

Binna Burra Road reopening marks key recovery milestone

Address by Steve Noakes, Chair, Binna Burra Lodge, on the occasion of the official reopening of the road into Binna Burra by the Governments of Australia and Queensland on 31 August 2020.

In keeping with the spirit of the Reconciliation Action Plan that Binna Burra Lodge 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 emerging.

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 Binna Burra Road was rebuilt following the bushfires we experienced around this time last year.

This reopening of Binna Burra Road marks a 'soft-opening' period for the second opening of Binna Burra Lodge since our first opening back in 1933.

We plan to do an 'official second opening' of Binna Burra Lodge in November this year at the time of our Annual General Meeting.

That gives us a few months to bed-down all our remaining assets and a new era of operational activities.

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 – 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.

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.

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.

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 Playground.

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.

The road is the only access into the Binna Burra side of the Lamington National Park.

This World Heritage-listed national 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.

The Park has 130km of walking trails, including many of the original walking tracks that were built in the 1930s with the help of the founders of Binna Burra

Lodge and the National Parks Association of Queensland. Now, we have 14 trails into the National Park starting at Binna Burra.

For us, Binna Burra Road is more than simply a transport route — it embodies almost a century of history and heritage, intergenerational stories and perseverance by the Department of Transport and Main Roads and its predecessor agencies.

The road is also a symbol of our collective human drive to keep moving and persist, no matter the circumstances of disasters such as a major bushfire season and now what will most likely be a few years of living with and managing the COVID pandemic.

The remarkable engineering, construction and project management skills applied to the rebuilding of the road now makes the road itself an attraction!

Good tourism experiences are all about local story-telling, and there is another fascinating story now to add about this road since when the Beaudesert Times on the 6 March 1931 reported: 'A party of surveyors have been working for some time on the road on the southern end of Beechmont, along the route which is expected some day to be one of the approaches to the National Park'.

Roadworks were a little slower back in the 1930s. Four years later, on 22 March 1935, the Beaudesert Times noted: 'The main road under construction from the Beechmont School to Binna Burra is nearing completion it has already proved a blessing during the recent rainy weather to residents of the south end of the mountain, as the thrill of being bogged is a thing of the past.'

This southern end of Binna Burra Road into the Binna Burra side of Lamington National Park is as much a part of the rich history and heritage of this place as the destroyed Lodge will continue to be, even though it was totally destroyed in the bushfires last year.

Like the Binna Burra Cultural Landscape, the road is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of Queensland's history and provides the only access to

the aesthetic significance of our mountaintop forest setting with spectacular panoramic views of one of Queensland's significant World heritage Listed natural environments.

Without the support of the Commonwealth and State Government investment in the post bushfire disaster recovery efforts over the past year, we would not be standing here today and getting ready to reopen the Binna Burra side of Lamington National Park and our activities here at Binna Burra Lodge.

The Binna Burra Road reconstruction has been part of the national response to rebuilding communities affected by bushfires across large parts of Australia. Without it, we could not rebuild and fully recover the important role Binna Burra plays as the largest single job creator in our local Beech Mountain community.

All current and future generations of our local community and visitors from Queensland, from around Australia and from overseas who visit this place for many decades ahead will be able to experience this road, and, as a result, the protected areas of the Lamington National Park and the services provided by Binna Burra Lodge.

In our part of Australia, the road will become a symbol of how destruction also brings local people and all levels of government together.

That spirit of cooperation has been essential to help affected regions such as the Scenic Rim, communities like ours here at Beechmont & Binna Burra, and individuals including our Binna Burra staff to recover after the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires that brought destruction and loss like we have never seen before across Australia.

Thank you.

Steve Noakes.