

# McDonald's Track

The McDonald's Track Plaque near the roundabout at the McDonald's Track and Westernport Road intersection, Lang Lang.



In 1860 Mr G. T. McDonald started constructing a track, that still bears his name, starting from Tobinyallock (now Lang Lang). The plan of his survey was endorsed: "Plan of trial survey from Melbourne to Gippsland, via Cranbourne and Tobinyallock. Diverting from the Lower Gippsland Road at Yallock Bridge (Lang Lang River bridge) and joining the Upper road at Morwell Bridge." This was the biggest piece of road construction ever done in South Gippsland. It ran easterly and north-easterly from Tobinyallock to Morwell, a distance of about 112 Km (70 miles) and for most of the way, through the heart of the big scrub country. The track was only 2.1 metre (7 foot) wide.

The road was intended for a better stock route from Sale to Melbourne, but was abandoned as there was no permanent water on it, although it ran through some exceptionally wet country. The reason for this was for most of the way it ran along the top of the dividing range, which falls away sharply in places.

After completing the track in 1862, it remained idle and unused for 12-13 years. When the first pioneers came, the track was entirely overgrown and very difficult to trace. So much so that some of the blocks were surveyed right across it, the land surveyors not noticing it at the time. After being run again, it became the base line for the survey of many thousands of acres and as the settlers came in, they kept opening up the old "7-foot" track further and further east.

The first encounter the pioneers had to traverse was the sand hills at Lang Lang East. After leaving the Lower Gippsland Road (now South Gippsland Highway) at Lang Lang, they headed east for about 10 Km past the Cherry Tree rises and came to Tinpot Hill (now just before Forest Drive at the road cut-out). It was steep, 1 in 4, sandy with no solid bottom and almost impassable during winter.

Mr G. T. McDonald was a native of Dumfries, Scotland. He arrived in Victoria in 1853 and worked as a surveyor. In 1870 he married a daughter of the Hon. W. F. Mitchell and 8 years later went to Queensland, entering the survey department there. He also took up land in that state, where he resided with his family for 37 years. He died at Wynnum, a Brisbane suburb, at the age of 80 years.

## **McDonald's Track**

Dear McDonald's Track trekker/

Thank you for accepting the invitation to join with the members of the Poowong Historical Group to do the "McDonald's Track Trek" on Easter Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2010 departing from the car park opposite the Uniting Church in Poowong at 9.00 am; returning some time in the afternoon after 2.30 pm.

We are proposing to have lunch at Yarragon on the way home. You may bring your own lunch and have it in the park at Yarragon or choose your own restaurant. There are plenty from which to choose in Yarragon. We hope that about an hour there will see everyone fed and watered.

Bob Attenborough will be our voluntary bus driver and Harley's are supplying the bus, a 28 seater. To date (15<sup>th</sup> March) we have 26 people who have indicated they want to come on the trek. Ten dollars (\$10) per person should cover our expenses.

I have included some information about "The Track" and a little of what I have found in my own research. Just a taste of what we hope to learn on the day. Please, if you have one, wear your name-tag and feel free to bring along any photos, other information or matters of interest that you may have about "The Track"; you will be given an opportunity to share your stories with the rest of us. There will be a P.A. system for our use.

The first point of interest will be at Nyora where a major deviation confused some present day scholars.

### **Rex**

George Thomas McDonald and his party were commissioned to find a stock route from the vicinity of Western Port to the vicinity of Morwell Bridge. He completed the task in 1862 and took at least two years to complete the job.

He began at the bridge over the Tobin Yallock Creek (Lang Lang River) approximately where the South Gippsland Highway crosses the Lang Lang River now.

His aim was to blaze a trail along the watershed of the Bass and Lang Lang Rivers, and then the Tarwin and the Latrobe Rivers and whatever other rivers are on either side of the watershed through this part of Gippsland. Until he reached the area where Nyora is now situated, he would have only been in the Tobin Yallock/Lang Lang River catchment.

Our intention is to follow as near as practical the "track" along that watershed. This track was used exclusively by the very earliest selectors from 1874; twelve years after McDonald cleared a dray track seven feet wide. It wasn't a road, there were no fences to distinguish the borders, only a partly cleared and partly overgrown cleared path through the bush, in places somewhat like a tunnel through the undergrowth. One can imagine that constant use made it easier to identify; and those using the track were constantly looking for better grades and short cuts. Hence throughout the length of what was originally McDonald's Track there have been many deviations around steep hills and there is an obvious

short-cut which by-passed the spot where Nyora is now. By the time McDonald's Track was surveyed, the short-cut became McDonald's Track. Hence the argument that the "Track" never went through Nyora.

The roads we'll follow today are as close as it's possible to get to the original. There were at least two deviations between Poowong and Ranceby, that have now reverted to the original McDonald's Track, cutting through the hills that were the reason for the deviations.

As we're particularly interested in the track which followed the watershed, there are places where we'll just have to use a little imagination because some of the deviations are quite substantial.

### EXTRACTS FROM SOME PUBLICATIONS

#### "Land of the Lyrebird" - T.J. Coverdale

*"But civilisation's first effectual mark was laid on the wilderness when G.T. McDonald in 1862 completed the track that bears his name. This was the biggest piece of road surveying ever done in South Gippsland. Although he did not plot it as the two-chain road it is now, he ran the course throughout and cut a track along it. It ran easterly and north-easterly from Tobinyallock to Morwell, a distance of about seventy miles, and for the most of the way through the heart of the big scrub country. It was a monument to the skill and perseverance of the man who, after more than two years of difficult and tedious exploring, completed it. His supplies had to be packed from Cranbourne, distant during part of the work over sixty miles. The road was intended for a better stock route from Sale to Melbourne, but was abandoned, as there was no permanent water on it, although it ran through an exceptionally wet country."*

*"The first survey of part of McDonald's Track as a road was made by Thornhill in 1876 in conjunction with the survey of the Bluff road."*

**Attributed to Mr J.G. Saxton:** *"Mr G.T. McDonald was a native of Dumfries, Scotland. He arrived in Victoria in 1853, and did much good work as a surveyor in this State. In 1870 he married a daughter of the Hon. W.F. Mitchell, and eight years later went to Queensland, entering the survey department there. He also took up land in that State, where he resided with his family for thirty seven years. He died at Wynnum, a suburb of Brisbane, in 1915, in the eightieth year of his age; he was an honest workman and a genial kindly gentleman."*

**Digger Index:** George Thomas McDonald married Amelia Margaret Mitchell in 1869. Amelia was born at Barfold, midway between Heathcote and Kyneton. There were five children registered in the vicinity of Castlemaine, Victoria up until 1878.

**Buln Buln by Graeme Butler:** *"John Carson was another of this well-known family. He was better known than some of the others as he was contracting in the area long before the selection era. His major work was with G.T. McDonald, in the four year long task of cutting the Track, in the early 1860's, working with a team of five."*

## **BUS TRAVELLERS**

Rex & Topsy Motton	Jeetho
Stephen Halliday	Poowong
Colin & Lauren Stewart	Poowong
Aggie Coote	Poowong
Vern(Wigga) & Shirley Burchett	Inverloch
Kelvin & Glenda Olsen	East Poowong
Doug & Dorothy Boston	Radovick Street, korumburra
Bob & Ailsa Attenborough	O'Mearas Road, Poowong North
John & Briggita Halliday	Poowong
Shirley Holland	Carinya
Janet & Betty Wilson	165 Bena-Kongwak Rd., Bena 3946
Frank & Jenny Dean	Loch Post Office
Rod Wellard	7 Mary Street, Warragul 3820
Colin Silcock	9 George St. Warragul