

In late May 2013 a 'Cornish Convoy' departed from Kadina, on the Yorke Peninsula of South Australia, to trace the journey taken by many Cornish forebears and others in the early 1850s, overland to the Victorian goldfields. The Convoy was timed to coincide with the conclusion of the Kernewek Lowender Cornish Festival, when many interstate visitors were returning home.

The 'Cornish Convoy' is part of the Overland Gold project to research this relatively unknown aspect of Australian history – <http://www.cornishvic.org.au/overlandgold> and 'Overland Gold' on Facebook.

DAY 1 Monday 27 May 2013: Morning - KADINA to BURRA

All ready by 9 am as planned and, after a group photograph, the Convoy set off.

It comprised 10 vehicles, and 17 participants: 12 from Victoria, 2 from South Australia, 1 from ACT and 2 from New South Wales.



This first section was not strictly part of the 'Overland Gold' route but was included because most of the participants were in the 'Copper Triangle' towns of Moonta, Kadina and Wallaroo for the Kernewek Lowender Festival the previous week.

The section from Kadina to Clare was of particular interest too because of the Cornish involvement in opening up that route in the 1860's. Moira Drew had presented a paper about the leader of that group, Thomas Ninnes, at the Festival Seminar a few days before.

The track had been needed to provide easier and quicker access to the growing markets in the area brought by the development of the mines and related growth of communities.

Leaving Kadina along the road towards Port Wakefield for approximately 15 km, we turned off, north east towards Lochiel.

The first stop was at the locality of 'Ninnes'. Here we walked a short distance along the 'Old Bullock Track' towards Kadina, still bordered by remnant scrub, to gain some perspective of the country through which they 'blazed the track'. A little further on, we viewed the plaque and interpretive sign to mark the settlement and District Council of Ninnes, both named after Thomas Ninnes.



At Lochiel we stopped at the Town Hall where Kathy & John Nicholls hosted a morning tea and information session, a contact established through our mutual interest in the history of the route from Clare to Kadina. The historical displays were of great interest to the group, and one member of the group took the opportunity to make contact with a relative in the area, who joined us for morning tea.

To arrive in Burra in time for lunch, we continued on through Blyth and the outskirts of Clare.

DAY 1 Monday 27 May 2013: Afternoon - BURRA to KAPUNDA

Burra is significant in the Overland Gold story. It was the starting point in the journey taken by many miners and their families to the Victorian goldfields in the early 1850s

Our visit to Burra was arranged through Meredith Satchell and the Burra History Group and centred on the Old Town Hall. There was an opportunity to view the Museum displays before a short talk on the early days of Burra by History Group member Eric Fuss, and a driving tour of the main sites conducted by Julian Ratcliffe.

Leaving Burra we headed south along the Barrier Highway, and on the outskirts of town, turned south onto the Old Adelaide Road.

This gravel road is understood to be part of the early 'copper roads' to Port Adelaide

Around 10km along, a day's travel by bullock dray from Burra, we stopped briefly to view what remains of the Sod Hut settlement.



Continuing south between two ranges of hills, we passed through Stony Gap and on to Black Springs. While there we investigated the site of the original settlement and cemetery before continuing along the 'Old Burra Road' through Springfield and Marrabel to Kapunda.

Several roads met at Black Springs, where there was good water from a permanent spring.

Over dinner that night, we had the opportunity to discuss the day's travel and peruse literature and maps relating to the journey.

Here we said farewell to two of the group, Michelle and Brian Tresidder, who were staying on in Kapunda for a few days before continuing their travels in South Australia.

DAY 2 Tuesday 28 May 2013: KAPUNDA to MENINGIE

To begin Day 2, we gathered at Map Kernow, the giant statue of a Cornish miner which stands close to the spot where copper was discovered in 1842.

Before setting off we said another farewell, to the Lokan family who were returning home to South Australia and the ACT for various other commitments.

From Kapunda we deviated from the 'copper road' and followed the route described by Thomas Ninnes. He describes travelling via the Reedy Creek mine and on to 'the sandy banks of the Murray River'. The majority of other early 1850's travellers who began at Burra, appear to have travelled to Adelaide and from through the Adelaide hills to the crossing over the Murray River at Wellington.

Our route from Kapunda through Nuriootpa, Angaston, the Eden Valley, Springton, Mount Pleasant and Tungkillo, took us through some wonderfully scenic areas.

The road between Tungkillo and Palmer climbs over a significant escarpment and our next stop was the viewing area at the top from which you can see a great distance over the Murray River plains and beyond. The sun was shining, and the thermoses and Cornish goodies came out – it was a beautiful spot for morning tea.

From Palmer, we turned south towards Murray Bridge. The road is primarily flat, running between the river to the east and hills to the west. The Reedy Creek Mine, to the south west of Palmer and mentioned by Thomas Ninnes, operated in the early 1850's, and employed a high percentage of Cornish miners. It was the centre of a village of around 600.



A few km south of Palmer, just before passing over the Reedy Creek, we stopped briefly at the predominantly-German Palmer cemetery, and then deviated away from the River to pass through less-populated areas, turning south-west to Monarto and Callington.

Copper was discovered in this area in 1845 by Cornish miners and a number of mines established. The Bremer Mine operated at Callington from 1850 and employed a significant number of Cornish miners. The suggestion has been made that miners travelling from Burra may have had contacts or family at Callington, and passed by there on their way to Victoria!

After a sandwich lunch from the Callington General Store, eaten in the sunshine at tables beside the oval, we investigated the narrow streets and some of the early architecture, and the historic site of the Bremer Mine. It is now privately owned but there is an interpretive sign and several buildings are visible from outside the fence.

From Callington, heading south and crossing over today's Princes Highway, we turned at Chauncey's Line Road to Hartley to view the remains of an early Methodist Church at the intersection and a sign providing a brief history of settlement in the area.

Chauncey's Line was surveyed in the early 1850's and passes through relatively flat country rather than the steep gradients of other routes through the hills. It may have become a major thoroughfare if Wellington had remained the main crossing point over the River.



Chauncey's Line Road to the east being gravel, we opted for a quicker trip to Wellington, continuing on sealed road to Woodchester and then turning west. From that road we had clear views in all directions, including to Mt Barker clearly visible behind. Joining the road from Strathalbyn at Langhorne Creek we passed the blue waters of the northern edge of Lake Alexandrina before arriving at Wellington, and afternoon tea at the Old Court House.

Wellington is a significant location in the 'Overland Gold' story. It was the first and in 1852 the main 'all weather' crossing point over the Murray River. It might have remained so, but it proved difficult to find footings for posts, so the road and railway bridge was built upstream at Murray Bridge instead.

The original punt / ferry operated from the other side of the Old Court House. The Old Court House, extensively restored in the 1980's and housing a museum, café and retreat, is under new ownership and renovations are in progress.

There are several information panels and items of historical interest on the river bank.

After some much-needed exercise investigating the river bank and interpretive signs, we crossed the Murray River on the punt / ferry – much as the early travellers would have done.

The road south from Wellington passes through low scrubby country with occasional distant views from higher ridges. We were treated to some wonderful sun-set views before arriving at Meningie on the shores of Lake Albert. Mt Barker was clearly visible from here too and must have been a major landmark for travellers in the 1850's.

Over dinner at Meningie, we were joined by two residents interested in our exploits. Local historian John Boundy's Cornish forebears arrived in South Australia in 1848 and we enjoyed the opportunity to hear his story as well as information regarding the state of development in the area in the 1850's. He even returned home to collect a copy of the Boundy family history for donation to the Cornish Association of Victoria Library. Marianne Cunneen also spent some time with us and wrote a comprehensive article on the 'Cornish Convoy' for The Lakelander newsletter.

DAY 3 Wednesday 29 May 2013: MENINGIE to HORSHAM

The route for Day 3 is the most consistently described amongst the accounts on early 1850's travel. It follows the coast along the Coorong, turning inland near Kingston to Naracoorte and on to Horsham, and passing the northern end of the Grampians. A mail route between Adelaide and Mount Gambier was established in the 1840's and there had already been considerable movement of stock along this route. In late January 1852 a 'suggested route' to the goldfields was published in the Adelaide press, describing a 'main route' with several short-cuts. Various establishments sprang up to service travellers, and form the origins of some of today's townships and locations.

Heading south, the first location mentioned in 1850's accounts is Magrath Flat where there is a substantial stone house on the left on the bend. We then passed through Stony Well, Woods Well, Policemans Point and Salt Creek, stopping at the roadhouse / café. This is now the main centre along the Coorong especially for those visiting for camping and fishing. Some took the opportunity for coffee from the Cafe, some for tea from the thermos and some a quick return trip to Meningie to collect reading glasses, before continuing on!

To the south east, inland from Salt Creek is Tilley Swamp, in the 1850's a far more extensive area of swamp and wetland which features in many accounts of travel. Tilley Swamp Accommodation House was located in this vicinity. Further south, Blackford, inland from Kingston and on the early mail-route, also provided accommodation to travellers.



The reach Blackford we turned off the Highway at Taratap Road and then south on a gravel road along the Blackford-Taratap Range, one of a series of low ranges interspersed with low flat areas that are a feature of this part of south-east South Australia. Peter and Margie England at Blackford had kindly agreed to us visiting. Interrupting a busy farm schedule, Peter gave a brief history of the property, pointing out original sections of the homestead and describing the ways they continue efforts of previous land holders to conserve the nearby waterway. An interesting and inspiring visit.

From Blackford we continued on gravel road south to Reedy Creek, another location mentioned by several overland travellers, and turned east towards Naracoorte. Here the road passed over several more of the series of ranges running parallel to the coast.

Naracoorte is another significant location in the 'Overland Gold' story.

The township of Naracoorte was originally referred to as **McIntosh's** after Scot, William McIntosh, who arrived in the 'Mosquito Plains' area in 1845 purchasing the original hotel and building an inn, and is generally referred to as the 'founder' of Naracoorte.

McIntosh's is mentioned in the '*suggested route to the goldfields*' published in the South Australian press as well as in the majority of accounts of overland travel.

In Naracoorte, a visit to the Sheep's Back Museum had been arranged and we received a wonderful welcome from a group of National Trust volunteers associated with the Museum, who greeted us with hot soup and lunch. We also met Skye Hoklas from the Naracoorte Herald, who produced an article and photograph for publication in the next edition.

It was especially interesting to meet National Trust volunteer Mike Hornabrook, who had been involved in the 1986 re-enactment of a bullock dray load of wool from Naracoorte to Port Adelaide lead by 'Bullocky' Jim Kelly. His comments about that re-enactment were of great interest.

After all that, there was a little time for a brief talk by volunteer Bill Vogel and tour of some of the Museum galleries before departing on our last leg of Day 3 to Horsham.

Leaving Naracoorte, we followed the Wimmera Highway through Apsley and Edenhope to Horsham, a route which closely resembles that of 1851, winding through predominantly pastoral country with beautiful stands of trees.

Apsley in the early 1850's was a significant crossing point for travellers and the location of the Border Inn (not the current hotel, or location!). We stopped briefly at the bullock wagon display and information boards in a small park beside the road.



At Edenhope, or Lake Wallace as it was originally known and in the early 1850's a regular camping spot, we took a detour to drive around the shore of the lake, only partially full.

From Edenhope we followed the road as it veers to the north east to pass close to Mt Arapiles, and cross the Wimmera River the first time around 7 km to the west of Horsham.

After dinner at the Horsham RSL we were treated to a special opening of the Horsham Historical Society courtesy of Research Officer Lindsay Smith and son Dale. Lindsay presented two slide shows on early Horsham history and gave a guided tour of the premises

DAY 4 Thursday 30 May 2013: HORSHAM to CASTLEMAINE

From Horsham we took the Henty Highway north and turned east towards Longrenong, one of the earliest stations in the area and mentioned in several 1850's accounts.

The rain had set in overnight, and to avoid wet gravel roads, we continued along Longrenong Road and turned right onto the Murtoa-Glenorchy Road, otherwise we would have travelled through the Marma Forest to join the Murtoa-Glenorchy Road. The Wimmera River was visible as a line of trees on the right, and there were occasional glimpses of the Grampians in the distance, although visibility was restricted in the rain.

To visit the township of Glenorchy we turned off the main road just before the large bridge over the Wimmera River.

Glenorchy is another significant location in the 'Overland Gold' story.

It was the junction of four early landholdings and became the intersection of early travel routes, the major one following the northern bank of the Wimmera River.

The sometime infamous Four Post Inn opened here in 1847, followed soon afterwards by a store, a smithy and a post office.

We stopped at the eastern end of Carfrae Street, which runs along the bank of the river, at a street sign showing the route from Mt Alexander to Adelaide and another for the Gold Escort route. A little further along Carfrae Street, we visited the site of the Four Post Inn.



After a brief tour of the town, and braving light drizzle, we had morning tea in a clearing on the other side of the River. Here we said farewell to Bill and Gwen Phillips, who were returning to Melbourne for a family birthday celebration.

While in Glenorchy we made contact with two residents interested in the Overland Gold project and hope that this will lead to a further exchange of information

From Glenorchy, we continued on the northern side of the Wimmera River travelling east towards Campbell's Bridge. A short distance from Glenorchy we stopped to inspect a river ford crossing, before continuing on to Campbells Bridge, Greens Creek, Joel Joel and Crowlands (with Mount Cole directly ahead of us), before joining the Pyrenees Highway near Eversley, and on to Elmhurst. In the last sections, the road crossed the Wimmera River several times and the headwaters were close by on the eastern side of the range.

The weather had deteriorated, so instead of turning south to travel via Lexton, we opted to take a more direct route via Avoca and turned at Bung Bong to Amherst and Talbot.

We ate lunch in under-cover area near the tennis courts, where Robyn Crocker gave a brief summary of the history of the area gleaned from her family research. It was then clear that the location for lunch was carefully planned after all, beside the remains of a holding tank of the 'once extensive' Back Creek Gas Works which supplied gas to the town until 1938!

Leaving Talbot, we took the road to Majorca, passing along McCallum's Creek and on to Rodborough Road to pass over the Tullaroop Reservoir, complete with one lone pelican gliding across the surface in the rain. Following this road to the east towards Mt Alexander, we travelled over a high plain with views in all directions, eventually passing the property Plaistow, settled by the Joyce family.

Joyce family records refer to their homestead being 'on the route to the diggings'. They are believed to have made a 'small fortune' selling hay for horses and sheep for mutton.

Not far past Plaistow, we joined the Pyrenees Highway near Newstead and continued on to Castlemaine, the site of the Mt Alexander / Forest Creek goldfields.

We concluded our journey at the old Castlemaine Market, the Information Centre and gallery.

The Cornish Convoy in Castlemaine
– those who did the full 4 days and approximately 1,000 kms

L-R: Jenny Trewarne, Robyn Crocker, Moira Drew, June Whiffin, Alison Woodward, Derek Trewarne, Jill Beard, and Dorothy Tresidder



In footsteps of early Cornish gold diggers

KRISTEN ALEBAKIS

ABOUT 20 people last week recreated the convoy people took in the 1850s to get from South Australia to Victoria, chasing gold.

Convoy project coordinator Moira Drew said the guided self-drive tour followed the overland routes between Kadina on Yorke Peninsula in South Australia to Castlemaine in Victoria.

The convoy was part of the Cornish Association of Victoria's Overland Gold project, which aims to highlight the little known aspect of Australian history when people began travelling overland to the goldfields in 1852.

"The convoy travelled first to Burra, the starting point for a large proportion of those who travelled to the Victorian

goldfields in 1852," Ms Drew said.

"Other centres visited included Kapunda, Wellington, Meningie and Naracoorte in South Australia and Horsham, Glenorchy and Talbot in Victoria, before finishing in Castlemaine."

Ms Drew said last week's convoy was about tracing the journey people took in the 1850s and learning what they went through.

"There wasn't much information out there regarding what took place in those days so hopefully through our trip we are able to make more people aware of it," she said. "All of us that went on the trip definitely learnt a lot and we had a great time."

Ms Drew said she would now work to make the information she found more widely available.



CONVOY: This group recreated a gold rush convoy from SA.

Bendigo Advertiser 6 June 2013.

An article also appeared in the Naracoorte Herald on 6 June 2013 -

<http://www.naracoorteherald.com.au/story/1551793/cornish-convoy-comes-to-town/?cs=1488>

N B:

With the weather becoming increasingly cold and wet, an option to continue on to **Bendigo** was not taken up!

The Overland Gold project has not included travel to **Ballarat** because in late 1851 and early 1852 the focus of the Victorian gold rush was on the Forest Creek / Mt Alexander (Castlemaine) and Sandhurst (Bendigo) areas. Ballarat and surrounding areas had experienced a small 'rush' prior to this, and became a major mining centre again later.

With many thanks to all those who assisted and supported the Cornish Convoy. May it be the first of many journeys following and investigating the early overland routes from South Australia to the Victorian goldfields

Moira Drew, June 2013