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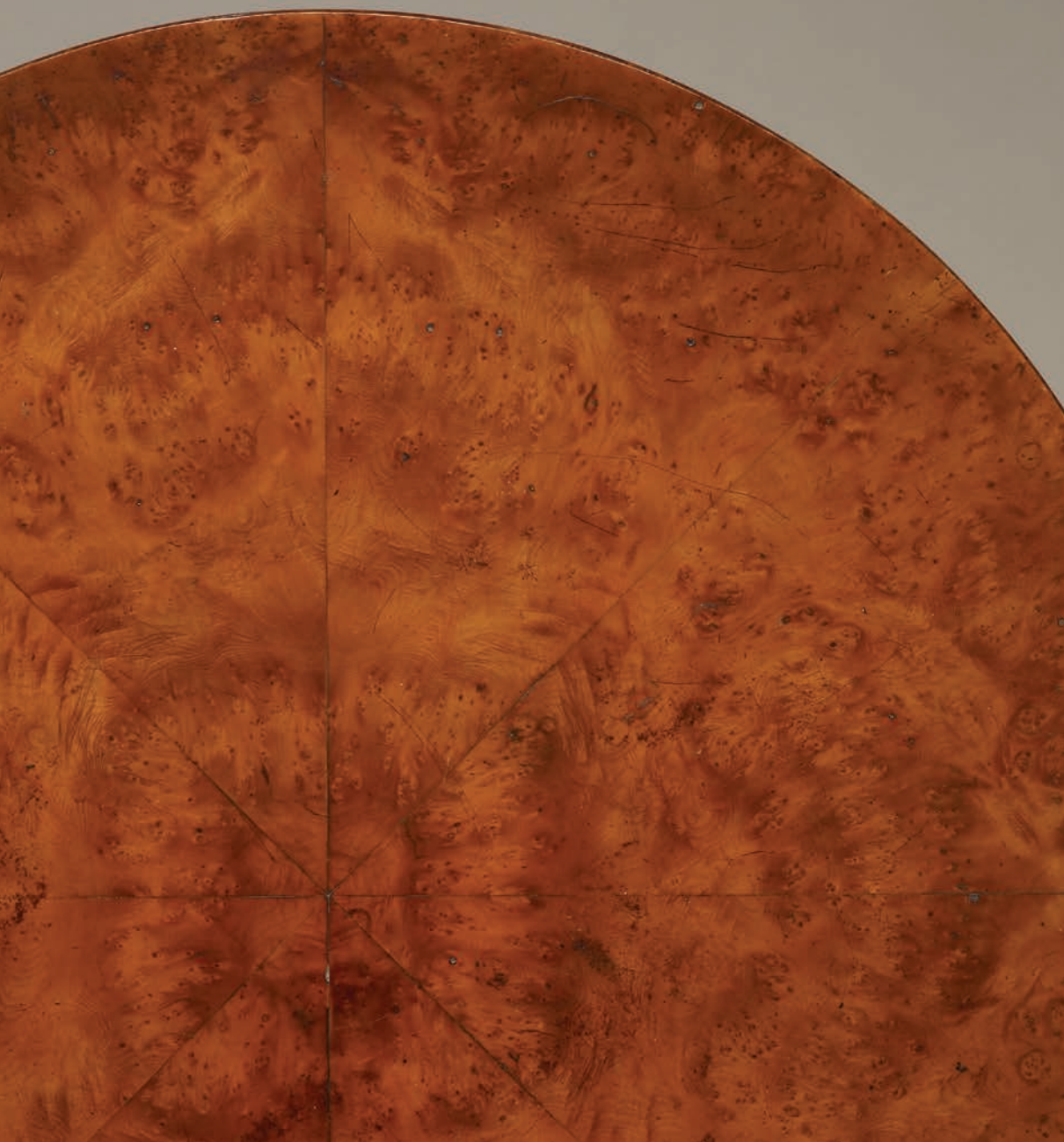


Overland to Orford from Pittwater (Sorell) and Richmond to Spring Bay (Orford) in the nineteenth century

Malcolm Ward and Russell Rowlands

THE EAST COAST of Tasmania was occupied and traversed for millennia by the Tasmanian Aboriginal people, specifically the Mairremmener people in the areas considered by this paper. Lamentably, little is known with certainty about the routes they used to traverse the country. Contemporary diarist Robinson mentioned 'native roads' or MARKENNER numerous times in his journals in the 1830s, including some along the Prosser River.[1] Most were narrow, suitable for travelling in single file. Later historian Robson mentioned paths of the 'Oyster Bay tribe' extending up the Prosser River and through to Black Charlies Opening but did not cite a source.[2] Sometimes the later Europeans adopted and over-printed the Indigenous paths but also forged new routes, partly out of a lack of knowledge about the country around them and later to accommodate their wheeled carts and carriages.

The first permanent European settlement on the east coast of Van Diemen's Land north of Sorell was by the Meredith and Amos families at Great Swan Port, in 1821. They went there when there were no roads or tracks there from other settlements, so the sea was mainly used to get to and from Hobart Town. Overland access to Great Swan Port via an established route began in 1822, when George Meredith wrote of finding a way there from Jericho in the Midlands (where he had some other land), eastwards through the 'Eastern Marshes', meeting the coast at Little Swan Port, thence travelling north along the coast. He expected it to take three days on foot or two with a horse.[3] Whatever track was developed then, it had hardly advanced by 1840, when a party including Charles and Louisa Anne Meredith, plus their baby, travelled the route in a broad, stout type

of gig. Louisa later wrote of the vehicle having to be winched by ropes in the steep terrain and she and the baby having to walk rather than possibly be thrown from the conveyance, or to cling to it for dear life. This way from Hobart Town was evidently preferred to the existing one via Richmond, to Prossers Plains (Buckland) and through the Prosser River gorge to Spring Bay, and then north up the coast.[4]

Pittwater (Sorell) and Richmond to Prossers Plains (Buckland) early days

No contemporary documentation has been found of either Indigenous people or Europeans travelling from Pittwater or Richmond and the Coal River Valley to Prossers Plains prior to 1825. The Tasmanian Aboriginal people certainly would have done so for a very long time and it is likely bushrangers and early land users at Buckland such as Stines and Troy also did, but the routes they used are uncertain.[5] They might have originally been via the coast: a rough cart track, possibly following a path pioneered by the local Indigenous people, developed in the nineteenth century, which followed the coast from Sorell to Dunalley, Marion Bay and through to Spring Bay.[6]

The earliest account of someone travelling from Pittwater to Prossers Plains and further up the east coast was in 1825, in a journal kept by Private Robert McNally, on his way with a military detachment to Great Swan Port. In September, they walked from Pittwater, through Orielton to 'Black Charlies farm' where they stayed the night and were given a meal by 'Black Charlie'.[7]

Although McNally's journal can sometimes be difficult to follow geographically, from this and later entries, it is apparent that Black Charlie occupied land near the junction of the present-day Tasman Highway and Fingerpost Road to Richmond, near the foot of the hills that 'Black Charlies Opening' passes over. The term Black Charlies Opening was first recorded by George Augustus Robinson in his journal on 16 January 1831. He noted that it was called TRAN.MARROINE.MEN.YER by the 'Oyster Bay natives' and that Black Charlie had a farm on the plain below. Black Charlie was probably Charles Antonio/Antony, a settler of Indian heritage who settled in the area in the early 1810s.[8]

Traffic coming from Richmond, which would have been the main route until the Sorell causeways were opened in the 1870s, would have used the road now called Prossers Road, but which probably was originally known as the 'road to Prossers Plains'. Travellers would have turned on to a road

no longer extant which ran to the south of the present Fingerpost Road, heading east across the top of a grant to William Parramore, intersecting the road from Orielton about where the Fingerpost Road joins today.[9]

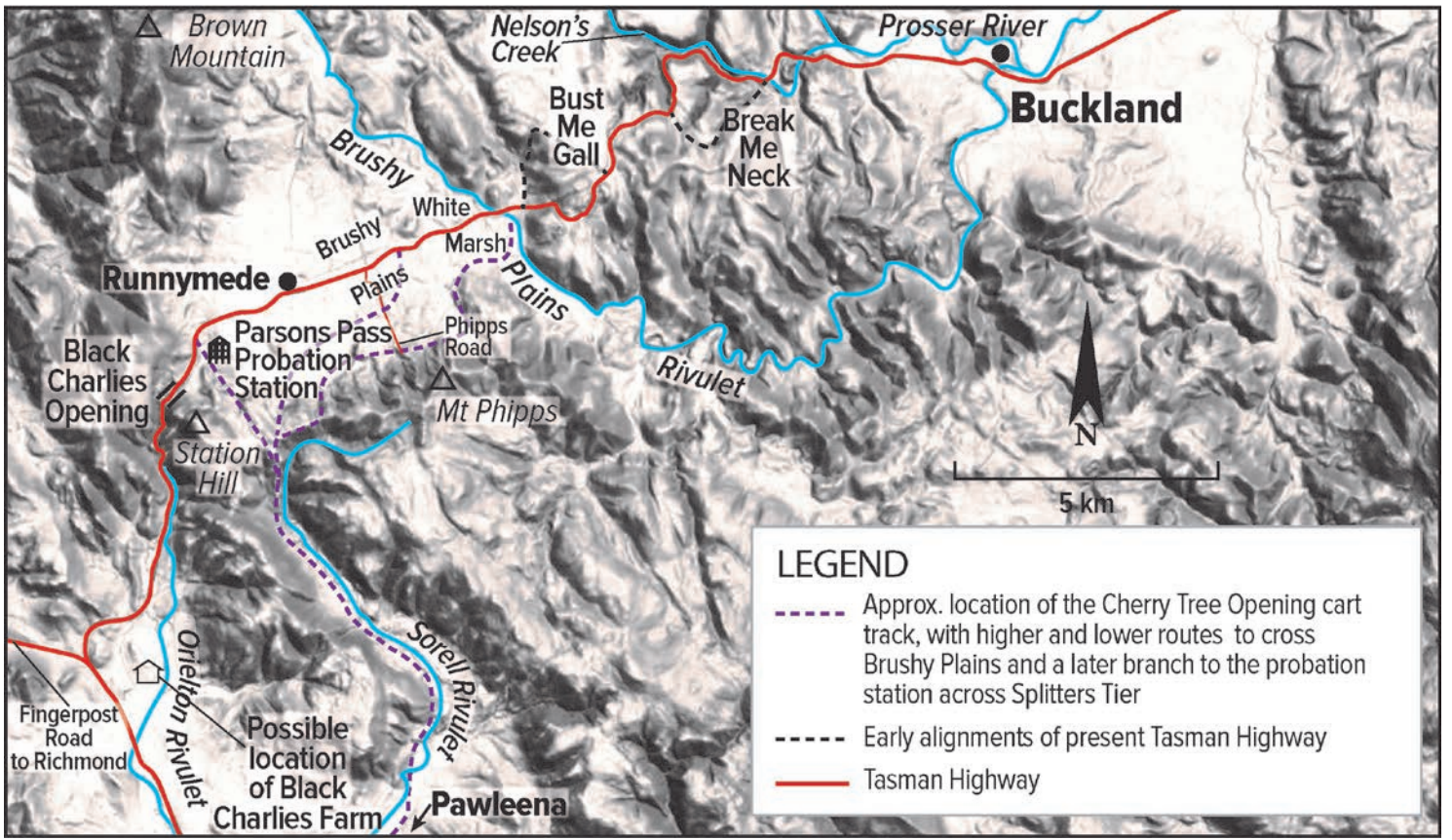
Onwards from Black Charlies Opening, on several journeys Private McNally described traversing a very wet and boggy stretch of what is now the Runnymede area through to White Marsh and Brushy Plains Rivulet. A map showing these localities is given on page 33. From there, McNally's detachment went on to Prossers Plains, either over the 'Burst my Gall' (later, Bust me Gall) and 'Break my Neck' (Break me Neck) hills or down the lower but still rugged Brushy Plains Rivulet (he does not indicate which). Their onward journey to Spring Bay is described in the next section. Surveyor James Erskine Calder attributed the names 'Burst my Gall' and 'Break Neck' hills to early Swan Port settler John de Courcy 'Paddy' Harte.[10] Could he have named Black Charlies Opening, as well?

From the early 1820s, settlers, 'messengers' and convicts at Great Swan Port rode or walked south via the coast and then cross country from Spring Bay to Prossers Plains as described below, and George Meredith and Harte then went via 'Black Charley' or 'Black Charles' then from 1826 through to Richmond or Sorell.[11]

That year, the Land Commissioners travelled through Orielton, staying the night 'near the creek' and later 'went along the road to Oyster Bay into Brushy Plains nearly inaccessible and very steep'.[12] This is consistent with a stay at Black Charlies before continuing up the Orielton Rivulet through the Opening. The top of the Orielton Rivulet was rugged enough to conceal bushrangers – the Brady gang were reported to have been seen in 'Black Charleys Gully' prior to their raid on Sorell in late 1825.[13]

From Pittwater, an alternative to following the Orielton Rivulet up to Black Charlies Opening was to follow the adjacent Sorell Rivulet northwards past Cherry Tree Opening (Pawleena), then over the hills to the west of Mount Phipps (map page 33). From there to get to the east coast, travellers probably kept to the higher ground heading eastwards, avoiding the Brushy Plains marshes, as indicated by a sketch by surveyor Thomas Scott for the Black Line operations in November 1830.[14] This track was evidently taken by a newspaper correspondent in 1856, who wrote that there was thick forest between the two openings and many tracks

Opposite: Topographic map showing principal features in the Orielton to Buckland area mentioned in the text. Original map by Diane Bricknell,© Malcolm Ward. Base map of topography defined by LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) is reproduced with permission of the Land Division, Department of Primary industries, © State of Tasmania.


Brown Mountain
Nelson's Creek
Prosser River
Buckland
Bust Me Gall
Break Me Neck
Brushy
White Marsh Plains
Brushy Plains
Runnymede
Parsons Pass Probation Station
Phipps Road
Mt Phipps
Rivulet
Black Charlies Opening
Station Hill
N
5 km
LEGEND
Approx. location of the Cherry Tree Opening cart track, with higher and lower routes to cross Brushy Plains and a later branch to the probation station across Splitters Tier
Early alignments of present Tasman Highway
Tasman Highway
Sorell Rivulet
Orielton Rivulet
Fingerpost Road to Richmond
Possible location of Black Charlies Farm
Pawleena

for logging operations. Onwards towards White Marsh, the writer came across the former Travellers Rest Hotel, kept by Isaac Bumford, and this may have been a later stopping place after Black Charlies. One track from Cherry Tree Opening probably also went straight down from the hills to the properties at Brushy Plains and across the plains.[15] No trace of these latter ways remains today at Brushy Plains, and it is likely that the track from Cherry Tree Opening was modified to join up with what is now Phipps Road, which joins the Tasman Highway east of Runnymede (map page 33).

Quaker missionary James Backhouse travelled to Great Swan Port via Brushy Plains several times in the 1830s. In 1833 when travelling from Richmond he wrote:

> W.T. Parramore [who had land just west of Black Charlies farm] furnished us with a guide, who took us through among the woody hills, by a narrow winding track, called Black Charleys Opening, to the Brushy Plains; where the path joined the cart track from Sorell Town.[16]

The 'cart track' from Sorell was probably the route via Pawleena and Cherry Tree Opening, which Backhouse used the following year: 'We pursued our way through the long and dreary Cherry-tree Opening, over the Brushy Plains, the White Marsh, and Burst-my-gall Hill, to Prossers Plains'.[17]

So, in the 1830s there were two ways to climb up to Brushy Plains, then several more routes once you reached the top. The way via Black Charlies Opening probably became the dominant one because it took traffic from Richmond as well as Pittwater, plus the climb via Cherry Tree Opening was slightly higher. The tracks would have also been used by timber-getters, and at some stage one was formed from the Cherry Tree Opening track to the future location of the Parsons Pass Probation Station across 'Splitters Tier'. A rough track also existed from Sorell to Buckland via the 'Carlton Scrub' (Nugent) by 1842.[18]

Going further east from White Marsh and across Brushy Plains Rivulet, the 'old road' climbed Burst my Gall Hill, curling around it to the north (opposite to the present alignment) and re-joining the present alignment at Stringy Bark Bottom (map page 33). The road then went south of Break me Neck Hill and rejoined the present alignment near where it crosses Nelsons Creek west of Buckland. A track following this route is still marked on maps today. The 1856 newspaper correspondent took this route, noting a 'tremendous deep ravine, and if the traveller

The road up to Black Charlies Opening during a phase of improvements in 1934 (*Photographer W.J. Rowlands, Rowlands family collection*)

makes a false step, he may be precipitated hundreds of feet over rocks and huge blocks of stones'.[19] This was probably at Nelsons Creek as marked on Wedge's 1867 plan (see below).

In 1867, surveyor Robert Robinson examined both the possible routes between White Marsh and Prossers Plains and estimated the respective costs.[20] He reported that an alignment close to the 'present road' (over the hills) was the most practicable, and cheapest, as it avoided a number of bridges needed over the Brushy Plains Rivulet.[21] Later in 1867, surveyor John Helder Wedge drew a plan showing a detailed alignment of a road over the hills between White Marsh and Prossers Plains, as mentioned above. This is close to the present alignment of the Tasman Highway.[22]

Early settlement of Brushy Plains and the Parsons Pass Probation Station

Brushy Plains was renowned as being a wet, foggy and boggy place. The early routes from the valleys below probably went eastwards along its southern edge to avoid thick vegetation, bogs and leeches, but clearly tracks also went through the bogs, as Private McNally's detachment traversed them several times around 1825. He wrote (with some licence) 'march through Brushy Plains to our middle in water for seven miles …' and he also complained about the leeches.[23] The Land Commissioners described it in 1826 as 'embosomed by Hills, very marshy & difficult to pass over – it is thickly covered with long coarse grass & brushwood'. During October and November of 1830, soldier and settler members of the Black Line proceeded through Brushy Plains on their way to Sorell.[24]

In September 1831, Samuel Robinson Dawson placed a newspaper advertisement cautioning the public against trespassing on his grant of 2560 acres at Brushy Plains, which is the first known European settlement in the immediate area.[25] Dawson continued to reside at his Claremont Estate at Clarence Plains, leaving his servants to work at his new Brushy Plains farm. This included cutting 'a large drain, full two miles in length' to drain a bog. Dawson sold the farm to George Bilton in 1837, but Bilton was soon heading towards insolvency and in 1840 sold the Brushy Plains farm to Charles Octavius Parsons.[26] Parsons purchased more nearby land and made 'great improvements with borrowed money which alarmed his friends'.[27] What had become known as Black Charlies Opening also became known as Parsons Pass. In 1842, Parsons became a Road Commissioner for Buckland, and he recommended a new road be built from Parsons Pass/Black Charlies Opening to Prossers Plains (Buckland). James Calder undertook a survey of the possible route and handed in his report during June 1844.[28]

Meanwhile, the continued difficulties of transporting supplies and farm produce up or down the steep slopes crowned by Black Charlies Opening would have hampered Parsons' farm operations – at one stage he owned farms at Sorell and Orielton, plus Camden on the Fingerpost Road to Richmond, in addition to owning Brushy Plains. Possibly at his request, early in 1843 the Parsons Pass Probation Station was set up near the top of Black Charlies Opening.[29] According to landowners in the area, remnants of the old station remained until recently, located on the south-eastern side of the Tasman Highway, on the northern slopes of Station Hill. A small farm dam marks the location today.

The probationers at the Parsons Pass Probation Station would have been employed building the road but they also cut timber and made bricks. Some of the men could well have been used to construct Parsons' 'mansion' and its outbuildings.[30] By June 1844, Parsons was in financial difficulty and needed to start selling his farm holdings. This led to the closure of Parsons Pass Probation Station 'and the materials either sold or carried, as they lately were from Parsons Pass, a distance of fourteen miles, on men's shoulders' to Prossers Plains.[31]

The new owner of the farm, by now known as the Runnymede Estate, was Askin Morrison, an influential businessman, shipping merchant and whaling ship owner of Hobart. Once again road and transport difficulties needed to be addressed so, at Morrison's request, the Parsons Pass Probation Station was re-established at its previous site in December 1845, with Morrison contributing to the funding. He employed as many as ninety probationers at sixpence each per day, and much roadwork,

Morrison's flour mill at Runnymede; undated but about the early 1920s (*Rowlands family photograph*)

farm-work and building construction was achieved during the three-year life of the new station.[32]

Between 1846 and 1849 Morrison built a large, steam-powered flour mill to grind the wheat from the district. At least 21 small-acreage farmers were operating under his tenant farming system. Boom times after the Victorian gold discoveries meant prosperous times in Brushy Plains/Runnymede. Morrison, mostly at his own expense, instigated extensive new road construction and repairs that benefitted other farmers in the district and travellers from Orielton to Prosser's Plains and beyond.[33] Morrison sold the Runnymede Estate farm to fellow ship owner William Crosby in 1875.[34]

Prossers Plains (Buckland) to Spring Bay (Orford) Earliest routes

According to George Augustus Robinson, the area today known as Buckland, formerly Prossers Plains, was called LOETH.MAR.RER by the local LAIR.MAIR.RE.ME.NER and PY.EN.DAY.MAIR.RE.ME.NER people. They crossed the Prosser River or LEE.ER.MANG.EN.ER MEN.NAN.YER downstream via the bar at its mouth. Robinson referred to a 'native road' or MARKENNER in the area, 'about a mile [from the crossing place] on the opposite side through a valley'.[35] This location is difficult to place; Calder put the MARKENNER along the Prosser River upstream to its source, then joining with a 'road' along the Coal River Valley, one of his 'great highways' used by the Mairremmener people.[36]

Europeans may have first arrived in the area of present-day Buckland as early as the first decade of settlement. Thomas Prosser, an escapee from Port Dalrymple in 1808, was reputed to have been captured in the area following which several features in the area took his name (see box).[37] No contemporary reports of this capture or where it occurred have been found. Bushrangers John McCabe and John Townshend were captured in 1813 at 'Prossers Plains' where some huts had been erected, so the name was certainly established early.[38]

Henry Rice was sent by Lieutenant-Governor William Sorell to examine the east coast region in 1819.[39] At Prossers Plains, Rice encountered conditions that would continue to impede overland access to the coast for decades to come. Going eastwards from Brushy Plains, he found the Prosser River at first impossible to cross due to recent rains. After a few days he managed to cross over to the north side and found variable quality land, cut by several small rivers. He re-crossed the Prosser and continued eastwards over the hills to the coast, south of present-day Orford. Finding the Prosser River still high and unable to be forded at its mouth, he explored further to the south before returning to the river, going upstream to the 'falls' and wading across with difficulty. From there he continued northwards along the coast. These falls became known as the First Crossing.

In 1820 ex-convicts Stines and Troy had their licence for a 'grazing occupation' between Prossers Plains and Oyster Bay renewed but it is not known if they actually occupied any of the area or how they got there.[40] The first documented European exploration of the lower Prosser River was by George Meredith on 9 April 1821 on his first voyage from Hobart Town to Great Swan Port by whale boat. Looking for a navigable route to 'the interior', he rowed or sailed up the river until the way was barred by rocks (the First Crossing) and continued on foot for some kilometres, noting that beyond the first barrier, the river consisted of numerous pools, rocks and stream segments. He turned back at about the point which later became known as the 'Fourth Crossing'.[41]

Routes in the 1820s and 1830s

Late in 1821, Lieutenant-Governor William Sorell sent Deputy Surveyor-General George Evans with a party, including Thomas Scott, to look at the practicality of building a road from Hobart Town to Great Swan Port to facilitate the new settlement there. Scott produced a drawing extending from the Prosser to Rocky Hills north of Little Swan Port and a sketch of the party crossing the Prosser at its mouth, which is best reproduced on the cover of Suzanne Lester's book 'Spring Bay Tasmania'.[42]

In a report in 1824 to the incoming Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur, Sorell noted that he had abandoned the idea of building a road as there were still relatively few people at Great Swan Port, and it was difficult following the Prosser River in particular. Sorell had encouraged the settlers to look at a line of road from Swan Port to Jericho in the Midlands and this way, via the 'Eastern Marshes', was used for a number of years, as noted above.[43]

Who was Prosser?

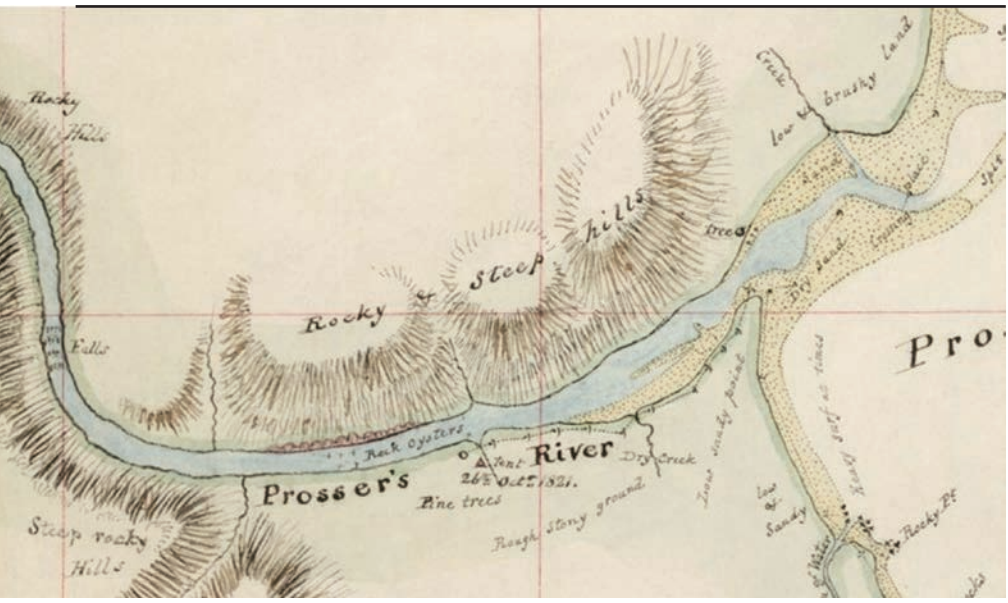
PROSSERS PLAINS and the Prosser River (formerly Prossers River) were most likely named after Thomas Prosser, who was born in Cork in 1774 and trained as a linen and cotton printer. He was a member of the Irish rebellion and in 1798 was tried, convicted and transported in the *Minerva* to Sydney, sailing from Cork in August 1799. Those on the *Minerva* joined other Irish prisoners in the colony as a substantial bloc and this caused unease in the authorities. With good reason – the Irish soon began planning an escape, with weapons. The leaders and some others, including Thomas Prosser, were rounded up in 1802 and sent to Norfolk Island.

Back in Sydney in 1807, Prosser led some others in escaping in a boat, intending to board a ship heading to Madras. Captured and tried, Prosser initially escaped conviction, but Governor Bligh intervened and ordered a retrial, whereupon Prosser was convicted and sent to Port Dalrymple, Van Diemen's Land.

In February 1808, Prosser and eight others were reported as having escaped from Port Dalrymple. No reports of his subsequent capture have been found, but stories in a number of books place his capture at the river which now apparently bears his name. Prossers Plains was first mentioned in a surviving newspaper report in 1813, so it was obviously an early name and may well have been named after the convict from Ireland.

Thomas Prosser apparently returned to Sydney by about 1811 and received an absolute pardon in 1812. Reports of Thomas Prosser continuing in Van Diemen's Land after this date may refer to one or both of other convicts of that name who arrived at Port Dalrymple on the *Emu* in 1815.

SOURCES:
A.M. Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution*, Darlinghurst, 1994, pp. 64-149, 212.
Convict Department, *Assignment Lists and associated Papers*, CON13/1/1, p. 46, TA.
HRA III, Vol I, p. 562.
Sydney Gazette, 15 Jan, 15, 22 February, 29 March 1807, 16 January 1813.



Lower reaches of the Prosser River, portion of a plan produced by Thomas Scott from an 1821 expedition. Note, at right, the 'crossing place' at the mouth of the river which was used by both the Tasmanian aboriginal people and early European travellers; at left, the 'Falls', which became the First Crossing point, and the rock oysters in the middle which were later put under lease by Louisa Anne Meredith (*Survey of a part of the E. coast, Van Diemens Land, 1821*, SLNSW FL3723745, State Library of New South Wales)

Private Robert McNally and his detachment, walking to Great Swan Port from Pittwater in 1825, appear to have followed the Prosser River east from Prossers Plains until about the Thumbs Marsh. At this point, rather than progressing down the Prosser River gorge, they ascended the hills eastwards to the coast, perhaps even straying through the rugged 'Three Thumbs' area, before heading north again, and crossing the Prosser at some point, presumably at its mouth.[44]

Thomas Scott produced several maps of Van Diemen's land during the 1820s. One published in 1826 shows a bridle path on the southern side of the river from Prossers Plains to Prossers Bay (Spring Bay). At the scale of the map, it is difficult to tell precisely, but it appears to roughly follow McNally's route over the hills – though towards the end, it went more directly to the coast.[45]

Another sketch produced by Scott for the 1830 'Black War' campaign shows the track in slightly more detail, following the Prosser River out of Buckland as far as Thumbs Marsh, ascending the ridge easterly to near the prominence called Donkey Track Point and following a ridge to near Shed Hill, before descending to Prossers Bay close to Orford Rivulet.[46] LIDAR shows a track following this route today.

Thus, through the 1820s, foot and horse traffic mainly avoided the gorge which marked the final few kilometres of the Prosser River's course and instead crossed high ground to its south. This required the river to be forded at its mouth, an uncertain proposition during the rainy months. George Augustus Robinson passed through the area in January and March 1831 and seems to have followed the river all the way, probably using the Indigenous MARKENNER referred to above. Approaching first from the north, he walked along the north side of the Prosser for about '4 miles' (6.5 kilometres) and then crossed at a ford with some adjacent cliffs. Based on the distance, this would correlate with what was later known as either the Third or Fourth Crossing. All along the Prosser River, Robinson noted the presence of huts, left over from the October 1830 'operations against the aborigines'.[47]

In the 1830s, traffic generally used Robinson's route in following the Prosser River, rather than going over the hills, although in 1832 George Meredith was forced to go from Great Swan Port to Hobart Town via St Paul's Plains to his north, as he had heard that the Prosser River was 'impassable for horses'.[48]

The rugged gorge encountered at the lower reaches of the Prosser River had been given the name 'Paradise' in a 'contrarian' way, as described by James Backhouse when he visited in 1833:

A sketch drawn by Thomas Scott for the 'Black Line' campaign. Buckland is in the middle left (Cruttenden and Olding's properties) and a track is shown going east and following the south bank of the Prosser River until it ascends the hills, avoiding the gorge on the lower reaches of the river (Portion of *Thomas Scott – papers connected with the campaign after the Natives, Sept. – Nov. 1830*, SLNSW, A 1055/2 image 119 of the on-line presentation of this work)

> [Exiting Prossers Plains] we crossed the Thumbs Marsh, a grassy opening under the Three Thumbs Mountain, and met our friend Francis Cotton, who proved a most welcome guide in passing through the rugged, woody, ravine of the Prossers River, which is ironically called Paradise. We forded the River, at a rocky place, and travelled along the side of some very rough, steep hills, called the Devils Royals, to the sandy beach of Prossers Bay, on which there were the skeletons of two whales.[49]

This crossing from the south to the north bank is likely to be at the location later called the First Crossing, or The Falls, which ends the navigable part of the Prosser River, as found by George Meredith. Melville described the route the same year when it was earning some notoriety:

> [From Prossers Plains] continue along the southern bank of the river, including two miles of the worst tract of road in the Colony, and which by way of contrariety it is presumed, is called Paradise. Cross the river at a very inconvenient ford [the First Crossing]. The road continues along the northern bank of the river for one mile, called the Devil's Royals, a continuation of Paradise; and for this mile, the river may be considered navigable for a vessel under twenty tons.[50]

The description of the lower part of the gorge, marked by numerous pillars of dolerite rock as the 'Devil's Royals' is curious. Devil's Royals was the nickname given to the 50th (Queen's Own) Regiment of Foot, and it might easily be imagined that the dolerite stone pillars in the gorge were named as an allusion to its soldiers. However, the 50th did not arrive in Van Diemen's Land until 1834, so a direct connection cannot be made.[51] The Nomenclature Board card file at Tasmanian Archives has an unsourced note that Francis Cotton gave the name, while colonial surveyor James Erskine Calder credited early east coast settler John Harte as naming both 'Paradise' and 'Devil's Royals', describing them as '[two of the] silly names that disgrace our maps of the east coast'.[52]

Theophilus Jones in his 'Through Tasmania' series in the 1880s had a more romantic but still martial view of the features:

> It is for the most part picturesque to wildness, columnar sections of rock standing in courses, decreasing in size toward the top. ... Very little imagination would take one back to the times of the Plantagenets, and transform these weird combinations into

bastions, turrets and battlements of a castle with chimneys and watch towers overlooking the walls.[53]

The 'road' through Paradise and the Devil's Royals continued to be a challenge through the 1830s and Lady Franklin could not get through on her tandem gig in 1840.[54] In 1842, Prossers Plains settlers such as Grueber, Cruttenden and Simpson agitated by letter and petition for a road to be built by convicts through to the coast, capable of taking wheeled appliances and presumably, their produce to a vessel to market.[55]

At this time, many on foot and horse still travelled to the southern side of the entrance of the Prosser, where a ferry operated across the mouth during at least the early 1840s, approximately between where the current Orford boat ramp is and the end of Gore Street on the other side. George Banning held the contract in 1843 to carry government officials over the river and this was extended into 1844. Then the government purchased a boat, for a 'considerable saving' over the contract price.[56]

Planning a road using probation stations

In December 1842, Surveyor-General Robert Power wrote to his deputy, James Erskine Calder, instructing him to meet Thomas Cruttenden to consider a line of road from Prossers Plains out to the coast. Calder did his initial survey in the summer of 1842-43 and wrote to Power explaining the line he had chosen, which was entirely on the west and north side of the Prosser River from Buckland to Spring Bay, despite that route needing to cross several small tributaries of the Prosser just east of Buckland (Calder suggested bridges) and to navigate around or over several stretches of rocky cliffs. One of these cliffy areas he described as being 'very bad' and are assumed to be the cliffs near the junction of the Prosser with Burnt Bridge Gully.[57] In this letter, Calder called Paradise 'this abominable place' and years later he wrote of 'the hateful 'Paradise' of Prossers Plains'.[58] In spite of the rivers to be crossed, the cliffs to be navigated and the 'precipices' along the way, Calder thought that a 'good practical road should be formed'.

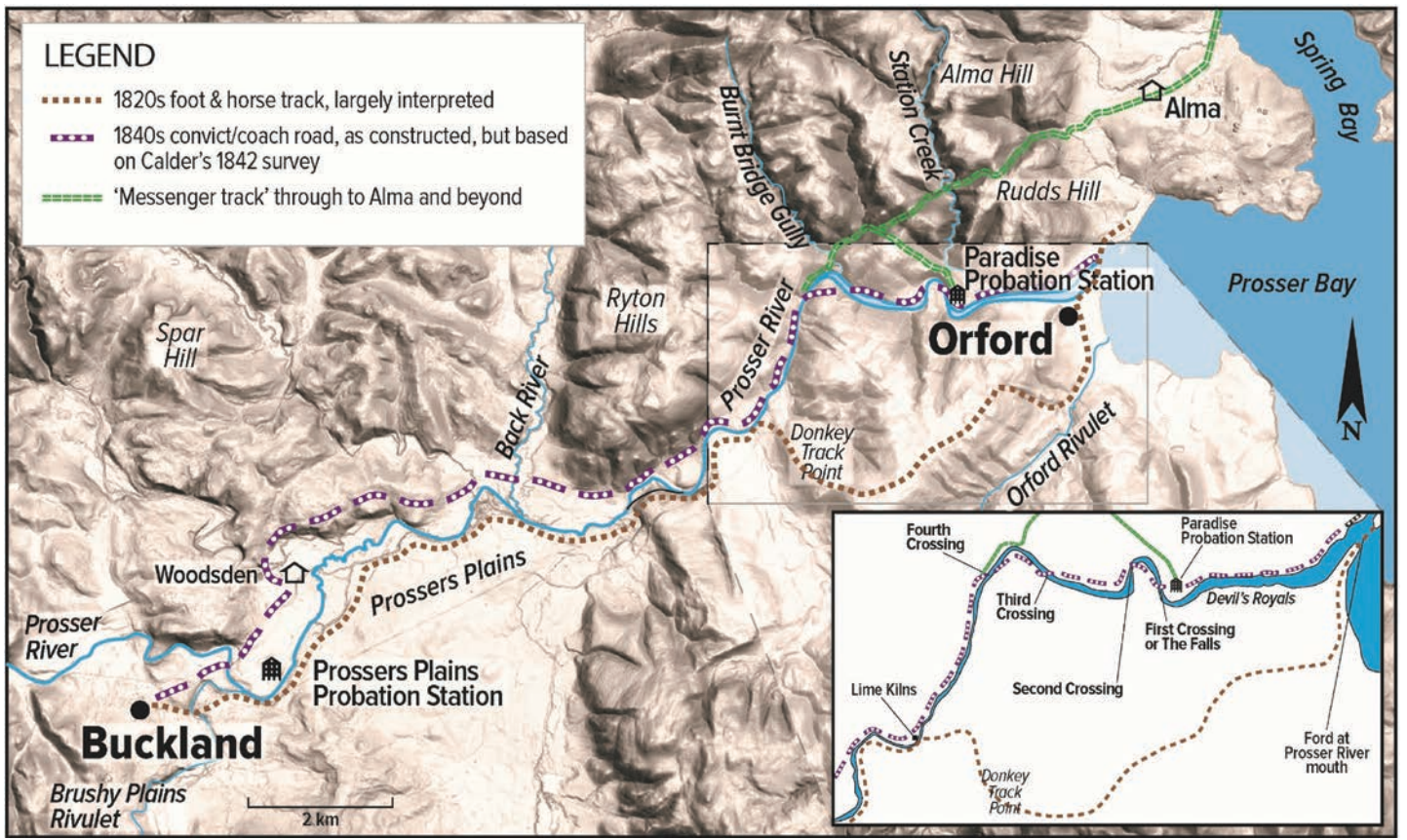
One of the reasons why Calder went to the west and north of the river may have been that limestone had been discovered a mile or so north-east of the Brockley homestead in 1841. James Rawlings asked to be able to work the lime and enable a better quality of mortar to be produced for buildings.[59] By 1843 several lime kilns were in operation (map page 45).[60] Calder's main reason, however, was likely to avoid any crossing of the Prosser below Buckland and to have a 'year round' route to the north.

Calder's route was not met with general approval. In May 1843, 27 residents of Prossers Plains, who had properties on the south side, petitioned Lieutenant-Governor Franklin to have the new road constructed on that side, rather than the way Calder had marked out.[61] Franklin referred them to the Road Commissioners but no change was made.[62] Arguments between those on the north and those on the south continued until a bridge crossed the Prosser near its mouth some twenty years later.

A probation station to house men to build Calder's road was relocated from Parsons Pass to the north bank of the Prosser during 1843. It was sited east of Buckland near the road to Woodsden, which was established by Thomas Cruttenden after he settled in the district in 1824.[63] By December 1843, the probation station was almost completed, with a new forge about to be finished, but lacking a smithy. Similarly, the hospital was almost ready, but no bedding or clothing had been received and six cells were completed, but had no padlocks. The road east to Spring Bay had been cleared for five miles (about 8km) – about to just past Brockley – and partially formed, while the road back to Richmond had only progressed one mile.[64] The following year, the numbers at the probation station had grown from 98 to 245 and included a storekeeper, a medical officer, a superintendent and several overseers.[65]

The Buckland probation station soon ran into difficulties. A visiting Magistrate in March 1844 described it as 'very bad' and suggested its cessation.[66] Later that year the station was demolished, including the wooden quarters of Assistant Superintendent Evans, which was taken down and the components taken to Paradise to shelter the wives of the officers there.[67] Some men remained at Buckland but after reports of insubordination at the new station on the Prosser River (Paradise) in January 1845, it was recommended that all personnel remaining at Buckland be removed to Paradise to consolidate the effort in the one place, and it appears that this occurred around February 1845.[68] Although some documents indicate that the station was still in use in some way later in 1845 or 1846, Brand put its span as only 1843-44.[69] In 1990 the site consisted only of scattered bricks and stones.[70]

Opposite: Topographic map of the area between Buckland and Spring Bay, showing the approximate original foot route, the 1840s convict/coach road as built and the messenger track. Locations of the four crossings of the Prosser River shown in the inset. Original map by Diane Bricknell, © Malcolm Ward. Base map of topography defined by LIDAR is reproduced with permission of the Land Division, Department of Primary industries, © State of Tasmania.


LEGEND
1820s foot & horse track, largely interpreted
1840s convict/coach road, as constructed, but based on Calder's 1842 survey
'Messenger track' through to Alma and beyond
Alma Hill
Alma
Spring Bay
Station Creek
Burnt Bridge Gully
Rudds Hill
Paradise Probation Station
Prosser Bay
Orford
Ryton Hills
Spar Hill
Back River
Prosser River
Donkey Track Point
Orford Rivulet
N
Woodsden
Prossers Plains
Prosser River
Prossers Plains Probation Station
Buckland
Brushy Plains Rivulet
2 km
Fourth Crossing
Paradise Probation Station
Third Crossing
Devil's Royals
First Crossing or The Falls
Lime Kilns
Second Crossing
Ford at Prosser River mouth
Donkey Track Point

In respect of the new station at Paradise, two sites on the north side of the river were considered within the gorge, one near the centre of the area being worked and the other close to the First Crossing, which had the advantage that it could be serviced by water.[71] After Calder was consulted, the latter site was chosen and huts were constructed over the winter of 1844. Masonry arrived, carried downstream by Joseph Carter in his oyster boat.[72] The new station was built over the summer and autumn of 1844-45 and from April a meat tender was called to supply it.[73] The remains of twelve narrow stone cells and other ruins remain today, but the site has been disturbed by souvenir hunters and both overhead power line pylons and the laying of water pipes have impacted close by.

The housing of a probation party at the first crossing at Paradise to construct a road was first suggested by Spring Bay Commissioner George Rudd in 1843, who noted that Calder's line was suitable, except for a portion at 'the Royals' that would need blasting. The lieutenant-governor declined this suggestion.[74] The date the Paradise probation station was de-commissioned is not known but it seems to have only had a brief life, probably closing by 1848. It was not mentioned in La Trobe's report of May 1847.[75]

The road route Prossers Plains to Spring Bay

Did the constructed road follow Calder's route along the north bank of the Prosser? It appears not entirely. A LIDAR survey covering the Prosser River looks through vegetation and loose soil, and the 1840s road shows quite clearly. From the vicinity of the Buckland probation station, it climbs along the side of the ridge behind Woodsden homestead and then down to the river flats where it crossed the Sand and Back rivers. A number of small cottage ruins exist on or close to the Prosser just downstream from Woodsden. The road then passes immediately behind Brockley homestead, built in 1842 by Stephen Gruber,[76] then follows along the west river-bank, passing the lime kilns and lime burner's cottage, just south-west and opposite of where Black Bridge Gully joins the Prosser.

After continuing northwards along the west side of the Prosser and approaching Burnt Bridge Gully (opposite to where the Tasman Highway takes a 90-degree bend to the east), the road builders abandoned Calder's line and forded the river to the eastern side at what became known as the Fourth Crossing. A branch of the road continued northwards on the west side over Burnt Bridge Gully and went north-east around the back of the hills away from the Prosser River to Alma homestead, on the way to Triabunna. This was the 'messenger' track used by men who shuttled

between Great Oyster Bay and Hobart Town carrying letters and parcels before any formal post service existed.[77] From Waterloo Point (Swansea) to Spring Bay took about two and a half days, and from Spring Bay to Richmond about a day and a half.[78] A branch descended from the 'Alma track' downhill south-east along the ridge crest to the Paradise probation station.

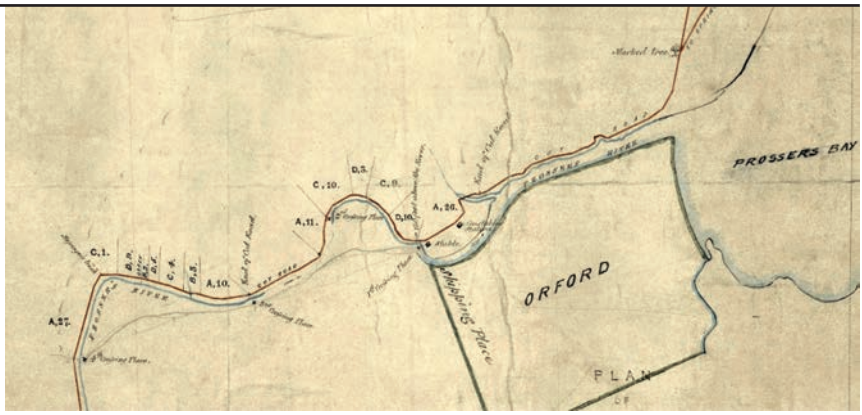
Having forded the river at the Fourth Crossing, the convict road came up the east side bank where a well-constructed but much overgrown convict road is still present. It then turned a 90-degree bend more-or-less underneath the present-day Tasman Highway opposite Burnt Bridge Gully.

LIDAR indicates that after just a short distance, the road descended back down to the Prosser River and forded it at what became known as the Third Crossing, which is now under the impoundment behind the Lower Prosser Dam. Today, the track re-emerges out of the water on the north side as a well-constructed colonial road.

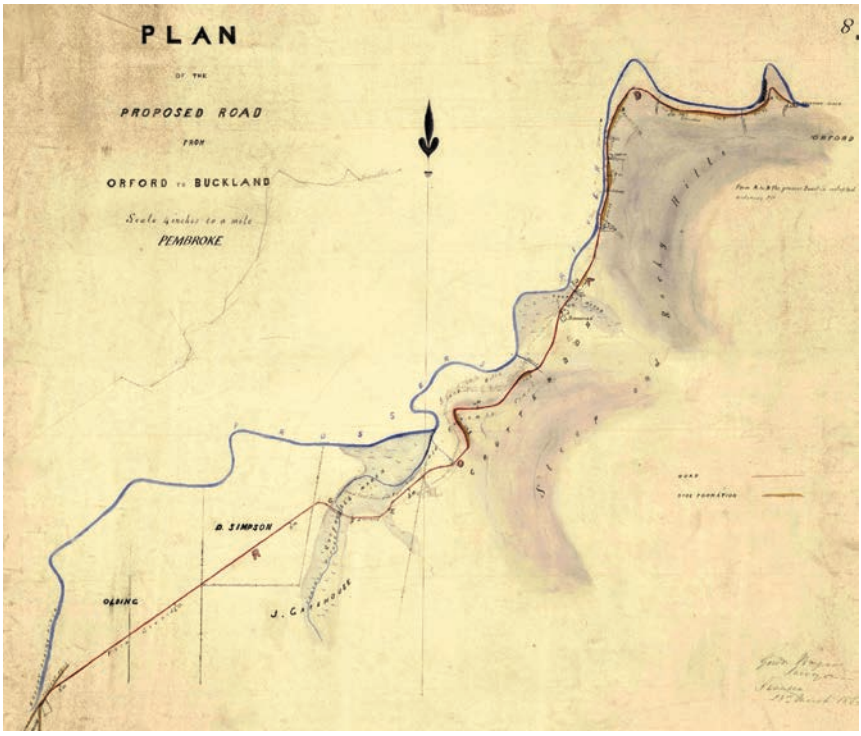
The road continues along the north bank of the Prosser River until re-crossing to the south side at a point known as the Second Crossing, at the top of a horseshoe bend in the Prosser (just below the dam today), and re-crosses to the north about 400m on, at the First Crossing, also known as The Falls, and later the Devils Royals ford. Immediately over the First Crossing was the Paradise Probation Station, and a well-formed

Downstream side of a culvert on the hill behind Woodsden. The two early buttresses indicate that the quality of engineering was not high (Malcolm Ward)

Convict road on the south bank of the Prosser, almost opposite Burnt Bridge Gully (Malcolm Ward)



An undated plan, presumably from the 1860s, showing in grey pencil the proposed new road works on the south side of the Prosser River from the '4th crossing' on the left to the '1st crossing' in the middle of the map. This work was undertaken by Solomon Green in 1863. It is interesting in that this map shows, in red, a line of road from 'C1' (Burnt Bridge Gully) to 'A10' on the north side, which never existed, as far as can be told. Note also the 'messenger's track' at C1 at the left that leads to Alma and Spring Bay, bypassing Orford. (Lands and Surveys Department, Map – Pembroke Roads 6 – plan of proposed inprovements [sic] in the line of road leading from Spring Bay to Hobart Town incl Prossers River, Prossers Bay and Orford, AF398/1/349, TA)



1865 plan of the proposed line of road down the Prosser River from Buckland as far as the 'first crossing', entirely on the east and south side. (Lands and Surveys Department, Map – Pembroke Roads 8 – plan of proposed road from Orford to Buckland incl Brushy River, Prossers River, incl various landholders, surveyor G Burgess, AF398/1/351, TA)

'convict' road still exists from there, over Station Creek for about 1.3km to the Tasman Highway, as described by Melville, above.

Features on the convict road

Today, a number of interesting and so far well-preserved features can be found along the old road. It is evident that the greatest effort was made in the initial year(s) at the Buckland end, where several well-constructed culverts and several drains survive between Woodsden and the Back River.

The first culvert after Woodsden consists of about ten courses of ashlar sandstone over and around a lined drain of about 1m across and 1.5m high. The outer wall is in good condition on the upstream side, but has started to fall apart on the downstream side due to tree roots and some obvious poor engineering. Two crude, early buttresses support the wall which is nevertheless bowing out.

A short distance along the road towards Brockley is a covered and lined drain approximately 15cm square which lies at an angle to the road. Further along towards Brockley is the second culvert, almost invisible from the road. The upstream side is marked by just a row of stones at the track's edge, which appear to outline a drain like the last. On the downstream side, however, about fifteen courses of sandstone blocks support the road and the culvert on a steep rocky slope. The rows of blocks step slightly out for the first seven courses from the top, and then the structure is straight, although several failures have occurred. The drain is approximately 0.75m square.

Further on within a pine forest is a second covered drain, with the up-stream side lined by stones but uncovered for at least ten metres. A bulldozer constructing a small nearby dam disturbed some of the cover stones in the 1990s, according to the landholder.

Where the old road approaches the Sand River from the west stand the ruins of a two-room cottage occupied by the Raspin family. The building was constructed of flags and boulders of sandstone, with ashlar blocks lining the openings, quoins on the corners and occasionally incorporated into the walls. The fireplace on the south side is also framed with sandstone ashlar blocks with bricks behind. The chimney still stands, supported by some wire and a wall in the shape of the gable-ended roof it originally supported. What appear to be buttresses on the west side have failed to support that wall. A stand-alone bread oven of sandstone flags and some carved blocks stand about 1.2m high about 10m from the cottage and may have originally been within a separate wooden kitchen structure.

Upstream side of the culvert (Malcolm Ward)

Downstream side of the second culvert between Woodsden and Brockley. It is almost unable to be seen from the track level (Malcolm Ward)

Upgrades to the road

The main route down the Prosser with its four crossings apparently continued in that arrangement through to the 1860s, although when the Prosser was up, any of the four crossing points would have been problematical.[79] A flood in 1854 damaged the constructed road.[80] In 1863 and 1864, the warden of the Spring Bay Council asked that the 'messenger track' from Burnt Bridge Gully to Alma and Triabunna, which avoided all the Prosser crossings, be proclaimed a public road. Although colonial treasurer Charles Meredith finally agreed, it appears not to have made any difference to the state of the route, which remains a formed track like the 'convict road'.[81]

In 1863, Solomon Green worked to build a road on the south side of the Prosser River from the first to the fourth crossings, eliminating two crossings of the river.[82] About the same time, a bridge began to be talked about near the mouth of the Prosser, which would require a further extension of the road along its southern bank, through the steepest part of the gorge. John Mace of Woodsden on the north side wanted none of that and raised a petition for the upgraded road to be kept on the north side.[83] He was unsuccessful.

A causeway through Gatehouse's marsh east of Buckland was built in 1865, and the same year, a tender to push the entire road on the east and south side through to Orford was awarded.[84]

Over about 700m north of Black Bridge Gully a constructed terrace can be found intermittently immediately up-slope of the current Tasman Highway.[85] Its origin is uncertain, but may have been one of the early tracks to the gorge on this side of the river.

The 'messenger track' uphill from Burnt Bridge Gully, heading towards Alma (Malcolm Ward)

The road through the Paradise Gorge in 1880. Note the lack of the drystone wall on the river side that exists today, demonstrating that the wall was not 'convict built'. In fact, the road and retaining wall down to the river were reconstructed in the late 1920s, resulting in new walling and widening of the road, mostly via cutting-out of the embankment toe on its inside.[86] The rocky outcrop in the centre left was partially removed in 2021 when it became unsafe. (*View of the road near the Orford property Paradise*, PH30/1/4107, TA)

A new timber bridge over the Prosser River to meet the south-side road was opened in December 1866 and was named after the colonial treasurer of the time, Charles Meredith.[87] Earlier, Charles had spotted an opportunity, and purchased five town blocks facing the south side of the Prosser, up to what became Charles Street, where the new bridge joined.[88] Charles and Louisa-Anne Meredith built a house there called Malunnah, finished in 1868.[89]

Conclusion

Although the Tasmanian Aboriginal people had traversed the land for millennia, the severe topography of the country between Orielton and Spring Bay retarded the development of a road suitable for wheeled vehicles from Pittwater/Sorell and Richmond to Spring Bay and onwards to Great Swan Port. While water courses might normally be relied upon to provide a route from the interior to the coast on their banks, here the Prosser River, Brushy Plains Rivulet and their many tributaries cut through dolerite rock hills via steep and rugged valleys and gorges, making following them problematical.

Foot and horse traffic initially went over many hills to avoid the steeper topography around the rivers and creeks but from the 1830s the need for wheeled access to get produce to market drove a closer examination of the practicality of following the rivers. Establishment of probation stations at Parsons Pass, Prossers Plains (Buckland) and Paradise (lower Prosser River) in the 1840s led to a 'road' being established via Black Charlies Opening, Brushy Plains, Burst my Gall and Break me Neck hills, Prossers Plains and then, finally, down the rugged Prosser River gorge. Numerous river crossings were required but few bridges were built, and river fords frequently flooded and cut off access.

It was not until the 1860s that something like the modern alignment of the Tasman Highway was established, more-or-less following the old colonial road from Orielton as far as Prossers Plains and then the Prosser gorge was finally followed on the east and south side, where the steep and cliffy terrain still limits the establishment of a highway of adequate standard.

The authors would welcome any correspondence on this article. MALCOLM WARD is a retired geologist, now a history researcher and writer based in Orford. RUSSELL ROWLANDS, now retired, was a 50-year resident and farmer at Runnymede. His family first purchased land in Brushy Plains/Runnymede in 1839. Russell recently completed a history of European Settlement at Runnymede and would welcome enquiries on this at rrowlands@iinet.net.au.

The Meredith Bridge over the Prosser River, looking upstream. The Merediths' house Malunnah is shown just above the left-hand end of the bridge (L.A. Meredith, *My Island Home*, London, 1879, p.33)

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