

THE STORY OF COX'S ROAD

From time immemorial	11th May to 6th June 1813	19th November 1813 - 8th January 1814	18th July 1814 - February 1815	25th April - 7th May 1815
Aboriginal people used the ridges and valleys of the Blue Mountains for tens of thousands of years, moving freely across Country via Dreaming Trails.	Explorers Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth made the first 'crossing' of the Blue Mountains, reaching as far as Mount Blaxland, just short of the Great Dividing Range.	Assistant-Surveyor George Evans followed the route of Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth and went on to explore to the banks of the Macquarie River. He surveyed the route on his return journey.	On Governor Macquarie's instructions, William Cox with a team of convicts and soldiers constructed Cox's Road from Emu Ford to the Macquarie River, following the route surveyed by Evans.	Governor Macquarie travelled Cox's Road and proclaimed the settlement of Bathurst at the Flag Staff on 7th May 1815.

The Crossings

The crossing of the Blue Mountains by Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth in May 1813, the further exploration by Evans in 1814, the road building by Cox in 1814 to 1815 and the journey by Macquarie to establish Bathurst in May 1815, were a series of four events in a transformative two-year period in NSW- from the penal colony camped on the Cumberland Plain to the beginning of European settlement of inland Australia, with all that followed.

In 1814 Governor Macquarie commissioned William Cox to make a road over the Blue Mountains to Bathurst following the route marked by Assistant-Surveyor George Evans.



Macquarie



Evans



Cox

"... the road thus made must be at least 12 feet [3.7m] wide, so as to permit two carts or other wheeled carriages to pass each other with ease; the timber in forest ground to be cut down and cleared away 20 feet [6.1m] wide. Grubbing up the stumps, and filling up the holes, so that a four wheel carriage or cart may pass without difficulty or danger. In brush ground it is to be cut 20 feet [6.1m] wide and grubbed 12 feet [3.7m] wide".

Governor Macquarie, 1814

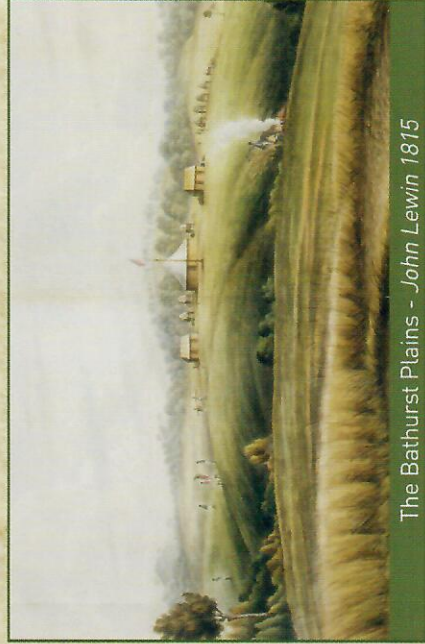
From Emu Ford at Penrith, Cox's Road ascended Lapstone Hill and continued west, generally on or near the alignment of the present day Great Western Highway to Mount York, where it descended Cox's Pass into the Hartley Valley and Wiradjuri Country.

The road continued west, crossing the Fish River and the O'Connell Plains. It crossed Campbells River at The Lagoon and proceeded north to the western bank of the Macquarie River.

On 25 April 1815, His Excellency Governor Macquarie and Mrs Macquarie departed from Sydney with a party of 42 people and travelled west by Cox's Road. Their journey culminated with the naming and proclaiming of the site of the Colony's first European inland settlement, Bathurst, on 7 May 1815 on the western bank of the Macquarie River.

"He (the Governor) then named the place and new town to be marked out "Bathurst", and each drank a bumper; some in wine, and the rest in rum, to the King's health, and success to the town of Bathurst."

Major Henry Colden Antill, 1815



The Bathurst Plains - John Lewin 1815

Building the road

Surviving precincts of the 1814-1815 Cox's Road are rare examples of early colonial road building in NSW. The surviving remnants have state significance as rare examples of pre-1820 road building using manual and primitive tools, and predating the more sophisticated road survey and construction techniques of the 1820s and 1830s.

Cox traced the way, marking trees along the line. In timbered country, a gang of fire-makers would burn the bush along the line. A clearing party was then sent to fell the timber, and cut down the undergrowth. It is unclear how much grubbing of stumps was done as, by 1819, the roots of ungrubbed trees had appeared on the surface of the road.

A manageable gradient was achieved through excavation and embankment, by cutting the natural surface down or filling the surface to level or raise it. There was a minor use of retaining walls made of simply stacked field stones.

Major ascents and descents involved side cutting and embankments and zig-zags were occasionally formed across the face of the slope. There was limited use of blasting. On Mt York, huge boulders were moved out of the way by levering and hoisting.

At Linden, Woodford and Mt York precincts there is evidence of side drains, used to direct water away from the road.

Cox's working party constructed at least 12 bridges over streams using round beam and slab decks, corduroy log causeways and possibly cribwork. Land bridges were constructed at Linden (Bluff Bridge) and at Mt York.

The road was built over whatever material occurred naturally along the line. On the rocky ridges the rock platform became the pavement. Once the road reached open country, road making was little more than marking the line of the road.