

## Overland Gold

**This brief report covers some issues and thoughts from a trip from Mt Alexander to Lake Wallace (Castlemaine to Edenhope) on 23, 24 January 2012**

The first point of interest was the **Loddon River near Newstead**. This is a significant river, at least by Australian standards. The river seems to be accessible from the western side. The existing bridge is at least the third made in this vicinity with the first public bridge being opened in 1860. So our travellers would have had to cross the river without the benefit a bridge, quite an operation for any wheeled vehicle.

It is clear that the river has deepened significantly since contact, and looks to be twice the depth that it would have been in the 1850's. This is evidenced by mature (large girth) red gums which would mark the former depth, now clearly being in a line halfway down the river bank. It is widely accepted that closer settlement, land clearing and cultivation contributed to this river channel deepening. So throughout the journey now there are more and deeper gullies, creeks and rivers cutting the route than there would have been in 1852.

At the Newstead end of Rodborough Road 400 metres past the entrance to Plaistow is an old cemetery - the older graves are further from the road and I do not know how old. Did not see any name on the cemetery itself either.

From the rise to the west of Plaistow, looking east, Mt Alexander can be seen at 11.30 (just left of straight ahead) and the mountain at Maldon at 10.00.

Looking back (west) over a creek the topography is interesting with the roadway making an easy descent down a shallow valley guarded by minor escarpments on either side. Photos x 3

**Images:** Rodborough Road, near Plaistow, looking east



## Lake Wallace (Edenhope) to Glenorchy

The route from Lake Wallace to Glenorchy via Lake Kanagulk and Officer's Station differs from that via Mt Arapiles for a number of reasons. These differences are important in ease of travel.

As you have said, Moira, travel was either by foot, by hack (ridden horse with possibly a pack horse alongside), by horse drawn vehicle, or bullock drawn vehicle. These vehicles (I understand) were typically four wheeled - rather than two wheeled, and probably heavier as in more wagon like than carriage or gig or buggy like. Where draft animals are used the distance traveled is from 8 to twenty miles per day with horses generally being faster than bullocks.

Physics would indicate that a firm surface is easier to traverse than a soft surface. Sandy soils tend to be firmer when wet, clay soils firmer when dry. Diary entries support this. Flat terrain is easier than undulating or hilly. Creek, gully and river crossings are always difficult. Swamps almost impassable.

Where water is readily available travel is easier. Carrying water is expensive - using about one eighth of the carrying capacity where water is not available daily.

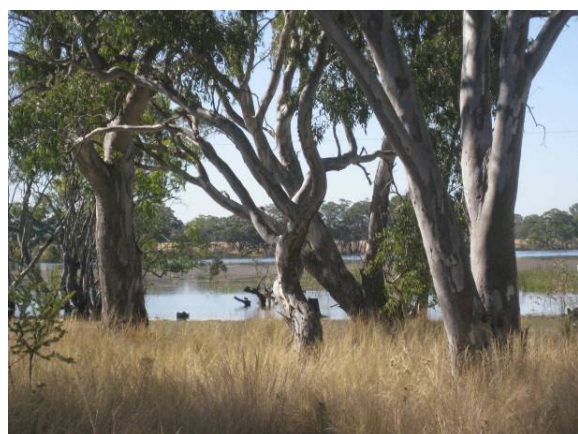
Heavily timbered and scrubby country is more difficult to traverse than sparsely timbered grassland. The regular burning of much of the country resulted typically in open woodlands. This burning was carried out by the indigenous population prior to settlement and carried on by squatters until the widespread use of fencing increased the cost of burning. Fencing was introduced as labour became short due to the exodus of workers to the goldfields.

Settled areas are more likely to have services/supplies than non settled areas - yes obvious but important. Settled areas supplied meat, flour, replacement horses, company and information. There are records of aborigines helping travelers through both the Coorong and the 90 Mile Desert. Still, I assume that travel through settled areas would feel safer.

So as to the question of why this route or why that route, the factors above may have impacted the decision. However as numbers swelled it may have been just so much easier to "go with the flow".

The southern route from Lake Wallace to Glenorchy would have been easier for heavier vehicles and in drier times, given the frequent surface water, and less sandy terrain. The northern route would have been more suited to faster travel and after rains (Although I am told that land along both routes can get very boggy in wet winters).

Along the southern route there are numerous lakes, many of which are easily accessible. They are good places for picnics, and possibly even for a bush camp. They have no facilities, at least none that I saw.



**Images:** Lakes at Murrumbidgee between Lake Wallace and Wombalano, and at Douglas



I attach photos of the lakes at Murrarbool between Lake Wallace and Wombalano, and one at Douglas. There are others, including Lake Kanagulk, at which camping is permitted.

The northern route passes through the Jilpanger "Scrub". A detour down one of the tracks that lead off the [Wimmera] Highway is well worth it to see what the country may have looked like and to get some feel for the isolation travelers experienced. Again I recommend stopping for a "boil up", picnic, a walk and some pondering. This is a good place to walk for an hour or so just to get the feel of the pace that the overlanders would have made.



**Image:** Track in the Jilpanger Scrub

Just after Glenorchy the road crosses the Dunmunkle Creek and then within 200 metres there is a sign to the river saying "River Ford". Easy access to this ford makes it a great place to experience the Wimmera River and contemplate the crossing with horses and wagon



**Image:** Crossing over the Wimmera River at 'River Ford' signposted from Glenorchy - Campbell's Bridge Road

Closer to Campbell's Bridge there is a bushland reserve that looks quite good for camping.

### **Roses Gap Road [over the northern end of the Grampians]**

A number of older maps show Roses Gap quite prominently, and this was used as a route. There is a good camping area along this route within the Grampians National Park. I find it difficult to imagine wheeled vehicles traversing this route. It must have been a slow journey due to rough terrain - rocks, gullies slopes - and this would certainly have placed stresses on the vehicles leading potentially to breakages and breakdowns.