

## The Great North Road *The Convict Trail* **Wisemans Ferry**

The Great North Road is a 240km convict built masterpiece constructed between 1826 and 1836 to provide an overland route from Sydney to Newcastle and the Hunter Valley. Much of the original convict built road remains in use today, although a lot of the original surface is well buried beneath bitumen.

Convict built remains, such as stone retaining walls, pick dressed cuttings, culverts, bridges and stone cut drains, can be seen when driving along the road, or when walking in Dharug and Yengo National Parks.



Statue of Solomon Wiseman; River views, Interpretative sculpture; Base of waterfall at Thomas James Bridge

# Wisemans Ferry

The village of Wisemans Ferry is situated on a bend in the Hawkesbury River at its junction with the Macdonald River. It was named after Solomon Wiseman who owned the land the village is built on.

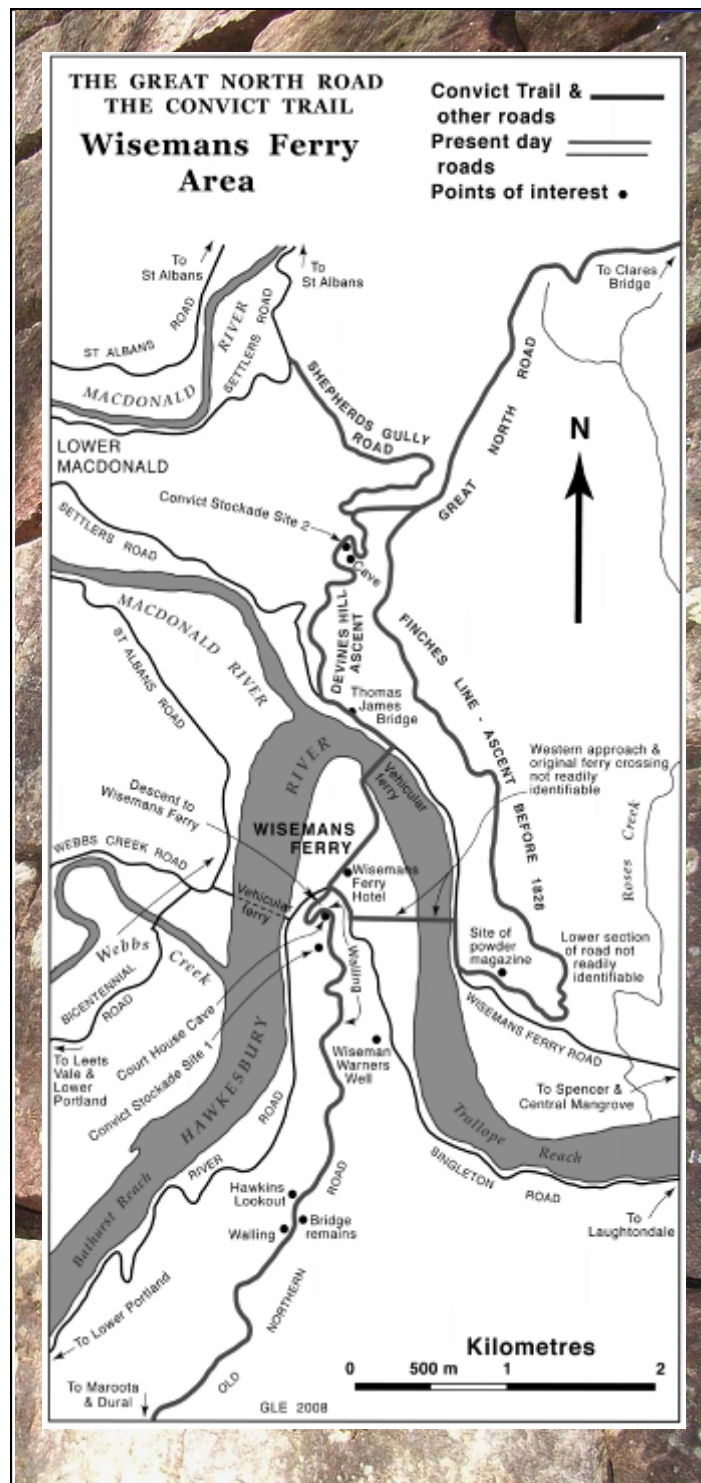
In 1827 Wiseman was granted a government contract to operate a ferry here. It has operated continuously longer than any other ferry in Australia.

Wiseman was an east-end Londoner and Thames River worker. In 1806 he was transported to Sydney after being convicted of stealing timber which he was employed to unload and move by barge. He was fortunate that his wife was allowed a berth on the ship. She replaced a woman who had declined to join her husband.

As a skilled bargeman he was utilised on Sydney Harbour, and after gaining his freedom became involved in coastal shipping. In 1817 two of his coastal ships were wrecked, but that year he was granted land. He chose this strategic position and established an inn.

When the road to the Hunter was planned, Wiseman built a grand two-storey stone house facing the river. It is now part of the hotel. While the road was being built he used the location to advantage, obtaining both the licence to operate the ferry and a contract to provision the road gangs. Convincing the surrounding settlers for a number of years that this contract was his by rights as the sole applicant, he profited massively. He died in 1838 and the land was first subdivided in 1857.

A statue of Solomon Wiseman can be found today near the hotel.



In the late 19th century, as white Australians began to acknowledge their convict origins, highly romanticised stories were spun to attract, horrify or entertain early tourists to Wisemans Ferry and the Inn. As a means of refuting some of these tales, we mention the following facts:

- The magistrates' court was held in a house, not a cave.
- Only the Supreme Court could order hangings, and these took place in the prison yard.
- Wiseman's first wife died many years before the stone house was built.

Gunpowder was used in cutting down the cliff-face, large caves provided places for dry storage.

The first ferry route met the base of Finchess Line on the north side of the river. Its wharf-sites on both sides of the river are now on private land, and remains can sometimes be seen at low tide. At the current ferry route (in use since 1829), stones from the original northern wharf can be seen at low tide, as can pick-dressing on the cliff-face immediately above the road opposite the ferry exit.

Imagine the horror of the convicts, often of urban background, on being faced with the cliffs opposite the ferry and being told they were going to build a road to the top – and far beyond.

On the south, the descent into Wisemans Ferry village is carried in parts by convict-built dry stone walls. Many of these are of similar height and quality to those found opposite on Devines Hill.

The grey steel pillars in Court House Cave have been added recently as an earthquake-protection measure.

## THE CONVICT TRAIL

The Convict Trail is the name for The Great North Road, the surrounding land, and historic buildings. The Convict Trail Project Inc. (CTP) is a community based organisation with objectives of the care, protection and promotion of the Great North Road.

To achieve its objectives the CTP works with many partners, including the NSW Heritage Office, councils, Dept. of Corrective Services, NPWS, RTA & local tourism associations. The Project brings together community groups, individual members, tourism groups, State Government agencies and local councils including both Baulkham and Hornsby Councils. For more information, including “conservation partners” visit the CTP website.

This brochure is part of a series of area specific electronic brochures available from the Convict Trail website. The content of this brochure has been compiled in good faith but is published without responsibility in law or otherwise for its accuracy and without any assumption of duty of care by the Convict Trail Project. The sites are listed to allow you to appreciate how much evidence remains and what is supporting the road you are driving on.

In January 2008 the Australian Government submitted for assessment for World Heritage listing a series of Convict sites, a combination of Devines Hill and Finchs Line sections of the Great North Road was one of the 11 sites submitted. This section is Nationally listed, other sections are state listed and the whole road is of National importance.

Remember: do not trespass on private property. Many of the convict relics noted in this guide are used for traffic. You should only view them from safe locations.

For extra information purchase an “Explore the Convict Trail” booklet or visit the Convict Trail Website [www.convicttrail.org](http://www.convicttrail.org).

New members welcome.

Photos: E.A.Roberts



Wisemans Ferry: Anglican Church built 1890s using stone from 1840s ; Wildlife on by-roads, tortoise; diamond python.