

Historical Roads of New South Wales

*HUME
HIGHWAY*



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NEW SOUTH WALES

Historical Roads of New South Wales.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROUTE OF THE HUME HIGHWAY.

The Hume Highway is the main road leading from Sydney to Albury, and thence to Melbourne, via Liverpool, Cross Roads, Narellan, Camden, Picton and Berrima to Goulburn, and onwards through Gunning, Yass, Coolac, Gundagai, Tarcutta and Holbrook to Albury.

Prior to 1928 the Hume Highway was known as the Great Southern road (Main Road No. 17). In 1928, the Main Roads Board adopted the principle of giving each important State Highway the same name throughout its length and, after consultation with the local governing bodies concerned, arranged with the Country Roads Board of Victoria for the re-naming of the road from Sydney to Melbourne, via Albury, as the Hume Highway. This name was adopted as a tribute to Hamilton Hume, one of the two pioneers who led the first exploration party overland to Port Phillip in Victoria, much of the route of the Highway being along that followed by Hume on his overland journey.



Hamilton Hume.

Hamilton Hume was born in New South Wales in the year 1797, his parents having been amongst the earliest settlers in the Colony. In his early days he was hardy and athletic, as well as intelligent and spirited. He acquired from the natives an unusual facility for finding his way without the aid of a compass. In addition to his exploration of the route from Sydney to Port Phillip, his name is associated also with other noteworthy explorations, particularly in the western portion of New South Wales. Hume died on the 19th April, 1873.

EARLY EXPLORATIONS.

In the first years of the Colony, the main southern route from Sydney Cove and Parramatta went by way of Prospect (about 17 miles west of Sydney) and then turned generally south via Carne's Hill and Narellan to Camden, as those localities came to be called. Later a route was developed from Sydney via Liverpool and Cross Roads to Carne's Hill, and this became the principal avenue for traffic southwards. Shortly before the passing of the Main Roads Act the road between Cross Roads, Campbelltown and Narellan was improved, and for some years carried the main traffic to the south without passing near Carne's Hill.

Hume was one of the earliest explorers of that part of New South Wales situated between Liverpool and Goulburn. During the year 1814, in company with his brothers, he discovered a tract of country, which was named "Argyle," subsequently forming the County of Argyle, and situated immediately north of Goulburn. On the 3rd March, 1818, he accompanied Surveyor James Meehan on a journey which commenced at Liverpool, under instructions to see if overland communication could be effected between Sydney and Jervis Bay. Meehan's party proceeded by a then existing track as far as the site of Moss Vale, thence on a line to the north of the present route of the Hume Highway, which the party reached at Marulan, and from there in a southerly direction to the east of Bungonia and to the west of Lake Bathurst, making the return journey to the south of where the City of Goulburn now stands.

With the extension of settlement from Sydney Cove towards the west and south, in 1824, the Governor, Sir Thomas Brisbane, supported an expedition to obtain information regarding the unexplored territory between Sydney and the southern coast of what is now the State of Victoria. The leaders of the expedition were Hamilton Hume and William Hilton Hovell. The latter resided at Naralling, where he obtained a grant of land in 1821, and from which the present village of Narellan takes its name. The party set out from Appin, near Sydney, on the 3rd October, 1824, and travelled first via Picton, Bong Bong, Kenmore and Breadalbane to Hume's property near Lake George, which was reached ten days later.



Cooma Cottage, Yass. Residence of Hamilton Hume.

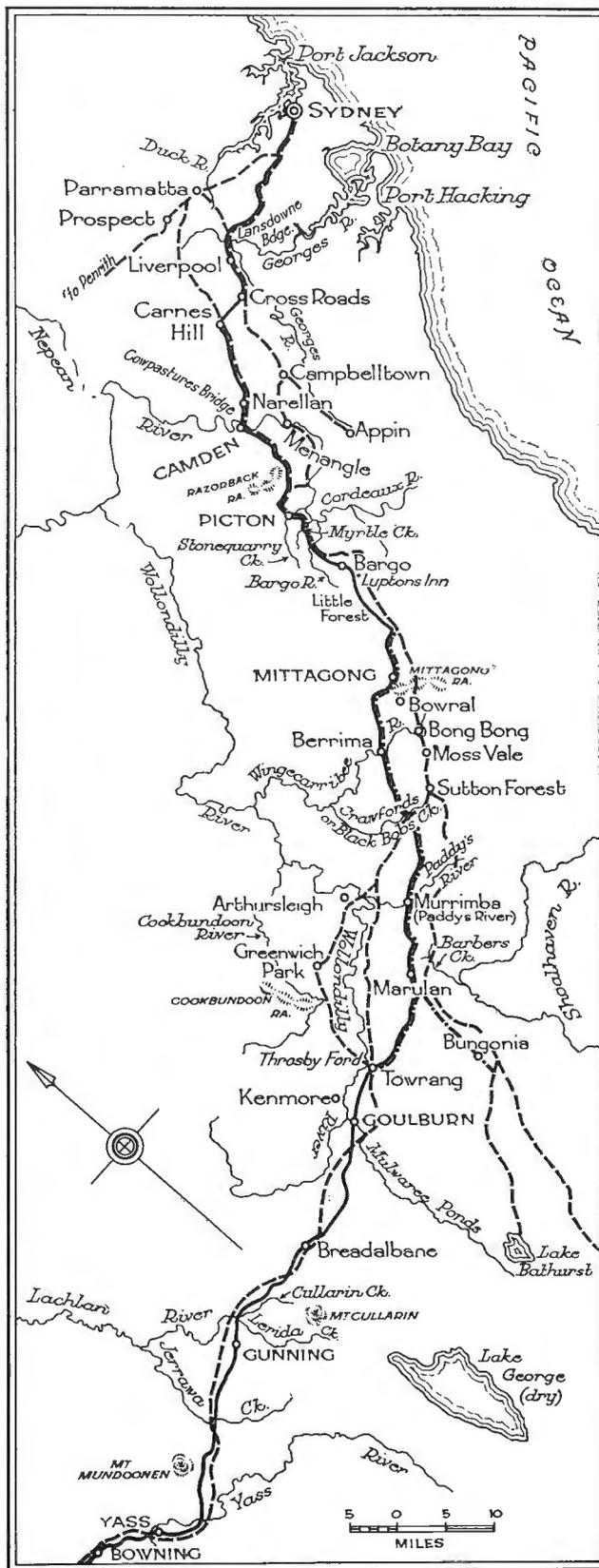
They then proceeded to Yass Plains, crossing the Goodradigbee River, where they were delayed by a flood, and entered unexplored and mountainous country. They passed close to the site of the present town of Tumut, and on the 16th November, 1824, reached the Murray River near the site of what is now the City of Albury. The journey ended on the western side of Port Phillip near the site of the present City of Geelong. The route of Hume and Hovell's party thus followed to a considerable degree the general route of the present inland road connection between Sydney and Melbourne, now known as the Hume Highway.

EARLY SURVEYS.

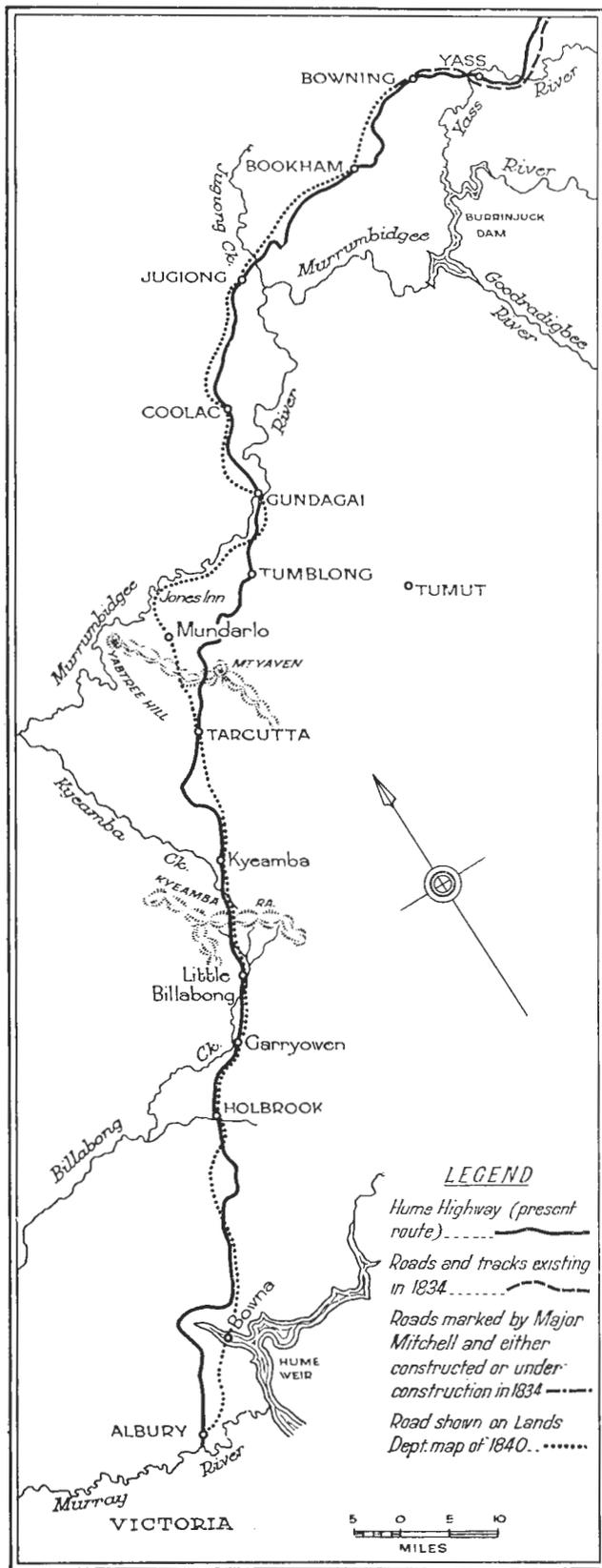
The earliest survey of the route of the future Hume Highway appears to have been carried out by William Harper in 1821, his field books containing particulars of a traverse from the Nepean River, near Camden, over the Razorback Range and onwards to the Wollondilly River near Paddy's River. Following this a survey was carried out by Surveyor Ralfe over Cookbundoon Range, continuing until it intersected the Wollondilly River near Breadalbane. This was completed on the 8th July, 1826.

In a statement accompanying a letter dated 21st July, 1829, from the Colonial Secretary to the Surveyor-General, Major T. Mitchell, it is set out that the line of the road in use through the Argyle district was from Campbelltown to Menangle Ford, then from Stonequarry Creek to Myrtle Creek, and on to Bargo and Lupton's Inn, about 10 miles south of Picton, thus not passing over the Razorback Range. The route then passed over the Mittagong Range to the township of Bong Bong, near Moss Vale, and from there to Paddy's River, where a good bridge had been constructed. It then proceeded to Barber's Creek, a distance of 67 miles from Menangle Ford. The route previously projected over the Razorback Range was not abandoned, however, because on the 11th November, 1829, Surveyor H. F. White was instructed to proceed to Stonequarry Creek and make a detailed survey of the Razorback Hills, and to show a line of road on his plan.

On the 26th March, 1830, Mitchell reported that, in accordance with the Governor's instructions, he had marked a line of road. Apparently this line followed the existing route via Campbelltown, as far as Lupton's Inn. Between the latter point and Little Forest, a



Locality Map Showing Mitchell's Line.



Locality Map.

distance of about 6 miles, the previous line was straightened, with a slight saving in distance. From Little Forest a considerable alteration in the existing route was made. The new line left the old track at Little Forest Hill, and "although it was somewhat tortuous, the ascent to favourable ground was easy, and this ground could not be reached by any other manner." The new line continued to the northward of the old track and passed through Bowral to Berrima, where Mitchell reported there were two natural piers of rock upon which a small but permanent bridge could be built. The line then went southwards along almost flat country to Black Bob's Creek, where there was a slight detour to the east in order to avoid a deep gully, which Mitchell recommended should be bridged. The then existing track to Goulburn was intersected almost immediately after crossing Black Bob's Creek, and the new line reached Paddy's River at Murimba. Mitchell recommended the erection of an iron bridge at Paddy's River, although he said that both at this point and at other places where he had recommended bridges, even if they were not built at once there would be no great impediment to travelling when the line had been cleared. The new line then proceeded by way of Marulan to Towrang, where it rejoined the old line at a distance of 10 miles from the "Marked Tree" west of Barber's Creek. The saving in road length by adopting the new line proposed by Mitchell was 22 miles 9 chains, and it dispensed with the need for two crossings over the Wollondilly River, which were necessary on the line proposed previously.

As stated previously, Mitchell's new line did not cross the Razorback Range. However, a line for a road across the range was determined following on the detailed survey of Surveyor H. F. White previously referred to, and an inspection by the Commissioners for partitioning the Territory. Many objections to this route were raised in the Press, and it was opposed by Mitchell, but without result. Mitchell stated that the suggested route was not in the proper line for the great road through the Argyle district, and that he "would never have thought of applying all the means allowed for the construction of great roads through the most important part of the Colony to the Razorback, where the road must, in time, become a cross road, being out of the best direction for a great road to Argyle."

EARLY CONSTRUCTION.

The first definite record of a road being constructed from Sydney to the south is the construction of a section between Sydney and Liverpool by William Roberts, and its opening on the 22nd March, 1814.

The discoveries of Hume and Meehan to the south in 1818 had disclosed the existence of promising lands, and Governor Macquarie decided to encourage settlement in the new country. In order to give access to it a road was necessary, and this was constructed by convict labour. The earliest reference to this road is in a letter from the Governor to Commissary-General Drennan, dated 9th September, 1819, where instructions were given for "the construction of a cart road through the country as far as the settlement about to be established there." The work was commenced on the 9th

October, 1819, and was completed in February, 1821. The length of the road was 75 miles, and its average width 33 feet. The cost of operations was £280 3s. 8d., which included the erection of six bridges. The road crossed the Bargo River at the point where the present highway passes over the stream by a bridge, thence it passed over the Mittagong Range. Proceeding south, the new road crossed the Wingecarribee River below the present bridge at Bong Bong, and passed through what are now Moss Vale and Sutton Forest, beyond which it went west across Paddy's River by means of a low level bridge, and a short distance further on the road crossed the Wollondilly River. It then ran through Arthursleigh, an early land grant, thence to Greenwich Park and across the Cookbundoon Range. The old road appears to have reached the Wollondilly River again at what is now Throsby's Ford.

Early in 1822 a new line from Merrimbo to Goulburn Plains was discovered, and this route, although not actually surveyed, was used.

In 1832, with the greater part of his surveys completed, Mitchell's active mind was exercised in planning the construction of new great roads, and in devising some means of preventing the stoppage of the King's Highways as a result of destruction by flood or fire of the rude wooden bridges which had hitherto served as crossings of the various watercourses. In that year, when passing along Macquarie-street, Sydney, he saw a mechanic engaged in cutting the coping stone of the dwarf wall in front of the Legislative Assembly. This man was David Lennox, who afterwards became Superintendent of Bridges. Lennox, who was born in Ayr, Scotland, was 45 years of age when he took service under Mitchell, having arrived in Sydney on the 11th August, 1832. The early bridge erected over Prospect Creek during the construction of the original road from Ashfield, Sydney, to Liverpool, had been destroyed by flood, and others, subsequently erected, had suffered in the same way. At this time a bridge carried on stone piers existed, but was in a ruinous condition. Lennox designed a stone bridge of a single span to replace the latter, and the design and erection was approved by the Governor. It was erected by convict labour, the stone

for the bridge being obtained from 7 miles downstream on the banks of George's River, and conveyed to the site of the bridge by means of punts. The foundation stone was laid by the Governor on 1st January, 1834, and the bridge was opened to the public on the 26th January, 1836. The span of the arch is 120 feet, the height of the crown above high-water mark 30 feet, the length 190 feet, and the breadth 27 feet. This bridge is still in use.

Approval was given in 1832 to the construction of the road on the new line surveyed by Mitchell in 1830. In the course of an address to the Legislative Assembly in 1833, the Governor stated the road might be opened in six months. However, it was not completed until some years later. There are no definite records as to the order in which the work was carried out, but there are records of the bridges built by Lennox in conjunction with the road construction. In 1833 he received instructions to construct a bridge over the Wingecarribee River at Berrima, and although there was some delay in the commencement of the work it was completed in June, 1836. It was designed on the lines of the Lansdowne Bridge, and had an arch span of 50 feet and a width of 27 feet, including parapets. This bridge was destroyed by flood in 1860.



On the 23rd January, 1834, Lennox reported having laid out the site of a bridge on the main southern road at the crossing of Midway Rivulet, 3 miles south of Berrima. For this crossing a wooden bridge was designed supported by three masonry piers 20 feet apart. In 1835 the Surveyor-General reported that the bridge had been completed.

Again in 1834 Lennox laid out the site of a bridge at Crawford's or Black Bob's Creek, 7½ miles beyond Berrima. The span of the bridge was 30 feet. Although the bridge was passable for traffic in April, 1836, it was not completed for some considerable time afterwards. The Surveyor-General reported that the piers and walls were of excellent stone resting on a solid mass of rock, and that the bridge was constructed of strong beams, supported by a brace. This bridge has since been replaced.

A map dated 1847 shows that by then the main southern road passed through Goulburn and Yass. The Yass River was bridged by a structure completed by



Lansdowne Bridge over Prospect Creek.



The Dog on the Tuckerbox Monument.
Erected on Site of Drover's Camp 5 miles from Gundagai.

Lennox in 1854. A track then continued through Bookham, Jugiong and Coolac to Gundagai, where the Murrumbidgee River was crossed by a ford. Prior to a great flood in the Murrumbidgee River in 1852, the township of Gundagai was located on the half-mile wide flat on the northern bank. The flood destroyed the original town, inundating the flat to a depth of about 15 feet, with the loss of eighty-nine lives. As a consequence settlement was transferred to higher ground overlooking each bank.

The track then followed the southern bank of the river to Jones' Inn, a distance of 20 miles from Gundagai, where it turned sharply southwards to Tarcutta (passing through Mundarloo, crossing a range between Yabtree and Yaven Hills), running generally in a south-westerly direction through Kyeamba Station and over Kyeamba Range to Garryowen and Germantown, now Holbrook, thence via Bowna to Albury. At this time the route was merely a track serving the various holdings which had been taken up, although the route of the track is substantially the same as that of the Highway to-day.

The control of the main southern road was assumed by the Department of Public Works in the year 1861. At that time a fair amount of metalling had been carried out between Sydney and Goulburn, although the surface was not good, excepting in a few small sections. From Goulburn to Albury very little construction work had been undertaken.

By the Shires Act of 1905 the care and control of public roads was transferred to the Councils of Shires and Municipalities.

With the passing of the Main Roads Act in 1925 the Great Southern road became eligible for assistance from Main Roads Funds. In 1928 it was proclaimed a State Highway and named in honour of Hamilton Hume. Since 1925 the highway has been improved throughout, including the construction of many deviations. By 1940 it had been provided with a bituminous or other dustless surface over its full length in New South Wales, 375 miles, and similarly on through Victoria to Melbourne.

Step by step, over a period of 150 years, the Highway has been developed and improved. After the construction of railways, and prior to the introduction of motor vehicles, the Great Southern road, like other main rural highways, lost much of its earlier significance, and improvement lagged. This lost ground has been more than regained since the introduction of motor vehicles. To-day the Hume Highway carries a heavy and concentrated traffic. It performed a vital function during the war years. The Highway, as it now exists, forms a permanent and fitting memorial to the Australian born and intrepid explorer—Hamilton Hume.