

### 3. CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

#### 3.01 Aboriginal history

An investigation of pre-European and post-contact Aboriginal sites was carried out by Dr Val Attenbrow of the Australian Museum. Her full report comprises section 14 in Part 2, and a brief outline of this is given below.

Aboriginal people have occupied the Blue Mountains for at least 22,000 years. Heritage sites relating to both pre-European and post-contact Aboriginal occupation of the Katoomba Falls Creek Valley have been identified and examined in the fieldwork of this study.

Three pre-European archaeological sites and one isolated stone artefact were recorded on the public land. The approximate locations of these are shown in Figure 8. One of the pre-European archaeological sites was in Katoomba Park and consisted of grinding grooves in the creek bed. Information about an area of special significance to local Aboriginal people in the NE section of Frank Walford Park was also received. Because of the vegetated nature of the study area, other buried or obscured pre-European archaeological sites could possibly be found with additional work.

Post-contact Aboriginal occupation of the valley was documented from written sources and from interviews with local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Katoomba residents. Occupation of the valley was mainly in the area where the Catalina Racing Circuit is now located. Some of the Aboriginal house sites have been identified by local researchers, as shown in Figure 14-4 of Part 2. A non-denominational Christian church, known as West Katoomba Mission, was established in the valley and became an important influence about 1910. Services in the church hall were apparently attended by both Aboriginal and white families from the area. The hall was demolished in the 1960s and the site is now a privately owned residential allotment.

The Aboriginal sites identified to date, though small and containing limited physical evidence, provide information about the Aboriginal occupation of the Katoomba Falls Creek Valley in both the pre-European and post-contact periods. At location 3 in Figure 8 is a rockshelter with floor deposit and this has the potential to provide further evidence in the form of stratified and datable stone artefact assemblages.

None of the pre-European or post-contact sites is considered to have educational or tourist potential as individual sites. However, they could have more visual impact and meaning if presented to visitors within the broader context of Aboriginal occupation of Katoomba Falls Creek Valley, or of the entire Blue Mountains.

All Aboriginal heritage sites are important and of value to Aboriginal people as they are a link with their past. The post-contact sites are still of interest to members of the Katoomba Aboriginal community, being part of their own remembered history. Members of the Katoomba Aboriginal community have expressed a wish for their prior occupation of the Valley to be acknowledged in an appropriate manner such as the placing of a plaque in the area. They, and the Daruk Local Aboriginal Land Council, would need to be consulted about the wording of such a plaque and about any interpretive signs, booklets etc intended to provide information about the Aboriginal occupation of the valley.

Both the pre- and post-European Aboriginal archaeological sites are protected under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974. The latter may also be protected under the Heritage Act



of NSW, 1977. Dr Attenbrow states that protective measures should be undertaken at locations 2 and 3 in Figure 8 to ensure their preservation. She suggests that the locations of all sites should be marked on BMCC records and plans, and staff (both office and field) should be informed of their existence. When any works or development are proposed, the presence of the sites should be taken into account to ensure they are not damaged or disturbed.

Dr Attenbrow also suggests that Council staff should be particularly aware of the area of special significance to the Katoomba Aboriginal community in the NE section of Frank Walford park. Any proposed works or development likely to affect this area should be referred to the Daruk Local Aboriginal Land Council and to members of the Katoomba Aboriginal community.

Structural or artefactual evidence may have survived on some of the previously mentioned post-contact sites in the vicinity of Catalina Racing Circuit (see figure 14-4, part 2). Further investigations of these sites by a historical archaeologist experienced in post-contact Aboriginal settlements should be carried out before any work or development that involves (a) removal of debris and vegetation, or (b) excavation of, or interference with, sub-surface deposits. A detailed examination should also be made of the NW section of Frank Walford Park near several rock depressions regarded by local residents as Aboriginal wells (alleged to be the origin of the name "Wells Street"). Such investigations are necessary to ensure that evidence relating to Aboriginal occupation is not inadvertently disturbed or removed.

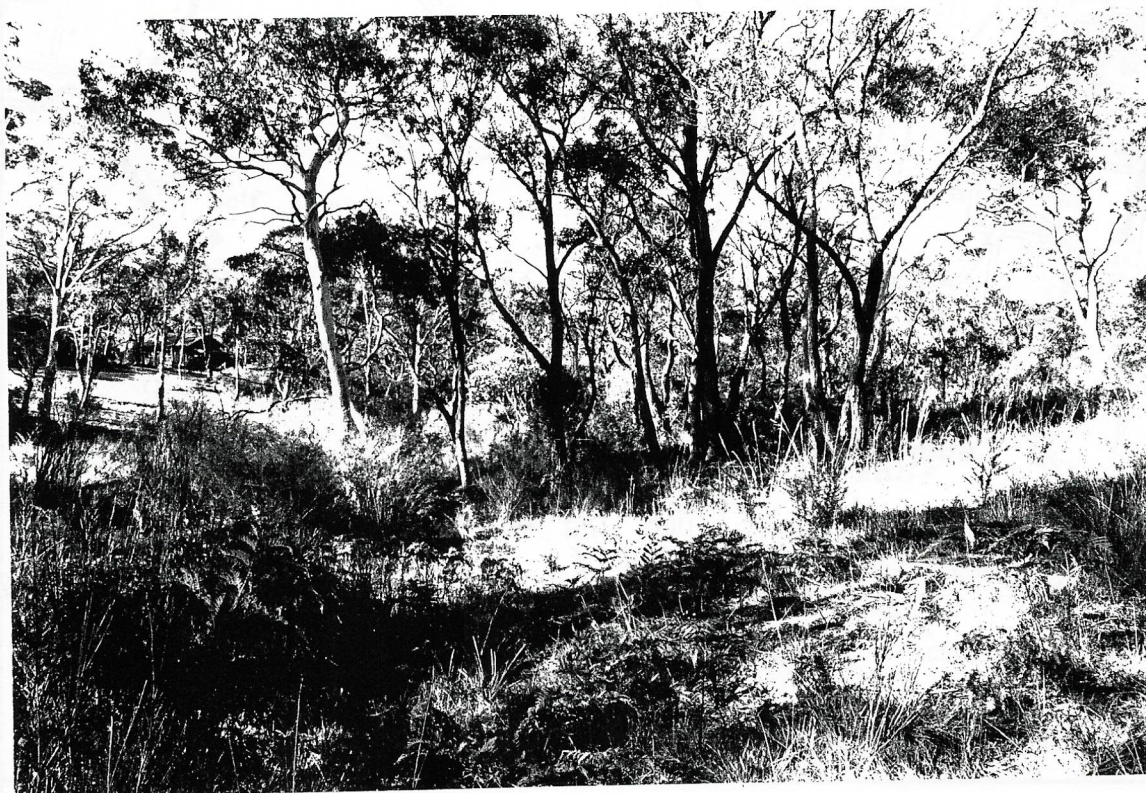
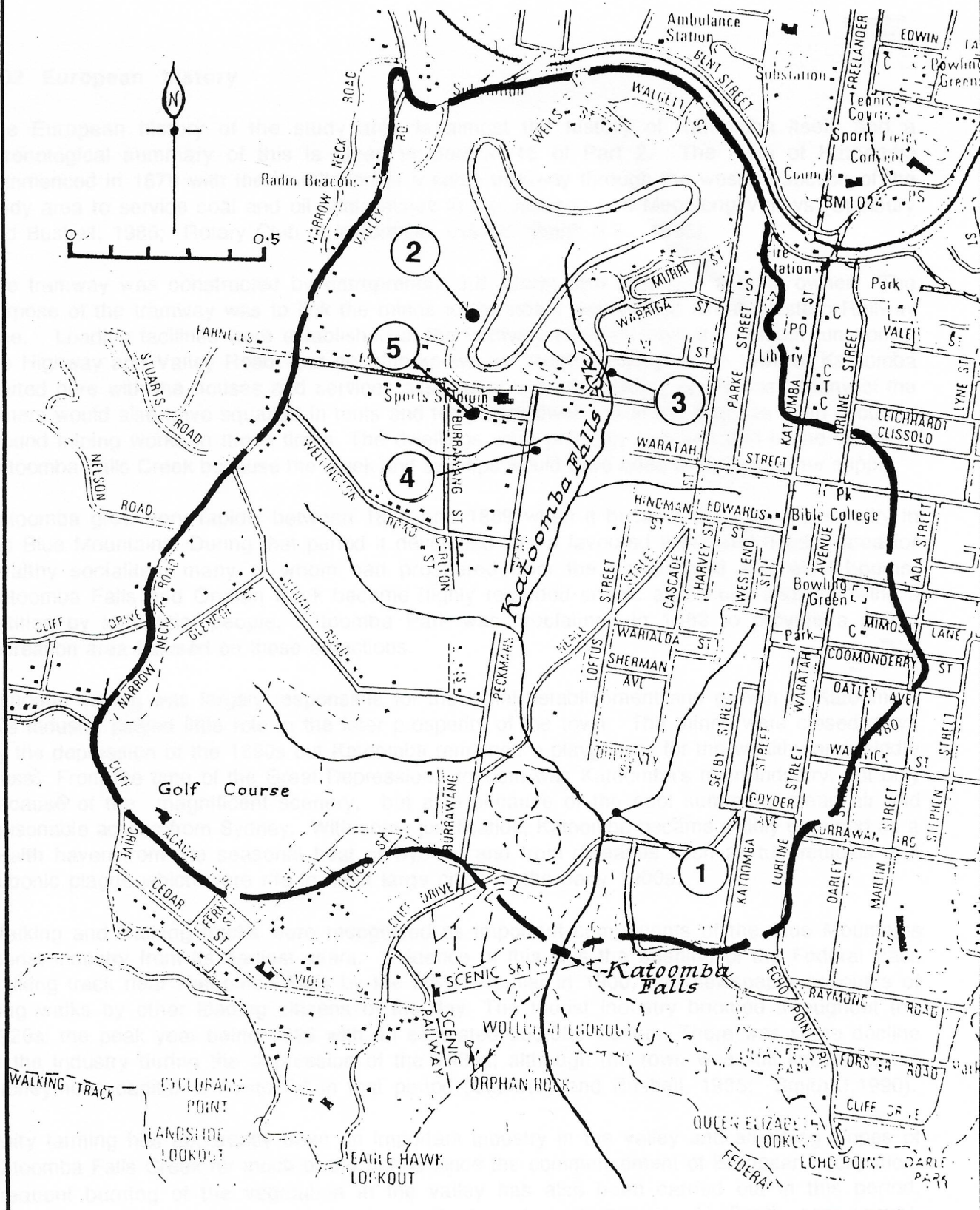


FIGURE 8

ABORIGINAL SITES

**PLATE 9** Location of isolated pre-European artefact find near Peckmans Road corresponding to Site 4 in Figure 8 (see, also Section 14 in Part 2)





**FIGURE 8**

## ABORIGINAL SITES

### PRE-EUROPEAN SITES

- 1 Grinding grooves
- 2 Stone artefact scatter
- 3 Rock shelter with deposit
- 4 Isolated artefact find

### OTHER SITES

- 5 Site of Katoomba West Mission Hall.

An area of special significance is located in the NE section of Frank Walford Park.



### 3.02 European history

The European history of the study area is almost the history of Katoomba itself, and a chronological summary of this is given in Section 15 of Part 2. The town of Katoomba commenced in 1879 with the installation of a cable tramway through the western section of the study area to service coal and oil shale mines in the Jamison and Megalong Valleys (Stanbury and Bushell, 1985; Rotary Club of Katoomba, c1970; Smith R.A., 1988).

The tramway was constructed by entrepreneur J.B. North who was also a mine owner. The purpose of the tramway was to link the mines to the newly established Great Western Railway Line. Loading facilities were established at the tramway terminus near the present junction of the Highway and Valley Road, and became known as "North's Siding". The town of Katoomba started here with the houses and services associated with the loading operations. Many of the miners would also have squatted in tents and temporary dwellings in the area, as often occurred around mining works in those times. The dwellings were probably concentrated in the valley of Katoomba Falls Creek because the creek and swamps would have been their main water supply.

Katoomba grew very rapidly between 1879 and 1889 when it became the first municipality in the Blue Mountains. During that period it developed into a favoured living and holiday area for wealthy socialites, many of whom had prospered from the earlier gold and wool booms. Katoomba Falls and Orphan Rock became highly regarded scenic attractions and, following a petition by influential people, Katoomba Park was proclaimed in 1888 to provide a public recreation area focused on these attractions.

Although mining was largely responsible for the initial establishment and growth of Katoomba, this industry played little role in the later prosperity of the town. The mines were closed down by the depression of the 1890s but Katoomba remained a playground for the wealthy and middle class. From the time of the Great Depression, tourism was Katoomba's main industry, not only because of the magnificent scenery, but also because of the cool summers, clean air and reasonable access from Sydney. With some justification, Katoomba became widely regarded as a health haven from the seasonal heat of Sydney and from diseases such as tuberculosis and bubonic plague which were rife in most large cities of the early 1900s.

Walking and walking tracks were recognised as important components of the Blue Mountains tourist industry from its earliest years. Evidence of this was the opening of the Federal Pass walking track near Katoomba Falls by the NSW Premier in 1900, and newspaper accounts of long walks by other leading citizens of the day. The tourist industry boomed throughout the 1920s, the peak year being 1928 with an estimated 500,000 visitors. There was some decline in the industry during the depression of the 1930s, although the town was still known as the "honeymoon capital of Australia" in that period (Stanbury and Bushell, 1985; Smith J, 1990).

Dairy farming has apparently been an important industry in the valley and adjoining slopes of Katoomba Falls Creek for much of the period since the commencement of European occupation. Frequent burning of the vegetation in the valley has also been carried out in this period, probably to stimulate the growth of grass and other plants for grazing (J. Smith, pers comm). Such practices have had considerable influence on the present landscape of the valley, particularly in the vicinity of McRaes Paddock. They have undoubtedly been a contributing factor to some of the serious soil erosion referred to in Section 2.03.

A significant event in the recent history of the area was the construction of Catalina Racing Circuit which was commenced about 1957 and completed in 1961 (see section 15 in Part 2). The subsequent car races provided a major boost to the tourist industry for about a decade when



many thousands of spectators were attracted to most meetings (W. Hawkless, pers comm). Nevertheless, for reasons that do not seem fully explained, the meetings were a financial failure and ceased in 1971 (BMCC, 1982). Rallycross motor cycle racing continued on the Circuit and adjoining tracks after 1971 but was stopped in 1980 because of dust, noise and damage to the tracks. Since then the Circuit has been used about once per month for time trials, lap dashes, hill climbs etc, with only one vehicle allowed on the tarmac at a time.

The continuing use of Catalina Circuit for motor sports is a very controversial issue for the Katoomba community at the present time, as reported in 5.01 and 6.03. However, there is little doubt that the Circuit has played a significant role (whether positive or otherwise) in the recent history of Katoomba and it is therefore a potential heritage item. When it is no longer used for motor sports some links with its original purpose should be preserved as an item of interest and information for future generations. The 2.2 kilometer long, looping roadway should also be recognised as a unique facility with a number of other potential uses for the Katoomba and wider Blue Mountains community, as suggested in Sections 5.01, 5.02 and 5.03 .

A number of items of significance to the European history of the study area have been placed on the BMCC Heritage Register, as listed in Table 5 below. They include 18 buildings and 4 building sites, providing some insight to the lifestyles and community activities of past times.

**TABLE 5 REGISTERED HERITAGE ITEMS IN STUDY AREA**  
(from BMCC, 1991b)

REGISTER NUMBER	ITEM	LOCATION
K12	Katoomba Cascades	Katoomba Park *
K13	Katoomba Falls	Katoomba Park *
K23	Balmoral House	190 Bathurst Road
K24	First School Site	296 Great Western Highway
K28	Stone Terraces	next to Balmoral House (K23)
K32	Carrington Hotel	15-47 Katoomba Street
K34	Paragon Cafe	63-67 Katoomba Street
K35	Katoomba Post Office	59-61 Katoomba Street
K36	St Hilda's Church of England	66a Katoomba Street
K37	"Shepton"	277 Katoomba Street
K40	Stone cottage site	33-35 Parke Street
K41	Old "Echo" newspaper office	23-25 Parke Street
K42	Falls House site	89 Peckmans Road
K43	House	91-93 Waratah Street
K59	Katoomba Falls Kiosk	Katoomba Park *
K61	"Gracehill Lodge" and garden	108-120 Narrow Neck Road
K67	Uniting Church	142 Katoomba Street
K69	St Canice's Roman Catholic Church	156 Katoomba Street
K70	Group of shops	49-57 Katoomba Street
K71	Former bank	66 Katoomba Street
K72	Former theatre	73-75 Katoomba Street
K73	Shops	110-114 & 118 Katoomba Street
K83	"Varuna" house, studio & garden	139-141 Cascade Street

\* Items located in the public land.

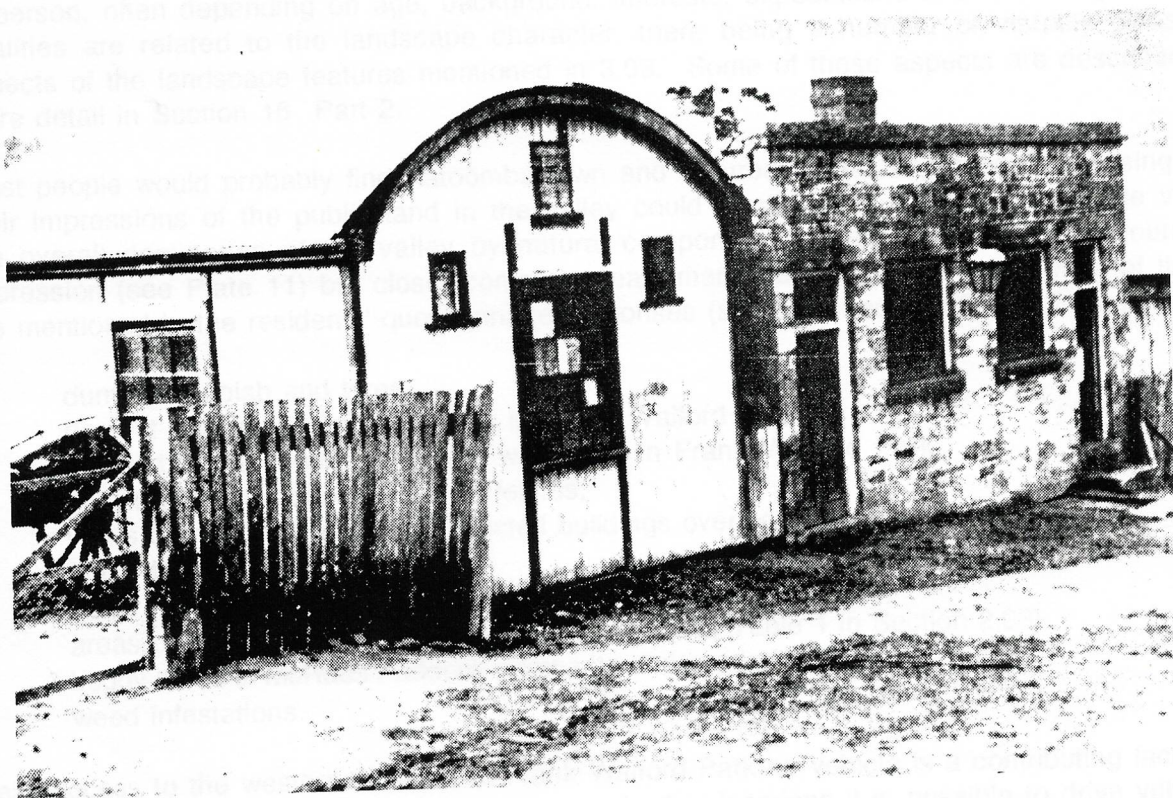


Only one cultural item of Table 5 is in the public land of the study area. This is Katoomba Falls Kiosk (K59) which was examined in some detail by consultants Manidis Roberts (1990). This building is regarded as the most authentic remaining example of the old kiosk-style buildings which were once numerous in the tourist areas of the Blue Mountains. In their management plan, Manidis Roberts recommended renovation of the kiosk and the construction of a new tea room consistent with the historical context and current needs (see 7.07).

The items in Table 5 do not include sites of the mining operations from which Katoomba began. As hinted by R. Fitzpatrick (1989) and probably by other local writers, the site of North's Siding has particular heritage significance and should be officially recognised as the birthplace of Katoomba. According to old maps (see section 15 in Part 2), North's Siding and much of the early settlement were near or within the present boundary of Frank Walford Park. The European historical importance of the locality is therefore quite substantial but this has apparently not been fully appreciated in other reports and studies (e.g. BMCC, 1982).

Extending southwards from the site of North's Siding is the privately owned route of the old cable tramway where a number of historical relics have been recorded. A report on some of these was prepared by R.A. Smith (1988) whose conclusions state ".... it is both desirable and appropriate for the remaining evidence of North's cable tramway, wherever found, to be properly documented, appreciated and given the necessary heritage protection by the Blue Mountains City Council." This recommendation is strongly endorsed in the present study.

Additional items that should be considered for possible heritage listing are (1) old dairy buildings in a property off Wellington Road, (2) the site of the West Katoomba Mission Church mentioned in 3.01, and (3) the site of J.B. North's home "Essendene" near the water reservoir.



**PLATE 10** Katoomba Falls Hotel about 1880. This was initially established to serve the needs of the mining community in the valley. The site is a heritage item (K12) on the BMCC Register, as listed in Table 5.  
(photo by courtesy of J. Smith)



### 3.03 Present landscape character

As for each of the other 25 towns and villages of the Blue Mountains, Katoomba has a distinctive urban character, largely reflecting its past historical development. Also in common with most of the others, Katoomba retains clear evidence of all major stages of its past development (BMCC, 1989; Department of Planning, 1989; Stanbury and Bushell, 1985). The contrast between the older eastern and newer western urban areas of the town is described in 15.05.

Separating the eastern and western urban areas is the green corridor of the public land. This has a mixed landscape, influenced by the varying physical characteristics as well as past land uses. Adopting the scheme of classifying open space suggested by Department of Planning (1992) one would describe Katoomba Park as "partly parkland and partly bushland". By the same scheme, McRaes Paddock would be "undeveloped with areas of bushland". The undeveloped part of this section has the general appearance of rural grazing land, consistent with its apparent use for that purpose over many years.

Frank Walford Park also has a mixed landscape with its sports facilities, bushland, undeveloped areas and formal gardens. The area as a whole is dominated by the clearly artificial structure of the Racing Circuit but a wild and natural impression is conveyed by the swamps, grassland and substantial areas of forest.

### 3.04 Aesthetic and visual qualities

Aesthetic and visual qualities involve preferences and judgments which may vary from person to person, often depending on age, background, interests, expectations and knowledge. Such qualities are related to the landscape character, there being a number of visually pleasing aspects of the landscape features mentioned in 3.03. Some of these aspects are described in more detail in Section 16 Part 2.

Most people would probably find Katoomba town and its urban areas aesthetically pleasing but their impressions of the public land in the valley could vary greatly. In the broadscale view, the overall domination of the valley by natural components generally conveys a favourable impression (see Plate 11) but closer contact reveals many aesthetic problems. Most of these are mentioned in the residents' questionnaire responses (see 5.01 and 18.03) and include:

- dumped rubbish and tyres
- derelict and vandalised buildings in Frank Walford Park
- disused pipes, electricity poles, wiring etc in Frank Walford Park
- dilapidated or poorly repaired fences,
- views of inharmonious and neglected buildings overlooking the area
- noise from motor sports
- water pollution
- areas of severe soil erosion and exposed soil (see Table 1 in Section 2.03)
- boggy areas in McRaes Paddock (remnants of degraded swamps)
- weed infestations.

Easy access to the western sections of Frank Walford Park by vehicle is a contributing factor to the rubbish dumping and soil erosion. At several other locations it is possible to drive vehicles to the boundary of the public land and park without being seen from houses or other vehicles. Rubbish is easily offloaded at these locations which include Lake Esplanade, Peckman Road near Stuart Road, and Lomond Street.





**PLATE 11** The broadscale view creates a favourable impression but closer examination would reveal a number of aesthetic problems

The 1982 Management Plan for Frank Walford Park stated "..... the current scene is one of neglect and dereliction", and this was repeated verbatim in an assessment of the area five years later (BMCC, 1982 p 33; Milemark, 1987 p 37). Apparently little effective effort has been made in more than ten years to rectify these circumstances as the same statement would still be true today in much of the area adjoining Catalina Circuit.

Some aesthetic and visual problems in Katoomba Park have been examined in detail by Manidis Roberts (1990). That study was quite critical of the buildings in the caravan park and the toilets near the ovals, describing them as "ugly" and "boring". It was also critical of past attempts to extend or modify the kiosk but praised the original style and design of this building. Most of the recommendations made by Manidis Roberts to improve the visual environment in Katoomba Park have apparently been accepted by BMCC and these would generally be endorsed by the present study.

### 3.05 Residential amenity

Despite the previously mentioned aesthetic problems, the residential amenity of the public land is quite significant. It enables the enjoyment of a range of recreational, leisure and educational activities, provides an aesthetically pleasing setting for many homes, and provides other benefits of urban open space as described in 4.09. It should therefore be recognised as having a positive influence on health, property values and the general wellbeing of the community.

The population of Katoomba is classed as "ageing", with 1550 people, i.e. 19 percent, over 60 (ABS Census 1991; Manidis Roberts, 1990). The older people tend to live in the eastern section of the urban area, especially in the vicinity of Frank Walford Park and it seems likely that 25 percent or more of the residents in this area are pensioners. As pointed out in



responses to the residents' questionnaire (see 5.01), walking is an important activity for these residents. It is one of the few physical exercises available and affordable to the elderly, and should be encouraged for its potential benefits to community health.



**PLATE 12** The traffic-free roadway of Catalina Circuit is a unique amenity with many potential community uses for both elderly and younger residents.

Catalina Circuit provides an even, relatively flat surface which is ideal for elderly walkers and wheelchairs. The same qualities, together with the large size of the circuit, should enable its simultaneous use for a range of leisure activities including rollerblading, skate board riding, and learner cycling. Attention would need to be given to the effective separation of these activities perhaps with removable barriers, lane marking and similar inexpensive measures. There is also a need to improve pedestrian access to the Circuit and make other minor modifications before full advantage could be taken of this potentially excellent community amenity.

McRaes Paddock contains open space and bushland suitable for passive recreational activities. Access to the Paddock is impeded by fences (see 4.04) and the unmade tracks have some rough and muddy sections. However, the terrain is reasonably level and it should not be difficult to provide good walking conditions for elderly residents (and tourists) in this area.

The amenities of Frank Walford Park and McRaes Paddock are reduced by the aesthetic and visual problems reported in 3.04. Effective measures to rectify these problems would be of direct benefit to the wellbeing of the local community.

An important disamenity of Catalina Circuit when it is used for motor sports is the resulting noise at the homes of nearby residents. In the past there has often been a tendency to discount noise as merely a nuisance, but there is increasing recognition of its health implications as outlined briefly in Section 15.07 of Part 2.



### 3.06 Summary of special features of the cultural environment

For the purposes of this study, the most important features of the cultural environment may be summarised as follows:

1. Three pre-European Aboriginal archaeological sites and one area of special significance to Aboriginal people have been identified in the public land. Protection of the archaeological sites is required under the National Parks and Wildlife Act. Works likely to affect the area of special significance should not be undertaken before conferring with Daruk Local Aboriginal Land Council and members of the Katoomba Aboriginal community.
2. The northern and western parts of Frank Walford Park have much significance for the European history of the Blue Mountains. The site of North's Siding, which is within or near the boundary of the Park, should be recognised as the birthplace of Katoomba. This site deserves special protection and listing in the BMCC Heritage Register. The route of the old mining tramway and several other items, including Catalina Circuit, are also worthy of consideration for heritage listing.
3. Although the present residential amenity of the public land is quite significant, some relatively minor works would considerably increase the value of Catalina Circuit and McRaes Paddock for passive recreational activities such as walking, rollerblading, skateboard riding and learner cycling. There is a definite need for such an amenity because of the age structure of the population and the lack of other local facilities for these activities.
4. The aesthetic qualities and residential amenity of the area are detrimentally affected by a number of environmental problems in the public land. These include dumped rubbish and tyres, derelict buildings, water pollution, soil erosion, weeds, degraded swamps and noise from motor sports. The elimination of these problems would be of direct benefit to the local community and to others likely to use the public land.