

Royal National Park's World Heritage Status

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Background

Royal National Park, dedicated in April 1879, was Australia's first national park and one of the pioneer national parks of the world along with Yosemite, Mackinac and Yellowstone in America. Each of these national parks has some claim to primacy, according to the criteria one chooses to make this assessment, and can claim to be either the first, second third or fourth. Of these, Royal was the first reserve in the world to be 'dedicated for the purpose of a national park'.

In Australia, it is generally stated that Yellowstone National Park was the first national park in the world and Royal the second. This view is misleading and should cease. Yellowstone was dedicated as Yellowstone Public Park in 1872 and ceded to the state of California; however, it was directed by congress to be called Yellowstone National Park in an Appropriations Bill, 1878 to indicate it was a federal park and not referring to it as a dedicated national park. This was to emphasize the fact that the federal government and not a state government controlled it, and address political tensions in the area at the time. There were three territories vying for control of the area and powerful railway interests operating. Retrospective legislation in the US statutes was made in 1970 to create the Yellowstone National Park in 1872. The status conferred by this retrospective act of creation of the Yellowstone National Park in 1872 is now accepted as an historical fact, and the first three American national parks have been listed as Yellowstone 1872, Yosemite 1890 and Sequoia 1890. (*Dictionary of American History, 216-221*). When Yellowstone National Park celebrated its centenary in 1972 the Yellowstone Library and Museum agreed that 'Royal National Park ('National Park' until 1955) was the first protected area in the world to be set aside "for the purpose of a national park."'

These efforts have led to unending and unprofitable argumentation. We mire in polemics of the *oldest*, or the *first*. Many things are left out, retrospective legislation has changed our view on things, and meanings of words and concepts have changed considerably since the early days.

It is *First National Park's* approach to appreciate the case for each of Yosemite, Yellowstone, Mackinac and Royal and consider them all important as the 'pioneer' national parks of the world. From these, the national park movement was founded. One could include the New Zealand reserve Tongariro (1887) and the Canada reserve Banff Hot Springs Reserve (1885).

Royal is Australia's premier national park with a very conservative assessment of over 4 million visitors per annum. It rightfully holds its place at the top in Australia's list of magnificent natural places along with Kakadu, the Great Barrier Reef, the Kimberley, and the Pilbara, for example.

World Heritage Listing of the Royal Reserves proposal

In 2009 the group *First National Park* formed and proposed the World Heritage Listing of Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area, the Royal Reserves (RRs). It presented its case with the publication in 2012 of the book *First National Park: A Natural For World Heritage* by Dr Geoff Mosley.

The World Heritage proposal for the Royal Reserves has been widely supported by the local community, the Sutherland Shire and Wollongong City Councils and by the New South Wales Nature Conservation Council. On the 8th October 2013 the federal and NSW Environment Ministers announced that Australia would prepare a World Heritage nomination for the Royal Reserves. The first step would be their inclusion on Australia's Tentative World Heritage List - an inventory of properties, which the State Party (in this case the Australian federal Government) considered to have potential Outstanding Universal Value. Any further research needed to prepare a World Heritage nomination could then be carried out after inclusion on the Tentative List.

NSW Government reports 2014, 2015

The NSW Government's Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) then commissioned a number of reports by consultants as follows:

- 1) GML Heritage PL, *Royal National Park and Reserves World Heritage Tentative List Submission*, October, 2014;
- 2) Context PL, *Royal National Park and Reserves World Heritage Tentative List Submission Peer Review*, November, 2014;
- 3) Context PL, *Royal National Park and Royal Reserves World Heritage Nomination Proposal*, May, 2015; and
- 4) Context PL, *World Heritage Theme: The Evolution of Conservation Philosophy and Protected Areas. Rationale, Methodology and Approach for a Future Scoping Study. Final Report*, May, 2016.

The May 2015 report to OEH concluded that there was “a potential for the World Heritage Committee to look favourably on a transnational serial nomination of places associated with the development and evolution of environmental conservation philosophy and protected areas across the world” and the May 2016 report outlined a possible rationale and approach for a future scoping study on this theme.

One of the areas included in a potential list of areas for the proposed scoping study was the English Lake District. Since May 2016 the situation with regard to the World Heritage listing of areas that are internationally significant with regard to this theme has changed markedly because, without any thematic scoping study, on 9th July 2017 at its 44th meeting in Krakow Poland, The English Lake District was World Heritage listed by the World Heritage Committee, in part because of its significance in conservation philosophy and protected area history.

Part of the reasoning behind the inclusion of the property in the World Heritage List in relation to criterion (vi) and other criteria was that the Lake District “inspired an awareness of the importance of beautiful landscapes and triggered early efforts to preserve them” and that these were “ideas that underpin the global movement of protected areas and the development of recreational experience within them”. The boundary for the listed area was The Lake District National Park reserved in 1951. This national park falls into the IUCN protected area category V - landscape/seascape. *First National Park* member Dr. Geoff Mosley was one of the reviewers of the nomination for IUCN.

Expert assessment of the consultant’s reports

Dr Geoff Mosley made an expert independent assessment of the NSW government’s reports and concluded that it was clear from his reading that they paid insufficient attention to the cultural significance of what happened historically at the Royal Reserves. He said, “The title of the book *The First National Park: A Natural for World Heritage* was chosen to make two points. First, that this was the first protected area in the world to be set aside (in 1879) for the new land use purpose of “national park”, ‘National Park’ having been used differently as a reserve name at Yellowstone Public Park/Yellowstone National Park (1872) and Mackinac National Public Park (1875) to indicate that these public parks were under US federal control. To make this terminology difference easier to understand it is worth noting that when Mackinac National Public Park was transferred to control by the State of Michigan in 1895 it became Mackinac State Park. Similarly, Yosemite Public Park (reserved in 1864) and placed under the control of California, did not become Yosemite National Park until the federal Government took back control in 1906. The second reason for the use of ‘A Natural’, in the title of the book was the historical fact that the 1879 ‘National Park’ (renamed Royal National Park in 1955) was, at first, intended primarily for relatively intensive recreation similar to the uses of the inner city parks, but that the largely natural character of this area brought about a revolutionary change in protected area land use with nature conservation becoming a major objective, and the natural environment of a relatively large protected area providing for a new type of recreation including bush walking. Earlier protected areas in New South Wales and elsewhere in Australia were established to protect river banks, coastal areas and specific small sites of scenic interest such as caves and waterfalls.

What was disappointing about the various reviews referred to above was that there seemed to be in them an inadequate understanding of the extent to which what happened at the Royal Reserves influenced, through positive connections, the spread of the national parks and wilderness systems in New South Wales and to a lesser extent in other parts of Australia. The influence was particularly important in the Blue Mountains and the Snowy Mountains.

Details of the influence that the Royal Reserves had on the spread of the national parks and wilderness systems can be found in the following books by Dr Geoff Mosley: *Australian Alps World Heritage Nomination Proposal* (1988); *Blue Mountains for World Heritage* (1989); *Battle for the Bush. The Blue Mountains, the Australian Alps and the Origins of the Wilderness Movement* (1999) and *The First National Park: A Natural for World Heritage* (2012).

In 2017 and 2018 Britain further successfully nominated a number of industrial sites, as well as the English Lake District, for their cultural heritage values. This adds more weight to our argument that the course of action of developing a new theme is no longer needed and that the Australian Government can safely place the Royal Reserves onto its Tentative List For World Heritage Listing right now and then spend the time necessary preparing their submission. The nomination of the RRs would also benefit from the World Heritage committee's ongoing interest in cultural landscapes.

The British industrial sites have now been inscribed because they were representative of a genre of cultural heritage, and the British thought that they were important enough to nominate. It is interesting to note that not all World Heritage sites are superlative in nature and superlative characteristics may not by themselves be sufficient or even necessary. They may be of global importance because they are representative of a genre.

Which sites are nominated for the World Heritage List largely depends upon who takes the initiative. The World Heritage Convention is international in character, but the nomination of a potential site starts at the national level. The Convention recognizes that countries should possess different characteristics regarding their political, cultural and economic circumstances. The World Heritage Committee also recognized that countries must be willing to participate.

The World Heritage Committee signaled in the 1990s that it was looking to widen the range of sites included on the list particularly into the areas of industrial archaeology and cultural landscapes. The nomination of the RRs would also benefit from the World Heritage committee's ongoing interest in cultural landscapes.

That the World Heritage Committee has seen it to be very appropriate to inscribe on the World Heritage List examples of early mining, and sites relevant to the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, such as factories (e.g. Derwent Valley Mills) and transport, surely then it is also appropriate to include on the World Heritage List sites significant to the development of protected areas, the conservation of natural areas, and the development of one of the most important concepts in the history of conservation—national parks.

At Royal National Park a whole new approach to recreation—a breakthrough—developed. Instead of public parks being man-made in grassy landscapes inside cities, we now had a new kind of park—a national park, which was much larger in area and essentially natural. It was the experience of this that inspired the development of a widespread system of national parks devoted to nature conservation as well as a distinct type of recreation.

First National Park will continue its campaign for World Heritage Listing of the Royal Reserves as per our report by Dr Geoff Mosley presented in his book *The First National Park: A Natural For World Heritage*, and fully support all efforts of the Federal and State Governments in this regard.

We continue to request that the Federal Government place the Royal Reserves onto their Tentative List For World Heritage now.

Appendix

Outstanding Universal Value of the Royal Reserves

The book *The First National Park: A Natural for World Heritage* explains in detail how the Royal Reserves meet the following World Heritage criteria set out in paragraph 77 of *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*:

(vi) be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria);

(vii) contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;

(viii) be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;

(ix) be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;

(x) contain the most important and significant habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of Outstanding Universal Value from the point of view of science or conservation.

There is already a World Heritage Area in the Sydney Basin that has met the bio-heritage requirements of criteria (ix) and (x). This is the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBMWA) that was listed in 2000. A renomination of the GBMWA is proposed in relation to criteria that include (vi), (vii) and (viii) and to extended areas but *The First National Park* book details how even if this is successful, for obvious reasons, to do with their mainly coastal location, the World Heritage listing of the Royal Reserves would add features of Outstanding Universal Value with regard to these criteria and also to criteria (ix) and (x) to those that may result from the GBMWA renomination.