
The Air Up There

Vintage Tourism in the Blue Mountains



81
VIEWS

Blue Mountains
WONDERLAND,
N.S.W.

Introduction

The Air Up There: Vintage Tourism in the Blue Mountains is a unique look back at Australia's first holiday resort region and those who passionately promoted it.

At the time of writing, the Blue Mountains region has again been ravaged by natural disaster in the form of bushfires from which the tourism industry, so vital to the region, strives to regain its momentum. There is no better way to present the resilience of this industry than by showcasing the vibrant, rich tourist past that endures today and will most certainly endure into the future.

The Air Up There focuses primarily on the 'Golden Age' of tourism from the 1900s — 1950s. In the 1900s, the growing availability of transport via the motor car expanded accessibility

both to and throughout the region while by 1957 the steam rail era was at an end.

The seed that sowed the idea for this exhibition came from the discovery of Harry Phillip's iconic 'View-Books'. Ornately lettered on the cover and with glorious panoramic photographs that would hold up against the best photographers of today, these books and a few original photographs and glass plates are nearly all that remains of his legacy. Phillips' contribution to the development of the Blue Mountains as a premier tourist destination was immense and is a major source of inspiration for this exhibition.

No one exhibition can ever cover 'the whole story' of a topic as broad and nuanced as the story of early tourism in the Blue Mountains. *The Air Up There* exhibition looks at a number of areas: the tourism pioneers; stereography; promotional tourism posters; motor and rail travel; souvenirs; the Scenic Railway; postcards; and recreational walking and fashion.

The unique and fascinating objects on display have been carefully selected to both give insight into a past era and celebrate the age old attraction of the Blue Mountains Wonderland.

Tim Smith
Curator
The Air Up There



Harry Phillips

Born in Ballarat, Victoria in 1873, Harry Phillips (1873-1944) moved to Katoomba in 1908 with his family after spending three weeks in the region on a holiday. He quickly set up a small photographic business and soon combined his growing photographic talents with his printing experience to produce a range of photographic brochures that he called 'View-books'.

The 'View-books' of Harry Phillips were one of the earliest forms of promotional material produced in the Blue Mountains. Distributed nationally and internationally, 100,000 copies were published by 1920. Relatively few remain today, scattered throughout second-hand bookshops, libraries and private collections.

While Phillips is best known for his sweeping panoramic vistas of the Jamison Valley and Grose Valley, he was also well recognised for his cloud compositions.

Harry Phillips *Frederica Falls*, (detail) 1910. Hand-coloured by Isabel May Phillips c. 1920. Blue Mountains City Library Local Studies Collection

At the peak of his success, Phillips owned two shopfronts in Katoomba, producing at least eighty photographic books from 1909-1944, primarily of Sydney and his beloved Blue Mountains.

Following his death in 1944, Phillips' photographic plates were sold to a postcard company in Gympie, Queensland that continued to use his photographs on a range of souvenir products. Sadly, the original plates were seen as outdated technology and were disposed of in the early 1970s.

The glass plates and photographs in this exhibition likely represent some of the last of the original objects from the Harry Phillips legacy. Photographs feature his unique left-slanted handwriting, while the glass plates were hand-



coloured in the 1920s by his daughter, Isabel May, using sable brushes and Japanese coloured inks.

Harry Phillips was good friends with adventurer, filmmaker and fellow photographer Captain Frank Hurley (1885-1962). One of their outings was reported in *The Blue Mountains Echo* in 1919:

On Boxing Day, Capt. Frank Hurley, of South Polar fame, and until recently official photographer to the A.I.F. with Mr Harry Phillips, the well-known Mountain photographer, carried out a trip to Mt. Solitary, for the purpose of securing photographs from that spot. They left Katoomba at 6 a.m. and arrived at their destination at noon, covering a distance of about 10 miles.

One can only imagine the conversation on their hike, but you can be sure clouds would have been high up on the list, as this was a shared passion that forged their friendship.

Left: The Phillips family: Isabel Jane, Harry and their daughter Isabel May, 1918. Blue Mountains City Library Local Studies Collection.

Right: Harry Phillips *Mists in Jamieson Valley, Echo Point* 1935. Blue Mountains City Library Local Studies Collection.

Frank Hurley

Frank Hurley had many claims to fame. He was official photographer of Mawson's 1911 expedition to the Antarctic; and in 1917 he joined the Australian Imperial Force as an honorary Captain where he documented iconic war scenes. His pioneering film techniques combined with his experience in the souvenir postcard industry in 1905 made Hurley an ideal candidate to exploit the natural beauty of the Blue Mountains.



A number of Hurley's contributions feature in this exhibition; the Blue Mountains View-Master reel; postcards; and his 1952 book *The Blue Mountains and Jenolan Caves: A Camera Study*; but perhaps his greatest contribution to the promotion of the Blue Mountains was his 1936 film *Treasures of Katoomba*.

While the storyline may be considered twee by today's standards it is not without its charm. Hurley's experience as a filmmaker ensures that the rugged landscape is beautifully shot, capturing the majestic grandeur of the Mountains and clouds with sensitivity and depth.



Picture This

A wonderful range of Australian illustrators from the 'Golden Age' of advertising created the eye-catching posters that captured the grandeur and beauty of regions from all over Australia. One of the most influential was James Northfield who was active from the 1920s to the 1950s. The Art Training Institute of Melbourne in 1928 described him as "Australia's most capable poster artist". His *The Blue Mountains, New South Wales* poster c. 1930s captures the rugged beauty of the region as well as a feeling of contemplative tranquility.

Image: James Northfield, *The Blue Mountains NSW* 1936. Courtesy of the James Northfield Heritage Art Trust.

Immerse Yourself

Of all the methods available to convey the spectacle of a visit to the Blue Mountains in the early part of last Century, none worked better than the immersive 3D illusion of the stereograph.

The stunning views of the region — from the Three Sisters to the Jenolan Caves — provided souvenir vendors and tourists alike a vast spectrum of material.

Stereograph Cards

Stereograph cards as tourist mementos came into existence in the mid-1850s. The way that they worked was deceptively simple. Two images of the same view, taken at ever-so-slightly different perspectives were placed side by side on a card. When the card is placed into a stereoscope, the brain merges the two perspectives into a single three-dimensional image, giving the viewer the feeling that they are immersed in the scene.

The personal stereograph cards of E.B. Docker (1842-1923) are a fine example of the stereographic process. Docker, a notable amateur photographer, was president of the Photographic Society of New South Wales between 1894-1907 and his stereograph images of the Blue Mountains are some of the most haunting and delicate of the era.

Image: View-Master Reel 5008: *The Blue Mountains* 1956. Sawyer's Inc. Private collection.

View-Master

The stereoscope gave way to a new device in 1939 – the 'View-Master', manufactured by American company Sawyer's Inc. The View-Master was seen as a replacement to picture postcards and was widely available at photographic outlets and scenic attraction gift shops, very quickly becoming a hit among holiday-makers.

The only reel of Blue Mountains views was released in 1956. With the quaint, contemplative poses and fashions of the time, the Blue Mountains reel captures views of Mount Solitary, Leura and the Three Sisters. The photographs used in this reel were taken by Frank Hurley, with one of the images featured in his book *The Blue Mountains and Jenolan Caves: A Camera Study*.



In 1958, Sawyer's Inc. established a manufacturing plant in Sydney to meet the growing local demand. The model produced locally was the 'E-Type' Viewer, made of Bakelite. Today, the View-Master is considered a toy, but its legacy endures.



Postcards from the Edge

With so many picture-perfect moments to capture in the Blue Mountains, from scenery to hotels, guesthouses and streetscapes, postcards inspired by the Blue Mountains were produced in the thousands in the early part of last Century.

Their role was to provide a simple, cost effective means for fast communications with friends and family — cheap to purchase and to post, they were the nearest thing to immediate communication. With up to three deliveries per day, a postcard could be posted in the morning and almost certainly arrive to the recipient by the evening!

Postcards provided a cheap and portable souvenir of places visited and were accessible to all classes. Today, popular with collectors due to their glorious illustrations and fabulous black and white photography, postcards as time-capsules provide a veritable showcase of fashion, architecture, tourist spots and streetscapes long changed or gone and allow a brief insight into people's lives of the time.

Illustrated and photographic postcards of the Blue Mountains were produced by a staggering number of businesses locally, Sydney-based and even interstate.

Within Katoomba, some of the best known manufacturers include Green's Souvenirs, Harry Phillips, Kitch & Co. and A. Manning. Sydney-based production included ranges from the iconic manufacturers such as Kerry & Co., John Sands, Swain & Co. and Valentine and Sons. Many interstate manufacturers also produced local ranges for the Blue Mountains including The Rose Stereograph Company and Murray Views.



Dave Evans: Felix-Man

A visit to Echo Point between 1920 and 1960 would have brought you to the open air photographic studio of David (Dave) Evans, also known as the 'Felix-Man'. Visitors, mainly children, would pose (at times apprehensively) with one of his child-size dolls of Felix the Cat, Mickey Mouse or The Mountain Devil for a souvenir photograph which was developed on the spot.

Plying his trade rain or shine, with the simple souvenir portraits he took, Evans would never reach the levels of fame that Harry Phillips achieved but the legacy of his output of three decades remains a curio.

Very little is known of Evans' life. All that is known is that in 1962 the 'late D Evans' photographic license was transferred to Souvenir Snapshots of Katoomba. Evans' final resting place, like his life, remains a mystery today.

The Medlow Bath Hydropathic Establishment

In 1904, Mark Foy opened The Medlow Bath Hydropathic Establishment, claimed to be Australia's first health resort.

Foy had visited many overseas spas in his quest to resolve his health problems. Following a visit to Smedley's Matlock Bath in England he had hoped that a similar concept would catch on in Australia. Where better to establish such a venture than the pristine air of the Blue Mountains? Foy sold most of his shares in the family retail business to pursue his dream.

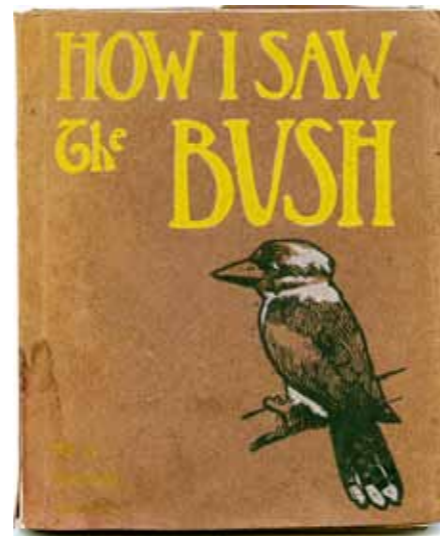
For authenticity of experience, Foy recruited Dr George Baur from Switzerland to develop a range of treatments similar to that found in overseas Baths. The resulting range of weird and wonderful treatments were presented in *The Medlow Bath Hydropathic Bath Book*. The Bath Book featured 83 treatments including

"Neptune's Belt", "The Sitz Bath" and "Spinal Slapping".

A small book *How I Saw The Bush* — By a British Globetrotter, published around 1910 and given away to guests staying at the Baths described with humour an early visit to the Medlow Bath and provides a unique insight into what was perhaps the most curious of all therapies, the "Electric Light Treatment":

Then there was an electric light bath in a building by itself, which astonished me exceedingly. You are shut up in a white box, with your head outside, and the light of seven hundred and eighty-four candles concentrated into forty-nine electric bulbs that dot the interior of the box is focussed onto your unclothed skin. The result is that you immediately lose your rheumatism, gout, indigestion, spinal complaint, neurasthenia, perihepatitis, and house-maid's knee, and come out ready to play forward in an international football match. At least, that is what I was given to understand.

Interest in hydropathic baths soon waned, and Foy moved forward with plans to convert the Bath into The Hydro Majestic which became one of Australia's most iconic hotels.



How I Saw The Bush by a British Globetrotter. c.1910. Blue Mountains City Library Local Studies Collection

Souvenirs

The wide range of natural wonders and landmarks of the Blue Mountains ensured an almost limitless plethora of images to be used on souvenirs. In the early 20th Century, some of the most beautiful china and porcelain was manufactured by companies such as Shelley, Noritake and Florentine and were widely available throughout the region in souvenir and photographic shops. The most sought after range by collectors today is Shelley China's *Jenolan Caves* collection.

Katoomba Souvenir shops flourished with owners such as Wallace "Wal" Green (1898-1986) often assuming the role of both photographer and proprietor ensuring a near endless stream of product lines to sell. Items such as salt and pepper shakers, ashtrays, notebooks and framed photos were cheap to produce and easy for travellers to carry on their journeys.

Iconic to the Blue Mountains is the *Mountain Devil* souvenir, so called due to the impish expression of the unique seedpod of the *Lambertia Formosa*. The doll's actual origin is unknown, but certainly in the 1930s, Mountain Devils were made with pipecleaners, wool and miniature props to form a multitude of doll designs, including golfers, ballerinas and wedding couples.



Image: Broken Column, Lucas Cave, Jenolan Caves NSW, Pin Dish, Shelley China c.1940s. Private Collection



Motor Touring

Mark Foy, one of Australia's earliest Motoring enthusiasts, started Australia's first motor touring business. On 29 September 1903, *The Sydney Daily Telegraph* reported:

A motor car service has been established from Blackheath to the Jenolan Caves, and with the exception of a line of steam omnibuses in Western Australia, is the first public service motoring venture in Australia. The test supplied by the road from Blackheath to Jenolan is a severe one, for it is studded with hills, and there are two rises extending over a couple of miles each. The vehicles with which the service has been inaugurated are two 9-h.p. De Dion cars, propelled by petrol each capable of seating six people, and so far they have given every satisfaction, doing the journey in about three hours and a half. ... The visitors were entertained by Mr. Mark Foy, who is an enthusiastic patron of the sport of motoring, at his residence at Medlow, and great interest was taken by them in the preparations being made there for the erection of an elaborate hotel and hydropathic establishment. ... The establishment is the first of its kind erected south of the Equator, and is one of the lines of the celebrated Spas of England and the Continent.

Image: Kerry & Co. *Grand Arch, West Side, Jenolan.* (detail) 1903. Photograph features Mark Foy's wife and young son in Mark Foy's 1902 De Dion Bouton. Blue Mountains City Library Local Studies Collection



Walks and Falls

A favourite pastime of early tourists to embrace the "elixir of life" that is Mountain Air was to enjoy leisurely strolls among the towering tree-ferns. Numerous tracks ambled down to the valleys where cascading waterfalls met meandering streams.

Women, dressed in simple, yet elegant Edwardian whites would pose in the beautiful bush settings for the burgeoning hobby of photography. Many wealthier families would employ a family photographer to capture the outings and the resulting black and white images create a timeless mood of simpler times.

Image: *Couples on a bridge.* 1910. B&W photograph. Blue Mountains City Library Local Studies Collection

All Aboard!

Steep Ambition: Scenic Railway

In the late 1800s, economic development in Katoomba consisted of two distinct industries – mining and tourism. In Katoomba, the coal and shale that was mined near what we now know as the Scenic Railway site was brought up via the incline railway before being transferred to a tramway.

With the downturn of the coal industry in Katoomba from 1903, and the increased use of the railway as a mode of transport for opportunistic walkers needing to make their way back up from the Jamison Valley, it was soon realised that a unique tourism experience could be created.

In 1933 the Katoomba Colliery *Scenic Railway* was opened and was an instant success.

Harry Hammon took over the lease in 1945, continuing the operation of the Scenic Railway as a tourist attraction. Following the success of the railway, Hammon added the second significant experience in 1958, the *Scenic Skyway*.

Captain Frank Hurley was reported to have said "...that a trip on the scenic railway was one of the most thrilling experiences of his life – and his life has been full of thrills!". (1940, *Farmer and Settler*)

Harry Phillips *The Katoomba Colliery Scenic Railway*, 1935. Blue Mountains City Library Local Studies Collection



The Need for Speed: The Caves Express

In the early 1900s special excursion trains were widely utilised by people to make the long journey from Sydney to the Blue Mountains, they were affordable and reasonably fast. In fact, due to the unsealed state of the highway and roads leading to the region, the Railways almost held a monopoly on the transportation of people to the resort region.

However, from the early 1900s a new threat was slowly emerging — the motor vehicle. Within the region, motor tour operators established businesses to transport visitors to many a scenic gem. Commencing with Mark Foy's operation out of Blackheath in 1903 (followed by the Hydro Majestic from 1904), other local operators sprang up en masse offering private tours and coach tours of key destinations throughout the region.

In the 1920s, once the roads and highways were sealed, the opportunity for private travel from Sydney on a much larger scale was created. Cars were becoming more affordable and people grew accustomed to the freedom and faster travel times that motoring brought to their holiday experience. Passenger numbers declined and Railways had to respond to this changing climate, their response was speed, and so the *Caves Express* was born.

The Caves Express commenced its service in 1929 from Central and reached Mount Victoria in around two and a half hours. It achieved its speeds due to both a reduced carriage load and a reduction in the number of stops.

To sell their message of speed, the Railway would work hard to ensure that the message was clear to potential travellers. Stories such as "CAVES EXPRESS: Makes Rail Speed Record For Mountain Climb" were published in newspapers and brochures promoting rail travel to the region exclaimed "The Caves Express is one of the world's fastest mountain-climbing trains".

The Caves Express ended its run in 1942 due to wartime reduction in timetables and was re-instated for a short period between 1953 and 1956, ending again before the Blue Mountains Rail line was electrified in 1957.

About *The Air Up There* :

Early 20th Century Blue Mountains tourism efforts centred around three things: the majestic, rugged scenery of the region; outdoor walks; and the purported health benefits of mountain air and climate. Of the latter, these claims were spruiked far and wide by physicians, tourist guides and newspapers in a bid to attract holiday-makers to the region, some of these claims included:

“Mountain air is more rarified than ordinary air. It is perfectly pure also and free from all atmospheric dust and microorganisms”. Dr. P. Muskett (Blue Mountains Echo, 1901)

“To those debilitated by strenuous work in the cities or suffering with any form of anaemia, nerves or lassitude, a course of the ozone-laden winds proves a veritable elixir of life.” (Katoomba Daily, 1920)

“It has long been recognised that some magical elixir is contained in Katoomba air. Contagious diseases are virtually unknown. The Government Medical Officer, commenting on Katoomba’s air, stated that it was “definitely aseptic and antiseptic.” That disease germs cannot survive in it is beyond question”. Harry Phillips

(Katoomba-Leura Illustrated Guide, c.1930)

Front cover image:

Harry Phillips *Blue Mountains Wonderland*. (Cover) c. 1918

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