

Seasons of Neglect: The Case for a Hampden Bridge Trust

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Hampden Bridge, reliable, brilliantly designed, iconic and resilient against any flood has become a focal point for Kangaroo Valley. Locals see it as a 'bridge for eternity' but nothing can be eternal without maintenance and care.

There have been times where the love the Kangaroo Valley community has for the bridge has resulted in innovations and support.

In 1957 the south-east side of the bridge came under the control of the Shoalhaven Council for development as a tourist site. (Clark) Now part of the [Holiday Haven](#) tourist park group, the area comprises 21 cabins, 8 powered camping sites and 13 unpowered camping sites. Holiday Haven is well integrated into the greater Shoalhaven Tourist strategy and is an affordable and popular destination. Along with Glen Mack caravan park, Holiday Haven has an important function within the community. However, there is almost certainly a need for Holiday Haven to be even more integrated into the local multi-million dollar walking, kayaking and environmental businesses which are now the dominant industries for the Kangaroo Valley village and the region.

In 1966 the Kangaroo Valley Progress, Tourist and Ratepayers Association asked the Department of Main Roads to paint the bridge in its original colours of white woodwork and black ironwork. (Clark)

In 1968 worried about the bridge's capacity to take heavy loads, DMR imposed a 20 ton weight limit but this was not able to be enforced consistently because the nearest weighbridge was at Nowra. (Clark p.23) The enforceability and policing of weight limits remains a major concern for locals, fifty seven years later in 2025.

Clark notes that in 1968 “.. this limit (20 tons) was generally observed, with timber trucks using a nearby ford”. (Clark) He makes no mention of the ford in question but it was most likely the ford from Upper River Road to Glen Murray Road which involved a further shallow water crossing on Glen Murray Road near the intersection between Glen Murray Road and Berry Mountain Road. Both these fords were passable when river levels were low which meant heavy trucks effectively by-passed the town. Another possibility could be shallow crossings near the Bendeela Picnic Area which can, when river levels are low, be used for 4wd crossing. It should be noted that though the Kangaroo River and its upper ancillaries such as Gerringong Creek have several fords; however the pristine waters of the Kangaroo River are part of the Sydney Water Catchment and this would almost certainly become an issue if fords were used as a bypass or diversion of traffic away from the main Village thoroughfare. This is almost certainly why Transport NSW quite soundly rejected these options in its initial 2025 assessment of future options for an B73/MVR371 crossing for Kangaroo Valley. (NSW "Hampden Bridge Replacement Options Study – Internal Draft")

In 1966 the Minister of Lands gave Kangaroo Valley Historical Society permission to set up an historic park and museum on land at the north-western end of the bridge. It was opened in January 1969 and continues to successfully and meaningfully attract many visitors to stop and also to take one of the many Kangaroo Valley bush walks. Since that time it has been revealed that the Nature Reserve, of which the Pioneer Farm land was once a part, was an Aboriginal reserve, the site for a historic Aboriginal school pioneered by Hugh and Ellen Anderson. (P. C. Botsman) This offers a wonderful opportunity for greater participation from Valley and Shoalhaven First Nations communities and to add a broader understanding of the “pioneer farm”.

In addition in 1966-7 across the road from the Pioneer Farm the development of Apex Park was the first project of the Kangaroo Valley Apex Club. In 2024 the park has been supplemented by the extremely popular [Kangaroo Valley Cycling Pump Track](#) which is managed and maintained by the community in conjunction with Shoalhaven Council.

In 1973 K.R. Condon of Bundanoon Quarries replaced a missing corner stone on the bridge. (Clark)

But the major concern over time has been the damage done by heavy vehicles when they crossed the bridge. In 1973 the secretary of the KVHS noted that when members sat in the Museum Park office they could feel the vibrations of heavy trucks on the bridge and called for an onsite meeting with DMR engineers. One suggestion then was that a new bridge be built leaving the Hampden Bridge for foot traffic.(Clark p. 24)

In 1982 at a cost of \$48,667 the longitudinal deck planks were replaced, and on its 90th anniversary Hampden Bridge was named on a list of NSW's 50 most historic bridges.

- **1990s onward:** Structural analyses began due to increasing loads. Consultants argued for ongoing repairs.
- **2010:** Major rehabilitation, adding significant dead load (strengthening) but revealing issues with some members.

- **2020:** Night closures for essential maintenance (e.g., geotechnical investigations, cable relocation for repairs).
- **2021:** Significant renovations (~\$3 million), including structural upgrades.
- **2025 (May–June):** Load limit reduced from 42.5 tonnes to 23 tonnes after testing showed strain from heavy vehicles, to reduce maintenance needs and preserve integrity while long-term options are explored.
- **2025 (August):** Urgent night works replaced 9 damaged upper truss timber beams; further strengthening planned for 2026 (12 lower truss beams).
- **Ongoing:** Regular inspections, hanger replacements, load testing, and surveying. Transport notes "higher than normal" maintenance over the past 30+ years, with investigations for temporary/permanent solutions (e.g., new crossing) to allow heavier loads.

One of the major issues that would probably be agreed universally is that as a historic bridge, Hampden Bridge needs its own independent trust and management committee. One of the recommendations of this report is that to ensure Hampden Bridge is never again allowed to deteriorate to the point of crisis, there must be a fully funded, legislated 50-year Heritage Asset Management Plan and Maintenance Endowment (estimated \$18 million, invested at 5 % real return to generate ~\$900 k per annum in perpetuity) (Heritage NSW, 2024). This endowment, modelled on the highly successful Sydney Harbour Bridge and Hawkesbury River rail bridge trusts, should be established under the NSW Heritage Act with joint TfNSW/Heritage NSW/Environment and local community and First Nations oversight with annual public reporting. This trust might also include the management of the Hampden Bridge precinct including the Holiday Haven camping area and the Pioneer Farm and the adjoining Nature Reserve.

In addition to this recommendation (which is argued in even more detail later in this report), we will now go on to make the case for keeping the Hampden Bridge as the sole working bridge for the Moss Vale thoroughfare through the Kangaroo Valley Village. This also, amongst many other benefits, ensures that the sensitive Barrengarry and Camberwarra Mountain sections of the B73/MVR371 can be well managed in a financially prudent and responsible way.

(Next section: Hampden Bridge: The Heart of a Unique River Ecology, a Flourishing Village and an East/West Road Corridor)

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