

WOODLANDS PARK, BULLI

On Sunday, 14 April 1991, a dedication ceremony will take place at Bulli to set in place a plaque and name a hitherto unnamed piece of parkland on National Avenue, just under the escarpment to the south of the elbow at Bulli Pass.

The land (formerly a block affected by slip) will be named Woodlands Park, in honour of the original title allocated by Captain Robert Marsh Westmacott to part of his northern Illawarra property which he held between 1837-47. The park is located just to the west of the 300 acre block originally granted to Cornelius O'Brien, but purchased by Westmacott in 1837.

This area of the Illawarra escarpment, just to the south of Bulli Pass and running off Georges Avenue, is of immense historical significance to the region, for it was through this land that the original **Old Mountain Road** into Illawarra passed. This route was used by Charles Throsby to bring the first cattle into the district in 1815, and if followed the track which had been used by the local Aboriginal people for thousands of years. A detailed history of the various roads in this area and the fate of the Old Mountain Road (which was used sporadically until the 1930s but is now overgrown and 'lost') is contained in Bill McDonald's **The Oldest Road (IHS)**. It is hoped that in the future the old track will be rediscovered and perhaps partially cleared to reveal some of the convict stonework to be found near its upper reaches.

In the meantime, our only record of the road is contained in Bill McDonald's comprehensive account, and within the various paintings of the area. Perhaps the most famous of these, and the most significant, are the set of watercolours taken by Augustus Earle in 1827, a number of which are reproduced in **The Oldest Road**, and one of which graces the Woodlands Park plaque.

When Earle visited Illawarra in April-May 1827 he travelled from Appin to the top of the Bulli Mountain, then down the Old Mountain Road and along the coast to Wollongong and Kiama. An outline of his adventures in Illawarra and the artworks he produced of the region are to be found in the *IHS Bulletin* of April 1987. His journey, and unfortunate fate therein, is also partially described in a piece of doggerel verse which he composed on 19 May at Mr Hassal's, Appin, and included in a letter to Mrs Ward (Mitchell Library, Ae23). The verse reads as follows:

Dear Madam I in duty bound
my troubles to rehearse
And as I'm lots of time on hand,
I'll give them you in verse

My friendship for your family
induces me to do it
Tho' troubling you with doggrel rhymes
is nere no way to shew it.

I'll tell you of our journey too,
and what befel us there
We leap'd over sprightly Cowisess back
'twas a pleasant sight to view

Two serving men brought up the rear,
with saddle bags well stowed
And blankets, boatcloaks, fire locks
made up a precious load

Thro' Liverpool and Campbelltown,
a western course we keep
But then our heads, we southward turn,
and steep towards the deep

Now Bumberry curren's pleasant vales
and Appin's plains are past
And Illawarra Mountain Steep
we've got o'er safe at last

We traversed Mountain Bog and Bush,
and Bivouaked at night
Determined hunger and fatigue,
we'd turn into delight

It was a curious sight to see,
us laying round our fire
Our teaster Heaven's Canopy,
our down bed on the biiyer

Thus roughing it and laying out,
Chill'd by the frosty breeze
Twas nothing to the Stockmens huts,
where you're devoured by fleas.

The road now lay along the beach,
 the surf roll'd at our feet
 The glossy sands from ebbing tides,
 by sounding hoofs were beat

The whole Five Islands now in view,
 Far in the distance stretch'd
 The scene was charming, warm and clear,
 I took my book and sketch'd

And now thro' Bush and Brake again,
 we bend our devious way
 Thro' verdant plains and lowing herds,
 we rode nearly all one day.

Such tangled thicket now we pass'd,
 such mighty trees we saw
 Such giants of Australian growth,
 now fill'd my mind with awe

They seemed to say "in future times,
 we'll guard our native shore
 Such Navies shall grow out of us,
 as ne'er were seen before."

We now had reach'd a lovely spot,
 by Farmer call'd his Farm
 And hop'd to get our bellies fill'd,
 with a drop to keep us warm

But O what horror we all felt,
 when wide we gazed around
 To find a barren wilderness
 of Gum trees most profound

Instead of finding here withall,
 to pass a pleasant day
 We trapesid up and down the Rocks,
 and hungry went away

But keen our wits we bent on him,
 we'd time to look about
 And though not used to riding much,
 begin now to sing out

And when attempting to dismount,
such Oh's and Ay's they made
We thought their limbs were injured much,
and I felt sou afraid

Yet we all know that voyages long,
are made with far more ease
By all your copper bottom'd ships,
for they defy the seas.

I'd recommend to tars on shore,
when horses they will ride
To take a hind from what's above,
then they will stem the tide.

But now my jokes I must curtail,
my own mishap to tell
'Twas on the last days journey,
the accident befel

Me riding on quite soberly,
the day was closing fast
And shadows by the setting sun,
athwart the road were cast

While the red glare shone in my eyes,
which made by footing frail
A log of wood lay in the road,
my eyes it did assail

So violent the shock I felt,
crash crash there goes the bone
O here's a pretty mess I'm in,
I wish I was at home.

Condolence now came thick and fast,
as on the ground I lay
And all express'd a wish to serve,
if I'd point out the way

They hoist me on my horse again,
one led me by the head
And twenty miles I rode that night,
before I got to bed

At Mr Hassall's I sojourne,
on a bed of thornes I lay
I grunt and groan thro' all the night
the same thro' all the day

But all my rage and oaths I find
to fire's adding fuel
So I'll take the Nurse's old adage,
patience and Water gruel.

Earle had broken his leg on the 9th or 10th May and wrote the above verses while he was recuperating at Mr Hassall's Macquarie Grove property. In the same letter he notes that originally he wrote Mrs Ward a normal letter describing his Illawarra adventures, but as the writing was almost unintelligible due to the awkward position in which he lay, he tore it up and wrote the above descriptive verse in its stead.

Earle's references to a night 'Bivouak' after getting over the Bulli Mountain are reflected in his 1827 collection of watercolours of the area and the magnificent oil **A Bivouak of Travellers in Australia, in a Cabbage tree forest, Daybreak 1838** (National Library of Australia). This famous work contains a view of Earle's party camped half way down the Old Mountain Road at Bulli, and is based on one of the 1827 watercolours. The Woodlands Park plaque also contains a copy of one of Earle's views of the Old Mountain Road. Perhaps in the future this park may serve as the set-off point for expeditions in search of the path of the Old Mountain Road. The last such expedition involving Society members occurred in 1968, after bushfires had cleared the area. Unfortunately we may have to wait for another such fire before we can rediscover this historic road.

*Michael Organ
10 March 1991*