



CHAKOLA

Wildlife Refuge & Conservation Area

230B Mount Scanzi Rd, Kangaroo Valley NSW 2577

Background Information

Chakola (an Aboriginal word for *Lyrebird*) is set in approximately 32 hectares (80 acres) of unspoilt bushland along the Kangaroo River in Kangaroo Valley, just over 2 hours south of Sydney. Kangaroo Valley was part of the tribal lands of the Wodi-Wodi Aborigines when, in 1817, explorer Charles Throsby and cattleman Captain Richard Brooks opened up the area for white settlement. Kangaroo Valley was recognised as a place of distinction when classified by the National Trust in 1977.

The property was purchased by the Deacock family in 1963 and gazetted a Wildlife Refuge (No. 207) by NSW Parks & Wildlife Service in 1967. More recently the property was placed under a Voluntary Conservation Agreement with the relevant authorities to ensure the continued protection of the native flora and fauna. Today, 89% of the property (ie excluding the building areas) is protected in perpetuity from any development. As a consequence it is very much a case of ***“Take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but footprints”***.

In December 1965 Chakola opened as a children’s holiday camp – one of the very first facilities of its kind - and ever since has operated as a ‘creative leisure’ and ‘experiential learning’ centre where children, adults, families or common interest groups have had the opportunity to work out their own ideas – whatever they may be - as long, that is, that the environment did not suffer.

The initial philosophy was that Chakola be used for experiments in recreation & education. Until the mid-70’s Chakola enjoyed experimental bookings which included Ausventure Holidays (Venturing to Learn & Learning to Venture) for children aged 8 to 13 years. It was found that young boys & girls quickly redefined what most adults & often the media describes as “adventure”.

Schools, universities and many other organisations have hired Chakola for a variety of aims including education, adventure, crafts, music & social activities. All were exposed to the concept of care for the bush and each other. For over twenty years a lease was in place with “Experiential Learning Systems” who ran “Operation Challenge” for executives and their teams from the corporate sector. They were also involved in University “Leadership Selection & Training Courses” sponsored by industry.

The owners seek to retain the uniqueness of Chakola and ensure no undue pressure is applied to the property by way of restricting the numbers accessing the property and ensuring that there are no activities which could prove detrimental to the environment, flora or fauna.

Whilst the owners allow a very diverse spectrum of uses for Chakola, there are some aspects that are “restricted”. The following is an indicative list of areas/features that need to be considered.

* There must, at ALL times, be care shown to the bush habitat and ALL wildlife on the property. No fauna or flora is to be hurt or damaged in any way & nothing must be removed from the property. Penalties do exist for contravention of the rules as laid down by the National Parks & Wildlife Service of NSW.

* No trees or other flora are to be felled or disposed of. In the event of possible safety concerns with specific trees or areas of growth, then consultation must take place with the owners.



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- * Extreme care must be taken in the cliff areas at all times. These are predominantly sandstone which can crumble or fracture without warning. We recommend staying well away from cliff / escarpment areas.
- * Do not enter the bush alone. Covered footwear should be worn at all times for protection against sharp sticks and stones, nettles, thorns etc.
- * If using the river recommend safety wear is to be used by all participants and due care given to the condition of the river prior to organising water activities. Infrequent flooding can raise river levels by up to 30m, erode walking trails and deposit sharp foreign objects washed downstream
- * All vehicles must be parked in the designated parking area - only vehicles effecting deliveries should proceed beyond the carpark to the buildings complex.
- * There is a pioneer cabin close to the river and a small 'yurt' along the upper fence line. These are the personal retreats of the owners and are not for use.
- * 'Unplugged' music is welcome, however loud amplified music is not.

The open & closed forests of Chakola are part of the Shoalhaven River Escapement, which has been identified as significant for saxicolous (rock dwelling) animals. Examples are wallabies, bats, snakes, frogs & gliders.

Several threatened species have been identified on the property, including Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby, broad-headed snake, several micro bat species, monitor lizard & four bird species. Mobs of Eastern Grey Kangaroo and other wallaby species including red-necked, swamp and wallaroo are regularly seen. Transient bird and animal species including Glossy Black and Gang Gang Cockatoo are occasionally seen.

The National Parks Service maintains a fox baiting programme and several wildlife monitor cameras have been installed – please do not touch baits or cameras.

A flora survey was undertaken in 1999 which identified seven different types of vegetation occurring at Chakola - Grey Gum/Stringybark Forest/Woodland; Scribbly Gum/Bloodwood Forest; Tall Blue Gum Forest; Peppermint Bloodwood Forest; Moist Sub Tropical Rainforest; River Oak Forest; and Kunzea Shrubland.

There are 4 plant species of National Conservation significance and 46 plant species of Regional significance listed. Chakola has 15 Pigmy Orchids (identified by Dianne Dorrington) and 80 flowering plants (identified by Ken Rubelli). Introduced tree species are monitored and in some cases removed. Invasive weed species such as *Lantana Camara* and *Solanum mauritianum* (wild tobacco) are also controlled.

The property is well treed with the upper level being relatively flat and it is here that the main buildings of Chakola are located. The demarcation of this zone is the rocky outcrops that appear within the lower table zone. This in turn leads to the 60m sandstone escarpment and ultimately the Kangaroo River to which the property has approximately half a kilometre of river frontage, which remains wild. The river banks were resumed by the Metropolitan Water Board as a catchment area to the Shoalhaven Dam – however there is an agreement in place permitting access to the river and the drawing of water.