



Convict Trail Project

April 2025 Newsletter

A VIRTUAL WALK UP THE GNR: North towards Broke

[Contributed by Elizabeth Roberts]

In our virtual trip along the Great North Road we paused in February at Wollombi. Today we are venturing north towards Broke. This section was started after the road to Newcastle was opened. We will later return to Wollombi and complete the journey to Newcastle.

Surveyor Mitchell with the passion for roads to follow straight lines surveyed the road to have nine creek crossing between Wollombi and Paynes Crossing. There is no evidence the nine bridges were built, but as the first two on leaving Wollombi were built it is possible the remaining were fords or causeways that altered with every flood. These wooden bridges have been replaced several times. It appears the bridge as you left Wollombi had stone abutments part of which remain and part had been rebuilt.

Much of the road between Paynes Crossing and Wollombi was rebuilt in the 1860s doing away with six of the crossings leaving Wollombi, Williams and Paynes Crossing bridges. This section of the Brook is heavily affected by floods that removed much of the evidence.

The section of road between the Wollombi and Williams bridges was the most difficult of all to be built in this branch. The Brook looped round a high sandstone outcrop and ridge. The ridge line facing the road from Wollombi fell virtually vertically from the top to the creek below and the men had to build the road up this cliff face. In parts, the cliff face was cut back the width of the road and nearer the top it was supported by a rock wall. For many years after the rest of the road had been sealed this section was left unsealed and unfenced as the safety fence that had been installed had slid down the cliff face. In approximately 2010, a team of archaeologists was employed by Cessnock City Council to record the cutting and find the still existing walling before the road was widened by cutting back the cliff face. The road was then sealed and safety fencing installed. A photographic montage of the cliff face as recorded appeared on the cover of *The Pick "Evidence"* Volume 9. A very small section of the original cutting remains on the top corner. Having climbed to the top of the ridge, the road turns a corner and drops down to Williams Bridge.

The further north the road went, the easier the construction became. The area that now forms the village of Broke was initially set aside by Thomas Mitchell and named after an army colleague Captain Broke, later Major General Broke, then Sir Charles Broke Vere. Captain Broke was one of Wellington's intelligence officers in the Peninsular Wars of 1809 – 1814. Mitchell was involved in topographical intelligence, surveying, and mapping battlefields from when he joined in the army 1811.

CTP NEWS:

Great North Road Bicentenary

Did you know in 2026 we will be celebrating 200 years since work commenced on building the Great North Road?

Key dates to note are:

September 1825 - Heneage Finch surveyed the line of the Road to Wollombi,

December 1825 - Governor Brisbane returned to Scotland and in January 1826 Governor Darling arrived in Sydney.

April 1826 - Influential Hunter River landholders petition the Governor to have the surveyed road built.

September 1826 - two Road Parties of 67 men commenced work at Castle Hill

December 1826 - Lt Jonathan Warner was appointed to build the Road and was stationed at Wisemans Ferry.

1827 - Solomon Wiseman received a licence to operate a ferry with boats he had had constructed for that purpose.

1832 - The Great North Road to Newcastle opened.

1833 - Work commenced on the northern branch.

The Great North Road and its connecting routes passes through, or is in some way connected to eleven Local Government Areas, five National Parks, the RMS and the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority. There are at least thirteen historical societies and a number of family history groups within the Road's area of influence.

Let's all do something to celebrate!

The CTP is happy to help co-ordinate activities but has no funds to devote to this.

What are your ideas? Here are some simple low cost suggestions:-

- have a guest speaker talk about aspects of the Road
- have a display about the Road in the local library or information centre
- have an outing to part of the Road
- add something about the Road to an existing regular event.
- if the theme is suitable, hold a Road related Heritage Festival event
- research some of the men who worked on the road.

Dharug and Lower Hawkesbury Historical Society are thinking about how to celebrate the start of the Ferry. What can your local council or local historical society do?



Road Updates

The Hills Shire Council are about to renew the signage associated with the installation at Wisemans Ferry.

The CTP signage is also missing from our pole so we plan to replace this in the near future.

Bedlam Point:

Removal of invasive vegetation: Fiorella and Elizabeth met with representatives from *Bush-it* landcare group and Hunters Hill Council to discuss the most effective use of the CTP funds. In the last few years this site has become heavily infested with Morning Glory creeper. The drain Ryde Council installed about 15 years ago to catch the storm water coming down Punt Road does not appear to be functioning properly as the area below it is again a quagmire.

A lot of people were observed using the Looking Glass Bay Walk but none of those observed continued onto the Foreshore Walk around Bedlam Bay. They mostly returned up Punt Road and those who went further continued along through the bottom of Gladesville Hospital via Campbell Drive.

After much discussion it was decided the funds were probably best spent having a coral tree removed. This tree is growing on the Road and blocking the view from the NPWS installed viewing seat on the original Punt House site above the Road.

Digital cabling installation at Bedlam Point: When Elizabeth arrived, she thought the company installing the digital cabling had dug a hole into the 1830s guttering that was already damaged when steps were installed as an entry to the Medical Council of NSW now occupying a refurbished Gladesville hospital building. Fortunately when she had a second look they had dug their hole adjacent to the gutter but not in the gutter.

Below: Tim Baker [Bush-it Bush Regeneration], Fiorella Julca [CTP] and Michael Shilman [Hunters Hill Council] inspecting the vegetation at the water's edge with an exceptionally high tide washing in over the wharf remains.



Thomas James Bridge

The reinstatement of the stone walling has commenced in the area supporting the bridge. Elizabeth had been waiting for this announcement before starting a conversation with reinstatement staff about the use of stone dust between the stone when re-laying the stone. This use of stone dust is something that was long suspected but finally proven when one of the stones of Ramsays leap was removed some years ago. Here the still golden stone dust was found, as the wall had compressed. In all the other work along the Road and at Mitchells Pass, the stone work had had opened and the stone dust was very dirty so it was difficult to tell if it was original or not. It took more effort than was anticipated to convince the Thomas James Bridge team they should be using stone dust. She was also very concerned to see Epoxy was being used to repair a broken stone, having always been told she was to use pozzuolan and slacked lime and never to use epoxy.

Eventually after talking to Sadat Rahman from Hawkesbury Council, Elizabeth met with a number of people at Thomas James Bridge to discuss her concerns. Present were Gerry Delaney, the owner of the engineering company, his daughter Emily who is a trainee manager, Emily Mollon of Cian Moylan Project Engineers and Patrick Timbs, the Project Manager as well as Sadat Rahman. In the end, Elizabeth considered this was a successful meeting.

Photo below, taken by Patrick Timbs, shows Thomas James Bridge being re-constructed.



And in closing Best Easter wishes to you all. It's wonderful weather for a walk up Devine's Hill and you will be able to see Thomas James Bridge on the way.