

## WOLLONGONG SEEKING WATER SUPPLY 1895

The Illawarra Mercury of Saturday, August 24th, 1895 carried a lengthy article headed THE WATERWORKS QUESTION in which mention is made of a government scheme estimated at 66,000 pounds which was considered too costly for the Borough's ratepayers. This was followed by a modified scheme costing about 33,000 pounds which had been approved by the Public Works Committee in 1892. This too had been shelved "owing to the reigning depression."

Alderman McKenzie of the Wollongong Borough Council suggested "that water could be conveyed to Wollongong from the Cordeaux River at a much smaller cost than 30,000 pounds. Accordingly, on Thursday, August 22, "about 9.30am a party, consisting of the Mayor (Ald. Beatson), Aldermen MacCabe, McKenzie and Cochrane, Mr. C. Morton, C.E., Mr S.Edwards and local press representatives, started on horseback for the Cordeaux River." With the aid of an aneroid they measured the height of all the hills they crossed

and finally located a suitable location on the river at an elevation of 1120 feet. Situated close to Mr. Isaac Brown's residence, this "splendid site for a storage reservoir" was 70 feet higher than any of the intervening hills.

"It was generally agreed that Alderman McKenzie's scheme was perfectly feasible, and that no tunnelling and very little cutting would be necessary in connection with the laying of pipes from the river to Garden Hill, where, in the event of the scheme being adopted, the service reservoir would be constructed. Alderman MacCabe, however, making a rough estimate of the probable cost, based upon the estimate in connection with the Government scheme to bring water from the Cataract River, expressed the opinion that Alderman McKenzie's scheme would prove as costly as the other."

On the way home, the party inspected "Hell Hole Gap" but were not impressed with the quality of the water.

As Councils are wont to do, the whole project ended with a ridiculous alternative as shown in the final paragraph of the article:

"At a meeting of the Council last night it was decided not to go on with Alderman McKenzie's scheme at present, and, in accordance with a suggestion by Alderman Galvin a committee was appointed to supervise the sinking of holes on the flat near the race-course, samples of the water obtained to be sent for analysis to the Board of Health."

The last paragraph notwithstanding, had these aldermen really laid the foundation of a scheme which eventually brought water to Wollongong?

All this, of course has a bearing on Jon Breen's talk. It also is interesting in the light of the great fire of Wollongong which occurred on Sunday night after all this was published on Saturday. I refer you to Anne Wood's article in the Illawarra Mercury of 4 February, 1999, which describes how eleven shops burned down for lack of water on the night of Sunday 25th August, 1895.

**Frank Osborne**