

Heritage Assessment of the Alstonville Plateau

Jane Gardiner and Stephanie Knox
Centre for Coastal Management
Southern Cross University
Lismore Australia

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Executive Summary

This study examines the heritage of the cultural landscape known locally as the Alstonville Plateau, which is located in far north-eastern New South Wales. It was initiated by the Alstonville and District Citizens and Ratepayers Association who were concerned that rapid population growth was placing pressures on the landscapes and historic villages of the Plateau. It was noted that there had never been a heritage study of this area and it was considered that the heritage of the Alstonville Plateau consisted of more than the nine items listed on the Ballina Local Environmental Plan.

The study was undertaken using a community values assessment methodology developed by Chris Johnston (1994). This not only resulted in the community identifying heritage items on the Plateau but also allowed the community to assess the significance of these items. Workshops, questionnaires and a High School Photographic Assignment allowed a broad cross section of the community to contribute to the study. This methodology was particularly successful in identifying social values early in the heritage study process and determined the significance of items at a local level. The study also incorporated elements outlined in the Heritage Study Guidelines published by the New South Wales Department of Planning (1990) (now the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning). While this study was comprehensive it must be remembered that community lists are not exhaustive and there is a tendency for the minute, mundane and portable elements of the environment to be neglected.

As an outcome of this study a comprehensive inventory of all items identified by the community was compiled. The significance of these heritage items was determined using community "voting", placing the items identified into an historical context, examining heritage registers and using the criteria listed in guidelines provided by the Australian Heritage Commission (1975) and the New South Wales Department of Planning (1990). The study, through the community questionnaires, also asked the community to comment on various aspects of heritage management. Over eighty percent of questionnaire respondents wrote that they would like the rural scenery and views on the Alstonville Plateau to remain unchanged.

The report also examines the current role played by government agencies and community organisations in protecting and managing heritage on the Plateau. It concludes that while many organisations are interested in identifying and managing heritage it is mainly through the Local Environmental Plans of Ballina Shire and Lismore City Councils that environmental heritage is protected. However an examination of heritage protection measures for the cultural landscapes of the Alstonville Plateau revealed that Local Environmental Plans and Regional Environmental Plans do not recognise landscapes or their associated views, travel routes and natural features.

The study found that heritage protection has concentrated on listing elements of the built environment on the Ballina Shire and Lismore City Local Environmental Plans. Management of these items has been left to individual property owners. However it noted that in recent years government bodies and community groups have taken a more active role in managing items of natural heritage on the Plateau. In particular the New South Wales Parks and Wildlife Service plays a major role in managing three Nature Reserves in the study area and community groups manage many of the rainforest remnants and local parks. Educating the community about its heritage has mainly been performed by the North Coast Branch of the National Trust and the Richmond River Historical Society and its associated museums.

The report concludes that the Alstonville Plateau has a rich heritage and that the protection and management of its landscape, and the heritage items within it, will provide a continuing challenge for Ballina Shire and Lismore City Councils and the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning. It is hoped that this study will form the basis for continuing research into the heritage of the Alstonville Plateau.

Recommendations

Fifty - three recommendations are made for the consideration of Ballina Shire and Lismore City Councils, the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, public authorities and the community concerning heritage protection and management on the Alstonville Plateau. The following recommendations are considered to be those of highest priority.

Review Rural and Environmental Protection Zones

As the cultural landscape of the Alstonville Plateau is considered significant by the community the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning could consider expanding the objectives of the North Coast Regional Environmental Plan (1988) to include heritage landscapes.

Ballina Shire and Lismore City Councils could review current Environmental Protection and Rural Zones in their respective Local Environmental Plans with the view to producing a zone for protecting heritage landscapes. The aims and objectives of this zone would include those relating to heritage landscapes, environment protection and rural land use practices.

Review Heritage Schedules and Lists

The Department of Urban Affairs and Planning could review and amend Schedules 1, 2 and 3 of the North Coast Regional Environmental Plan to include additional items of State and Regional significance. The historic townscape of Alstonville could be conserved under an Alstonville Main Street Conservation Area.

Ballina Shire and Lismore City Councils could amend their existing heritage schedules to include heritage items listed in Section 4.3 and Appendix 10.6 of this report. Items listed on these schedules should be consistent with items listed on the North Coast Regional Environmental Plan, the Register of the National Estate and the Register of the National Trust.

The Australian Heritage Commission and the National Trust could amend their registers so that they are consistent with both Councils' Local Environmental Plans and the North Coast Regional Environmental Plan.

Heritage Study

So that heritage items throughout the Shire can be adequately compared and assessed Ballina Shire Council could consider undertaking a shire-wide heritage study.

Acquisition and Active Management

Ballina Shire and Lismore City Council could consider holding discussions on the management of Marom Creek and Marom Creek Falls (which form the boundary between the two Local Government Areas) with the view to jointly acquiring land adjacent to the creek and providing public access to the falls.

As the land adjacent to Duck Creek, particularly in the vicinity of Marshalls Falls and the Duck Creek Weir, is considered of significance at both a national and regional level, Ballina Shire Council could consider either acquiring land in this area or encouraging the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service to consider acquiring this land for a Nature Reserve.

To ensure the continuing enjoyment of views from the study area Ballina Shire and Lismore City Councils could consider acquiring land adjacent to key viewing places and providing adjacent parking.

With at least five significant waterfalls in the shire Ballina Shire Council could consider investigating the management of such features with the view to eventually actively managing such areas.

Ballina Shire Council may also investigate the proposal to build a walking track from Lumley Park to Tosha Falls, where a public easement already exists.

Other Heritage Protection Measures

A range of heritage protection measures ranging from the establishment of an Environmental Heritage Committee to setting a good example in the management of heritage items under Council ownership or control, could be considered by Ballina Shire Council.

Conservation Incentives

Ballina Shire Council could investigate ways of attracting heritage funding to the Shire and also encourage the community to seek funding for heritage management and promotion. Consideration could also be given to the idea of introducing a differential rating system for owners of heritage properties and initiating a heritage awards scheme.

Presentation and Promotion

Ballina Shire Council could consider promoting heritage on the Plateau either by publicising walking and/or driving heritage trails across the area (through their tourist centres) or encourage community groups to undertake such a task. Both Councils should also consider encouraging the Richmond River Historical Society to continue the practice of placing plaques adjacent to heritage items in the study area.

Public Authority Actions

Both Commonwealth and State Government departments which own or control heritage properties on the Plateau could liaise with Ballina Shire Council so that they can manage and conserve heritage items in accordance with local Council policies and guidelines. Government departments could also consider the implications of vacating heritage properties and ensure that these vacant properties are protected.

Community Actions

As the Alstonville Plateau is considered a distinctive landscape with both natural and cultural elements distinguishing it from other areas in the state it is recommended that the National Trust consider classifying the Plateau as a Landscape Conservation Area. It is also recommended that they continue their educational role on the far North Coast.

Continuing support should be given by the residents of the Plateau to their local Garden Clubs, Service Clubs and the Far North Coast Branch of the Society for Growing Australian Plants who maintain the parks and gardens in the area. Alstonville, Wollongbar and Rous ratepayer and progress associations should be supported in their efforts to foster an interest in heritage matters.

The Alstonville - Wollongbar Chamber of Commerce could also consider the heritage of the Alstonville Plateau as a potential tourist attraction and consider heritage matters in their plans to redevelop Main Street.

3. Identification of Heritage Items

3.1 Introduction

One of the most important outcomes of this study is the production of an Alstonville Plateau heritage inventory. This is a comprehensive listing of all items identified by the community and is included in Appendix 10.9. Each record locates, describes and attempts to give a history of natural and built items, landscapes, views and travel routes, community places, landmarks and events. It also includes information on community values and a statement of significance. It is hoped that this database will be of use to various authorities concerned with heritage conservation. Notes on the entry of information to the inventory accompany Appendix 10.9.

The following discussion reviews, under the categories of landscapes and views, natural items, travel routes, historic items, community places and landmarks, and events, the heritage items identified in the course of this study.

3.2 Landscapes and Views

This section describes not only landscapes and views but also viewing places which are usually from the edge of the plateau escapement or high points on the plateau. Workshop participants wrote that there was a strong link between landscapes and views and the travel routes identified. In some cases it is not one view but a series of glimpses of the landscape that make up the viewing experience. The adult community tended to focus on views and viewing points rather than landscapes on the Plateau. In fact it was the Alstonville High School students posters which showed that not only were the views from the Plateau important but also the rural views on the Plateau itself.

Views and Viewing Places

The views identified at the community workshops are listed in Table 3.1 and their locations can be seen in Figure 2.5. Details concerning the location, description of the view and linkage to particular travel routes are recorded in the inventory (see Appendix 10.9).

Table 3.1 View Sites of Alstonville Plateau

Perrys Street Panorama Park Ocean View Drive Gap Road Perrys Hill Maguires Creek	Wollongbar - Bruxner Highway Uralba Valley Crawfords Lane Victoria Park Wardell Road Coolgardie Range *	Sneaths Road Cowlong Road Slades Corner Leadbeatters Lane Tuckombil Tintenbar School * <i>* Not located on Plateau</i>
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Nearly all of the 18 views identified were from public roads. The exception was the view from Victoria Park. Views are predominantly off the plateau and appear as the roads descend over the edge of the escarpment. Views to the east incorporate views to the Pacific Ocean and a rural landscape dominated by the cane fields of the coastal plains. Northern views are distant, but spectacular, with a backdrop of the Border Ranges and the eye catching Mount Warning. Elements in the foreground view often include rolling grazing land and tropical fruit orchards. To the south views are over the Tuckean Swamps and often include Buckombil Hill, a local reference point.

Views which are not off the Plateau are best described in Section 3.4 which deals with travel routes. They include a series of vistas down the valleys of Maguires and Uralba Creeks and include the

views along both sides of the Bruxner Highway at Wollongbar where the road follows the ridge top. Views identified on the Plateau always incorporate the rural landscape. It is important to note that these are not the only views.

Landscapes

High school students, as mentioned earlier, photographed thirty-one landscapes and views. Their posters best illustrated the landscapes of the Plateau which are often defined by the land-use practices. Posters showed cattle grazing, tropical fruit and nut plantations, cash crops like peanuts and peas and landscapes which included rainforest remnants and local creeks. One poster just showed photographs taken from public viewing places such as Gap Road, Panorama Park Estate, Wardell Road and Rifle Range Road.

Landscapes, as distinct from views, included the Urban Buffer Zone between Alstonville and Wollongbar. This is an interesting inclusion as the zone is limited in extent and is not clearly seen from either the Bruxner Highway or Pearces Creek Road. In both cases, the roads pass through cuttings and travellers have only a fleeting view of farmland before they again reach urban development. The best rural view of this zone is from Perrys Street. Other landscapes singled out by workshop participants as significant were those where peanuts were being grown and stooked. According to C. Bryant (pers. comm. 1996) the Alstonville Plateau is probably the only location in Australia where stooking of peanuts is still carried out.

No new views or landscapes were added to the initial list by questionnaire respondents. Figure 3.1 shows a typical landscape view to the north and Figure 3.2 shows a peanut stook.

3.3 Natural Items

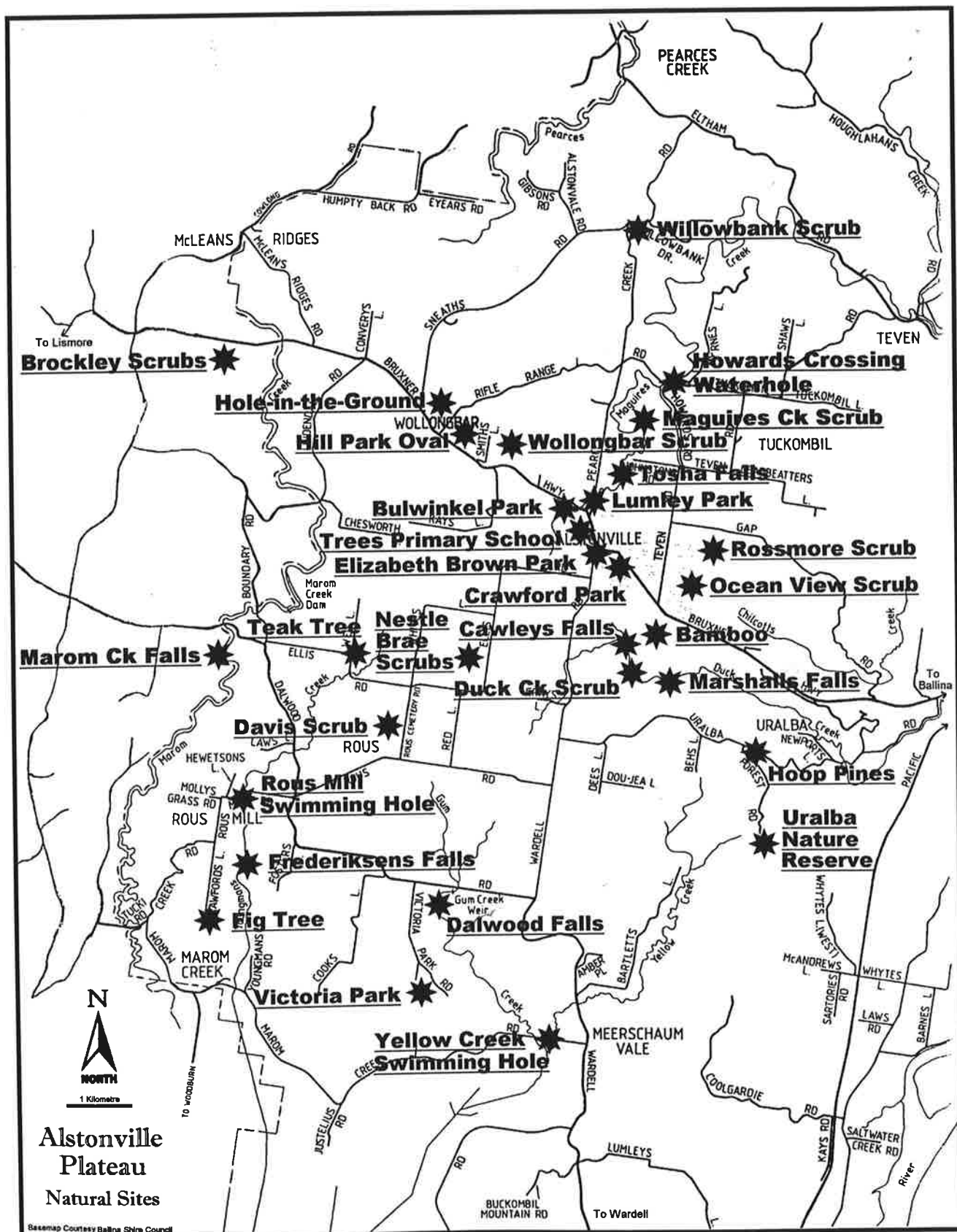
Natural items identified at the workshops chiefly consisted of rainforest remnants or individual rainforest trees, parks, waterfalls, swimming holes and creeks. The only fauna mentioned were the platypus associated with some creek systems. Geological features on the Plateau were not mentioned although workshop participants had been given a wide definition of natural items (see Glossary). The natural items identified at the community workshops are listed in Table 3.2 and their locations can be seen in Figure 3.5.

An examination of these natural items reveals that more than half of the items are located on privately owned land. This will obviously influence the manner in which natural items are managed. It should also be noted that all six creeks draining the Plateau are considered important as either total catchments or because they contain a natural item like a waterfall or swimming hole. Nearly all the natural-looking parks on the Plateau were identified by the community. Figure 10 shows Marshalls Falls the most spectacular waterfall on the Plateau and Figure 11 shows Duck Creek Weir and its associated rainforest remnant.

Table 3.2 Natural Sites of Alstonville Plateau

<u>Identified in Workshops</u>		
Bamboo, Wardell Road Booyong Scrub * Brockley Scrubs Bulwinkel Park Dalwood Falls Davis Scrub Nature Reserve Duck Creek Scrub Nestle Brae Scrubs	Ellis Road Teak tree Frederiksens Falls Howards Crossing Lumley Park Maguires Creek Marom Creek Marom Creek Falls Marshalls Falls	Ocean View Scrub Nut-Tree Dip Hoop Pines Tosha Falls Uralba Nature Reserve Victoria Park Nature Reserve Willowbank Scrub Wollongbar Scrub Wollongbar-Hole-in-Ground Yellow Creek Swimming Hole*
<u>Identified by School Students &</u>	<u>Questionnaire Respondents</u>	
Crawford Park Elizabeth Ann Brown Park Fig Tree Crawford Lane	Hill Park Oval (Wollongbar) Maguires Creek Scrub Rossmore Scrub	Rous Mill Swimming Hole Trees, Alstonville Primary * Not on Plateau

Figure 3.5 Location of Natural Sites



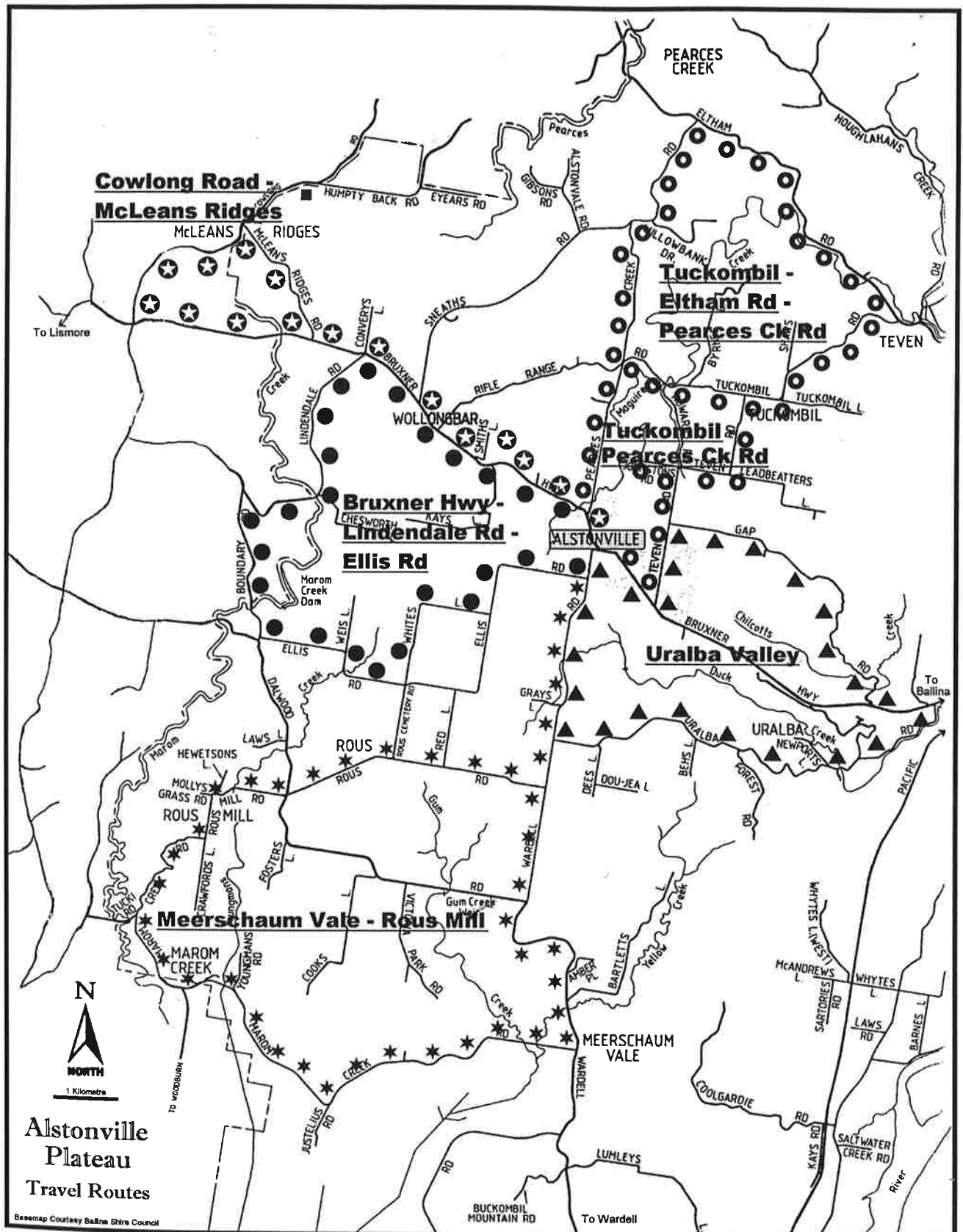
3.4 Travel Routes

Only workshop participants had the opportunity to identify travel routes and as mentioned earlier participants often linked these routes to views and viewing places. As the drawing of travel routes was one of the last tasks to be completed at the workshops only a small number of potential travel routes were identified. Participants wrote that it was difficult to decide on any particular route as all roads provided interesting views of the rural landscape. Figure 3.6 and Figure 3.7 show examples of road views along two of the travel routes. Travel routes, drawn by the community, are shown in Figure 3.8. All routes start from and return to Alstonville. For convenience these five routes are referred to as:

- Uralba Valley Route which travels to the east
- A short Tuckombil - Pearces Creek Road Route and a longer Tuckombil - Eltham Road - Pearces Creek Route to the north
- Cowlong Road - McLeans Ridges Road Route
- Meerschaum Vale - Marom Creek Road - Rous Mill - Rous Road Route
- Western route which travels along Bruxner Highway - Lindendale Road - Boundary Road - Ellis Road and back to Alstonville.

Except for the Bruxner Highway many of the roads in this area are single lane and some are unsealed. This means that travelling is slow and residents and visitors often have more opportunities to view the rural scenery. Section 6 dealing with the management of heritage items will discuss the importance of these local roads. Several groups commented that they had extended travel routes off the Alstonville Plateau to the Tuckean swamps and to Lennox Head because it provided travellers with a contrast between wetlands, coastal and Plateau landscapes. While travel routes cross the main streams in the area none of the waterfalls can be seen from the road and water views are limited. Elements which make up the viewing experience and the location of heritage items along travel routes are described in the inventory (refer Appendix 10.9).

Figure 3.8 Location of Travel Routes



3.5 Historic Items

Items described as historic were identified on the basis that they provided evidence of past activities, peoples and events and were part of the built environment as opposed to the natural environment. This very broad description of historic items meant that a wide range of items ranging from well preserved buildings such as the Federal Hotel, to the trace of a light rail line and the sites where villages, hotels or factories once existed were included in this category. However, there are still many historic items in the rural landscape not identified possibly because they are not large structures, or are in poor state of repair or are not considered attractive. For example, the dairy bails, dairies and machinery sheds associated with the important dairying industry on the Plateau were not mentioned by the community. Nor did they mention the dry stone wall at the intersection of Teven Road and Rifle Range Road as an historic item although they did report it as an important landscape component in the view from Slades Corner.

While workshop participants identified the bulk of the historic items, the questionnaire respondents added a further five historic items namely the Alstonville Court House and Police Station, Duck Creek Weir and water pipeline and the Uniting Church (not just the Hall), Pearces Creek School and Laurel Hill. As mentioned earlier, respondents also divided some complex sites into their component parts. For example, at Rous Mill they thought the school and school house, old bakery and Uniting Church should be listed separately.

More than fifty historic items were identified and have been located on two maps: Figure 3.12 shows the locations of the historic sites in Alstonville, while Figure 3.11 shows the locations of all other sites. Photographs of several of these historic items are shown in Figure 3.9 and Figure 3.10.

The list of historic items individually recorded by workshop participants and questionnaire respondents is shown in Table 3.3. Items have been grouped under various descriptive headings. It should be noted that some historic items were not located on the Alstonville Plateau. These items are marked with an asterisk and are included in the inventory (Appendix 10.9) but are not located on the maps.

Few buildings and structures on the Alstonville Plateau are older than one hundred years. This is most likely due to the fact that buildings were constructed of timber and were particularly susceptible to fire and decay. They were also easy to remove and rebuilt elsewhere. Early Plateau farmers were particularly resourceful at reusing building materials and hence there is virtually no physical evidence of the towns of Lynwood and Dalwood or the big sugar mills, namely Rous Sugar Mill or the Melbourne Sugar Company Mill at Alstonville.

Table 3.3 Historic Sites of Alstonville Plateau

<p><u>Identified in Workshops</u></p> <p>Public Buildings Agricultural Research Institute Agricultural Showground Alstonville Post Office McLeans Ridges Hall McLeans Ridges School Meeschaum Vale Hall * Rous Mill School & House Rous School RSL Hall Tintenbar Shire Chambers Tregeagle Hall* Tropical Fruit Research Station Tuckombil School</p> <p>Residences Beacom House* Blair Athol Brockley Cottage Bulwinkel House Crawford House Fibro House Roseleigh</p>	<p>Commercial Buildings Butter Factory CBC Bank Federal Hotel Maranoa Opportunity Shop Rous Mill Bakery</p> <p>Streetscapes Main Street The Avenue</p> <p>Churches Saint Bartholomews Church Saint Bartholomews Hall St Pauls, Alphadale Uniting Church Hall Uniting Church, Rous Mill Presbyterian Church</p> <p>Cemeteries Wollongbar (Alphadale) Alstonville Rous</p> <p>Monuments Freeborn Drinking Fountain Paddy Bugden Memorial</p>	<p>Farms Bau Farm Brockley Farm Frederiksens Farm Smiths Farm Waratah Farm Warburtons Farm</p> <p>Transport Duck Creek Track Booyong-Ballina Railway* Rous Mill-Alstonville Railway</p> <p>Sites Alstonville Saw Mill site Bewers Hill Hotel site Lynwood Town site Molasses Pits Rous Mill Spring Hill Butter Factory site Rous Sugar Mill site</p> <p>Other Items Ansteys Quarry* Youngmans Creek Arch Fairfield Pine Trees Frederiksens Falls Hydro-electricity Plant</p>
<p><u>Identified on Questionnaires</u></p> <p>Public Buildings Alstonville Court House and Police Station Duck Creek Weir and Water Pipeline Pearces Creek School</p>	<p>Residences Bellington House Russelton House Laurel Hill House</p>	<p>Churches Uniting Church</p> <p>* Not on Plateau</p>

Figure 3.11 Location of Historic Sites - Plateau

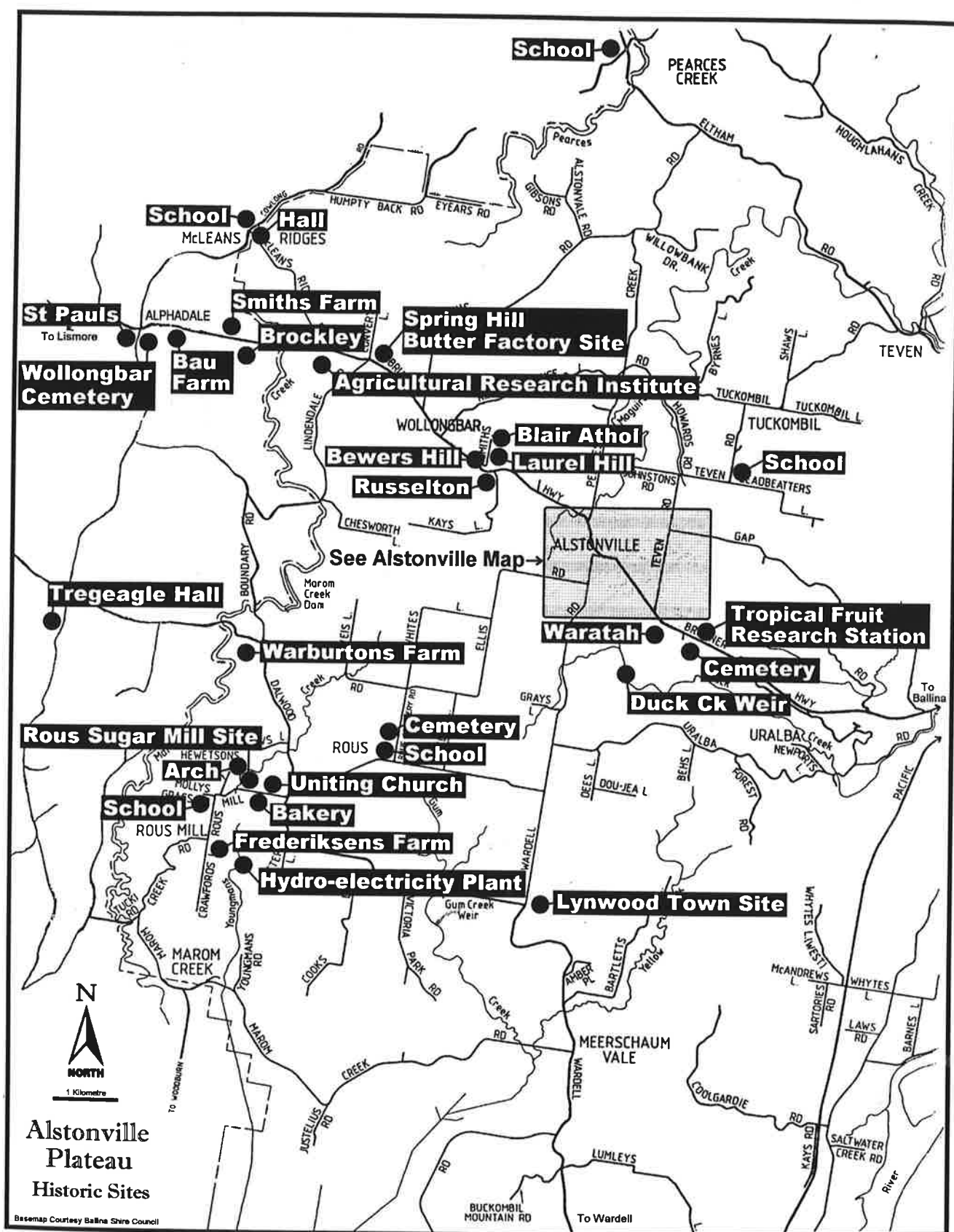
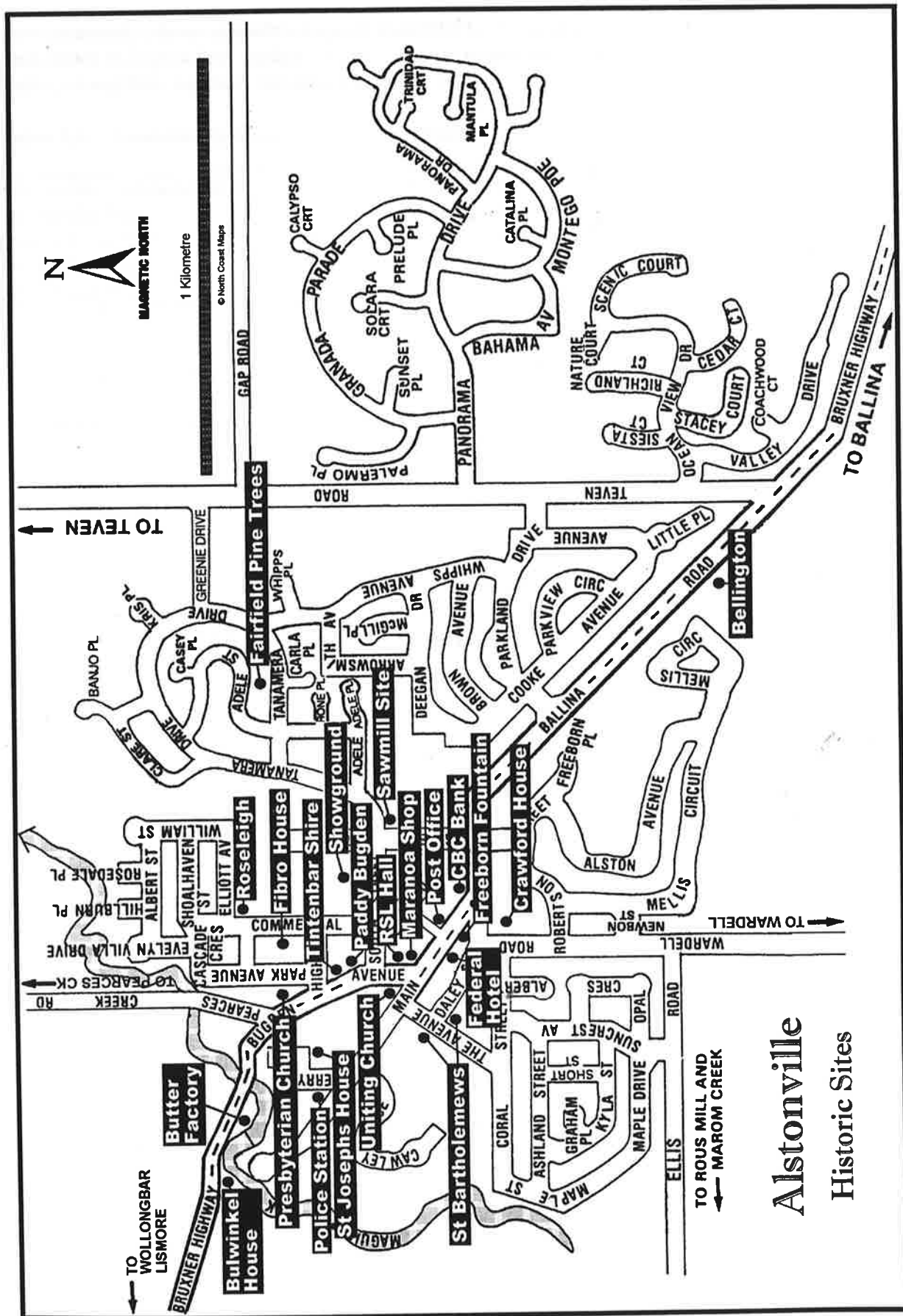


Figure 3.12 Location of Historic Sites - Alstonville



3.6 Community Places and Landmarks

Few community places or landmarks were identified by the workshop participants and no new places were added by high school students or questionnaire respondents. Community places are listed in Table 3.4 and their locations are shown in Figure 3.15.

Table 3.4 Community Sites of Alstonville Plateau

Alstonville Community Centre Alstonville Pool Our Lady of the Rosary Church Baptist Church Alstonville Plaza	Wollongbar Community Hall TAFE College Rous Mill Hall Scout Hall Namajira Haven	House-With-No-Steps Macadamia Magic Open Gardens - Shalom Park, Pleasant Place
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Questionnaire respondents questioned the inclusion of these places in the Alstonville Plateau Heritage Assessment. Many wrote that the Alstonville Shopping Plaza, Scout Hall at Gap road, TAFE at Wollongbar and Macadamia Magic at Alphadale should be removed from the list. The recent age of these places was the main reason given for their removal. Some respondents also said that places like the Plaza were not special places - "they were just a place to shop".

3.7 Events

Events were recorded in this heritage assessment because they often tell us about associations with particular places which are not obvious except when the event is taking place. For example, for most days of the year Elizabeth Ann Brown Park looks like a small urban park used at lunchtime by local shopkeepers, but on Anzac Day this park comes alive for Alstonville's Anzac Day Service. Soldiers, a colour party, community groups, the Alstonville Primary School Band and residents fill the park. Most events on the Plateau are of recent origin with the exceptions being the Alstonville Agricultural Show which has been run for over one hundred years and the Anzac Day March and Service which has taken place each year since the end of World War I. "Farmarama" at the Wollongbar TAFE has been running for ten years and the Tibouchina festival and parade has passed down Main Street and Green Street to the Agricultural Showground since 1983. Carols-by-Candlelight is an inter-denominational service and in the 1980s was held at Geoff Watt Oval. However the unpredictable nature of the weather caused the organisers much concern and when the Apex Pavilion was erected at the Showground in 1992 the event moved to this venue.

3.8 Overview

The items identified by the community show the interdependence between the rural development of the Plateau and the growth of villages. Items listed by the community (see Appendix 10.9) also revealed that they principally valued elements of both the natural and rural environment. The introduction of the Alstonville High School photographic assignment successfully added a visual dimension to this study. Students were able to accurately identify rural and natural landscapes and views and show the aesthetic appeal of these areas. However the inventory produced as a result of these community consultations should not be considered complete.

Figure 3.15 Location of Community Sites

