

Address on the first anniversary of the bushfires.

Version #2

On Sunday 8 September 2019, the central lodge and pioneer cabins at Binna Burra were destroyed in bushfires. The Sky Lodges and other infrastructure also suffered damage. The company reopened for business one year later, starting with the Sky Lodges and a 'Bushwalker's Bar & Café' at Groom's Cottage.

Address on the first anniversary of the bushfires.

**Steve Noakes, Chairperson, Binna Burra Lodge.
Tuesday 08 September 2020**

Mayor Greg Christensen, Councillors and distinguished visitors and guests here today ...

... in keeping with the spirit of the Reconciliation Action Plan that Binna Burra is now engaged in, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and offer our respects to the Elders both past, present and future.

May I also acknowledge those who over past decades have served as Board members, staff and shareholders of this unique company operating inside this special world heritage listed national park.

On behalf of all those associated with, or have an affection for Binna Burra, I'd like to thank the Australian and Queensland Governments for their collaborative support to ensure we all now have access on the single road into the Binna Burra side of the Lamington National Park. The support and cooperation between all levels of government – Federal, State and Local - along with the support we have received from the National Bushfire Recovery Agency has been critical to us being here today one year after the bushfires devastated our part of the Scenic Rim.

Today is about reflection as well as our ambitions to continue to 'bring back Binna Burra'. I am going to focus more on what happened last year in terms of our response and recovery, and our CEO Jonathan Fisher will focus more on what's ahead for Binna Burra.

Because it is the first anniversary of the bushfires at Binna Burra last year, I note research¹ which indicates how *'anniversary dates of traumatic events can reactivate thoughts and feelings from the actual event, and survivors may experience peaks of anxiety and depression. Around the anniversary of a traumatic event, people are likely to remember*

¹ <https://www.apa.org/topics/anniversary-traumatic-event>

events clearly and many will feel emotions more intensely than usual. Reliving the sadness is a very natural part of the healing process. But there is no one right way to heal. Try not to compare your reactions to those of others. Each person is different, and each individual will find his or her own way of coping with the memories.'

For those who are willing to share their thoughts and experiences about the bushfire last year, may I acknowledge our colleagues here from Griffith University who are collaborating with Binna Burra, Mt Barney Lodge and Scenic Rim Regional Council in a 12 month research project called 'Fire memories – gathering stories about the fire impacts and responses to build resilience' – Karine, Sarah, Margarida, Guy and Jim. They are interested to connect with people today who would be willing to share their stories from last year.

Let me now share some history of this cultural landscape we are on today.

The first camp at Binna Burra was held in 1933 here where we stand today.

During the 1930s, management of Binna Burra was divided between the co-founders of Binna Burra, Arthur Groom and Romeo Lahey. Arthur Groom was the on-site manager, while Romeo Lahey took charge of building infrastructure, as well as surveying and constructing the first walking tracks in the adjacent national park.

Almost nine decades later, today, we now have our CEO, Jonathan Fisher as the on-site manager while Tim Medhurst is looking after the building infrastructure and coordinating the surveying and construction.

The spirit of Binna Burra envisioned by Groom and Lahey lives on through the contributions of Jonathan and Tim, and everyone else who has contributed to getting Binna Burra reopened just last week.

As you will be aware, we've had big challenges with road access since the bushfires in early September 2019.

We salute the remarkable work by the Department of Transport and Main Roads and all their contractors for their efforts to reconstruct the road into Binna Burra side of the Lamington National Park.

Without that single road, we could not rebuild and fully recover the important role Binna Burra plays as the largest single job creator in our local Beechmont community.

Now, the road has almost become an attraction in its own right!

But access was different in the early days.

Back in 1934, a flying fox and the first buildings were erected on site.

The flying fox comprised a heavy-duty cable, strung between a tree at the unloading point known as 'the Dump' and one on the cliff top near the future Lodge site, driven by a large whim (wheel) laid horizontally and rotated by a draught horse, to raise attached baggage and supplies about 150 metres. The remains of that 'whim' are still here with us just over by the Barn.

In the early 1930's, guests walked up the steep goat track or the less steep sheep track to the campsite.

In 1934 Lahey's road building team excavated a large site for buildings and felled trees for their construction.

After the demolition work over the past few months, that flat piece of land at the top of this road is once again flat and empty.

By October 1934, the dining room, kitchen, store, staff dining room, bathrooms and lavatories, flooring and tables for the tents and the first slab cabin dormitory for guests were built.

They were inexpensive to build because the materials came from the property and achievable because there were skilled broad-axemen to build them.

When we rebuild a lodge at the top of Mt Roberts, we'll recycle timber from the log storage you will notice up the right hand side of the road where the Discovery Forest playground used to be.

By the end of 1935, two more slab huts, accommodating 22 people, and staff quarters were completed, and a dinner bell had been installed by Lahey.

The bell which signalled our gathering today was part of a locomotive built for Lahey Brothers timber mill down in Canungra in 1910.

The bell is a symbol of Binna Burra's resilience.

It's now 110 years old and the ring is louder and clearer since it was the only item that survived the 2019 fire destruction of the lodge and the cabins.

In 1936, Arthur Groom began constructing a small cottage on the other side of the mountain 'saddle' from the Lodge, in anticipation of his marriage to Marjorie Dunstan.

With our reopening last week and with no-where else to provide any food and beverage services, we have now transformed the 84 year old Groom's Cottage into our Bushwalkers Bar and Café.

Today, it's the broadcast base of our friends from ABC radio.

Between 1938 and 1953, a further dozen cabins were constructed. All of those pioneering cabins were lost in the bushfires.

The one surviving cabin is the Forestry Cottage (Cabin 43). It was constructed in 1941 for the park overseer and will shortly be used for our new evening host couple so we have 24 hour staffing on site.

Now, let me recall what happened this time last year.

In early August last year, we had our first taste of what was to become an unprecedented six month Australian bushfire season.

At that time, a hazard reduction burn in the national park along the eastern side of Binna Burra Road opposite a number of local homes – including my own house and the houses of many here with us today – went a little further than originally anticipated.

In advance of what was to come in the following month it became a practice run for our local Beechmont Rural Fire volunteers and QPWS Rangers.

Photos of that lead up period before the major bushfire impact are part of the story in the Bushfire Gallery.

Four weeks later, the bushfires raged up from the western side of the Summit and Timbarra Drive community in Beechmont, destroying eleven local houses, including two private homes here at Mt Roberts and our historic Binna Burra Lodge.

We were at the front-end of a terrible national bushfire season, and in our case here at Beechmont and Lower Beechmont, it was not just a bushfire in September but a period of five more months of bushfire threat until we finally got some heavy rainfalls in January this year.

I again pay tribute to all the emergency service providers during the bushfires last year for the many – perhaps hundreds - of houses they did save.

The good news was the early 2020 rain made me feel confident our bushfire danger was over. The not-so-good news was the rain caused substantial impacts on the road works, pushing out the completion date many more months.

Here at Binna Burra, as the bushfire caused major damage to the cliff-side road, it also damaged other buildings and infrastructure including the Binna Burra Sky Lodges and our educational Discovery Forest playground.

The Pottery Shed, the Barn, Groom's Cottage, the Tea House and the campground were essentially saved by the intense aerial water bombing by emergency services.

As you have seen driving up today, the extent of the road damage has resulted in a full year of no business activity for Binna Burra Lodge Limited.

That hurts any business enterprise when you can't trade for so long.

It's been a challenge the much reduced team here at Binna Burra has met.

We are still here today as a resilient and solvent business laying the foundations for the next 100 years of stewardship of our piece of the Queensland Cultural Landscape.

Of course, for everyone, the COVID pandemic has added some additional complexities to the restart of our business and our numerous public good activities.

Binna Burra is here because of the Lamington National Park. The park covers more than 21,000 hectares and is home to 390 species of Australian wildlife and features one of the most diverse areas of vegetation in the country.

About 10% of Park's total area was impacted by the bushfire last year. Much more damage occurred to Mt Barney N.P. and the Main Range N.P where in the Scenic Rim.

Inside the Bushfire Gallery our Mayor will officially open today, you'll note maps produced by the National Bushfire Recovery Agency which illustrate the extent of the six months of bushfire across Australia.

It shows how more than half of the total area of the Gondwana World Heritage footprint was impacted and how the Sarabah bushfire that started many days before it reached Beechmont and Binna Burra, moved its way down the southwards down the valley towards us.

The purpose of the Bushfire Gallery is to serve the public by enhancing understanding and reflection of the September 2019 bushfire at Binna Burra.

It is designed as a mobile facility.

For an initial three months, it will be located here at the Barn and, subject to other development project activities at Binna Burra, it may scaled up or down and be moved to another location either on Binna Burra land or in a suitable local community facility.

The Barn at Binna Burra is one of the remaining heritage buildings which sustained some minor damage during the bushfires last year.

The Barn actually survived the main bushfire on Sunday 8 September but was subject to another fire three days after, on Wednesday 11 September.

Fortunately, volunteers from the Beechmont Rural Fire service were here at Binna Burra. We can thank two local volunteers, David Murphy and Sam Rankin for saving the Barn. David served as Principal of the Beechmont State School for over 30 years and has been a wonderful contributor to the lives of so many local kids and our community in general.

Sam Rankin is a direct descendent of George Rankin, a member of the first Board of Directors of Binna Burra and owner of the land that Romeo Lahey and Arthur Groom managed to purchase to start Binna Burra back in 1933.

The Gallery provides access to a collection of images, remains, and information relating to:

1. the unprecedented Australian bushfire season in 2019/2020
2. the impact of the September 2019 bushfires on Binna Burra Lodge
3. the contributions of community volunteers and other groups in the response and recovery stages of a bushfire disaster
4. public awareness of bushfire management and safety
5. providing a link and resource for educational, research, scholarship and publishing activities
6. Protecting the memories and experiences of the bushfire by continuously improving the security of the collection

The Gallery will also encourage, facilitate and acknowledge gifts and donations that enhance the gallery as well as our archives and library to go up on the second floor of Groom's Cottage.

Long time Binna Burra supporter and shareholder, Don Marshall has produced and donated a wonderful historical record in his book titled Binna Burra Begins. It's for sale at Groom's Cottage and the sales of that book are needed to support the Bushfire Gallery.

Let me finish off with some words about two people significant in our bushfire response and immediate recovery efforts last year.

(Invite Ian up)

The first is Ian Pritchard – interim MD a few weeks before the fire – extended for six months after the fire

(Present plaque to Ian)

And finally, we are honoured and delighted that the official opening of the Binna Burra Bushfire Gallery will be undertaken today by the Mayor of Scenic Rim Regional Council, Cr Gregory Christensen.

Here at Binna Burra, and for many months that followed as the bushfires continued around the Scenic Rim region, the Mayor displayed enormous resilience, character, and leadership when the community needed such a person.

For us at Binna Burra, we are thankful for his immediate support at the time of the bushfires and the support the Mayor and Scenic Rim Regional Council have extended over the past 12 months of our recovery.

Today is a time when thoughts and feelings about the devastating wildfires are reactivated and many of us may feel emotions more intensely than usual.

Our Bushfire Gallery is designed to be part of the healing process as individuals find their own ways of coping with the memories.

Before we ask Mayor Greg to officially open the Gallery, we'll now ask him to address our gathering.