

Crossing the Mighty Murray

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The Murray River was uncontrolled before 1933, so was subject to flood and very low water. September and October were the flood months, while low water occurred in March and April.

These fluctuations had an effect on travellers wishing to cross. Hume and Hovell were the first to be inconvenienced in mid-November 1824. They eventually crossed above the junction with the Mitta Mitta.

One of the convicts swam across with a rope, while Hume made a frame over which he stretched a tarpaulin to make a boat.

Stockman James Gullifer began the first ferry service in about 1837, using a hollowed out log operated by an Aboriginal ferryman. It was later replaced by a log punt, first at the end of Hovell Street and later at the southern end of Wodonga Place where Wodonga St ran towards the river . Fluctuating water levels caused problems for the ferry operator and passengers.

Floods strained the ferry lines and low water made approaches to the punt very boggy. A bridge was needed.

On August 16, 1860, the first pile of a bridge across the Murray was driven by the mayor of Albury, J T Fallon. The occasion was toasted with champagne. The contractors, Messrs Kidd and Brickell, completed the work in 12 months at a cost of £7,500.

The opening was a grand affair. On September 2, 1861, a procession led by the Oddfellows Lodge, followed by dignitaries and school children, marched from the court house to the bridge. It was watched by 1200 people.

A banquet, chaired by T H Mate Esq, MLA for Hume, was waiting on the bridge itself.



The second Union Bridge opened in 1898, replacing the first bridge. The river was uncontrolled before 1933, so was subject to flood and low water.

The mayor J T Fallon invited Miss Sophia Chauncy to name the new bridge. This she did with another bottle of champagne, naming it 'The Union Bridge.' Miss Chauncy was the daughter of William S Chauncy, district surveyor, who designed and supervised the construction of the bridge.

The Beechworth mail coach then drove across the bridge to complete the celebration.

The Union Bridge has been replaced twice, first in 1898 and again in 1961.