

"ALLAN CUNNINGHAM AND ILLAWARRA."

The following notes have been kindly supplied by Mr. W. C. Wentworth, Jnr., on his address to the Society, 4/12/48:

There are several important links between the early history of Australia and the natural sciences. Captain Cook's original voyage of discovery was primarily intended to study the transit of Venus. Three great botanists played a big part in Australian history—Sir Joseph Banks, Robert Brown, and Allan Cunningham. All these three botanists were closely connected with the Royal Collection at Kew Gardens in London.

It was as a collector for Kew that Allan Cunningham arrived in N.S.W. in 1816, with the title of "King's Botanist." From then until his death in 1839 he played a significant part in the Exploration of Australia and the South West Pacific. He accompanied Oxley in his 1817 journey to the Lachlan basin; he was the first man to explore the headwaters of the Cudgegong and Goulburn Rivers and to examine the southern slopes of the Livenpool Range, through which he discovered "Pandora's Pass." He led the first expedition to the Boggabri-Moree area, and was the discoverer of the Darling Downs. He was responsible for exploring the Moreton Bay and Clarence River country. Twice he circumnavigated Australia, and he also reached Tasmania and New Zealand.

In 1818 this remarkable and energetic man visited Illawarra, and his detailed diary (covering 19 October to 19 November) has been preserved. This visit took place only three years after Dr. Throsby had opened up the original horse track from Appin to Bulli Pass and thence along the coast to Port Kembla, and Cunningham followed Throsby's route.

After leaving Appin, he found the track too rough for his cart, although it was being used by drays which brought in cedar from the top of Bulli Pass. (The cedar was sawn into planks below the range, and carried up to the top by manpower). He records the difficult descent from Bulli, and the night spent in the hut at the bottom. From then, he rode along the beach, crossed the mouth of Tom Thumb Lagoon, and made his headquarters at David Allan's Farm at Port Kembla.

From here, he made several journeys through the country, which was only just beginning to be settled, in search of new plants. He paid special attention to the creek bottoms round about the Berkeley Estate (north-east of what is now Unanderra) and to the margins of Tom Thumb Lagoon and Lake Illawarra. He went south to Shellharbour and Minamurra, and also traversed the western shore of the Lake to what is now Dapto and Albion Park. He climbed the range behind Yellow Rock, and also ascended Mt. Keira and Mt. Kembla. His diary gives us some interesting glimpses into life in Illawarra in those days.

Incidentally it is clear from his remarks that the entrance to Lake Illawarra was much deeper then than it is to-day; he records, "Its supply from the sea is over a flat low part of the beach, not exceeding 100 yards wide, where channel has about feet of water at low tide, sufficient to allow some small shark and an abundance of porpoises to pass into the Lake." It is also clear that, in those days there were no sandhills between Port Kembla and Windang—the vegetation came right down to the water edge (much in the way as it does, even to-day, on the beach south of Gerringong).

Cunningham's main interest in his journey to Illawarra was botany rather than exploration. The tremendous amount of work which he managed to pack into one month as recorded in his diary, is some indication of the vigour and fulness of his whole life.

The Society is deeply appreciative of the co-operation given by members of the Illawarra Naturalists Society in this address. They collected and arranged many of the specimens mentioned by Cunningham in his journal.