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WANDERINGS AWHEEL IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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An Account of various Cycling Tours  
undertaken during the years 1896 - 1908.

By  
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("Sprocket")

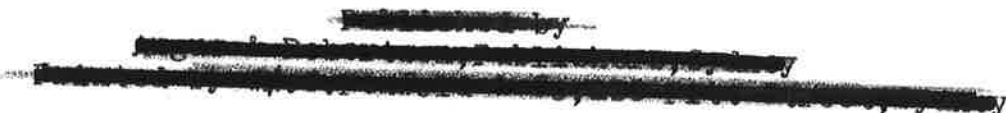
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Illustrations from Photographs taken by the  
Author.

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Six Hundred Miles in the Northern District.

To Port Macquarie by Road. A <sup>Two</sup> ~~Three~~ Weeks' Jaunt.

This tour was undertaken in 1904, and though the writer has gone over most of the route on many occasions since then, the impressions gathered on the first trip were altogether pleasurable ones, and are here set down from notes made during the course of the journey.

The journey commenced on a Monday, in April, of the year named, and practically started from Petersham. Avoiding the Parramatta road, or as much of it as possible, a course was taken through Five Dock, Abbotsford, Ryde, Castle Hill, and Dural, joining the Wiseman's Ferry road at McGrath's Hill near Windsor, after reaching which, 34 miles of the first day's journey had been covered. An early start had been made, so that it was not much after 11 o'clock when the wheels were turned into the old coach road which passes through Pitt Town, and so one to the Ferry, which lay about 25 miles from this point.

The road was in very fair order, but nothing like the conditions prevailed as were experienced on the Windsor road, where the firm gravel allowed a rapid pace to be maintained almost the whole of the way from Castle Hill. Pitt Town is a collection of small houses, most of them being of a good age, as settlement took place in this district from the earliest times. A number of fine oak trees, which were originally planted by Governor Bligh, may be seen from the road, this turbulent gentleman owning considerable land in this locality.

For the next 16 miles the road passes through very pretty country, with fine forests of timber on either side, and many an old farm-house, which had sheltered generations of Australians, attracted attention as the journey proceeded. Presently the road ~~the~~ takes a turn, and after climbing a long hill, plunges at once into the famous Maroota Forest, where the red gum, box, black butt, stringy bark, and other species indigenous to the Australian bush flourished in large numbers, attaining a height and girth, which was surprising. At the junction of the old convict built road to Glenorie, a ruined stone building, standing back from the road, is at once reminiscent of the early days. This is known as the "Haunted House", and possesses a rather sinister history. Originally it was built for the military, ~~but~~ then became a Court House, finally degenerating into a third-class hotel, and when a particularly atrocious murder was committed within its walls, it was ~~of~~ vacated by its tenants and gradually fell to pieces, until at the present day, with its gaping windows, roofless interior filled with weeds and rank vegetation, and its air of grim loneliness, it is a place to be shunned by the timid after nightfall.

The next five miles are excessively hilly, and the road is rough and sandy, with few places where riding in any comfort

could be indulged in. Suddenly the track improves and one realises that the great Pass, leading down to the river, constructed by convict labour in the early thirties, has been reached. The grade is very severe, necessitating the constant use of both brakes, but the surface could not be improved upon, and the run down the mountain, with its numerous curves, was greatly enjoyed. Dismounting at the last bend, the opportunity was taken of inspecting the famous "Court House Cave" which has been hollowed out of the solid rock, and commands a magnificent prospect over the valley of the Hawkesbury. Steps have been cut in the rock at the side of the road, so that easy access was obtained to this historic spot, where in the "bad old days", that peculiar brand of "justice" was dealt out to all who came within the grip of the "system". Under the overhanging archway are three "arm chairs", excavated in the rock, where the judges sat to review cases of insubordination, and other "crimes". It is a refreshing thing to literally turn one's back upon the court, and look out over the winding course of the river, hundreds of feet below. Such a panorama is worth coming miles to see, and in any other country but Australia, would be appreciated for its full worth. Half-an-hour was expended in exploring the bush at the top of the mountain where, in a sheltered nook, are the remains of several rough buildings, used, during the building of the road for the accommodation of the chain-gangs.

An extra steep descent, (with a dangerous curve half-way down) of ~~about~~ a few hundred yards, brought the traveller at last to his destination for the day—the Hawkesbury Hotel, the cyclometer registering 58 miles. This interesting old building was originally the home of Solomon Wiseman, who for many years ran the ferry, and was superintendent of convicts, when the road was in course of construction. It is substantially built of stone, quarried in the locality, and at the front, a semi-circular flight of stone steps, neatly fashioned, lead up to the verandah. The interior contains numbers of small, old-fashioned rooms, with queer staircases in unexpected corners, and there is a spacious cellar beneath the house, whose mysteries, one would have liked time to explore. Old Wiseman, who was somewhat of a character in his day, lived here for many years, and dying, was buried in the garden. His body was then removed to a vault beneath the old church, which has long ago vanished, and finally, he and his wife were taken from this resting place and eventually interred in the old cemetery some distance down the river. A comfortable night's rest followed a long tiring day, the last few miles inducing more fatigue than all the rest of the journey put together.

Next morning a start was made at an early hour, and having crossed the river by the punt, the ascent of the long hill on the ~~other~~ other side was begun. This portion of the road is also convict work, and for durability, and excellence, cannot be surpassed. The labour of building the road up the side of a particularly steep mountain must have been prodigious, and is evidenced by the enormous stone embankments which hold the road in place. Half-way up, there is another cave similar to the one on the opposite side of the river, and constructed for the same purpose. Near here can also be seen another of the en-

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-campment<sup>s</sup>, or the remains of it, which was used by the convicts when engaged upon the road on this side of the river.

When the top of the Pass was reached a short run on a falling grade, leads to the McDonald River, which is here crossed on a punt. About half-a-mile from here, to the right of the road, is a ruined Church, which was destroyed by a bush fire many years ago. It was, originally, a fine building, constructed entirely of stone, bearing tints of various hues, which show up vividly in the sunlight. The church was in use about sixty or seventy years ago, but was abandoned after the bush fire, and has never been used since.

St. Alban's, 10 miles from the Ferry, is a rustic village, with an old stone building as you enter the main street, the one and only hotel. The McDonald River is again crossed before reaching the village, on a fine wooden bridge, and the scenery round about is rather pretty, with hills in close proximity, and forest lands. The next 16 miles to Dean's Farm is fair travelling, with some hilly country to get over, here and there. This is an accommodation house for travellers and a stay of about an hour was made for a meal. On again, and soon the road began to rise steadily for several miles, until the top of Mount Manning is reached, where many treacherous patches of sand had to be negotiated. The far side of the mountain was in very good order so that the next few miles were soon run off. For a considerable distance the road follows the course of the Sugar Loaf Creek, and after leaving Laguna, 33 miles from the Ferry, the next 5 miles to Wollombi were very pleasant, with few hills, and good surface. This made 38 miles for the day, most of it over mountainous country, so it was decided to make Wollombi the headquarters for the night.

Wollombi is an old township, and some of its buildings are typical of the days when the present road was the only means of communication by land with Newcastle and Maitland. It came into existence about 1834, as the previous year, the "N.S. Wales Calendar for 1833" mentions in its Road Itinerary that "at the junction of the Ellulaung branch of the Wollombi River..... a reserve had been made for the village of Wollombi". To-day it is a quiet, picturesque little spot amongst the hills, where the days, and months, and years slip peacefully by, undisturbed by outside affairs.

At this point the main road divides, one branch going on to Muswellbrook, via Broke and Singleton, and the other continuing on to Maitland, via Cessnock. Turning into the latter road ~~early~~ early the following morning, very good progress was made to Cessnock, 17 miles, the road being in first class order. The same conditions prevailed as far as Maitland, another 17 miles, this section being in ~~places~~ places, like a racing track. From here a south easterly direction was taken and the Hunter River crossed at Hexham, 10 miles from Maitland.

Passing through Raymond Terrace, a good convict made road was entered upon, firm of surface, and with few hills, so that an even pace, averaging 12 miles an hour was maintained for the rest of the journey. At Berlang, 12 miles from the Terrace there is an excellent Accomodation house, where a halt was made for a meal, about 3 o'clock, and thence onward with few stops for another 19 miles, finally reaching



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the pretty township of Stroud, making 80 miles for the day. Quarters were secured for the night at the Australian Inn, and the sleep which followed, induced by the fresh air and a good day's work, was as sound and refreshing as could be wished.

Stroud, historically considered, is one of the most interesting towns in the interior of the State. It is reminiscent of the halcyon days of the Australian Agricultural Association, which had its headquarters here, and for some years the late Sir Edward Parry, of Arctic exploration fame, was manager, and did yeoman work for the district. The residence built for him, a quaint looking place, thoroughly English in appearance, is still standing, being at present in use as a bank, and manager's residence. All its interior ~~wood~~ <sup>woodwork</sup> is of cedar, the corridors being floored with brick, and the windows fitted with the old fashioned wooden shutters folding back into recesses in the walls. A huge oven in the kitchen, used in former times for baking bread, was well worthy of inspection, its peculiarity consisting of the fact that, the fire was put inside the oven, and then, when sufficiently heated, was withdrawn, and the bread put in its place. The building was erected in 1825, and is still in excellent order. *St. J.*

St. John's Church, which was built through the exertions of Sir Edward Parry, was erected in 1833, and the old fashioned cedar pews, originally fitted with curtains, as may be seen in many old English churches, are still to be seen. A number of interesting ~~tablets~~ tablets on the walls recall the names of dead and gone pioneers, most of them being in the service of the Company. Not the least interesting amongst these is one to the wife of the late Dean Cowper, who was chaplain to the A.A. Company for many years at Stroud. Days could be spent in this beautiful district, but many miles had still to be ~~trav~~ traversed, so that only a few hours could, on this occasion, ~~be devoted~~ be devoted to sight seeing.

About 10 o'clock the journey was resumed, and as the next section was over excessively hilly country it was not anticipated that any sensational tally of mileage could be recorded. However, Gloucester, 31 miles, was reached in a little over three hours, and here lunch was partaken of. The next 25 miles to Krambach was the ~~most~~ the most severe of the whole journey, the road running up and down mountains in a never ending succession. The scenery, however, en route, more than compensated ~~for~~ for the slow going, that, in the vicinity of the Brushy Mountain, being grand in the extreme. Krambach was reached at a late hour in the evening, the last two miles being all up hill and as rain was threatening, and in fact, fell heavily during the night the original intention of going on was abandoned.

Next morning the sky was bright and clear, and the rain overnight had considerably improved the roads. Consequently, good time was made over the intervening 22 miles to Taree. Before reaching the town, the Hastings River, which here is of surprising width, had to be crossed by means of a punt. A brief stay was made, as considerably over 50 miles had to be traversed ere Port Macquarie could be reached. The small settlements of Cundle Town, and Cooper-nook were passed through, and a halt made at Camden Haven in the early

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afternoon. After a refreshing cup of tea and something to keep it company the journey was resumed, the small settlement of Kew being passed, about two miles out, though why it should have received such a high-sounding name as its English prototype, when there is not the slightest similarity between them, is difficult to imagine.

The road surface was an ideal one for travelling upon, and for the next 15 miles the going was good, with a few hills here and there, but mostly level, or on a slightly falling grade. Shortly after six o'clock, from the summit of a rise, the distant town of Port Macquarie was visible, and a splendid run over an ideal gravel surface for about three miles brought the traveller to his destination, the mileage recorder showing 78 miles for the day.

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Port Macquarie is one of the most picturesque districts in the State. The township is surrounded on two sides by the broad estuary of the Hastings River, and is approached from the sea over a rather treacherous bar which has been responsible in the past for the wreck of many a staunch vessel. Here lie the bones of Benjamin Boyd's sumptuous yacht the "Wanderer", which met its fate in these waters on the 7th November, 1851. Many of the cabin fittings and other relics of this celebrated little vessel were washed ashore and have been preserved by the residents. A settlement was first made here in 1821, but its discovery is credited to Surveyor General Oxley in 1817, when on a tour of exploration from the east towards the coast. Port Macquarie was made a Penal settlement and the first few years of its occupation were employed in the erection of a great prison, whose mouldering remains constitute one of the chief spots of interest for the present-day tourist. A fine brick church, after the style so much affected by Macquarie, was designed by Greenway, and opened for Divine worship in 1824. This building is still in good order, and contains the original high-backed pews of the early days. The walls are covered with interesting Memorial Tablets to dead and gone pioneers, amongst them being one to that remarkable man, Major Clunes Innes, who at one time was Commandant at the Port, a wealthy and influential man, who lived in princely style at his mansion near Lake Innes. He entertained Governor Fitzroy in 1847 at the time of the latter's visit to Port Macquarie, giving a series of entertainments whose fame spread far and wide. The later years of the gallant Major's life were embattered by poverty, and the once fine mansion and its magnificent appointments is now nothing but an unrecognisable heap of mouldering building material, almost concealed by lantana bushes and rank grass and weeds.

There is still much to see in connection with the early history of the town and district, and two days were profitably spent in exploring the relics of the "bad old times", and in securing photographic mementos of those that were still in evidence. As to the scenic attractions of this beautiful district too much could not be said. It is a paradise for the sportsman and angler, and its sit-

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-uation at the edge of the sea, with range upon range of mountains in the background, and the "silver ribbon" of the Hastings River meandering through the district, must be seen to be fully appreciated.

On the third day the return journey was commenced, Taree, (56 miles) being the objective. From here a deviation in the route to Sydney was decided upon, and the river being crossed, a course was shaped next day for Booral on the Stroud road, where the outward route would be picked up. Alas, the old adage concerning human plans held good in this instance, as barely three miles had been traversed before heavy rain set in, continuing all that day, and for the next two days. The black soil in this district rendered progress of any sort a weary grind; Oceans of mud were encountered even on the hills, so that in nearly every instance the descents, as well as the ascents, had to be accomplished on foot. The soaking rain, which never ceased for a moment, was not the least unpleasantness of that never-to-be forgotten journey, and when 28 miles had been covered, and the little hamlet of Cooloongoolook, with its one hotel was reached, the traveller was not long in coming to the conclusion that he had had enough, so the welcome shelter of this little bush hostelry was gladly availed of.

All night long the rain continued, and as there seemed no appearance of a change, and the prospect of being kept a prisoner in such a dreary place was not an inviting one, the journey was once more resumed, rain or no rain. Another 28 miles had to be covered before there was any prospect of reaching roads that were fit to ride upon, and nearly seven hours were spent driving an unwilling steed through rivers of water, and mud, which was as tenacious as glue. All things, good or bad, come to an end sooner or later, and Booral, on the Stroud road, was reached at last. The rain was still falling heavily, but a good metal road was now under the wheels, and on the principle that once a person was thoroughly wet he could not get any wetter, quick time was made to the next halting place, Berlang, 14 miles distant, where comfortable quarters were secured for the night, the discomforts of the journey being soon forgotten under the benign influences of a bright fire and a substantial meal.

Next morning the weather conditions were still bad, though the rain was not so heavy. The next 28 miles to Mailand were run off by lunch time, and as the next stretch of country did not promise much in the way of shelter, it was decided to ~~at~~ discontinue the day's journey, and await a change of weather. This fortunately took place on the following day and the remainder of the journey to Sydney, was characterised by fine conditions, and some good average daily mileages.

No ill consequences followed to machine or rider during the days ridden in heavy rain, though spills were plentiful, the majority of these being induced by the slipperiness of the wet surface, and the treacherous nature of some of the bad portions of the roads. Sixteen days were occupied in all, inclusive of those spent at Port Macquarie, the distance actually ridden being about 620 miles, giving an average per day of 44 miles.

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