

EARLY GRAZING INDUSTRY

The Illawarra district was too difficult of access for any attempt to be made towards settlement. The precipitous Illawarra Range was the barrier. In 1815 the new colony was suffering from a severe drought and cattle were dying due to the lack of water. Settlers had heard from the aborigines that there was plenty of food and water in the Illawarra district, so Dr. Charles Throsby determined to see if the story was true. Accompanied by two white men and some natives, Dr. Throsby set out from Liverpool, by way of Appin, and cut a track through the bush to the top of the escarpment of the Illawarra range.

They were the first white men to look eastward from this vantage point and, through the swaying tops of tall trees and semitropical palms, to catch brief glimpses of the blue Pacific Ocean, although the

heavy foliage prevented them from seeing the full stretch of coastline with its glorious panorama of curving bays and golden beaches; a panoramic view which, later, was to bring world-wide fame to the name of Bulli.

Throsby and his men rested for a night, and next day they cut a track down the mountain near Bulli.

This story should not be lightly passed over; it was a herculean task and the men who performed it deserve every credit for their perseverance and stamina. They found the natives' story to be true, and returned to Liverpool with the good news of plenty of grass and water in the Illawarra area.

A herd of starving cattle was quickly collected and driven down the track to the coast, where the cattle were enclosed in stockyards. Throsby erected a stockman's hut - probably the first white man's building in the district - believed to have been situated where Smith Street joins Harbour Street, in Wollongong.

Other graziers soon followed Throsby's lead and the cattle thrived and fattened on the rich Alowrie pastures.

Throsby's cattle were marketed in 1817 and created such a good impression that the fame of the "Five Islands" cattle was immediately established.

Thus was the first primary industry established in Illawarra an industry which, with the later development of dairying, was made famous by the breeding of the Illawarra Shorthorn cattle. As might be expected in a cattle district, competition between breeders became keen, so the Illawarra Agricultural and Horticultural Society was formed in 1844, and the first show was held in Market Square in that year.

The Society became defunct in 1871 but was re-established in 1882. The first show under the new society was held on the town common, situated between Wollongong and Port Kembla, in 1883.

Once the Illawarra district became accessible by land, it was not long before the pioneers saw the commercial value of the cedar trees which grew in every gully and dale from Bulli to Broughton's Creek.