

MINING THE PAST

Russell Vale Golf Club has found a unique way to honour the heritage of its community by naming the course's 18 holes after local collieries.

BY RON BROWNE
CLUBS NSW MANAGER, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

On a glorious sunny Friday on 24 February, Russell Vale Golf Club, nestled in the foothills between Mt Ousley and Bulli Pass, celebrated the launch of a memorial to the district's mining past. The ceremony took place on the Club's 11th tee, now officially named after the South Bulli Colliery, originally known as the Russell Vale Colliery, which at one time was the largest coal mine in the Illawarra.

The concept of naming the Club's 18 holes after the mines of the Illawarra came from a Club member and director Barry Johnston, and was embraced by the board. Led by director Alan Sellers, they set to work researching the history of the coal mines while others investigated financing the project. With the assistance of Sharon Bird, the Federal Member for Cunningham, they secured funding from the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development's

The 11th tee was named after the South Bulli Colliery.

Stronger Communities Program. Once the project was under way, the Wollongong City Council came on board to construct and install the memorial plaques for each hole.

The ceremony featured an official welcome by President Robyn Crowe, a Welcome to Country by Richard Davis, a Wodi Wodi man, and then a brief presentation from Lord Mayor Bradbery about the council's involvement. Sharon Bird MP then formally launched the hole-naming ceremony.

The first mine in the Illawarra was the Albert Coal Mine, which was opened by James Shoobert and operated from 1849 to 1856. Descendants of Shoobert attended the

ceremony as well as many Club members and local State Member for Keira, Ryan Park.

Whether playing golf or walking the course, you can relive the history of coal mining in the Illawarra in a unique and accessible way. The collieries selected – well-known and obscure – all played a role in the emotional mix of success, failure, tragedy and heroism that is the Illawarra "black gold" story.

The full list of hole names is available from the Club, but shout yourself a pleasant stroll through the grounds of this gorgeous golf course and read the details for yourself – and check the temperature of the beer and wines at the 19th (the club house bar). ♣

