

OVERLAND TO WOLLONGONG

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It is a usual custom of mine to pay a visit to the Illawarra district at Easter time, and having heard famous accounts of the new **Bottle Forest Road**, and my friend B. having made full enquiries from what he considered a most reliable source, and received information confirmatory of the published reports that the road was excellent the whole way, and the distance only thirty miles from the **George's River punt to Wollongong**, we determined to take that route, travelling in B.'s dog-cart. Tuesday, 11th April, was fixed as starting day.

We left Sydney at about 10 a.m. To those who have not travelled along the road to **San Souci**, a short description will not be uninteresting. At the outlet of the **Newtown Road**, after crossing the railway bridge, is the parish of St. Peter's, and travelling along this continuous road beyond St. Peter's Church, we get into an open country, passing alternately a brick-kiln and a pretty suburban cottage. From this road is obtained a splendid view of that magnificent site upon which is built the residence of the Hon. Thomas Holt, the Warren. A half-hour's drive along this well-formed road brings us to the **Cook's River Dam**. After passing which, for a mile or so, I pity a traveller's poor bones if he proceeds faster than at a slow walk; but afterwards the road is tolerably good.

It appears that the part of the road just described is a kind of "no man's land", which practically accounts for its ill-conditioned state. Beyond this we come upon numbers of market gardens, and nestling among them a neat well-kept nursery, called "Rosevale" which, when we passed, reminded me of a rich Brussels carpet, a patch of dahlias as a centre piece, with their many varieties of color, being its chief attraction. In the midst of these busy hives of domestic happiness may also be noticed the march of Christianity, in the shape of a neat stone chapel, partly roofed, and apparently well on its way to completion; whilst a little way further on stands the already finished and useful little Church of England, unpretending in appearance, but no doubt as useful to its frequenters as the more elaborate edifice in George Street. About a quarter of a mile beyond the above-named church is the Half-way House, bringing us to the **Koggerah Road**, a disgrace to somebody, and along this labyrinth of ruts we drag on for four miles to the **George's River punt**. About a mile this side is a black bog, through which

we drive to reach the commencement of what is called **Tom Ugly's Point**. At this part of our journey we catch sight of the waters of the river, around the edge of which might be made a beautiful carriage drive.

The river, viewed from this point, is something grand, and I believe as much water can be seen at one time as anywhere in our harbor. From this point the punt crosses to the other side of the river. We arrived at the punt about 1.45 p.m. (having made a call on the road), and we found it about twenty yards from the shore, but no puntman. His house is on the other side, so we cooeeyed and waved unsuccessfully for a considerable time, and - no puntman. A smart storm of wind and rain, and a delay of an hour-and-a-half, caused us to hold a consultation, the result being an immediate return to **Cook's River**, with the hope of better success on the morrow, and, as we afterwards learned, a wise determination.

Wednesday morning. Fine, after a night's rain. A light and early breakfast - too light, as we afterwards discovered; harnessed our young horse to the dog-cart, leading an old one behind, placing more confidence in him in case of difficulty, and started at 7 a.m. over the same road as already described, reaching the punt at 8.45. We were fortunate in catching the puntman just starting, and gained the opposite side of the river, which, at this point, is twenty-two chains wide. At 9.10, and not till then, did we consider ourselves fairly on our journey.

Passing through two gates and a fence with slip-rails, then through another gate, we turned sharply to the left, leaving the upper part of the river directly behind, ascending all the time, and passing through a forest of burnt gums and stunted under-brush. About another mile-and-a-half brings us to a sandy flat of about 100 yards wide, passing which, we emerge on to the continuation of the same hard gravel bush-track, the foliage beginning to look much greener and fresher, but with very marked traces of bush fire. This seems only a belt of verdant foliage, as another hundred yards or so brings us to a more open part, many dead trees, numbers having been bark-ringed, and very many bleached with age and exposure to the weather. We now reach another outlet, with five slip-rails to remove and replace, and putting us about another mile on our journey.

We here saw the first finger-post, and across the road lay two large burnt trees. Another half-mile brings us to an apparently better country, this fact being ascertained by the softness of the track, and by the abundance of grass. Another half-mile and we reach a deserted hut, and another gate. We now pass through a belt of nice forest oak, and in the next few hundred yards a patch of Christmas bush, and within about half-a-mile of the hut we reach **Mr. Holt's boundary fence**, which runs for a mile down to the **Woronora River**.

Passing through the gate about 10.45, we proceed on our way, the track beginning to get much firmer, and consequently more gravelly and barren; the surrounding country being uninviting in appearance, the trees and scrub very stunted, and consisting largely of honey-suckle. Three miles further on, along a pretty hard hill-top track, we get a glimpse of **Bottle Forest**, a considerable way off, the surrounding country seeming pretty barren. We also catch a sight of the hills surrounding **Port Hacking and Kangaroo Creek**; time, 11.30, and young horse getting tired from his heavy pulling on both sides of the river, so determined to give him a spell. Harnessed the old horse, expecting great help from him, as he had been running for some weeks on good grass; but here commenced our troubles - the old horse jibbed. We wasted an hour-and-a-half trying every means to get him along, without success, and were compelled ultimately to re-harness the young horse, travelling forward slowly, saving him for any emergency. Passing through stunted bush, with a splendid view of a range of hills and valleys stretching to the right as far as the eye could reach, and seeing in one or two places what we considered to be portions of the old road passing among them, half an hour's slow travelling brought us to a dilapidated fence, and a few hundred yards further to **Bottle Forest House**, at exactly 1.30 p.m. We rested ourselves and our horses here for an hour, giving them a feed of grass and ourselves two small sandwiches each (all the food we took with us). Whilst here, I took the following hasty observations: - The first building seen as we approach is a cow-shed and yard, and not until this is reached is **Bottle Forest House** visible, in consequence of the thick bush surrounding it.

The house itself is situated upon a gentle grassy slope, covering a frontage of about forty-eight feet, exclusive of the usual projecting bush-chimney at one end.

The house contains altogether nine rooms, and a kind of small pantry at the back, and is a complete ruin, the end of the roof of the centre portion having fallen in; all except two or three of the rooms have been stripped of the floor, and seem to have lately been tenanted by wallabys and horses. The house is said to be haunted; gratuitous information of this fact is conveyed to the traveller in the one word which is found standing out in bold relief among the other scribblings which cover the inside walls. The house is surrounded by, and nestles in the midst of, the only *Wattle Forest* we saw, thus giving us a pretty convincing impression that *Bottle Forest* is a corruption of *Wattle Forest*. In front of the house are traces of a flower-garden, consisting of gladioli, etc, and on the green slope is the roof of some out-house, divided into two compartments, one of which, with the ground for a floor, evidently formed at one time the sleeping place of some person who either loved solitude or wished to evade observation. In this compartment was a much-worn, but pretty clean quilt, done up into a bundle, and lying as if it had formed a pillow. The occupant is supposed to have been an escaped prisoner from **Wollongong Gaol**, and was also said to have been re-captured a few days previously.

From **Bottle Forest House** we take a course between south and south-west, through a long avenue, bounded on either side by tall trees. We left here at 2.30, trying the old horse again with no better success, and causing another half-hour's delay, again falling back upon our young one. At 3.30 passed the **seventeenth mile-post** (the first we saw), and as a warning to other travellers not to fall into the same error as we did in supposing ourselves that distance from Wollongong, instead of, *as it really is, twenty-nine miles*, I will give my readers the proper distances.

Part 2 will continue in the November/December 2013 Bulletin.



Picture of Bulli Pass from the collections of the Wollongong City Library and Illawarra Historical Society