

## IN SEARCH OF THE NEW MYSTIC LAKE ESTATE

Part 1, Danny Nolan

Imagine if you will. Sometime in the late 1800s, talk of a railway extension was being planned to Upper Ferntree Gully branching off from Ringwood with options of going even further out.

Bayswater was booming and The Basin area was becoming a popular spot for holiday seekers wishing to escape the heat and smell of a bustling Melbourne city as well as being the home of some very wealthy industrialists and entrepreneurs.

Imagine also, that these influences meant taking the line from Bayswater up the Mountain Highway to Forest Road and then following Forest Road down towards the Quarry and onto Upper Ferntree Gully; bypassing the open fields and sparsely populated area that was Boronia but still servicing Ferntree Gully township.

Imagine again, just to humour me, if this deviation had happened and the boom that exploded Boronia's growth instead took place in the quiet leafy Basin area.

Maybe, just maybe, some of those many unrealized housing estates that were planned during the period of the post-first World War years through to the 1950s may have actually taken place, and the road to SassafRAS wouldn't be tree after tree cutting through a National Park, but driveways, front yard gardens and letterboxes.



The Basin's development is indeed littered with failed, scaled-down and unrealized housing developments and subdivisions. From the failed Ferndale development that resulted from the tragic death of the Griffith Family in 1925 to the scaled-down Schneider estate that was planned without reviewing the site or the terrain, and packed 640 lots on what now comfortable holds little more than half that.

Then there's the New Mystic Lake Estate situated on the south side of Mountain Highway opposite Inverness Avenue. Planned in the early 1950s this estate offered wonderful views in a bush setting and was heavily advertised in newspapers, both mainstream and regional, as

well as radio. It attracted interest both local and from afar, that was until they saw what they had to build on. Though some sites were bought sight unseen from the plan, the plan didn't show how unsuitable the majority of lots were, due to their steep incline, being rocky, or having a creek running through them. Ultimately the development was a flop, and in the 1960s the Government restricted any further development in the estate, and began progressively buying back properties, demolishing any buildings, and incorporating the land into the Ferntree Gully National Park, which in itself was incorporated into the Dandenong Ranges National Park in 1987.

Despite this, eight properties were built or settled upon, and one still remains on the gentler north side of the Highway. So, with this in mind, I decided I had to check this out. Another hidden treasure that this area keeps revealing every time I take a little closer look around the place that I call home.



On entering the former estate via Alamein Track (formerly Alamein Avenue), you get a sense that this could have been a grand entrance, the way the road has been cut into the hillside. You also notice it's on a very dangerous blind bend and crossing here is to be taken with caution and quick feet. The road these days has been gated for emergency vehicles only, but cyclists and hikers are more than welcome; and of course, because it's a National Park, no dogs.

The track is in excellent condition and bears no resemblance to a normal fire access road. The road is unsealed but is flat, well gravelled and with not a tyre track rut to be seen, I'm assuming from when the estate was first established. The track is remarkably flat with the north side falling rather steeply and the south side being less severe, making any evidence of its existence impossible to see from



the main road below. The main entrance is definitely the way to go. I tried to climb up the slope about a hundred metres down the road because it was closer to the car, but gave up after about five minutes when it dawned on me that if I broke a leg here, I'd be a skeleton before they found me and could inadvertently end up as a murder mystery.

Alamein Track makes up one of two entrances to the New Mystic Lakes estate from Mountain Highway, the other is Tobruk Avenue (now Track) which we will discuss later. The other road of any significance is Government Road, which starts as a track but then becomes a proper sealed road as it merges further towards the township into the old Schneider estate mentioned earlier and Old Forest Road. The only other is Cleve Road, now also a track.

Alamein Ave is just short of 800 metres long and a pleasant walk. While I was there, I passed a couple of locals going for an afternoon ramble. There are some points along the track where the vista is breathtakingly beautiful, exposing you to views as far as the city on the horizon and upward to the old transmission towers. You could understand why some people decided to make this their home. On my visit however, proof that anyone ever lived here was not as obvious or easy to find.

That is until you look that little bit closer. Driveways and property entrances are all but grown over these days, but a look up the hill shows what seems to be garden terraces made with rocks, and on closer inspection, flat graded areas are evident, the odd plant that really shouldn't be growing in a National Park is also a bit of a give away that someone once tended a garden here, though no structure exists.

On my return back down, it occurred to me that today's building and engineering practices could easily develop this road and the north side of the hill; for proof just look at the Ferntree Gully quarry or anywhere in Warrandyte. Luckily for us that will never happen thanks to the incorporation into the National Park.

Now it was time to venture further up the road and higher on the hill to Tobruk Avenue and talk some more of the estate's history and hopefully, find some old ruins.

To be continued ...

References and much thanks to:

Rick Coxhill's history of the Basin and the Trove newspaper website.

[www.coxhill.com](http://www.coxhill.com) [www.trove.nla.gov.au](http://www.trove.nla.gov.au)

