



The Eastern Paddock from Hanging Rock. Insert a large hotel building, a Spa and some modern units and just stop and look again.

HANGING ROCK— MORE THAN JUST A PILE OF ROCKS

Many years ago, it became something of a ritual that when we had visitors I would invariably take them to Hanging Rock and our visit would culminate in a climb to the highest peak. Finding the actual rock was not difficult, but hauling oneself up its sheer sides was not easy. Once seated on the top (and we knew we were in the right place as the

cement that had once held the post for the long-gone trig station was still there) there was never any doubt that the effort had been worth it. 360 degrees views of unspoilt country and perfect peace. We would often sit there in silence for a long time just soaking in the views. I have no doubt that some of the peace we experienced stayed with us when the next day we headed back to Melbourne to resume our working lives.

In recent days, a proposal to impinge on these views and the special ambience of the Rock by constructing a large complex of buildings in the immediate surrounds, and to also intrude on the Rock itself by introducing packaged activities, has understandably caused enormous community concern. Nature has given us a place of serenity and strange beauty which speaks with a mythic voice making it a place of wonder to all who visit..

We may never know exactly what the Rock meant to the local Aboriginal inhabitants before it became the favoured place for relaxation for white settlers, but we do have records from that time on until the present day. For over thirty years now, each week at our Local History Centre we extract any articles of local interest from the district newspapers in preparation for their indexing. Without doubt, one of the largest collections in this section of our archive, are the articles which relate to Hanging Rock. In addition to this, we have amassed many other documents and oral history transcripts which tell its story over the years.

One of the earliest descriptions of the Rock, is found in a report written by William von Bandowski in 1855. Blandowski was the curator of the Museum of Natural History in Melbourne and although his report which he entitled “Personal Observations” concentrates mainly on his geological findings, his comments about the importance of the Rock and its surrounds are worth reading. *“Dryden’s Monuments,”* (the common name for The Rock during his time as it stood on land then owned by Edward Dryden), *“as well on account of its geological character as its singular confirmation, (is) one of the most remarkable spots in Victoria, if not in (the) whole (of) AustraliaThe approach to it presents a scene of the most imposing grandeur. A massive wall of dolerite, whose deep and sombre hue is in exquisite harmony with the dark green of the eucalyptus, rises almost perpendicularly above the loftiest of the trees, and imparts a striking majesty to the whole view. The interest increases at every step approaching the monument, and a beautiful variety of rapidly changing scenery is unfolded like a panorama before the observers’ eye.”*

In 1907, Woodend’s first **“Progress Association”** was formed and its members soon set about publicizing the district through a series of pamphlets. In *“Woodend—the Popular week-end and Holiday Resort”* (c. late 1920’s) we read under the heading *“The Far-famed Hanging Rock—of un surpassed Grandeur”* the following: *“The famous Hanging Rock is but five miles out from the town, standing as an imposing and solitary monument in the middle of a plain and towering 360 ft above it.....if the visitor should not be concerned about its geological composition, he must be impressed by the grandeur of the uninterrupted outlook for many miles around, which he gains from this mount of castellated rocks.”* These are just two excerpts from the many thousands of words which have been written about Hanging Rock and the importance of its surrounds to the impact it has on all who come to experience its unique and special qualities. There is nothing unique or mysterious about hotel buildings and spas, and those seeking to take part in activities such as yoga, can do so in their local suburb or town. It is its natural features which attract people to the Rock and it is nature which keeps its mythology alive. Impinge upon this and the loss will irreparable and we will deny future generations the opportunity to-as our present day brochures so rightly say, “experience the mystery”. *Janet Hawkins.*