



Tidbinbilla Heritage

Rock Valley Homestead and Heritage Precinct

**Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve
Ngunnawal Country**

**ROCK
GG
VALLEY**



ACT
Government



There are rich stories in the Rock Valley Heritage Precinct.

The Traditional Custodians of the Canberra region, the Ngunnawal people, have a continuing cultural, social, environmental, spiritual and economic connection to the lands and waters of the Tidbinbilla area that stretches over time immemorial.

Ngunnawal men have a special relationship to the valley, particularly through its use for ceremonies and passing on of traditional customary men’s lore/law. Ngunnawal people maintained and used the valley as a gathering place and a place to source food, including the migratory bogong moths. The Ngunnawal custodianship and connection to Country continues strongly today.

The abundant resources used by the Ngunnawal people were similarly attractive to European settlers. In the 1830s George Solomon Webb grazed his cattle on the Tidbinbilly Pastoral Run, which extended over the whole valley and out to Paddys River.

As the large pastoral runs were broken up in the second half of the 19th century, smaller holdings were available for selection. The first small settlers at Rock Valley were the Sheedy family, from 1884. When they moved to Castle Hill near Tharwa the area around today’s homestead was taken up by the Green family.

The Greens initially settled deeper in the valley at Ash Corner in the 1880s but moved to this site, building the homestead in stages from 1895.

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VALLEY**

European settlers in this district relied on sheep and wool. This brand is modelled on Rock Valley’s wool bale stencil, with George Green’s initials at the centre.

Heart of the Valley and Community

The settler stories in the Rock Valley Heritage Precinct are told in the homestead, house garden, the larger produce garden and orchard, and the surrounding paddocks.

The homestead stayed in the Green family's hands for 70 years, across three generations. Risen from the ashes of the 2003 wildfires, it is one of few constructions remaining from the rural phase of settlement in the valley.



***The pioneers George & Mary Ann Green
(TPA Archives)***

Its story spans nearly two centuries of European settlement, from 1830s squatting to small holding selections in the 1880s, to nature reserve in the 1960s, to today's stewardship and care.

Of the accessible historic homesteads in the ACT, Rock Valley is the only one that represents the lives of small landholders in a remote setting, who carved a property out of the bush and pursued diverse livelihoods.

Their story takes us from survival through off-farm work with large landholders, to self-sufficiency and independence, to becoming the physical and social hub of the Tidbinbilla and Gibraltar valley communities.



***Eddie and Keith Green with friends and family
at Rock Valley (TPA Archives)***

The families of the Tidbinbilla and Gibraltar valleys looked out for and supported each other, their links made stronger by inter-marriage.

Rock Valley was central to this mountain valley community, connected to other residences, schools, social facilities, local industries, communication and transport.

It was a popular venue for social activities, attracting the broader district to woolshed dances, gymkhanas and carnivals, and luring Canberrans into the countryside for casual recreational use (picnics, camping, fishing, and blackberry picking).

Even before Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, it was a hub and start point for early bushwalkers and hikers in the youthful Canberra, as rural and high country areas of the ACT became popular for outdoor recreation.

The Green family also guided walkers in the hills, in some of the earliest nature-based tourism from Canberra.

The House

Artefact material collected near the homestead indicates that the site was used by Aboriginal people long before the arrival of settlers. It was an obvious place to be – on a gentle slope, close to the river, between two creeks, with soaks fed by permanent springs upslope.

The homestead was built in stages from 1895, commencing with two timber slab buildings and an outdoor oven, followed by a single bedroom of pisé (rammed earth), using material excavated on site. Four additional pisé rooms (bedrooms and a parlour) were constructed in ensuing years.

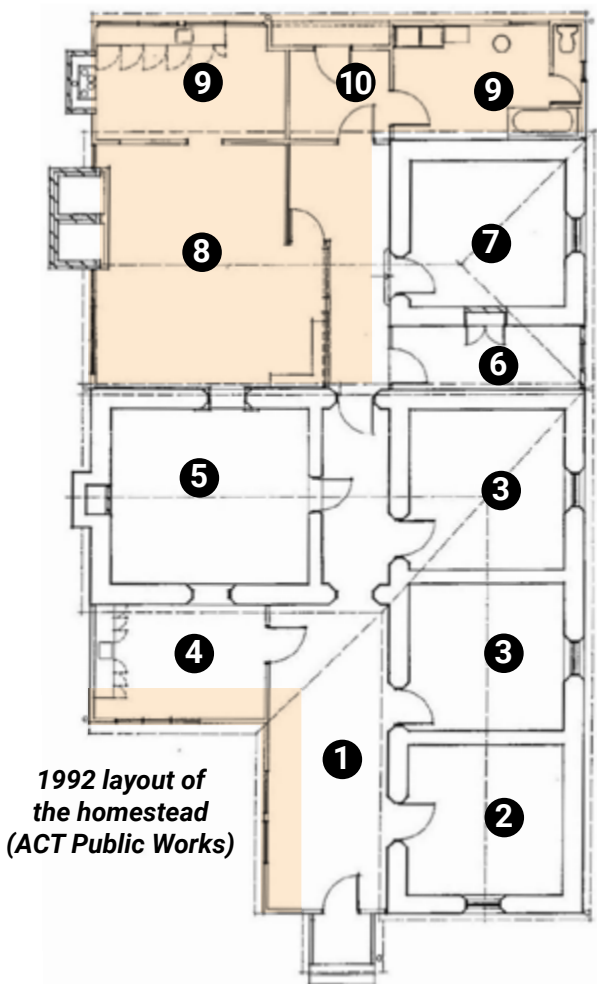
George Green and George Hatcliff had become skilled in pisé construction, and they were responsible for at least a dozen pisé buildings around the district up to about 1911. Most of the pisé structures in the district have been lost over time, and Rock Valley Homestead is one of the very few that are publicly accessible.

The technique of ramming successive layers of earth can be clearly seen in the walls of the homestead, as are relics of the render that was later applied.

Later additions in the 1920s and 1940s-50s (living room, kitchen and bathroom) were built with timber walls and fibro sheeting, replacing the original timber slab buildings.

In January 2003 wildfire affected 99% of the Reserve and almost destroyed the homestead, but most of the pisé walls remained standing.

A new roof, verandah and awnings, and partial reconstruction of walls and floors, have stabilised and protected the structure. Scorched timbers have been retained to help tell the story of the fire. Later fibro additions were not reconstructed, and only the fireplaces and chimneys remain.



Shaded area not reconstructed post-fire

Key

- ① Verandah / entry - enclosed 1967
- ② George & Mary Ann's bedroom c.1905-11
- ③ Bedroom c.1905-11
- ④ Verandah space enclosed 1940s-50s
- ⑤ Living room / Parlour c.1905-11
- ⑥ Breezeway / later Bathroom & Pantry c.1915
- ⑦ George & Mary Ann's first bedroom 1895
- ⑧ Kitchen & Living room c.1920
- ⑨ Enlarged kitchen plus bathroom 1940s-50s
- ⑩ Rear verandah & porch enclosed 1967

The House Garden

As the property prospered, plants could be incorporated in the grounds for their beauty and aesthetics alone, without the need to be useful.

With plenty of water available from springs, the second generation Greens (Tom and Elma) developed an attractive house garden and made feature plantings of trees around the grounds and along the access road/driveway.

In 1955 Eddie Green (of the third generation) redesigned the house garden as part of a Junior Farmers competition.

This included soil treatment, new planting, garden beds, a 6ft (1.8m) enclosing fence, a bush house, ponds, trellises, terracing, paving and paths.

While much of the landscaping around the house was consumed in the 2003 wildfire, numerous plants regenerated and survive today.



**Concept drawing of Eddie Greens' 1955 garden design
(F Sivya 2010)**



The Produce Garden

Fed by a spring, with irrigation ditches, the property had a highly productive orchard from the beginning, with 74 trees by 1897. These were mostly apples, but there were also pears, peaches, apricots, plums, cherries, quinces and winter pears.

A second orchard was developed in the 1940s to the north of the homestead.

The garden also supplied lemons, grapes, passionfruit, elderberry, walnut, Spanish chestnut, tree lucerne (tagasaste), and figs.



Crops included wheat, oats, corn, maize, rye, lucerne and canola, with potatoes and pumpkins in the deep black soil of the river flats.

George Green also made trial plantings of tobacco 'down by the rocks', and sugar cane.

A bountiful vegetable garden, bolstered by an ample supply of sheep manure, produced tomatoes, onions, cabbages, carrots, peas, beans, broad beans, cucumbers, parsnips, squash, jam melons, strawberries, blackberries, gooseberries, and leafy greens grown at the duck pond.

Outbuildings

While sheep were the mainstay of the property, the Greens also raised cattle, chickens, turkeys, ducks, pigs and bees, and George Green stocked the river with rainbow trout.

A number of outbuildings supported the livestock and mixed farming. Most of these were located on the rise above the homestead. They included a large woolshed with an engine room, yards and milking bails, a dairy, poultry sheds, a piggery, a shed on stumps for grain storage, a pisé stable and hayloft with yards (later used to house vehicles and equipment), a storage shed and cool room, and a blacksmith's shop with bellows and forge.

A pisé garage was constructed near the turning loop at the front of the homestead in the 1930s. With a more social flavour, a tennis court was added to the west of the house in the 1950s.

All the outbuildings were removed after the property was resumed in the 1960s. The Reserve Works Depot was built here (the site is now the car park), and the homestead was used for storage and staff accommodation until 2003.



The Rock Valley woolshed, servicing both the Greens' wool growing operation and dances for the district (TPA Archives)

Step back in time and into the stories of the Rock Valley Homestead and Heritage Precinct

**Please show consideration and care while
visiting this Registered Heritage Place**



**This project was supported with funding made
available by the ACT Government under the ACT
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Things to do and see

There is plenty to see, do and learn at Rock Valley. Step into the stories of this heritage precinct, and let its secrets unfold.

Homestead

Make yourself at home in the old pisé homestead, navigating the rooms and imagining the lives of three generations of the pioneer Green family who lived here from the 1890s to the 1960s.

See the marks of the 2003 bushfires that almost erased the homestead, and the reconstruction works that have secured it for future generations.

Walks

Take a calming stroll through the house garden, now carefully tended by descendants of Tidbinbilla pioneer families.


Or explore the grounds, to the orchard and produce garden, or around The Rocks, with views across the lower valley.


Picnics

There are numerous places for a picnic in the grounds, in the old orchard, or near The Rocks.

Please do not disturb or remove any materials, and watch for snakes and European wasps.

Further Information

 **Tidbinbilla Visitor Centre (02) 6207 7921**
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