



AUSTRALIA'S OLDEST WINEMAKING REGION



Aboriginal History

The Wonnarua (“people of the hills and plains”) were the first inhabitants of the (Coquun) Hunter Valley, with the Worimi to the north eastern shores, and the Awabakal to the south eastern shores. The Wonnarua have occupied the upper Hunter for at least 30,000 years, with traditional knowledge holding that occupation extends back to the early stages of the Dreaming.

The Discovery

The first sighting of the Hunter River by European settlers was in 1797, when it was discovered by chance by Lieutenant John Shortland during a search for escaped convicts. The Hunter Valley’s initial value was as a source of timber and coal for the steamships.

The first overland route to the Hunter was discovered in 1820 by John Howe and a road-way was constructed largely along his path from Windsor to Singleton in 1823; this is now the Putty Road.

The First Road

The first road between Sydney and Newcastle crossed the Hawkesbury River at Wiseman’s Ferry then travelled via Judge Dowling’s Range to Bucketty and on to Wollombi where it split. One branch headed North to Jerrys Plains (between Muswellbrook and Singleton) and the other headed East to Newcastle through Cessnock and Maitland. Built by convicts between 1826 & 1836, visitors can still see many of the original convict-built features when travelling along The Great North Road; Tourist Route 33 to Wollombi.



The Early Vineyard History (1820 – 1900)

By 1823 some 20 acres of vineyards had already been planted on the northern banks of the Hunter River and what is now the Dalwood /Gresford area between Maitland and Singleton. The early pioneers of the Hunter Valley's long winemaking history were George Wyndham of Dalwood, William Kelman of Kirkton and James King of Irrawang.

The Hunter Valley's future was further assisted by the arrival of viticulturalist James Busby; who, after an extensive study tour of Europe's wine growing regions, arrived back in the Colony of New South Wales with a collection of some 500 vine cuttings drawn from collections and private plantings. It was a replica set from these cuttings which established the Hunter Valley's claims to viticultural fame; when Busby's brother in law William Kelman took up one of the first official land grants at Kirkton on the Hunter River.

By 1840 the Hunter Valley's registered vineyard area exceeded 500 acres. In the latter part of the 19th century 4 families established vineyards in the area; the Tyrrell, Tulloch, Wilkinson & Drayton families, alongside the well known Dr Henry Lindeman.

Modern Vineyard History (1900 – 1970)

By 1930 the Pokolbin area had built a reputation for quality wine production. A number of qualified winemakers enhanced the Hunter Valley's reputation in Sydney and Melbourne, led by the famous Maurice O'Shea of Mount Pleasant and Ben Ean of Lindeman's. After a decline in vineyard activity, Dr Max Lake established Lake's Folly in 1963; the first new vineyard planted in the nineteen hundreds.

Today

Today, the Hunter Valley is certainly one of Australia's most well-known wine regions; there are over 150 wineries producing a wide array of exceptional wines reflective of their origin. Hunter Valley Semillon enjoys a very special place in the world wine industry because, as award-winning Australian wine writer Campbell Mattinson puts it, "it produces a wine (...) that is acknowledged as the best in the world, the benchmark. It is the same kind of advantage enjoyed by Burgundy and Bordeaux and Champagne.

For more information, please contact marketing@winecountry.com.au or call 02 4990 0900

HUNTER VALLEY

