

LEX LOCI'S TRAVELS

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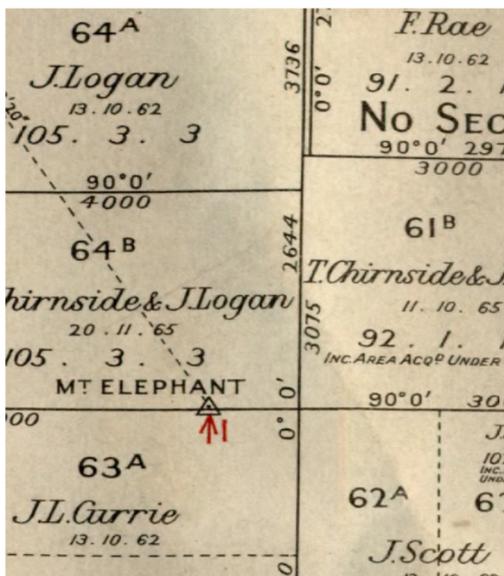
An ad-hoc one-pager from The Public Land Consultancy

The Elephant in the Landscape

As you drive along the Hamilton Highway, it's a bit hard to miss. And yet it was ignored for a Century and a half. Standing 240 metres above the surrounding plain, Mount Elephant has been compellingly visible for 20,000 years. The artist Eugene Von Guerard certainly saw it in 1857.

It's now listed on the register of National Estate as 'one of the highest and one of the major scoria cones in the largest homogenous volcanic plains on earth.'

Here's what Lex wants to know: why was this significance not reflected in place-law for so long?



It seems that somehow the mountain went quite unnoticed by the colony's top-hatted administrators. They just rolled out their rectangles across the Geelengla Parish Plan, unperturbed by topography.

The gentry of the day, including Thomas Chirnside esquire, responded by buying up those rectangles. Then followed grazing, Patersons Curse, thistles and rabbits. And even worse, quarrying for scoria.

Elsewhere, significant landscape features like river frontages and foreshores were retained as Crown reserves. But not mountains, and not escarpments. The Crown land we now call the Alpine or the Grampians National Park was retained principally because it was too inhospitable to attract buyers.

So Mount Elephant was deemed unworthy of public land status. Its listing on the National Estate Register didn't happen until 1980. The Corangamite Planning Scheme showed it as Farming Zone right up until 2012.

But the key date for our Elephant was 1 January 2000, when 50 people from the little town of Derrinallum welcomed in the new millennium from the summit. They went on, in collaboration with the Trust for Nature, to purchase the mountain. Largely with their own money. It's still private freehold land, but now controlled by a public entity - the Derrinallum-Lismore Community Association Inc.

So this little community did what all the apparatus of government found itself incapable of doing. Lex says: Go Derrinallum!

See you there! Lex Loci