

# Sydney to Albury by Road

*Greg Ryan*

Prior to 1928 the Hume Highway was best known as the Great Southern Road. In 1928 the NSW Main Roads Board, after consultation with the Country Roads Board of Victoria, renamed the inland road from Sydney to Melbourne as the Hume Highway. Much of the present highway route is along the path followed by Hume and Hovell in 1824.

The first definitive record of a road being constructed from Sydney to the south is the construction of a section between Sydney and Liverpool commissioned by Governor Macquarie and built by ex-convict William Roberts. It opened in February 1814.

Tolls were imposed coming out of Sydney “to defray the weighty expense attending the construction of the said roads.”

In 1818, with promising lands to the south, Governor Macquarie encouraged settlement in the new country. A new road was necessary, and work commenced in October 1819 and completed in February 1821. The road reached Wollondilly River, north-east of present day Goulburn but had several lengths of steep grade, many river and creek crossings and poor construction quality.

In 1832 approval was given to construct a road along a new line surveyed in 1830. Convict labour was used and from 1836 to 1842 the Towrang Stockade housed up to 250 convicts engaged in construction.

Travellers on the Great Southern Road faced many hazards and not just the poor road conditions and river crossings. Bushrangers, many escaped convicts, preyed upon travellers. John Hume, brother of the explorer, was killed by bushrangers at Gunning in January 1840.

Control of the road was assumed by the Department of Public Works in 1861. At that time, gravel surfacing had been carried out between Sydney and Goulburn. From Goulburn to Albury very little construction work had been undertaken. The southward expansion of the rail system during the 1860s and 1870s lessened the need for the road to be improved, and development slowed.



The first bridge over the river at Yass, 1860

The *Border Morning Mail* reported in December 1940 that “there now remains only a few short sections of unpaved road in the whole 565 miles between Sydney and Melbourne.”

In August 1954 ‘Route 31’ signs began to appear across the full length of the highway as part of a national numbering scheme.



A section of the Hume Highway south of Gundagai in 1951

With the opening of bypasses of Tarcutta and Woomargama in 2011, and Holbrook in 2013, the Hume Highway completed its evolution into the road we see today, a critical part of the nation's transportation infrastructure.