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## *Passing Through Mitchells Pass*

Like most early settlers, my ancestors came through", rather than "to" the Lower Blue Mountains. If I could turn the time machine back one hundred and fifty nine years, I would be able to look out from my house and see my grandfather, Patrick Parker, at the age of two weeks, being carried up Mitchells Pass in a bullock wagon. (Yes, we had long generations in our family and Patrick was 81 when I came along).

Thomas and Anne Parker came too late to be convicts but appear to have been assisted Migrants. They left Ireland with three children and lost one on the way but, in March 1841, three days before Sydney Heads, the infant Patrick was born, causing the family to call him a "shellback". Like all children born in British ships, he was registered in London, instead of Sydney.

The slow journey up the Western Road with a new baby was not easy and neither were the first ten years at Fish River Creek near Bathurst.

In 1851, Gold brought the whole world rushing up Mitchells Pass to Bathurst – but the Parkers were already there. Ten year old Patrick was the Tent Boy, gathering wood, lighting fires and watching possessions on the claim of his father and brother. He would later tell my father of seeing, "Ten thousand men living under canvas". However, Old Thomas saw little gold but lots of hungry miners, so they soon went back to raise beef on the farm.

By age thirteen, Patrick was out on the road driving his own team of bullocks. When he was about eighteen, one memorable journey to Sydney brought him down Mitchells Pass again.

The Pilgrim Inn was not for the bullock drivers. They camped in a place of water and grass – if they could find one. They could not carry feed and bullocks often starved in the Mountains but there was a swampy area near the present Matthew Parade and, of course, Glenbrook Lagoon a little farther away. Men and dogs slept under the wagon.

In the morning, they yoked up the oxen and Patrick started them off with cracking whip and the famous bullocky's language. He managed not to lose the high load of wool as it swayed out over the gully on the sharp bends. At Lennox Bridge the long team curved around the horseshoe and the rouseabout was sent ahead to warn oncoming traffic. On the steepest pinches the brake blocks were jammed against the iron tyres until they screamed and smoked.

Floods on the Nepean River forced a number of wagons to wait many days for the ferry/punt to be in service again, after which each driver was supposed to take his turn in order of arrival. However, a driver called Tom Gaffney decided to use his fighting prowess to "Jump the cue", but, to everyone's surprise, young Patrick Parker beat him in a fist fight.

On reaching the city, Patrick watered his bullocks at Sydney University and saw his first train when the line only ran from Central to Parramatta (1855-60).

Back in Bathurst, Patrick established a large family and a soap and candle factory, both of which prospered for many years – until the disastrous 1890's depression.

Again, Patrick headed for Sydney but this journey took the family down the Lapstone Zig Zag Railway in its second last year of operation (1891). They probably didn't see much of Glenbrook or the Zig Zag for the train reached Central in the morning and "They all tumbled out to the news that their bank had crashed".

*(continued overleaf)*