



A section of the Peat's Ferry Road. Woodcut c. 1883

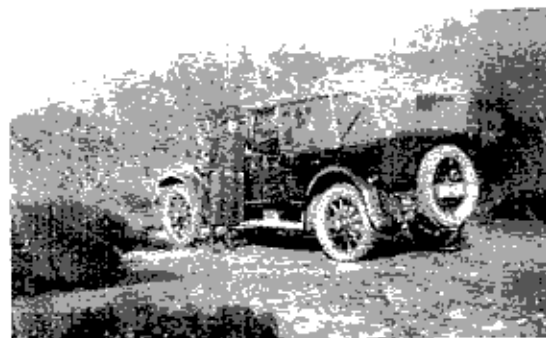
The road gang stayed at my father's hotel, and were paid 8/- per day. My recollection is that they were on the job for about eighteen months. Mr Croudace, whose relatives are prominent people in the Newcastle district, was superintendent of the work.

In fact, the road was never completed. In 1854, the following report was written:-

... at this date, the road between Pearce's and Kangaroo Point (that marked for ten miles from the latter place to Sydney, measured marked and re-cleared of heavy brushwood and saplings). On opposite side of the river a

wharf of considerable dimensions has been constructed, and the road from thence to Peat's house completed onwards for a further distance of four miles. The road has been re-cleared for two miles further to the top of the mountain. Consideration is now being given to diverting the road to Gosford, instead of Wollombi.

Unfortunately, as Mr Lewis observed in the 1920s, the money spent was largely wasted because the road was only a bridle track for most of its northern end.



A lady poses by the car at the Basin in the 1920s.



MARVELLOUS MUOCAMURRA



INTRODUCTORY NOTES BY
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THE PEAT'S FERRY ROAD

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The construction of the road itself appears to have begun in August, 1847, when a work party was sent out by George M. Perry, who was the Clerk of Works of the road. The party was to clear away any trees or logs that may be blocking the route. The party originally sought to camp near the Basin end of the road but had to shift closer to Sydney because of the lack of water. The camp was established on a flat about nine miles from the Hawkesbury.

In February, 1848, T.S. Nutt completed a survey of the route. Henry Selkirk copied part of this plan and published it in 1925. To modern observers, little is still visible of the former road. Originally, it followed the ridge, but the railway line generally usurped its position. The line was formed along the course of the road, which was pushed to the west of the line in most cases. Royston Parade, in Asquith, is part of the original road and a further short section at Cowan even retains the name. It is, however, in Muogamurra Sanctuary that the best preserved section remains.

By October, 1848, considerable progress appears to have been made. A letter from the Deputy Surveyor General to Superintendent Perry stated:-

The road from Peat's ten acres requires completing, the chief expense of which will be at the turning from opposite the Smith's Forge under the great rock, repairing the bridge, and improving the ascent therefrom to the rocky flat at the top of the mountain. At the sharp turn above the bridge I propose to employ some gunpowder.

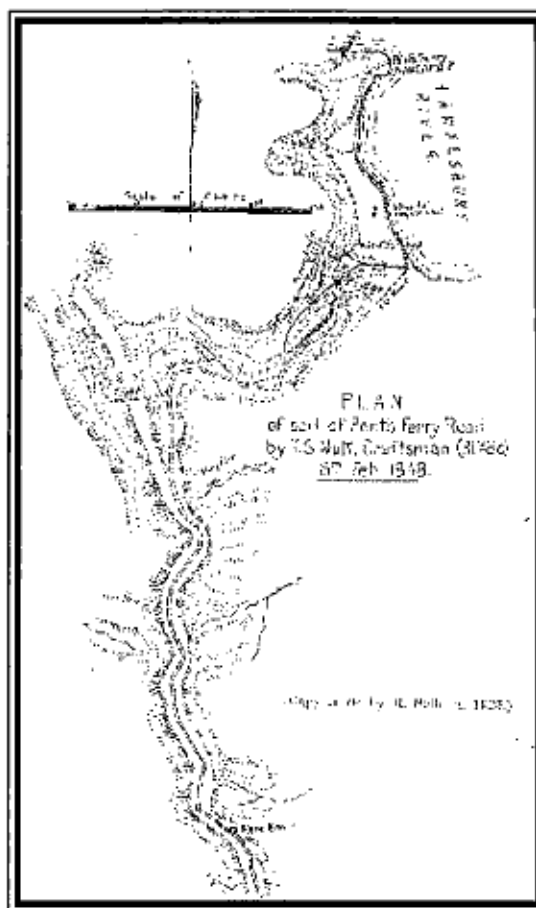
In his letter, the Surveyor General mentions a landform known as "The Sentry Box". This is a small vertical cave on the approach to the bridge at the "Devil's Elbow". The bridge was blown up during World War II as a defence precaution, and later virtually obliterated by the Expressway construction. The area that is described to Perry, is, however readily identifiable, almost opposite the Rest Park, where the smithy once had his workshop.

Curiously, too, the construction of the bridge forms part of local legend. In July 11, 1914, the *Cumberland Argus* recorded :-

(The Old Mail Road) is historic and so is the culvert. Both were built almost 100 years ago by assigned labour in charge of the man after whom Peat's Ferry is called. The wharf on either side was

built by the same labour. The culvert was washed away twice and tradition relates that the man who built it the third time got his freedom because he made such a substantial job of it. And, although the timber in it is nearly a hundred years old, it is as good as the day it was put in, which goes to show the kind of timber that was in these ranges at one time, though there is hardly a stick of hardwood in them now. Around the culvert is very romantic and one of the many beauty spots of the River.

By 1914, of course, direct knowledge would have given way to legend. The "culvert", or bridge, was not built under Peat's



guidance, although his assigned convict servants may have built the original path from Kangaroo Point to Peat's Crater.

The problems with the bridge are, however, recorded. Up to 1852, the builders were still, apparently, trying to improve the bridge and the ascent. The climb from above the present cemetery to the top of the hill, later known as The Devil's Elbow, was originally called "Holiday Pass".

By 1852, the road from Pearce's Corner to Peat's Ferry was able to be used by wheeled vehicles. In October, 1852, it was reported that the Government had purchased a punt from Mr Peat and that it was fully operational, under the charge of a man named Jefferson. Fortunately, a description has survived:-

Way back in 1852, we used to have a punt which ran between Kangaroo Point and Peat's Ferry. It was a two-masted boat, and was worked by a jolly old jacktar, named Jefferson. He was a merry fellow, that Jefferson, and could spin a good yarn or dance a lively step dance with the next fellow. Crossing the Hawkesbury then was rather a slow process.

One day, I remember it took a whole day to get thirty-four horses across. On one occasion, Mr Osborne, who was taking a mob of horses from Maitland to Melbourne, reached the ferry, and while the horses were being carried across one of them sprang overboard and was drowned. My Father salvaged the body and cut it up. The flesh was buried around the fruit-trees in the Hotel orchard, but during the night the native dogs came down and dug up the horse-flesh and devoured it.

This description was left by Mr Lewis, whose father Tom Lewis, had been the publican of the Travellers' Rest Hotel at Mooney Mooney. To the north of the Ferry, the progress on the road was much slower. Mr Lewis recalled that the road party stayed at his Father's hotel:-

At that time the road was being made from the ferry wharf to Gosford, via Mooney's Creek. Twenty-five men were employed on the job, including two convicts, who were finishing their sentences.