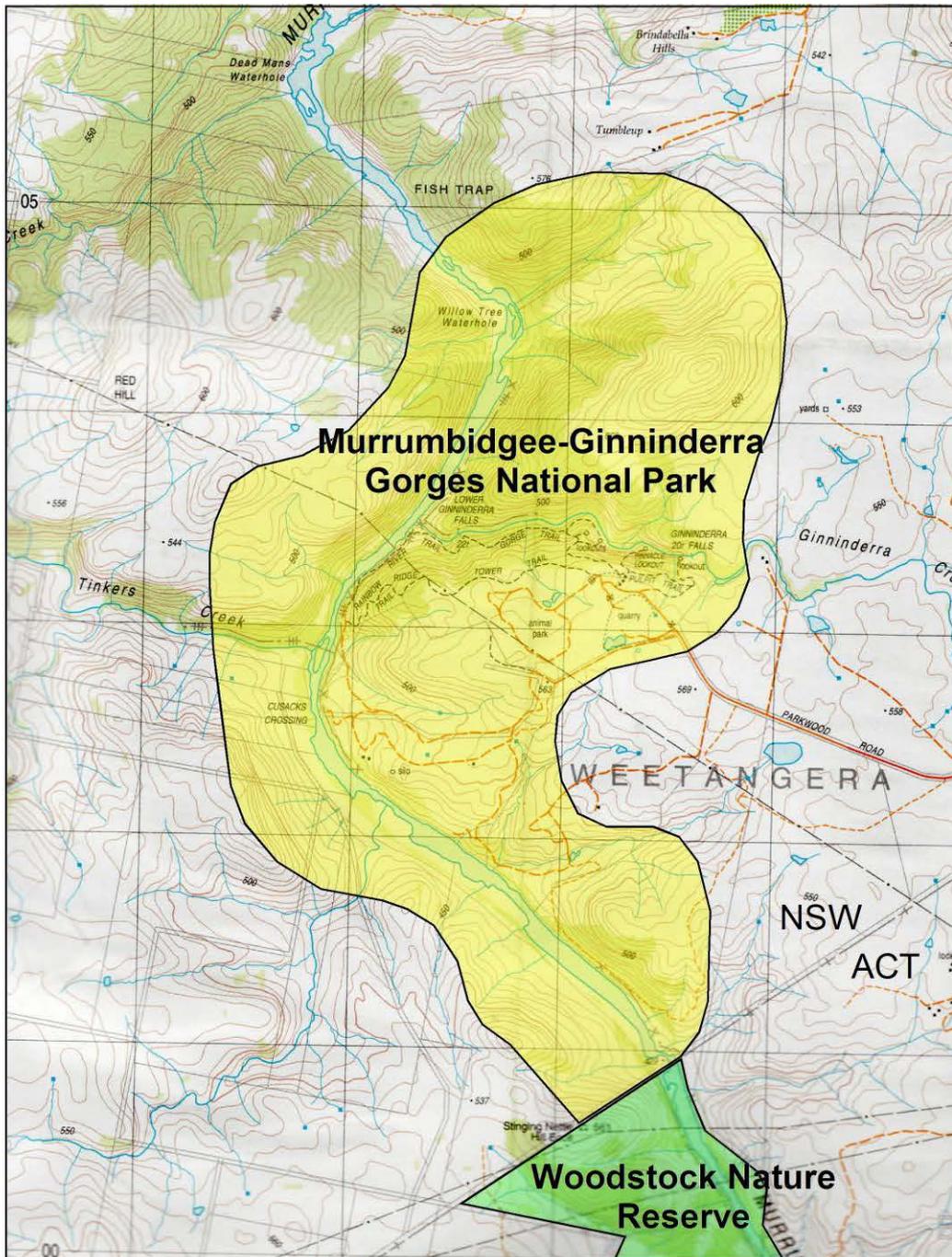
Further information will be incorporated as it becomes available.

***Crowea exalata* “Ginninderra Falls”**



Introduction

The area around the confluence of Ginninderra Creek with the Murrumbidgee River is an area of outstanding natural beauty. It has a number of attractive waterfalls and gorges that make it natural area for recreation and education. It is located in the Yass Shire just to the north of the ACT border and is close to a large population centre. By 2020 the population of Belconnen and Gungahlin together will be over 150,000 people.



Proposed national park boundaries

Park area and boundaries

The boundaries of the proposed Murrumbidgee-Ginninderra Gorges National Park have been chosen to enclose significant watercourses, gorges, rapids and waterfalls of the Murrumbidgee River and lower Ginninderra Creek, neighbouring surrounding grassland and forest areas, and major hilltops and elevated topographic features. The boundary with the ACT is continuous with the Woodstock Nature Reserve that includes the Murrumbidgee River corridor as far upstream as Uriarra Crossing.



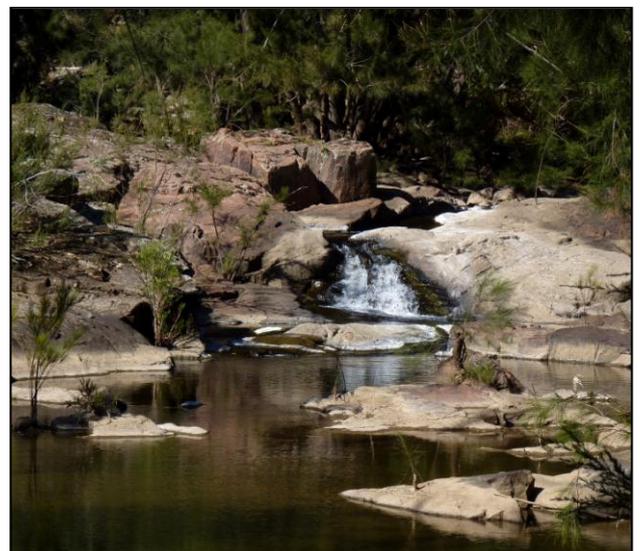
Murrumbidgee River and Woodstock Reserve from Shepherds Lookout looking northwards.

The area of the proposed national park within NSW is about 700 hectares. The Woodstock Nature Reserve is about 200 hectares in area. The combined public park area is thus about 900 hectares. It is proposed that the NSW and ACT parks authorities cooperate in providing cross-border access to both the left and right banks of the Murrumbidgee River corridor within the combined public park areas.

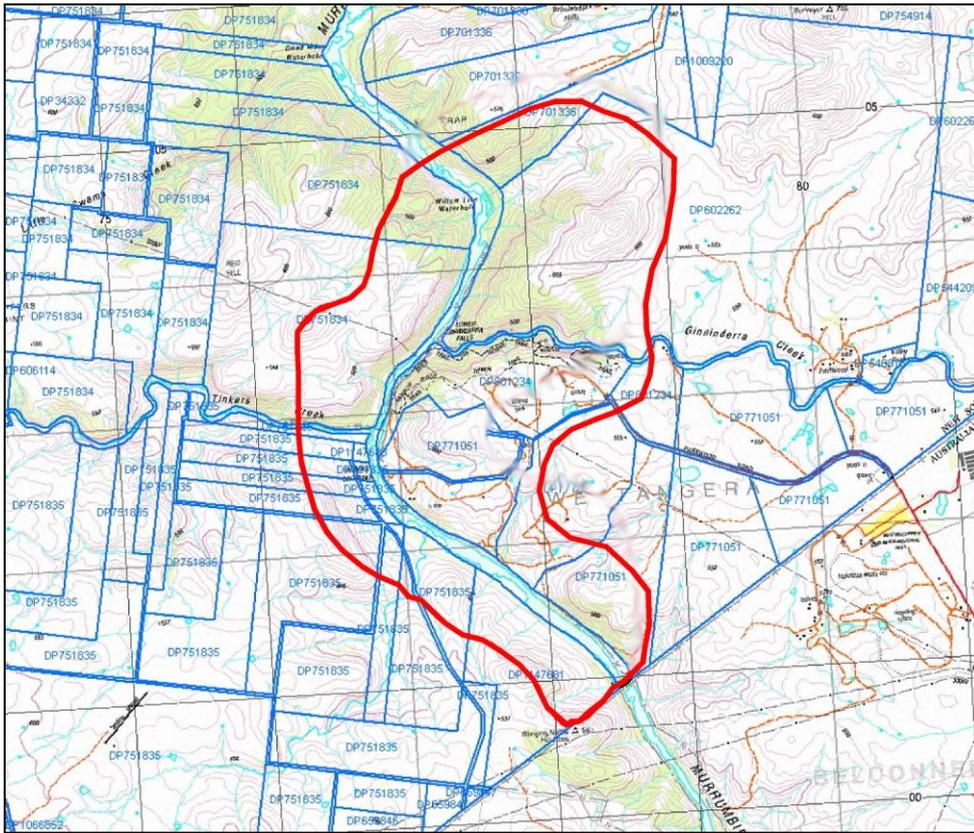
The boundaries have also been oriented such that there is minimum impact of urban infrastructure across the parkland area. However, the visual impact of some existing infrastructure like high tension power lines and pylons is something that will have to be accepted.

The proponents of this national park will oppose the introduction of further large infrastructure features onto the landscape within and near the national park. However, the proponents also recognise that there may be future pressures on the ACT Government and Yass Shire Council for residential suburbs and broad acre developments across this region.

Inevitably the acquisition of some freehold land will be required to establish the national park. The proponents of this national park urge the NSW Government to enter into negotiations with landowners for the acquisition of the rural land areas affected (Doug Finlayson, 2011).

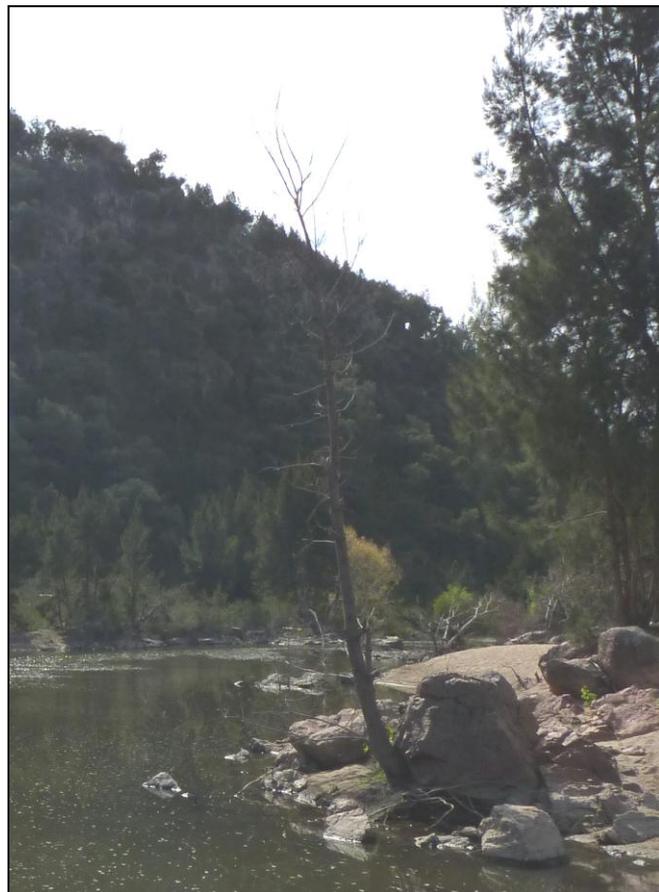


Lower Ginninderra Creek



Land ownership boundaries

Murrumbidgee Gorge cliffs downriver from Cusacks Crossing; Ginninderra Porphyry within the Laidlaw Volcanic Suite

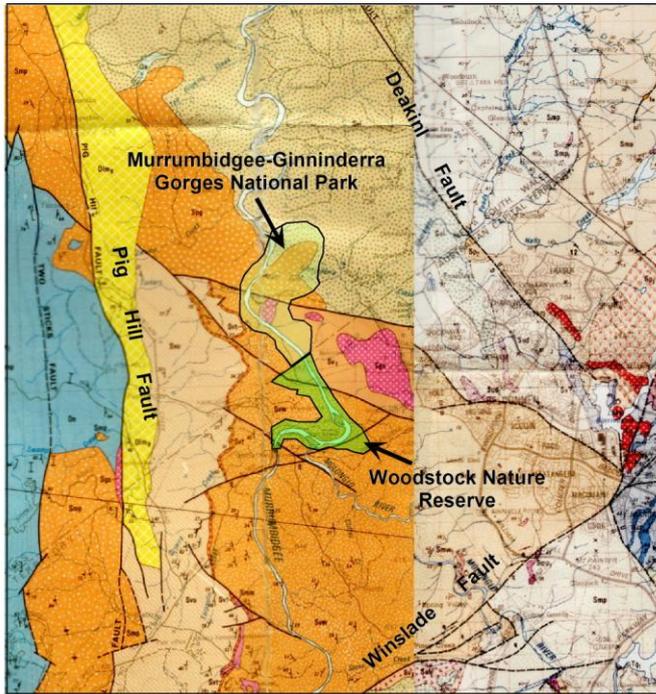


Geology

The landscapes of the Yass-Canberra region are the deeply eroded remnants of rocks that were formed 488 - 359 million years ago. During those times Australia was part of a super-continent called Gondwanaland that also included Antarctica, South America and India.

The area of the Murrumbidgee-Ginninderra Gorges National Park is located in a topographic low region defined by three major fault systems: -

- 1) **Pig Hill Fault** – one of many north-south trending faults to the west of the park.
- 2) **Winslade Fault** – a northeast-southwest trending cross-fault to the south of the park evident at the Cotter water pumping station on the Murrumbidgee River.
- 3) **Deakin Fault** – a northwest-southeast trending cross-fault that extends through central Canberra.



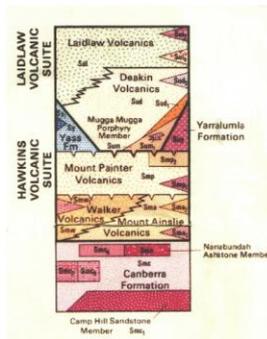
The area as a whole is dominated by elements of **two volcanic suites** of igneous rocks recognised throughout the whole Canberra region – the **Hawkins Volcanic Suite** aged about 428-424 million years (Ma), and the slightly younger **Laidlaw Volcanic Suite** aged about 424-422 Ma. These suites are both within the Silurian geological period (444-416 Ma).

Some granite pluton outcrops are also evident along the bed of the Murrumbidgee River (Doug Finlayson, 2011).

Murrumbidgee-Ginninderra Gorges National Park

Composite Geological Map

Derived from 1:100,000 scale maps
 Canberra sheet, 1992
 Brindabella sheet, 1979
 Bureau of Mineral Resources, Geology & Geophysics



Outcrop of the Walker Volcanics, Hawkins Volcanic Suite, along the Murrumbidgee River in the Woodstock Nature Reserve.

Ginninderra Porphyry outcrop of the Laidlaw Volcanic Suite downriver from Cusacks Crossing.



Landscapes and weathering

Over the last 350 million years the Yass-Canberra region has been in a non-marine environment and erosion has exposed rocks at the surface that were once deeply buried. More recently, during the cool periods of the last 3 million years, there was extensive erosion of steep hillsides by rain and frost action. The net result is the gently rolling landscapes seen across the area of the proposed Murrumbidgee-Ginninderra Gorges National Park with deep river gorges cut through the softer rocks to form rapids, gorges and waterfalls.



Other consequences include the layers of sand, gravel and silt being deposited on the gently-sloping areas adjacent to the hillsides. Examples are seen along the Murrumbidgee River and its tributaries. Such near-surface deposits form the *regolith*, the term applied to the blanket of weathered rocks and soils that cover the bedrock, often to depths of many metres (Doug Finlayson, 2011).

Ginninderra Porphyry gravel quarried near Ginninderra Falls for use in landscape gardening. Similar deposits are found elsewhere in the region.

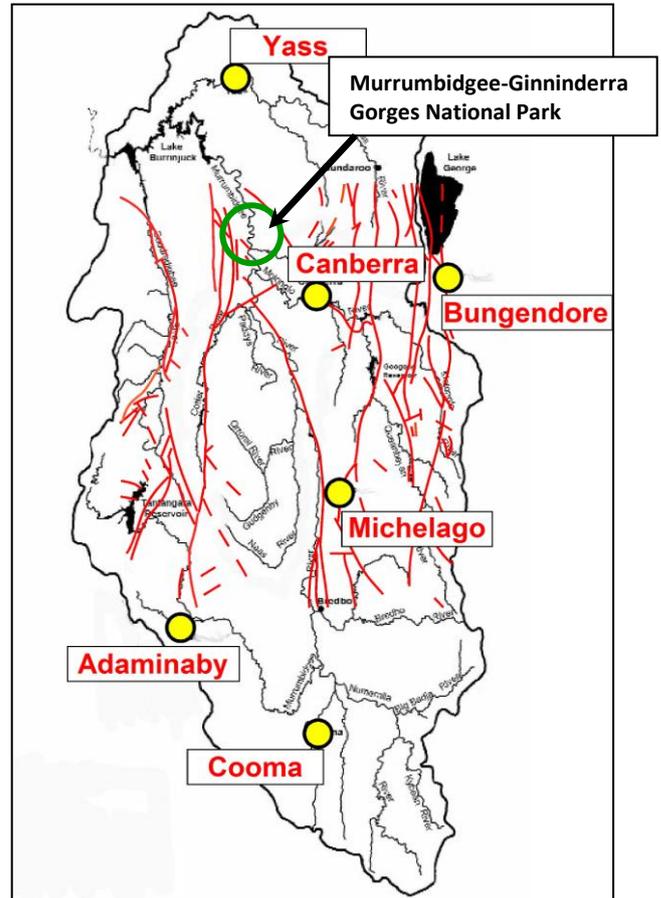
Drainage and river flow

The river drainage system across this part of New South Wales is controlled by the major geological faults traversing the region. This is illustrated by the adjacent map showing major Lachlan Orogen faults and the rivers of the upper Murrumbidgee River catchment area.

The area of Murrumbidgee-Ginninderra Gorges National Park includes the landscapes formed over an extended period of geological time when erosion carved river courses through weaknesses in the rocks and developed two significant features:

- 1) **Waterfalls on Ginninderra Creek** near its confluence with the Murrumbidgee River as it makes a river course flowing westward from the higher ground to the northeast of the Deakin Fault.
- 2) **Gorges developed on the Murrumbidgee River** north of the Ginninderra Creek confluence where the river carves its way through units of the Laidlaw Volcanic Suite and Laidlaw Volcanic Suite to the north of the Winslade Fault.

Both features are key elements of the Murrumbidgee-Ginninderra Gorges National Park and will be a great attraction for visitors to the park from the nearby population centres and elsewhere, not just for recreation but also for education and appreciation of the natural environment (Doug Finlayson, 2011)



Upper Murrumbidgee River drainage system with superimposed major geological faults (red).



The Murrumbidgee River at Cusacks Crossing

Aboriginal heritage

Historical background

The following extracts from the 2010 book *Lairds, Lags and Larrikins: An Early History of the Limestone Plains* by David Meyers gives a summary of the interaction of aboriginal families in the Limestone Plains region and white settlers in the early half of the 19th century.

“Two things become evident when looking at early relations with the Aboriginal people in the colony. Firstly, the colonial governments of the day had no concept of the seasonal, cyclic and episodic movement of aboriginal people to seek out food and fibre sources, and for the purposes of ceremony and trade, nor did they have any idea of the unique relationship the aborigines had with the land.

For their part, the aborigines soon found that the Europeans were determined to stay on the land and own the soil. Their first experiences had been with the explorers who came and went much in the way that the aborigines would have expected. As the Europeans began methodically occupying all of the best open pastures and monopolizing the surface water, it became apparent to the aborigines that their traditional hunting grounds were disappearing to the point that they would have to fight for them or move on to other land. This other land could be the territory of other tribal groups. Put simply, patterns of seasonal migration broke down, areas remaining free of Europeans were over-utilized and eventually depleted of flora and fauna.⁷ The Europeans' stock started to become a necessary food source.

The Limestone Plains had been home to the Aboriginal people for thousands of years. Carbon dating of stone and charcoal remnants at the Birrigai Rock Shelter west of the Murrumbidgee River concluded that aboriginal people had lived in the region for about 21,000 years. Lyall Gillespie noted that numerous implements and flakes had been found at Pialligo, Black Mountain Peninsula and on the slopes of Mount Alnslie. He also recorded the finding of 7000 implements and flakes including axes, choppers and scrapers on “Reisdale”, his mother's farm, situated between Ginninderra and the Gundaroo Road. Those were dated at between 2000 and 5000 years before the present.

Various tribal groupings have been identified in the ACT and region: the Ngunnawal, the Ngarigo, the Ngambri, and the Ngurmal. Josephine Flood indicated that two distinct languages were spoken: Ngunnawal in the north and Ngarigu in the south. The various claims on “country” are still contentious. Inter-marriage has complicated the issues involved and a vigorous debate continues. The nomadic lifestyle of aboriginal families makes historical research difficult.

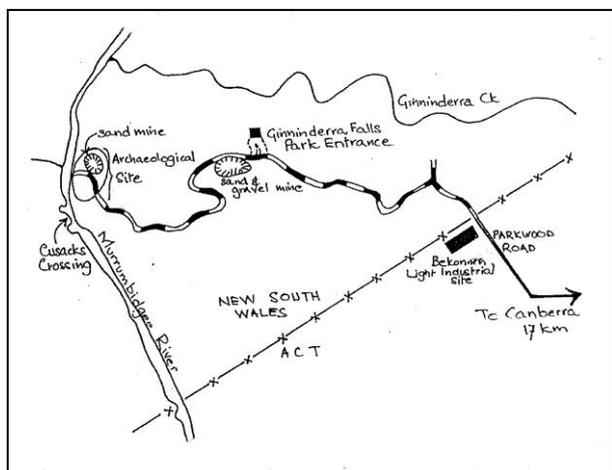
The seasonal nature of their lifestyle meant that at particular times of the year they (the aboriginal families) would be elsewhere. It should be remembered that the aborigines had no way of storing food and had to search out food for the family group on a daily basis. The local aboriginal communities around the Limestone Plains only came together for corroborees and ceremonial gatherings. Mostly they lived in small family groups of 10-20 people, which were self sufficient and highly mobile when the need for a fresh source of food arose.

One of the aboriginal campsites in the Brindabella foothills closest to the Limestone Plains was on John McDonald's “Uriarra” station (at intersection of Uriarra Road and Cotter Road). John's wife related the story of the local moth harvest to John Gale. She said that large numbers of aborigines gathered to feast on a big flat rock near the stables, which was called “Uryarra” meaning “running, to the feast”. The aborigines collected moths on the high hills west of “Uriarra” and brought them back to the camp.”

Archaeology

The following is a summary of a field investigation by sixteen members of the Canberra Archaeological Society at sites of interest within the Ginninderra Falls Park on 31 July, 1988, and reported by Tessa Raath,

Department of Botany, Australian National University. A copy of the report is available through the ACT Library Service – accession number C1021503398. Sally Brockwell and Helen Cooke, current members of the Canberra Archaeological Society are thanked for their advice and assistance in collecting relevant aboriginal heritage information.



Earlier casual visits to the Ginninderra Falls Park had indicated that there had been use of the area by aboriginal families/groups. The purpose of the 1988 field day was to examine sites near the Murrumbidgee River not far from Cusacks Crossing and where there had been sand and gravel mining as well as recreational camping by tourists. The field day was greatly assisted by Mr. J. H. Hyles, proprietor of the Ginninderra Falls Park.

The sites investigated revealed a number of surface scatters of stone implements as well as isolated flaked stone artefacts. In other cases heavy duty stone implements were found exposed on the eroded surface of the sand and gravel mine. Artefacts were also present

on the surface of the unsealed road which leads to the sand mine and the picnic place nearby on the Murrumbidgee River bank.

It was considered that all of the sites were of general interest to the study of aboriginal occupation in the Southern Tablelands, and in the case of the sand mine site, of particular interest to the study of aboriginal exploitation of riverine environments.

There was extensive disturbance of the site because of sand and gravel mining and associated earthworks. A systematic survey was conducted across three areas. The principal items identified across the sites were stone artefacts and manuports (stone arrangements for camping/ceremonies). Seventy three (73) artefacts were identified at one site, forty eight (48) at another, and thirty seven (37) in the third. These comprised flakes flaked pieces, blades, pebble tools, cores and backed blades. Artefacts ranged in size up to twelve (12) centimetres.



Aboriginal stone artefacts displayed at the Regatta Point exhibition.

Rock types of the artefacts include silcrete/quartzite, chert, quartz and volcanic rocks, most likely sourced from the nearby river bed. Based on the data available, there was no archaeological evidence to enable a specific function of sites to be attributed.

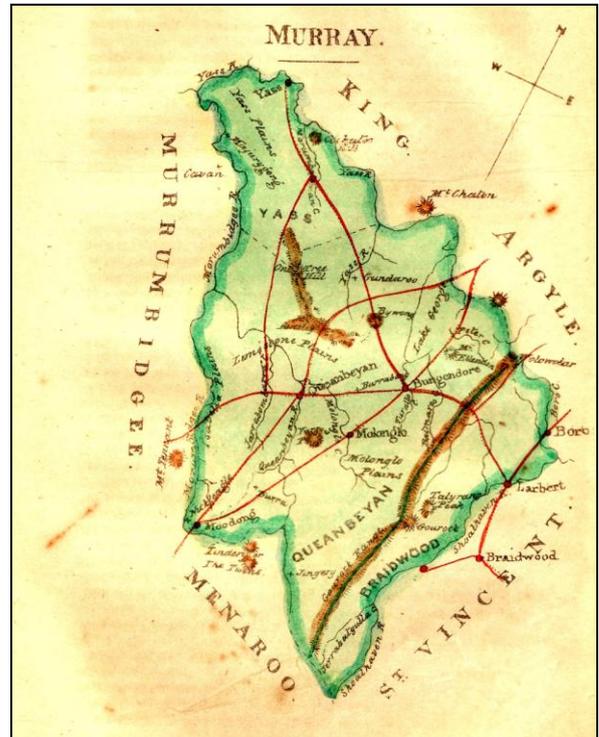
The 1988 report indicated that “Ginninderra Falls Park is an asset to the community....” and that “the archaeological sites are viewed as enhancing the natural resources...” (Sally Brockwell and Helen Cooke, 2011)

European heritage

European settlers pushed out from Sydney in the early 19th century in search of new pastures for stock and in 1820 Joseph Wild, James Vaughn and Charles Throsby Smith crossed from Lake George to a camp on the banks of the Molonglo River near Pialligo. In their subsequent report to authorities in Sydney they commented favourably on the pasture. The next year Charles Throsby explored the area further and found the Murrumbidgee River; he also reported limestone outcrops suitable for making building mortar which resulted in the region being called Limestone Plains.

In 1824 Joshua John Moore took up a land grant and called his property on Acton Peninsula "Canberry". In 1825 Robert Campbell sent James Ainslie with a flock of sheep from Yass to establish a property that is now called "Duntroon". There were subsequent European settlers on the Limestone Plains.

1848 map of Murray County showing the Murrumbidgee River western boundary.



In 1835 Charles Sturt, in part as a reward for his exploration of the region, was granted land in Murray County and he called the property "The Grange". He subsequently sold the property to Charles Campbell (son of Robert Campbell) in 1838. In 1850 Charles Campbell had a stone house built and renamed the property "Belconon". That house on "Belconnen Farm" still stands today; it is within the boundaries of the ACT.



In 1840 Thomas and Eliza Southwell and their two children settled on Ginninderra Creek calling their property "Palmerville". In 1854 Thomas purchased more land and renamed the property "Parkwood". The homestead is still occupied today. Thomas built a wooden slab Wesleyan Church near his homestead in 1863; this was subsequently replaced in 1880 by a fine stone church that still stands today (Belconnen Community Council, 2011).

Crucial to the establishment of rural grazing properties was the reliability of water supply across the whole of the upper Murrumbidgee River catchment area. For the last 150 years the area has been used mostly as grazing country but in recent years vineyards have been planted, quarrying has been conducted and an urban recycling centre has degraded the public amenity and visual impact.

Heritage listed "Belconon" homestead built by Charles Campbell in 1850.



Flora and forest cover

The vegetation at Ginninderra Falls is very special with a rich native flora surviving in the protection of its steep gorges. The walking tracks in the Ginninderra Falls area take one through a variety of ecosystems. The differences in altitude result in different mix of plants at each level and each change of slope. More than eighty native species have been identified and this diversity provides resilience for the ecosystems to cope through drought, fire and flooding rains.

Ginninderra Falls has at least three icon species - a delightful crowea that has long been in cultivation, an endangered pomaderris and many stands of callitris pine (commonly known as Cypress pines). The latter are one of the few softwood species native to Australia, growing in the dry, inland areas of New South Wales.

Crowea exalata 'Ginninderra Falls' with its pink star flowers in winter is an attractive form of a species that has proved popular in horticulture. It is the only place we find it occurring naturally in the Canberra region. There are six pomaderris species listed, one of which is the endangered *Pomaderris pallida*. These wattle-like shrubs occur in patches, provide a wonderful floral display, but are very choosy about where they live. *Callitris endlicheri* stands dominate the slopes of the gorge. These pines can be completely killed by fire and are slow to reach maturity. The pine is common in the river corridors, but there are few large stands elsewhere.



A number of species that occur naturally in the gorges have made their way into mainstream horticulture. Not only is it fascinating to see familiar garden plants in the bush, it is critical to protect adequate genetic diversity in the natural populations. *Correa reflexa* comes in red forms and green ones. Correas have proved themselves in cultivation with many cultivars including the locally developed 'Canberra Bell' for our centenary. *Hardenbergia violacea* and *Brachycome* species are also in the bush and our gardens. *Grevillea juniperina* is another popular garden plant that comes from the lower slopes of these gorges.

Ginninderra Falls vegetation may look similar to Molonglo Gorge, but that's deceptive. Although callitris dominates, the species mix is different. Plants like *Styphelia triflora* are common in Molonglo Gorge, but don't seem to appear in Ginninderra Falls. *Crowea exalata* 'Ginninderra Falls' does not seem to occur in

Molonglo Gorge nor does *Pomaderris pallida*. Callitris stands can be wiped out for decades by extensive fire so we must ensure the landscapes are retained in most of the few places where they occur.

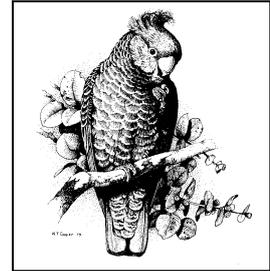
There are only two or three steep gorges like this in the Canberra region. They are all very special places in the environment and their protection is essential for keeping species diversity and genetic diversity for each species.

A full composite list of 80 Ginninderra Falls flora is available on request (Jean Geue, 23 June 2011).



Bird life

The proposed Murrumbidgee-Ginninderra Gorges National Park would be of enormous value to the conservation of birds in the local region. As the urban fringe within the ACT spreads ever closer to the riverine habitats provided by the Ginninderra Creek and the Murrumbidgee and Molonglo Rivers there is an urgent need to conserve habitats associates with the local river systems.



Canberra Ornithologists Group logo

The Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) is a volunteer-based community group with around 350 members whose mission includes the conservation of native birds and their habitats. COG plays an active role in advocating for the protection of native vegetation/bird habitats and for the mitigation of threats to and impacts on native birds. The COG area of interest not only includes the ACT but also the areas in NSW bounded by Yass and Goulburn to the north, Lake Bathurst to the east and Bredbo in the south.

The unique environment provided by the Ginninderra Falls and associated gorge and the riverine habitat within the Murrumbidgee corridor is home to a minimum of 178 bird species with the possible breeding by 127 of them. Eleven species listed as 'Threatened' or listed as 'Species of Concern' within NSW and the ACT will be found within the proposed area. Of particular importance would be the conservation of the rich raptor community, including wedge-tailed eagles and peregrine falcons that will be severely affected if not destroyed by the proposed urban development within the Molonglo Valley, ACT.



Wedge tailed eagle

Bird watching and associated activities are now well recognised as a major tourist attraction as

demonstrated by the ever increasing number of regional **Bird Route** brochures produced by local councils. With its proximity to the large urban population of the ACT, the proposed area with its mix of unusual habitats would soon become a major tourist attraction for those interested in the regions flora and fauna (Chris Davey, President, COG).

Recreation and bushwalking

Murrumbidgee River gorge below Cusacks Crossing



Within the boundaries of the proposed national park there is a huge opportunity for the development of a network of walking tracks. The basis for walking tracks along Ginninderra Creek and falls is well established. The network along the creek was developed when the waterfalls formed part of a recreational and wildlife park in the 1960s to 1990s. There is still evidence of the track network.



Several walking tracks are in place at Ginninderra Falls although rehabilitation and/or maintenance are needed. The falls have been closed to the public for some years and the trails have been neglected.

Signage along the currently disused Ginninderra Creek walking track network.

The walking tracks lead to spectacular views of the upper falls and down to the lower falls and from this point it is easy to reach the Murrumbidgee River. There are fine views of the timbered gorge along

Ginninderra Creek and of the surrounding countryside. A study of the suggested National Park should result in more tracks being developed in the area of Ginninderra Gorge and along the Murrumbidgee.

Existing, and any new, tracks would undoubtedly heighten the appeal of the proposed park to the 150,000 people that will live in Belconnen and Gungahlin by the year 2020 and others elsewhere in the ACT and the surrounding areas of New South Wales, together with visitors to the nation's capital city.

There is scope for the development of existing tracks from the Woodstock Reserve within ACT near Uriarra Crossing into the proposed national park within NSW along the Murrumbidgee River corridor. This would undoubtedly be a popular route into the national park.

Other walking tracks within the national park could take advantage of the high areas to the north of Ginninderra Creek. The view from the summit would be outstanding.



High ground within the proposed national park viewed from the "Parkwood" homestead.



For many visitors to the proposed national park the easier tracks would be the main attraction leading down to the Murrumbidgee River corridor. The water holes along the river would undoubtedly be attractive summer destinations (Graeme Barrow and Doug Finlayson, 2011).

Murrumbidgee River corridor near the confluence with Ginninderra Creek.

Fish

The Murrumbidgee River and the lower section of Ginninderra Creek carry a variety of fish fauna, valuable as environmental entities and for recreational angling. Native species include Murray cod, silver perch, golden perch, western carp gudgeon, smelt, galaxias and the endangered trout cod and Macquarie perch.

Golden perch



Introduced species include carp, redfin, mosquito fish and goldfish. Brown and rainbow trout are occasional visitors (Brian Pratt, 2011).

Insect fauna

The composition of the insect fauna of the Canberra region follows a transition broadly corresponding to temperature as influenced by altitude, and precipitation controlled largely, on the local scale, by altitude and topography. Thus the fauna of the crest of the Brindabella Range is different to that of the lowlands around Canberra. On a more restricted scale, the flora and vegetation of a locality can tell us much about the kinds of insects we can expect to find there.



The Murrumbidgee River where it leaves the ACT to enter the proposed Murrumbidgee-Ginninderra Gorges National Park is the lowest topographic point in the ACT, with a correspondingly warm climate. River oaks (*Casuarina cunninghamiana*) lining the Murrumbidgee and the lower parts of its tributaries are host to insect species not found elsewhere, while on the surrounding slopes of the gorge, Burgan (*Kunzea ericoides*) provides abundant nectar in summer for a host of species, some of them very flamboyant. Black cypress pine (*Callitris endlicheri*), one of only two native conifers locally, is commonly found scattered within the Burgan shrubland; it is the sole local host of a number of moth, beetle, sawfly and other species.

A second major habitat within the proposed National Park is the aquatic and riparian one. Dragonflies, caddisflies, stoneflies and numerous species of beetles and bugs breed only in freshwater. A proportion of these can utilise man-made reservoirs and dams, but many require permanent streams. The Murrumbidgee River is important as the major permanent lowland stream in the region. Fortunately, the Murrumbidgee River corridor within the ACT enjoys a level of nature conservation protection. The proposed National Park would provide a valuable extension of this protection into the warmer lower reaches of the river within our region, which are likely to carry insect faunal elements rare in, or absent from upstream parts (Kim Pullen, 2011).

(Kim Pullen is with the CSIRO Division of Sustainable Ecosystems, Canberra. He has been collecting and studying insects in the Canberra Region for 45 years.)

Frogs, lizards, snakes, turtles and skinks

The populations of reptiles and amphibians in the Molonglo River gorge and Ginninderra Creek area is likely to be similar to the populations in the region as a whole.

Peron's tree frog





Eastern snake-necked turtle

John Wombey, formerly with CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology lists fifteen species of frogs and toads as being possible in the region. Also thirty six species of skinks, lizards, dragons and monitors are identified as being possible within the region along with eight species of snake. The Eastern snake-necked turtle is common near all the creeks and rivers (**CSIRO List of Australian Vertebrates**, 1998 by M Stanger, M Clayton, R Schodde, J Wombey and I Mason).



Red bellied black snake

Tourism and education

The area of the proposed Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park has been a recreation destination for the duration of European settlement in the 19th century until the closure of the recreational park in the 1990's. The attraction of the area is the spectacular waterfalls along Ginninderra Creek and the Murrumbidgee River course through the series of gorges.

At the time of the closure of the Ginninderra Falls recreation park to the public in 2004 it was estimated that about 15,000 to 20,000 visitors travelled to the falls every year. Since that time the population of the ACT and surrounding NSW area has grown well beyond 300,000 persons and is likely to eventually reach 500,000 by 2050. The likely visitor numbers to the proposed Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park will probably then exceed 50,000 per year.

In 1907 John Gale, long-time editor of Queanbeyan newspapers, when promoting the attractions of the Queanbeyan area as the site of the Australian capital, indicated ***“...we have a few show places that outrival anything...”*** and when describing the Ginninderra Falls - ***“the magnificent waterfalls...They must be seen to be appreciated. They are not difficult of access and are the admiration of all who have visited the locality.”***

The attractions of the gorges and river corridors within the proposed Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park are self-evident when visiting the area. The park will be an “oasis” within the region. The attractions of the Ginninderra Creek waterfalls and cascades are a delight on a hot summer's day. The recreational potential for the large lagoons on the Murrumbidgee River are also self-evident.

Tourism and education go hand-in-hand in the area envisaged for the Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park. Education can be formal or informal. With the diverse ecosystems within the proposed park boundaries and a good network of pathways, formal education tours by qualified rangers are an option. So too are self-guided excursions by visitors, individually or in family groups.

Business and funding

In their application for subdivision of lands on **4 November, 1984**, to the Yarrowlumla Shire Council, Queanbeyan, the land owners J.H. Hyles and B.T. Corkhill set out the objectives of the proposed subdivision. The objectives included the following:

1.2 – To establish an Environment Protection Zone within the Yarrowlumla Shire, along the corridors of the Murrumbidgee River and Ginninderra Creek.

1.3 – To preserve the Ginninderra Falls area as a tourist and recreation venue.

1.4 – To progressively enhance the tourist and recreation facilities in an environmentally conscious manner.

and

1.7 – To protect the corridors from further materials extraction processes which have significantly damaged the area in the past.

It is clear that since the 1984 land subdivision these objectives have not been accomplished.

The proponents of the Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park wish to return to these very worthy objectives and establish a sustainable national park that ensures public access to these places of outstanding natural beauty for present and future generations.

It is envisaged that the Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park will be incorporated with the NSW network of national parks. The NSW Government has set out a strategic document for the management of its national parks –

New South Wales National Parks Establishment Plan 2008

Directions for building a diverse and resilient system of parks and reserves under the National Parks and Wildlife Act

<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au>

It is envisaged that the park would be managed by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). In part, the Establishment Plan aims to

“.....increase opportunities for nature-based and cultural tourism and recreation, and improve community wellbeing.”

More specifically, the plan recognises the following themes.....including -

“culturally important places with aesthetic, historic, scientific or social value for past, present or future generations particularly focusing on –

- areas of ongoing Aboriginal cultural use
- areas which are significant to Aboriginal communities for the objects they contain or landscape features of significance
- lands which are outstanding examples of cultural heritage which are poorly protected, threatened, not accessible to the community, or are of particular aesthetic and recreational value”.



The Public Reserve system seeks to –

“provide opportunities for public enjoyment including nature-based recreation and education in a diverse array of landscapes in all regions of NSW.”

and

“In addition to the conservation imperative to protect biodiversity, another primary objective of the public conservation reserve system is its role in protecting areas of special value to people, including places of aesthetic, historic, scientific, social and recreational value.”

There is considerable detail in the Establishment Plan. One statistic worth quoting is that within the NSW Southeast Highlands region within which the proposed Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park lies, the total area under a reserve system is 5.2% of the land area. Overall NSW has 8.4% of reserved land area compared with 16.8% in Victoria, 26% in South Australia, and 13% in Western Australia.

There are many examples of business models that can be used for the operations of the proposed Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park. Because vehicle entry to the park will inevitably



be along the Parkwood Road, a model found at the ***Hanging Rock Recreation Park*** may be considered. The park, one hour’s drive from Melbourne, is run by the Shire Council. Vehicle entry is controlled by boom gate and exit by a ticket purchased in the park vending machines - \$25 per car. The park has resident, on-site ranger staff. Catering staff come in every day. The Hanging Rock Recreation Park is a very, very popular destination for Melbourne residents.

Entrance to Hanging Rock Recreation Park, Victoria

There is similar management of the ***Tower Hill National Park*** near Warnambool on the Shipwreck Coast of Victoria. This park is run by Parks Victoria. Our preferred model is for management of the Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park by NSW Parks & Wildlife Service along similar lines as the Victorian examples.

Tower Hill Recreational Park, Victoria



Ginninderra Falls Association

The following persons are members of the Ginninderra Falls Association Committee elected on 14 February 2012 advocating the establishment of the national park.

President: Chris Watson
Vice-President: Brian Rhynehart
Secretary: John Connelly
Treasurer: Douglas Finlayson
Committee members:
Bryan Pratt
Graeme Barrow
Anna Hyles
Darryl Seto
George Heinsohn



The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

Category II National Park

Category II protected areas are large natural or near natural areas set aside to protect large-scale ecological processes, along with the complement of species and ecosystems characteristic of the area, which also provide a foundation for environmentally and culturally compatible spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities.

Primary objective

To protect natural biodiversity along with its underlying ecological structure and supporting environmental processes, and to promote education and recreation.

Other objectives:

- To manage the area in order to perpetuate, in as natural a state as possible, representative examples of physiographic regions, biotic communities, genetic resources and unimpaired natural processes;
- To maintain viable and ecologically functional populations and assemblages of native species at densities sufficient to conserve ecosystem integrity and resilience in the long term;
- To contribute in particular to conservation of wide-ranging species, regional ecological processes and migration routes;
- To manage visitor use for inspirational, educational, cultural and recreational purposes at a level which will not cause significant biological or ecological degradation to the natural resources;
- To take into account the needs of indigenous people and local communities, including subsistence resource use, in so far as these will not adversely affect the primary management objective;
- To contribute to local economies through tourism.