



National Rock Garden

Celebrating the Geological
Heritage of Australia

Newsletter No. 27

May 2024

Exciting news from the NRG: it's happening!

Connecting with big rocks

A New Zealand rock for the National Rock Garden?

How you can help the NRG



The National Rock Garden is proudly supported by the Geological Society of Australia and the Australian National University and the Minerals Council of Australia



Australian
National
University



www.nationalrockgarden.org.au

Exciting news from the NRG: it's happening!

Brad Pillans, Director, National Rock Garden

It's official. The National Rock Garden has broken ground and construction of Stage 1 of the garden is well under way at our new home in the National Arboretum of Canberra!

After 12 months of planning and an extensive dry period in Canberra, our successful tenderers Glascott Landscape and Civil commenced site works for Stage 1 on 15 May. The first rocks to be emplaced at the new site are the eight Federation Rocks, the last of which was moved from the previous temporary site on Thursday 30 May. Over the next few weeks, other rocks will be moved onto the site including several that have not yet been on display in Canberra, including Mawson Charnockite from Antarctica and Bulahdelah alunite from NSW.



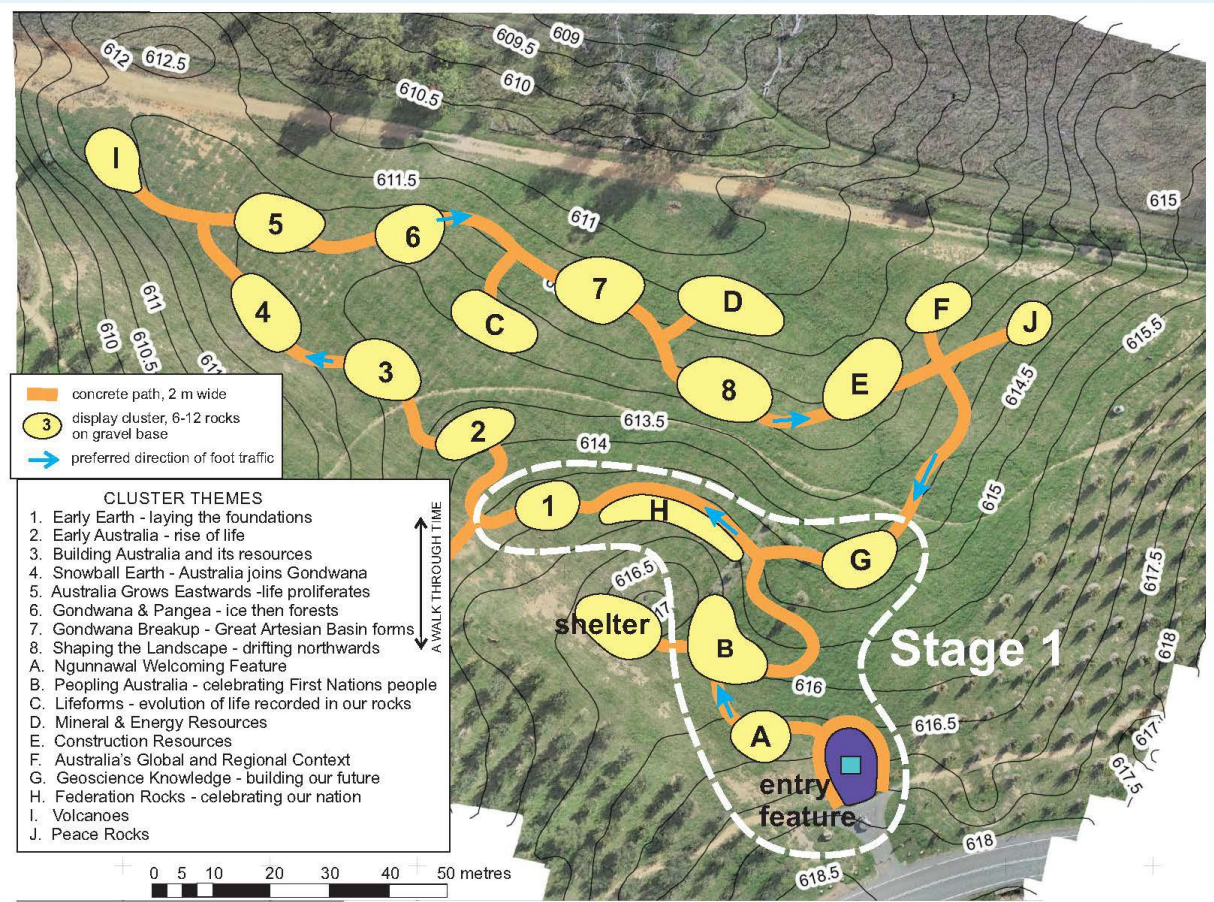
First steps: construction of paths at the NRG. View over the NRG from the entrance, looking north towards the Federation Rocks display, with Mt Painter on the skyline. Image courtesy M. Cooper.

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*The Federation Rocks on display in their new home, just waiting for the last two rocks to arrive.
Image courtesy M. Cooper.*

The concept design for the garden, created by Harris Hobbs Landscapes, features a series of themed rock clusters, linked by gently graded, fully wheelchair-accessible paths. The layout will be integrated with a complementary planting of Weeping Wilga trees (*Geijera parviflora*) in an indigenous-inspired pattern (not shown on the figure below). Stage 1 sees the installation of an entry feature rock, plus five rock clusters, including the Federation Rocks and an Indigenous welcome feature. Entry will be from Forest Drive, the main access road to the Arboretum visitor centre, which is located some 150 m south of the NRG site.



Stage 1 of construction of the National Rock Garden in Forest 13, National Arboretum Canberra.

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Excavation work at the National Rock Garden in May 2024. Geotextile fabric is being rolled out and covered with a gravel subbase. Image courtesy B. Pillans.

The Indigenous welcome feature rock pad is currently being created, designed in consultation with ACT Traditional Custodians. Once the pad is in place, then four beautiful, rounded boulders (tors) of local volcanic rock can be moved and installed.

Work on Stage 1 should take up to two months to complete, after which fundraising and preparation for Stage 2 will kick into high gear. The official opening of Stage 1 is planned for later in the year.



The Hawksbury Sandstone and Tasmanian Dolerite Federation Rocks being uplifted for transport to the National Arboretum Canberra in May 2024. Image courtesy M. Cooper.

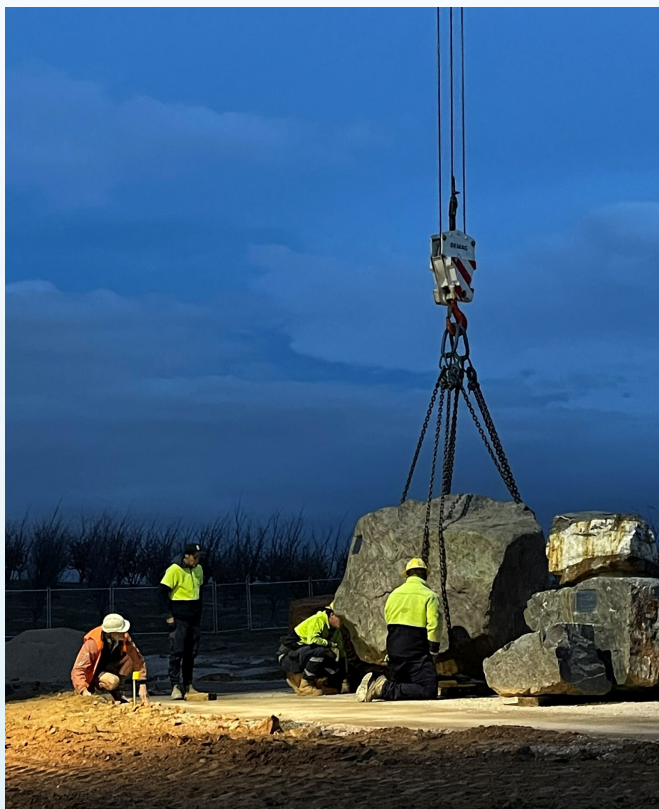
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Stage 1 construction costs have been generously supported by recent donations from Partners of the NRG, the Minerals Council of Australia (\$105,000) and the Geological Society of Australia (\$20,000). Stage 2 construction costs will be significantly higher than Stage 1 construction costs and we are actively seeking major sponsors to fund this important next step.

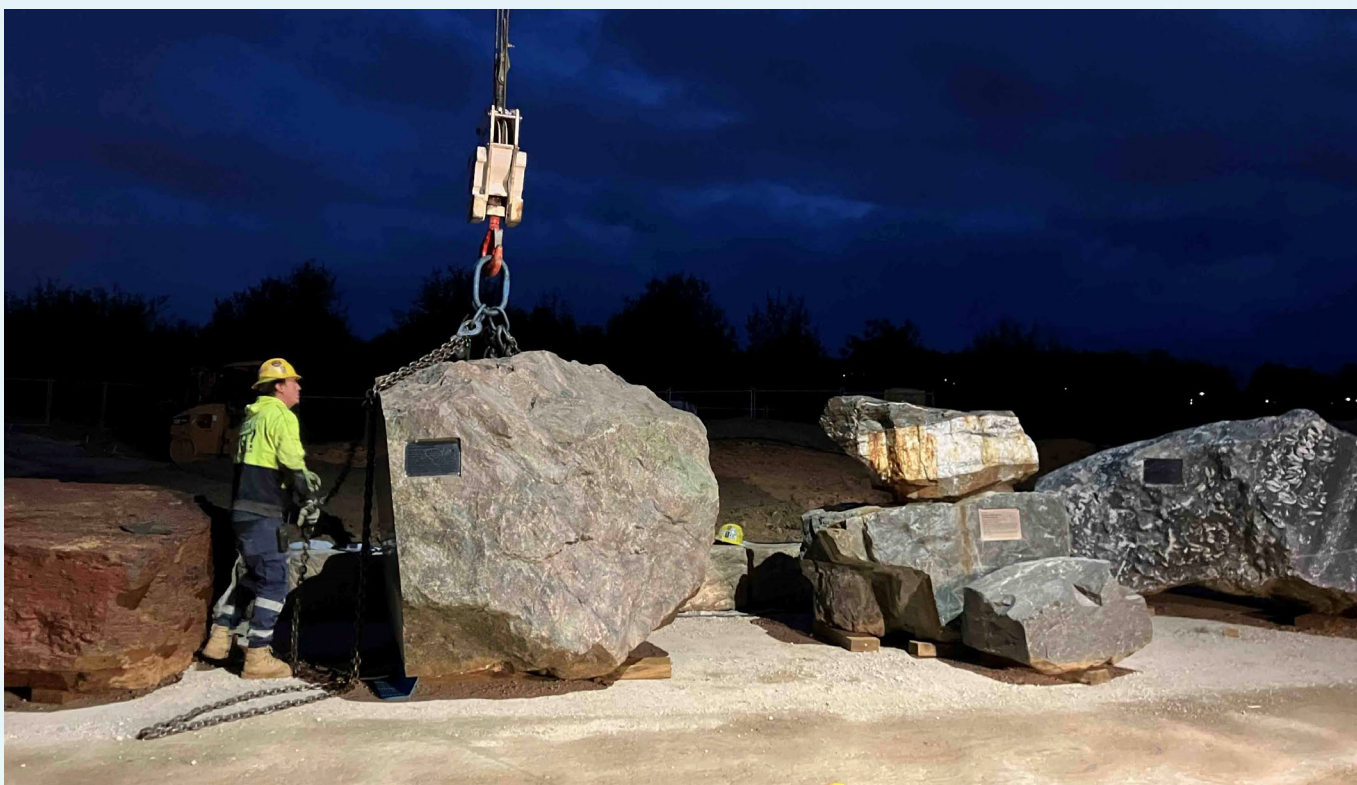


*A big rock needs a BIG crane! Preparing to transfer the last of the Federation Rocks to their new home.
Image courtesy M. Cooper.*





Left and below: after dark, the final rock, South Australian Oorlano Metasomatite, being placed into the Federation Rocks display at the new site at 5.30 pm on 30 May. Images courtesy M. Cooper (left) and B. Pillans (below).



If you have an idea for a newsletter story, or there is a rock that you would like to see featured in a future NRG newsletter, please let us know via [email](#) or [Facebook](#).

Connecting with big rocks

Dr Marita Bradshaw, National Rock Garden Steering Committee

The NRG is a strong supporter of the annual Canberra and Region Heritage Festival (<https://www.environment.act.gov.au/heritage/heritage-festival>) having participated over many years despite disruptions of COVID-19 and adverse weather. Happily, 2024 has been a golden autumn in Canberra and tours of the current site have been well patronised during this year's festival. The festival theme was *Connections* and visitors were encouraged to connect with *deep time* at the National Rock Garden where some of the rocks are more than 2 billion years old (Brockman Iron Formation). Many took the opportunity to connect with the past lives of clams, trilobites and corals, inhabitants of tropical reefs that once grew in Canberra (Canberra limestone) and inland Queensland (Chinaman Creek Limestone). Descriptions of the rocks on display can be found at <https://www.nationalrockgarden.com.au/explore/federation-rocks/>.



Brad Pillans showing Heritage Festival visitors the giant clams (megalodont bivalves) in the Chinaman Creek Limestone, one of the Federation Rocks at the current NRG site. Brockman Iron Formation is in the foreground and Canberra's autumn colours in the background. Image courtesy M. Bradshaw.

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In addition to the self-guided tours advertised in the Heritage Festival brochure, Brad Pillans and I were on site for the last day of the festival, Sunday 28 April. There was a steady stream of visitors all day with more than 50 people from seniors to young enthusiasts, coming to see the big rocks and learn about our geological heritage. Hand specimens of other interesting rocks were also on display. Some visitors, eager to see more, walked up to the storage area to preview other big rocks awaiting the move to the new site. The response to our Heritage Festival event shows that there is a ready audience for the new expanded National Rock Garden which is now taking shape at the National Arboretum Canberra.



*Above: A variety of interesting hand specimens on display during the Heritage Festival event.
Top right: Visitors to the National Rock Garden during the Canberra and Region Heritage Festival investigating the rocks in storage. Images courtesy M. Bradshaw.*

A New Zealand rock for the National Rock Garden?

Brad Pillans, Director, National Rock Garden

The three large rocks placed outside the entrance to the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, in Wellington, are very striking and similar in size to rocks displayed in the National Rock Garden in Canberra (see below). Two of the rocks are andesite boulders, said to have been erupted some 75,000 years ago from Mount Taranaki (Taranaki Maunga, formerly known as Mount Egmont) in the western North Island. Since Wellington and Canberra are sister cities, a similar rock from Taranaki Maunga would be very appropriate for the NRG. Also, the North Island of New Zealand is part of the Australian tectonic plate, so geologically speaking a rock from Taranaki Maunga is an 'Australian' rock. Indeed, Kiwis often refer to Australia as the 'West Island', indicating that they accept the idea of geological unity.



Three large rocks placed at the entrance to Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington. The two rocks on the right are from Taranaki Maunga. Image courtesy B. Pillans.

In February 2024, my wife, Sue, and I travelled to New Zealand to investigate the feasibility of bringing a rock from Taranaki Maunga to the NRG. As a first step, we visited the quarry from which the Te Papa rocks were obtained, and the owners of the quarry agreed to donate a rock to the NRG. We also discussed the proposal with local Māori representatives who were very supportive. More on this developing story in the next NRG newsletter.

*Taranaki Maunga (2,519 m),
a dormant andesite stratovolcano,
western North Island, New Zealand.
Image courtesy B. Pillans.*





WE NEED YOUR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Although work by committee members and friends of the National Rock Garden is voluntary, we nevertheless incur the regular costs of an incorporated entity. We therefore seek donations from individuals who recognise the importance of geoscience and geoscience education to the future of Australia.

Re-location of the National Rock Garden to the National Arboretum Canberra requires substantial funding for footpaths, rock display pads and an NRG pavilion. Significant funding is also required for transport and delivery of rock specimens, preparation of specimens for display, creation of descriptive plaques for the rocks, and maintenance of the NRG site. While we will be encouraging corporate contributions for the high-cost transportation of larger rocks from interstate, we welcome all donations, however large or small.

Please make a tax-deductible donation:

BANK TRANSFER:

Account Name: National Rock Garden
BSB: 082-057
Account Number: 11-836-1338

CREDIT CARD:

Name:

Address:

Credit card: Visa: MasterCard: (Please tick one)

Credit card number:

Name on card: Expiry date: CVV:

Email address:

Phone number: Donation amount: \$.....

Signature:

Please send this information to:

Mail: National Rock Garden Trust Inc. PO Box 576, Crows Nest, NSW 1585

Email: brad.pillans@anu.edu.au

Cheques can also be made out to the National Rock Garden Trust and sent to the address above.

Feedback and further information

We welcome feedback and suggestions on the development of the National Rock Garden and would love to hear from you! Email us at: brad.pillans@anu.edu.au or michelle.cooper@ga.gov.au.

Tax deductible

The National Rock Garden is a registered charity and all donations over \$2 are tax deductible. Making a donation to the National Rock Garden is a great way to reduce your tax and feel good too! To donate, please complete the form on the previous page or visit <https://www.nationalrockgarden.com.au/support/>.

Join our mailing list

The newsletter is circulated twice a year. New 'friends' are welcome and can be added to the email circulation list by contacting Brad or Michelle (details above), or by clicking the 'subscribe' button on the [NRG homepage](#).

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Newsletter edited by Michelle Cooper.