

## ON HODDLE'S TRACK:

“The Smoke Signal” for March 1975 reports that the South Coast Conservation Society is to join Kiama Council in a feasibility study for an eight-mile walking track between Saddleback Mountain Reserve and the Minnamurra Falls Reserve (a splendid idea, and one which could be developed much further, as “The Smoke Signal” points out, in a district which could have some of the finest walking tracks in Australia).

Anyway, we can assure them that part of the proposed route is a practicable walking track. Robert Hoddle walked it in 1830, when he was sent with a gang of twenty axemen to find a route from Bong Bong to Illawarra. “Having surveyed the Wingecaribbee Swamp,” he reported, “and ascertained the most southern part of it, I commenced to encounter the most formidable brush I have ever met with, for so great a distance since I have been in the Colony. It abounded with every species of prickly brush, brambles and nettles. The Native Vines were so thickly entwined about the trees, as to render the Sun obscure; at the time it shone with great brilliancy . . . I followed the Range until I was stopped by Cliffs, and proceeded then to endeavour to descend towards Illawarra, or to make for Kiama. I was unable to descend, except by the Range bending 15 degrees southward of East, from the southern Point of the Wingecaribbee Swamp. I discovered the leading Range to Kiama, and after employing the Gang for two days I was enabled to descend the Cliffs to that Range. The Road I have made is sufficiently good to enable Pack Horses to descend. I think a Cart road might be made without much difficulty. The great obstacle I had to contend with was the Brush.”

He was not enthusiastic about his twenty axemen: “With the exception of Six Men and the Overseer I have never met with a more idle and useless set of men. I have never had more than Ten at Work. The first day they commenced four or five shammed Sick.” (Government stroke even then?).

Next year Assistant Surveyor William Jaques reported: “Mr. Hoddel (*sic*) with great pains and personal risk has traced out a Road from Bong Bong to the Boat Harbour at Kiama. He ascended from the former place up a long Range of almost impervious Brush . . . Having joined the Summit of the Mountain, the Road is marked chiefly along its brink the Mountain being chiefly a plain open Moor, swelling in Knowls and Mounds, the bare Rock frequently presenting itself, and the soil loose and tender pro-

ducing Rushes, Sedges, Sharp flags, stunted scrubby shrubs and aquatics. The frequent gullies although small and the boggy holes, surrounding the tufts of the general herbage render the Road plashy and full of numerous sloughs, there is one thick Tea Tree Brush, through which a passage has been traced and which can easily be cleared, but the great quantity of rain and the dense fogs . . . render Mountain Roads unpleasant and unsafe.

“After various attempts Mr. Hoddle descended a long Range . . . From the Summit to the foot of the Rock which Mr. Hoddle descended is 20.75 chains. Before this part of the Road can be made practicable for loaded teams, the Rock must be partially cut and part of it blasted; on the Range leading therefrom, there is a considerable bight and a rough stoney precipitous pass that always will be bad and dangerous, no greater improvement can be effected here than removing the largest of the stones. Throughout the whole of this Range there is very thick Brush.”

Hoddle's track never became a major highway, but parts of it are in use on the road from Robertson to the head of Jamberoo Pass, the foot track along the north edge of the Barren Ground (in the Faunal Reserve) and as Saddleback Road. It is not hard to identify some of the places mentioned by Hoddle and Jaques. The “plain open Moor” would be the Barren Ground; the 20 chains where the rock had to be cut and blasted, the eastern tip of the Barren Ground where old roadworks are, or were a few years ago, still clearly visible; the “rough stoney precipitous pass,” the pinch just east of Saddleback summit; the final range with “very thick Brush,” the Saddleback Range.

Mr. Hoddle went on to lay out Melbourne; when he was superimposing his neat right angles on its modest undulations, did he ever think about Saddleback and the Barren Ground?

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