

OVERLAND TO WOLLONGONG (Part 2)

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Thus:- Beginning from **Wollongong**, the distance to **Bulli** is eight miles; from **Bulli** to the top of the mountain is three miles; from there to where **Bottle Forest Road** joins the old road, one mile (from this junction I know not why, the measuring commences); and from here to the seventeenth mile-post makes the twenty-nine miles from **Wollongong** - a fact worth knowing. We found this very disheartening, as you will perceive as my narrative proceeds. Just before reaching this post we passed over a cut-away boulder of free stone, and I think this is the first of the few pieces of the road that has any claim to being made.

3.35 - Passed the sixteenth mile-post.

3.45 - Young horse knocked up. Harnessed the old rogue, and after some little difficulty and thrashing we got him along at a walk by leading.

4.30 - Passed the fifteenth mile-post. Just here are several pinches, formed of broken freestone. Horse jibbing, rushed him at them, and succeeded in mounting them by leading and pulling him up.

After much delay caused by our refractory old horse, at

5.35 - We passed the thirteenth mile-post and two bogs, in one of which we stuck.

5.50 - Changed horses again, ... leading Charley, the old horse, for a mile or two.

6 p.m. - Passed the twelfth mile-post; more bogs, ... Mr B leading the young horse, the former going pretty well until about 7 p.m., when we reached somewhere about the tenth mile-post. It was getting dark; and not wishing to lose more time than could be helped, we determined, not knowing what obstacles yet stood in the way, to walk forward.

Running the dogcart into the bush, and strapping our bags on to one of the horses, we started on foot. Dragging the weary horses after us, we proceeded thus until 10 p.m., drinking occasionally as we came upon clean water - and what with our previous exertions, and the heavy state of portions of the road, we determined to camp until the moon rose. We came to this determination in the middle of a bog, so gave ... instructions to stop at the first spot that would give us fire-wood. We found it not far from the other side, some-where near the five-mile-post - seventeen miles from **Wollongong**, and here we spent a miserable two-and-a-half hours until 12.30, wet almost to our knees - the water having been pumping out of our boot tops - a hot fire in front and a keen wind behind; and we were not sorry when the moon peeped through the trees, and although her light was obscured by clouds, we started off again, pinched with hunger and miserably cold with inaction. Soon after leaving our camp we passed more bog, and got into a thick forest. In an open space at the commencement of this forest stood a good sized hut, which, unfortunately, we passed without examining. Wishing to push on the remaining our miles or so that we then supposed would bring us to some habitation, we travelled on, occasionally finding a mile-post, until we reached number one - only another mile to travel, but uneasy in our minds, well-knowing that within a mile of **Wollongong** the coast-line should be getting low, whilst here it seemed to be too bluff. Just as I considered we should have travelled the mile, ... [we] came upon the old road at two a.m. Not knowing how far from houses we might be, or what part of the road we had come upon, we trudged on for another mile, when we reached the mountain top above **Bulli**. Three more weary miles down the mountain brought us to host **Floyd's** at 3.30 - having walked fourteen miles. His house being full at the time, he very kindly supplied us with refreshment, of which we stood much in need, making us up a bed each upon his parlor sofas, where three hours' refreshing rest placed me in a condition to proceed to Wollongong in a spring cart, a distance of eight miles, arriving at about 11.30, whilst my friend remained behind to arrange about getting our dogcart through the bogs. I omitted to mention that these extend to where the new road joins the old, and that within less than half a mile of the junction is a particularly bad one. It took all day to get the dogcart to **Bulli** - Mr Floyd ... going for it with a strong, fresh horse. The latter discovered our error in passing the hut, as it contained

damper, beef, tea and sugar, etc besides horse-feed. The dogcart arrived at about 7 p.m., when my friend started at once for **Wollongong**, being stuck-up on the road - not by bushrangers, but by an entirely new feature in the Illawarra district, a "**toll-bar**"!! near the **Fairy Meadow Road**. He joined me about 10.30 p.m., making the trip, including, say, two hours from **Sydney** to beyond **Cook's River**, from where we started, thirty-nine and a-half hours - **three working days**. I will not trouble you with the remainder of our travels; passing through **Figtree, Charcoal, Dapto, over Mullet Creek and Macquarie River Bridges**, turning on to the Shellharbor road just beyond the Macquarie River Bridges across the Minna Murra by punt, and on to Kiama, returning via Jamberoo, and down Therry Mountain, recrossing the Minna Murra and Macquarie Rivers. After a day or two in Wollongong and surrounding districts, returned to Sydney via Bulli (one hour and twenty minutes coming up the mountain), **Appin, and per train from Campbelltown**.

We found the road from Bulli Mountain to Appin rather sandy and hard travelling for the horses, and could not get beyond Campbelltown in the one day, although in many places it was being much improved.

The roads about Illawarra are excellent, pointing out the advantages of incorporation in a very marked degree.

The **Shellharbor road**, with a bridge across the **Minna Murra** and the mile or so of sandy road on either side of the river, particularly this side, repaired with the abundance of material on the spot, would make a much better mail route than the one now in use.

With regard to the **Bottle Forest Road**, no doubt we travelled it under difficulties (it has been said that it is the first vehicle that has travelled the whole distance from Sydney to Wollongong). Our jibbing horse causing delay, travelling by night on foot, when everything looks dreary, having to feel instead of see our way through the numerous bogs extending from the thirteenth mile-post to the junction of the old and new roads, which, with daylight, we might probably have skirted, and our being without food, etc., no doubt made a great deal of difference. Nature has done wonders on this road. Passing, as it does, among hills and mountains, it is for miles almost level, and in no place through is there a hill equal to any of the streets in the western portion of our city.

No doubt the opening of this road is a good work commenced, but if it is

not made more passable for produce, etc., a year or two will see it overgrown for want of traffic.

The distance is, I believe, as follows: -

Sydney to the punt at George's River,
twelve miles;

to Bottle Forest, twelve miles;

to the seventeenth mile-post,
say three miles;

to Junction, seventeen miles;

to Bulli, four miles;

to Wollongong, eight miles -
fifty-six miles.

F.W.R. Balmain, May, 1871



*Minnamurra River - From the collections of
the Wollongong City Library and Illawarra
Historical Society*