FROM HERE TO THERE
Mankind down the ages has always been faced with the need to travel and the problems connected with it, whether it be for survival, pleasure, business or warfare, to name a few reasons.

This naturally has applied to the South Coast of New South Wales which was first traversed on foot by Europeans following the wreck of the ship *Sydney Cove* on an island of the Furneaux Group in Bass Strait in February 1797.

Seventeen of the survivors, including the mate and the supercargo Clark, set off in the ship’s longboat with the idea of reaching Sydney but in trying to land on Gabo Island in early March the boat capsized. On reaching the mainland near the Victorian border of today the party started the long trek north on 15th March.

With numbers progressively dwindling by deaths from native attack, sickness, hunger and possibly drownings when crossing the mouths of the many inlets and rivers encountered. It was only Clark and two others who were eventually picked up by a fishing boat south of Port Hacking, close to Sydney, just nine weeks later. By then their plight must have been desperate, but not to the extent that they were unable to note and report the existence of coal seams at present-day Coalcliff.

The barrier of George’s River and the cliffs of the Illawarra Range kept the south coast free of European settlement for twenty-five years after arrival of the First Fleet until the discovery of a steep descent near Bulli brought the first settlers, cedar cutters and soldiers into the area by means of bullock wagons, horseback and on foot via the long rough haul from Liverpool and around the headwaters of George’s River at Appin.

With cedar-getting, performed by convict gangs, escapees and emancipées, being the main industry for the next twenty-five years transport along the coast was mainly by bullock, and even manpower, haulage along primitive tracks leading to beaches and inlets where sawn cedar was loaded into small roughly-built sailing scows for transport to Sydney. Just how many of these small craft were lost at sea will never be known.

As cedar became scarce there was a change-over to dairy farming and grain production, and it became necessary to move about from farm to farm, to shop at stores in the various small village centres which had sprung up and, more importantly, to cart farm produce such as butter, grain, livestock and even passengers to the nearest primitive shipping port for transport to Sydney by sailing boats.

The means of traction was partly by bullock cart and increasingly by horses harnessed between the shafts of carts, buggies and sulkies, and this continued without change for fifty years until Illawarra was connected by progressive stages to Sydney by one hund-
red miles of railway terminating at the Shoalhaven River at Nowra.

Prior to this and until the opening of Bulli Pass in 1868 most passenger traffic to Sydney was by sea, sail giving way to paddle steamers and finally to propellor-driven ships. In good weather the paddle steamer Illawarra would arrive at her Sydney berth four hours after leaving Wollongong.

However, the horse maintained its ascendancy until the motor car began to emerge as the coming mode of travel at the end of World War I, and even in the early 1920s the township of Albion Park supported four blacksmith/farriers and a thriving coach-building establishment.

Sydney could also be reached by a stage coach service; this was a trying two-day trip via Rixon's Pass, thence via Appin to Liverpool.

This was somewhat improved by the opening of the easier-graded Bulli Pass in 1868 and the building of the Southern railway to Campbelltown. A typical journey then was that of my father and his brother when returning from Albion Park after holidays to the Kings School at Parramatta where they were boarders in the 1870s. They would board the stage coach from Gerringong at Albion Park in mid-afternoon; this was driven by either Joe Schilling or Billy Raftery. The latter in later life built and ran the Commercial Hotel at Albion Park for many years.

An overnight stay was made at the Queen’s Hotel in Wollongong, overlooking Market Square, followed by an early morning start and a haul up Bulli Pass where all male passengers were expected to alight and walk and to help the horses by pushing at the steepest pinches. Kings Falls, near Appin, was reached for an early lunch and a change of horses, after which the travellers continued on to Campbelltown to join a late afternoon train to Parramatta—a sixty-five mile journey in twenty-seven hours.

—Bert E. Weston.

(To be continued)
FROM HERE TO THERE

(Continued from August Bulletin)

Roads remained primitive and followed the original tracks; they lacked grading, drainage and surfacing and in wet seasons became quagmires. Hand-broken rock was the only means available for the limited amount of stabilisation carried out with picks and shovels, wheelbarrows and drays as the working tools.

Crossing the numerous streams which crossed the coastal plain from mountains to sea was a problem for many years. A journey to Kiama from Dapto, now a twenty-minute car drive, was in those early days in wet weather better accomplished by being driven to Wollongong and taking passage in one of the mosquito fleet sailing south.

Gradually the smaller streams were bridged and vehicular punts were built and put into use on the larger rivers; the first of these were manhandled across by the users hauling on ropes, later steam winches were used on the largest vessels and finally replaced by oil engines. At least twelve such ferries were operating on South Coast rivers early this century including three on George’s River.

Many creeks were crossed by means of stone-paved fords and so remained for many years until replaced by small bridges and culverts. As late as 1916 the main South Coast road crossed Cabbage Tree creek, near Fairy Meadow, two miles north of Wollongong, by an open ford. In that year a Mrs. McIlwraith was drowned in a flash flood during a thunderstorm when coming in by sulky to pick up her school-teacher daughter.

Bitumen sealing of main roads did not commence until late in the 1920s. However, the main streets and footpaths were surfaced in a number of towns with coal tar produced by the gasworks at Bega, Nowra, Kiama and Wollongong. This thin veneer of blacktop soon broke up into a pot-holey condition worse than the original natural surface.

Until it was formed and bitumen-topped, the road from the top of Bulli Pass to Loftus, made of the existing ironstone gravel, presented a deeply corrugated and dusty running surface—a horror stretch from which the few motorists of that time emerged looking like Red Indians.

By the 1930s Princes Highway between Sydney and Nowra possessed a two-lane bitumen surface, but followed the original alignment except for deviations by-passing the very steep Mount Brown near Dapto, and Stoney Range between Oak Flats and Shellharbour. Some cars could only climb these hills in reverse gear.

During the 1950s the highway between Nowra and the Victorian border was similarly improved by deviations, culverts, cuttings,
widening and bitumen-sealing. Apart from a powered vehicle punt now giving access to Comerong Island across Alexander Berry’s original hand-dug canal near Crookhaven, all the vehicle ferries have been replaced by bridges along the south coast.

For over one hundred years, until the wreck of the fine little passenger steamer Merimbula near Jervis Bay in 1928, hundreds of small sailing ships and steamers carried passengers and cargo up and down the South Coast. The loss of Merimbula ended the passenger era, but ships of the Illawarra Steam Navigation Company continued operating until 1952 in the transport of general cargo to ports south of Nowra.

When I attended Wollongong High School during World War I, it was then located on Smith’s Hill and from its windows on any day an average of a dozen small coastal steamers, belching clouds of coal smoke, would pass by carrying general cargo, blue metal, coal, timber, silica and livestock to the city.

Far out on the horizon passed a daily procession of European passenger liners, inward or outward bound, under the house flags of many nations.

From those early days of the cedar-getters until the present time, losses by stranding, collision, fire, gales, foundering and enemy submarine attack have accounted for over four hundred vessels along the N.S.W. South Coast and over one thousand lives.

The passing of the horse as a general means of transport saw the end of many things which at the time seemed unchangeable; there were the long funeral corteges composed of buggies, sulkies and horsemen slowly moving along country roads; hundreds of children headed for school on ponies and hacks, and sometimes three small infants jogging along on a gentle giant of a draught horse.

Dozens of coal miners travelled on horseback from home to work.

Bicycles were a cheap and essential means of getting to work, and dozens of employees of the earliest industries at Port Kembla was bisected by Allen’s Creek and until a rickety footbridge was built all cyclists had to strip naked, tie their clothes to the seat of the bike and hoisting it high would then wade across in water at times shoulder high. For four years while attending Wollongong High School I rode a bicycle three miles each day to Albion Park station; this machine was bought second-hand from Wakeford’s in Wollongong for the ruinous sum of two pounds.

(To be continued)

—Bert E. Weston.
ERRATUM

Unfortunately in the September Bulletin two lines of type were accidentally omitted from the last two paragraphs of the instalment of “From Here to There” on page 56. Our apologies to Mr. Weston and to our readers. The paragraphs should have read as follows:-

Bicycles were a cheap and essential means of getting to work, and dozens of employees of the earliest industries at Port Kembla either cycled or rode horses to their jobs each day from Wollongong and Unanderra.

The road from Wollongong to Port Kembla was bisected by Allen’s Creek and until a rickety footbridge was built all cyclists had to strip naked, tie their clothes to the seat of the bike and hoisting it high would then wade across in water at times shoulder high. For four years while attending Wollongong High School I rode a bicycle three miles each day to Albion Park station; this machine was bought second-hand from Wakeford’s in Wollongong for the ruinous sum of two pounds.

All trains were met at Wollongong and the town served by Beattie’s two-horse coaches until the mid twenties. Several trips per day reached out to Mount Kembla, Port Kembla and points north. Eventually a Mr. Mant provided a primitive bus service to Port Kembla for a few workmen, with backless forms on the rear of a light Ford truck.

With an open Napier touring car Jim Stringer operated Wollongong’s first hire car service from his home in Campbell Street; he also ran a backyard car repair business and would drop spanners and crank up the Napier at any time in response to a phone call.

Probably the earliest item of motorised transport in the district was the motor buggy introduced by Dr. Scott of Dapto. This had all the features of the ordinary horse-drawn vehicle with high wooden-spoked wheels and iron tyres; the horse was replaced by a noisy engine under the seat which was connected to the rear wheels by a chain and sprocket and with tiller steering to the front wheels.

Until the end of the 1914-18 war cars were few and far between and generally owned by doctors and business heads, but from then on prices dropped and sales increased. In 1924 the local Ford agent, Bert Harrigan, sold 123 vehicles. All agricultural shows provided opportunity for car firms to stage an exhibit of the latest models, after which any interested prospects would be visited at their farms or town homes for demonstrations and sales talks.

In the event of a purchase the car would be delivered to the buyer direct from Sydney by a driver who would be given accommodation for about a week while teaching the owner to drive and maintain the vehicle. In the absence of any Australian books on the subject it was almost mandatory that the budding motorist should study an English handbook entitled “Learning to Drive.” Among other things and after dealing with the need to wear dustcoats,
leather gauntlets and goggles, it stressed the importance of keeping a sharp lookout for things such as the sudden flight of a flock of birds from a distant tree, a cloud of dust rising above a hedge or of a cow or horse grazing at the roadside which suddenly raised its head and gazed intently down a side road. Any of these phenomena could be interpreted as denoting the approach of another car and appropriate action should be taken.

There existed two main hazards of the road, one being the dense plume of dust trailed by a moving car into which one did not venture because of the danger of meeting another car head on, the other being the constant risk of a burst tyre leading to a capsize. Tyres were of narrow section and of frail canvas and rubber construction; it was essential to carry ample supplies of rubber solution, patching material and blow-out sleeves; a family drive on a Sunday afternoon was lucky to escape punctures, from the hundreds of horse shoe nails which littered the roads, or, worse still, the complete ruination of a tyre ripped by a cast horse shoe.

Early in the 1920s a teenage girl, Celie Watts of Nowra, was killed when a passenger in a car headed for church one Sunday. A wave of horror swept along the coast, the event was a main topic of conversation and some people were so pessimistic that they were loud in asserting that we had not heard the last of motor car fatalities. To the best of my knowledge this was the only car-caused death on the south coast in that particular year whereas in the Albion Park area alone there were three people killed in horse-drawn vehicles.

On hilly roads in wet weather, water ran down the centre horse track and the wheel tracks and carried down road material to form a deep mud puddle at the bottom which later dried out into a bed of thick bull-dust. Both mud and dust were the cause of many accidents when they gripped the tall and narrow car wheels then in use, threw them into full lock, and capsized the vehicle. Injuries from such an occurrence usually resulted from splintered hood bows and daggers of broken plate glass from the windscreen.

About 1925 a syndicate in Sydney started to run a daily express return passenger bus from the city to Nowra. A body was built on a Reo truck chassis and the service began with the idea of doing the hundred-mile journey in a three-hour dash as against a five-hour train trip. The venture soon ended with the vehicle a rattling wreck, owing to being pushed at comparatively high speed over endless potholes and corrugations, and the driver a nervous wreck from his daily ordeal.

When the railway reached Nowra in 1893 Sydney-bound people from further south made great use of it in preference to the slow and unpleasant sea voyage, and various stage coach services ran from Bega to Nowra bringing passengers to the railhead.

The journey could have been little improvement on the ocean trip as the primitive "main" road traversed long stretches of undeveloped forest country which provided no revenue for more than
basic upkeep, rough and either boggy or dusty roads were a way of life for the traveller.

Over the years there has been agitation to have the railway extended down the coast to Bega, but the long mileages between centres of population, the amount of bridging and of costly earthworks necessary, made it an unattractive proposition.

Early this century motor transport crept in to replace the horse-drawn coaches, and large Cadillac cars operated by Balmain Bros., George Harrison and Bartlett, gave passengers at least a faster trip between towns, but the atrociously bad road conditions existed for another fifty years.

To those of the present-day generation who are accustomed to seeing car showrooms full of models and extensive advertisements for their sale, it may seem unbelievable that only twenty-five years ago, when I wanted to buy a popular model of General Motors car in Wollongong, I was told that the agent had only a monthly quota of four vehicles and there was a delivery delay of fifteen months against a firm order.

However, a friend of mine at Eden on the far South Coast made representations to the local dealer, who also had a quota of four cars per month and agreed to make one available to me; the one condition was that the car would be delivered by a driver to his premises at Eden by road from Sydney and I would have to travel down to Eden and drive it back to Wollongong; upwards of five hundred miles of travel.

However, the involved method of obtaining a car was put into effect; but I was seen driving the vehicle in Wollongong and the agent in Eden was heavily fined by his Association for selling outside his area.

The eventual establishment of mail services, post offices, telegraphic and telephone facilities eliminated much of the need to travel and visit in order to communicate with others.

A telegraph wire linked most towns, and in each post office one at least of the staff had to be a skilled operator on the Morse key and able to read the dots and dashes transmitted by good and bad telegraphists. It was customary for each post office to have a local lad employed as a trainee postal officer, whose duties comprised endless practice on the Morse key and delivery of telegrams by pony or bicycle to all except the most remote households. A telegram cost ninepence for fifteen words and delivery was free.

Initially few businesses and fewer homes had a telephone and a call made from a local post office was a lengthy and frustrating exercise in temper and patience; a four-hour wait for a Sydney connection from a coastal area was not unusual and as late as twenty-five years ago one booked a call from Wollongong to Sydney by first asking the operator what amount of delay could be expected; fifteen minutes was a fair average time lapse.

Over the past one hundred and fifty years the Illawarra and Far South Coast districts of N.S.W. have seen the rise, and in most cases the total demise, of modes of transport which included bullocks, horses, sailing ships, paddle and propeller-driven steamers,
stage coaches, charabancs and punts. Travel between Sydney and the Victorian border is now stabilised on rail, air and motor transport in various combinations and can accomplish in one day the nine weeks tragic trek of the survivors of the wrecked "Sydney Cove" in 1797.

(Concluded)

—Bert E. Weston.