

Cox's Road Dreaming – Guide Book

A short review

From a colonial history perspective Cox's Road is celebrated as the first transport artery linking coastal settlements and the inland of Australia and deserves as a consequence to be seen as an historical artefact of national significance.

Therefore the new publication *Cox's Road Dreaming Guide Book*, a gift given to us in our bicentennial year by Greening Bathurst, and its project coordinator Dr David Goldney, with its detailed revelations about one hundred and sixteen historic sites right on our doorstep, is a momentous gift that will surely be cherished through the years ahead. There has never before been a publication about the crossing over the mountains anything quite like it, and the scope and quality of the work is just staggering.

The book takes the form of a detailed guide-book to a whole series of sites that lie along Cox's Road. Descriptions of these sites connect us to the ground beneath our feet through their natural history, their geography and geology, and through the physical archaeological evidence of the human stories of exploration and discovery, pioneering accomplishment, settlement and migration that are preserved in them.

An outstanding feature of the guide book is how it shows the heritage along Cox's Road from different perspectives. Many of the sites David Goldney and his team have documented, for example, are of special significance to the Wiradyuri, Gundungurra and Darug peoples, rather than the mainly European audience, as revealed through a telling of their stories and an examination of their places in country connected to them.

In this way Goldney and Greening Bathurst have restored some balance, at long last, to our understanding of the deeper meaning of Cox's Road which we are able to see now as far more than just a physical relic of our pioneering days, but as a history changing event at a unique moment in time that altered the futures of both the Aboriginal peoples and the arriving colonists and set in motion the fulfilment of the colonial dream which became modern Australia.

Reading the 116 place descriptions in this guide book, and the detailed background essays which accompany each of them, and referring to its superb collection of images, and examining its eight beautifully presented maps, one cannot help but be drawn to visit some of the sites along the road. I will certainly be heading out to discover or revisit some of these places right on our doorstep through new eyes, and with Goldney's descriptions in hand.

Right at the beginning of the guide book Goldney admits that this work is based on more than forty years of research and field work. He encourages us to explore our history with our boots on, he invites us to become historical geographers as we walk in the footsteps of the explorers, or drive in the wheel marks of the pioneers, or as we contemplate the whole meaning of country while walking upon it, as our Aboriginal antecedents did for millennia, and their descendants continue to do.

I personally found the book fascinating and rewarding. For me Goldney's descriptions and the stories he tells brings a completeness to my understanding of this chapter in our history. His academic scholarship is widely known and respected after a lifetime of commitment and there could have been no one better placed to write this comprehensive work than him. Indeed the great local historian, the late Theo Barker knew it years ago and he was the one who encouraged Goldney to research and write this detailed and insightful work.

One day Australians will realise even more deeply how significant the road over the mountains has been in our history and the 116 sites along the way will surely be celebrated in our national consciousness in the way other nations celebrate the journeys of their peoples across the physical landscape as a metaphor for their greater journeys of nation building. The Oregon Trail National Historic Site in the United States of America springs immediately to mind as a good example.

This book then, and the call to action it implies, is a magnificent bicentennial gift to the people of the Bathurst region, and to those who live along the road, and those who travel on it, and to visitors who come to experience our place in the world. David Goldney and Greening Bathurst, and the team who helped them create *Cox's Road Dreaming* deserve our congratulations and thanks for the production of this unmatched definitive work on the subject.

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