

## History of coal mining in the Southern Highlands

The extent of coal deposits in the Southern Highlands and their commercial viability was reported to the state government by mining surveyor William Keene in 1853.

There have been more than twenty coal mines operating locally since then. There were eight at Medway, four at Bundanoon and seven near Mittagong.

### Medway Area

The first colliery in the Southern Highlands was the **Cataract Mine** which opened in 1867 near a waterfall on Medway Rivulet.



### **Cataract Mine used a Rope to Lift Coal from the Adit to the Platform at Cliff Top<sup>1</sup>**

The Berrima Coal Mining and Railway Company Ltd opened a colliery on the Medway Rivulet in 1881 and built a standard gauge private railway line to the main southern railway line. In 1888, it was named **Great Southern Colliery** and it operated until 1896.

Also on the Medway peninsular, **Loch Catherine Colliery** opened in 1923 and produced spasmodically until 1929. The colliery reopened in 1964 and in 1990 Loch Catherine Colliery was amalgamated with Berrima Colliery.

**Medway Colliery** was opened in 1924. It was purchased by Southern Portland Cement Ltd in 1926 and renamed **Berrima Colliery**.



**Inclined Tramway at Berrima Colliery showing full skips of coal being raised on the left track and empty skips being lowered on the right track**

Berrima Colliery served the Berrima Cement Works until the colliery closed in 2013. It had operated for 89 years making it the longest operating colliery in the Southern Highlands.

Metropolitan Portland Cement Ltd opened **Carrada Bulli Colliery** in 1949 and it closed in 1952.

### **Bundanoon Area**

**Rock Roof Colliery** opened in 1869 and was renamed **Erith Colliery** in 1871. It closed in 1896.

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<sup>1</sup> Town and Country Journal, 25th March 1876, p. 500 and The Illustrated Sydney News, 15th April 1869, p.168





A picture of the Erith Colliery adit in a cliff face and the ladderway for access<sup>2</sup>

**Ringwood Colliery** opened in 1884 and closed in 1885 after a royalty dispute with the landowner. After lying idle for a decade the colliery reopened in 1896 and was renamed **Collins Colliery**. The colliery ceased production in 1912. It reopened in 1923 as the **Federal Colliery** and closed again in 1924.

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<sup>2</sup> Town and Country Journal, 16th September 1882, p. 555



Ringwood Colliery platform and poppet head used to hoist coal up the cliff face<sup>3</sup>

## Mittagong Area

**Black Bob's Colliery** was an early source of local coal for the Fitzroy Iron Works in the 1870s and it closed in 1889. It reopened in 1937 only to be abandoned in 1941. The colliery was reopened in 1947 as **Southern Colliery** which operated successfully until its coal reserves were exhausted in 1968. **Southern Extended Colliery** opened in 1969 and was discontinued in 1971.

**Mittagong Colliery** opened in 1883. It was renamed **Box Vale Colliery** in 1890 and closed in 1896.

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<sup>3</sup> Jim Longworth "Hung Out For Coal - Tramways of the Ringwood and Erith Collieries", Light Railway Research Society of Australia, "Light Railways" magazine October 1995, p. 5





**Locomotive on the Mittagong side of the tunnel on the Box Vale railway line<sup>4</sup>**

**South Main Colliery** at Mittagong opened in 1951 and closed in 1955.

Two mines near Mittagong mined the only known deposit of anthracitic coal in Australia.

**Mount Waratah Colliery** opened in 1957 and closed in 1971 and **Mount Alexander Colliery** opened in 1956 and closed in 1972.

### **Joadja Creek**

The vast majority of the collieries in the Southern Highlands mined the Wongawilli Seam. An exception was the Joadja Creek oil shale mine which mined the American Creek Seam because of the localised presence of a thick layer of torbanite (oil shale) that was able to be heated in retorts to distil kerosene and other products. Mining commenced in 1873 and ceased in 1903 when cheaper kerosene from North America flooded into the world market.

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<sup>4</sup> John McColgan "Southern Highlands Story", 1995, p. 155



**Inclined Tramway out of the Joadja Valley<sup>5</sup>**

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<sup>5</sup> Leone Knapman "Joadja Creek, the shale oil town & its people 1870-1911", 1988, p. 2



**Miner's houses still standing in Carrington Row of Joadja Creek**