

Our Hon. Research Officer, Mr. W. A. Bayley, F.R.A.H.S., has supplied the two following notes:

FIRST WOLLONGONG SQUATTERS

During the first twenty years of the settlement planted at Sydney Cove in 1788 the hinterland to the foot of the Blue Mountains was occupied by sheep and cattle and on the arrival of Governor Macquarie in 1810 he found that there was not sufficient land to supply grants to all who had been promised them. To overcome the land shortage Macquarie issued instructions that the Illawarra area was to be used for further grants. In pursuance of that policy the Government gave all the land away without retaining reservations for public purposes and has ever since been buying it back again.

Little has been recorded of south coastal exploration after Bass's examination in 1797, but in 1807 bird collectors visited the Five Islands, which term meant the mainland district as well as the islands themselves, and crews of ships wrecked at Shoalhaven in 1813 made their way back to civilisation along the Illawarra coast.

Meanwhile overland settlement reached Liverpool on the upper reaches of George's River in 1810, and with the laying out of the township, moved on to Campbelltown and Appin from which overland contact was made with the Illawarra seacoast from the west. It appears that some aborigines advised Dr. Charles Throsby at Liverpool that grass and water were in ample supply at the "Five Islands", and in 1815 Dr. Throsby with a party of two whites and two aborigines went to check the information. After spending the night at Appin they travelled eastwards along the plateau and reached the top of the mountain range 1,000 feet above sea level. The following night was spent at the top of the range, after which they cut a track down the mountain slopes near the site of Bulli and travelled to the site of Wollongong. Although there are no rivers on the narrow Illawarra plain north of Wollongong they found an abundant supply of water in the many creeks which flow swiftly down the mountainside to the ocean and ample grass on the fertile seaside plain.

The first mob of cattle was driven to Illawarra without delay and a stockman's hut was built for Dr. Throsby near Wollongong harbour, where today is the corner of Smith and Harbour Streets. Squatting had begun on the coast and the news of favourable pasturage conditions was published in the SYDNEY GAZETTE on March 18, 1815, and again on September 28, 1816. A number of squatters had by the latter date driven cattle to pasture on the coast and Surveyor-General John Oxley was instructed in November, 1816, to proceed to "the New District of Illawarra" to make a survey and mark the proposed land grants. Dr. Throsby's stockman's hut was the meeting place for the settlers.

Deputy Surveyor-General Meehan went with Oxley and recorded that the descent from the plateau above the coastland was difficult. He appears to have examined the coastal strip of land from Coal Cliff southwards and said that although the plateau soil above was sand, cedars, sassafras and cabbage palms abounded on the mountainsides. The cabbage palms and fern trees on the mountainsides impressed Governor Macquarie on his visit in January, 1822.

In December, 1817, Governor Macquarie reported to the British Government that the Illawarra had "some little time since been discovered" and was suitable for pasturage and agriculture. In 1822 he went to see the district for himself. He named the coastal mountain down which Throsby had gone in 1815 "Regent Mountain" and the mountain, just south of Mount Keira, up which subsequently went O'Brien's new road, "Mt. Brisbane", but the names have not been preserved.

At the precipice overlooking Bulli, Macquarie noted the "very grand magnificent bird's eye view", and the "horrid steep descent". That bird's eye view continues to be enjoyed today at the Bulli Look-out at the top of Bulli Pass — a world-renowned panorama of emerald plain and azure ocean. The "horrid steep descent" today carries the famous Bulli Pass on the Prince's Highway — perhaps the busiest of the main roads climbing from the coast to the plateau.

A traveller, Peter Cunningham, wrote of the descent, "You have to crawl . . . down the precipitous edge of the mountain drawing your horse gently after you for you dare not well attempt to ride . . ." Cunningham, too, noted the richness and beauty of the Bulli district; the tall fern, cedar and cabbage trees and the luxuriant growth of vegetation, in which abounded beautiful birds, including the red-crested black cockatoos and blue pigeons.

Between Macquarie's report and his visit, Oxley had laid out the earliest grants which dated from 1817 in Wollongong, though the first settlements in the Bulli district — the Parish of Wonona — seem to have been in 1821 by Cornelius O'Brien, R. Lillis, P. Lillis, Thomas Trotter, T. Brophy and D. Guiney.