

JULY MEETING

The speaker at our July meeting was Mr. N. H. Robinson, a leading authority on the natural history of Illawarra and a prominent member of the Illawarra Natural History Society. He has kindly provided the following summary of his talk:-

Early Naturalists In Illawarra

When Captain Cook sailed northwards past the Illawarra District, he had with him Joseph Banks, a leading botanist of the day. Banks did not set foot in this district, but was responsible for visits by a number of early naturalists during the early part of last century.

After Banks had returned to England, he became honorary director of the Royal Gardens of Kew. W. T. Aiton replaced him in 1793. Banks had two goals for the Gardens. Because of his great botanical interests, he wanted an adequate descriptive stock for scientific purposes and also wished to augment the Garden's stocks. His earlier visit to Australia's east coast had shown him a wide range of environments and great diversity of plant life. Consequently he remained very interested in Australia and sent or enlisted collectors.

His first collector in N.S.W. was David Burton, Superintendent of Convicts. Burton was a part-time collector until he was killed in 1792.

In 1800 he was replaced by George Caley, a full-time collector. Caley visited the general area of Picton in 1802. He left the colony in 1810.

Robert Brown, a noted naturalist of the early nineteenth century, is linked with this district. Brown was a widely-travelled man. For example, he sailed with Flinders when Flinders circumnavigated Australia.

The type specimen of the Spine-tailed Log-runner is recorded as having been collected at Mount Kembla in 1804 by Robert Brown. This was eleven years before Charles Throsby built his hut near Brighton Beach. The author has been unable to find any evidence that Brown actually visited the district. On the evidence available, it is probable that another person gave the specimen of this rain forest bird to him.

Brown later became Banks's Librarian and the first Director of the Natural History Department of the British Museum.

Botany by this time was a science in itself, and the days of the amateurs were over. Banks decided to send two professional collectors overseas. Two from the staff of the Gardens of Kew were appointed, James Bowie and Allan Cunningham. Cunningham was born on 13th July, 1791. He was the son of a head gardener of a lesser garden than Kew. Eventually he worked at Kew where he came to the notice of Banks. In 1814, both Bowie and Cunningham were sent to South America where they gained considerable experience in collecting, camping, and exploring. Two years later both left and Cunningham sailed to Australia, where he landed on 20th December, 1816.

Cunningham the botanist was in the party with Oxley and Evans when they explored along the Lachlan River in 1817. We know from

the history books that they were blocked by swamps, and this fuelled the theory that there was an inland sea. Many people do not realize that early naturalists played a considerable part in exploring or helping to explore various parts of this continent. An example is Cunningham, who not only was engaged in this expedition, but also travelled to the Darling Downs overland and was in an expedition that sailed half way around southern and western Australia to Melville Island, with Captain Philip Parker King (son of the Governor).

On 19th October, 1818, Cunningham left Parramatta for the Five Islands District. It is interesting to note that his description of the early stages of the route described an environment suitable at that time for Gaimard's Rat-kangaroo, now extinct on the Australian mainland, but still found in similar environment in Tasmania. Students of natural history can gain much useful information from records such as his.

Cunningham used David Allan's farm, named Illowrie or Allowrie, as his main base in this district. David Allan was Deputy Commissary General. On this four-week stay, Cunningham gathered specimens of plants and seeds, as well as recording the general botany of the areas traversed. Parts of the district examined on this first expedition were from about "Merrimorra" River, present-day Minnamurra, approximately westwards to the mountain range and northwards to the present-day Mt. Keira. He favoured the rain forest, although he examined and recorded most environments. He stated the most luxuriant vegetation was in deep recesses of dark woods under the mountain range.

In one section of Cunningham's journal he wrote about the aboriginals in canoes spearing fish in Lake Illawarra. Mention is also made of pelicans, ducks, teal and other aquatic birds. Tom Thumb Lagoon also was mentioned. A koala was killed on the mountain range by an aboriginal with him, south west of the Lake, on one occasion.

Cunningham journeyed to King's Fall between Appin and Bulli in January, 1824, while in March, 1824, he travelled through the Cow-pastures and Bargo Brush on an expedition to the Southern Tablelands. During 1826 he spent three weeks in Illawarra and in December, 1829, held another excursion to Illawarra. His last visit to our rain forests was in either December, 1830, or January, 1831.

In 1839 W. B. Clarke, perhaps the best known of our early geologists, came to the district.

John Gould, best known as an ornithologist, also visited this district when he collected in Australia from 1838 to 1840. Gould was born in 1804 at Lyme in Dorsetshire, England. When he found he had insufficient material for his "Birds of Australia," he came to Australia with his wife. Artists that assisted Gould included his wife, Mr. Richter and a number of others.

In his books, Gould mentions the following mammals in this district: Koala, sugar glider, red-necked wallaby, swamp wallaby, parma wallaby, red-necked pademelon, potoroo and leopard seal. He makes reference to either personally hunting or seeing the following in Illawarra: Swamp wallaby, parma wallaby and red-necked

pademelon. Gould, like other prominent naturalists, used collectors to augment their collections.

Other sources of early natural history information can be gleaned from early writings such as the "Paulsgrove Diary." In 1833 and 1834, reference is made to seventeen species of fauna.

A thank you is extended to Wollongong Library, the Illawarra Historical Society, and the Mitchell Library in helping gather the information .

—NORMAN ROBINSON.