

Munibung Hill – features and historical value

Fergus Hancock, October 13th 2017

Munibung Hill represents a high feature point in the northern part of the Lake Macquarie catchment. Its highest point, at 155 m AHD, shares the highest elevation east of the Watagan Range with Charlestown ridge. From the lower peak of Munibung Hill, a vista of the coastline from Caves Beach to Tomaree Head may be enjoyed. Viewpoints of the beauty of the Lake Macquarie – Newcastle and Lower Hunter Region is fully accessible, including the Fern Bay-Stockton Bight, Fullerton Cove, Nobbys Head, Redhead headland and beach, Green Point, Swansea Channel and Lake Macquarie as far south as Pulbah Island. The views west of Munibung include the Blue Gum Hills RP, Sugarloaf Range the Watagans and towns as far south as Morisset.

Munibung is representative of the youngest Permian geological series – the boundary between the Boolaroo Formation and the Moon Island Beach Formation, the uppermost formation of the Newcastle Coal Measures before the Triassic terrestrial sediments dominate (see Mackenzie and Britten, 1969). The boundary between the Boolaroo and Mon Island Beach Formations is located roughly at the crest of Lawson Rd on the highest eastern foot ridge to the hill. Two coal seams, the Fassifern and Great Northern Seam, are exposed at different heights on Munibung, separated by the Bolton Point Conglomerate. The upper section of Munibung Hill is formed from the Teralba Conglomerate Member, which forms the cliff lines exposed on the eastern and southern sections of Munibung. The Awaba Tuff underlies the Great Northern Seam and may be the source of yellow pigment sought by Awabakel men for ritual hunting and scouting parties.

Lake Macquarie was formed in its current state following the Pleistocene Glaciation, which peaked about 18000 years Before Present (BP). Sea levels at the time were about 168 metres below current sea level. The final marine transgression stabilized approximately 6000 BP at around current sea level (0 m AHD). Munibung Hill became more prominent forming the northern end of Lake Macquarie from that time, and Awabakel people travelled regularly between Bolton Point and Munibung Hill for annual ritual purposes (Umwelt 2004).

The geological series has created several micro-habitats, including a spring-fed wet gully rainforest community along an unnamed gully line on the western flank of Munibung Hill. Coal exposures have also created significant geotechnical hazard zones, one of which is located in the gully slope below Lucilla Ridge. Although the hill was cleared by the end of the 19th Century (Matthews 2011) regeneration of dry coastal rainforest pockets interspersing Angophora woodlands creates a range of vegetation types along the crest of the Munibung Hill ridge line. This includes small pockets of swamp mahogany gully forest, Angophora ironbark pockets, Coastal foothills spotted gum/ironbark forest, Coastal Narabeen moist forest and coastal wet gully forest (Lake Macquarie 2014).

Munibung Hill played an important role in local indigenous history. Rev Lancelot Threkeld recorded that Munibung Hill was named Ko-na-ko-na-ba by Awabakel people, and was a source of a yellow mineral that was used for pigment by hunting bands. A number of stone rings existed on the crest of the ridge line, that have been interpreted to have been associated with initiation of young men into the tribal community (Gunson 1974 in Umwelt 2004). No stone rings have been found on Munibung Hill, but dense understorey regrowth in many areas of Munibung could hide stone rings or other important features (Umwelt 2004). This is particularly true on the northern and eastern slopes of Munibung Hill that have not been subject to field surveys.

A large range of plant species of value to Awabakal people existed on Munibung Hill. Though the ridge was almost completely cleared, regrowth has regenerated a large number of plant species important to indigenous people.

Munibung Hill formed an important part of European history following the grant of 1280 acres of land to William Brooks in 1839, which he named Lochend. Brooks partly cleared the hillslopes for grazing and also opened a coal mine at the end of Hopkins St in 1843, that trundled coal to Speers boat for ship loading to Sydney. The mine closed in the 1850s, leaving a small quarry site with sheer cliffs backing into Munibung Hill, now forming part of the Crown Reserve.

Williams Speers purchased part of this selection in 1870 and developed part of the Lake Macquarie foreshore to provide access for goods shipped through to the Swansea Channel to Sydney. Speers Point is named after him. Land was subdivided to form The Esplanade and Main Rd in 1902.

The eastern side of Munibung formed part of a 2560 acre selection by Joseph Weller in 1833. By 1869 this had been transferred to Newcastle Wallsend Coal Co. Following the 1889 subdivision of the Parish of Macquarie

and the formation of Government Rd, linking Cardiff to Warners Bay, further subdivision of land including the current alignment of Lawson Rd occurred between 1919 to 1922.

A number of returned servicemen were settled in the Teralba area, and a number settled between Boolaroo to Speers Point and Warners Bay following World War 1.

Munibung Hill is an important feature of cultural and historical importance to the Awabakel people and showing the history of settlement and occupation since Europeans arrived in the Newcastle – Lower Hunter Region. This importance should be reflected in its management and protection to remnant vegetation, fauna, archeological and cultural features. It should be managed to show the effects of time, human occupation and the importance of such cultural features to the community and local indigenous people.

References

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