

“Maxwell’s Slab Hut” Kedumba Valley

Restoration & Re-use overview

A Blue Mountains Community and NPWS initiative



Background

The upper Kedumba Valley within Blue Mountains National Park was first settled in the 1860s. Itinerant cattleman from the Burraborang Valley took up partially improved bush holdings, moving stock in and out of the valley for the first 30 years. These holdings were sufficiently “*improved and demonstrated permanent occupancy*” that in 1889 the government surveyor granted title to William Maxwell. William Maxwell was the son of two transported Irish convicts. Williams’s father, Thomas Maxwell was charged with counterfeiting and transported in 1823. Williams’s mother, Elizabeth Osbourne, transported 1831 for steeling woollen yarn.

Three generations of the Maxwell family lived and farmed the kedumba Valley from 1860 – 1992. During this period of Maxwell family occupation, they constructed five timber slab huts and a number of utility buildings. One of these huts, the one pictured above, built in 1925 is still standing.

In 2001 a report into the huts heritage value and structural condition was commissioned. This report identified the hut as having state significance and possibly national significance, it also specified that urgent stabilisation work was required to halt the huts deterioration. These works were completed in 2004. In 2015 a report into huts condition and possible re-use was commissioned. This report recommended that the best way to preserve the hut, was to fully restore the hut to the condition and function as per the huts use in 1925. The adaptive re-use being identified as accommodation for “back country walkers”. To facilitate these new objectives, the National Parks and Wildlife Service is seeking to enter into partnership with a number of key

community stakeholders and persons, to raise funding, restore the hut and maintain the hut for ongoing community benefit and heritage value.

Heritage Value

Maxwell's hut has been assessed as having state heritage value and possibly national value. The NSW State heritage list, currently only has two huts on the list that meet the same heritage value as Maxwell's hut. Maxwell's Hut has been assessed as meeting all seven criteria for heritage listing. It is unusual that built structures meet all seven heritage listing criteria.

Heritage significance –

A) **Historical significance;**

Kedumba slab Hut precinct is an outstanding symbol of pastoral life in a place close to but profoundly remote from the main settlements of the Blue Mountains for most of the 20th century

B) **Special association with a group of persons important to NSW cultural history;**

The Kedumba Valley is associated with three generations of one family who were in continual occupation for over 100 years.

C) **Aesthetic significance;**

Maxwell's hut is an excellent example of vernacular bush craft which in isolated areas continued to be passed down through three generations of the one family. The timber detailing of this vernacular building is considered of exceptionally high technical/research/archaeological potential

D) **Social significance;**

Significant documented social history in relation to identifiable group and sense of community place.

The Catholic community of which the Maxwell's family belonged in the Burragorang and surrounding valleys was highly significant and tightly-knit. Scouts and the early bush walking movement have a strong association with the Maxwell family.

E) **Technical / Research Potential;**

The Kedumba slab hut precinct has considerable potential to provide significant information about vernacular buildings from 1890's to the 1920's and about life in an out-of-the-way valley.

F) **Rarity;**

Because of the combination of inherited vernacular skills in timber construction, the exceptional inaccessibility of the property and the loss of comparable properties through fire, demolition and flooding, Kedumba slab hut precinct state significance of a rare and endangered species.

G) **Representativeness;**

The Kedumba slab hut as an individual element within the precinct may well be the only example of its type, certainly as a 20th century built example.

State Heritage listing.

Adaptive reuse

It is proposed to restore the Maxwell's hut to a "standard of function" as of its construction & use in the 1920's. The hut would provide basic overnight accommodation for bushwalkers, similar to the huts in the Kosciuszko National Park. In view of State heritage significance and other circumstances of the Kedumba Slab Hut, use of the Kedumba slab hut should be pre-arranged/booked.

The proposed program of physical conservation works would make the hut habitable, secure and weather tight. Simple camp-style beds would be provided. Services and facilities, such as water, gas, electricity would not be permanently provided.

Community Benefit

1. The hut once restored will be listed on the NSW State heritage list and possibly the national heritage list.
2. The hut will have significant interpretive value in relation to pioneer settlement and way of life pre modern utilities.
3. The hut will form part of the recreational experience for bush walkers undertaking back country camping in the Kedumba Valley.
4. The hut will form part of the recreational experience for person's undertaking the ruined castle, Mount Solitary, Kedumba Valley, Jamison valley back country trail.
5. The hut will add another recreational experience/opportunity for visitors to the Blue Mountains region.