

**SUMBISISON TO
TASKFORCE ON TOURISM AND NATIONAL PARKS**

Tourism and National Parks in New South Wales

BY

**BLUE MOUNTAINS TOURISM LTD (BMTL)
REGIONAL TOURISM ORGANISATION**

INCLUDING THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF:

**BLUE MOUNTAINS
LITHGOW
OBERON**

**MANAGERS OF THE
GREATER BLUE MOUNTAINS DRIVE**



Blue Mountains Tourism Ltd

Background

Who are BMTL:

Blue Mountains Tourism Ltd (BMTL) is endorsed by Tourism NSW and Tourism Australia as the Regional Tourism Organisation for the Blue Mountains, Lithgow and Oberon Local Government Areas. BMTL is a public company limited by guarantee and is a membership based organisation with 335 members as at 30 June, 2008

BMTL has a Board of twelve with eight representatives elected by the industry, one nominated representative from each of the three local government areas and a representative from the local Department of Environment & Climate Change. A representative of Tourism NSW attends Board meetings and acts in an advisory capacity to the Board.

The Board has an Executive Officer who is the Manager of the contracted secretariat service provided by Blue Mountains City Council Tourism Branch.

BMTL Mission:

To attract viable diverse markets, increasing visitation and provide quality experiences that motivate and create the desire to return.

BMTL Vision:

The Blue Mountains Region will become Australia's premier nature-based recreation destination, and an internationally recognised leader in sustainable tourism practices.

What does BMTL Do:

BMTL is responsible for destination marketing of the Blue Mountains, Lithgow and Oberon Region in both the domestic and international markets. This is achieved through development of an annual Marketing Plan in consultation with the local industry and ongoing input into the Marketing Plan through industry specific 'Target Teams'.

BMTL Regional Tourism Plan 2004 – 2007:

Developed in 2004 the Regional Plan was reviewed in December 2007 and the review recommended continuing the focus on developing experiences based on four core appeal areas of:

Nature, Arts/Culture, Heritage, Indulgence/Rejuvenation.

The Review identified that whilst a number of our objectives had been met or development commenced there was a gap in particular in developing indigenous tourism product.

Regional Tourism Product:

Whilst the Region has a diverse range of attractions, accommodation, day spas, dining, antiques, heritage and retail options it is best known for its stunning natural environment and easy access to panoramic lookouts, short, medium and long bushwalks of varying grades, mountain biking, abseiling, canyoning, guided walking tours and 4WD tours. Activities such as horse riding, off Park, compliment the nature based experiences in the Region.

The Blue Mountains, Gardens of Stone, Wollemi, Yengo, Kanangra-Boyd National Parks and the Jenolan Caves Karst Conservation Area which are all part of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, and the Abercrombie River and Turon National Park are all significant components of our local tourism product.

Relationship with our Regional NPWS:

BMTL and its industry members are fortunate to have a good working relationship with the various local National Parks Offices throughout the Region. In addition to a representative from National Parks on the Board (also Treasurer) a representative of the BMTL Secretariat is a member of the Blue Mountains Walking Track Project Industry Steering Committee. Blue Mountains City Council, DECC and Lands Department also have a joint Working Party to implement and maintain a Blue Mountains Walking Track Strategy and the BMTL is represented on this Working party by the Secretariat.

New Initiatives:**Greater Blue Mountains Drive**

In November 2000 the Blue Mountains National Park along with 12 other conservation areas were inscribed on the World Heritage List under the title Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

In December 2007 BMTL launched the Greater Blue Mountains Drive (GBMD) to the domestic market. This project had been developed in conjunction with NPWS, neighbouring Regional Tourism Organisations, local Councils, and in consultation with TNSW and Tourism Australia.

The GBMD was then launched to the international market at the 2008 Australian Tourism Exchange (ATE) in Perth.

The GBMD aims to provide a tangible tourism product to deliver the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBMWH) and its values to both domestic and international markets. This new marketing direction will offer a superior iconic touring route showcasing the World Heritage Area and guiding access to the diverse landscapes and experiences it contains. The Drive has its own brand identity, website and print collateral.

National Landscapes – a partnership between conservation and tourism

BMTL in conjunction with the local National Parks office and the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Advisory Committee worked hard to ensure that the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area was included as one of the first eight 'National Landscapes' to be launched by Tourism Australia at ATE in 2008.

The Chairperson of BMTL also Chairs the Greater Blue Mountains National Landscapes Steering Committee which includes the Chair of the World Heritage Advisory Committee and the DECC Regional Manager, Blue Mountains Region.

Preserving our World Heritage Values and Environment

As implied in its Vision for the Region BMTL is very conscious of the need to preserve our environment which is at the core of our nature based recreation industry and that any development needs to be done in a sustainable manner to ensure the preservation of our National Parks and World Heritage values.

However to optimise the potential of existing activities within the National Parks and to open the door for new and sustainable tourism opportunities there needs to be a more flexible strategic approach to present management policies and planning practices.

We are fortunate in the Blue Mountains Region to be working with National Parks officers who have a proactive and open approach to working with the local tourism industry however in terms of being able to develop their own tourism initiatives/product they are often hamstrung by resource, capacity and time demands.

Tourism provides a very real and growing opportunity through the new 'experience seeker' tourist to enhance the visitors understanding of the value and role of National Parks in our society, increase visitation to the Parks and introduce more sustainable practices for tourism products, however a balance has to be achieved for commercial and private partnerships to be able to work within the Parks.

Submission on suggested Tourism Opportunities within National Parks

The following items are raised based on experiences largely in the Blue Mountains, Lithgow and Oberon Region specifically however a number of the issues would also be relevant to the broader Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area and in some instances could be applied to other areas of the State.

At the outset we would like to make it clear that BMTL has a very good working relationship with our local National Parks offices in Blue Mountains, Lithgow and Oberon and none of the matters raised in this document should reflect on our local offices.

We would also like to acknowledge that the Blue Mountains Region has been fortunate to receive a \$7million State Government grant over 4 years for upgrade works in various sectors of the Blue Mountains Region however whilst a lot has been achieved, in particular the upgrade of the National Pass to award winning status, there is still insufficient funds to manage the principle asset particularly, in high use areas, and continue the upgrade of other tracks and sites that would broaden opportunities for the experience seeker. These funds cease in June 2009. Often funds have had to be re-directed to reacting to asset failure rather than enhancing or developing new infrastructure. Many sites have suffered through years of under funding and substantial use.

If tourism within the National Park and increased visitation is to be a new priority, and done properly, then there will need to be as a minimum a continuation of the Revitalizing Sydney's National Parks program, or other new sources of income, to fund the development of new tourism opportunities. In the case of the Blue Mountains tourism Region ongoing commitment to the maintenance and enhancements of the substantial (ageing and often heritage listed) existing infrastructure that serves the visitor and community is critical as our local economy relies heavily on tourism.

Discontinuation of the Revitalization Program will leave the local tourism industry and the broader regional economy in a very vulnerable position.

The consequence of this will be reactive closure as assets deteriorate until they are no longer safe. This has an enormous economic impact on the region and a good example of this scenario in recent times was the closure of the Giant Staircase and Govett's Leap for extended periods in excess of six months.

Funding for National Parks

It is recognised that the issue of funding is an ongoing challenge facing all levels of government however current resource levels are insufficient to cover the costs of maintaining existing infrastructure to a world class standard as expected in this highly visited World Heritage area – now a tourism National Landscape.

Increased visitation and development of tourism opportunities will require sufficient funds for:

- management and maintenance of the principle asset/infrastructure
- inclusion of road signposting in budget considerations
- recurrent day to day management costs (as basic as toilet paper and cleaning)
- management costs associated with the urban interface, pest control and weeds
- adequate funding for marketing of existing product eg Blue Mountains Discovery Tours, so that they can start to provide a commercial return.

- seed funding for new opportunities over a three year period so that they can establish themselves in the market place and start to deliver a commercial return

Pay Parking: Is often seen as an easy revenue opportunity however as most National Parks have multi entry points there is not always the opportunity to introduce “Pay Parking” and there is always potential for introduced parking fees to act as a deterrent and displace visitors into other lesser known and developed areas resulting in greater impacts on the infrastructure and environment. This approach is not a ‘value-add’ to the experience and more effective ways of enhancing the visitor experience and raising revenue should be investigated.

However, should Pay Parking be considered as an option any profits should be channelled back into the local area for infrastructure maintenance/upgrades – not into consolidated revenue and this should be communicated in a positive way to the park users – eg they will actually see some improvements for their money and not see it as a deterrent to visiting the area. This is probably more relevant in today’s climate of high petrol prices.

Sponsorship Partnerships: Sensitive and relevant forms of sponsorship should be sourced and if possible the commitment placed onto a ‘waiting list or holding fund’ (or however it can be appropriately named and managed) for available opportunities when they arise. This would allow projects that may be falling short of budget to have access to the fund and with the agreement of the sponsor be allocated to a particular project to allow it be completed.

Example: Wentworth Falls precinct had to be closed for six months to allow major upgrade works to be undertaken, however due to higher than expected costs the toilet block and entry roundabout have not been able to be completed at the same time. Aside from the fact that public perception would be that after a six month closure all upgrade works would have been completed, it is possible that to complete the work, particularly at the entry, more closures may be required.

Had there been an available ‘sponsorship fund’ perhaps some of the funds could have been directed to development of the lookout area for example with the sponsor acknowledged at the Lookout, the funds earmarked for the ‘lookout’ could have been redirected to other elements less appealing to sponsors such as the toilet block. eg a camera company may have been enticed to sponsor the lookout upgrade. As core staff time is devoted to the project they don’t at the last minute have time to be seeking sponsorship at short notice.

Delivering on the Experience

Track head Interpretation and route marking

Consider: Ensuring availability of adequate funding for continual installation and maintenance of track head interpretation and route marking on more remote tracks or tracks with a propensity for high use by inexperienced walkers who could easily get lost.

This will also encourage wider use of the Parks if there is a certain confidence that there is less risk of getting lost and will enhance the experience seekers visit. In the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area a lot of walks go down into the valleys which are a very different experience for many Europeans who are used to walking in areas where it is easy to get a line of sight to identifiable landmarks for guidance.

Planning & Heritage Issues

Whilst the importance of maintaining Heritage values in the National Park is recognised there also needs to be a degree of flexibility in considering how these values are managed and most importantly a strong commitment to efficient resolution of issues, in particular heritage issues, so that prolonged closure of key sites is avoided.

A good example of this is the closure of Lillian’s Bridge at Wentworth Falls, near Empress Falls and the Valley of the Waters track in the Blue Mountains National Park. Closed now for nearly 21/2 years

– originally it was supposed to be 6 months – it has become a source of great frustration for commercial operators and visitors who use the area and an extremely poor public relations exercise for National Parks as a whole. From our involvement on the Community Reference Group for the Walking Tracks Project we believe that the delay has been caused by the lengthy process needed to obtain internal National Park approvals under the Heritage Act from elsewhere within in the actual National Parks department.

Consider: Implementing a process within National Parks where differing views on heritage items can be independently mediated to avoid lengthy delays in resolving these issues before the project can be moved forward.

Management and Planning for Infrastructure Improvements within the National Park

Feedback from the 2007 National Walking Tracks & Trails Conference was that Australia wide there is a shortage of skilled labour that can be contracted to undertake the construction and maintenance of walking trails to meet the standards established by National Parks.

In the Blue Mountains a joint program by National Parks, Lands Department, Blue Mountains City Council and Tourism has seen the development of a joint Walking Track Strategy which has enabled sharing of information and co-ordination of track works and interpretation across landholders. However due to the ad hoc nature of funding for all agencies and the reliance on grant funding to undertake many of these projects it is often difficult to provide sufficient ongoing work for contractors to maintain skill levels, particularly in stonework, or their availability for contract work when needed.

Consider: A strategic approach to employing/tendering contractors on a statewide or joint regional/landholder basis, which ever is more feasible, so that there is a more consistent availability of work to ensure that skill levels are maintained and contractors adhere to the standards set down and expected for the National Parks.

Tourist Signposting

Unlike built tourist attractions there needs to be a different set of criteria for signposting National Park sites and this needs to be consistent across the State. There also needs to be a commitment to including replacement of signs in any asset management plans for the Parks. The Tourist Attractions Signposting Assessment Committee (TASAC) – a joint venture between Tourism NSW and the RTA, have made numerous attempts over several years to commence some meaningful dialogue with National Parks on how to progress development of a consistent signposting policy statewide for National Parks. A member of BMTL Secretariat is the regional representative on the TASAC Sydney Sub Committee.

In 2007 Sydney Regional office of the RTA were keen to progress a pilot study for National Parks signposting, particularly for World Heritage areas, and to fund the signage however despite the efforts of Blue Mountains Tourism and the Blue Mountains Regional office of National Parks to progress this opportunity TASAC were unable to get a clear commitment from National Parks Head Office to progress the pilot study.

Consider: The role that appropriate and consistent tourist signposting can play in increasing visitation to National Parks statewide and how an ongoing commitment to developing and maintaining a relationship with TASAC can be established with a view to a pilot study being undertaken to develop tourist signposting, particularly in a World Heritage area with varying levels of Park access, facilities and user numbers. Whilst The Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (Greater Blue Mountains Drive) would provide a good opportunity the critical thing is that such a pilot project is developed as soon as possible for National Parks in NSW.

Licensing of Commercial Operators

The local management of the Commercial Operators Licensing ensures that those National Park staff who have intimate knowledge of the Park and reserve areas can advise commercial operators in finding alternate locations which assists in managing environmental and capacity issues within the Park. It also allows for some informal monitoring of service delivery (often through the local grapevine) of locally based operators and this should continue. However NPWS does not have the

resources to monitor all interpretive guiding and the accuracy and quality of the information being delivered – especially by out of area operators. Regrettably out of town operators often do not know the correct names of locations or in fact the history of the site.

There needs to be a way of ensuring that commercial operators continue to deliver quality, up to date, accurate and consistent messages when they are visiting specific National Park Regions and that everyone is telling the same story in terms of World Heritage values and that operators are aware of the acknowledgement that needs to be shown to local Aboriginal language groups when entering an area and respect the cultural interpretation of Aboriginal stories.

The risk of having poor or inaccurate information and experiences is that the integrity and professionalism of all operators then comes into question.

Consider: Developing a 3-4 hour localised training module, either in house or in partnership with an organisation such as TAFE, that becomes a requirement for all operators to attend before attaining their commercial license. This should not become overly bureaucratic or costly for operators and may only need to be scheduled once or twice a year as long as someone from each business attends each year. It would ensure that accurate and consistent information is being delivered and that operators are up to date with relevant environmental issues within the local area.

Consideration would need to be given on how this would be managed for operators who visit several different Parks however the quality of the experience and the respect for aboriginal culture needs to be understood by all operators. Alternate web based or hard copy training could be investigated.

Consider: How such a training course could be developed for the larger coach companies (inbound and domestic) so that we ensure accurate, up to date and consistent messages are being delivered to the visitor. It is often frightening what some drivers are overheard telling their passengers!!

Tourism Management Structure within National Parks

The State Government's recognition that nature tourism is a major drawcard for visitors and that there are opportunities to enhance sustainable tourism in National Parks is to be applauded.

However in considering the development of business partnerships it will also be necessary to consider how these initiatives will be managed within existing management structures.

National Parks have highly qualified and very dedicated people working on park management, conservation and in some areas relationships with Traditional Owners, however it would be unrealistic to expect those same people to take on developing business partnerships, marketing and communication plans, building and maintaining relationships with the local tourism industry, fully understanding the complexities of the tourism industry and enhancing visitor services as part of their daily role.

Consider: What management structures and skills will be needed to allow Parks Head Office and Regional offices to develop business partnerships and tourism within the National Parks and how will this be managed to ensure the link to sustainable business practices and the conservation needs of the Park service.

Specific Challenges for fostering Tourism in the Blue Mountains Region and Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

Fire Season:

- Regrettably the peak fire season coincides with the peak summer tourism season, particularly for the Nature Based Adventure Operators. The economic impact of bushfires on tourism revenue in areas such as the Blue Mountains is enormous – not just on licensed tourism

operators immediately impacted by the closure of the Parks but on the many and varied tourism and non tourism businesses in the Region.

- BMTL acknowledges that resident, fire fighter and visitor safety should always be the priority in any declared Section 44 fire or in any other fire situation
- BMTL acknowledges that often the media damage on the industry is far greater than the actual fire, and in many instances is harder to manage!
- Despite efforts by Tourism, National Parks and the local RFS in the Mountains to try and manage this the media preference for sensationalism continues – the Three Sisters ringed by fire in a promo for the evening news and fire updates, when the actual fire has fortunately never been any where near the Three Sisters sends a very damaging and misleading message not only domestically but internationally, often leading to cancellations for one to six months out from the fire.

Consider: Is there an opportunity for State Government to play a role in bringing about a sensible and consistent approach by the media to reporting through appropriate training more appropriate, rather than censorship, that provides a broader appreciation of the economic impacts of their actions on Regional areas, especially those with a high tourism profile.

- National Parks, Tourism and Council have worked closely to develop a more consistent, informed and regular method of providing accurate information to the local industry, licensed operators and Visitor Information Centre staff on the fire situation and Park closures and this seems to be working well.
- However what is extremely frustrating for many tourism operators is that often there may be a blanket closure of the National Park due to resource and management issues when in fact the fire front is a considerable distance from those areas of the Park used by operators (fortunately locally there have been times when some flexibility has been allowed for commercial operators)

Consider: Is there a way of safely allowing licensed operators to still use the Park in times of fire (when and where it is reasonably safe to do so) without giving the wrong message to ‘passers by’ that the Park is open

- Re-opening of the National Park after fire – a huge challenge for National Parks because whilst the fire may have moved away from the local area the walking tracks cannot be re-opened until they are inspected for damage and safety by NPWS. Unfortunately the NPWS staff who can do this are usually still fighting fires in other areas of the State often for weeks or months on end.

Consider: Is there a way of training local tourism operators who are frequent users of the tracks, therefore familiar with relevant safety issues, who could go out and inspect tracks after a fire and report back to a National Parks Co ordinator so that the tracks could be re-opened more quickly, similar to the system used in Victoria. It is highly likely that operators would undertake to do this work voluntarily.

Consider: Recurrent budgets being set aside for fuel management similar to those available for water catchment areas

- BMTL acknowledges that fire ignitions are out of the control of all fire fighting agencies and are often started by various means, however it would be reasonable to say that in the summer fire season the majority of fire ignitions, particularly in remote areas are started by lightning.

Consider: Providing Regional areas with the capabilities for ‘rapid response suppression’ of wildfire ignitions eg one helicopter permanently located in a Region, improved access to technology for identifying ignitions.

This would be increasingly important if more built assets were established within the National Park eg camps at Mount Solitary or Dunns Swamp and with the impacts of climate change.

Potential tourism developments within National Parks in the Blue Mountains Region and Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

Recognition of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area in the National Landscapes program as a “quintessential Australian landscape” requires that the Region now consider how it can deliver on that promise – how can the experience seeker access the ‘best of the best’!.

Already as a result of discussion with BMTL and observation of visitor needs, staff from Blue Mountains National Parks have developed a number of ideas with tourism potential for the Region that would enhance the overall visitor experience. These concepts would also assist in delivering outcomes identified in the Regional Tourism Plan and provide access to experiences that will deliver on the promise for the National Landscapes program.

Opportunity: Blue Mountains Discovery Tours

A great product, concentrated on school holiday periods, well delivered but inadequately marketed, simply because there never seems to be sufficient budget allocated to marketing.

The opportunity to participate in media and agent famils is often difficult because the costs of ‘bringing someone in’ has to be covered and there is insufficient contingency in the budget for these opportunities.

The program has to be very selective about advertising opportunities due to budget limitations. The Discovery Program has participated in the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area Education Program developed as a partnership between BMTL and industry operators and needs to be able to sustain the marketing participation in this program. However the Discovery Program cannot afford to participate in BMTL’s International Planner for example which would be a cost effective way for it to reach international markets – in particular groups.

Consider: Allocation of more realistic budgets for marketing and development of the Blue Mountains Discovery Tours and Education program.

Opportunity: Aboriginal Guided Discovery Walks

In high visitor areas such as the Blue Mountains there would be opportunities to develop daily walks from say Echo Point, Blackheath Heritage Centre and potentially Wentworth Falls departing at a set time each day that could capture both the FIT market and the coach market. However like any tourism business it takes time to establish the product. Coach companies will not commit specific activities to a scheduled program until they know it is reliable, sustainable ie will still be operating in 12 – 18 months when the brochure is released into the market. It takes time to build the profile and reliability of the service.

In particular an Aboriginal guided Discovery Walk or tour would have enormous potential at Echo Point or Katoomba Falls and more importantly provide a great opportunity for educating both domestic and international visitors about traditional and contemporary aboriginal culture whilst at the same time addressing the values of World Heritage and Park conservation.

It would also meet the gaps identified in the review of the Regional Tourism Plan.

If successful the project could be tailored to the needs of specific areas around the Greater Blue Mountains Drive providing opportunities for the six language groups that are part of the GBMWhA.

Consider: Seed funding for a period of three years for Blue Mountains National Park to develop a pilot program for Katoomba Aboriginal Tours/Aboriginal Discovery Tours.

Consider: Adequate budget being assigned to the project for marketing to allow it to be profiled in the marketplace, establish credibility for the FIT and coach market and actively pursue international markets by participating in programs run by BMTL and others, make sales calls on coach companies

and inbound operators in Sydney, advertise in various tourism publications and generally market the program.

Consider: The price point for this program needs to be carefully considered, it needs to be at a realistic level to create the demand so that should prices increase there is no risk of pricing itself out of the market, and it needs to be on a more realistic level with other commercial operated tours.

Opportunity: Development of an Iconic Overnight Walk with facilities enroute

As part of the Regional Strategy developed for the Blue Mountains Region it identified the development and use of iconic lookouts and walks as a key element in the development and marketing of the 'nature' experience. This is now more critical with our inclusion on the National Landscapes program and the development of the Greater Blue Mountains Drive.

Whilst the collateral for the Greater Blue Mountains Drive identifies a number of 'classic' walks the only overnight walk identified is the Six Foot Track. Whilst this is a popular overnight walk increasingly the experience seeker is looking for a more iconic walk that accesses wilderness, not necessarily along fire trails, and one that offers the panoramic views that are synonymous with the Region.

Through guide books and word of mouth enquiries are increasing for information on the 'round' walk from Katoomba to Mount Solitary and return.

At present the condition of the tracks in some areas are poor however there is no doubt that with it's close proximity to public transport and the hub of historic walking tracks already providing access to the area this has enormous potential to be developed as an iconic overnight walk. It would create the perception of being involved in a 'wilderness' experience and provide accessibility to a broader range of participants.

The development of environmentally sensitive 'base camps' along the walk would provide revenue opportunities for National Parks as well as provide opportunities to develop guided walks with private commercial partners or for National Parks to develop a specific Aboriginal guided overnight walk – that they may consider making available exclusively through National Parks thereby increasing the employment opportunities for local Aboriginal people.

Consider: Blue Mountains National Park have been successful through an internal program to secure \$50,000 for a feasibility study of this project. The Taskforce needs to consider how such a project could be funded through its development, implementation and marketing stages should the Feasibility Study provide a positive recommendation.

Consider: The development of this walk becoming a blue print for developing 'best practice guidelines' for other environmentally sensitive and sustainable NSW iconic walks and camps for private operator and/or National Parks. Currently we are falling behind other Australian States in developing this type of iconic walk (with or without facilities) however the advantage of this is that we can learn from their experiences and develop a better product for the market.

Consider: Should the project proceed that it be allocated a realistic budget for marketing.

Consider: What Government influence may be needed to make insurance of any built assets within the National Park affordable for the operator, private or public, given there is likely to be a perceived high risk, particularly from fire.

Consider: What strategies may need to be put in place to protect any capital investment in tourism infrastructure within the National Park from the risk of fire.

NB: A comprehensive outline of the Project was submitted by Blue Mountains National Park to the NPWS internal Tourism & Partnerships Award 2008 "Bright Ideas".

Opportunity: A renewed Destination - Govetts Leap, Blue Mountains National Park

Blue Mountains National Park have submitted a concept to an internal National Parks program for ‘bright ideas’ for a unique, sustainably built and commercially viable venue (restaurant/café) combined with an interpretation centre at Govetts Leap. A key element for this development would be that any revenue earned would be retained for continued updating of the interpretive display to ensure it remains relevant in today’s society with continually changing focus on different environmental issues.

The existing interpretive display at the Blue Mountains Heritage Centre in Blackheath is tired and outdated and as with any attraction it needs to be able to reinvigorate itself regularly to encourage repeat visitation.

One of the great potential elements of this project is that it could provide for a more interactive outdoor involvement with the actual site through the Discovery Ranger program, particularly for the mobility or sight impaired given its location near the Fairfax Heritage Track which is suitable for wheelchairs. The development of sensory audio features along the track for the sight impaired or elderly could provide a point of difference for this site over other Interpretive Centres about to be built in the area at Mount Tomah and Katoomba and create an opportunity for growing a specific niche market along with the general tourism market. Whilst this was not included in the original National Parks concept it is something that could be investigated through a feasibility study.

Consider: Providing funding for a Feasibility Study and Cost Benefit Analysis for this project.

Consider: Potential for revenue from any site specific venture to be channelled back into the site for development of interpretive displays and or interactive displays (not just in this Region).

Consider: Should such a project be considered feasible ensure that it has an appropriate Marketing Budget allocated to support it.

NB: A comprehensive outline of the Project was submitted by Blue Mountains National Park to the NPWS internal Tourism & Partnerships Award 2008 “Bright Ideas”.

Opportunity: Bringing ‘Life’ back to Hartley Village

This landmark historic site is well placed strategically to draw more visitors however other than school groups it’s ability to capture repeat visitation is limited because of the static nature and heritage values of the site. Whilst it is appreciated that any activity would have to take account of and be in keeping with the historic values of the site the reality is that it needs an injection of ‘life’ for it to be able to provide any commercial returns for either cost recovery of day to day operational expenses or ongoing maintenance costs.

Whilst the development of the Greater Blue Mountains Drive is a new initiative in terms of the touring motorist to engage them with World Heritage in fact the touring motorbikes have been using several sections of the Greater Blue Mountains Drive for some time as a ‘favourite’ weekend ride. In particular the ride along the Bells Line of Road between Hawkesbury and Lithgow, the ride along the Great Western Highway past Hartley to Jenolan Caves and Oberon and the ride from Oberon through Tarana and back to Sydney – are well known. Empty nesters and DINKS (double income no kids) who are now in a financial situation of being able to relive their youthful fantasies of purchasing high powered motor bikes for road touring are a strong growth market.

Blue Mountains, Oberon, Lithgow and Hawkesbury Tourism offices are in discussion about the development of a motorbike specific touring guide for the Region (and/or the Greater Blue Mountains Drive) and have had some initial discussions with the Road User Safety Unit of the RTA re possible sponsorship and the Blue Mountains National Park office re possible involvement for Hartley Historic Site.

Consider: Adapting the infrastructure at Hartley Historic Site to cater for the motor cycle touring market and vintage and contemporary motoring enthusiasts. Development of the infrastructure should be multi purpose so that it can be used as an additional attractor to the site mid week for the

grey nomads, international and domestic touring FIT market and if possible an interest for the specialized coach tour market – not necessarily the inbound coach market.

Consider: Once a Business Plan has been developed for the site on this basis and the implementation of works commenced then the lease for the café could be put out to tender again with some specific criteria to fit in with the theme. Consideration should be given to possible opportunities of working with other café's/tearooms in the Hartley Valley to ensure a good working relationship.

Consider: Should such a project be considered feasible ensure that it has an appropriate Marketing Budget allocated to support it that can also be supported by other partners such as the RTA Road User Safety Unit or in partnership with the café vendor.

NB: A comprehensive outline of the Project was submitted by Blue Mountains National Park to the NPWS internal Tourism & Partnerships Award 2008 "Bright Ideas".

Opportunity: Filial Bushwalk to the Blue Gum Forest

A concept prepared by Blue Mountains National Park provides an opportunity to increase visitation to the Park with the introduction of a program aimed at a potential new community of bushwalkers ie family bushwalkers, church, community or school groups to develop an appreciation of the Australian bush and the importance of National Parks, develop personal fitness, and encourage family based activities.

This concept also has the potential to be aimed at groups of single females or modified for international visitors.

The program would be aimed at families or individuals who have not considered venturing into the Australian bush due to fear of getting lost, fitness or uncertainty of what they might see/find eg snakes, spiders, etc

The concept for this project was for the Blue Gum Forest which offers the best of bush walking experiences: views, terrain, natural wonder and history – however it could also become a blueprint for developing such programs in other parts of the State.

The proposal has the potential to connect participants to Australia's bushland, provide a memorable experience and foster the Healthy Parks Healthy People concept.

Consider: Undertaking a feasibility study to assess potential demand and markets, cost structure, private and community partnership opportunities and whether revenue generation or 'community good' and increasing Park visitation would be the primary outcome for the concept.

Consider: Should the project be considered feasible ensure that it has an appropriate Marketing Budget allocated that can be supported by other private and/or community sector partners.

NB: A comprehensive outline of the Project was submitted by Blue Mountains National Park to the NPWS internal Tourism & Partnerships Award 2008 "Bright Ideas".

Opportunity: Mountain Bike Rides

Mountain Biking is becoming an increasingly popular activity both in Australia and world wide as identified at the 2007 National Walking Tracks & Trails Conference. Generally the most appropriate sites will be on either National Park or Council lands. Blue Mountains, Lithgow and Oberon are becoming well known for this activity and a number of rides have been identified on the National Parks website and included in the National Landscapes Program.

Whilst many of these rides are along fire trails eg Woodford to Glenbrook on the Oaks Fire Trail, Anderson Fire Trail, Narrowneck and the more recent development of rides on the fire trails in the Kanangra Boyd National Park there needs to be a strategic approach to how these trails are managed for this purpose and the potential impacts on the sites.

Consider: The opportunities to develop partnerships between Parks, Councils, Tourism and private operators to meet the needs of this growing recreational activity that has the potential to increase visitation to the National Parks and complement rides on other land users sites eg Council, Lands Department.

Consider: Options for improving the experience through trackhead interpretation, brochures and maps of rides that also includes information on minimising risk for the rider, shared users and the environment.

Consider: What influence may be needed to engage Sydney Water Catchment and Railcorp in considering options for appropriate and sustainable tourism developments on adjoining lands eg the potential to develop a Mountain Bike trail from Katoomba to Mount Victoria running parallel to the railway has merit however in some sections it adjoins Sydney Water Catchment which is not accessible to the public.

Access to Yerranderrie from the Wollondilly area is another good example.

Consider: What strategies may need to be put in place to protect any capital investment in tourism infrastructure within the National Park from the risk of fire or in some cases potential flooding of access roads.

Opportunity: Development of 'Luxury' Camping Facilities at Dunns Swamp

The Greater Blue Mountains Drive consists of a core route and 18 Discovery Trails – one of those is the Capertee/Dunns Swamp Discovery Trail.

This site has long been a very popular day use site for locals and in recent times has been growing in popularity with those tourists fortunate enough to find out about this very special place and it is attracting more motor homes, pop top campers and tent camping – this is likely to increase with the development of the Greater Blue Mountains Drive and implementation of Stage One of the Masterplan for improved access, expansion of day use and camping facilities, site landscaping and World Heritage interpretation.

The consultation process for the Masterplan would provide a good basis for developing a Feasibility Study for the site looking at opportunities to provide 'luxury' camping, opportunities for long term leasing of the site to commercial operators and associated responsibilities, economic implications of capital investment vs return on revenue and planning and tendering processes required for implementation.

The Feasibility Study would also need to clearly define the term 'luxury' and how that should be delivered or promoted to the visitor, or if in fact it is 'luxury' camping when compared to the perception it may create in the minds of some users – particularly overseas visitors.

Another consideration for a Feasibility Study would be the impact on the experience of current peak season traffic eg Christmas and Easter, whether or not a dedicated area is required for the 'luxury' camping experience so as not to erode the experience for the regular camper or motor home and the impacts of seasonal weather conditions such as fire and floods.

Consider: Development of a Feasibility Study, Implementation Strategy and Business Plan for the site on the development of 'luxury' camping facilities at Dunns Swamp and develop these Plans as a blueprint for potential private enterprise arrangements in other National Parks state wide.

Consider: Additional experiences that could be included at the site to encourage use of the 'luxury' overnight camping eg Aboriginal campfire storytelling, bush tucker or bush cooking lessons, star gazing, possum prowls, – provide and deliver a total experience, not just a luxury camp.

Consider: Should such a project be considered feasible ensure that it has an appropriate Marketing Budget allocated to support it and participation opportunities for other private sector partners.

Consider: What Government influence may be needed to make insurance of any built assets within the National Park affordable for the operator, private or public, given there is likely to be a perceived high risk, particularly from fire.

Consider: What strategies may need to be put in place to protect any capital investment in tourism infrastructure within the National Park from the risk of fire or in some cases potential flooding of access roads.

NB: A comprehensive outline of the Project was submitted by Blue Mountains National Park to the NPWS internal Tourism & Partnerships Award 2008 "Bright Ideas".

Examples of Potential Development enquiries that have been received at Blue Mountains Tourism:

- Operator looking for a suitable site to build Australia's longest Flying Fox ride to be made available to tourists
- Operator looking for a site to establish a luxury permanent campsite based on the type of luxury camp offered in South African game parks and the ability to involve local aboriginal guides in the project
- Ability to develop a 7 day walk to cross the Blue Mountains from Glenbrook to Lithgow Staying at B&B's or resort style accommodation each night with luggage transported on to the next location by the owners while the guests walk along the National Park fire trails and tracks – similar to accommodated walks in other parts of the world and Australia eg Great Ocean Road.
- Japanese tour groups seeking an opportunity to do some voluntary work that would provide them with an experience of undertaking some bush regeneration work
- Suitable land to build a six star eco resort - joint efforts by Blue Mountains Tourism CEO and Blue Mountains National Park Managers resulted in the Emirates Wolgan Valley Resort being established in the Region

Potential Opportunities with broader implications

- Consider what potential there may be for developing strategies that allow park users to offset carbon emissions
- Consider what resources including insurances, management issues, etc may be required to develop a program for voluntary bush regeneration or similar work in the Parks by overseas groups – ie an opportunity to get their hands dirty. Montague Island may already have this in place and it could be adapted for bush regeneration work.

Submitted on behalf of Blue Mountains Tourism