



OPTIONAL DAY — TOUR OF THE CAMDEN AREA – SW SYDNEY

Monday 13 September, 2021

The Optional Day tour will take us to the Macarthur Region of NSW on the Cumberland Plain of the Sydney Basin. The Nepean River curves through its undulating landscape dotted with distinctive mounts, and the Blue Mountains on its western edge. The tour aims to illuminate the conference theme by exploring the phases of change that have modified the area's cultural landscape. We will appreciate firsthand the landform and imagine the spirit of place as felt by First Nations people. We'll see colonial period estates, and gardens of different eras.

Arriving in the area, we will drive around *The Australian Botanic Garden Mount Annan* established in a now-rare remnant area of critically endangered Cumberland Plain Woodland. We will stop to admire the vivid, spring display of Australian native flowers, planted against a backdrop of Australian tropical trees, ferns and palms.

For millennia this country was the intersection and meeting place of three First Nations Peoples, the *Dharug*, the *Dharawal* and the *Gundungurra*. The original name for the area is thought to have been Belkennie.

Word of the existence of a herd of cows and bulls flourishing in this landscape - having wandered from the fledgling Sydney colony in 1788 - excited official interest and drew the Europeans to the area. The fertile river-flats where the wild cattle were found years later subsequently became known as '*The Cow Pastures*' of the district now called Camden.

John Macarthur was granted 5,000 acres in 1805, the first land grant south of the Nepean River. Others soon followed, causing the dispossession of the First Nation Peoples. Competition for resources culminated in the loss of Aboriginal lives in the Appin massacre of 1816.

The region became the heartland of the Macarthur family's agricultural enterprises. They and other early settlers from Sydney built the many surviving colonial houses, gardens and large farming properties in the district, some of which we will see or visit.

We will visit Camden on the Nepean River, located at the centre of the Macarthur region. The historic town retains the layout drawn up by James and William Macarthur (sons of John and Elizabeth Macarthur), who dedicated eight hectares of land for sale and constructed several buildings.

We will also enjoy country hospitality! Lunch at *Denbigh*, an early farm complex and a colonial garden with contemporary elements, will be followed by a scenic drive through the farming district to the Macarthur family seat *Camden Park*. The tour ends in a not-to-be-missed exploration of *Camden Park's* extensive gardens, where we will discover the remains of its once-famous furnace-heated propagation and production nursery, and see some plants rarely found in other Australian gardens.

Booking for the Optional Day can be made via the AGHS website from 1 April. We welcome you to join us on this special tour of a historical area on the brink of change.



Spring garden display at the Australian Botanic Garden, Mount Annan. Image © Christine Hay



Verandah garden of 'Denbigh' house. Image © Gina Plate



'Camden Park', colonial garden features both native and exotic flora. The young bottle tree on the left is part of a succession planting program. Image © Gina Plate