

Historical Roads of New South Wales

STURT
HIGHWAY



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NEW SOUTH WALES



Sturt Highway (S.H. 14) passing through mallee country near Euston.

Historical Roads of New South Wales

The History of the Sturt Highway

Description of route.

The Highway leading from east to west through south-western New South Wales and thence through north-western Victoria and South Australia to Adelaide, was named the Sturt Highway in honour of Captain Charles Sturt, whose historic expedition in 1829-30 down the Murrumbidgee and Murray Rivers opened up a large area to settlement.

Commencing from the Hume Highway (State Highway No. 2), at Lower Tarcutta, the Sturt Highway in New South Wales follows generally the course of the Murrumbidgee and Murray Rivers and extends for 357 miles through Wagga Wagga, Narrandera, Hay, Balranald and Euston to the bridge over the Murray River near Mildura (Victoria).

It links with other Highway routes serving the south-western area of the State. At Narrandera, the Sturt Highway crosses the Newell Highway (State Highway No. 17). At Hay it junctions with the Mid-Western Highway (State Highway No. 6) and crosses the Cobb Highway (State Highway No. 21), and at its terminating point in New South Wales, the Sturt Highway is joined by the Highway leading to Wentworth and thence north to Broken Hill and on to the Queensland border (State Highway No. 22).

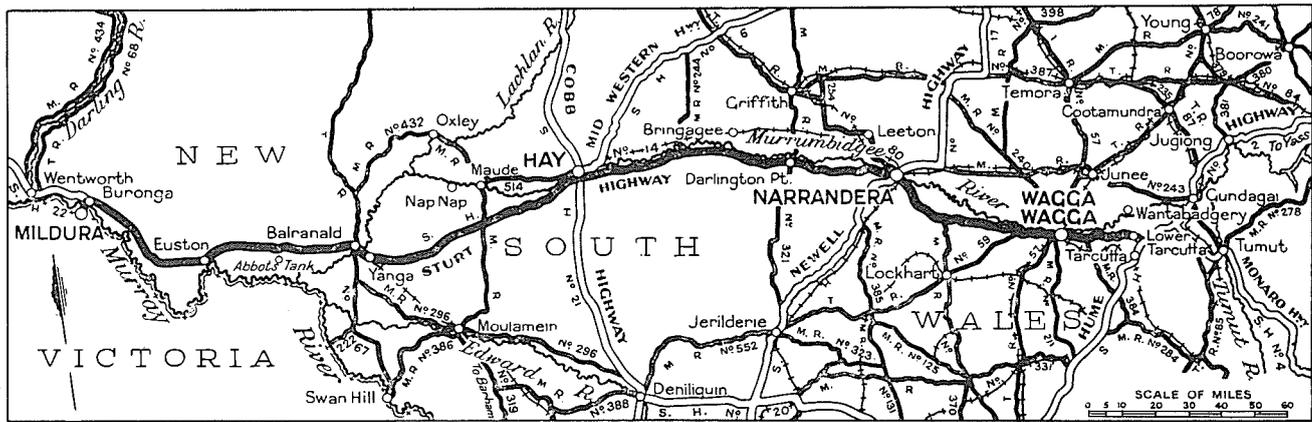
From its commencement at Lower Tarcutta through the Wagga district, the Sturt Highway traverses a region of undulating slopes, the dominating soils being red-brown loams. Continuing west to the Narrandera district, it traverses inland plains with similar soil types. Sheep-grazing and wheat-growing are the main industries of these areas.

Between Narrandera and Balranald the Highway passes through extensive saltbush plains with heavy-textured grey and brown soils. To the eye the plains are for the most part perfectly level, though there is a general slope of from six inches to five feet to the mile. West of Balranald the Highway follows generally the Murray River to the bridge over that river near Mildura, passing through heavy grey soils on the black box river flats and light-textured brown soils in the adjoining undulating mallee country. Wool-growing is the chief industry of the area west of Narrandera, with irrigation farming in certain localities along the rivers.

The Sturt Highway continues through part of Victoria and South Australia, via Mildura, Renmark, Waikerie, Blanche Town and Gawler to Adelaide.

Exploration.

The title page of Captain Charles Sturt's "Journal of Two Expeditions into the Interior of South Australia" bears the following quotation from a book, "Netherlands", by Sir William Temple: "For though most men are contented only to see a river as it runs by them, and talk of the changes in it as they happen; when it is troubled, or when clear; when it drowns the country in a flood, or forsakes it in a drought; yet he that would know the nature of the water, and the causes of those accidents (so as to guess at their continuance or return) must find out its source, and observe with what strength it rises, what length it runs, and how many small streams fall in, and feed it to such a height, as to make it either delightful or terrible to the eye, and useful or dangerous to the country about it . . .".



Map showing route of the Sturt Highway (S.H. 14).

Sturt, describing in his journal the expeditions he made along the Darling, Murrumbidgee and Murray Rivers, reveals that he did not conform to the category of "most men", and that he was not "contented only to see a river as it runs by", but that in order to discover its character, he followed it along its full length in spite of seemingly insuperable difficulties.

Rivers in the colony of New South Wales had set a problem to explorers since the crossing of the Blue Mountains in 1813. Several inland rivers, the Lachlan, the Macquarie and the Castlereagh, were discovered, but their final destination remained a mystery. Surveyor John Oxley's two expeditions following the Lachlan River in 1817 and the Macquarie River in 1818 had resulted in several important discoveries, but had failed in their original purpose of locating the destination of the inland rivers. As a result of his exploration, Oxley propounded the theory that the westward-flowing rivers flowed into an inland sea in the centre of the continent.

It was Charles Sturt who refuted the theory of the inland sea and discovered the final destination of the inland rivers of New South Wales.

Charles Sturt was born in 1795 in India. He was educated in England. At an early age he entered the army and saw service in Spain, Canada, France and Ireland. He rose to the rank of captain, and came to New South Wales in 1827 as a member of the Sydney garrison.

In 1828 Governor Darling decided to send out another exploring party in an attempt to solve the problem of the inland rivers, and chose Charles Sturt as leader of the expedition. Sturt reached the Darling River in the vicinity of the present town of Bourke. His expedition had discovered a new river, which most probably received the waters of the inland rivers; the problem yet to be solved was the route of the Darling River. The Murrumbidgee, stated to be a river of "considerable size and impetuous current," was chosen as the spearhead of further exploration.

At the end of September, 1829, Sturt received the Governor's instructions to make preparations for a second trip "for the purpose of tracing the Murrumbidgee, or such rivers as it might prove to be connected with."

Sturt chose George McLeay, son of the Colonial Secretary, "rather as a companion than as an assistant", to accompany him on the expedition. The party with bullock drays carrying stores set off from Sydney on 3rd November, 1829, and proceeded to the Liverpool Road turn-off. Sturt noted in his journal, "At a quarter before 7 the party filed through the turnpike gate and thus commenced its journey with the utmost regularity."

Captain Charles Sturt (1795-1869).

Print from Mitchell Library.



On this journey Sturt took a whaleboat 27 feet long. He notes "she was built by Mr. Egan, the master builder of the dock-yard, and a native of the colony . . . she carried two tons and a half of provisions, independently of a locker, which I appropriated for the safety of the arms . . . she was in the first instance put together loosely, her planks and timber marked, and her ring bolts, etc., fitted. She was then taken to pieces, carefully packed up, and thus conveyed in plank into the interior to a distance four hundred and forty miles, without injury."

The party proceeded to Hamilton Hume's property near Lake George. From there they travelled to the property of Cornelius O'Brien at Yass. O'Brien was described by Sturt as "an enterprising settler, who has pushed his flocks and herds to the banks of the Morumbidgee . . . and was good enough to present me with eight wethers as I passed his station. It may be some gratification to Mr. O'Brien to know that they contributed very materially to our comforts." The party came next to Tuggiong (now Jugiong), another property of O'Brien, and so to the Murrumbidgee River. At the confluence of the Murrumbidgee and Tumut Rivers they reached the station of Mr. Whaby, and Sturt noted, "we were now beyond the acknowledged limits of the located parts of the colony." Five miles beyond Whaby's they crossed the Murrumbidgee to the north side, along which they continued.

The explorers were frequently met by natives who would lead the party for some distance and then pass them on to other natives of the next locality. One of

these natives was "an extremely facetious and good-humoured old man, who volunteered to act as our guide without the least hesitation. There was in his manner a cheerfulness that gained our confidence at once, and rendered him a general favourite. He went in front with the dogs . . .".

The party traversed plains of a "wearisome description" to a point some miles west of the present township of Maude, where the country assumed an impossibly marshy nature; "the wheels of the dray sank up to their axle-trees, and the horses above their fetlocks at every step. The fields of polygonum spread on every side of us like a dark sea, and the only green object within range of our vision was the river line of trees." Sturt decided to continue the journey by boat. The whale boat was assembled, and in addition, a skiff, 13½ feet long, was built on the spot by the carpenter. Sturt chose six men to make the boat journey. The rest of the party were to remain for one week at the depot and then return to Goulburn Plains. On 6th January, 1830, the boats were loaded and the party set off down the river, landing from time to time to note the country. After some 15 miles they passed the mouth of the Lachlan River. Towards the middle of January, Sturt wrote: "Hopkinson called out that we were approaching a junction and in less than a minute afterwards, we were hurried into a broad and noble river. It is impossible to describe the effect of so instantaneous a change of circumstances upon us . . . such was the force with which we had been shot out of the Morumbidgee, that we were carried nearly to the bank opposite its embouchure . . . To myself personally, the discovery of this river was a circumstance of a particularly gratifying nature, since it not only confirmed the justness of my opinion as to the ultimate fate of the Morumbidgee and bore me out in the apparently rash and hasty step I had taken at the depot, but assured me of ultimate success in the duty I had to perform. We had got on the high road as it were, either to the south coast, or to some important outlet." Sturt believed that this river, which had "a medium width of 350 feet, with a depth of from twelve to twenty", was formed by the junction of the Goulburn, Hume and Ovens Rivers discovered by Hume and Hovell in 1824. He said, "The river improved upon us at every mile. Its reaches were of noble breadth and splendid appearance." Sturt writes: "I laid it down as the Murray River in compliment to the distinguished officer, Sir George Murray, who then presided over the colonial department . . ."

The explorers continued along the swift-flowing Murray River. On 24th January, upon rounding a bend of the river, they sighted on a spit of land where the stream narrowed, a vast concourse of natives. "There could not have been less than six hundred natives", Sturt recorded later, "they were painted in various ways. Some who had marked their ribs, and thighs, and faces with a white pigment, looked like skeletons, and others were daubed with red and yellow ochre, and their bodies shone with the grease with which they had besmeared themselves . . . they worked themselves into a state of frenzy by loud and vehement shouting."



Sturt Monument at Wagga Wagga.



Sturt Highway near Wagga Wagga.

The explorers faced an impasse. There seemed no way out of their hazardous position except by a battle in which the white men would be at a distinct disadvantage. Sturt was on the point of giving the order to fire when everyone's attention was diverted by a commotion on the opposite bank, where four natives had suddenly appeared. The leader of these leapt into the water and swam across to the hostile group. He was seen to expostulate with them and eventually succeeded in calming them. On approaching closer, Sturt recognised the peacemaker as one of a party of natives to whom he had offered hospitality on the previous night. Just at this point Sturt observed "a new and beautiful stream" coming apparently from the north. They pulled up the new river which was 100 yards wide and 12 feet deep. Sturt was convinced that this was the Darling, the upper reaches of which he had discovered in 1828. He wrote: "After some miles, I directed the Union Jack to be hoisted, and giving way to our satisfaction, we all stood up in the boat and gave three distinct cheers."

On 9th February, 1830, thirty-three days after they had left the depot on the Murrumbidgee, the explorers reached the mouth of the Murray, "at a beautiful lake," says Sturt, "which appeared to be a fitting reservoir for the noble stream that had led us to it." Sturt computed the lake to be about 53 miles across, and named it Lake Alexandrina, in honour of the heir-apparent to the British crown.

The river channel was so shallow at the lower end of the lake that Sturt was forced to leave the boat and make his way across the sandhills to the shores of Encounter Bay. A vessel had been despatched to meet the party at St. Vincent's Gulf. However, the men were too weak to reach there by land, and the heavy surf forbade their taking the boat by sea. Sturt's only course was to return by the way he had come.

On 13th February the party commenced the return journey of 1,000 miles. "Our journey homewards," wrote Sturt, "was only remarkable for its labour . . . we were from sunrise to five o'clock on the water, and from the day we left the depot to that of our return we never rested upon our oars. We were thirty-nine days gaining the depot from the coast, against a strong current in both rivers, being seven more than it took us to go down." The journey by boats was continued, but the strength of the men was failing rapidly and on 11th April, Sturt realised that they could go no farther. He landed, formed a camp by the river near the site of Narrandera, and despatched two of the men on a 90-mile walk to the depot established on the forward journey, at the site of Wantabadgery. This distance they covered in three days, and returned with provisions and drays in three more, on the very day on which the food supply of the party failed. Sturt and his party finally reached Sydney on 25th May after an absence of six months.

Sturt's health was affected by the privations of the journey and he was suffering from temporary loss of sight.

In 1836 Surveyor-General Mitchell traced by land the Lachlan River to its junction with the Murrumbidgee, and followed that stream and the Murray to the Darling River junction.

Steamer traffic on the rivers.

The effect of the discovery of gold in 1851 in New South Wales and Victoria was widespread. In the Riverina the immediate effect was the curtailment of development due to the virtual cessation of transport to the area. Road carriers with their bullock teams were attracted to the more lucrative freights of the goldfields. The stations of the Riverina were stranded without

stores, and their produce and woolclips uncollected. This emergency focussed attention on the possibilities of using the rivers for transport.

William Randell and Captain Cadell ran the first two steamers along the Murray in 1853.

William Randell, a flour miller near Adelaide, devised a plan of transporting flour by boat along the Murray River. Timber frames for a vessel were cut near Adelaide and were carried across the mountains to the Murray River, near Mannum, where the vessel, the "Mary Ann," was assembled. The first voyage in March, 1853, was unsuccessful, and after travelling only 125 miles the vessel was forced to turn back, owing to shallowness of the river.

In August, of the same year, when the river had risen, Randell set out again and proceeded along the Murray beyond the Murrumbidgee River junction to a point 770 miles from the sea. There, on 14th September, 1853, the "Mary Ann" was passed by another steamer. This was Captain Cadell's vessel, the "Lady Augusta," brought by Captain Cadell from Sydney by sea to enter the Murray at its mouth. Cadell's journey terminated at Gannawarra Station (near Barham), while Randell proceeded to Moama.

The voyages of Randell and Cadell indicated clearly the transport opportunities offered by the rivers. In a short time steamers were running up the Murray to Albury, up the Murrumbidgee to Gundagai, along the Edward River to Deniliquin and up the Darling River for some hundreds of miles.

The establishment of river traffic had a rapid and widespread effect in south-western New South Wales. The cost of living was reduced and the quality of stores was much improved by competition. Towns were called into being as stopping-places on the river

run. More and more cargo passed to river transport, which eventually carried half the wool of New South Wales. More cargo passed through Wentworth than through any port of New South Wales, except Sydney and Newcastle. At its zenith the river fleet comprised 200 steamers and several hundred barges.

River traffic was beset by its own hazards. "Snagging" of the rivers had to be kept up continually. Traffic also was dependent upon the flow of the river. Captain Harris, writing of a journey he made in 1911, tells of a steamer near Moama, which, "with its attendant barge, loaded high with wool, was firm on the bottom of the river. It had been there for two weeks, and was likely to remain another two months until the waters came from the head of the Murray. Only the captain and the cook were aboard the 'Dreadnought'; the other hands had been paid off, and were filling in time working at Wentworth and on neighbouring stations."

As late as the 1920's river traffic still continued. However, with the greater use being made of the railways and roads, river traffic dwindled and ceased to play a part in the transport system.

Settlement.

Wagga Wagga.—By 1832 settlement had extended down the Murrumbidgee River to the site of Wagga Wagga, where Robert Holt Best took up the first holding. Best's homestead was situated near a convenient stock crossing place of the river, and here a town arose. Wagga Wagga was the name of Best's holding.

A town was surveyed at Wagga Wagga in 1849 by Surveyor Townsend. The town had by this time become a main crossing place for stock travelling to Victoria. Due to freshes in the river, the ford was frequently impassable.



Berembed Weir on the Murrumbidgee River east of Narrandera.

Photo by Water Conservation & Irrigation Commission.



Yanko Weir on the Murrumbidgee River, west of Narrandera, adjacent to Sturt Highway.

Photo by Water Conservation & Irrigation Commission.

The introduction of steamer traffic on the Murrumbidgee River in the 1850's and the construction of a bridge over the river at Wagga Wagga in the 1860's were important factors in the town's rise. During the early 1870's a steamer company was formed at Wagga Wagga and a regular trade operated along the Murrumbidgee River to the Victorian ports on the Murray. The railway was extended from Cootamundra to Wagga Wagga in 1878.

Narrandera.

Hamilton Plains was the name first given to the area where Narrandera now stands. The name was bestowed by Captain Sturt on 12th December, 1829, in honour of the surgeon of Sturt's regiment. In later years the locality was generally known as Yanko Plains.

Narrandera is recorded in 1848 as a pastoral station held by Edward Flood. Like Wagga Wagga, Narrandera grew from a crossing place for stock travelling from the north.

In 1859 Surveyor Edward Twynham made a survey for a village. As well as traffic from the north through Narrandera, there developed a steady traffic from the east, as settlers and overlanders established a route along the Murrumbidgee River to far western New South Wales and South Australia. In 1866 Narrandera was described as being on the main line of road between Wagga Wagga, and Hay, Balranald, Wentworth and South Australia: "A two-horse vehicle, conveying the mails plies weekly between Hay and Wagga Wagga . . ."

The railway was extended from Junee to Narrandera in 1881.

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Hay.

Lang's Crossing Place, situated on a ford of the Murrumbidgee River, was the original name of Hay. The Lang Brothers, after whom the locality took its name, took up land in the area in the 1840's, and built their homestead close to the present Hay.

Hay also became a busy crossing place for stock. River traffic was another factor in Hay's rise. In 1859 a town was proclaimed at Lang's Crossing. The name, Hay, was chosen in honour of John Hay (later Sir John Hay), who was member for the district in 1859.

In 1866 Hay was a town of 250 inhabitants. The "Sydney Morning Herald" noted: "Owing to the central position in that region, but especially to its being on the direct line of the road to Fort Bourke and the rapidly advancing country intermediate between the Lachlan and the Darling, its prospects of growing prosperity are thought to be most encouraging." (7th April, 1866.)

The railway was extended from Narrandera to Hay in 1882.

In 1912, Hay, with a population of 3,000, was described as "virtually the capital of that vast south-western Riverina," and "the natural business centre for a large area of rich pastoral country."

Maude, Balranald and Wentworth.

The town of Maude was surveyed in 1861, and became a port of call for steamers along the Murrumbidgee. In 1896 the "Riverine Grazier" reports of Maude, "The wool-carrying season having commenced, several teams from Chillchil, Culpataro, Weonga and Holmeswood, have already arrived, giving our usually quiet village a more animated appearance, and the teamsters will be in full swing. The late opportune rise

in the river now enables steamers to pass up and down with full loads of wool, which previous to the rise, they were not able to do without some considerable danger to their navigation."

The laying out of a town at Balranald was prompted by the rise in the value of land by the introduction of river steamer traffic. A punt for stock was established by Denis Hanan in 1859. By 1866 there were two punts in operation at Balranald, which was described as the chief crossing place over the Murrumbidgee River for stock from South Australia.

Bailliere's Gazetteer of 1866 notes of Balranald, Euston and Maude: "There is no communication with these places by land except on horse-back, but the Murray and Murrumbidgee river steamers call at the places on these rivers . . ."

Prior to 1853, Euston, about 100 miles east of the Murray-Darling river junction, was an important stock crossing place over the Murray. But following the introduction of steamer traffic, the junction of these two rivers became the obvious site for a town, which at that time was known as McLeod's, after the earliest settler there. Wentworth, the town which grew up there, was named after William Charles Wentworth (1793-1872), explorer and statesman.

The town is described in 1866 as "one of the most important townships of the colony, being the centreport for the transmission of wool and stores to and from all parts of the river Murray, and the extensive district of the Darling, as well as on mercantile matters in its relations with South Australia and Victoria." The "Riverine Recorder" (22nd June, 1898) comments, "Nearly 2,000 bales of wool passed through Wentworth during last week."

At Wentworth, "bond stores and warehouses held goods for distribution upriver as far as Bourke by steamer and by bullock, horse and camel teams radiating in every direction on land . . ." ("Wentworth Magazine," April, 1929.)

Captain Walter Harris described the town of Wentworth of 1911: "It is a straggling old town, possessing many fine brick and stone public buildings, and many private ones just the reverse . . . Wentworth's main attraction lies in the fact of its being at the junction of the Murray and Darling, the two great rivers of Australia . . . A long low tongue of land, with river gums growing on it divides the waters of the mighty waterways . . . We crossed the Darling by a fine draw-bridge at the back of the town."

Roads.

The earliest overlanders proceeding to the new colony of South Australia, travelled down the main south road, now the Hume Highway, whence they followed the south bank of the Murray River to South Australia. Edward John Eyre, overlander, explorer and station-owner, travelled from Limestone Plains (now Canberra), to Adelaide in 1837 by this route. Charles Sturt in 1838 took 300 cattle to Adelaide by the same route. In the same year, Charles Bonney and Joseph Hawdon travelled from Melbourne also along the Murray with stock to South Australia.

However, in February, 1839, Edward John Eyre, at the conclusion of a second overlanding trip to Adelaide, with 1,000 sheep and 600 cattle addressed a letter to the Colonial Secretary to report the finding of a new and more direct route: "We left Limestone Plains (our point of departure) on 15th December, 1838, and following the high road to Port Phillip, as far as the crossing place of the Murrumbidgee, we turned down the river to the westward, instead of following further south, as all the parties coming to this colony had previously done, and by this means we avoided crossing the several rivers on that line of road, materially shortened the distance, and obtained a more abundant supply of feed and water for our stock. After passing my party twice across the Murrumbidgee to avoid some ranges, I continued following its right or northern bank . . ." After crossing the



Sturt Highway crossing black soil plains, 26 miles west of Hay.

Murrumbidgee at its junction with the Murray, Eyre continued along the north bank of the Murray, crossed the Darling and proceeded to Adelaide.

Eyre concludes his letter, "I have therefore much pleasure in stating it as my opinion that though far from being a good line of route for driving sheep, yet in ordinary seasons I consider it to be a perfectly practicable one, and have no doubt that by careful and judicious management and dividing the sheep into small flocks for the driving, this most valuable description of stock may eventually be introduced into the colony, in considerable numbers by a safer and cheaper means than can be done by water . . ."

The road pioneered by Eyre in 1839 left the Hume Highway at Gundagai and followed the north bank of the Murrumbidgee River through the sites of Wagga Wagga, Narrandera, Hay and Balranald and the north bank of the Murray River through the sites of Euston and Wentworth to the South Australian border. By 1852 a mail service by horseback was operating from Wagga Wagga as far west as Balranald.

A map of the railways and roads in New South Wales in 1857 shows a road following the south bank of the Murrumbidgee River from Tarcutta to Wagga Wagga, where it crosses the river and proceeds along its northern bank and the northern bank of the Murray for the rest of its distance.

Teamsters began to travel along the eastern half of this route, bringing stores from Sydney and taking back the wool clips, but they could complete only two journeys a year, and in times of drought, with scarcity of feed along the route, their journeys were even more infrequent. With the introduction of the river traffic referred to earlier in this article the road was little used. Bailliere's Gazetteer of 1866 notes of Narrandera, "A two-horse vehicle conveying the mails, plies weekly between Hay and Wagga Wagga . . ."

A bridge financed by a joint stock company was constructed over the Murrumbidgee River at Wagga Wagga in the 1860's. In 1895 this bridge was replaced by one 645 feet long consisting of six timber trusses on iron cylinder piers and nine approach span trusses.

By 1867 two tracks were in evidence running from Wagga Wagga, one on the south bank and one on the north bank of the Murrumbidgee River, converging at Balranald. From there the road followed the north bank of the Murrumbidgee to the Murray junction, and along the north bank of the Murray through Euston and Wentworth to the South Australian border. (De Gruchy and Leigh's Squatting Map of the Riverina District of New South Wales.)

These roads were unimproved and were, in effect, mere stock routes. Anthony Trollope, the noted English writer, remarked of his tour of the Riverina district in 1873: "And there is no stone . . . not a particle of what the road-makers call metal . . . in the country among the rivers . . . The roads are altogether unmade and consist of tracks through the mud or dust. When anything is done towards the making of a road in or near the towns, clay is burned for the purpose, into brickbats, or wooden blocks are used." "A typical

Riverina road," says Trollope, "consists of various tracks, running hither and thither, and very puzzling at first to a 'new chum', till he learns that all these tracks in the bush are only deviations of one road. When the bullock drays have so cut up a certain passage that the ruts are big enough and deep enough to swallow up a buggy or to overset the stage-coach, the buggies and the stage-coach make another passage, from which they move again when the inevitable bullock-drays have followed them."

A complaint of the roads through Narrandera was made by a Narrandera correspondent to the "Town and Country Journal": ". . . the traffic through the town, east to west, is the highroad for the extensive western districts of the colony . . . but owing to the utter want of roads beyond Yass, on this side, we New South Welshmen will have to travel over the greater portion of southern and western New South Wales to and from Sydney, actually by way of Melbourne! As it is now, a few know the Melbourne route is easier—and even cheaper, and use it already . . ." (27th February, 1875).

In 1896 the widening of the road from Bringagee to Narrandera (on the north bank of the Murrumbidgee River) came under consideration: "Surveyor Somerville stated that he was of opinion that it would be beneficial, in the public interests, to widen the road by resuming part of the freehold . . . the existing road, which had a varying width of two chains, was now fenced on both sides for the greater part, and the widening of the road would necessitate the removal of the fences . . . A large number of sheep travelled along the road yearly. The estimates of the numbers which had been given to him varied from 80,000 to 500,000. The road was a very important one and it was necessary to keep it open. Camping and watering places were both required." ("Riverine Grazier", 3rd March, 1896.)

A bridge had been built over the Murrumbidgee River at Narrandera in the 1880's after considerable local agitation. A report from Narrandera to the "Town and Country Journal" (27th February, 1875), states, "A public meeting will shortly be held here to petition for a bridge. The private bridge over the Murrumbidgee at Wagga Wagga is paying 80 per cent. to its shareholders. At least half the traffic represented by that ought to cross by way of Narrandera; and this will show that a bridge here will be highly remunerative to the public treasury." This bridge was replaced in 1920 by a three-span timber structure, 330 feet long.

A description of the road between Hay and Balranald is provided by a traveller who made the journey in 1898: "Leaving Hay going down the north side of the Murrumbidgee . . . we pass a hotel at the fourth mile . . . for ten miles further the plains extend to the 'mail change', where there is a bend of the river, and the road here is very circular . . . bends of the river are met with every few miles . . . At this season there is neither stock nor pasturage seen on the country we have passed from Hay, some 30 miles . . . all seems desert, waterless and barren . . ." From Nap Nap station on the

Murrumbidgee River beyond Maude, the narrator continues, "there are several roads, but we take the river road, 12 miles to the boundary rider's hut, six miles to a station . . . At Yanga we are 106 miles from Hay by the road that we came and six miles more to Balranald, making 112 miles from town to town, by the river road, but this can be shortened by bearing further from the river and going longer distances between water. In very dry seasons, such as the present, the more direct but drier road over the plains is hardly so desirable as the road nearer the river, although even by the lower route 45 miles of road is passed over without coming to the river, viz., from the punt before mentioned to Balranald."

In 1899 the "Riverine Recorder" at Hay remarked, "The river is our chief means of obtaining supplies and forwarding our wool and other products" (1st November, 1899).

Reporting on works proposals for 1904-5 for the road between Balranald and Euston, the Public Works Department District Officer at Balranald stated:—

"This is a mail route, it has been cleared years ago and is a splendid natural road but the repeated heavy rains have worn deep gutters in some places and have also burrowed holes in the limestone patches as is usual in such country. I propose to put £20 on this road for the ensuing financial year to keep in repair in the places mentioned to clear fallen timber here and there when required."

In 1908, the Public Works Department District Officer at Wentworth, when reporting on the road leading from Balranald to Euston and from Euston to Wentworth stated:—

"The chief traffic on these roads is the Mail Coach—3 times a week—and light traffic which however is only moderate. The heavy goods are shipped by the River Steamer . . ."

In 1911 a Captain Walter Kilroy Harris and his brother undertook a journey by sulky from Newcastle to Adelaide and back. Leaving Newcastle, they travelled via the south coast of New South Wales, through Victoria by way of Gippsland, Melbourne, Ballarat and Serviceton to Adelaide. On their return journey the brothers travelled along the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers traversing various sections of the present Sturt Highway. Captain Harris's diary provides an interesting commentary on the state of the road and the forms of transport at that time. From Mildura, Harris reports: ". . . our road lay along the Travelling Stock Route." Here, "big teams and record loads are still further features of the methods of getting produce to the railway stations . . . teams of 10 to 20 horses, driven without reins, are always being met on the road to the railways, and there never was a time when teamsters made better money. Some back-loading is taken, but lighter vehicles with springs, rattling along at mail-coach pace, are becoming popular for taking stores out to townships off the railway line."

"In coaching vernacular," Captain Harris states, "'cut line' is a cleared space through the bush, generally about 100 feet in width, in the middle of which the 'cut track' is to be found . . . 'Natural roads' are the routes from place to place made by travellers picking out the firmest ground. But fencing is going on to such an extent in the more settled districts that the vehicles are limited to a somewhat narrow space, and the only track is often spoiled by all the traffic going along it, and the impossibility of turning off the new ground when it gets at all worn."

"Every traveller except perhaps the 'bullocky' and his slow-moving team, must get out of the 'cut track' as the coach approaches. The 'cut track' is a track cut by the wheels of the vehicles. By keeping to this the driver is always sure of finding a good 'bottom'. In



Bridge over Murray River at Mildura.

some country there is no good 'bottom' on either side of the 'natural road'; in wet weather the coach would soon be bogged . . ."

"If the coach happens to get bogged where extra horses are available, drivers never put them in. The vehicles would probably be dragged to pieces. But if a 'bullocky' is within coo-ee, the ladies are first lifted out and handed across the mud . . . and the coach is moved by the choicest expressions the 'bullocky' can bring into play."

En route for Balranald, Captain Harris reached Abbot's Tank. "Eleven miles away," he writes, "we crossed a big open plain, covered with knee-deep, dry yellow grass . . . on which were grazing a number of horses belonging to a couple of road maintenance men, who were just starting the work of ploughing up the only patch of the 26 miles of bush road between the Tank and Balranald."

Beyond Balranald, Harris states: ". . . the track had taken us across the black-soil plains, which had been converted into a sticky sort of paste by the rain the day before. Here the going was very dreary, and when out of consideration for the pony, we decided to walk, our boots promptly took on as heavy a coating of mud as the wheels . . . we had taken about five hours to come 18 miles."

Approaching Maude, the travellers relate, "we picked up the tracks of a horseman who had ridden in from Canoon station the previous night to meet the mail running between Hay and Maude. These tracks guided us across a bare stretch of black-soil plain . . ."

From Hay the travellers continued eastward. "There was no fear of becoming 'Bushed' in this particular district," Captain Harris states, "as for about 80 miles from Hay our course lay between the railway line and the river, and though we might miss the right track, we could not go far wrong . . . for the most part our route lay along a Travelling Stock Route, 200 links wide." Shortly afterwards, Captain Harris left the road along the Murrumbidgee River and proceeded in a north-easterly direction to his destination at Newcastle.

The route used by the coaches between Wagga Wagga and the South Australian border as late as 1914 lay along the north side of the Murrumbidgee River to Darlington Point. Here the river was crossed and the route lay along the south side of the river to Hay. A bridge over the Murrumbidgee River at Darlington Point was built in 1905 replacing a punt service which had operated since 1886.

The river was recrossed at Hay where a bridge had been built in 1874. This bridge, which was opened by Sir Henry Parkes on 29th August, 1874, replaced a ferry service which had been in operation since the 1850's. The bridge, which is still in use, is of steel and timber with an opening span, and is 786 feet long. The route then followed the north side of the river through Maude and Balranald where a bridge (still in use) had been built in 1882, and the north side of the Murray River through Euston and Wentworth to

Lake Victoria and the border. By 1919 the route from Hay had been altered to follow the south side of the river to Maude whence the road departed from the course of the river and proceeded in a more direct line to Balranald.

It will be seen from the foregoing that by 1919 the road followed generally the present route of the Sturt Highway west from Darlington Point; that is, on the south side of the Murrumbidgee River to Balranald and the north side of the Murray River to Wentworth. Between Wagga Wagga and Darlington Point the road still followed the northern side. However, by 1928 the only section along the Murrumbidgee River following the northern side was that between Narrandera and Darlington Point. At this time the route had been classified as a main road from its commencement at the Hume Highway through to Maude. From Maude an unclassified road was followed to Balranald on the border of the Western Division. In September, 1929, the route of the main road from Narrandera to Darlington Point was changed to the south side of the Murrumbidgee River. Thus the road followed the present route along the south side of the Murrumbidgee River throughout.

In the same year the section of the road from Wagga Wagga to Hay was proclaimed as a Trunk Road (No. 58). In 1930, this length was named the Sturt Trunk road in commemoration of Sturt's expedition down the Murrumbidgee River 100 years earlier.

The route now known as the Sturt Highway (State Highway No. 14) was proclaimed as such in 1933. It extended for approximately 460 miles from Lower Tarcutta via Wagga Wagga, Narrandera, Hay, Balranald, Euston and Wentworth to the South Australian border. The new highway comprised what was previously a section of the Monaro Highway from Lower Tarcutta to Wagga Wagga, the road along the south bank of the Murrumbidgee River from Wagga Wagga to Hay (Trunk Road No. 58) and that portion of the Mid-Western Highway from Hay through Wentworth to the South Australian border.

In 1930 the terminating point of the Sturt Highway in New South Wales was changed from the South Australian border to the bridge over the Murray River near Mildura, so that the name would be confined to the most direct route to Adelaide.

At the time of its proclamation as a State Highway the route of the Sturt Highway was generally unsuitable for modern traffic. It has now been provided with a bitumen surface from its commencement at the Hume Highway through to Narrandera (93 miles), in the towns of Hay and Balranald and for some miles at its western end. Elsewhere, the road has been improved by loaming and gravelling.

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Mr. B. T. Dowd, Department of Lands, Sydney.
The Mitchell Library, New South Wales.
The Public Library, New South Wales.

—J.M.E.