



# Big Sky Trailblazers August 2019

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## Last Ride: Crooks Mountain by Lisa



No one felt the freezing wind today, 11<sup>th</sup> of August, more than the nine brave riders who headed out to conquer the mountain. It was a challenging ride with some steep inclines up to the top, but yet again we got rewarded with beautiful scenery to gaze upon.

In the shadow of the mountain riding was a little more pleasant as there was no wind and we got a chance to stop along the way, not just for lunch and morning tea, but also to look at caves, parts of the old convict road and have a lot of the history explained by Peter Crook and our very own Mark.



Slippery, narrow, barely existing tracks lead us back down to camp. Once out in the open the weather really started to take its toll and I think we were all ready to head home to sit in front of a warm fire, after a solid five hour ride. All horses and riders were well behaved.

Thank you again to Mark and Liz for organising this ride as well as Peter Crook and Nigel! It was well worth getting out of bed for!!

Gary our first time rider with us and the other boys checking out the trigg



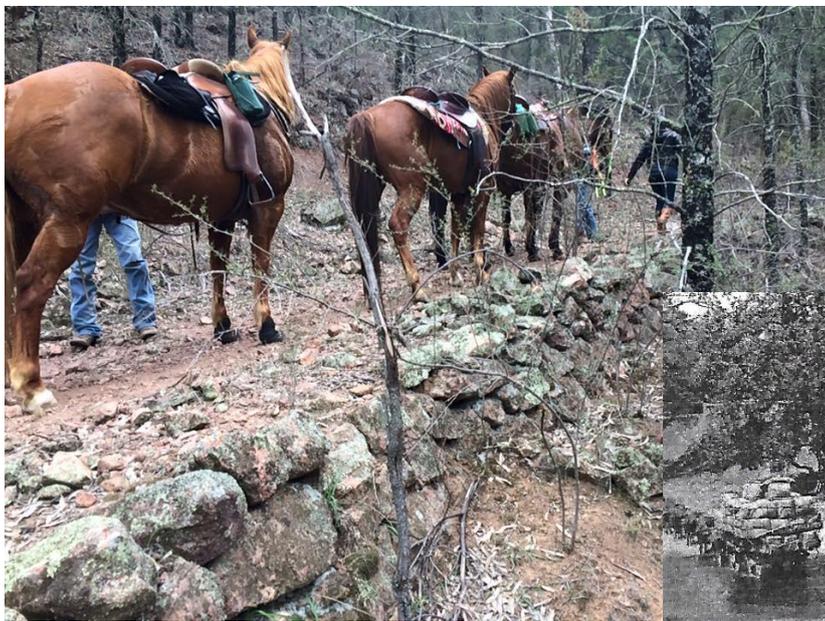
One of the original bridges nearly all gone



The shack that people slept in on a camp over



Looking back towards Gunnedah Mark and Rick good to have you back Rick



Now and the Past

Some interesting reading

**The Wool Road with Convict Cutting Through Kelvin Hills** By Dou McDonagti



**In the Beginning** The starting point in the story of the North West's Convict Road, also known as the Wool Road, is to go back to the 1840s when early settlers in the district realised the necessity for a road from the North West of NSW to the coast. Such a road to the newly settled area would enable wool, timber and other farming goods to get to markets and ports, towns such as Port Macquarie, Newcastle and Sydney.

**Oxley, Mitchell and Cunningham** Exploration by Oxley, Mitchell and Cunningham from the 1820s onwards had shown that the district was perfect for grazing sheep and also for wool production. Possibly the north-west area was settled so early due to the explorer William Lawson (of Blaxland, Wentworth, and Lawson fame) taking up land near Bathurst and seeing the potential to the north of there. Such potential was realised when pastoralists by the name of Cox moved to the Mudgee district. From there it was a short jump for the family and many other settlers to reach the north-west region of NSW.

**Settlement in the District** Cox and his descendants were only the beginning. After Surveyor Thomas Mitchell had opened up the area north of Gunnedah and Boggabri in 1835 substantial land holdings became viable. Some of earliest properties in the district became the property of the Campbell dynasty which began with Alexander Campbell in the early 1840s.

The Campbells, and the many other new settlers to the district where soon met with the gnarly problem of how to get their valuable, agricultural products grown on prime soil through the sticky black soil which patchily surrounded the areas in question. There was also a question as to how to avoid rivers, such as the Mooki and the Namoi which were very prone to flooding.

**Road or Railway to the Coast** Railways were unlikely to travel on the northern side of the Namoi and Peel Rivers due to the black sticky soil and the likelihood of flooding-so roads, and well constructed roads at that, were absolutely vital to get the bullock drays to the city areas. One of these roads, or road spurs, was what is known locally as the Wool Road or the Convict Road.

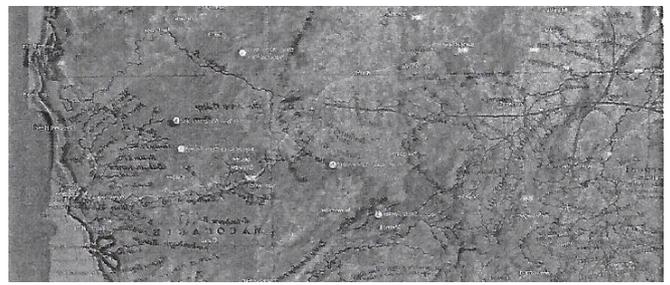


The modern topographic map at left shows where the Kelvin Hills portion of the North-West Wool Road, north of Gunnedah was situated. The section in the densest part of the vegetation, and on private property is what has survived to 2017.

**Wool Road at Yidre** One of the roads outlined in the map below identifies Yidre (in the top left hand corner) - a prominent landmark also known as Nobby's Rock, a few kilometres north of the current crossing of the Namoi River on the road to Kelvin. This area is high ground, thus avoiding flooding rivers and sticky black mud.

1891 Surveyed map of northern NSW, overlaying a modern road map shows major roads. Red shows the original major roads in the district. The section in the Kelvin Hills, is at top left. At the time, no major roads went directly through Gunnedah although certainly bush tracks would have carried the mail and some coaches.

This map was surveyed in 1891 and supports the idea that the original road into the district proceeded over the Namoi River at Carroll, then keeping to the high ground of Kelvin Hills. The fuller version of the map shows the Wool Road snaking its way toward Barbers Lagoon to the Maules Creek area, which is known to have a pre-1850's history, northward past Tarriaro, eventually reaching Narrabri. However, the map does not indicate when the road was constructed, although the author believes it would have been in existence from the 1850s at least when the area was opened up to farming.



**Narrabri ... On to Pilliga?** Some local anecdotes report that the road reached Narrabri, via the northern side of the Namoi River, then branched out into the Pilliga Forest and onward to Rocky Glen (between Gunnedah and Coonabarabran) through the red soil scrub. The only available map of the district during this colonial period (1891) does not include the Pilliga area so being able to confirm or deny this is not easy. Some locals also point to evidence of an old road from Gwabegar to Rocky Glen and then on to Johnson's Woolshed Reserve and Washing Plant on the banks of the Namoi River near Gunnedah. However, like the suggestion of a road into the Pilliga, the available map does not support this idea and as the author has not observed these 'road remains' is unwilling to say this was certainty.

**Over the Namoi River at Carroll** Once over the Namoi River at Carroll, near Gunnembene, the road progressed south toward, and eventually reaching Werris Creek. From there the road travelled through Murrurundi and down to the Hunter area of New South Wales. An alternate route was also available with the road to Werris Creek crossing over a major road which traversed the Liverpool Plains coming out at Tamworth before up and over at Port Stephens Cutting reaching Dungog and, eventually, Port Macquarie.

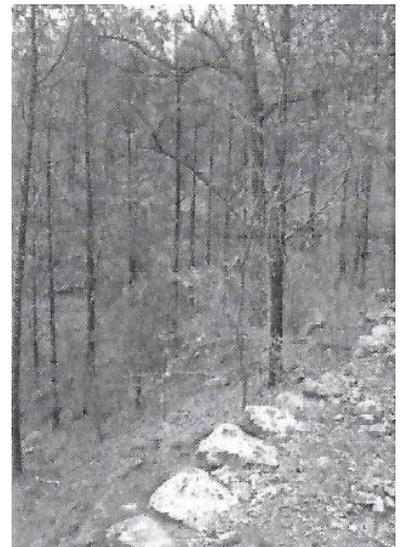


**More About the Road in the Kelvin Range** The roadwork's in the Kelvin Range have stonework that is eye-opening in its workmanship. The remaining section of the road, confined to areas not under plough, includes a small bridge that has typical

Although only a couple of kilometres remain it is remarkable just how sturdy the whole construction is. Wandering along the road it is very easy to imagine that there is no modern day giving a sense of the quiet that must have existed all those

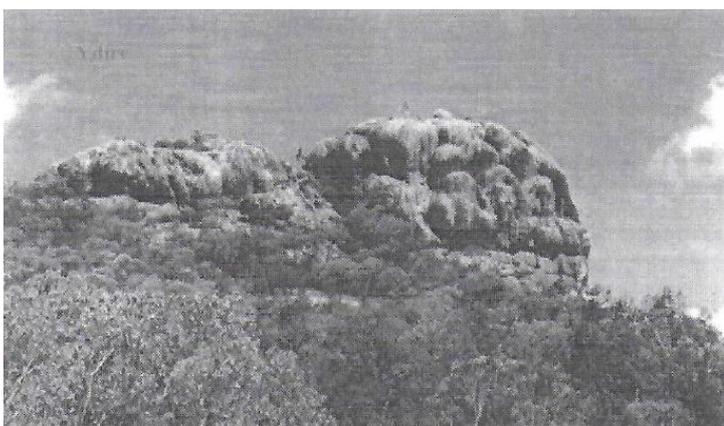


Photographs show some of the amazing stonework still observable. **The photograph above** shows the access point for viewing the road. Once there it is off by foot as the owners of the land the road is on have no wish to hasten the roads



The **photograph at right** shows the clever workmanship on an incline - the rocks at the edge of the track act as a bulwark, banking the road and protecting it from erosion. The fact that the road remains intact shows that the exceptional colonial engineering was a very effective tool in taming the harsh Australian environment.

**The Kelvin Wool Road-Yidre Footnote** The Kelvin area was first crossed by Europeans in the 1830s. In fact one of the first known landmarks in the district was Yidree and was marked as such in future maps of the district. Myself, and the whole McDonagh family, feel a strong kinship with the area - with my brother John being accorded a rare honour



by the Kamilaroi people in allowing his ashes to be placed at the summit of the peak when he passed in 2003.

Prior to this my uncle, and former Mayor of Gunnedah, Russell McDonagh took it upon himself to note down as much of the indigenous history of the area as he could. The page following this shows my brother John's attempts at deciphering Uncle Russell's notes, making them available for posterity.

John was, in fact, with me when I made my first journey to the Wool Road.

# News and Info

## Meeting: None held but Joe (President made the decisions)

1. Dubbo ride is a go ahead but is postponed until November
2. ATHRA reimbursement for Trail Boss Course finally got the money in the bank
3. Venue booked for 7th and 8th December Christmas Party at Somerton. Email to be sent to Tamworth, Armidale and Coast guys inviting them closer to the date
4. Beach Ride there was more than 15 interested. Out of the 15 we have received 4 payments/forms and 4 more saying they are very interested lots have ended up saying no for one reason or another. As of this time there is enough commitment to go ahead with this ride
5. September ride will be a day ride close to town – info will be sent in the next couple of weeks
6. A ride will be held in October for those who don't go to the beach
7. Bank Balance \$2,980.50 and petty cash \$105.15

## Notes

1. The Club equipment and spares will be kept at the Parkview Hotel.
2. Cath and I did a pre ride for Spring Ridge State Forest
3. Chrys may be able to organise a ride down in the Snowys for next year should we put a EOI out to see if anyone would be interested?
4. When putting things on Facebook please don't use an address so that its kept private for property owners etc – thanks
- 5. The reason we would like you to let us know by email that you are coming is that if you had an insurance claim we can prove that you hand intent of coming on the ride. Also if the ride was cancelled or changed we would be able to notify you. When you have emailed the Club this then gets put on the Ride Register so we know what day if a camp over you are coming etc**
- 6. We normally would like you to respond that you are coming one (1) week before the actual ride to help whoever is doing the paper work as they do have a life**
- 7. Normally only paid up members receive a Newsletter or Ride Info, a visitor or new member would email the Club to request one or go to ATHRA site**

**FACEBOOK VERSUS EMAIL** – If you could please email even if you have put it on facebook some of us that organise things don't always look on facebook and at least by email one gets pinged so you know to look at it.

**If ride needs to be changed at the last moment, only those who have responded by email will be contacted**

| Calendar of Possible Events 2019 |                                |             |                                  |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|
| Date                             | Where                          | Type        | Person to Organise Ride          |
| <b>11 August</b>                 | <b>Crooks</b>                  | <b>Day</b>  | <b>Mark Goddard</b>              |
| 25 August                        |                                |             | Bushrangers                      |
| <b>1 September</b>               |                                |             | <b>NETRA</b>                     |
| <b>8 September</b>               |                                | <b>Day</b>  |                                  |
| 22 September                     |                                |             | Bushrangers                      |
| <b>6 October</b>                 |                                |             | <b>NETRA</b>                     |
| <b>4-7 October</b>               | <b>Beach Ride</b>              | <b>Camp</b> | <b>Joe Rennick/Cath Anderson</b> |
| <b>12 October</b>                |                                | <b>Day</b>  |                                  |
| 27 October                       |                                |             | Bushrangers                      |
| <b>3 November</b>                |                                |             | <b>NETRA</b>                     |
| <b>10 November</b>               | <b>Dubbo</b>                   | <b>Camp</b> | <b>Allanah Gainsford</b>         |
| 24 November                      |                                |             | Bushrangers                      |
| <b>1 December</b>                |                                |             | <b>NETRA</b>                     |
| <b>8 December</b>                | <b>Christmas Party and AGM</b> |             | <b>Bluebums</b>                  |

PLEASE REMEMBER THIS IS A POSSIBLE CALENDER THINGS COULD CHANGE DUE TO WEATHER OR OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES