THE ROAD TO ILLAWARRA

Notes prepared by Mr. W. C. Wentworth, jnr. (Member), following his address to the members at Brandon House on 5/12/46.

Early pioneers of the district probably made use of the black's knowledge of routes into it. The word "Illawarra" means "pipeclay" and refers to the clay seam recently exposed in the construction of Port Kembla baths. A black's kitchen-midden in this area shows stone knives which have been brought in from distant localities, and prove that aboriginals visiting the locality to obtain this ceremonial pipeclay, were familiar with routes across the range. It is probably no coincidence that Charles Throsby's "original hut" was located here.

First settlers were probably "illegals," taking refuge from the Government, followed by some of those concerned in the Rum Rebellion, and graziers who were affected by the Governor's edict banning settlement "west of the Nepean." First official approach by land was Throsby's route from Appin and his descent of the Range in 1815. A rough cattle track was cut down the mountain a few hundred yards south of the present "elbow" on Bulli Pass.

In 1820 Throsby discovered a second track descending the tip of the spur north of the present Macquarie Pass, along the route which subsequently became known as "Osborne's Cattle Track."

In 1821 the first real road was made by Cornelius O'Brien, who collected £60 from six settlers for the purpose. The route started at Figtree, followed along the Mount Nebo ridge, and then swung south through the Gap, and up to the top of Mt. Keira. Thence it ran along what subsequently became the Wilton road for about five miles, where it diverged right and followed the ridge down to the Cataract River, which it crossed at Jordon's Pass about one mile above the present Broughton's
Pass. Sydney was then reached via Appin. This track seems later to have been developed for rough wheeled traffic.

In 1820 a track (Hoddle's) was cut from Bong Bong to Kiama via the Saddleback Ridge; this was never extensively used, and was "lost." About this time also, a route was discovered behind Dapto (the existing "Bong Bong Track").

In 1830 a track (Hoddle's) was cut from Bong Bong to Kiama in substitution for the original track which followed the beaches south from Bulli, over the mouths of Tom Thumb and Lake Illawarra. Mitchell visited the district in 1834 to lay this out. (This road ran via Albion Park and Jammeroo.)

In 1835 the first proper vehicle road was built. It ran up Mt. Keira, virtually along the present route, through Broughton's Pass to Appin, and was the main land approach to the Coast for the next 13 years.

In 1824 the Bong Bong Track was improved, and made just barely passable for wheeled traffic.

In 1843-44 a road was constructed by Mitchell from Lugarno Ferry through Menai, across the Woronora River near Engadine (the Pass of Salengal) and thence generally along the present road line to the top of Bulli. (An alternative route from Menai via Darkest Forest to Maddens Plains junction was cleared about the same time). Next year the road was through to Mt. Keira along the top of the range.

Bulli Pass (Westmacott's) was open for loose traffic in 1844, but remained impassable for vehicles until 1868.

1847-48 saw the opening of two new routes to Appin. Rixon's Road ascended the mountain behind Woonona, turned right, and in about two miles bore left and crossed the north branch of the Cataract River just above the present site of Cataract Dam. McEvoy's Road followed O'Brien's route for about one mile after its divergence from the Wilton Road, joining Rixons Road just about the Cataract crossing.

Jammeroo track was probably in use in the '60, but was not really constructed until 1875. Macquarie Pass route was probably used as a rough track about 1862, but the present road is comparatively recent (1898).

The road from Tom Ugly's to Engadine (where junction was made with Mitchell's line) dates from 1864; the road from Wollongong to Stanwell Park came in stages, being complete about 1866.