

Glen Innes Celtic Heritage Recognised: The Recipe and Ingredients

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Firstly, turn back the clock some thirty years to a time when rural communities in New South Wales were taking the brunt of State Government service rationalisation. It was a time when it was necessary to try to restrict the impact of the loss of railway services, relocation of State Forestry jobs to the coast and the list goes on.

To the community of Glen Innes it appeared that we were under siege and as the Mayor of the Municipality of Glen Innes at the time, there was an urgent need for a strategy. This strategy would on the one hand need to fight off the onslaught and on the other develop long term positive options for growth. It is fair to say that the enthusiasm for a long term solution would not have had the same commitment had it not been for the pressure for survival.

Various meetings identified our opportunities and resources needed to create a result. We identified the New England National Highway as a very significant opportunity. We just needed a reason for the thousands of travellers to turn off the highway, just once. Another area which probably seemed unrelated was our lack of a common theme to promote our town to the wider community and also to give a basis for a greater sense of unity.

Every opportunity was explored with mixed success until early one Sunday morning I had a call from local pharmacist, John Tregurtha saying: 'Macca on 'Australia All Over' is talking about a pile of rocks that Scotland wants to give to Australia. Apparently no one wants it. What about you get on the phone and let them know that we'll have them.' That was the beginning to much rivalry between the most Scottish towns around New South Wales. Television crews descended on Glen Innes and we were on the map for our cultural connections. We lost that war, but it opened the doors with the Celtic Council of Australia and through the support and dedication of Peter Alexander as the Chair we had another opportunity.

Peter Alexander had many discussions with myself, Lex Ritchie and others about his grand idea. The proposal for the Australian Standing Stones was unique and gave the potential to realise three of our community's key goals:

- An identity and point of focus that set us apart from so many similar communities.
- A basis of common identity to unit our community.
- A means to develop tourism potential and give reason for travellers to turn east for at least a short while.

The road to success against competition for the establishment of the Australian Standing Stones brought about another round of competition with other towns. As a result of this ‘friendly rivalry’ over the years, our community has been able to develop our relationship with other communities. Mossman (Qld) and Glen Innes now have a ‘Friendship Agreement’ and Maclean (NSW) and Glen Innes enjoy a sense of common purpose.

It seemed that to get ahead of the pack we needed to go the extra mile, thus my wife Kathy and I set off half way around the globe to the island of Kearstay. Travelling through England to the Orkney Islands and selecting The Ring of Brodgar as the basis for the Glen Innes Array was an experience not to forget. It is now history that we won the race and the Australian Standing Stones were built.

The original perceived benefits have now been recognised and the community has the benefits of what at the time appeared to be something ‘Quite off the Radar’ thirty years earlier.

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