

NEW ENGLAND NATIONAL PARK

PLAN OF MANAGEMENT

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service

March 1991

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FOREWORD

New England National Park was established in 1931. In 1986 it was incorporated in the World Heritage List as one of the Sub-tropical and Warm Temperate Rainforest Parks of Eastern Australia. The park is located 75 km east of Armidale and 50km west of Coffs Harbour on the Great Escarpment which runs along the eastern edge of the New England tablelands.

The rainforests of the park are extensive and diverse and the landscape has some of the finest scenery in north-eastern New South Wales. Several major lookouts have been constructed on the western edge of the park which provide magnificent views over the park towards the coast.

Much of the park offers an ideal setting for wilderness recreation. Accordingly it is proposed to declare and manage 28 000 ha. of the park as wilderness. There is a walking track system that samples a wide range of environments with access from day-use areas which contain picnicking facilities. Over-night facilities range from car based camping areas to self-contained cabin accommodation.

Suitable sites for commercial development are located adjacent to the park within easy access of Point Lookout. The plan aims to encourage the development of commercial cabin style accommodation near the Point Lookout Road and integration of any such development with the park walking track and interpretation facilities.

The objectives, policies and actions for managing the area as a national park also meet the requirements of the World Heritage Convention. To this end particular attention is given in the plan to the protection of scenery, rainforests and the habitats of special animal communities such as the rufous scrub-bird, eastern bristle-bird and bent-winged bat.

The plan of management sets out the scheme of operations for New England National Park. Its implementation will provide for the appropriate use of the area and for the continued protection of its outstanding natural and cultural features. In accordance with the provisions of Section 75 of the National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974 this plan of management is adopted.

Tim Moore,
Minister for the
Environment

27th July, 1990

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INTRODUCTION

The National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974, requires that a plan of management be prepared for each national park. A plan of management is a legal document which outlines how a national park will be managed in the years ahead. It can be revised and rewritten if necessary to accommodate changes in management practices.

The procedure for the adoption of a plan of management is specified in the Act and involves five stages, namely:

- * The Director gives notice that a plan of management has been prepared.
- * The plan is published and placed on public exhibition for at least one month.
- * The plan and copies of all representations are referred to the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council for consideration.
- * The Director submits the plan of management to the Minister together with any comments or suggestions of the Council.
- * The Minister may adopt the plan after considering the comments of the Advisory Council or he may refer the plan back to the Director and Council for further consideration before adoption.

A draft plan of management for New England National Park was placed on public exhibition for a period of two months during November and December, 1988. Forty four submissions were received during this exhibition period from individuals and organisations with an interest in the management of the area. Many of the comments received have been included in this final plan.

For simplicity, much background information has been omitted from the plan. Anyone who would like additional information can refer to the exhibited plan of management for New England National Park at:

The Visitor Centre,
Dorrigo National Park,
DORRIGO. 2453.

2. MANAGEMENT CONTEXT

2.1 World Heritage Areas

The International Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage was adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 1972. The Convention provides a permanent legal and administrative framework for international co-operation for the safeguarding of the cultural and natural heritage of mankind.

New England and Dorrigo National Parks and Mount Hyland Nature Reserve form a geographical group of three of the sixteen areas in New South Wales which comprise the World Heritage Area of Sub-tropical and Temperate Rainforest Parks of Eastern Australia.

The inclusion of the Sub-tropical and Temperate Rainforest Parks of Eastern Australia in the World Heritage list in 1986, added to the listing within Australia of Kakadu National Park, the Great Barrier Reef, Willandra Lakes Region, Western Tasmania Wilderness National Parks, Lord Howe Island Group and Uluru National Park.

The Convention provides for the nomination of properties on the basis of cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value. It also provides for the protection, study and appreciation of the heritage.

The rainforests of New South Wales represent a natural heritage of international significance as ancient and isolated reservoirs of a great variety of plant and animal species of considerable value.

The World Heritage Convention is designed to complement, to aid and to stimulate national initiatives, not to compete with them or to take their place. The Convention clearly identifies that it is for each country to accept the responsibility for the conservation of its own heritage.

2.2 National Parks in NSW

The national park concept was introduced into Australia through the establishment of Royal National Park in 1879, only seven years after the world's first national park was created at Yellowstone in the United States of America.

For the purposes of preparing plans of management, the 1978 International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) definition of a national park has been adopted in New South Wales.

`A national park is a relatively large area; (1) where one or several ecosystems are not materially altered by human exploitation and occupation, where plant and animal species, geomorphological sites and habitats are of special scientific, educative and recreative interest or which contain a natural landscape of great beauty; and (2) where the highest competent authority of the country has taken steps to prevent or to eliminate as soon as possible exploitation or occupation in the whole area and to enforce effectively the respect of ecological, geomorphological or aesthetic features which have lead to its establishment; and (3) where visitors are allowed to enter, under special conditions, for inspirational, educative, cultural and recreative purposes'.

The following general purposes relate to the management of national parks in New South Wales:

* The protection and preservation of the scenic, natural and cultural features;

- * The conservation of wildlife;
- * The maintenance of natural processes as far as possible;
- * The provision of appropriate recreational opportunities; and
- * The encouragement of scientific and educational enquiry into environmental features and processes, prehistoric and historic features and park use patterns.

National parks are a part of the regional pattern of land use. The management of a national park aims at minimising disturbance to natural and cultural resources. Other land uses are distinguished by an acceptance or encouragement of environmental modification. National parks, therefore, provide for only a limited part of a range of land uses in any region.

2.3 Location and Regional Setting

New England National Park is located on the coastal escarpment at the head of the Bellinger River and Five Day Creek, about halfway between Coffs Harbour, on the north coast, and Armidale on the New England Tableland. The park comprises a total of 29 881 hectares as at 31st March, 1989. The boundaries are shown in Diagram 2 of this plan.

Ebor township is the closest settlement to New England National Park and is located on the main road from Armidale to the coast. Ebor is also central to an important group of conservation areas on the New England Tableland which include Dorrigo, Guy Fawkes River, Cathedral Rocks and Oxley Wild Rivers National Parks and Guy Fawkes Nature Reserve. New England National Park occupies that part of the coastal escarpment with the greatest topographic relief in northern NSW. The altitude within the park ranges from 100 metres on the Bellinger River to 1563 metres at Point Lookout.

The park is situated between the grazing and agricultural lands of the tablelands and the timber production and grazing areas of the coastal valleys. While the park's surroundings are only moderately settled, the populated coastal plain is within two hours drive. The increasing population of centres such as Coffs Harbour are important factors in park use and management.

The park provides a significant component of the wide range of outdoor recreation opportunities offered by the mountainous escarpment between the North Coast and New England Regions. The North Coast Region has been identified as a priority area for tourism development in New South Wales. Emphasis is being given to identifying potential tourism development areas with outstanding environmental and aesthetic qualities. Tourism development in these areas should be sympathetic with the environment and make the most of the natural attractions and the experiences they offer.

2.4 Importance of New England National Park

The importance of the New England National Park can be summarised as:

Geology and Geomorphology

* The escarpment, resulting from headward erosion by coastal streams of the uplifted lands of the New England Tableland.

Scenery

* Spectacular panoramas of the hinterland forests and distant coastline from the highest point on the coastal escarpment.

Plants and Animals

* A wide range of vegetation and habitats influenced by the altitudinal range and including:

- the presence of sub-tropical, warm temperate and cool temperate rainforest; and
- sclerophyll forest, sub-alpine woodland, heathland and swampland.

* Plant species which are rare, restricted or on the boundary of their distribution.

* A rich fauna, including rare species.

Recreation

* Opportunities for a diverse range of outdoor recreation activities provided by:

- access to high vantage points and scenic landscapes;
- low key camping facilities in natural settings;
- a network of walking tracks traversing the escarpment; and
- the wilderness condition of much of the park.

3. OBJECTIVES OF MANAGEMENT

New England National Park will be managed in accordance with the general purposes of management for national parks in New South Wales listed in Section 2.2 of this plan.

Consistent with the general purposes of management, specific objectives of management will apply for the period of this plan and are consistent with the requirements of both the World Heritage Convention and the National Parks and Wildlife Act.

The specific objectives of management are:

* The protection of the natural condition and diversity of native plant and animal communities, with emphasis on:

- rare and endangered species;
- remedial works in the heathland on Wrights Lookout;
- improvement of fire management;
- protection of the landscape; and
- seeking co-operation to protect habitats and landscapes adjacent to the park.

* The establishment and protection of a wilderness area in the headwaters of the Bellinger River and Five Day Creek.

* The protection of cultural resources with emphasis on:

- conservation and interpretation of the Point Lookout Antimony Mine; and
- identification of Aboriginal sites.

* The provision of additional opportunities for the appropriate use, understanding and enjoyment of the park by:

- expansion of Thungutti camping area in the Point Lookout area;
- improvement of the escarpment walking track system in the Point Lookout area;
- the promotion of walking routes in the wilderness area of the park; and
- improvement of the information and interpretation available to park visitors at Banksia Point, Thungutti camping area and at the Point Lookout Road entrance to the park.

4. POLICIES AND FRAMEWORK FOR MANAGEMENT

This section contains the policies and framework for management of New England National Park together with relevant background information. Policies are summarised under the following headings:

- * Natural Resources;
- * Cultural Resources;
- * Recreation Opportunities; and
- * Management Support

The policies established in this plan of management will provide the framework for management consistent with anticipated resources available to the Service and anticipated community trends for the next 5 to 10 years. The actions identified are those immediate proposals which are to be undertaken in the next five years. Other management actions may be developed over the life span of this plan consistent with the policies set out in the plan.

4.1 NATURAL RESOURCES

4.1.1 Landform, Geology, Soils and Hydrology

Located on the abrupt escarpment edge east of the undulating plateau of the New England Tableland, the park consists of impressive cliffs, rugged ridges, spurs and streams. The streams converge on two major river valleys; the Bellinger and the Macleay.

From the plateau rim, there is a gentle down slope westwards onto the tablelands. To the east, there is a precipitous drop into the coastal valleys. Point Lookout at 1560m above sea level is one of the highest points in north-eastern New South Wales. By contrast, the lowest point in the park, on the Bellinger River, is only 100m above sea level. This large altitudinal range (only exceeded in Australia in the Snowy Mountains and Victorian Alps) is an important environmental contributor to the diverse range of vegetation communities and animal habitats in the park.

The bulk of the park is composed of tightly folded Palaeozoic sedimentary and metamorphic rocks - slate, phyllite and greywacke. On the plateau, these are overlain by an extensive sheet of tertiary volcanics - basalt, trachyte and tuff. The volcanics may have been extruded from a point within the park known as the Crescent, a gabbro batholith surrounded by a residual arc ridge of altered rocks well down in the Bellinger Valley.

Relatively recent headward erosion of the coastal rivers has resulted in the deep dissection of the Palaeozoic sediments to form the rugged central section of the park. The overlying basalts and trachytes, having been completely eroded from this section of the park, are exposed in the cliff line that forms the edge of the plateau.

The different rock types in the park produce quite different soils which are in turn an important factor in the complex pattern of vegetation communities.

Limited mineralisation in the Palaeozoic rocks in the central area of the park is responsible for a number of small antimony mines which were worked during the first half of this century.

The plateau rim of the park drains away across the tablelands to the Nymboida, Guy Fawkes and Styx rivers in a series of gently-graded creeks. There are a number of small boggy areas along creek lines on the plateau, including a small swamp near Thungutti Camping Area.

The bulk of the park, drains steeply into the headwaters of the Bellinger River and Five Day Creek. Many of the upper streams have numerous small waterfalls, rapids and cascades. The Bellinger River, by the time it leaves the park, is a meandering river channel which is subject to rapid flooding.

The landscape of New England National Park and its surrounds is one of the most outstanding scenic features of north-eastern New South Wales. The result of a combination of geology, geomorphology and relatively undisturbed natural vegetation, the park is rimmed by a spectacular line of cliffs and bluffs along the edge of the plateau, with a dramatic drop into the broad basin of rainforest below.

Much of the landscape visible from the vantage points within the park is not managed by the Service. The park occupies the foreground below the escarpment. The middle-ground is largely state forest, managed for timber production, and much of the distant views are freehold lands, some of which come very close to the escarpment in many places. Land clearing or the erection of structures on private lands close to the escarpment could change the landscape. Sympathetic management of forestry lands is essential due to their high visibility from lookouts within the park. State forest in the catchment of Sunday and Scraggy Creeks will be added to the park following cessation of logging by about the end of 1992.

Policies

- * Protect the outstanding scenery and natural features of the New England National Park environment.
- * The catchment areas of the Bellinger River and Five Day Creek within the park, will be protected to maintain their undeveloped and unpolluted condition.
- * The catchments of Sunday and Scraggy Creeks will be managed to restore and protect scenic and catchment values when added to the park.

Action

- * The District will contact all relevant agencies such as Lands Department, Forestry Commission, Local Government, and the Catchment Areas Protection Board seeking their co-operation in protecting the quality of surrounding landscapes which are a feature of the park.

4.1.2 Native and Introduced Plants

The park contains a diverse assemblage of plants with over 500 species distributed among eleven plant communities. The communities are distributed in a complex pattern determined by differences in climate, altitude, topography, parent material, aspect and exposure. The high, cold, windswept plateau surface on the western margin of the park has practically no plant species in common with the warm, sheltered, eastern margin on the Bellinger River.

The most widespread and abundant communities within the park are the interknitted rainforest and wet sclerophyll forests. Sub-tropical rainforest occupies the valley bottoms giving way to warm temperate rainforest in the gullies above 1000m. These grade into cool temperate rainforest at about 1200m on the escarpment. Occupying the complex of ridges below and in places traversing the escarpment is wet sclerophyll forest. There is a demarcation in species composition at about 1200m. The lower forest is dominated by taller eucalypt species while the upper is dominated by cold adapted species. On the plateau there is a gradation into grassy forest of similar species. Other plant communities within the park have a more limited distribution, related to soil

type, topography and climate. These include dry sclerophyll forest, sub-alpine woodland, heathland, mallee and sedgeland.

Heathland communities have a very restricted distribution but high significance because of species richness. Heathland is found on Wrights Lookout, in a few patches on the plateau around the Point Lookout Area and at Barren Mountain. Unregulated visitor use is damaging the heathland at Wrights Lookout.

Within the varied plant communities there are a number of species which are either rare, (e.g. *Kunzea opposita*), of limited range (e.g. *Eucalyptus approximans*) or at the limit of their geographic distribution (e.g. *Eucalyptus nitens*).

Weeds are not a serious problem in the park and are generally confined to sites of periodic disturbance along water courses. The occurrence of lantana along the banks of the Bellinger River, where the species appears stabilised, is the most significant. Biological control agents released to date have had a limited effect in the park.

Policies

* The diversity and distribution of native plants will be maintained through the operation of natural processes, the mitigation of human impacts and through specific conservation programs where necessary.

* Scientific and educational enquiry into environmental features and processes of the park will be encouraged and controlled.

* Control measures for introduced weeds will be implemented in accordance with conservation objectives and efficient management practices. Biological control will be encouraged.

* The Service will co-operate with adjoining neighbours and local government and other agencies to control weeds, particularly those proclaimed noxious.

* Environmentally sensitive sites will be protected by the management of visitor use.

Actions

* Biological control agents will be used against lantana as they become available.

* Remedial works to protect the heathland will be carried out on Wright's Lookout.

4.1.3 Native and Introduced Animals

There is still a great deal to learn about the composition and distribution of the park's animals. However, the wide range of habitats that exist within the park, and the fauna studies so far undertaken, indicate a rich fauna.

Both of the Australian monotremes, the platypus (*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*) and echidna, (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*) occur in the park. The forest and woodland communities of the plateau carry populations of the eastern grey kangaroo (*Macropus giganteus*), red-necked wallaby (*Macropus rufogriseus*), wallaroo (*Macropus robustus*) and swamp wallaby (*Wallabia bicolor*).

Studies in and adjacent to the park suggest that the more common macropods in the eucalypt forest of the escarpment are the swamp wallaby, red-necked pademelon (*Thylogale thetis*) and parma wallaby (*Macropus parma*). Potoroos

(Potorous tridactylus) occur in wet sclerophyll forest where a ground storey is well developed. Arboreal marsupials such as the brush-tailed possum (Trichosurus vulpecula) and greater glider (Schoinobates volans) are common. Other arboreals are the ring-tailed possum (Pseudocheirus peregrinus), feather-tailed glider (Acrobates pygmaeus), koala (Phascolarctos cinereus) and phascogale (Phascogale tapoatafa).

Tiger quolls (Dasyurus maculatus) are often seen around picnic areas; they are well distributed along the plateau margin. Brown antechinus (Antechinus stuartii), bush rat (Rattus fuscipes) and, to a lesser extent, bridled bandicoot (Isodon macrourus) are common small mammals. Swamp rat (Rattus lutreolus), fawn-footed melomys (Melomys cervinipes), and Dusky antechinus (Antechinus swainsonii) are less common.

Near Platypus Creek, there is a large breeding colony of bent-winged bats (Miniopterus schreibersii) in one of the old mines. Little red flying foxes (Pteropus scapulatus) and grey-headed flying foxes (Pteropus poliocephalus) occasionally visit the lower section of the park. The dingo (Canis familiaris dingo) occurs within the park.

A comprehensive list of birds and their habitats has been compiled for the park. Among the 113 birds so far recorded, there is an excellent representation of rainforest birds. Of the 36 NSW rainforest dependent birds (Morris, 1977, Frith 1977) some 24 are found within the park.

Several birds require special comment. The sooty owl, (Tyto tenebricosa), a scarce and little known species which inhabits rainforests and adjacent wet sclerophyll forests in eastern Australia, is resident within the park. The rufous scrub-bird (Atrichornis rufescens), a rare ground-dwelling, almost flightless species confined to rainforest and adjacent wet sclerophyll forest in north-eastern NSW and far south-eastern Queensland, has been recorded along the plateau rim. The eastern bristle-bird (Dasyornis brachypterus), a rare bird inhabiting dense scrubs and thickets of eastern Australia, has been recorded in the heaths of Barren Mountain but has not been seen for many years.

Little is known about the composition and distribution of amphibians and reptiles within the park. Of special interest is the sphagnum frog (Philoria sphagnicolus) found in the higher parts of the park. The frog is known from only a small number of sites in New South Wales.

Little study has taken place of the invertebrate fauna of the park but new species are still being found.

Many species of rare and endangered animals are found within the park. Those which occur on the New England Tableland section of the park are particularly vulnerable because of the limited occurrence of their habitat in the park. These habitats extend to adjoining lands, and highlight the importance of developing co-operative wildlife management programs.

However, throughout the majority of the park the rugged and isolated situation and size of habitats affords considerable protection for native animals.

Wild dogs and macropods can be a problem for neighbouring agricultural properties. Aerial and hand baiting are carried out adjacent to and within a perimeter zone of the park.

Horseriding in New England National Park is considered inappropriate because of its steep terrain, high rainfall and highly erodible soils.

Policies

* Native animals will be conserved by maintaining natural processes and the diversity of habitats.

* The habitats of rare or endangered species will be protected and manipulated where necessary to favour the species.

* Control programs for pest animals will be undertaken in co-operation with adjoining neighbours and other control agencies.

* Horseriding will not be permitted in the park.

Actions

* Protect known locations of rufous scrub-bird territories by exclusion of fire and other disturbances to the habitat.

* The conservation plan proposed for the antimony mine and precinct (q.v. p22) will provide for the continued use of mines by bent-winged bats.

* Assist wild dog control associations in localised control programmes where dingoes and wild dogs are travelling from the park to attack domestic stock.

* Seek the co-operation of neighbours to protect rare and endangered species in New England Tableland habitats adjacent to the park.

* Undertake a survey to assess the status of the eastern bristle-bird.

4.1.4 Fire Management

Fire management in national parks involves scheduled fire prescriptions, (i.e. the deliberate use of fire) for the protection of life and property and the manipulation of vegetation communities and animal habitats. It is also concerned with the management of unscheduled fires which arise from natural or human causes.

New England National Park contains large areas of fire sensitive rainforest. If burnt the rainforest suffers significant damage and degradation. At the same time its nature renders it an effective barrier to fire spread except in the most extreme, though infrequent fire seasons.

In close association with the rainforest and occupying a considerable area of the park are the sclerophyll communities. Some of these communities such as the dry sclerophyll forests, scrubs and dry heathlands are regarded as needing fire every ten to twenty years to maintain vigour and density. In the case of the dry sclerophyll forests of the Point Lookout area, a long fire free period has resulted in the senescence of understorey shrubs and their replacement by coral fern.

For other communities such as the wet sclerophyll forests, woodlands, wet heathlands, sedgeland and mallee-heathlands, there is insufficient information to identify their fire requirements. However fire at infrequent intervals and affecting only localised areas is unlikely to cause significant damage.

Incidence of pre-historic fire in the park is likely to have been low. This is still the case for most of the park. The exceptions are the dry eucalypt forests below the escarpment in the east and south and the narrow plateau area to the north and north-east of Point Lookout. In both areas, fires originating on adjacent grazing properties periodically escape into the park. Of particular concern is damage to the margins of plateau rainforest which is the habitat of the rare and endangered rufous scrub-bird.

The occurrence of fire in the park has the potential to alter the distribution of both rainforest and sclerophyll forest. The status of both communities is unclear so fire management will continue to emphasise the early suppression of all unscheduled fire.

Management trails within the park give the district a range of options for the monitoring of fires, maintaining a natural fire regime, and for suppression of fire where warranted.

Two currently established fire management trails in the park will continue to be maintained. These are:

- * Robinsons Knob Trail - crossing the park on the water-shed between the Bellinger and Macleay Rivers;

- * Cliffs Trail - following the south-western boundary of the park.

Grass Tree Trail is to be managed as a walking route from the Robinsons Knob Trail to Sunday Creek (q.v. p 18).

The trail system links with trails in adjacent state forests and private lands and provides access for fire prevention and control.

Fire presents a potential threat to land uses adjacent to the park including agricultural, settlement and forestry. It therefore needs to be managed in terms of potential impacts on life and property, both inside and outside the

park, in addition to its use for the management of natural and cultural resources.

Fire management strategies need to be developed from a co-operative approach between local fire management authorities. The basis for co-operation is provided by the Bushfires Act, 1979, and implemented at the local level by Shire Bushfire Protection Committees.

With the application of computer technology, the prediction of fire behaviour in terms of intensity, rate of spread, and extent, has greatly improved. Computerised systems for fire prediction within the park are available and will provide an invaluable tool for fire planning, prevention and suppression. They are dependent on the collection of detailed information on the fuels, terrain, weather and fire history of the park.

Policies

* Fire management will aim to protect life and property within and adjacent to the park.

* Following preparation of a fire management plan, fire will be used to manage the natural and cultural resources of the park in accordance with established prescriptions.

* Fires occurring from lightning will be managed in accordance with established fire prescriptions.

Actions

* A fire management plan will be prepared to assist implementation of fire management policies.

* Information on the responses of individual plants and animals to fire will be used to develop and where necessary modify fire prescriptions.

* Records of fire occurrence will be maintained with particular emphasis on detailed mapping, and the recording of frequency, seasonability and intensity of fire.

* Information on fuel characteristics will be progressively upgraded.

* Robinsons Knob and Cliffs management trails within the park will be maintained. No new permanent trails will be constructed for fire management. Temporary trails and fire breaks will be rehabilitated after use.

4.1.5 Wilderness

New England National Park contains a substantial area that meets the requirements for wilderness as specified in the Wilderness Act, 1987, viz.:

- the area is, together with its plant and animal communities, in a state that has not been substantially modified by humans and their works or is capable of being restored to such a state;

- the area is of a sufficient size to make its maintenance in such a state feasible; and

- the area is capable of providing opportunities for solitude and appropriate self-reliant recreation.

The wilderness area comprises the rugged gullies and ridges of the headwaters of the Bellinger River and Five Day Creek and embraces most of the park. The extent of the wilderness covering about 28 000 ha, is identified in diagram 2 of this plan.

Robinsons Knob and Grass Tree Ridge management trails traverse the wilderness area. A short spur trail from Grass Tree Ridge trail provides access to the old Point Lookout antimony mine.

Policies

* Management of the wilderness area will be characterised by a minimum of regulations, facilities and services.

* Essential management trails will be the only established routes within the wilderness area.

* Vehicles will only be permitted within the wilderness area for essential management or rescue operations.

Actions

- * The wilderness area outlined in Diagram 2 will be declared under Section 59 of the National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974.
- * The Grass Tree Trail will be managed as a walking route.
- * The Robinsons Knob Trail will be maintained for emergency management vehicular use.
- * A brochure on wilderness walks with information on walking routes, camping sites and watering points will be prepared.

4.2. CULTURAL RESOURCES

The park straddles the headwaters of the Bellinger and Macleay Rivers, the catchments of which closely correspond with the former territories of the Gumbaingerrri and Thungutti tribes respectively. The principal traditional information the Aboriginal communities have about the park refers to Point Lookout, a local peak situated on the upper watershed of the Bellinger and Macleay Rivers. The peak is linked through a network of stories to other places lower in the Macleay Valley but its importance is assured by virtue of its place as an outlier in the tribal territories.

The present archaeological evidence of the prehistoric use of the escarpment forests is minimal. This is partly a function of the absence of systematic archaeological survey in the park, but it is also reasonable to suppose on the basis of evidence elsewhere in northern forests that the material culture of rainforest use is elusive, sometimes cryptic, and often has been selectively impacted by forestry operations. Nonetheless a typical suite of site types would include river campsites, stone quarries and workshops, shelter deposits, and ceremonial sites. Campsites are located primarily on terraces adjacent to perennial streams, although stonetool workshops also occur on ridges and saddles in higher locations away from water. These latter sites are susceptible to impacts from road making and forestry operations, as are the sites on the terraces of the upper Bellinger River.

There is no satisfactory chronology for the Aboriginal use of the upper catchments of the North Coast rivers, although it is known that many hinterland resources, including the escarpment forests, came under increasing use in the mid Holocene. This lack of adequate dating of the hinterland cultural sequences is symptomatic of the general under development of prehistoric research in this area.

European settlement and industry has resulted in impacts that are characterised by locally intense alterations to the forests and land formations. Mining of antimony between 1900 and 1954, in which up to 40 miners were housed on the cleared slopes above the Platypus Creek, has left a significant historical resource (mine workings, buildings, a tramway and machinery) located in a remote part of the park. The rugged topography of the park prevented the exploitation of timber on any significant scale. Lack of finances encouraged the Park Trust to allow limited selective logging for Red Cedar in the 1950's.

The early park reservation has resulted in the successive construction of administrative and recreational buildings and park facilities, mostly on the western plateau margin of the park. These buildings and walking tracks have gathered local historical significance due mainly to the relatively long tenure of the early Trust Rangers and their associations with the dwellings and tracks.

Policies

* Structures, objects and sites of cultural significance will be conserved so as to retain or recover the cultural significance of the resource and provide for its security, maintenance and future.

* Understanding and appreciation of the cultural resource will be promoted through interpretation.

* The local Thungutti and Gumbaingerrri Aboriginal communities will be consulted in the development of policy for Aboriginal sites.

Actions

Aboriginal Cultural Resource

* A program for survey and analysis of Aboriginal cultural relics will be instituted.

Historic Cultural Resource

* A conservation plan will be prepared for the antimony mine and precinct.

* The history of the management of the park will be prepared and exhibited at the proposed Banksia Point Field Study Centre (refer section 4.4.2).

* The antimony mine and precinct will be interpreted in a way which promotes wilderness values of the park.

4.3 RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

New England National Park provides a significant and long established component of the outdoor recreation opportunities on the New England escarpment. The park provides for a diversity of recreation activities in a natural setting including picnicking, bushwalking, camping and low key accommodation. The park attracts about 60 000 visitors per year, predominantly from the New England Tableland and North Coast Regions.

The potential for tourism development in New England National Park is constrained by access limitations reflecting both the dissected topography of the park and the location of park boundaries.

4.3.1 Vehicular Access

Vehicular access for most park visitors is provided by the Point Lookout Road classified as a Tourist Road (TR4002), under the Main Roads Act. The road is unsealed for all but the last one kilometre to Point Lookout. Located in an area of high rainfall area the unsatisfactory condition of the road deters visitors and results in continual disturbance to roadside plant communities. As a classified road, maintenance and improvement funding is the responsibility of the State Government through the Department of Main Roads, with works responsibility delegated to Dumeresq Shire Council.

Short spur roads maintained by the Service, provide access from the Point Lookout Road, to facilities at Banksia Point, Berarngutta, Thungutti, and Wrights Lookout carpark.

The Black Scrub in the north eastern section of the park is an important rainforest conservation area within the New England wilderness area. The edge of the escarpment in the vicinity of Little Murray Lookout potentially offers important opportunities for visitors to view the rainforest and the wilderness and to gain relatively easy access to them. The Black Scrub is traversed by an old survey track which runs from the escarpment to the Bellinger River thus offering a walking route across the wilderness.

The Brinerville-Thora Road provides vehicle access to the Upper Bellinger River and the vicinity of the eastern end of the park. The road is maintained to within one kilometre of the park boundary by the Bellingen Shire Council. Beyond, to the derelict Dardanelles Bridge, the road negotiates difficult terrain and receives limited maintenance from landholders dependent on property access. East of the Dardanelles Bridge the road borders the park for one kilometre.

The remote and scenic features of the Upper Bellinger River attract visitors during the summer period primarily for river based activities. The rugged terrain and the wilderness condition of the park in this locality provide a scenic backdrop to river activities. The standard of the existing road and the dissected topography of the adjoining park however restricts potential for increasing recreational development.

The southern section of the park is bordered by an access system of roads and trails through state forest and private land. The access system primarily services adjoining land. The development of recreational facilities here would conflict with protection of the adjoining wilderness area. From this network Cliffs Trail traverses the southwest boundary of the park, providing access for fire management and to neighbouring land. Recreational vehicle use of Cliffs Trail also conflicts with protection of identified wilderness values.

Policies

* To provide continued support for the Tourist Road classification and upgrading of Point Lookout Road as the main visitor access to the park.

* To develop access routes to localities suited for recreational development.

Actions

* Encourage sealing of the remainder of the Point Lookout Road.

* Investigate with the aim of establishing a suitable lookout and picnic facilities in the vicinity of Little Murray and locate a walking route down the Black Scrub Ridge.

* Maintain existing Service roads in the Point Lookout area.

* Maintain Cliffs Trail for management and adjacent landholders access.

4.3.2 Walking Tracks

The established park walking track system centered at Point Lookout consists of a network of about 20 km of formed track and incorporates two lookout platforms. The walking tracks enable visitors to experience sub-alpine woodland, eucalypt forest and rainforest in close proximity.

The escarpment topography, surface materials and the high rainfall present difficulties for track location and maintenance. Considerable attention has been given to drainage, nevertheless sections of the walking track system are difficult to maintain.

Management trails provide an established extension of the walking track system east from the Point Lookout road area into the park wilderness.

A walking route is a barely perceptible footway for well equipped and experienced walkers. Use is infrequent and no special construction is normally undertaken other than to overcome particular obstacles. The route may be marked if necessary.

Policy

* To maintain a walking track system in the Point Lookout Road area.

Actions

* The walking track from Point Lookout carpark to the lookout platform will be re-routed and hard surfaced to provide access for elderly and disabled visitors.

* All walks in the park will be graded according to difficulty and such information will be displayed at entry points to tracks and routes.

* Track markers will be installed on those walking routes where visitors often experience navigation problems.

4.3.3 Camping and Accommodation

Camping facilities are provided both in the park at Thungutti near Point Lookout and two kilometres to the west and adjacent to the park at the Little Styx River. Nearby Cathedral Rock National Park also provides camping facilities.

Low key facilities at Thungutti provide for car based and walk-in camping. There is the potential at Thungutti to provide for expansion of camping facilities. This camping area is unsuitable for caravans.

The Service also provides low key camping facilities on Crown Land at the Little Styx River through a long standing arrangement with the Armidale Pasture Protection Board. These facilities provide for caravan and for overflow camping from Thungutti.

Weather conditions in the high rainfall plateau edge are often unfavourable for camping. Throughout the rest of the park the lack of access and suitable sites restricts the potential for additional car based camping.

Three cabins, providing accommodation for up to twenty-four people, are located at Banksia Point in the Point Lookout area. Basic accommodation is provided at Toms Cabin and self-contained facilities are provided at the Chalet and the Residence. Toms Cabin and the Chalet were established as an alternative to camping for visitors at Point Lookout. The Residence was provided for staff accommodation which is not required at present.

The continued provision of cabin accommodation is an unacceptable commitment on existing staff and financial resources. The immediate area is unsuitable for additional cabin development to a level to be economically viable. Suitable sites for a commercial development are located adjacent to the park within easy access of Point Lookout and the park walking track system.

Policies

- * To maintain low key camping facilities in the Point Lookout area.
- * To encourage the development of commercial cabin style accommodation on land adjacent to the park near the Point Lookout Road and integration of the development with the park walking track and interpretation facilities.
- * To maintain cabin accommodation within the park subject to the provision of adequate funds, requirements for staff accommodation and alternative accommodation not being provided in the Point Lookout locality.

Actions

- * Redesign Thungutti camping area and provide for a small increase in the number of sites for car based camping.
- * Encourage the development of commercial cabin style accommodation adjacent to the park near the Point Lookout road.

4.3.4 Day Use and Parking Facilities

Day use and parking facilities are provided at Point Lookout, Berarngutta and Banksia Point on the plateau area accessed by the Point Lookout Road. The facilities provide picnic grounds and, together with parking areas at Toms Cabin and the park entrance, provide access to the walking track system.

Existing day use and parking facilities in the Point Lookout Road area fully utilise the capacity of the narrow park plateau to provide a high quality park setting for day visitors.

Provision of access to the Black Scrub area (q.v. p 21) will require the establishment of day use and parking facilities on the escarpment. Suitable sites for these facilities are limited in the park but may be provided in the vicinity of Little Murray.

Policies

- * To maintain existing day facilities within the park.
- * Provide additional day use facilities on the park perimeter to encourage visitors to experience and understand a wider range of park environments.

4.4 MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

4.4.1 Management Facilities

Located within the park are a number of existing facilities necessary for implementation of park management. These facilities include a staff residence, workshop/depot, loading ramp, park management trails and access to the facilities of other organisations.

Policies

- * Adequate staff accommodation and a workshop/depot for park management will be maintained in the Point Lookout Road area of the park.
- * The park management trail system will be maintained in a trafficable condition, for Service access and for other organisations with authorised facilities and activities.

4.4.2 Interpretation and Environmental Education

Interpretation and environmental education assists protection of natural and cultural features and is a major aspect of managing public use. There is also a strong public expectation that information about the park and its features will be readily available. New England National Park has a significant role to play in the community as a resource for environmental study and education.

Appreciation, understanding and use of a wide range of park environments can be achieved most effectively by increasing interpretation programs in the Point Lookout area which is accessible to most park visitors.

Policies

- * Direct interpretation and environmental education programs to provide appreciation, understanding and use of a wide range of environments and features throughout the park.
- * The Point Lookout area will be the focus for expanded interpretation and environmental education programs.

Actions

- * An unsupervised field study centre will be developed in the old park office at Banksia Point.
- * Interpretative displays incorporating a park map will be established at Thungutti camping area, and at the park entrance on the Point Lookout Road.
- * Interpretation of the walking track system will be improved.

4.4.3 Research and Teaching

The function of research in the park is to assist the understanding of its resources, use and effective management. The park has long been important to research and educational institutions in Armidale.

For the effective management of research and teaching activities in the park there are three important components:

(i) establishment of priorities for research projects and monitoring programs which reflect park management needs;

(ii) establishment of a system for the documentation and dissemination of research results and the management of research and educational programs through controls on all such activities, whether carried out by the Service or by other agencies or people; and

(iii) application of criteria and conditions, so that the natural values and features preserved in the park, and other management objectives are not compromised.

Policies

* All research and teaching programs will be subject to Service policy and procedures for the granting of permits, conduct of research and the production of results.

* Research in New England National Park will be encouraged into the protection, conservation and preservation of the natural and cultural resources.

Action

- * A priority list of research needs for the park will be prepared.

4.4.4 Alien Uses

A number of government organisations occupy or use lands reserved as part of New England National Park. These works, facilities and operations affect the natural and cultural features and recreation opportunities of the park to varying degrees. All such works, facilities and operations require a lease, licence or easement under the National Parks and Wildlife Act.

The three current occupancies are:

- Department of Transport and Communication's tower and building on the escarpment edge north of Point Lookout.
- Electricity Commission of NSW's access through the park to a communication tower located next to the park boundary; and
- Department of Main Road's Tourist Road in the park running from the park boundary to Point Lookout. Maintenance responsibility is held by Dumaresq Shire Council.

Policies

- * The Service will continue to liaise with organisations occupying or using lands reserved as New England National Park to assess the impact of, and necessity of each work, facility or operation.
- * For those works, facilities and operations found to be essential and for which no formal agreements with the Director of Minister are current, action will be taken to lease or licence the works, facilities or operations under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974.
- * For those other works, facilities and operations where leases and licences are not granted, action will be taken to remove them.
- * New works, facilities or operations proposed by any organisation or individual will not be permitted unless they are consistent with the purpose of reservation of the park.

5. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

This plan of management is part of the system of management developed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The system includes the National Parks and Wildlife Act, management policies, established conservation and recreation philosophies, and strategic planning at corporate, Regional and District levels.

The orderly implementation of this plan of will be undertaken within the annual programmes of the Service's Dorriggo District. Priorities, determined in the context of district and regional strategic planning, will be subject to the availability of necessary staff and funds and to any special requirements of the Director or Minister.

District programmes are subject to ongoing review, within which, works and other activities carried out at New England National Park are evaluated in relation to the objectives laid out in this plan.

The environmental impact of all development proposals will continue to be assessed at all stages of the development and any necessary investigations undertaken in accordance with established environmental assessment procedures.

Section 81 of the Act requires that this plan shall be carried out and given affect to, and that no operations shall be undertaken in relation to the national park unless they are in accordance with the plan. However, if after adequate investigation, operations not included in the plan are found to be justified, this plan will be amended in accordance with Section 76(6) of the Act.

Other lands may be added to the park, e.g. the catchments of Sunday and Scraggy Creeks. There are agreements between the Forestry Commission and the Service regarding addition to this land to the park. Such lands will be managed consistently with this plan.

As a guide to the orderly implementation of this plan, relative priorities for identified activities are summarised below:

Plan Priority
Reference

Action

Seek the co-operation of all relevant agencies to protect the scenic quality of areas adjacent to the park. 4.1.1 Ongoing

Introduce biological control agents for lantana. 4.1.2 Ongoing
Undertake remedial works to protect heathland at Wrights Lookout. 4.1.2 High

Protect from fire and disturbance known rufous scrub-bird territories. 4.1.3. Ongoing

Assist wild dog control programs. 4.1.3 Ongoing

Seek co-operation to protect rare and endangered species

in New England Tableland
habitats. 4.1.3 Ongoing

Undertake eastern bristle-bird
survey. 4.1.3 High

Preparation of fire management
plan. 4.1.4 Moderate

Maintain Robinsons Knob and
Cliffs management trails for
fire management

Declare wilderness area. 4.1.5 High

Manage the Grass Tree Trail
as a walking route 4.1.5 Ongoing

Maintain the Robinsons Knob Trail
for emergency management use. 4.1.5 Ongoing

Prepare brochure for wilderness
users. 4.1.5 High

Investigation and analysis of
Aboriginal cultural relics. 4.2 Ongoing

Prepare conservation plan for
antimony mine and precinct. 4.2 High

Prepare and exhibit history of
park management at Banksia
Point. 4.2 Moderate

Interpret the antimony mine. 4.2 Moderate

Encourage sealing of the
remainder of Point Lookout Road. 4.3.1 Ongoing

Investigate the feasibility of
establishing suitable lookout and
picnic facilities in the vicinity
of Little Murray Lookout and
locating a walking route down the
Black Scrub ridge. 4.3.1 Moderate

Maintain existing Service roads
in the Point Lookout area. 4.3.1 Ongoing

Maintain Cliffs Trail for
management and adjacent
landholders access. 4.3.1 Ongoing

Re-route and hard surface the
walking track from Point Lookout
carpark to the Lookout platform. 4.3.2 Moderate

All walking tracks in the park
will be graded according to
difficulty and such information
will be displayed at entry points
to tracks and routes. 4.3.2 Moderate

Track markers will be installed on those walking routes where navigation problems arise. 4.3.2 Moderate

Redesign and expand Thungutti camping area. 4.3.3 High

Encourage the development of commercial cabin style accommodation adjacent to the park at Point Lookout. 4.3.3 Ongoing

Maintain existing day use and parking facilities in the Point Lookout area. 4.3.4 Ongoing

Establish unsupervised field study centre at Banksia Point. 4.4.2 Moderate

Establish interpretative displays at Thungutti camping area and at the park entrance on the Point Lookout road. 4.4.2 Moderate

Improve walking track interpretation. 4.4.2 Low

Prepare priority list of research needs. 4.4.3 High