ILLAWARRA IN THE 1810s:

Descriptions of roads and routes to and through Illawarra in the early 1800s were recorded by Allan Cunningham in his journal which was published as part of the book "Early Explorers in Australia" by Ida Lee (Mrs. Ida Marriott) in 1925, occupying pages 407 and 427. Cunningham's botanical interests led him to record those names, most valuable to naturalists, in his diary.

As ours is a historical society and those interested might refer to the diary itself, we propose to publish in the Bulletin portions of interest generally during succeeding issues, omitting technical data.

The Journal is Chapter 11 of Lee's book, extracts of which follow:

The Five Islands and Illawarra
19 October - 19 November, 1818

"19th October, 1818, Monday. At an early hour (6 a.m.) I left Parramatta with a laden cart of luggage and provisions, intending to make good an 18-mile stage before I halted for the day, travelling leisurely in order the better to make an observation on the botany as I passed along. In my route towards Liverpool, on a line of road, about 9 miles, bounded by open forest-land and confined dense brush, many interesting (already described) plants were in flower . . . To the southward of Liverpool the country is open forest land of common eucalypti . . .

And on the banks of George's River, which empties itself into Botany Bay I gathered flowering specimens of Casuarina sp., a tree of moderate size, with smooth bark. In situations on the roadside, more or less subject to inundation, a delicate, tufted small lobelia . . . is in flower, and Ruellia australia is common in grassy dry spots, decorating our path throughout this day's route, I halted at the farm of an old resident, who liberally allowed me to put up at his house.

20th Tuesday. We commenced our journey from the farm we had stopped at during the night, travelling over the high beaten road, bounded by forest-land of fine grassy rich appearance, but by no means profitable to the botanical collector.

Finding myself obliged to make arrangements for the charge and care of the government cart, which I intend shall convey the whole of my luggage to the verge of the Mountain Range bounding the fertile country, in the vicinity of the Five Islands, I stopped at the last farm, previous to entering upon the rocky, sterile or damp, morasssy country, extending southerly 15 miles to the mountain. Rather than leave the cart 4 weeks on its summit (beyond which I can only avail myself of pack-horse carriage), and subject it to be burnt or destroyed otherwise for the sake of the iron work, I have determined to send it back to this farm, whose proprietor has kindly promised to take charge of it till I might send for it on my return from the excursion.

(The town of Campbelltown was not laid out until 1820 and Appin until 1834, the district up to those years consisting of scattered farms.—W.A.B.).

"In a rocky creek which waters this little farming establishment I employed myself for a few hours in the afternoon in which I gathered the following . . . (a big number of specimens)."
"21st Wednesday. Leaving the little farm we resumed our journey at an early hour, continuing our route southerly about 2 miles, when the road abruptly terminates, or rather continues by paths or partially beaten ways, striking east and west. Taking the former, we arrived at once upon an entire change of country, of a rugged sandstony character, alternated by extensive tracts of spongy bogs. Crossing a run of water, the drainings of a morass called King's Fall, which empties itself into Botany Bay, we pursued our course generally S.S.E. over this diversified bad country, affording me much variety of common Port Jackson plants...

"The swamps afforded me some specimens of... The Government horse, afforded me by His Excellency's order, not caring to face the rugged boggy country in this day's stage, could not be induced to proceed from the King's Fall onward. It obliged me to avail myself of the fortunate circumstances of an empty cart passing to the mountain for red cedar, which I hired to carry my luggage 14 miles, sending my servant back with the Government cart to the little farm I left this morning, with directions to follow me with the horse as speedily as possible.

"About 2 o'clock we arrived at what is termed the Mountain Top, along the ridge of which the road runs before it strikes down to the sea coast and country in the vicinity of Five Islands of which we have a bird's eye view from the immediate edge of the mountain summit. A sudden change again takes place, for, in an instant, upon leaving the morass with small stunted eucalypti, we entered as it were, within the dark shades of a tropical forest, composed of very lofty timber of the red cedar... (turpentines, Blue Gums and treeferns) "the whole being bound together with immense scandent and volubilous plants, that cannot fail to arrest the attention and admiration of the most indifferent observer.

"After settling myself beneath a hut of cabbage tree thatch... where we intend passing the night, and having secured my plants in paper, I took a walk down the side of the mountain, by the little beaten steps of the Government sawyers, and was much struck with the abundance of the Filices, whose great exuberance is wonderfully promoted by the perpetual humidity that exists in these deep woods which the solar ray never has any direct chance to exhaust. I gathered some very fine specimens... About the time I returned to my hut my servant arrived with the Government horse, when we made up a good fire for the night."

(To be continued)
Cunningham's Journal continued:

**ILLAWARRA IN THE 1810s**

22nd Thursday. Early this morning I sent the packhorse down the mountain to a small farming establishment at its base, with as much of the luggage as the beast could conveniently carry, and I kept with the remainder till the return of my servant and horse. (Here he records discoveries of more plants).

At noon the man and horse returned to me, having left part of the luggage in the charge of a new settler, who had erected a temporary hut on the sea-shore, about 2 miles east of the mountain's foot. Finally, leaving our encampment with the remaining part of the luggage, we followed the beaten horse road about a mile through the same continuance of thick matted forest of various descriptions of timber till we arrived at the pitch of the descent down the mountain, which is at present, in many parts, very abrupt, steep and rugged ... (plants) are very luxuriant on the roadside down the mountain. On my way I gathered specimens of a small tree ... flowers pentandrous ... The Passiflora of New South Wales which frequently abounds in deep shaded situations a few miles north of Parramatta, decorates the wooded descent with a profusion of its orange and green flowers, having its slender scandent branches laden with young fruit.

About 5 p.m. we had descended to the base of the mountain, which is abundantly indicated by the marshy grounds and runs of limpid water we crossed a little elevated above the level of the sea, but not before the horse was completely worn out with the severe exercise of the day. Arriving at the palm-thatched hut of the settler, who very liberally offered me a part of the same, we halted for the night, intending to reach our ultimate headquarters early on the morrow ... Rain at close of evening (8 p.m.), which the slight roofing of our hut, without the aid of my tarpaulin, would barely keep out.

23rd Friday. My specimens, prior to our departure, having been slightly injured by the rains of the preceding night, I placed the whole into dry papers, packed up all my luggage, and proceeded forward to my ultimate destination at Mr. Allan's farm, Illawarra, 10 miles to the southward. The horse road continues along the lengthened beach, which is broad, and bounded by brushes or small woods, in which Banksia ... at this period in flower and young fruit, are particularly remarkable ... Having passed several lagoons, formed of waters from the mountains, and two salt-water inlets, one of which is connected with Tom Thumb's Lagoon visited originally by the late indefatigable Bass, in his voyage to the westward, we arrived at the farm about 3 p.m. In the environs of this I intend to employ myself for about three weeks, in the examination of the botany around.

This farm, for which the native name Illowree or Allowree is retained, is the property of David Allan, Esqr., Deputy-Commissary-
General, and comprises 2,000 acres of fine grazing land, whose western boundary is the Red Point of Cook and the charts. The good land extends inland from the sea westerly 10 miles, till it terminates at or near Point Bass, southerly towards which, in either direction from Illawarra, the land gradually decreases in breadth.

24th Saturday. I destined the whole of the day to the examination of the country around me, and especially to the westward, inland. From thence alone it appeared I would be most likely to meet with botanical novelty, and accordingly we left the farm-house in a north-westerly direction, taking with us an assistant and guide, the nephew of the chief of the Lake Allowree (Flinders' name for Illawarra) whose services I purchased for the day for a small piece of tobacco.

We passed through a large portion of very fine rich forest, but very unprofitable botanical land, about 2½ miles before we reached a thick wooden bottom, about half a mile in diameter, having a running stream passing through it, where I noticed several trees of various dimensions, very different from any seen before, and although few were in flower or fruit, I gathered some specimens.

On the margins of these woods I observed a slender tree... (two)... I could not find any appearance of flower or fruit on the many plants I examined, some of whose clear stems were 3 feet high. Ferns abound in these situations, but are by no means numerous in species; of these I found in frutification I collected specimens. A robust habited tree (in stature) having a soft weedy stem, large cordate leaves, and densely covered with stinging spines or soft herbaceous aculae evidently allied to urtica, forms thick and dangerous woods to attempt to pass through, of which I regret I was unable to discover either flowers or fruit, and that it produces abundance, appears to be sufficiently demonstrated by the many small plants of all sizes and ages in the boggy bottoms, where among the superabundance of scandent and volubilous plants (unknown to me) I gathered duplicate seeds... while my native guide was furnishing himself with long pieces of the tough stringy bark of Currajong... for fishing lines.

About 3 p.m. we took a circuitous route southerly, towards the sea coast, with little or no further success, for, having once left these shaded hollows, the forest land commences, which carried us to the sandy beach...

25th Sunday. Visited the last farm southerly, in this range of country, about 10 miles from Illawarra, situate on the small river called Merrimorra (the Minamurra of modern maps) by the natives.

26th Monday. We were prevented from returning to Mr. Allan's farm last evening in consequence of the high tide, its great depth and strong current of water at the mouth of the Lake through which our route ran. I therefore availed myself of this detention and took a range over the forest grazing lands westerly, to the shaded hollows
under the mountain belt, the plants of which I found, however, were for the most part of the same description as those already observed in similar situations . . .

Amongst a group of fourteen natives from Shoalhaven who were encamped near the Merrimorra Fiver Farm, I observed they had their fresh water in baskets made of the leaf-sheaths of some palm, which they called Bangla, and which they informed us grew under the mountain range. With a view of ascertaining the point whether or not any palm exists in New Holland—without the Tropics—I persuaded one of these people to become our guide (under the promise of tobacco on his return), and conduct us to the woods where this doubtful tree existed. We travelled about 4 miles over forest land, in which I gathered specimens of croton sp., a tall shrub, with subrotund cordate serrulate leaves and axillary racemes of flowers . . . We passed through some low swampy grounds . . . as we approached the mountain base, and entering some dark moist woods, some few plants of the palm presented themselves. Its fronds are pinnated and large; it has all the habit of some smooth Areca or cabbage tree, and appears to be the identical species of palm of which I obtained seeds on the North Coast, during the late voyage of discovery . . .
27th Tuesday. The greater portion of the afternoon was employed on the margins of Tom Thumb’s Lagoon, and in the shaded woods in the vicinity, with very small success; (here he mentions many plants, attributing their being first noted by the naturalist “Mr. Brown”) ... At dusk we returned to the farm hut, having met with no other plants of any moment.

28th Wednesday. I have examined the shaded hollows or bottoms westerly, towards the mountain belt. On land occupied by various settlers, for the most part as runs for cattle, I find I am generally a month too early for flowering specimens ... I now purpose to spend two or three days on or immediately under the range; and this morning I removed my headquarters to the stock-keeper’s hut near the mountain, taking with me a sufficiency of salt provisions and abundance of paper for the limited time I intend being absent. About 8 a.m. we left the hut, with an intention, if possible, to reach the summit of Hat Hill, bearing about 8 or 9 miles (apparently) W.N.W., and as a guide through the more intricate woods, I had induced an intelligent native to accompany me. About 11 a.m. we had penetrated through much confined thicket and small patches of clear open forest-land alternately. when my native guide, seeing the more rugged and difficult part of our route before us (and in truth not caring to be absent long from his wives and children), complained of sickness and finally abandoned us, returning back to the hut with all possible speed.

The botany of these thickets varies in nothing from what I have of late so frequently observed ... With some difficulty we descended to the rocky bed of the water gully, which is supplied by springs in the belt, particularly from one that has its rise near Hat Hill, which, falling over rocks, passes through this channel into lagoons at the foot of the range.

In an opening through the trees we could clearly distinguish the bold rocky summit and perpendicular face of the hill, which we intend to ascend, although the densely wooded and brushy rising grounds, broken with ravines, between us, are no small barriers against the attempt.

(Here Cunningham begins confusing the names of the two mountain peaks we call today Mount Kembla and Mount Keira; placing Cook’s “... round hill the top of which look’d like the Crown of a hatt,” today proven conclusively by Edgar Beale to be Mount Kembla [Bulletin, June 1970] and named by Flinders “Hat Hill” [Observations, Gardiner-Garden p9 and The First Footers, McDonald p15] erroneously as Mount Keira and for comparison bestowing the names Cap Hill or Molle Hill on the true Hat Hill, Mount Kembla, which he also wrongly states as lower than Mount Keira when its summit is higher.

Keeping in mind that when Cunningham names Hat Hill he refers to Mount Keira and when he names Cap or Molle Hill he means Mount Kembla, and that he evidently ascended Mount Keira first by way of the gully at its west; descended and the following day ascended Mount Kembla from a north-easterly direction, the account now continues, using Cunningham’s own words).

After crossing two deep water-channels, and passing over several minor elevations, we arrived at the back of the lower part of the
range considerably to the left or southward of Hat Hill, and tracing it continually upon the ascent we at length reached the rugged summit of this flat-topped mariner's landmark at 3 p.m. I cannot state otherwise but that I was much disappointed upon finding this eminence entirely covered with very common Port Jackson plants, affording me nothing interesting...

From this elevation we had a very extensive view to the seaward, of the whole of the farmed land occupied by various settlers, and bounded by the ocean, comprising from north to south an expanse of near 40 miles. The view westerly on the contrary, is very confined, the country being a succession of lofty ranges behind each other, from among which, large smokes of native fires were observed ascending. The rocks are of sandstone much excavated by the weather, and the general rugged aspect much the same as that presented to the traveller on each side of the road over the Western or Blue Mountains.

After a range of full one hour on this summit, I thought it advisable to descend, and make the most of the daylight and sun, which was much obscured by the dark clouds blowing from the eastward and enveloping the summit of this lofty hill. About 5 p.m. we descended to some rocky holes of water, and being surrounded by Corypha Australia, I determined to halt for the night till daybreak, and while my servant was constructing a hut or gunya of its fan leaves, I kindled a fire to prepare us a meal, which at this time of the evening we found very acceptable...

29th Thursday. At an early hour we left our fire and followed the descents from the mountain, in a direction to the northward of east, that enables us to avoid all the deep creeks intersecting our route yesterday... We saw numbers of the lyre-tailed pheasant, but they were very shy, not allowing us any chance of shooting them.

My servant, however, ran down a young hen bird unable to fly. I set out with my servant and a native as a guide and assistant from the hut at 7 a.m., for another remarkable eminence on the ridge of the mountain belt, called Cap or Molle Hill, which has a round top from a near land view of it, but at a distance out at sea appears at particular bearings perfectly flat, and has been frequently taken for the Hat Hill of Captains Cook and Flinders. (and correctly—editor). Our guide directed our route over a large portion of rising rich pastureland, thinly wooded with common eucalypti, till we entered the brushes conducting us to the base of the hill, comprised for the most part of plants already observed...
Cunningham’s Journal continued:

ILLAWARRA IN THE 1810s

29th Thursday continued: (He is about to climb the real Mount Kembla):

In the steep ascent many interesting specimens made their appearance...

About 1 p.m. we arrived at the summit of Molle Hill, which by no means so elevated as Hat Hill, nevertheless commands an extensive view to the seaward. Being much more to the southward, the true formation of Lake Illowree can be well traced from the sea to the westward, and presents from this elevation a beautiful sheet of water. As on Hat Hill this mount has little novelty, being chiefly clothed with the vegetation of Port Jackson... Some trees we passed this day were 35 and 40 feet high. The rocks on the summit of Molle or Cap Hill are bold and bluff to the northward, and are of the prevailing sandstone of Sydney. About 4 p.m. we had descended and had returned to our temporary quarters, the thunder from the mountain hastening our despatch.

31st Saturday: I took a walk in the confined brushes in the environs of the farm, but found, in consequence of the quantity of rain that had fallen this morning, it was vain to collect flowering specimens, and in reality the route I took furnished me nothing but what I had seen before excepting a twining shrub... About 2 p.m. I packed up all my specimens and returned to my original headquarters at Illawarra, or Five Islands farm. (No entries Sunday or Monday).

1818. November 3rd, Tuesday: This day I visited Lake Allowree, on the margins of which I expected to make some further discoveries in botany. The woods and close-shaded bottoms we passed afforded me little variety or deviation from the individual specimens of which frequent mention has been made... We came out upon the margin of the Lake, which is extensive, but very shoaly on its expanded surface. Pelicans, ducks, teal and some other aquatic birds were swimming, and in detached parties I observed natives of the Lake,—their hereditary property in possession—in canoes, spearing fish, which is said to be abundant. The most moderate calculation of the dimensions of this lake is, from east to west 12 miles, and from north to south about 16 miles. Its supply from the sea is over a flat low part of the beach not exceeding 100 yards wide, whose channel has about 9 feet of water at flood tide, sufficient to allow some small shark and an abundance of porpoises to pass to the lake. Its margins are covered with a dead seaweed...

On the more elevated lands I gathered specimens of some small plants... Approaching rain with thunder warned us to return, which we did by shaping our course along the sea shore...

4th Wednesday: In a walk I took southerly in the afternoon, on the beach, I added some specimens and seeds to my gradually augmenting collection...
5th Thursday: Repeated observations prove the necessity of leaving the immediate shores to seek for botanical novelty... I have now determined to spend 5 or 6 days in these shades as profitably as possible and intend therefore to make my headquarters at the bark hut of a friend...

My intended headquarters is on the south-west side of the Lake, distant about 12 miles from Illawarra, towards which we commenced our journey at 9 a.m. Nothing can exceed the rich luxuriance of the grasses of the fine grazing land we passed over in the first 4 miles, the great nourishment of which is abundantly demonstrated by the many head of large well-bodied cattle grazing thereon. Arriving at a small rivulet that intersected our course, running easterly from the range, we forded it and passed through an intricate but interesting brush, where I observed some shrubs not in flower or fruit different from any previously detected. From these thickets southerly, the forest grazing grounds continue, occasionally interrupted by small brooks or creeks of running water. The many well-beaten cross-paths of cattle intersecting one another, having led us imperceptibly off our own true course, it was late before we even reached the borders of the Lake, and being overtaken by a heavy drenching rain, with thunder and lightning, I thought it advisable to halt for the day, 5 miles short of my ultimate destination, at a temporary hut on the lake.

6th Friday: Wishing to examine some close confined thickets in the neighbourhood of the hut, I did not change my headquarters this day...

7th Saturday: About the hour of 8 we departed from the hut on the lake, directing our course over fine forest land to our intended headquarters with more than ordinary caution, to prevent being led a second time out of our road by the many paths leading to all points of the compass. At 11 a.m. we arrived at our destination, after a long route through much rising uneven ground, and taking possession of a comfortable spare apartment recently attached to a bark hut, I prepared myself to visit the woods near the farm. About half a mile to the westward of this Australian farm house, some extensive confined thickets, to which I directed my attention, employed us during the remaining part of the day...

8th Sunday: Particularly fine and favourable weather for drying my specimens.

9th Monday: I prepared this day to visit (if possible) the summit of the main range overhanging the extreme boundary of the farm, although from the elevated, bluff, perpendicular appearance of the rocky face, I had little hopes of reaching this lofty part of the ridge. To ensure the most practicable ascent I secured, for a little tobacco, the most useful assistance of a native, with whom we started at 8 a.m. on a south-westerly course for the eminence in view. At 11 a.m. having passed over much hilly fine grazing forest land, we arrived at the base of the range, where on rocks in the bed
of a running creek, taking its rise in the mountains, I commenced collecting the few interesting plants detected in this day’s route . . .

Ascending the steep sides of the mountain through thick brushes of Croton and the same description of plants as observed on the sides of Molle or Cap Hill . . . we reached the summit early in the afternoon, and found scarcely any other than the common plants of New South Wales . . .

The native, our guide, espied, on a tree, an opossum . . . having many habits of the ring tailed species. It was a female and her cub. They were asleep, hanging by the claws, among the topmost shoots of a slender Eucalyptus. It has no tail; it has a thick bluff head of the wombat, with strong incisor teeth, but does not burrow in the earth as that harmless, easily domesticated animal. (Note: “This seems to have been a native bear”—koala W.A.B.). The length of the mother was 28 inches, and its weight upwards of 30 lbs.; the cub was about half grown, its length not exceeding a foot; it was covered with a fine thick grey fur. The Australian killed the parent in order the better to carry her down the range, but the young one, at my suggestion, and request, was suffered to live and was carefully brought to the farm hut. The heat of the day had brought out snakes from their retreats in the hollow trunks of fallen timber, and it requires the utmost caution to avoid treading upon them as they lay basking in the beaten paths among the high grass. At dusk we returned to the farm hut, having had a fine day for the ill-paid excursion we had made.

(To be concluded)
Cunningham's Journal concluded:

ILLAWARRA IN THE 1810s

(Cunningham had climbed the real Mount Kembla; descended and returned to the farm hut near the mountain).

10th Tuesday: I employed myself in some gullies under the range, with a view to collecting any few remaining flowering specimens that might be worth attention...

11th Wednesday: At an early hour we left the farm, with all my luggage, for my original headquarters at Illawarra, which I hoped to reach at midday, in order to pack up all the plants and prepare for taking my departure for Parramatta early tomorrow morning. In the rich grassy lands I gathered specimens... About one p.m. I halted for an hour at the bark hut of another settler, having heard I might possibly procure good seeds of a species of palm... the Bangla, very frequent in the moist woods in the neighbourhood, and of which I had made much inquiry during my stay at the Five Islands. With the assistance of some people on the farm with axes, I caused several specimens 40-50 feet high to be fallen, laden with fruit, which I, however, found far from being ripe. They afforded me specimens that may prove the identity of the plant as being the same observed by me on the north coast on the 14th April last. It would seem, from the present state of the fruit, that it ripens about March next, and that as they arrive at maturity they fall off and furnish a substantial aliment to the numerous large birds (particularly pigeons) inhabiting these woods.

12th Thursday. I sent off a pack-horse, laden, to the foot of the mountain, about 10 miles north of the Five Islands, with directions that the man and horse should return to me early in the afternoon, in order to be ready to take off the remaining load of my luggage and collections early in the morning...

13th Friday: At 5 a.m. I finally left the Five Islands Farm, with the remaining part of my collection, for the foot of the mountain, and arrived at the settler's hut there early in the forenoon. Having made the necessary arrangements relative to the conveyance of my luggage up the mountain on the morrow, I took a walk into the shaded woods at its base, of which the plants, although very interesting, are uniformly the same as those in similar situations, of which frequent mention has already been made...

14th Saturday: The whole of this day was occupied in carrying up my luggage to the hut on the mountain top.

17th Tuesday: At 6 a.m. we left the temporary hut on the mountain top for the farmhouse of Mr. Middleton where my Govt. cart was left in charge... I made no discoveries of any moment.

19th Thursday: The rugged stage of 15 miles from the mountain top to this farm had so worn off the shoes of my poor horse as to render re-shoeing indispensable... I therefore determined to lose no time but to proceed with my cart together with the whole of my collection towards Parramatta where we arrived at the close of the afternoon.

(Thus the journal ends) Concluded