

Dangar's Lagoon

Dangar's Lagoon is situated approximately 4km South of Uralla along the Walcha Road.

Water levels at the lagoon often vary dramatically from season to season, but despite this fact, many varieties of bird species call the lagoon home. During wet seasons, large numbers of water birds can be observed from the bird hide, located at the southern end of the lagoon.

Over the years, more than 110 different bird species have been recorded at the lagoon. These include Great Crested Grebes, Blue-billed Ducks and Whiskered Terns. Swamp Harriers and Whistling Kites can be spotted cruising overhead, while Nankeen Night Herons roost in the dead trees. In nearby paddocks, you may flush a Stubble Quail, or set to flight Fairy-Wrens or Golden Headed Cisticolas.



History

Dangar's Lagoon is one of about thirty lagoons and swamps scattered along the Great Dividing Range within the New England Tablelands region.

The New England Tablelands were formed by the uplift of granite and adamellite intrusions approximately 250 million years ago. They extended from Stanthorpe in southern Queensland to the Moonbi Range north of Tamworth. The process of erosion formed a large, relatively level tableland dissected on the eastern edge by the escarpment line and encroaching gorges such as Apsley and Wollomombi. In some locations, the closure of natural drainage areas by sediments gradually formed shallow wetlands, swamps and lagoons such as Dangar's Lagoon.

Although there is little detailed knowledge, the use of these wetlands by local Aboriginal people is likely to have been extensive and seasonally important. These areas offered a plentiful and reliable supply of food and material in the form of aquatic plants and waterfowl. The wetlands and lagoons would have also provided a pleasant location to stay when moving through the area.

Transported in the uplift that formed the tablelands was gold bearing granites. In the 1850's, only five months after the first Australian gold rush at Bathurst, alluvial deposits were discovered at Rocky River near Uralla. Although further discoveries were made on the Tablelands in later years, the Uralla Gold Fields played an important part in the development of the New England Region. At its peak in 1856, the field had a population of five thousand people.

The discovery of gold, the establishment of the local pastoral industry and the subsequent growth of the Uralla township had major implications for Dangar's Lagoon. The necessary water for sluicing the gold working was taken from Dangar's Lagoon via a race, cut by miners through the western side of the range for a distance of two kilometres, reversing the Lagoon's normal drainage pattern from west to east. In 1896 approval was given for "Brown's Paddock Mining Company" to

increase the capacity of the lagoon and use the additional water for sluicing a nearby claim. Using horse drawn scoops, the wall on the eastern and southern edges of the lagoon was increased in height, greatly enlarging the available water capacity. Total cost of the construction of the race to carry the water exceeded two thousand pounds.

Before and during the gold rush era, the lagoon was an important source of reliable stock water for the surrounding pastoral runs. At that time, the area was known as “Salisbury Lagoon” and it was not until April 1925 when the lagoon was declared a Bird and Animal Sanctuary that the name changed to Dangar’s Lagoon. This was to honour Henry Dangar, an early pastoralist employed by the Government until 1827 as an assistant surveyor under John Oxley, then as surveyor by the Australian Agricultural Company to assist in the exploration of the New England area until 1833. Henry Dangar settled in the district and purchased the Gostwyck Station in 1835.

During the early 1900’s, the lagoon became a popular location for picnics, sporting events and social gatherings. As early as 1905, an Anniversary Day Swimming Carnival was held and this prompted calls for the area to be proclaimed a recreation reserve. In 1929 the Uralla Shire raised the level of the wall and again increased the water capacity. In 1932 and 1933 very successful aquatic carnivals were held on the lagoon. The Australian and Olympic 1500m swimming champion Andrew “Boy” Charlton competed in the 1933 Aquatic Carnival. A great amount of local interest was generated with over 2000 people attending. In addition to the swimming and diving events, there were boat rides and novelty events, such as the best decorated canoe, buoy races and a ‘canoe rough and tumble’.

In 1938, the lagoon wall was again raised to increase the water capacity however, subsequent floods had water lapping at the edge of the Uralla to Walcha Road, now known as Thunderbolt’s Way. In 1941, the water level was lowered by placement of pipes under the access road on the northern side of the lagoon.

In 1940, the lagoon was gazetted as a Travelling Stock Reserve administered by the then Armidale Pastures Protection Board.



In 1972, Dangar’s Lagoon was declared a Wildlife Refuge still under the ownership of the Pastures Protection Board. The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service prepared a scheme of operations to assist in the management of the area. During the 1970’s and 1980’s the eucalypt die-back, which had and still continues to ravage much of the native tree cover of the New England Region, combined with a number of severe droughts, took a heavy toll on the once extensive tree cover around the lagoon. A small planting program was undertaken by the NPWS and the local Apex and Rotary Clubs in the 1980’s and this was further enhanced by Greening Australia and the Harnham Landcare Group in 1996 at the southern end of the lagoon.

Although travelling stock still use the area when moving from one location to another, the lagoon is being managed to promote the habitat necessary for bird, animal, plant and aquatic life. In addition to still being a popular recreational area, the lagoon is also an important resource for environmental studies by local schools and other educational institutions.

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