

Historic Gardens of Jenolan Caves

This paper was originally prepared for presentation at the (cancelled) 2020 ACKMA Conference by **Ian Eddison**. Ian is a former guide at Jenolan and is currently the Caves Engagement Officer, Wellington Caves, NSW. For reasons of image density and file management, not all of the photographs that would have been projected during Ian's presentation are able to be included.

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Abstract

Historic Gardens of Jenolan Caves

First prepared in 2010, this paper justifies the expenditure to maintain the gardens and study the flora of the Jenolan Reserve.

19th Century - turning the first sod

The discovery of Jenolan focuses on the capture of absconded convict James McKeown. McKeown was in a hidden valley in an established camp site with a garden. James McKeown's convict records show his trade as "Kitchen Gardener".

The establishment of landscaped gardens began when Jeremiah and Lucinda Wilson began hospitality services in the valley in the early 1880s. Joseph Rowe was residing in McKeown's Valley and had a significant vegetable garden, most likely growing produce for where he was a cook - in Wilson's Accommodation House.

In 1888, formal gardens were developed and, in 1898, Mr Maiden, the Curator of the Botanic Gardens, laid out new plantations around Caves House. Mr Blakely was gazetted as gardener in 1899.

One significant walnut tree, planted in 1892, became a feature in a children's book - "The Wizard of Jenolan". The timber of this tree was subsequently made into the reception desk for Caves House.

20th Century - significant botanical interest

In 1900, the gardens were handed over to the lessee of Caves House. In the Department of Mines Annual Report, it was said, "Irrespective of the attractions found in the Caves, the picturesque little valley in which the Caves House is situated is now one of the most beautiful spots in Australia."

In the Agricultural Gazette of NSW in 1901, there is a list of plants collected in the vicinity of the Jenolan Caves by Blakely and Wiburd. These specimens still form the basis of our flora list today.

In 1905, one hundred ornamental trees were planted on the slopes and, in 1906, more were planted along the road between Caves House and the Grand Arch.

In 1954, the Binoomea Cut was officially opened and the announcements included references to the gardens and surrounding "nature trails". It was said that "the tracks

at Jenolan will be among the first of their kind in Australia."

In June 1997, an ivy-covered limestone wall in the main visitor precinct was revealed during garden maintenance.

21st Century - botanical interest continues

As recent as 2010, significant plants have been located in the region - *Geranium graniticola*, *Ozothamnus adnatus* and *Myoporum floribundum*, to name a few.

I obtained botanical specimens for DNA analysis by the University of Tasmania as part of a study on the relationships of Blue Gum species in Australia. This study's results demonstrate that the latest botanical science findings that the flora of Jenolan Caves make it a fascinating and important site botanically.

The late Prof Elery Hamilton-Smith had been very passionate for the maintaining of the historic gardens of Jenolan Caves and wrote "The Maiden Gardens - a case for restoration" in 2010.

The current Director of Jenolan Caves, Jodie Strickland, is well aware, and supportive, of the historic gardens of Jenolan Caves. Among many present projects, the gardens around the Blue Lake are planned for revitalisation.

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Introduction

Gardens at Jenolan Caves have evolved since the 1880s. The gardens have been a feature for visitors to enjoy. Permanent gardeners have not been employed on site for decades and introduced plants have become bushland weeds.

When the original version of this document was produced in 2010, the gardens were tended sparingly. In 2020, more planning is occurring and more tinkering in the gardens does take place. Regardless of the causes for the demise of the garden areas at Jenolan, the main reason that hinders the reinvigoration of the historic gardens is the need to cultivate continually and tend the gardens for their living and seasonal beauty. This requires continued financial investment. Formal gardens require professional horticultural care - trained and qualified horticulturalists and gardeners need to be employed.

This article, "Historic Gardens of Jenolan Caves", is the gathering of historical references and contributions by many people - demonstrating their desire to see the famous Jenolan Gardens restored.

I firmly believe that it is the combined knowledge and skills of a New South Wales Government multi-agency approach that is required to reinvigorate the "Historic Gardens of Jenolan Caves". It is most likely success will come through such combined interest. With appropriate planning and funding to enable restoration and ongoing garden maintenance, this will be achievable.

I trust you find the information within this article grounds for further effort to assist the cause to reinvigorate the "Historic Gardens of Jenolan Caves".

Discovery of the Jenolan Caves valley

Jenolan's First Gardener

Dr Dan Catchpoole, Member of Jenolan Caves Historical and Preservation Society (JCHAPS)

History tells us that the first European to visit New South Wales famed and world renowned Jenolan Caves was a gardener. The story of the discovery of Jenolan focuses on two brothers, James and Charles Whalan, and follows their attempt to hunt down the "notorious bushranger" James McKeown in 1836.

James Whalan, eldest son of Charles Whalan Sr, serjeant-to-arms for Lachlan Macquarie was one of the pioneers to settle on the greater western slopes following the crossing of the Blue Mountains, establishing a farm at Ginkin, west of the Jenolan valley. It is reported that the absconded convict, James McKeown, was seen stealing Whalan's horse. With the assistance of his servant, Jeremiah Beale, and of a trooper, James Whalan tracked and followed McKeown into a hidden valley eventually finding him in a relatively well-established camp site.

The eventual capture of McKeown led in turn to the observation of the limestone outcrops which house the now famous cave system - which was later explored by Charles Whalan Jr who brought them to public prominence.

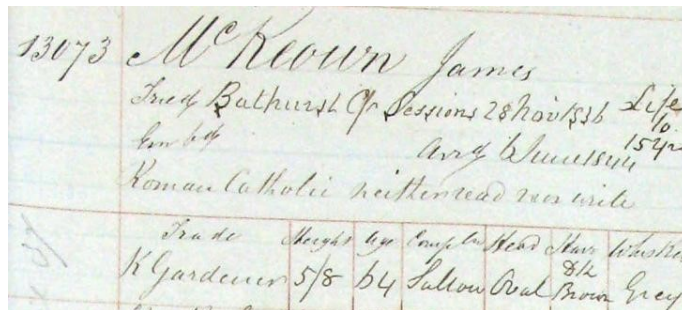
Being a convict, James McKeown did not receive the recognition of being the first European in the caves' vicinity. However, given the reports of an established campsite and a possible garden, likely growing corn/maize, McKeown undoubtedly had been there some time prior to this.

Indeed, reports indicate that McKeown had stolen a set of bullock bows with the intention to plough some land. Perhaps the horse was acquired to assist with this task. These bullock bows were apparently discovered by Jeremiah Wilson, the first "keeper of the caves" (or his brother Fred) in a small cave near the creek named "Bow Cave" as a consequence.

Until recently, little has been known about McKeown - much of the documented information being based on hearsay but not substantiated. Recent careful research has identified that James McKeown arrived in Sydney aboard the Asia4 on 21 February 1825, being assigned to Robert Smith of South Creek. Smith was building up land stocks south of Bathurst and presumably McKeown found himself crossing the Blue Mountains to help build this part of New South Wales. McKeown had a history of absconding, being sent to Moreton Bay (Queensland) for a brief period in 1827-1828. Following his capture at Jenolan, McKeown was sentenced to transportation to Norfolk Island for seven years, only to survive this most notorious penal colony to return to Tasmania in 1844 for a period of probation. His whereabouts following this time is not known.

Having tracked down a full series of records for James McKeown, we can now get a picture of who he was. Apart

from detailing what must have been a horrendous existence, yet one showing tremendous resilience to survive, we learn that McKeown had the trade of "plough and shears!" In further documents (see below) he is listed as "K Gardener" (kitchen gardener) further emphasizing his motivation for stealing a horse and some bullock bows - he wanted to survive and saw the potential within the Jenolan valley to establish a working garden.



McKeown's Convict record—supplied by Dr Dan Catchpoole

19th Century - Turning the first sod

Following James McKeown's attempt at a subsistence garden, the establishment of gardens at Jenolan Caves began, no doubt, when Jeremiah and Lucinda Wilson began hospitality services in the valley. This was probably when the first residence was built in the early 1880s. Photographs of this period show formed culverts, fencing and livestock and there is no doubt that the growing of vegetables was a priority.



Photograph from Jenolan Archives provided by Ted Matthews

The Mysterious Joseph Rowe

By the late Elery Hamilton-Smith

An Excerpt from BINOOMEA, The Newsletter of the Jenolan Caves Historical & Preservation Society. Issue 133, February 2008

Joseph Rowe is best known for his photographs of the Jenolan Caves. But there is more not known about him than is known.

The first references to him that I have found appeared in the 1880s. It seems that he was already resident in McKeown's Valley, but so far there is nothing that tells us

when he arrived at Jenolan nor where he came from. I once saw a suggestion that he had formerly operated a photographic studio in Sydney - but no photographic historian has found any hard evidence to support that. It seems he became a friend and helper to Jeremiah Wilson in the 1880s, both acting as cook in Wilson's Accommodation House and occasionally assisting with tours or other hospitality.

A press story (*Illustrated Sydney News*, 28 November 1889, p 21) tells of a free-ranging visitor who lowered himself into Frenchman's Cave on a knotted rope but then discovered that the rope was not long enough to escape from the cave. He managed to attract the notice of some walkers, who reported the problem. Rowe went to the cave immediately and alone, rescued him and took him back to the house and got on with cooking the dinner.

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Ian Eddison recommences the story:

No doubt, as a resident in the remote and rugged Jenolan Caves area, Joseph Rowe also grew his own subsistence garden. As a cook for guests in "Wilson's Accommodation House", it is likely he also provided produce from his own garden. Cavers have reported that on a late afternoon on



Ruins of Rowe's Cottage in 2010 (Ian Eddison)

Hennings Bluff, opposite the ruins of Rowe's Cottage, undulations in the valley can be seen as probable old rows of garden beds.

Charles Moore was the Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney from 1848 - 1896 (Janelle Hatherly Royal Botanic, Gardens, Sydney—personal comment 2002). During Charles Moore's time as Director, the Department of Mines records (1888) show that formal gardens were developed:

"Great improvements have been carried out at these caves in the way of making the outside surroundings attractive to visitors. Plantations and walks have been tastefully laid out and suitable trees, shrubs, and flowers planted. Altogether, it is intended to make the cave surroundings as attractive and pleasing to the eye as possible in order

that visitors, when not engaged exploring the caves, will be able to pass their time pleasantly in viewing the scenery and vegetation around. The improvements at the bathing-hole have been greatly appreciated, and consequently taken advantage of, by the visitors."

A decade later, the Department of Mines records (1898) has two entries stating:

"Garden seats were placed in suitable places."

"In order to add to the beauty of the surroundings of the caves, Mr Maiden, Curator of the Botanic Gardens, has been authorised to lay out new plantations."

The Department of Mines records (1899) also state:

"Considerable progress has been made by Mr. Maiden, Director of the Botanic Gardens, in forming and planning the area surrounding the Caves House. In connection with this work, W. Blakely was gazetted as gardener on the 25th August, 1899. For the protection of the plantations, wire netting has been erected, and active steps have been taken to prevent the trespass of stock. Hose and hose reels [sic] have been supplied."

In 2002, Janelle Hatherly of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney communicated, "I asked our historian, Ed Wilson, about Joseph Maiden's involvement with Jenolan Caves and he contacted Lionel Gilbert who wrote "The Little Giant" and who knows Maiden's life better than anyone."

Gilbert said that "Maiden had his fingers in so many pies like Rookwood Trust/Lord Howe Island Board etc. Maiden was good friends with Edgeworth David (the geologist) and both families went to the Blue Mountains for holidays. It is easy for him to imagine that Maiden went with David to the Caves."



The hard landscaping of walls, forged steel posts and stairs are the most resilient pieces of the Historic Gardens of Jenolan Caves.

Photos by Ian Eddison



One significant walnut tree, planted in the late 1800s (presumably 1892), has become a feature in a children's book, "The Wizard of Jenolan". This tree went on to survive 90 years before being uprooted in a storm. Considerable efforts went into saving the tree but these failed. The significance of the tree was such that the timber was milled, dried and made into a unique reception desk for Caves House. (Barry Richard—personal comment).



Photograph of the walnut reception desk by Clay McLauchlan

Visiting Jenolan in March 2020 to acquire some current images for this paper, I enjoyed half-a-dozen walnuts from another walnut tree in the same garden mentioned above. This was a regular annual treat of while I was guiding at Jenolan Caves.

20th Century - Significant botanical interest

The Department of Mines records (1900) state:

"The plantations having been completed during September, under the supervision of the Director of the Botanic Gardens, they were handed over to the lessee of the Caves House in terms of his lease (M. 00/21,372). Irrespective of the attractions found in the Caves, the picturesque little valley in which the Caves House is situated is now one of the most beautiful spots in Australia."



Provided by Dr Richard Medd
Quoted from *The Agricultural Gazette of NSW Vol XII 1901*.
Communicated by J. H. Maiden.

A List of Plants collected in the vicinity of the Jenolan Caves, by W. F. Blakely and J. C. Wiburud

"The enclosed list of Phanerogams and Vascular Cryptogams (including a few introduced species)

collected by Messrs. Blakely and Wiburud is printed as it will prove a useful basis on which to compile a flora of this very interesting locality. Mr Blakely was formally gardener at the Caves, and Mr Wiburud has been guide there for many years; the plants have from time to time been sent to me for determination, and the collectors are to be commended for their zeal in collecting so many, and for the care with which the specimens have been prepared. The work was purely voluntary, and carried out in their spare time. The specimens have been deposited for permanent reference in the National Herbarium, Botanic Gardens, and are of value in connection with the Botanical Survey of this State which is now proceeding."

The list, referenced above is not included in this document, but it is important to note that it still forms the basis of our flora reference list for Jenolan in 2020.

The Department of Mines records (1905) state:

"One hundred ornamental trees, supplied by the Director, Botanic Gardens, were planted by the guides on the slopes in the vicinity of the caves."

Could this be the planting of Sycamore which spread to over 50 hectares and is now the basis of a major multi-agency focus with volunteers? These efforts have significantly reduced this infestation – however, Sycamore remain and, as is usual in most bush regeneration projects, ongoing follow-up work is required.



The bright green Sycamore infestation is now been significantly reduced through a concentrated bush regeneration effort and the recent late 2019 fire.
Photo Chris Indyka

The Department of Mines records (1906) state:

"A further supply of ornamental trees, supplied by the Director, Botanic Gardens, were planted along the road between Caves House and the Grand Arch."



The Clarion Newspaper, Bathurst 12 November 1954.
Photo provided by David Hay

“NEW JENOLAN CAVES TUNNEL COMPLETED

The new man-made tunnel at Jenolan Caves (48 miles south east of Bathurst) will be officially opened by The Chief Secretary, the Hon C.A. Kelly, MLA today at 3pm. (Originally planned by the former Government Surveyor, Oliver Trickett in 1917, the tunnel was commenced in March this year, and runs for 400 feet through solid limestone. Its purpose to provide tourists with a smooth, gently graded path into the heart of the Orient and Temple of Baal Caves, which are probably the pick of the great underground caverns at Jenolan). Mr Kelly will also open the first of the new “nature trails” in the Jenolan bushland sanctuary. Described as “living museums”, nature trails are actually bush paths lined with attractive but unobtrusive labels pointing out the most interesting geological, botanical and zoological features. Although well developed in Europe and America, nature trails are still a novelty in the Southern Hemisphere, and the tracks at Jenolan will be among the first of their kind in Australia.”

“CAVES FUNCTION

The longest man-made tourist access tunnel in Australia, the “Binooomea Cut” at Jenolan Caves, will be officially opened next Friday at 3 pm. Official invitations for the occasion have been issued by the New South Wales Department of Tourist Activities and Immigration, Mr Kelly, will perform the official function which will include the inauguration of the “Nature Trails” network of pathways in the Jenolan Caves bushland sanctuary.”

The nearby walking tracks have been significantly improved in recent years, some with interpretive signage. Other walking tracks lack modern interpretive signage and some tracks have been closed altogether. Perhaps this stage of “Nature Trails” being “among the first of their kind in Australia” in 1954, can now be viewed as justification for reopening closed tracks and the addition of more interpretive signage.

In June 1997, Guide Daniel Bailey and I began removing an ivy covered limestone wall in the main visitor precinct under the direction of the late Senior Guide Nigel Scanlan. Some years later, maintenance staff member, Mark Simpson, built a new wall at the base of this area - to ensure a secure foundation would hold this area in place. No doubt many others have and will continue to tinker in the gardens. We need qualified landscaping and horticultural direction, year-in and year-out, to be successful.



English Ivy and Blue Periwinkle continue to claim the limestone at Jenolan, covering 430 million-year-old marine fossils; sending roots into the cracks; and splitting the rock in the natural environment and in early European landscaping.

21st Century Botanical Interest continues

The botanical list “collected in the vicinity of Jenolan Caves...” mentioned earlier may not be exclusive to the Jenolan Caves Reserve. Dr Richard Medd, a retired Agricultural Scientist, has spent recent times with me looking at the flora of the area. “As a community in an otherwise isolated area, travellers would have picked unusual plants which would have been of interest to the likes of Wiburd.” As recent as 2010, Richard and I found significant plants in the region - *Geranium graniticola*, *Ozothamnus adnatus* and *Myoporum floribundum*, to name just a few. This came about through my research and discussions with the late Keith Ingram, shared with Dr Medd, followed by field trips “in the vicinity of Jenolan Caves.”

One very reasonable concern about restoring the gardens is the possibility that more introduced plants become established as weeds in the bushland. The careful selection of plants and the continued maintenance of the gardens is essential in preventing this from occurring. This point was raised in an email by Dr Medd, when asked to contribute to this document.

PLANT BIODIVERSITY THREATENED IN JENOLAN RIVER VALLEY.

Dr Richard W. Medd H.D.A.(Hons), B.Rur.Sc.(Hons), Ph.D. Principal Research Scientist (Plant Ecology)(Retired) September 2010

Over the past 18 months or so I have been privately documenting and photographing native plants of the Jenolan River Valley. Inspired by the rich diversity of its tablelands vegetation, which contrasts markedly to communities on the western watershed of the Great Diving Range, I became increasingly aware of, and alarmed at, the extent of degradation.

Extensive tracts of tableland and montane forests cover the ridges and steep slopes of the Jenolan River Valley, made exceptional by remnants of sub-alpine and rainforest plant communities embedded in its rugged terrain. In addition, specialised plant communities and species adapted to limestone substrates occur on the karst formations. This blend is regionally (perhaps even nationally) unusual, making the Valley a valuable floristic province.

Documentation of the Valley’s flora is quite poor and dated. An old list, published over a hundred years ago (which Ingram revised and expanded but didn’t publish), indicates approximately 440 taxa, including several undetermined species, occur in the vicinity of Jenolan Caves. A search of herbarium records revealed in excess of 110 other species recorded within a five-kilometre radius of Jenolan Caves. During several recent excursions to the valley, I have identified a further additional 150 species, bringing the known flora to an extraordinary 700 species (approx.).

I have no doubt there are more still to be found.

About 130 species are introduced plants, a discouraging number of which are major weeds ravaging the Valley: e.g. *Vinca major* (Greater Periwinkle) in the riparian system along the Jenolan River downstream of the Caves and bushland around cottages and buildings; *Hypericum androsaemum* (Tutsan) on many slopes adjoining the River; *Pinus radiata* (Radiata Pine, Monterey Pine) encroachment within and noticeably around the periphery of the headwaters and along the ridges, to mention just a few of the serious invasion problems. A hefty number of these weeds are garden escapes; a poor legacy of past horticultural enthusiasm and disregard for the natural environment.

It is my considered view that the Valley's plant biodiversity is at considerable risk because of the mostly unchecked weed invasions, with ongoing degradation compromising its resilience. Of great concern is the number of rare and threatened species recorded in the area; at least one of which is now considered provincially extinct and another as extinct state wide.

Jenolan Karst Conservation Reserve is an iconic estate entrusted to the relevant State Authorities. My strong recommendation is that a thorough audit of the flora of the Reserve is urgently needed, as a foundation to developing a strategic plan for the remediation, restoration and long term conservation management of the plant biodiversity and vegetation communities, for posterity.

Dr Rebecca Jones of School of Plant Science, University of Tasmania has been studying the relationships of Blue Gum species in Tasmania and mainland Australia as part of a PhD project. With assistance from me, additional botanical specimens have been obtained for DNA analysis. This demonstrates the latest in Botanical Science studies continues to find the flora of Jenolan Caves a fascinating and an important site botanically.

Jenolan Karst Conservation Reserve is part of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, specifically due to the diversity of the Eucalypt woodland and the unique cave fauna present. (Dr J. James—personal comment).



Eucalyptus bicostata at Jenolan is an isolated population of 'Blue Gum'

English Ivy, Blue Periwinkle and Tutsan form dense mats and ground cover on slopes above what was originally garden and Sycamore has spread to around 50 hectares of the hillside. Volunteers have worked on the Sycamore invasion. The project has been coordinated by Lithgow Oberon Landcare Association (LOLA), National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust (JCRT), Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Management Authority (HNCMA), Sydney Catchment Authority (SCA) and Local Land Services. Contracted bush regeneration teams have worked on kilometres of the Jenolan River - targeting woody weeds (especially a *Deutzia* infestation). Contract bush regeneration on Sycamore removal has taken place. Unfortunately these works have come to a standstill. The JCRT provided more than \$9,000 of "in kind" support for Sycamore volunteer events annually during the active years of work to reduce Sycamore.

The author have collected seeds and had two nurseries propagate native plants to contribute to revegetate areas of Jenolan as part of the above weed management and landscape restoration. Personally, I have planted thousands of plants, often in my lunch break or after work in my own time.

Gardens and gardening have long been and continue to be of interest to people. In our region, the local town of Oberon holds an annual Daffodil Festival with private gardens open to the public, and a large, potentially world-standard, garden in "Mayfield" draws significant attention when open. The regional, cold climate Mt Tomah Botanic Garden is now the centrepiece for visitors to the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

There is so much interest in gardens that they feature in most media such as radio, television, social media and magazines. Tourism of gardens is significant internationally. From a modern-day tourism perspective, could the Historic Gardens Jenolan Caves, New South Wales, be transformed so that the picturesque little valley (in which Caves House is situated) return to be once again "one of the most beautiful spots in Australia"?

Conclusion

You are a "Stakeholder" in the Historic Gardens of Jenolan Caves, New South Wales .

I hope you will have read this document because of your interest in botany, history, caves or, specifically, Jenolan Caves.

There have been multi-agency efforts to conduct significant bush regeneration activities on the Sycamore invasion at Jenolan Caves. I was on the Steering Committee on behalf of Jenolan Caves. There have been volunteers, paid staff and contractors working on Sycamore removal before but never has there been such interest from so many organisations and individuals. A series of "Sycamore War" activities occurred resulting in significant reduction in the Sycamore infestation. The weed invasion at Jenolan Caves is not restricted to Sycamore. The weeds are escaped garden plants, a legacy of our history and of both flourishing times and hard times.

There is no doubt in my mind that, if our gardens were tended professionally and consistently, we not only would have a showpiece visitors would travel for, but we can also contain many of our weeds. This, along with appropriate bush regeneration techniques, can restore both the Historic Gardens and the World Heritage Listed Jenolan Caves Reserve's diverse Eucalypt dominant bushland.

How many qualified horticultural hours is needed to consistently tend the gardens? What resources are needed and where can we find the funds, year-in-year-out, to keep up the momentum?

Acknowledgements

The late E. Hamilton-Smith, the late N. Scanlan, the late J. Callaghan, The late K. Ingram, S. Melton, T. Mathews, P. Williams, C. Melbourne, C. Degotardi, E. Eddison, J. Hatherly, E. Wilson, L. Gilbert, D. Catchpoole, D. Hay, B. Richard, R. Medd, R. Jones, S. Reilly, J. James



Both images of Jenolan are from postcards from the late 19th or early 20th Century with the earlier image above

Supplied by Ian Eddison

