

Historical Roads of New South Wales

*NEW
ENGLAND
HIGHWAY*



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NEW SOUTH WALES

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The Story of the New England Highway

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The New England Highway forms part of the great arterial road system of the State, being the main inland route running north through New South Wales into Queensland. It leaves the Pacific Highway, which links Sydney to Brisbane along the coast, at Hexham, ten miles north of Newcastle. The New England Highway then passes through Maitland, Singleton, Muswellbrook, Murrurundi, Tamworth, Uralla, Armidale, Guyra, Glen Innes and Tenterfield to the Queensland border near Mount Lindsay.

This Highway originally formed part of the "Great Northern Road" stretching from Sydney via Wiseman's Ferry to the Queensland border. In 1928 the route from Sydney via Peat's Ferry to Newcastle, Hexham and the border was named the "Great Northern Highway." In 1931, the Sydney-Hexham section of the Great Northern Highway became part of the Pacific Highway, the coastal Highway linking Sydney and Brisbane, leaving the Hexham-Mount Lindsay section as the Great Northern Highway. Since the Great Northern Highway in the main traversed the New England tableland, it was considered appropriate that its name should be changed to the New England Highway and this was done in 1933, Queensland adopting the same name for the continuation of the road from Mount Lindsay to Brisbane.

The New England tableland is a vast pastoral and agricultural district averaging about 3,000 feet above sea level, following the general line of the Great Dividing Range and extending between the Liverpool Range in the south and the Queensland Border in the north. It owes its name to some resemblance to England in climate and appearance of the countryside.

Exploration.—John Oxley, Surveyor-General of New South Wales from 1812 till his death in 1828, was the first explorer to traverse any part of the New England tableland.

During 1818, Oxley had been sent by Governor Macquarie to examine the course of the Macquarie River. Oxley and party were travelling north-west along the Macquarie River, when progress was blocked by impassable swamps some 80 miles north of the site of Warren. It was then decided to abandon further exploration of the Macquarie, and from a depot which had been established at Mount Harris, about 30 miles north of Warren, a course was laid to the east which eventually led them to the coast at Port Macquarie.

After crossing the Warrumbungle Range, they came to a large expanse of gently undulating well grassed country, only lightly timbered and with marginal hills, which Oxley named "The Liverpool Plains" after Lord Liverpool who was then Prime Minister of England. His unbridled joy at his discovery may be seen from the following extract from his journal: "We seemed to

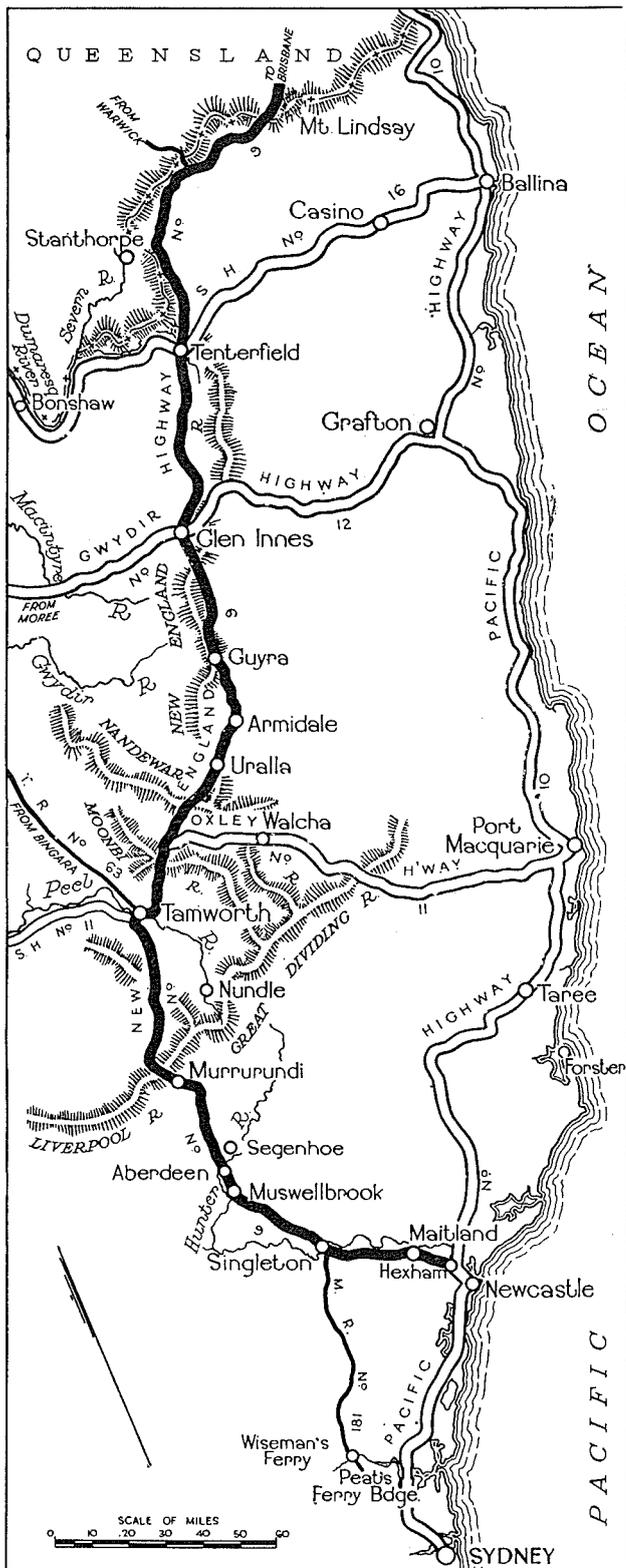
be once more in the land of plenty, and the horses as well as men had cause to rejoice at the change from the miserable harassing deserts through which we had been struggling for the last six weeks, to this beautiful and fertile country. From the hill on which we stood bearings were taken to the most remarkable points and objects connected with the survey, and the most distinguished, in point of beauty or singularity of appearance, were honoured with distinctive appellations."

The Peel River was discovered on 2nd September in the vicinity of the site of Tamworth. Oxley says that it was "the largest interior river (with the exception of the Macquarie and the Castlereagh), which we had yet seen. It would be impossible to find a finer or more luxuriant country than it waters north and south, its extent is unknown, but it is certainly not less than sixty miles, whilst the breadth of the vale is on a medium about twenty miles. This space between the bounding hills is not altogether level, but rises into gentle inequalities, and, independent of the river, is well watered; the grass was most luxuriant, the timber good and not thick, in short, no place in the world can afford more advantages to the industrious settler than this extensive vale. The river was named Peel's River, in honour of the Right Honourable Robert Peel" (member of the British Parliament who later became Prime Minister of England). Continuing east Oxley and his party discovered the Apsley River, and the head of the Hastings River, and eventually reached the coast at Port Macquarie in October, 1818.

A memorial to Oxley has been erected six miles north of Tamworth on the Manilla-road (Trunk Road No. 63) in the form of a ship's anchor from the Survey ship "Sealark." The anchor is on Oxley's 1818 route and it was erected on 2nd September, 1926, exactly 108 years after Oxley's discovery of the Peel River. The "Sealark" was a ship used for survey in Australian waters from 1910 to 1914.

Allan Cunningham, who had been with Oxley on an exploration of the Lachlan River in 1817, was the next explorer to enter northern New South Wales, and traversed the western fringe of the New England tableland. While Oxley had travelled from west to east, Cunningham travelled from south to north. Cunningham was a botanist who came to New South Wales in 1816, at the age of 25. He died in 1839.

On two earlier journeys Cunningham had discovered an entrance to the Liverpool Plains through the Warrumbungle Range, which he named "Pandora Pass" (1823), and explored the Liverpool Plains (1825). His exploration of northern New South Wales commenced on 30th April, 1827, when he set off from Segenhoe, on the upper Hunter River (Segenhoe station near Aberdeen had been established in 1826 by T. C. Macqueen)

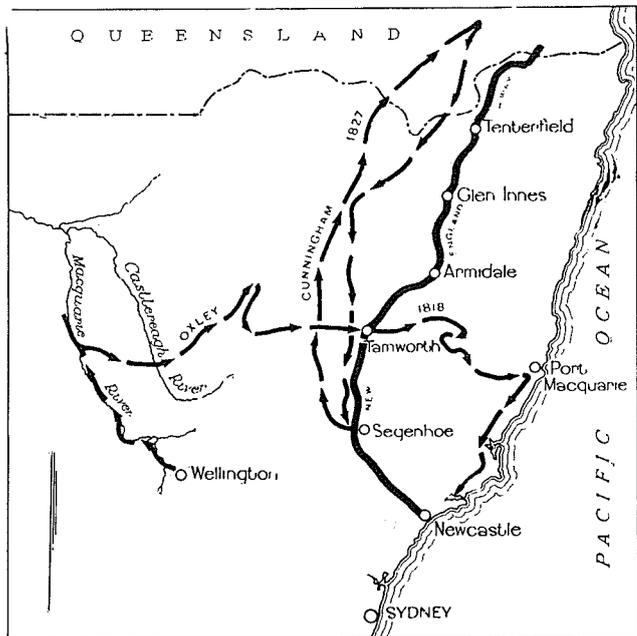


Map showing present location of the New England Highway.

with a party of six men and eleven pack-horses "to explore the entire unknown country, lying on the western side of the dividing range, between Hunter's

River in latitude 32°, and Moreton Bay in latitude 27° 5'. For this purpose a well-appointed expedition, equipped fully for an absence of five months, was placed by the Colonial Government under my direction. On the 11th of May, we crossed (in latitude 31° 2') Mr. Oxley's track easterly towards Port Macquarie in 1818, and from that point the labours of the expedition commenced on ground previously untrodden by civilised man."

The party journeyed on, crossed the Namoi River east of Gunnedah, the Gwydir River near Bingara and the Macintyre River near Yetman until they came to the Dumaresq River, where "It was my full intention to have continued my course in the direction of the meridian, at least to the parallel of 27°, before I made the least easting towards the coast-line; this design, however, the existing circumstances of the country we had penetrated compelled me to abandon; for the great debility to which the whole of my horses were reduced, by the labours of a journey through a line of country parched up by the drought, at once obliged me to pursue a more eastern course; in which direction, upon gaining the higher lands I could alone expect to meet with a better pasture than that on which they had for some time subsisted."



Map showing routes travelled by Oxley and Cunningham.

On his journey east, Cunningham came to a vast tract of open grassland which he named the "Darling Downs" after Governor Darling who was then Governor of the Colony of New South Wales. Cunningham's report says, "It was exceedingly cheering to my people, after they had traversed a waste oftentimes of the most forbiddingly arid character, for a space, more or less, of eighty miles, and had borne, with no ordinary patience, a degree of privation to which I had well nigh sacrificed the weaker of my horses—to observe, from a ridge which lay in our course, that they were within a day's march of open downs of unknown extent, which

stretched easterly to the base of a lofty range of mountains, distant, apparently, about twenty-five miles." Farther north Cunningham discovered a gap in the range of mountains near Moreton Bay. He terminated his outward journey in the Yangan valley east of the site of the town of Warwick, Queensland.

16th June, 1827, saw the beginning of Cunningham's return journey. He and his party crossed the Dumaresq River fifty miles nearer its source, in the vicinity of what is now Bonshaw, *i.e.*, fifty miles further east, than on their forward journey. On 9th July they came upon their former track in the vicinity of the site of Bingara and the following day they crossed the channel of what Cunningham had previously thought was the Peel River, but which he now knew to be another river altogether and which he named the Gwydir. Continuing south, the party crossed the Peel River slightly to the west of the site of Tamworth. "On 28th" (July, 1827), says Cunningham, "my party re-passed the Mountain Range, and after an absence of thirteen weeks, we returned to the station from which we had departed, on the Hunter, having, in that period, traversed upwards of eight hundred miles of every description of country."

Sir Thomas Mitchell, Surveyor-General of New South Wales from Oxley's death in 1828 till his own



Allan Cunningham.

death in 1855, carried out many extensive explorations of the interior and on one of these he traversed portion of the area through which the New England Highway now runs. He left Sydney in 1831, crossed the Peel River and reached the Namoi River and the Nandewar Range and then the Gwydir River, where he turned west and came to the Darling. The following extract is from his journal.

"General Darling left New South Wales in 1831. During the temporary government of Sir Patrick Lindesay another step was gained. A bushranger having been sentenced to suffer death for cattle-stealing, and who



Oxley Memorial 6 miles from Tamworth.

had been so long associated with the aborigines that he had acquired a knowledge of their language and means of subsistence, had related so plausible a tale respecting a very large river which he had followed in a north-western direction from Liverpool Plains to the sea coast, that the acting Governor was induced to despatch an expedition, under my command, to examine the country on that side. The report drew more attention, at that time, as the course ascribed to the river Peel by Oxley and Cunningham, was quite at variance both with recent surveys and this man's description of it. The result of the journey was the discovery of the Karoola, or Darling, as a *fresh-water* river, in the latitude of 28°; and that the basin comprehended all the streams falling westward from the coast-range, as far north as that parallel; and that one of these, the Peel, flowed westward, and not northward, as supposed by Oxley and Cunningham."

Settlement.—When the explorers came back with reports of fertile country beyond what had hitherto been regarded as impassable mountain ranges, ambitious settlers ventured farther north with their livestock.

The Maitland and Singleton districts had been explored in 1820 and settlement had spread rapidly through the Upper Hunter region; many of the settlers were pastoralists who had emigrated from England. Between March, 1822, and November, 1826, 372,000

acres of land in New South Wales, mainly in the Upper Hunter region, were appropriated to settlers. By 1827, there were 25,000 cattle and 80,000 sheep in this region.

"Limits of location" were set up in 1826 to stem the tide of pastoral advance. The boundary was roughly from Cape Hawke in the north (near the present-day town of Forster) and west to the "Wellington valley" (*i.e.*, the Macquarie River valley near Wellington). In 1829 the boundary was fixed by the Manning River to the north, and the Liverpool Range to the west. Port Macquarie district was added to the area the next year. Despite restrictions, settlement crept gradually north. The Government found it virtually impossible to patrol such vast expanses of open country and to check the movement, and by 1831 land had been exploited as far as the New England tableland.

Hamilton Semphill, who had received a grant of land on the Hunter River in 1831, was the first man to introduce stock to the New England tableland. In 1832 he established a pastoral station on the tableland which was named "Wolka," now Walcha. Twenty years later the township of Walcha was established on the Apsley River.

From 1832 others followed Semphill's example and within the next few years settlement had spread as far north as the site of Armidale.

This movement received impetus as a result of the Australian Agricultural Company being given large grants of land in 1832, "Warrah," an area of 249,600 acres on the northern foothills of the Liverpool Range and "Peel River," an area of 313,298 acres which stretched from the site of Nundle north-westerly to the site of Tamworth. This displaced many settlers and these displaced settlers, or "squatters," pushed farther

north. In 1861, two Acts were passed by Parliament providing for free selection of land and so more and more land was opened up.

Tamworth was named after Tamworth in Staffordshire, where Sir Robert Peel, Prime Minister of England, lived. The township of Tamworth was officially established in 1849.

Uralla (the name is said to mean "rocky" and "a chain of waterholes") had its beginnings about 1853, in which year its first hotel was built, although the foundations of the town were laid years before by travellers who journeyed along the road to Queensland. The town was officially established in 1855.

As early as 1834 there were squatters in the district of Armidale. In 1839 G. T. Macdonald was appointed the first Government Commissioner for the New England district and he fixed his headquarters where Armidale now stands. The town was established in 1849 and it was G. T. Macdonald who gave it its name, Armidale being the name of both his Scottish birthplace and also the baronial estate of a Scottish nobleman, Lord Macdonald.

Glen Innes was settled in the 1850's, when a Major Archibald Clune Innes from Scotland occupied land which became "Furracabad" pastoral station. This overlooked the "Glen" where the town now stands. The native name of the Glen Innes district is "Echrinde," meaning a place where wild raspberries grow. Glen Innes was officially established in 1851.

The most northern large town in New South Wales on the New England tableland is Tenterfield. A Court of Petty Sessions was established at Tenterfield Station in 1847 and it was declared a township in 1851.

The Great Northern Road.—A road from Sydney through Windsor to Maitland and Newcastle had been established as early as 1823. In 1831 a shorter route was established via Castle Hill, Wiseman's Ferry and



View of Peel River Valley north of Tamworth.

Wollombi to Singleton, Maitland and Newcastle.* Before this the only way of reaching the Hunter Valley was by sea to Newcastle and Morpeth. Morpeth (originally called Green Hills), situated at the head of navigation on the Hunter River, close to Maitland, was a thriving port until the use of the river for transport north of Newcastle declined following the opening of the railway between Newcastle and Maitland in 1857. In 1831 when steam navigation began, a cutter packet, the "Lord Liverpool," used to sail between Sydney and Newcastle in twelve hours. This way was usually chosen in preference to the overland route because of the slowness of the journey by road and the bad condition of the road in many places.

As settlement spread northward from the lower Hunter Valley, so did the Great Northern Road take shape. Sir Thomas Mitchell in his capacity as Surveyor-General, addressed the following letter to the Colonial Secretary in February, 1836:—

"I have the honour to report to you, for the information of his Excellency the Governor, that the bridge over that part of Wollombi Brook which is called Cockfighter's Creek, at the point where the Great North Road unites with the road along the right bank of Hunter's River is now completed; and to acquaint you, that the next operation of importance on the Great North Road leading to Liverpool Plains is, the forming of the banks of the Hunter at Leamington Ford, and some side-cutting on the Stony Range between the Ford and Muswell Brook, this being a work on which the labours of an ironed gang may be employed with advantage."

As early as 1840 some form of land communication had been established between Brisbane and Sydney. The Sydney Herald of 6th April, 1840, published the following item of news:—

"An overland mail from Moreton Bay arrived last night, being the first from that settlement. The Post started on the 25th February, and accomplished the distance in the short space of thirty-nine days. This circumstance will be hailed with pleasure by the Colonists generally."

By 1851 the Great Northern Road had reached the Gap, two miles beyond Murrurundi.

A Select Committee which reported on the roads of the colony in 1851 ("Select Committee on the Great Leading Thoroughfares of the Colony") divided the roads into three classes:—

Class 1. The main leading thoroughfares within the settled districts.

Class 2. The leading thoroughfares beyond the settled districts, subordinate to those in Class 1.

Class 3. The leading thoroughfares beyond the settled districts.

The report set out that £25 per mile was the sum to be spent on the Class 1 roads, £7 per mile on the Class

* (The story of the development of the roads from Sydney to the Hunter River Valley and Newcastle has been told already in the "Main Roads" Journal (March, 1949).)

2 roads and for Class 3 "a fixed sum of £200 should be placed at the disposal of each Court of Petty Sessions, for the repair of the leading thoroughfares in their respective districts."

The Great Northern Road from Morpeth to the Gap "above Murrurundi" was included in Class 1. The recommended appropriation for each section of the road was as follows:—

Section.	Distance in miles.	Rate per mile.	Proposed Appropriation.	
			£	£
Morpeth—Singleton ..	33	25	825	
Singleton — Muswellbrook	28	25	700	
Muswellbrook—Scone ..	17	25	425	
Scone—Murrurundi ..	25	25	625	
Murrurundi—The Gap ..	2	25	50	
	—	—	—	—
Total ..	105		2,625	

The road from Newcastle to Maitland did not then form part of the Great Northern Road and the road between these two towns was graded by the Committee in Class 2 at the rate per mile of £7.

A Select Committee which reported on "Internal Communication Progress" in 1852 recommended that surveyors should be appointed for the leading thoroughfares for the colony, including the Great Northern Road from Morpeth to the Gap near Murrurundi. They were to be appointed annually with a salary of £500 per annum including travelling and incidental expenses. The surveyor of the Great Northern Road was to reside at either Singleton or Muswellbrook.

The Main Roads Management Act, 21 Vic., No. 8 of 7th June, 1858, which defined the main roads of the colony, described the Great Northern Road as "from a point in Swan-street in the town of Morpeth, 100 yards easterly from the junction of George-street, via Maitland, Singleton, Muswellbrook, Scone, Murrurundi and Tamworth, to Armidale, a distance of about 236 miles."

Captain Martindale, R.E., who had been brought from England in 1857 as Chief Railway Commissioner, was responsible for the care of roads as well. He returned to England in 1861. During his term of office he furnished four reports on the internal communication of New South Wales—in 1857, 1858, 1859 and 1860.

In the first report, Captain Martindale expressed concern at the condition of the roads: ". . . on every side I learn that the roads of the country are deficient in everything that constitutes good roads. Originally ill laid out, ill drained, or not drained at all and never sufficiently metalled, in winter they are impassable sloughs and in summer the rudest common earth roads. The want of bridges suspends inter-communication when the rains set in and too frequently lives are lost in a vain attempt to restore it; while he esteems himself fortunate whose bullock-drays accomplish when the weather is bad three or four miles a day, and bears,



A recent view of the City of Armidale.

as best he may, in addition to great inconvenience and severe loss, the inevitable heavy charges for the carriage of goods."

The second report (1858) of Captain Martindale states that on the Great Northern Road between Morpeth and the Dividing Range it appeared advisable to deviate as little as possible from the track or road at present in use; for, although a better line might in many instances be followed, avoiding unnecessary ascents and descents, "yet a considerable expenditure has been incurred in clearing and forming this portion of the road, and land has been purchased and buildings erected on the strength of vicinity to the high road."

The report goes on to say that some deviations, however, were absolutely necessary, viz. :—

1. At Falbrook to meet a bridge urgently required over "that dangerous creek."
2. Near Muswellbrook to avoid the long ascent and descent over the Black Hills.
3. At Warland's Range up an abrupt spur where the road ascended with a gradient of 1 in $4\frac{1}{2}$ with a dangerous turn around a creek.
4. At the Dividing Range, the ascent up which to the Murrurundi Gap rises with a gradient of 1 in 5, with sharp turns dangerous to bullock teams.

Captain Martindale's third report (1859) in referring to these recommendations states: "Of the works recommended, the improvement of Warland's Range has been carried out, the bridge at Falbrook is in progress, and the Engineer for Roads is at present in the field making arrangements for the improvement of the road at Grass-tree Hill, Muswellbrook, and the Murrurundi Gap."

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Captain Martindale stressed the need for the provision of bridges since in many cases long circuits had to be made to find a crossing over a stream and mentioned in particular the need for bridges over the Hunter River at Singleton and at Aberdeen.

By 1859, the Great Northern Road had been divided into two districts, each under the immediate charge of a Road Superintendent. The first district was from Morpeth to The Gap, about 105 miles, the second from The Gap to Armidale, about 132 miles.

The first district was composed of four divisions, three of which had overseers immediately responsible to the Superintendent. There was no overseer in the fourth division since the Superintendent resided in that division.

The second district, as Captain Martindale stated in his third report, was being surveyed (1859) and proclaimed only and the divisions had not then been established.

"Previous to the year 1859," said Martindale in his fourth report, "there were about 40 miles of the Northern Road cleared and partially ballasted. During that year about $17\frac{1}{2}$ miles were ballasted, and a considerable length of clearing and forming done. In 1860 contracts have been taken, or arrangements are in progress, for metalling 6 miles, ballasting 35 miles, building 90 culverts and minor bridges, and reballasting nearly all the road ballasted during 1859; for forming 5 miles of new road near Muswellbrook, $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles on the new ascent to the Murrurundi Gap, 5 miles at Doughboy Hollow, and 2 miles new road at the Moonbie's Pass, which has been greatly improved. When these works have been completed, some of the worst difficulties on the Northern Road will be overcome"

The object chiefly kept in view upon the Northern Road hitherto after the construction of the bridges, has been the formation of a gravel road from Morpeth to the Murrurundi Gap, which it is anticipated may, at the present rate of expenditure, be effected in 1861."

Improvement on the Northern Road was not as great (said W. C. Bennett, Commissioner and Engineer for Roads in his "Report on the State of the Roads in the Colony of New South Wales, to 31st March, 1865") as on other routes, since the systematic metalling of road was not begun until 1863. Bennett went on to say that improvement by 1865 was such that the mails were accelerated, and were carried at night in many places, which had never been attempted in the late 1850's.

The stage reached in the development of the Great Northern Road by 1865 was as follows:—

Maitland-Morpeth—Metalled.

Morpeth-Singleton—Gravelled.

Singleton-Muswellbrook—Gravelled except for some metalled sections where gravel was not available.

Muswellbrook-Murrurundi—Metalled and the southern ascent of Warland's Range constructed to a width of 21 feet. A deviation (never constructed) was suggested between Blandford and Murrurundi to skirt the Page River obviating two bridges.

Murrurundi-Wallabadah—Metalled in sections.

Gaspard's Gap—Completed in 1864 together with the Sugar Loaf Deviation.

Tamworth—Bendemeer—Cleared and fenced.

Bendemeer-Armidale—Metalled in sections.

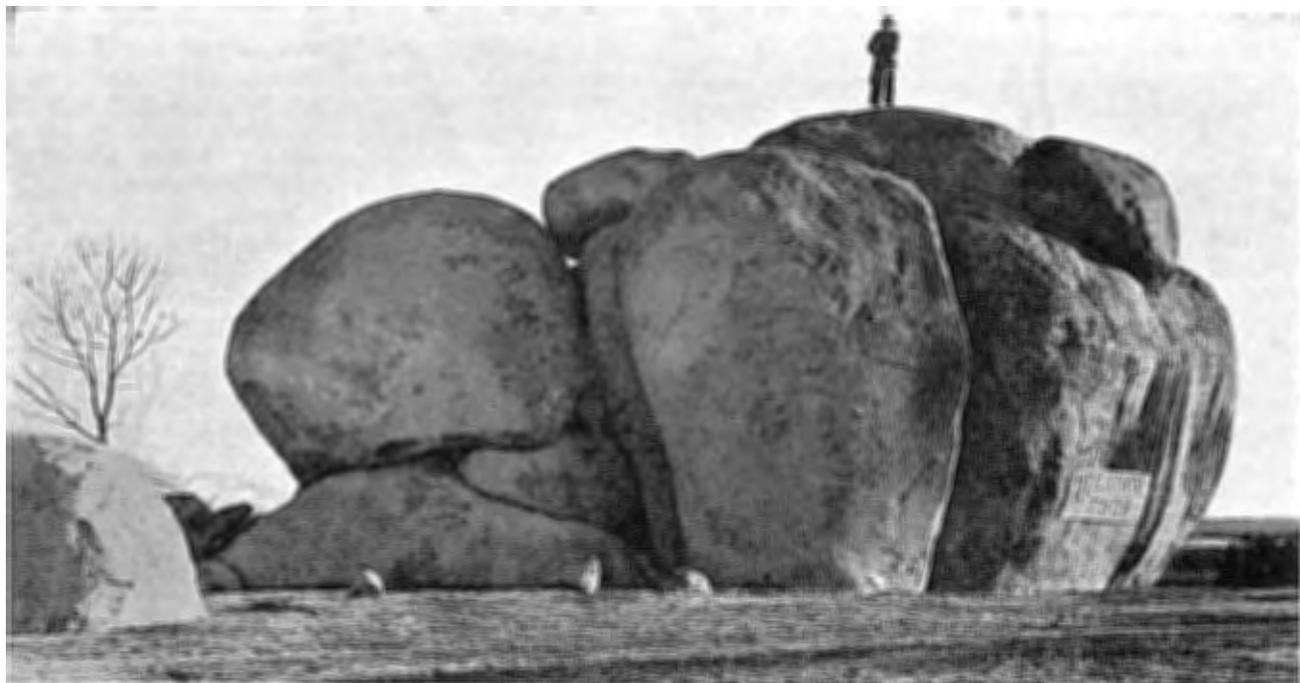
In 1866 action had been taken to proceed with works on the extension of the Great Northern Road from Armidale to Tenterfield.

The total amount of work set for the Great Northern Road for 1866 was estimated to be 5,400 lineal feet of clearing, 26,628 lineal feet of drains, 42,000 lineal feet of formation, 20,000 cubic yards of gravel, 3,300 cubic yards of ballast, 25,000 cubic yards of metal, 48 culverts, general repairs to three large bridges, rebuilding one bridge and general repairs and new gates to four toll bars. Nearly all of this was completed by the end of the year.

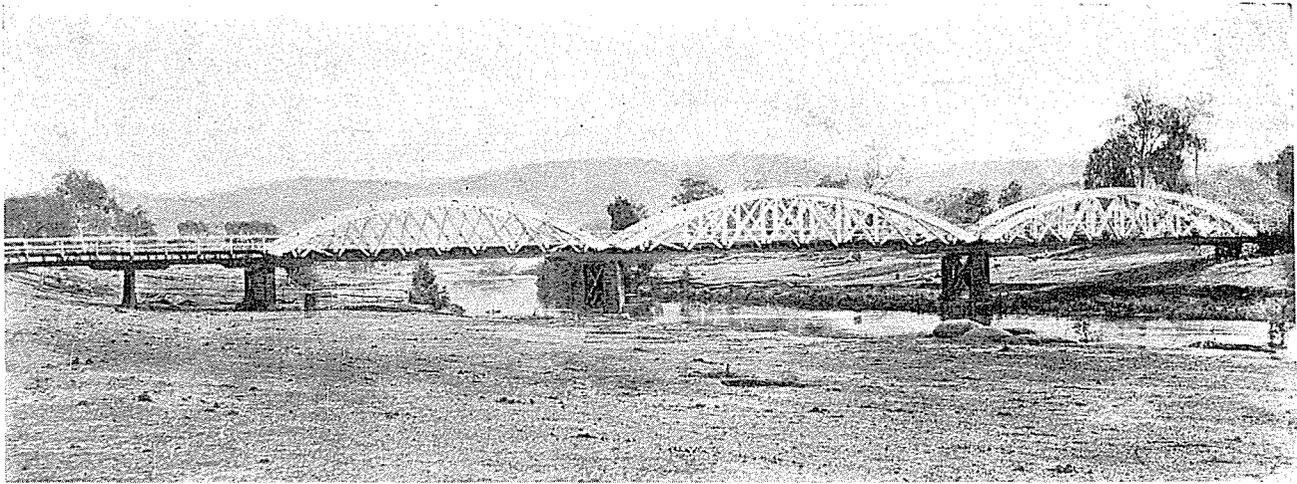
During 1867 progress on the Great Northern Road was retarded by floods. By the end of the year, however, a number of works on the road between Armidale and Glen Innes and between Glen Innes and Tenterfield had been completed, including works on the Bolivia Range.

The crossing of the Bolivia Range has always presented a problem in road location, and since the road to the north beyond Glen Innes was established, three different routes have been used. The pioneers used a route known as the "Centre Ridge," and it is along this route, still bearing the scour marks of the old wheel tracks, that the main telephone line runs to-day. It is a narrow spur running between two other ridges.

The second route was known as the "Bullock Track," and is the next spur to the west of the Centre Ridge. It was in use for about forty years, but because it had a very steep grade in the first 500 feet of the ascent, a still better route was sought. At the end of last century all possible routes were investigated, and the existing line, which is to the east of the Centre Ridge, was constructed by the Public Works Department in 1901. This section has been recently reconstructed by the Department of Main Roads in conjunction with the general reconstruction of the New England Highway between Deepwater and Bluff Rock.



Thunderbolt's Rock near Uralla called after the bushranger of that name.



Timber truss bridge over McDonald River at Bendemeer. Built 1874. Replaced by new structure 1904.

A report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 22nd April, 1868, is of interest; it reads:—

“During this month the works on the main roads have been progressing under the contracts already let, but, in consequence of the want of funds, contractors were restrained from proceeding too rapidly. This difficulty, it is hoped, will be removed in a few days by the passing of the Appropriation Act. All the works let can be completed before the wet weather sets in. The remainder of the works on main roads, for which contracts have not been taken, will be advertised at once. They consist chiefly of the contracts on the second district of the Great Northern Road, for extension of metalling at Red Hill, metalling of Coghlan’s Sidling, and Bad Flats between Tamworth and Moonbies, and thence to Bendemeer, some works north of Uralla and the cutting down of Saumerez Hill near Armidale . . .”

In 1869 deviations were proposed between Tamworth and Armidale, *i.e.*, at the Moonbies to avoid a flooded flat and at the Moonby Range where several lines were surveyed. In the same year the Supreme Court granted full power to the Commissioner for Roads to put side logs on roads to confine the traffic, with restricting injunctions to use the permission moderately. Prior to this, owing both to the uncertain state of the law and, at the same time, in compliance with an order of the District Court, all side logs on the Great Northern Road had been either removed or burned, causing a loss estimated—with the extra cost of maintenance, metal and labour—at £1,000. Progress in metalling continued between Tamworth and Tenterfield.

Annual floods and wet weather continued to be a set-back. The *Sydney Morning Herald* for 15th June, 1870, states:—

“The constant succession of floods and wet weather which have prevailed since the end of February has very much retarded the operations of the Roads Department. Up to the passing of the Estimates in the beginning of May, contracts could only be made for small quantities of work in accordance with the monthly votes. When the

Appropriation Act for the year passed, the wet weather had commenced, and the contractors found very great difficulty in drawing stone or timber. The consequent delay was felt very much on some of the metalled roads, where the heavy rain, followed by very heavy traffic, necessitated prompt supplies of maintenance material, which could not be obtained. The roads were thus rutted in some places, and this has occurred to a greater extent on the Northern Road than on any other, more especially between the Willow-Tree and Tamworth, where the newly-made roads over the black soil had not been consolidated. But when the maintenance metal that has been supplied shall have been put on, the road will be in better order than ever, and not likely to break up again. The consolidated metal roads have, in almost every case, withstood the weather and the traffic very well . . .”

A letter published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 23rd August, 1870, complains:—

“ . . . it is impossible . . . to conceive that one of the main thoroughfares of this colony should be in its present disgraceful and dangerous state. Commencing at Guest’s Hotel, Willow Tree, some fifteen miles north of Murrurundi, there commences a succession of creeks, gullies, and wide yawning chasms with abrupt and rotten sides and bed, and a loaded dray once in it is literally smothered. Nearly the whole way to Tamworth the bed of the road is one mass of slime and mud. From Tamworth to Uralla the road is as bad, and from Armidale to Glen Innes a great deal worse. At Uralla a storekeeper told me his stock of winter boots had been more than four months on the road, and the bill due before they have come to hand . . .”

Two unique suggestions for the improvement of the roads were made in 1870 and 1871. The first was contained in a letter published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of the 29th August, 1870. The correspondent wrote:—

“It appears that in spite of all the money expended our roads are only available in fine weather; whenever wet comes they are impassable. The

cause of all this is the want of a good foundation—you see, heavy ballast and good metal placed upon a substantial foundation are certain to become mud whenever it rains. It is a pity to see long lines of really good material placed in this way, knowing that shortly it is destined to become converted into a sort of pebble pudding or stony batter. Where there is a disease there generally exists a remedy, and we have one close at hand. George Stephenson carried railway trains over Chatmoss, which was an impassable morass, merely by placing bundles of heather for the ballast to rest on. If young leafy saplings and the branches of the trees we have growing upon the roadside were placed at a bottom, we should have something to work upon, and good roads forever . . .”

The second suggestion was a resolution (which was not adopted) moved in Parliament when a proposal to borrow £230,000 for the completion of railway lines already sanctioned was being dealt with in June, 1871. The resolution was as follows:—

“That this House is of opinion that the present condition of the roads of New South Wales is such as to render traffic on them almost impossible. That an improvement in the means of internal communication is most urgently called for. That in lieu of the system now in use of making roads of broken stones, iron rails should be substituted. That the roads which are most urgently required to be constructed in the first instance are:—From Murrurundi (or from Tamworth, if the proposed railway extension to that place be sanctioned) to Armidale and Tenterfield . . .”

The poor condition of the road at this stage may have been partly due to the diversion of interest from the road to the railway. The construction of a railway to the north from Newcastle had been commenced in the 1850's. The railway reached Maitland in 1857, Singleton in 1863, Muswellbrook 1869, Murrurundi 1872, Tamworth 1878, Uralla 1882, Armidale 1883, Glen Innes 1884, Tenterfield 1886 and the Queensland border at Wallangarra in 1888.

Newcastle was not linked with Sydney by rail until 1889. The usual mode of travel from New England to Sydney prior to that date was by road to the terminus of the railway, thence by rail to Newcastle and finally by sea to Sydney.

However, despite the railway development from the late 1850's until the commencement of the era of motor transport, the progress in the development of roads was steady and considerable, particularly in the bridging of rivers and creeks. The Department of Public Works, which had been established in 1858, assumed control of roads in 1861. Its Roads and Bridges Branch designed and built numerous bridges and culverts throughout the State during the latter part of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century.

Although bridges had been provided over the majority of the streams crossed by the Great Northern Road prior to this, it was the Public Works Depart-

ment which built and re-built structures of an enduring type. Some of the bridges constructed during this period and which are still serving traffic are:—

The iron and steel bridge (Victoria bridge) over Wallis Creek, Maitland, built in 1896.

The timber bridge over Glennie's Creek, north of Singleton, built in 1895.

The timber bridge over Muscle Creek, Muswellbrook, built in 1887. A footway was added to this structure in 1897 and it was widened in 1928.

The timber and iron bridge over the Hunter River at Aberdeen, built in 1893.

The iron bridge over the Peel River at Tamworth, built in 1881.

The timber bridge over the McDonald River at Bendemeer. This bridge was built in 1874 and was replaced by a new structure in 1904.

The Border Crossing.—No direct evidence can be traced in the records as to when the Great Northern Road was extended from Tenterfield to the Queensland Border.

A map of railway and coaching routes published in 1895 shows a coach route from Wallangarra through Boonoo Boonoo and Amosfield to Maryland. A similar map published in 1914 shows a coach route running from Tenterfield through Boonoo Boonoo, Amosfield (with a branch to Stanthorpe), Acacia Creek and Woodenbong and south to Kyogle. It will be noted that on this route the border crossing was between Amosfield and Stanthorpe.

The road from Tenterfield into Queensland crossing the border between Amosfield and Stanthorpe was the most used route until 1924.

However, this gave indirect connection to Brisbane and in addition the sections over the Darling Downs were difficult in wet weather.

In 1924 steps were taken to establish a more direct route to Brisbane from Tenterfield, via Amosfield, Legume and Woodenbong, crossing the border at Mount Lindsay, and this is the route the New England Highway follows to-day. The first step necessary to the establishment of this route was the construction of a missing link between Woodenbong and Mount Lindsay. The work was carried out by the Public Works Department and was completed in 1929. The second step, the improvement of the section between Oakey Creek and Woodenbong, was carried out by the Department of Main Roads and completed in 1934.

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The Public Library, New South Wales.

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Road Engineering and its Development in Australia (H. H. Newell, C.B.E., M.Inst.C.E., M.I.E. Aust.).