Protect the Gardens of Stone

"Say NO to open cut mining!"

17 August 2011
Media Release: For immediate release

"Mining under valuable pagodas risky business"

A scientific paper published recently outlines the international significance of the 'platy pagodas' found in the north-western Blue Mountains region. It notes the major impact on pagodas has been subsidence from longwall coal mining. The paper proposes the recognized values of pagoda landscape should extend, as should existing protection zones to enclose the entire core pagoda country.

Pagodas are distinctive sandstone formations found in the north-western Blue Mountains region of NSW. They come in two forms, 'smooth' and 'platy'. *'The Geoheritage and Geomorphology of the Sandstone Pagodas of the North-western Blue Mountains Region'* by H.G. Washington and R.A.L. Wray highlights the platy pagodas are an *"uncommon and significant geomorphic landscape feature, and are distinguished by the extent and regularity of their ironstone banding".*

The authors note they are *"not aware of any other rock formations in Australia or overseas that mimic the geomorphology of platy pagodas"* identifying the platy pagodas as significant, even by world standards.

"The unique geodiversity of pagodas can be easily ruined. Subsidence from longwall coal mining can cause a ground surface drop of up to 1.5 metres; this cracks the pagodas and further leads to their partial or total collapse. In relation to previous inquiries, government mining experts have reported for the Angus Place Colliery area for example, that 55 cliff collapses occurred over a 3 year period," says Keith Muir, Director for the Colong Foundation for Wilderness.

"Pagodas are a biodiversity hotspot, offering habitat protection to plant species that may have otherwise become extinct in some cases. A significant number of rare and threatened plant and threatened animal species prefer pagoda-related habitats. Our iconic lyrebird uses the side of pagodas to nest and raise their young. It is important these pagodas are completely protected," says Justin McKee, Gardens of Stone Campaigner for the Blue Mountains Conservation Society.

Parts of the core of pagoda country have been incorporated into the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, Wollemi National Park and Gardens of Stone National Park due to their biodiversity significance but the paper notes *"much of the pagoda heartland is still found outside of reserves, principally on Newnes Plateau, Genowlan and Airly mesas in the Capertee Valley, and in Ben Bullen State Forest"*.

The authors are concerned that *"scenic, cultural and geoheritage values of the pagoda landscapes have not been … officially recognised"* and conclude the platy pagodas *"deserve full and expanded recognition as a significant part of the geodiversity and geoheritage of the Blue Mountains region"* but are still under threat from coal mining.

"There are many coal mining applications threatening the unprotected pagoda complexes of the Blue Mountains region such as the 'Coalpac Consolidation Project'. We support the need to completely protect the heartland of pagoda country in the Blue Mountains region," concludes Mr McKee.

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Link to scientific paper: http://bit.ly/qjO5pG