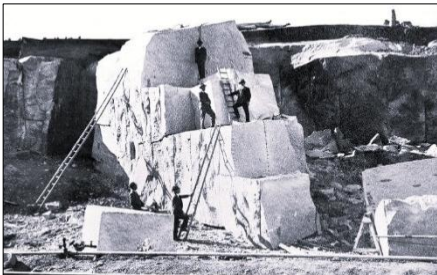


A CONCISE History of the NSW South Coast



www.southcoasthistory.org.au

South Coast History Society Inc.



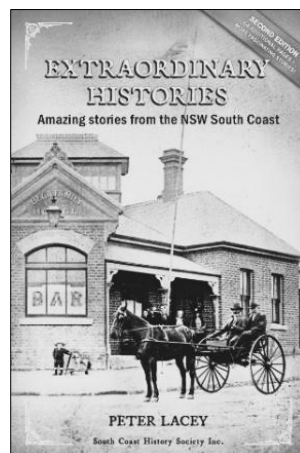
The South Coast's Fascinating History



The South Coast of NSW has numerous incredibly interesting histories - many more than can be squeezed into this very brief overview. It's therefore worth discovering more at www.southcoasthistory.org.au.

Here you'll find detailed histories of each of the towns and villages along the South Coast, about shipping and the many shipwrecks that occurred on the South Coast, about the South Coast's pioneers, its significant women, its industries... and you'll learn of the fascinating places where reminders of South Coast history can still to be found.

'Extraordinary Histories: Amazing Stories from the NSW South Coast', a 384-page softcover book, also provides comprehensive



information in one easy-to-read volume about the history of the entire South Coast - from Kiama to Kiah (and beyond!). It's just \$34.95. It has been an exceptionally popular book; only a few copies are still available. Phone 0448 160 852 for details on how to obtain your copy.

'*Recollections*' magazine - the South Coast's free history magazine - also includes more detailed information on many of the following topics. It can be accessed at **www.southcoasthistory.org.au**.

The Geography of the South Coast **Shaped the Area's History**

The geography of the South Coast has been the principal determinant of the area's history.

From Wollongong to the Victorian border, the geography is basically the same: the sea to the east, with very few natural safe harbours for shipping (Jervis Bay is the major exception, Twofold Bay is a safe shelter to a lesser extent); a significant range of mountains to the west

which, even today, it has been difficult to climb or descend; numerous major river systems that presented challenges to those wanting to cross them and which impeded any 'easy' development of a road system (notably the Minnamurra, the Shoalhaven, the Clyde, the Tuross, the Moruya, the Bega, and Towamba Rivers, along with Wagonga Inlet and Merimbula Lake, provided major crossing challenges).



The Brown Mountain Road, February 2020

The fertile coastal plain along the South Coast proved to be ideal for grazing and (once the challenges of transporting produce to the major Sydney market had been addressed) dairying.

Much of the land had been subject to traditional burning by Aboriginal peoples, so being well-grassed and largely cleared made it immediately attractive and usable. There was ample good timber for buildings and fencing, plus abundant fresh water was available to settlers; (*Recollections 1* includes more detailed information.) And the climate of the South Coast was, in general, enticing.

The South Coast's Original Inhabitants

Three Aboriginal 'nation groups' lived on the South Coast - the Tharawal in the area north of Jervis Bay, the Yuin between Jervis Bay and Eden, and the Bidwell in the area south of Eden. Numerous independent clans made up each of these larger nation groups.



The Wallaga Lake Aboriginal Gumleaf Band in the 1920s

In the main, the relations between explorers, early settlers and Aboriginals on the South Coast were cordial. There were isolated hostile incidents, but there were many more examples of Indigenous peoples working with or assisting the European arrivals. Colonisers, however, brought diseases such as chickenpox, smallpox, typhoid, measles, syphilis, and influenza that are generally accepted to have killed at least half of all Aboriginal peoples in south-eastern Australia.

The (surviving) local Aboriginals were gradually displaced from their traditional lands. From the early 1860s, settlements for Aboriginals, designed to segregate them from the white Australian population, were established by the government. Twenty-three Aboriginal Reserves (not managed by a government official) and three Aboriginal Stations were established on the South Coast (managed by a government official; these were at Roseby Park at Greenwell Point, Wreck Bay and Wallaga Lake; these are now the Jerrinja, Wreck Bay and the Merrimans Aboriginal communities). Many of these Aboriginal Stations and Reserves operated until the mid-1960s. (See *Recollections* 10, 20).

The names of many local towns and areas on the South Coast reflect their original Aboriginal names - for example, Gerringong is derived from a Dharawal word meaning 'place of peril', Moryua from a Brinja Yuin word meaning 'home of the black swan', and Pambula from the Dhawra word 'panboola' meaning 'twin waters'.

The Earliest Europeans

Captain James Cook and the crew of the *Endeavour* sailed up the South Coast in late April 1770, but they did not go ashore. However, they did name some landmarks: Cape Howe (now the eastern end of the NSW-Victoria border), Mount Dromedary, Cape Dromedary (they mistook Montague Island to be a headland!), Point Upright (at

Durras North), Bateman's Bay, Pigeon House Mountain, Cape St George, Long Nose (now Beecroft Peninsula), and Red Point (at Port Kembla).

Whalers were likely among the first visitors to the South Coast. In the pre-kerosene era, whaling oil was an extremely valuable commodity so, in 1791, five of the eleven Third Fleet ships that had transported 1,716 convicts to Sydney began whaling. The *Britannia* became the first ship to harpoon a whale off the Australian coast and eventually returned to England with a cargo of around 112,000 litres of sperm oil plus 1,900 seal skins.

The first Europeans to cross the South Coast on land were the survivors of the wreck of the *Sydney Cove* in 1797. Their epic journey commenced near today's Lakes Entrance when seventeen men set out to walk to Sydney; it ended two months later when three men were rescued just south of Sydney. (*Recollections* 47).

Reports by the *Sydney Cove* survivors then inspired George Bass and six volunteers to explore the NSW South Coast and the eastern coast of what is now Victoria in a 28½ foot whaleboat in late 1797 and early 1798. On that voyage, they postulated that a strait separated the Australian mainland from Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). This was confirmed in late 1798 when George Bass and Matthew Flinders again sailed down the South Coast and circumnavigated Van Diemen's Land.

Timber-getters, especially cedar cutters in the northern part of the South Coast, were also early visitors to the area.

The first settlers were squatters - they simply helped themselves to land that was outside the government's 'limits of settlement', (the area around Sydney in which the authorities were prepared to provide some protection to settlers). Records indicate that early

South Coast residents included Alexander Berry who was granted land on the banks of the Shoalhaven River in 1822, the Eden-Bega district pioneers Peter, Alexander and George Imlay from the 1820s (*Recollections* 53), Thomas Kendall (the father of the poet Henry Kendall) near Berry and Francis Flanagan near Moruya in the late 1820s, and William Tarlinton in the Cobargo area in the early 1830s.

Four Estates



The Office, Kameruka, on milk pay day

Several pastoralists acquired large parcels of land on the South Coast. They then needed labour to work their properties, and these workers in turn needed to be housed. These workers also needed to be supplied, but with the nearest towns then being some distance away and difficult to reach, small privately owned villages emerged to cater for their day-to-day needs.

Four significant 'Estates', with their own villages, were to become features of the South Coast: Coolangatta Estate north of the Shoal-

haven River, the Mort Estate at Bodalla (*Recollections* 18), the Kameruka Estate near Candelo (*Recollections* 37), and the Ayrdale Estate near Wolumla (*Recollections* 14).

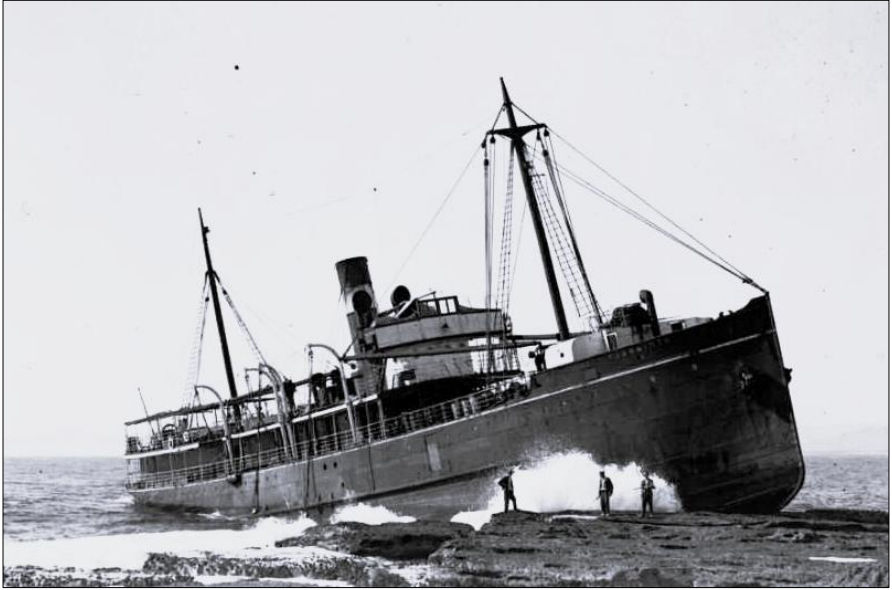
These Estates have significant histories associated with them. For example, Alexander Berry who developed the Coolangatta Estate had Hamilton Hume and three convict labourers cut a 209-yard canal to link the Shoalhaven River (which was usually closed at its mouth) with the Crookhaven River to give Berry shipping access to Broughton Creek village (now Berry) that he was developing (*Recollections* 50); the Kameruka Estate included a cricket oval where the visiting English cricket team in 1885 played (and won) a two-day match against a twenty-two man Candelo team, and also had a nine-hole golf course designed by Laurie Auchterlonie, a famous golfer and manufacturer of golf clubs (*Recollections* 36).

Equally significant was the development of Boydtown on the shore of Twofold Bay by Benjamin Boyd in the 1840s. This was intended to become the major port and township between Sydney and Melbourne, the centre of Boyd's whaling operations, and the export point for sheep, cattle, and their associated products that Boyd was producing. (At the time, he had interests in half-a-million acres on the Monaro plus in two million acres in the Riverina.) His visions evaporated, his 'empire' collapsed in 1847 when, as a result of a combination of circumstances, he became bankrupt. (*Recollections* 25).

Otherwise, the South Coast is an area supporting many small towns and villages, most of which developed to service small local populations or road traffic (many simply being the distance from the next village that a horse and cart could comfortably travel).

The histories of most of these towns and villages are at **www.southcoasthistory.org.au**.

Shipping... and Shipwrecks!



Back in the days when 'roads' were little more than rough bush tracks, to get anywhere or to get anything anywhere to or from the South Coast, meant a voyage on a ship. There were hundreds and hundreds of them - sailing ships at first, steamers later on. Many were privately owned and operated to transport goods and resources to their markets; timber millers owned ships, blue metal quarries in and around Kiama had ships to transport their blue metal to Sydney and elsewhere, Dorman Long & Company owned three ships that transported granite from Moruya to Sydney when they were building the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

A general, timetabled shipping service became available with the establishment in 1858 of the Illawarra and South Coast Steam Navigation Company, the result of an amalgamation of three smaller shipping companies that had previously been transporting goods between Sydney and the South Coast.

The ISCSN Co principally transported cargo. (It was popularly known as the 'Pig & Whistle Line' for transporting live pigs, and it was said it might wait an hour for a pig, but not one minute for a passenger). Its fleet included boats designed to carry specific cargoes: for example, the *Benandra* and *Bodalla* for carrying railway sleepers, and the *Duroby* for transporting silica from Ulladulla to Sydney and Newcastle.

Some ships carried passengers, but after the *Merimbula* ran aground in March 1928, the company decided to discontinue its passenger service. (*Recollections 11*).

As the saying goes, where there are ships there are shipwrecks! And there were hundreds of them along the NSW South Coast - but that's a major story, with details of 200 South Coast shipwrecks at www.southcoasthistory.org.au.

Dairying, Timber and Fishing



The three industries that historically have been the mainstays of the South Coast are timber, fishing and dairying.

Cedar cutters were active on the South Coast, particularly in the area north of Ulladulla, from the 1810s and 1820s. Then timber for building - both locally and in Sydney - became a major industry; and then, as railways were being extended across the state, an enormous demand developed for wooden railways sleepers from the South Coast. At various times, other timber-related products have also been produced: wattle bark (used in tanning), charcoal (particularly during and immediately after World War II, when burning charcoal to fuel motor vehicles became a substitute for scarce petrol), eucalyptus oil, and woodchips. (*Recollections* 23).



Whaling became Australia's first export industry with ship-based whalers operating well before Australia's first shore-based whaling station opened in 1818 in Twofold Bay. For the next 111 years, whaling was a significant industry in that area.

Commercial fishing on the South Coast, supplying a growing Sydney market, developed once the Illawarra Steam Navigation Company started a regular weekly service to the South Coast around 1866, and ice became available from the Sydney Ice Company which opened in 1864. Deep ocean fishing commenced from around 1925 when larger, more powerful engines were installed in fishing boats - and this ultimately led to the building of canneries in Narooma, Bermagui, and most notably, Eden that processed large catches of tuna and salmon. (*Recollections* 32).

The South Coast dairy industry started to emerge in the 1860s and by the mid-1870s, butter and cheese production in the area was well established. Initially, it was a home-based industry, with families milking their own cows and producing butter or (more likely, because it was easier to transport and it kept better without the need for refrigeration), cheese.

With improvements in transport and building of roads, numerous dairy factories opened that sourced their milk or cream from local farmers; Kameruka Estate, for example, had three cheese factories and a butter factory.

Around 1920, there were 49 cheese factories and 8 butter factories in the relatively small area between Tilba and Wolumla. Over time, smaller factories closed, leaving just a handful of large modern enterprises. The significance of dairying to the South Coast is highlighted by the fact that the Bega Valley (alone) produced almost half of all the cheese that was manufactured in NSW in 1900. (*Recollections* 7).

Gold... and Other Minerals

Gold mining and granite quarrying (which was predominantly around Moruya) were once major industries on the NSW South

Coast. Other minerals and rocks were also mined - tin in the Budawangs, talc near Cobargo, iron ore at Jerrara near Kiama, blue metal at Bombo, and silica from Mollymook - but extraction of most of these was undertaken by relatively small-scale operations that had very short lives.



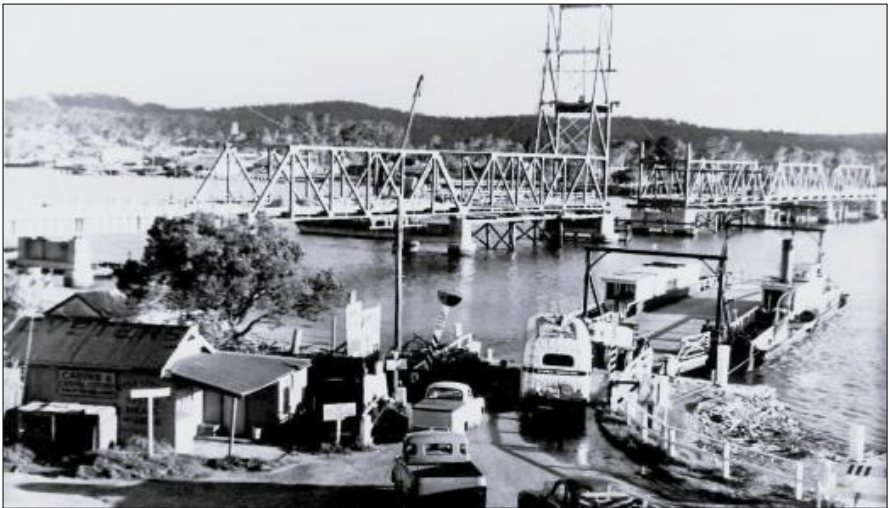
Gold was discovered and mined at many places along the South Coast. The goldfields around Araluen were particularly rich and, at one time, were among the three most productive goldfields in Australia. Mining commenced there in 1851 and continued through phases of alluvial mining, hydraulic sluicing, dredging, and reef mining until the late 1930s.

At its peak, in the 1860s and 1870s, 30,000 men were working the valley and 26 hotels were operating - in what is now predominantly a quiet grazing and farming area! (*Recollections 15*).

The Age of the Motor Vehicle

The arrival of the motor vehicle, followed later by the improvement of roads and the construction of bridges, had major impacts on the NSW South Coast.

The Prince's Highway, originally named in 1920 in honour of the Prince of Wales who later became King Edward VIII, and which was renamed the Princes Highway in 1941, was not sealed along its complete length to the Victorian border until 1976; a bridge was not constructed over the Clyde River at Batemans Bay until 1956; and the bridge at Nelligen, on the highway from Canberra, was not opened until December 1964).



Shipping services to the South Coast all but disappeared; tourism became a very significant industry; the importance of - and even the need for - many smaller, more isolated villages diminished; new opportunities opened up, such as the Bega Co-operative (now Bega Cheese) being able to supply fresh milk to the Cooma, Goulburn and Canberra markets.

Generally, the South Coast became less isolated and more accessible; and in more subtle ways, changes occurred, like posts that had supported verandahs on commercial buildings being removed - Bega's main street, Carp Street, providing an outstanding example. (*Recollections* 41).

Floods, Fires, Depressions, Wars

Major floods, major bushfires have regularly severely impacted the South Coast (see, for example, *Recollections* 38, 50).

Huge numbers of locals left the area in World War I and again in World War II to serve in the Australian armed forces, and this had an enormous effect on local families and businesses (*Recollections* 2,13). In World War II, there was also a real fear the area would be invaded by the Japanese, and plans were drawn up to evacuate the entire population of the area (*Recollections* 4, 28, 50), particularly after Japanese submarines had sunk a number of ships in South Coast waters (*Recollections* 54).



The Waratah's Recruiting March in World War I crosses the Nowra Bridge

Economic depressions in the 1840s, 1890s and 1930s also severely set back development of the area with, for example, the 1840s depression effectively stopping the development of Boydtown and killing plans to develop other major settlements on Jervis Bay and at Broulee (also *Recollections* 54).

Intrigued? There is, of course, much more to learn about the NSW South Coast's fascinating history.

www.southcoasthistory.org.au is the first place you should visit.

Libraries on the South Coast also have comprehensive local history collections and their professional staff are always very helpful.

Or call by your local museum/historical society - most can provide detailed information about their local area.

You'll surely be amazed by just how much you discover!



Crossing of the Bega River (1900)