

The Great North Road *The Convict Trail* Clares Bridge to Mt Manning

The Great North Road is a 240km convict built masterpiece constructed between 1826 and 1836 to provide an overland route from Sydney to Newcastle and the Hunter Valley. Much of the original convict built road remains in use today, although a lot of the original surface is well buried beneath bitumen.

Convict built remains, such as stone retaining walls, pick dressed cuttings, culverts, bridges and stone cut drains, can be seen when driving along the road, or when walking in Dharug and Yengo National Parks.



Top: Clares Bridge. Below: Sampsons Pass bridge remains, Circuit Flat Bridge, long view Circuit Flat Bridge

Clares Bridge to Mt Manning

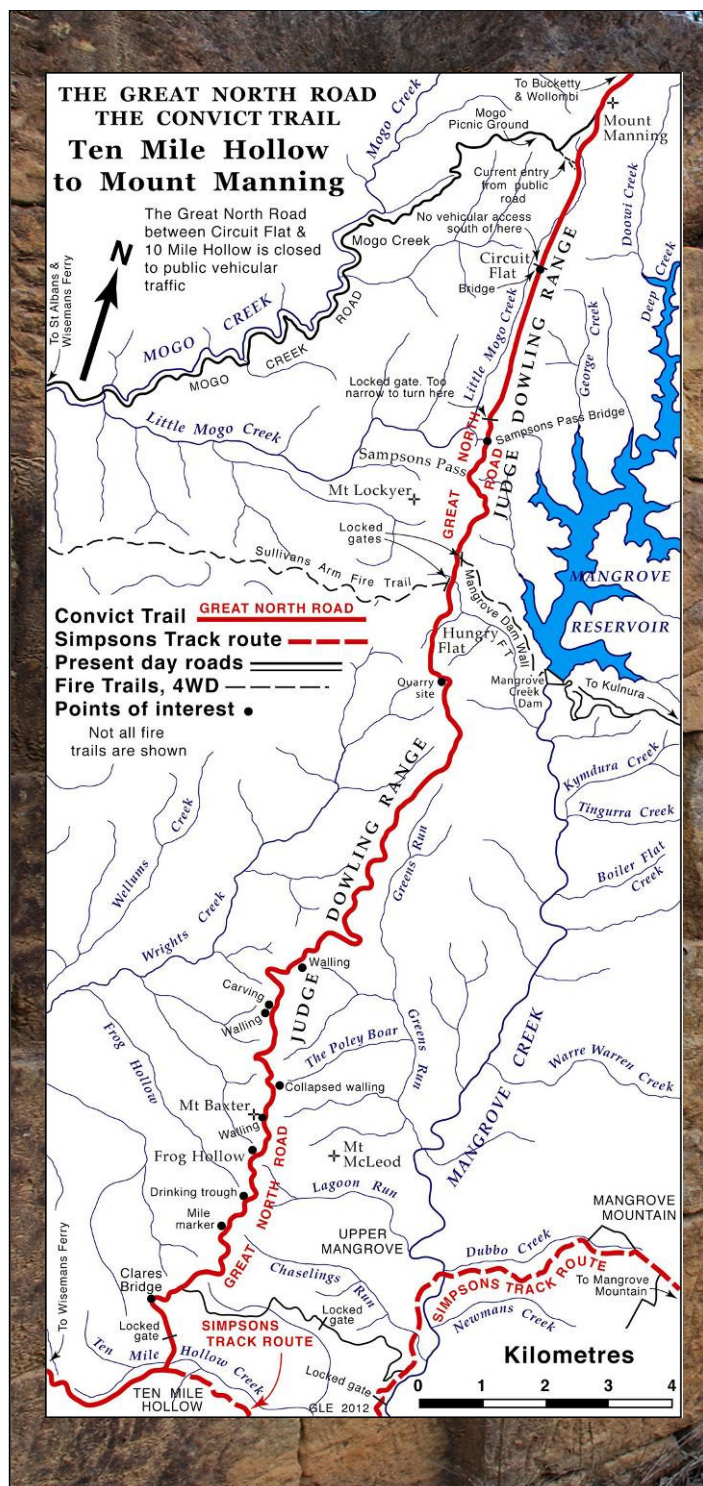
This is the most isolated and difficult to see section of the Great North Road. Although this section is surrounded by National Park the road itself is not managed by the NPWS. This locked, restricted entry section runs along Judge Dowling Range named after the Supreme Court Judge James Dowling who arrived in Sydney with his wife and six children on 24 February 1828 and next day was sworn in. Judge Dowling was not the only member of the judiciary to give his name to sections of the Great North Road. Mt Baxter was named after Alexander Macduff Baxter an ineffectual barrister, who through patronage was appointed NSW Attorney General, arriving in Sydney with his new Spanish heiress bride in July 1827 to take up his appointment. Mt Manning was named for John Edye Manning, a discharged bankrupt barrister, who was appointed registrar of the Supreme Court of New South Wales in August 1828 and arrived in Sydney the following May with his wife and five of his children. A fourth member of the NSW judiciary Thomas McQuoid, Sheriff of New South Wales gave his name to Mt McQuoid behind the Bucketty Rural Fire Shed.

The road forms the boundary between not only Gosford and Hawkesbury local government areas but also the State and Federal electoral divisions. Currently the locked road is so badly eroded that it makes regular maintenance impossible.

The Convict Trail Project has been attempting to restore the road surface to a sufficient extent that maintenance vehicles could drive through but this is proving to be a very slow, complex and expensive exercise. As part of this work occasionally two expedition equipped heavy duty 4WDs with very experienced drivers undertake the six hour trip. Last time both vehicles sustained damage.

This section is approximately twenty two kilometres in length and contains four sections of extensive and several kilometers of minor convict stonework. The extensive convict stoneworks are:

- Clares Bridge: The most spectacular bridge on the Great North Road, was built at the head of a semicircular



gully with long curved approach walls on both sides clearly visible from the road when approaching the opposite side. This isolated bridge appears to have been built to showcase the skills of all involved.

- Mt Baxter : Here the road was cut into the cliff face and supported on the outside edge by a long section of finely built wall.
- Sampsons Pass: This contains a long section of walling and the remnants of a narrow but high bridge
- Circuit Flat Bridge: Although of a much less scale than Clares Bridge it is believed this bridge was built by the same bridge crew as those who built Clares bridge.

Circuit Flat Bridge and Sampsons Pass are accessible from Mt Manning or Mogo Camping area.

Between Clares and Sampsons bridges the road travels up and over a number of passes as it changes from one side of Judge Dowling Range to the other. Much of the original work is still visible under the damaging overgrowth. Here it is possible to observe the work done by different gangs.

This area is only accessible to intrepid bush walkers and bike riders. Remember if you have an accident beyond the locked gates you will need to be evacuated out by helicopter, once someone else has walked out for help. Mobile phone coverage is only for Telstra 3G and is very patchy. There is no visible water available on the route and no food available near Bucketty. Push bikes will need to be walked over the worst sections, allow time for this in planning. There is a toilet and tank at Ten Mile Hollow and Mogo Camping Area. There is open space for camping at Hungry Flat.

A wonderful walk to Sampsons Pass in a completely isolated wilderness area can be had just one hour forty five minutes north of Sydney

If walking or riding in/through this section make sure someone knows exactly where you are going and your expected time of return. Always carry water, emergency rations, weather protection, a space blanket, a box of matches and a tyre repair kit and bike pump if riding.

THE CONVICT TRAIL

The Convict Trail is the name for The Great North Road, the surrounding land, and historic buildings. The Convict Trail Project Inc. (CTP) is a community based organisation with objectives of the care, protection and promotion of the Great North Road

To achieve its objectives the CTP works with many partners, including the NSW Heritage Branch, & Heritage council, Dept. of Correction Services, NPWS, RMS & local tourism associations

The Project brings together community groups, individual members, tourism groups, State Government agencies and local councils including both Hawkesbury & Gosford Councils. For more information, including “conservation partners” visit the CTP website

This brochure is part of a series of area specific electronic brochures available from the Convict Trail website. The content of this brochure has been compiled in good faith but is published without responsibility in law or otherwise for its accuracy and without any assumption of duty of care by the Convict Trail Project. The sites are listed to allow you to appreciate how much evidence remains and what is supporting the road you are driving on.

Remember, do not trespass on private property. Many of the convict relics noted in this guide are used for traffic. You should only view them from safe locations.

When walking or riding in the wilderness go prepared.

For extra information purchase an “Explore the Convict Trail” booklet or visit the Convict Trail Website www.convicttrail.org.

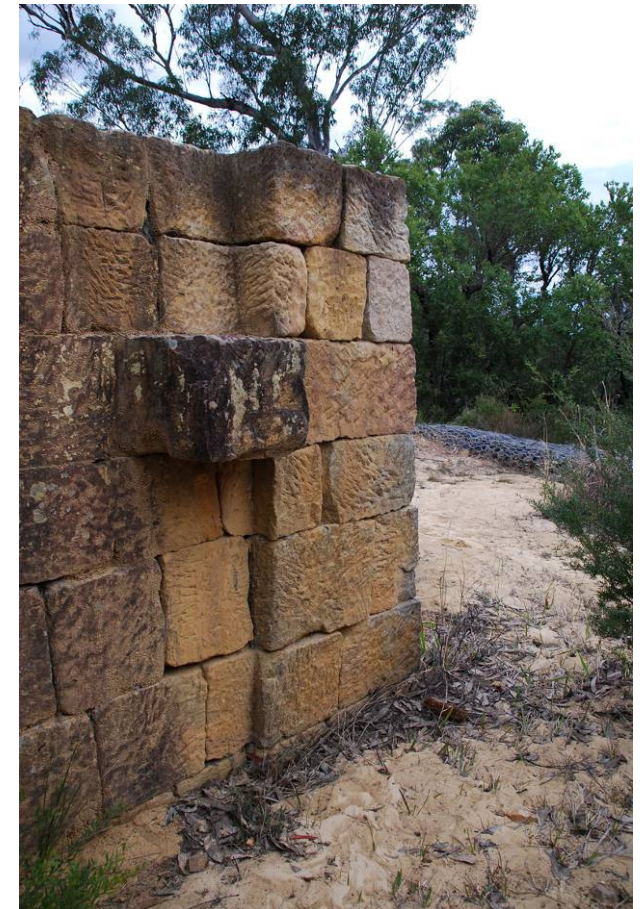
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Top: Detail Circuit Flat Bridge. L to R: Wing Wall Clares Bridge; Wing Wall Sampsons Pass; View from Sampsons Pass