



Cobb & Co country Moama to Wilcannia

Heritage Drives

SELF-GUIDED TOURS



FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA. 1200. L69597.

Crossing the plains, 1871

Self-guided tour

The Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW (RTA) and Cobb & Co NSW have developed this self-guided heritage tour. It celebrates more than 150 years history of the legendary transport firm, Cobb & Co, who pioneered transport links across eastern Australia.

The tour follows the Cobb Highway – better known to drivers and teamsters as the Long Paddock – which stretches from Moama on the Murray River to Wilcannia on the Darling River. Follow the history and stories as you drive the wide, open plains.

Between Ivanhoe and Wilcannia the Cobb Highway is unsealed and in wet weather this and many side roads may be impassable to traffic. Roads and bridges noted in this guide are used for traffic and should only be viewed from safe locations. Not all areas have mobile phone coverage.



For further enquiries:



02 8837 0151



www.rta.nsw.gov.au

Roads and Traffic Authority

June 05
RTA/Pub. 05.144



Cobb & Co re-enactment, 2002

→ Historical overview

The Cobb Highway (State Highway No. 21) begins at Moama on the Murray River and follows a travelling stock reserve to Wilcannia on the Darling River. The stock route, known as the Long Paddock, was the principal corridor for the movement of large mobs of sheep and cattle from Queensland to the Victorian markets. It was also a transport corridor for wagons carrying freight, coaches carrying mail, transporting passengers and providing gold escorts, and lone travellers crossing the vast plains.

The Cobb Highway, named in 1947, follows the tracks once used by the legendary coaches of Cobb & Co, the pioneering firm whose coaching activities of the late 1800s extended across Victoria, NSW and Queensland.

→ Cobb & Co

Cobb & Co's coaching operations commenced from Melbourne in 1854 and the renowned company pioneered transport corridors that stretched from Victoria to northern Queensland. Under the guidance of James Rutherford, in 1862, Cobb & Co relocated to Bathurst, NSW.

At its peak, Cobb & Co travelled 44,800 km a week and 6000 of its 30,000 horses were harnessed each day. A key to the firm's

success was the establishment of changing stations every 15–30 km along the routes, where a fresh team of horses was harnessed. It was common for a shanty or inn to be located at the changing station and these sites were often the seed around which towns and villages were established.

This tour takes today's traveller through the Riverina and across the plains to western NSW, following the tracks of the Cobb & Co coaches.

→ Your journey begins at Moama

The twin towns of **Moama (1)** and **Echuca (2)** are best known from the days of the paddle-steamer trade. From the Aboriginal word meaning 'meeting of the water', the port of Echuca was once the largest inland port in the Southern Hemisphere. The first European to settle in the immediate area was an ex-convict, James Maiden, who established the first cattle crossing on the Murray River – a punt service – as well as an inn.

Cobb & Co bought pastoral stations, including the renowned Perricoota Station which was established by Maiden, for fodder and horse breeding. They also purchased land along the coach road to establish changing stations.

Cobb & Co operated its Moama to Deniliquin service until the opening of the private railway line in 1876. The Deniliquin to Moama line included the construction of an ornate metal railway bridge over the Murray River, which is still in use today as a vehicle and pedestrian bridge. The railway saw the decline of the punt crossings, but the site of Maiden's crossing can still be seen, adjacent to the Maiden's Inn Holiday Park.

Today Moama and Echuca have faithfully restored heritage buildings, the world's largest collection of paddle-steamers offering cruises and accommodation, a woodturner and blacksmith working in the traditional manner, a wax museum, wine cellars and entry to the **Barmah** and **Perricoota State forests**. A short drive away is the Old Telegraph Station (3) which operated during the coaching days, sending messages along the line to confirm schedules.

Two roads carried traffic from Moama to Deniliquin, one following the river and the other, used by coaches, kept to higher ground. Heading north on the Cobb Highway you are following the old coach route. Just north of the present Moira Station homestead is a plaque marking the site of the former Moira Inn, once a changing station.

Originally called Redbank due to the colour of the soil on the banks of Gulpa Creek, the first European to settle at **Mathoura (4)** was William Moore Carter, in 1846. He planted an abundant vegetable garden and orchard and five years later built the Red Bank Inn. The town soon became a changing station and this site was later named after the area's stock run.

Today Mathoura is the gateway to **Moira State Forest** – Australia's largest river red gum forest. This is the traditional land of the Yorta Yorta people and trees scraped of bark for the construction of canoes and burial mounds can still be seen in the district. Canoe trees and middens provide links to the past. Please do not disturb these sites.

Coaches stopped at **Hill Plain**, located 19 km south of Deniliquin. The opening of the railway here brought to an end the Moama to Deniliquin coach run, however, the coaching industry continued moving further inland to service new settlements and connect to the ends of the rail lines. At this time Cobb & Co introduced combined coach and railway tickets for fast passage to Melbourne.



Cobb & Co Booking Office, Deniliquin, c.1880

Deniliquin (5) is located on the Edward River. The settlement dates back to the 1840s when Ben Boyd held a large pastoral area here. The name 'Deniliquin' is said to be derived from that of a local Aboriginal chief known as Denilakoon, who was noted for his size, strength and wrestling skills. Developed as the site of a major stock route river crossing, drivers would rest stock here before fording the river. A punt crossing was established, followed by an inn and soon a village. In 1862 Cobb & Co established coaching services from Deniliquin, heading south to Moama, north to Hay and Booligal, and east to Yass.

For visitor information visit the the Peppin Heritage Centre, which also houses a museum showcasing the region's pastoral heritage.

Visit the Waring Gardens, the Blake Botanic Gardens and the Island Sanctuary with its plentiful bird and wildlife. This island is the burial site of 'Old Jack' – a member of the Melville bushranging gang of the 1850s. Old Jack died after being accidentally doused with turpentine and set alight.

The famous Conargo Pub is a short drive away. Cobb & Co coaches heading east passed through **Conargo (6)** and on to **Jerilderie (7)**, a town made famous when the bank was held up by bushranger Ned Kelly and his gang in 1879.

From Deniliquin the Cobb Highway heads across the plains towards Hay. In the coaching days, changing stations were located at **Pretty Pine**, **Boree Sandhill** and **Wanganella (8)**. Wanganella Station was the Peppin family holding where the famous Australian merino sheep bloodline was developed. A bronze statue of a merino ram is located near the station gateway as a memorial to the Peppin family. Wanganella has a proud Cobb & Co heritage which is depicted in signage located near the war memorial park.

Black Swamp (9) was a coach stop and an overnight camping site for teamsters. Cobb & Co had a changing station here and the coach from Hay would arrive after midnight. The groom's wife, on seeing the coach lights coming across the plains, would be waiting with freshly baked scones. Legend has it that a headless horseman haunts the campsite. Intriguing variations of the legend are posted in signage at Black Swamp.

North of Black Swamp is the village of **Boooroorban (10)** – once called Pine Hill. The Royal Hotel was built in 1868 and remains largely unchanged – the old stables still stand at the rear of the hotel. At its peak the town boasted several hotels, a school, general store and a population of 200, today only the hotel remains. The building's coaching history is outlined in display signage.

The 80 km trip from Hay to Deniliquin took 13 hours. Many coaches ran through the night when the temperature was cooler, resulting in less strain on the horses. Three lights were mounted on the Cobb & Co coaches – two sidelights and a high central light and these triangular lights could be seen across the plains for vast distances.

One hundred miles shall see tonight the lights of Cobb & Co...

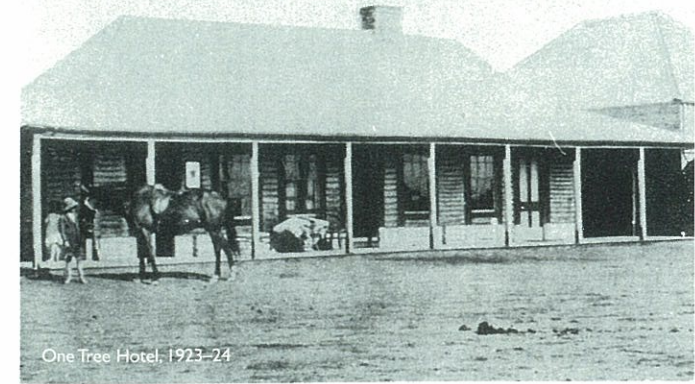
– **Henry Lawson, *The Lights of Cobb & Co***

Hay (11) is surrounded by the One Tree Plain at the crossroads of the Sturt, Mid Western and Cobb highways. The early settlement was known as Lang's Crossing as, like Deniliquin and Moama, it was a major river crossing for stock travelling the Long Paddock.

As the town developed it became a port for the riverboat trade and Cobb & Co moved loads of fodder from Perricoota Station by riverboat to its depot. The Cobb & Co Riverina Depot was situated here from 1862–1896. A coach factory was built on Lachlan Street and operated for 35 years. Henry Proctor managed the factory and one of the coaches that he built, the Sunbeam coach, is housed in Moppett Street.

The depot was established the same year that the organisation relocated its headquarters from Victoria to NSW. A cavalcade of coaches, wagons, horses and men made the trip across the Hay Plains to the Lachlan goldfields and on to Bathurst.

A swing bridge opened by the 'Father of Federation' Henry Parkes in 1874 once crossed the Murrumbidgee. The bridge's central panel rotated 90 degrees allowing large vessels to pass. Stories are told of the Cobb & Co coach drivers blowing their bugles as they approached and the stirring sight of the horses racing across the bridge, aware that their journey was soon to end. The bridge remained in place until 1973 and the turning mechanism is on view at Bushy Reserve.



The flat terrain makes Hay a good town for walking and cycling. Visit the Lachlan Street office of *The Riverine Grazier* newspaper to see their collection of historic photos. Shear Outback – the innovative shearers' hall of fame is a modern and interactive museum.

The old gaol located in Church Street, built in 1878, has also been a maternity hospital, a girls home and is now the museum for the Hay Historical Society. Learn of Hay's war history by visiting Australia's only War Memorial High School and its collection of photos, letters and diaries of the district's servicemen and women. During World War II Hay was the site of an internment camp and its story is told in an exhibition housed in two railway carriages located at the former railway station in Murray Street.

Bishop's Lodge in Moama Street is the former residence of the first Anglican bishop of the Riverina, Sydney Linton. The villa was built in 1888 of corrugated iron and timber, packed with sawdust for insulation against the heat.

One Tree Plain gained its name due to the presence of a single large gum tree. The landmark tree's gnarled branches gave respite to wildlife and man from the oppressive heat. In 1901 the smallest timber reserve in NSW was listed to protect the tree, but it was too late – the grand old giant had crashed to the ground during a fierce storm on the last night of 1899.

The One Tree Hotel (12) was established in 1862 but burnt down in 1899. However, the insurance policy required that an exact replica of the pine log building be reconstructed. The hotel remained active during the 1920s but later, business dwindled

and the licence was relinquished in 1942. It is said that the last drinks were served as a howling dust storm raged across the plain. The building, located on private property, remained in use as a residence until 1995 and has since been vacant.

A patch of grey discoloured sand

A fringe of tufty grasses

A lonely pub in the mulga scrub

Is all the stranger passes

- Henry Lawson, *Lake Eliza*

A series of Government tanks and dams that sourced underground water reservoirs were established at regular intervals along the Long Paddock route. Some of the tanks, capable of providing water to up to 12,000 sheep at a time, are visible and accessible from the roadway. Today places such as the **Quandong Tank** provide a pleasant spot to stop and take in the Old Man Plains.

The name of **Booligal (13)** comes from the Aboriginal word thought to mean 'windy place' and this is the traditional land of the Nari Nari people. John Oxley was the first European explorer of the region and a survey marker commemorating his expedition is located near the sportsground. Set on the Lachlan River, Booligal provided a watering stop and stock crossing as well as becoming a changing station.

Nearby is the **Willandra National Park** which covers 19,386 hectares – just one-eighth of the former Willandra sheep station area. The station was established in the mid-nineteenth century and became a famous merino stud. The restored homestead, ram shed – still with its thatched roof, stables, shearing complex and men's quarters are still standing.

The park can be reached via a private track, the Mossgiel Trunk Road, that runs off the Hillston-Mossgiel Road. The park supports a waterbird population and kangaroos, emus, small reptiles and ground-nesting birds can be found on the open plains.

The town of **Ivanhoe (14)** was established in the 1870s at the crossroads of the route between Wilcannia, Booligal and Balranald. The early settlement consisted of a store with a liquor licence. By 1883 the settlement boasted two hotels, two stores, a post office, telegraph station and blacksmith. The arrival of the railway line in 1925 and the completion of the line to Broken Hill in 1927 changed the focus of Ivanhoe from a coaching town to that of a railway service town.

Explore the Ivanhoe Heritage Trail, each site is sign-posted and provides details of the town's history. Tourist information and the heritage trail pamphlet are available from the post office.

The next section of the Cobb Highway between Ivanhoe and the Barrier Highway is 159 km of unsealed road. You should check local road conditions before embarking on this section.

Situated on the Darling River, **Wilcannia (15)** reached its peak during the late 1800s as an inland port and coaching depot. Known as the 'Queen City of the West', the town's prosperity came to an end following a series of drought years that reduced the water level in the river and thus access to the wharf. This coincided with the extension of the railway services to the region. The rail service to Bourke and Broken Hill bypassed Wilcannia and the town lost its significance as a trade centre.

Many beautiful Victorian era sandstone buildings mark the historic significance of Wilcannia as a trade centre. The Queens Head Hotel, post office, court house, gaol and the Knox and Downs Store form a largely unchanged streetscape from the late 19th century.



Wool wagon bogged on the Mossgiel to Ivanhoe road



Paddle-steamers at Wilcannia, c.1920

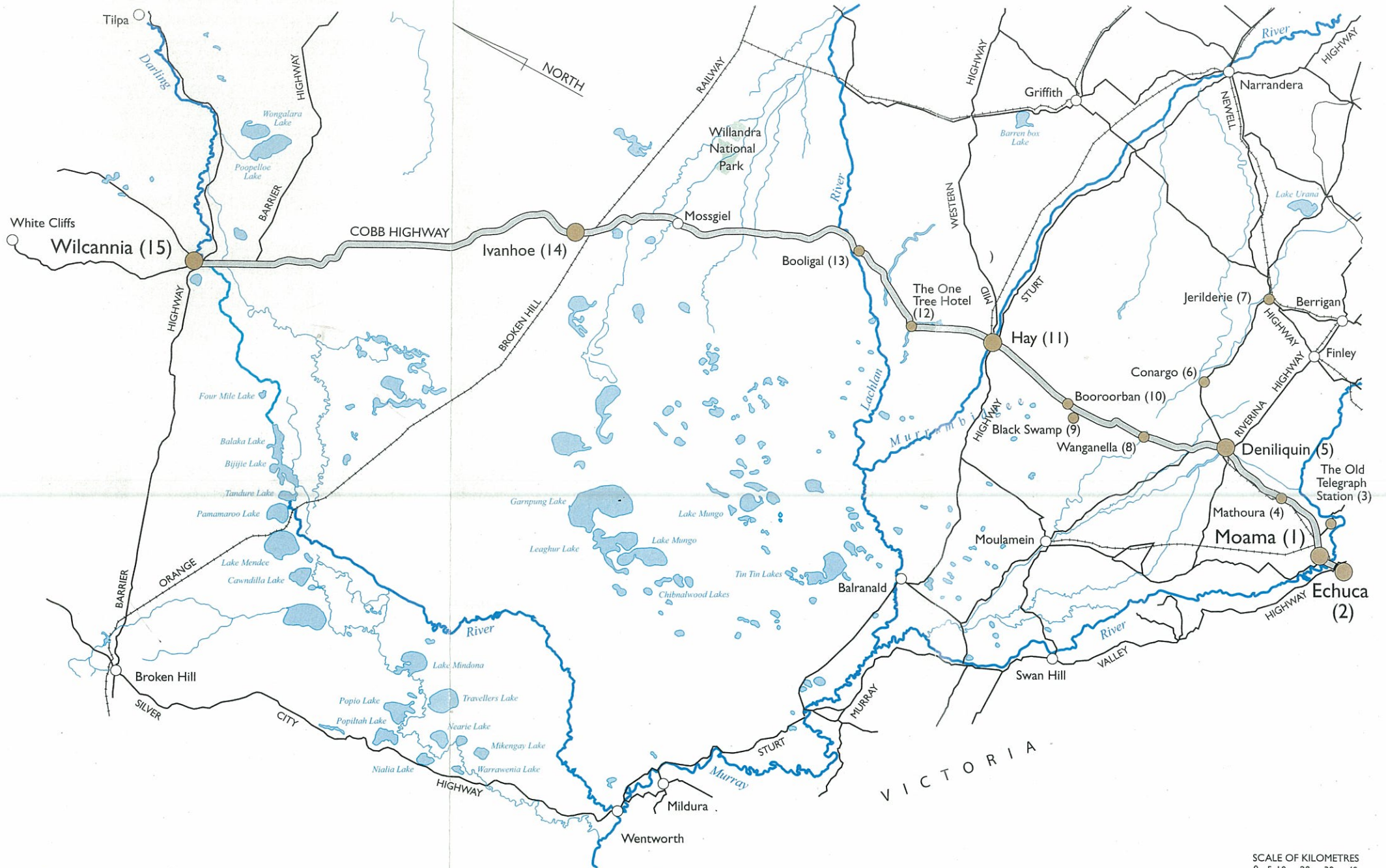
The Athenaeum was built in Reid Street in 1883 as a school of arts and included a public library. The Rich and Company Bond Store was erected in 1870 and is the only known surviving riverside warehouse associated with the former Darling River paddle-steamer trade. The building's size reflects the volume of wool and goods handled at the Wilcannia wharves between 1870 and 1900.

The old bridge over the Darling River was one of 23 engineered to allow the passage of riverboats and barges on the Murray Darling River system. It was opened to traffic in 1896, replacing a Government punt. The bridge is a metal truss construction with a lifting central span, and is still used by pedestrians and cyclists. Upstream stand the remains of Wilcannia's old wharf.

➔ End of an era

James Rutherford continued operating NSW and Queensland Cobb & Co services until his death in 1913. Aware that mechanised transport was the way of the future, he had purchased the first of a fleet of Cobb & Co lorries. Following Rutherford's death the company declined. The last coach service operated in Queensland between Yeulba and Surat in 1924.

The company had operated for more than 70 years with its drivers, road managers, grooms and innkeepers establishing their place in Australian history. The coaches may have been taken off the roads, but the legend of Cobb & Co lives on.



● COBB HIGHWAY HISTORIC SITES

