Upper Canal

Factsheet (Secondary Learners)

What is it?

The Upper Canal is used to supply approximately 20% of Sydney's drinking water. The water in the Upper Canal is sourced from Nepean, Avon, Cordeaux and Cataract Dams. Rivers and tunnels connect the Upper Canal to the dams. The Upper Canal can also be used as a backup to Warragramba Dam if Maintenace is needed on the Warragamba Pipelines.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Upper Canal has operated continuously since 1888!



How does it work?

Water flows by gravity through the Upper Canal - from the Illawarra Plateau (south of Sydney) through a series of open canals (44km), tunnels (19km) and aqueducts (1km) - all the way to Prospect Reservoir.



Can you enter it?

No entry is allowed to protect the water and the structure.



Simply entering this Controlled Area can result in fines of more than $1,000!

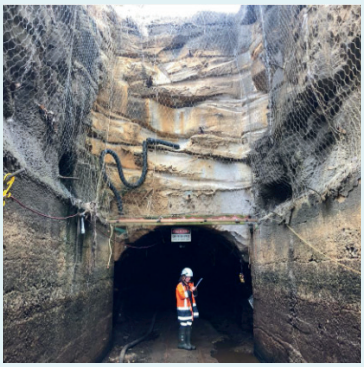
Different parts of the Upper Canal system



An aqueduct is a bridge that carries water. This Upper Canal aqueduct is similar to that built by the Romans in 1BC.



To cross over rivers pipes were used in sections of the Upper Canal.



In some sections the canal passes through tunnels in the earth.

Be safe

As urban development continues to spread across southwest Sydney, the Upper Canal is increasingly surrounded by houses and industry. Some locals are unaware of the Upper Canal's important role in Greater Sydney's water supply. On occasions people have entered the fenced area and the Upper Canal. Water can rise suddenly and move very quickly in the Upper Canal. Be safe - do not enter or swim in the Upper Canal.





Protect our water

You can help protect the water in the Upper Canal by keeping pollutants out.

- Do not enter the fenced area or the Upper Canal.
- Do not let domesticated animals in the fenced area or the Upper Canal.
- Do not damage the plants in the fenced area.
- Do not put any rubbish in or near the Upper Canal.

Report anyone in or near the Upper Canal (1800 061 069).

Koala Crossings

The Upper Canal passes through koala habitat in the Wollondilly Shire. Koalas move a lot during their breeding season (generally August through April in this region) to find mates. To provide koalas with easier crossings, and prevent them from being trapped or hurt, structures were built under fences and over piped sections of the Upper Canal. The structures are being monitored using wildlife cameras to determine if they are working as intended.





Did you know?



The accuracy of the surveying and craftmanship used to build the Upper Canal in 1888 is truly amazing.

It has a fall of approximately 0.93 millimetres per metre, giving it an extremely gentle slope (0.1% grade). Over its 54 kilometre length, it only drops 50 metres in elevation.

This historical marvel has transported water purely by gravity from the Southern Highlands to Prospect Reservoir purely for more than 135 years!