

# Blue Mountains Heritage Register Review

SHI Number

1173107

Study Number

LN081

Heritage Inventory - 2016 Heritage Review

Item Name: **Wilson Park Water Feature (Map of Australia)**

Location: **2-16 St Bernards Drive, Lawson [Blue Mountains ]**

Address: 2-16 St Bernards Drive

DUAP Region: Sydney West

Suburb / Nearest Town: Lawson 2783

Historic region: Sydney

Local Govt Area: Blue Mountains

Parish:

State: NSW

County:

Other/Former Names: Map of Australia

Area/Group/Complex: Wilson Park (Part)

Group ID:

Aboriginal Area:

Curtilage/Boundary:

Item Type: Landscape

Group: Parks, Gardens and Category: Lake/ Pond

Owner: Local Government

Admin Codes:

Code 2:

Code 3:

Current Use: Park/Recreation Area

Former Uses: Park/Recreation Area

Assessed Significance: **State**

Endorsed Significance:

**Statement of Significance:** Wilson Park Water Feature has significance at state level with historic, historical association, aesthetic, social and rarity values. The water feature was constructed in 1932 and incorporates a number of features including a relief map of Australia. Many schools in Australia in the early 20th C introduced maps of Australia in some form into their playgrounds but it is apparently rare for such a large scaled map to be integrated into a public recreation reserve. The feature is also associated with a number of well-known, local figures including long-standing local Mayor Percy Wilson after whom the park is named, local builder Frank Higgison and well-respected geographer Professor J. McDonald Holmes. The feature may also have some association with the increasing growth of the Blue Mountains Council in the 1930s with its Chambers nearby in Loftus Street, overlooking Wilson Park.

The relief map of Australia is the centrepiece of an overall water feature that has creatively integrated a series of ponds, bridge, weirs and channels into a cascading waterway from a natural creek-fed rock pool through this southern section of Wilson Park and then past the public swimming pool. The entire water feature sits comfortably within an attractive, wooded natural setting. The integration of the map into a water feature also extends Lawson's associations with its local waterfalls and natural Reserves, such as May's Cascades, Stanley Falls, Cecilia Falls, Cristabella Falls which were publicised by 'San Jose, the Blue Mountain Sanatorium' in early 20th C publicizing of Lawson and its health giving water qualities. San Jose overlooks Wilson Park. It is also interesting to note the long association with water and swimming in Wilson Park with its original use by steam trains in the 1860s drawing water, subsequently a popular natural swimming area in the early 1900s which was formalised in the 1950s into the popular public swimming pools.

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The water feature has high local social significance as evidenced by local newspaper articles and letters published throughout the life of the feature. It has long associations with local schools, school outings and local families using the park and the associated swimming pool. A local community group, the 'Friends of Wilson Park', have also played an important part in its recent repair and stabilization.

The size, detail and water features incorporated into the overall water feature at Wilson Park made it an exceptional example of this type of item at the time of its construction. Maps appear to have been relatively commonly constructed in the 1930s, the majority of these were constructed in school playgrounds and few, if any, appear to have survived. This being the case the concrete relief map at Wilson Park is a rare surviving example of a class of items constructed throughout NSW in the 1930s. The water feature appears relatively intact despite recent deterioration of some sections of the water channels and the small feature bridge.

**Historical Notes or Provenance:** Wilson Park, located to the south of the pool, was named after Percy Wilson, local shire president for 12 terms from 1923 to 1936. Wilson did much for the local area especially the development of this site as a recreation zone.

There are many exotic trees planted in Wilson Park and around the swimming pool. These were planted in memory of locals who served in the Second World War.

The waterfall at the north end of Wilson Park; Thompson Falls, was named after a railway worker who lived in Lawson in 1899.

The water feature in Wilson Park was constructed in 1932. The feature consists of a network of channels and two small ponds, one of which contains a circular island, the other a concrete relief map of Australia. The article in the Nepean Times commented on the accuracy and detail of the relief map. "The approximate size of the map is 32 feet by 24 feet. Scale of surface 75miles to 1foot, or one inch on the map equals 6 ¼ miles actual, the model being one four-hundred-thousandth of the neutral size. All capital cities are, State boundaries, and rivers are correctly shown, together with mountain ranges, the latter being of a larger scale to the surface, viz 3 inches to 1000 feet. The colours used are the regulation colors (sic) used for school atlases, and represent the following altitudes: Green, sea level,; grey, 500 feet; chrome, 1000 feet; red 2000 feet; brown, 3000 feet; light red, 4000 feet; white, 5000 feet and over. The map is surrounded by clear running water, in which the children will be able to sail boats around the Continent".

The site was opened on 12th May 1932 in the presence of local dignitaries and 100 school children. The open day was declared "a children's day". The newspaper headlines that covered the opening noted the uniqueness of the model. An article noted the attractive setting "all around the growth of ferns, with here and there a young fern tree, are exquisite. Little rockeries and rustic bridge are novel in such a remote spot and here and there on the smaller pools, floating water plants are very beautiful and are thriving well".

Some local records claim that the map was constructed by Frank Higgins, a local of the area. However no contemporary evidence of this could be uncovered during our investigations. Newspaper articles from the time credit the initial idea of the water feature to

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Shire President Percy Wilson and former Civic Commissioner and Chairman of the Main Roads Board Mr John Garlick. Others involved in the construction included Shire engineer Mr B.A. Hoffernan, concrete worker Mr Robert Medcalf and Professor J. McDonald Holmes, Department of Geography, Sydney University. These names are mentioned in several newspaper articles dating from May 1932.

At the opening address Professor Homes, from Sydney University noted that "the map was of great educational value...and as far as he knew was the only one of its kind in Australia" (ref Nepean Times 21st May 1932).

The Wilson Park concrete relief map has been raised as a newsworthy topic in local papers throughout its life. Articles mentioning the site were published in various periodicals including the Nepean Times and Sydney Morning Herald in 1932, 1941, 1986, 1994 and 2013. In addition to this there are also many letters from the public to the council regarding the feature. These articles and letters illustrate the continuing interest in the park and its water feature from the local community.

Newspaper searches have turned up a number of references to concrete relief maps constructed in the 1930s. In the majority of instances the maps were constructed in school playgrounds in the 1930s and were intended as play equipment and instructional tools. None of the references refer to associated water features and none of the instances uncovered were constructed on such a large scale as the map at Wilson Park. However, it is understood that there was a map of Australia constructed in the early to mid 20th C in a coastal rock pool in Newcastle (NSW) but it has not survived.

Preliminary research suggests that construction of concrete maps was common in schoolyards the 1930s but not common in public parks like Wilson Park. There are few examples, but in a 2005 study undertaken into the changing face of play in Australian school playgrounds a photograph was included of an outdoor geography lesson in the 1920s at a rural primary school with a reference noting 'map of the world in dirt with cut out ships and animals...a valuable learning environment where students have been able to create a tangible model of the lesson content'.

The brief review of maps of Australia in NSW suggests that given the nature of school playgrounds with degree of change likely that very few, if any, of the maps constructed in playgrounds in the 1930s survive today. The example in Wilson Park is likely to be the only remaining example and perhaps unique in its scale and incorporation of water.

<b>Themes:</b>	<b>National Theme</b>	<b>State Theme</b>	<b>Local Theme</b>
	4. Settlement	Towns, suburbs and village	Public Reserves
	6. Educating	Education	Map of Australia
	8. Culture	Creative endeavour (Cultur	Parks and Gardens

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**Designer:** Percy Wilson; John Garlick; Mr B.A. Hoffernan; Mr R Medcalf; Professor J. McDonald Holmes

**Maker / Builder:** Purportedly Mr Frank Higgins

**Year Started:**                      **Year Completed:** 1932                      **Circa:** Yes

**Physical Description:** Wilson Park is located in a small gully south of Lawson Pool. The slopes of the gully, around the park, are heavily vegetated with native species. It is understood that this area was once a swamp area and that the land that the park occupies was reclaimed from the swamp. The site consists of a network of channels, both concrete and sandstone lined, that run down either side of the park and down the middle of the park. The main channel runs down the middle of the park and incorporates two ponds, one circular with a circular island, and one containing an island in the shape of Australia. Water runs from south to north. To the south of the park is a waterfall fed by natural springs. The main channel of the water feature is sandstone lined with sandstone weirs that separate the channel into short segments. These weirs are also located at the entrance and exit to both ponds in the system. Small overflow channels lined with concrete are located along either edge of the park. These channels appear to prevent overflow of the main channel and also collect water that flows down the sides of the gully.

**Physical Condition:** No assessment of archaeological potential has been undertaken for the site.

The condition of the water feature varies along its length. In general defects along the length of the system mean that water no longer travels through the system as originally intended. The weirs along the system were originally intended to ensure that water remained in all the channels and ponds at all times. The failure of these weirs and wall and floor slabs within the system means that water tends to flow through the system rather than collect in it. Silt deposits in the ponds and channels have also altered the behaviour of water flowing through the system.

The waterfall pond wall is generally in good condition. Some minor repairs may be needed to surrounding wall lining.

In general the main sandstone lined channels are in fair to poor condition with common defects such as lifted base slabs and displaced wall slabs. Displaced stones have also created stone debris in the channel. At several weir locations along the main channel water travels under the weir structures rather than over them. This is typically due to failed wall and base linings in the channel upstream of the weirs. Damage due to vegetation growth is also common in the main channel. Both small and large plants (including tree ferns and roots from large trees at the downstream end of the system) have caused wall slabs to become displaced and the channel to leak. Overhanging vegetation has also obscured the outer wall of the main channel where it runs along the edge of the gully.

The north end of the main channel appears to be the most original in terms of water behaviour. Water in this area flows through a series of channel sections and over weirs, as appears to be the original intention. The secondary channels on the east and west sides of the park are generally in good condition, though thorough inspection of the full length of these channels was not possible due to vegetation encroachment and poor visibility of the

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structures. Some significant silt deposits were observed in the channels. It is recommended that a thorough structural inspection be carried out after draining the channels and clearing vegetation.

The circular pond is in fair condition. The walls appear to be in reasonable condition. However the pool, which was originally designed to be a pond of water, has significant silt deposits. A combination of silt deposits and damaged weir walls appears to have resulted in the pool being unevenly filled with water, and more akin to a swamp than a pond. Flow of water has been interrupted by significant silt deposits and vegetation. Consideration should be given to redesign of the outlet weir including lowering the weir wall and removing the pipe that runs through it.

The circular island in the middle of the pool appears to be in reasonable condition

The pool containing the island in the shape of Australia is in fair condition. In some locations the walls of the pool have suffered damage caused by vegetation growth. In some locations the base of the pond has lifted. It appears some previous concrete lining repairs have been installed and have also lifted in some areas.

In general the Australia island appears to be in good condition with only minor damage caused by vegetation encroachment. Water in this pool does not pond as intended due to a major defect in the pond base and weir at the downstream end of the pond. This defect allows water to flow under the base slabs of the pond into the channel below instead of overflowing the weir. The upstream inlet to the pond is also damaged with water entering the pond by travelling under the lining stones of the upper channel and entering the pond near to the Tasmania Island within the pond.

In some locations the pond has significant silt deposits. The bridge at the downstream end of the pond is in fair condition, though the damage to the pond base immediately adjacent to the bridge does pose a threat of undermining and destabilising the bridge structure.

**Modification Dates:** The c1943 aerial photograph suggests that the construction appears to have occurred in stages with the central ponds initially constructed and the westerly channels subsequently added to the arrangement. The photograph also suggests that there may have been another circular pond located on the eastern edge of the park and connected with a short channel.

Restoration of the map took place in 1986, the work was carried out by The Lawson Chamber of Commerce and the local Bushfire Brigade. In an article in the Echo local newspaper Doctor Keith King was quoted as saying. "We would like to see this unique map fully restored, not only for its historical importance but as another tourist attraction for the district." (Hardwick; <http://contourmaplawson.blogspot.com.au/>)

**Recommended Management:**

Mott McDonald report 2014 p5 recommendations "It is recommended that the Council consider listing the site on the Heritage register of the Blue Mountains City Council LEP. The council may also wish to consider nominating the site for listing on the NSW Heritage Register"

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Mott McDonald report 2014 p5 "Regardless of the strategy adopted for the site the following common defects will require repair, and various methods for repairing these defects are discussed in section 4.2

- Displaced base and wall slabs
- Vegetation ingress
- Silt build up
- All missing base and wall slabs be replace or patch repaired.
- The major defect at in the base at the outlet of Australia pond be repaired

A Council Resolution in 2015 approved the nomination for LEP heritage listing and investigate inclusion on the State Heritage Register. The water feature has been included on the Schedule of the LEP 2015 and a State nomination has been prepared and will shortly be lodged to OEH (2016).

**Management:** Recommended Management      Produce a Conservation Management Plan (CMP)

## Further Comments:

- Criteria a)** The Wilson Park Water Feature has local historical significance values because:
- It was constructed as part of an early 20th C education initiative in Australia for children in schools to assist in their identifying with the place called Australia and its place in the wider world. Many schools introduced maps of Australia in some form into their playgrounds. It is apparently rare for such a large scaled map to be integrated into a public recreation reserve.
  - Historically, the feature may also have some association with the increasing growth of the Blue Mountains Council with its Chambers on Loftus Street in Lawson, overlooking Wilson Park. Lawson was regarded as the 'civic centre of the Blue Mountains Shire'. The Chambers in Lawson were also substantially extended in the late 1920s and the water feature perhaps part of improvements to adjacent Wilson Park initiated during that period.
- Criteria b)** The Wilson Park Water Feature has local historical association significance values because:
- According to contemporary reports construction of the site was initiated by long standing Shire President Percy Wilson, for whom the park is also named. The initial idea appears to have been associated with Civil Commissioner and Chairman of the Main Roads Board John Garlick.
  - The concrete map is also associated with contemporary Sydney geographer Professor L McDonald Holmes. Holmes was well respected in his field and the Geographical Society of New South Wales annually awards a medal that bears his name.
  - Local folklore also associates the site with local personality Frank Higgison.
- Criteria c)** The Wilson Park Water Feature has state aesthetic significance values because:
- The concrete relief map of Australia is a rare example of scale maps that were relatively popular in the early 20th C.
  - The relief map of Australia is the centrepiece of an overall water feature that has creatively integrated a series of ponds, weirs and channels into a cascading waterway from a natural creek fed rock pool through this section of Wilson Park and past the public swimming pool. The entire water feature sits comfortably within an attractive, wooded natural setting.
  - It has also been noted, by Dr Keith King in 1986, that the map at Wilson Park is exceptional in its geographical accuracy, despite the limited extent of aerial exploration that

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had taken place over inland areas of Australia at the time of construction. The current condition of the map also indicates that the original workmanship of the concrete continent was of good quality.

- The integration of the map into a water feature also extends Lawson's associations with its local waterfalls and natural Reserves, such as May's Cascades, Stanley Falls, Cecilia Falls, Cristabella Falls which were publicised by 'San Jose, the Blue Mountain Sanatorium' in their early 20th C advertising of Lawson as a health spa (ref image attached). The heritage listed San Jose area is located immediately adjacent to Wilson Park at the top of the hill to the east. Today, the South Lawson waterfalls circuit is a popular natural attraction, include Federal Falls, Adelina Falls, Junction Falls and Cataract Falls. The water feature at Wilson park with its small waterfall at the rock pool should also be seen in this context.

- Criteria d)** The Wilson Park Water Feature has local social significance values because:
- Newspaper articles and letters published throughout the life of the concrete map indicate that the local community has had a strong connection to the site.
- Criteria e)** The Wilson Park Water Feature has local technical significance values because:
- The technical aspects of construction, scale, proportion and detail appear to have been represented in a high degree of accuracy. Similarly, the finished colours were the regulation colours used for school atlases and therefore represent an unusual record of educational elements of the period.
- Criteria f)** The Wilson Park Water Feature has state rarity significance values because:
- The newspaper articles at the opening ceremony in 1932 commented on the rarity and uniqueness of the map. A later article in 1941 similarly referred to its uniqueness.
  - The size, detail and water features incorporated into the feature at Wilson Park made it an exceptional example of this type of item at the time of its construction.
  - Despite the fact that concrete relief maps appear to have been relatively commonly constructed in the 1930s, the majority of these were constructed in school playgrounds and are unlikely to have survived to the present. This being the case the concrete relief map at Wilson Park is a rare surviving example of a class of items constructed throughout NSW in the 1930s.
- Criteria g)** The Wilson Park Water Feature has state representative significance values because:
- The concrete relief map of Australia is a representative example of relief maps of Australia that were commonly constructed in the 1930s as part of an early 20th C education initiative in Australia for school children to assist in their identifying with the place called Australia and its place in the wider world. Many schools introduced maps of Australia in some form into their playgrounds, few survive today.

**Integrity / Intactness:** The water feature appears relatively intact despite recent deterioration of some sections of the water channels and the small feature bridge.

References:	Author	Title	Year
	Barbara Chancellor	The Changing Face of Play in Australian Primary School Playgrounds	2005
	Katoomba Daily Katoomba Daily Thursday 12th May 1932	Concrete Contour Map of Australia, Dedication Ceremony	1932

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Katoomba Daily Friday 16th February 1934	Lawson Swimming Pool	1934
Mott McDonald	Engineering and Heritage Report, Wilson Park Water Feature	2014
Nepean Times Saturday 21st May 1932	Unique Model, Concrete Contour Map of Australia	1932
Nepean Times Thursday 12th June 1941	Unique Map at Lawson	1941
Sydney Morning Herald Saturday 7th May 1932	Map of Australia in Concrete at Lawson	1932
Various	Images from Blue Mountains Library c1930s-1950s	1930

Studies:	Author	Title	Number	Year
	Blue Mountains City Council	LEP 2015 Heritage Review	LN081	2016

Parcels:	Parcel Code	LotNumber	Section	Plan Code	Plan Number
	LOT	7319		DP	1144663

Latitude:

Longitude:

Location validity:

Spatial Accuracy:

Map Name:

Map Scale:

AMG Zone:

Easting:

Northing:

Listings:	Name:	Title:	Number:	Date:
	Local Environmental Plan	LEP 2015	LN082	21/12/2015

Local Instrument: LEP 2015

Local Identifier: LN081

Draft Instrument:

Technical Comment:

**Update Notes:** (1) Review 2016 - Item Name updated, Item type added, Statement of Significance rewritten, assessment criteria rewritten, Themes added, History updated, References added, Management added, 9 images added, Aboriginal statement added (CA/Oct2016) mapping modified (SR/Oct2016)

**Aboriginal Heritage:** The Blue Mountains Local Government Area is within the Country of the Darug and Gundungurra peoples and Blue Mountains City Council respects their cultural heritage and deep ongoing connection to this Country.  
This inventory sheet documents the European occupation of the site only, and the heritage significance of the place in this context (assessed against the heritage criteria set by the NSW Heritage Council).

This does not therefore, represent a complete history of the place, or represent the

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perspectives of Darug and Gundungurra Traditional Owners in relation to the colonial impacts on this site. Consultation with Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal stakeholders is required, before Aboriginal Cultural Heritage that may be associated with this place, can be recorded.

**Data Entry:**

Date First Entered: 26/06/2015

Date Updated: 11/11/2016

Status: Partial

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Image:

Caption:

Copyright:

Image by:

Image Date:

Image Number:

Image Path:

Image File:

Thumb Nail Path:

Thumb Nail File:

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Image:



**Caption:** c1932 Official opening of the contour map of Australia, Wilson Park, Lawson. Percy Wilson in hat, president of Blue Mountains Shire Council standing on bridge. Children from Lawson Public School and Stratford Girls School.

**Copyright:**

**Image by:** Unknown

**Image Date:**

**Image Number:**

**Image Path:**

**Image File:** 1173107b01.jpg

**Thumb Nail Path:**

**Thumb Nail File:**

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Image:



**Caption:** c1932 Another image of the official opening of the contour map of Australia, Wilson Park, Lawson. The detail and tonal qualities of the map are more evident in this image.

**Copyright:**

**Image by:** Sydney Morning Herald

**Image Date:**

**Image Number:**

**Image Path:**

**Image File:** 1173107b02.jpg

**Thumb Nail Path:**

**Thumb Nail File:**

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Image:



**Caption:** c1931 A model used during construction to illustrate the relief contours for construction. The image shows local resident Frank Higgison, carpenter, likely to have assisted in some way during construction.

**Copyright:**

**Image by:** Unknown

**Image Date:**

**Image Number:**

**Image Path:**

**Image File:** 1173107b03.jpg

**Thumb Nail Path:**

**Thumb Nail File:**

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Image:



**Caption:** c1931 The map under construction on site

**Copyright:**

**Image by:** Unknown

**Image Date:**

**Image Number:**

**Image Path:**

**Image File:** 1173107b04.jpg

**Thumb Nail Path:**

**Thumb Nail File:**

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Image:



**Caption:** Wilson Park (Part) and Water Feature. There appears to be another earlier pond to the south-west.

**Copyright:**

**Image by:** LPI SixMaps

**Image Date:**

**Image Number:**

**Image Path:**

**Image File:** 1173107b06.jpg

**Thumb Nail Path:**

**Thumb Nail File:**

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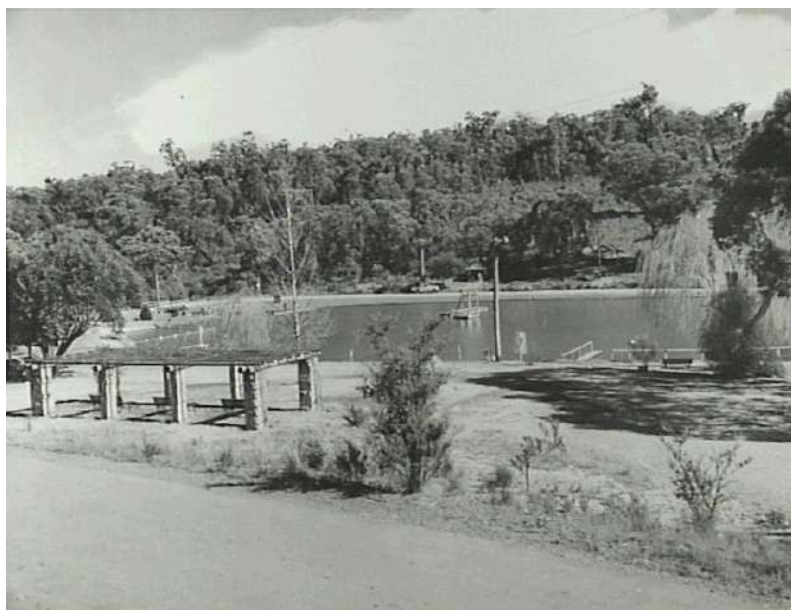
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Image:



**Caption:** View of Lawson Olympic Pool looking north. The water feature is off photograph on the left. The pool arrangement was altered in the 1950s but the stone pergola remains in the pool grounds today

**Copyright:** Springwood Historical Society

**Image by:** Unknown

**Image Date:**

**Image Number:**

**Image Path:**

**Image File:** 1173107b07.jpg

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Image:



**Caption:** A montage of early 20th C images pre-1950s illustrating the popularity of Wilson Park and its water related activities.

**Copyright:** Friends of Wilson Park

**Image by:** Various

**Image Date:**

**Image Number:**

**Image Path:**

**Image File:** 1173107b08.jpg

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Image:



**Caption:** A montage of early 20th C images pre-1950s illustrating the popularity of Wilson Park and its water related activities.

**Copyright:** Friends of Wilson Park

**Image by:** Unknown

**Image Date:**

**Image Number:**

**Image Path:**

**Image File:** 1173107b09.jpg

**Thumb Nail Path:**

**Thumb Nail File:**

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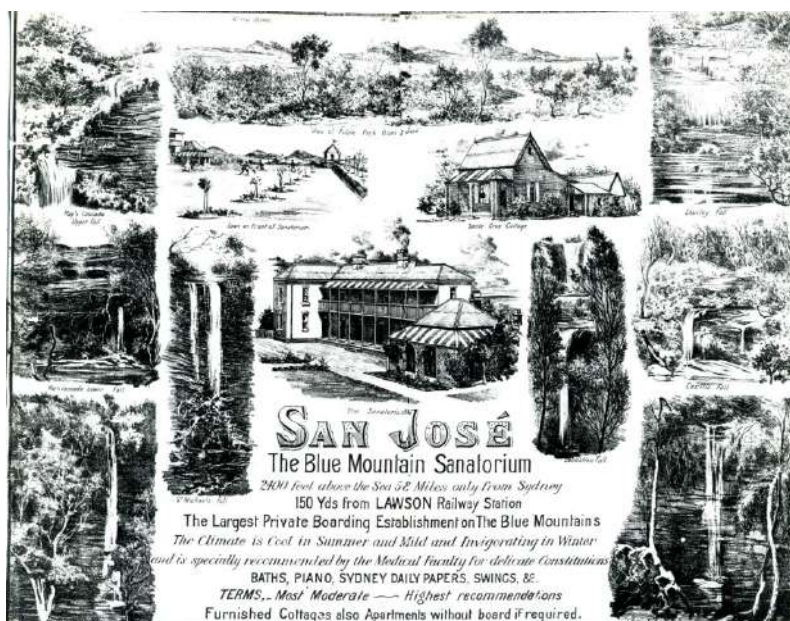
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Item Name: **Wilson Park Water Feature (Map of Australia)**

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Image:



**Caption:** Publicity material prepared for San Jose illustrating the particular appeal of Lawson and its waterfalls. Wilson Park is included at the top of the illustrations.

**Copyright:**

**Image by:** San Jose Sanatorium

**Image Date:**

**Image Number:**

**Image Path:**

**Image File:** 1173107b10.jpg

**Thumb Nail Path:**

**Thumb Nail File:**