

THE MAROONDAH HIGHWAY — PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

The Maroondah Highway is a road of contrasts — in its functions, its character, and the nature of the surroundings through which it passes.

From Box Hill to Lilydale it is a busy urban traffic artery used by commuters and commercial traffic daily. Beyond Lilydale a more leisurely atmosphere prevails through rich undulating farms and river flats. From Healesville to Narbethong the road climbs over the Great Dividing Range through magnificent forests and dim fern gullies, then runs on into north-eastern Victoria with its orderly pastoral beauty, placid streams, and rich river flats.

Apart from its scenic attractions, the Maroondah Highway leads thousands of Victorians each year to the summer pleasures of fishing and boating on Lake Eildon or to the winter exhilaration of skiing on the sparkling white slopes of Mt. Buller and nearby snow resorts.

Maroondah is one of the more euphonic words of the Aboriginal vocabulary, but its exact meaning has never been revealed. It was apparently the name for the locality in which the Maroondah Reservoir is sited. Compare the Anglo-Saxon flatness of "Watts River Dam", which in 1891 was renamed Maroondah Reservoir and later gave the highway its name.

The Maroondah Highway from Box Hill to Mansfield was declared a State highway under the provisions of the Country Roads Act in January, 1948. It is not, however, a continuous length.

Authority over the seven mile section climbing the Black Spur from Gracedale past Maroondah Reservoir to the Dom Dom Saddle was vested by Act of Parliament in the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works because it traverses the watershed of one of Melbourne's major domestic water supply reservoirs. By joint agreement of the Board of Works and the Country Roads Board, control of this section of road will pass to the Country Roads Board in July, 1971 and conferences are currently being held between engineers of the two authorities on carrying out improvements to this picturesque but rather winding section, having due regard to water catchment area needs and preservation of forest beauty.

History of the Highway

To put the Maroondah Highway into historical perspective it is necessary to talk of a sturdy Victorian pioneer, one Patrick Trainor, an English immigrant who was responsible for giving the first part of the highway its local name — "White Horse Road", and who was later to become a member of the first District Roads Board established in the Box Hill area in 1857 by proclamation of Victoria's Governor of the time, Sir Henry Barkly.

Patrick Trainor felt that a spot on the south-east corner of the main road's intersection with

Elgar Road (then a toll road by the way) was ideal for an inn to serve the developing district beyond, particularly the Cobb & Co. coaches, the gold miners to and from the new mines in the Great Dividing Range at Woods Point and Gaffneys Creek, the wood cutters and timber getters and the increasing number of farmers.

Patrick Trainor intended to call his inn the "Corduoy" but one day saw an exciting sight flashing between the trees — the gleaming silver white flanks of a mettlesome stallion ridden by Police Captain Robert Leach, later to be killed by bushrangers at Ballarat while on gold escort duty. "The White Horse" would henceforth be the hostelry's name, Patrick Trainor decided, and the road to the White Horse Inn was soon to become known as White Horse Road.

When Trainor established his hotel late in 1853, it was the second coach stop from the city — first was the Harp of Erin Hotel in Kew — and from remarks of his "the coach, horses and passengers were jolly glad to get there".

"The roads," said Pat at the time, "were not fit to be called cattle tracks — the horses I've seen in trouble on these roads used to break my heart. I've known the wheel ruts so deep that carts came to rest on their axles... even the bullocks used to jib. There were 20 miles of track between here and Lilydale without a pebble on it — beats me how the coaches made it — even the passengers had to get out and push."

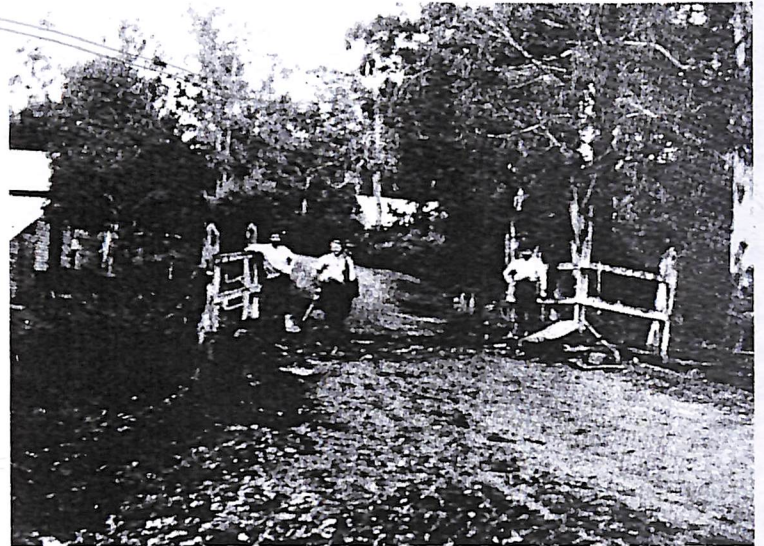
The "White Horse" Appears

In 1895 a wooden facsimile of the White Horse appeared above the verandah of the hotel where it stayed as a landmark until 1933. A few years later the White Horse was erected on its present position in the Box Hill shopping centre.

For authentic details on the road conditions in 1913 we can rely on the Country Roads Board's indefatigable first Chairman, William Calder, who immediately on his appointment commenced a survey of Victoria's largely neglected roads that could well have daunted a lesser man.

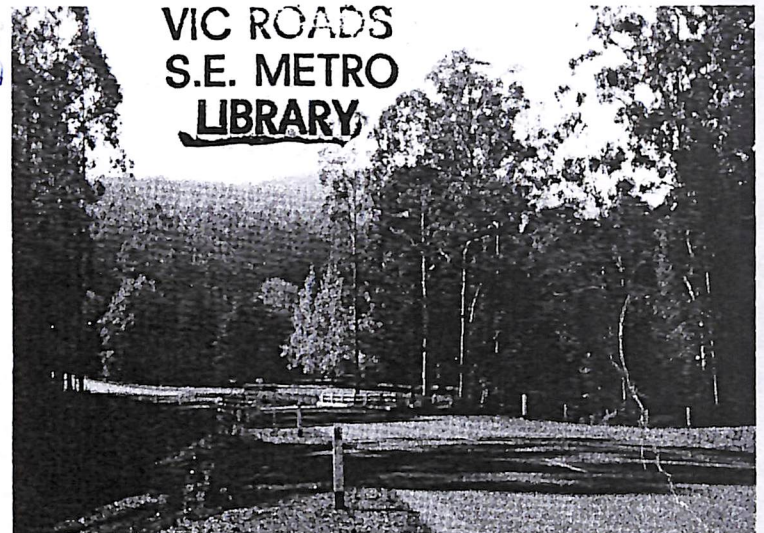
MAROONDAH HIGHWAY SUPPLEMENT

C.R.B. NEWS, OCTOBER, 1970



Above Maroondah Highway. Repairing bridge deck at Narbethong, Shire of Healesville, in 1914.

Below: Today — the Narbethong bridge.



William Calder's Comments

The general condition of the road was noted by William Calder. Here are some of his comments: "The grade at the Coach and Horses Hotel, Ringwood, reads as much as one in fifteen and the metalled formation is only 15 ft. wide."

"A steep gradient on the Melbourne side of Lilydale Shire boundary can be improved."

"The hill down into Lilydale can be much improved by cutting and regrading even if deviation to the north is not expedient because of the value of the adjoining land — £40 per acre."

"The road is mainly metalled to Healesville and for some little distance past the junction of the Yarra Glen Road, then only in patches with cobbles. There are several bad swampy stretches in the gullies."

In a hired car he humorously dubbed Prudence, he set off on May 6, 1913, to see for himself how difficult it was for himself of the day to get from Melbourne to Alexandra and beyond.

William Calder set out via The White Horse Road, noting with some surprise that the "new electric tramway has now been laid as far as Burke Road." The Maroondah Highway to be was then a series of individual roads — from Union Road to Box Hill it was called Healesville Road; from Box Hill to Healesville the Main Healesville Road; the Healesville to Alexandra Road was called just that; from Alexandra to Koriella it was the Upper Goulburn Road; then came the Yarck Road, the Kathkin-Mansfield Road and finally, the Mansfield Road between Merton and Mansfield.

MAROONDAH HIGHWAY SUPPLEMENT (Continued)

"The roads generally in Healesville are well maintained and drains are kept clean and free from obstructions."

"Here (beyond Healesville) I saw men engaged in breaking the local hard rock into metal for patching."

It was at Healesville that Mr. Calder met the man responsible for those good Healesville roads, a Mr. Anderson, the far-sighted, bicycle-riding Shire Engineer of the time who made three excellent suggestions:

1. That the Healesville-Alexandra road be diverted around the town of Healesville. (It still goes through Healesville);
2. That the road should go through Buxton rather than Marysville. (It now does. The main road at the time went through Marysville — it was first constructed in 1866);
3. That the steep climb up the old Black Spur Road could be avoided by deviation (a new Black Spur Road — the present one — was later built).

In July, 1913, the newly formed Country Roads Board served notice on Lillydale Council of the Board's intention to take over the main road "from the Lillydale Shire boundary near Ringwood to the Yarra River near Healesville" and the Council agreed.

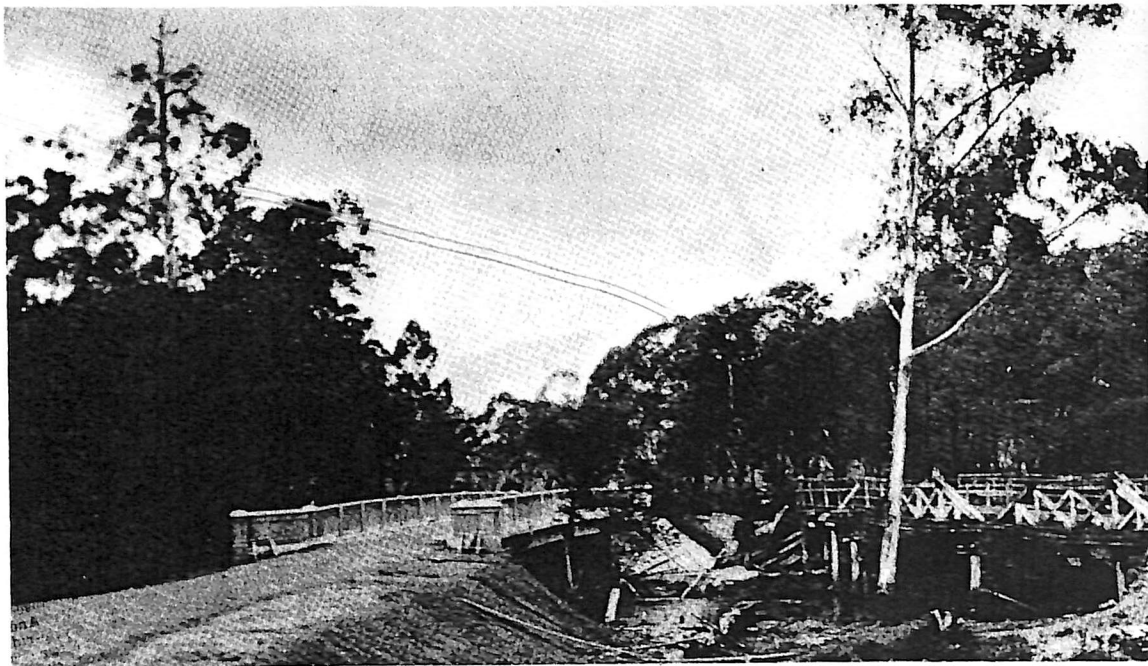
The Present and the Future

Major works on the Maroon-dah Highway carried out by the C.R.B. over the past eight years have cost about \$10 million and current improvements of a total value of a further million dollars are in hand to make Maroon-dah a very satisfactory and safe highway to drive on. True there is still room for improvement particularly in the outer metropolitan area, around Ringwood where congestion cannot readily be relieved even by modern traffic engineering practices because of many obvious difficulties of property acquisition in this thriving centre.

To circumvent these difficulties the Board has proposed that the areas of very dense traffic be by-passed by the Healesville Freeway, which it is anticipated will be completed within the next 10 years.

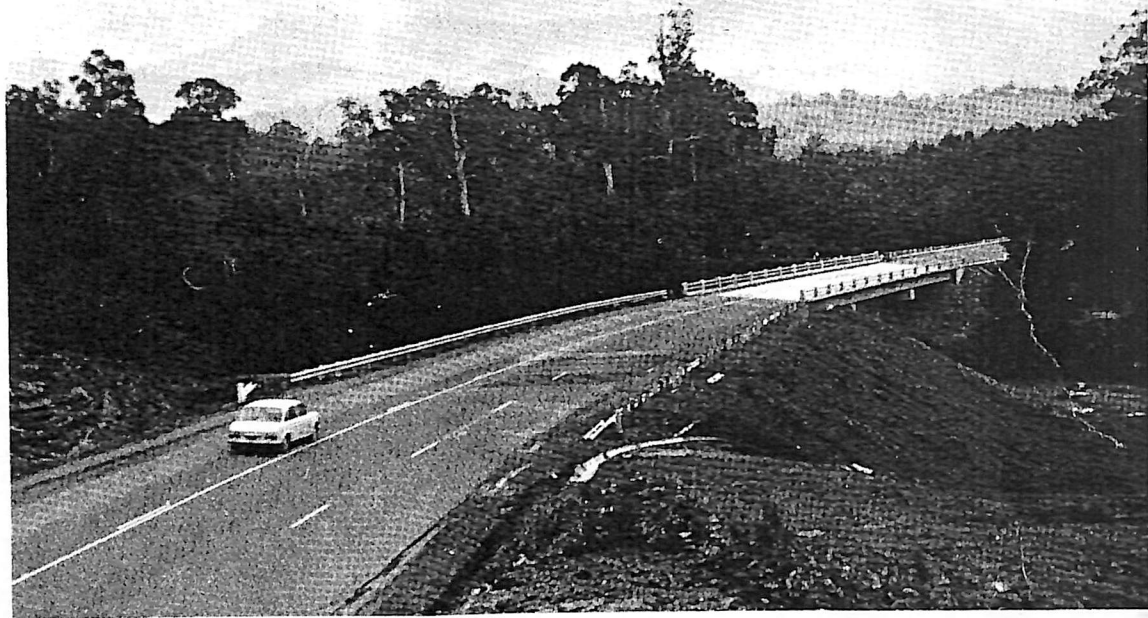
The Healesville Freeway, for which a good deal of land acquisition has already been made, is expected to begin in the Box Hill South area and link with Hull Road just west of the Lilydale Lime Quarry, eventually re-joining the Maroon-dah Highway beyond Coldstream.

The Board has found that the cost of roadside development and the maintenance on the Maroon-dah Highway has risen sharply in recent years and last year an amount of \$140,000 was spent on this work between Middleborough Road and 5 miles



Above: Yesterday— Original bridge over Yarra River (right). Bridge built in 1919 (left) and now replaced by the new Maxwells Hill deviation.

Below: Today— New Maxwells Hill deviation and new bridge over Yarra River.



south of Buxton alone.

The increase is partly due to additional work being undertaken in the development of wayside stops, such as at Coldstream, picnic spots, tree planting and median maintenance, all designed to make the highway more enjoyable and safer for travel. Partly the increase is due to the large increase in traffic — 12,000 vehicles per 12 hours at Springvale Road in 1963 to 28,000 vehicles in 1970.

The Maroon-dah Highway is administered by three C.R.B. divisions —

- Metropolitan Division — which controls the section from Union Road to Middleborough Road.

- Dandenong Division — which takes up the task beyond Middleborough Road for the next 50 miles to the Healesville/Alexandra Shires' common border (weekday 12 hour traffic count here varies from 28,000 near Springvale Road to 21,000 at Ringwood, 12,500 beyond Ringwood, 5,500 near Lillydale to just on 3,000 at Coldstream), and
- Benalla Division — which is responsible for the remaining 63 miles to road's end at Mansfield. (The weekly traffic count here falls to 700 vehicles and fewer, but can be quadrupled on a winter Sunday at the height of the snow season).

METROPOLITAN DIVISION

Both at Elgar Road and at Nelson Road, Box Hill, improvements are now being planned to make the capacity of each intersection match that of the four-lane undivided highway. Each intersection will be "flared" to increase capacity and to allow easier turning movements, but as additional land has to be acquired for the purpose, it could be nearing two years before the work is completed. Otherwise this section of the highway is deemed adequate for its demands, having regard to the coming of the Healesville Freeway.

MAROONDAH HIGHWAY SUPPLEMENT (Continued)

Within five years, widening to six lanes with a generous median will replace the present four lane section between the Box Hill Library and Middleborough Road. The present road was constructed nearly 10 years ago. The Board foresaw the eventual need for an increase to six lanes and planted trees to reserve space for the expansion which is now becoming necessary to carry the increased traffic and provide a median which can be indented to allow safe turns.

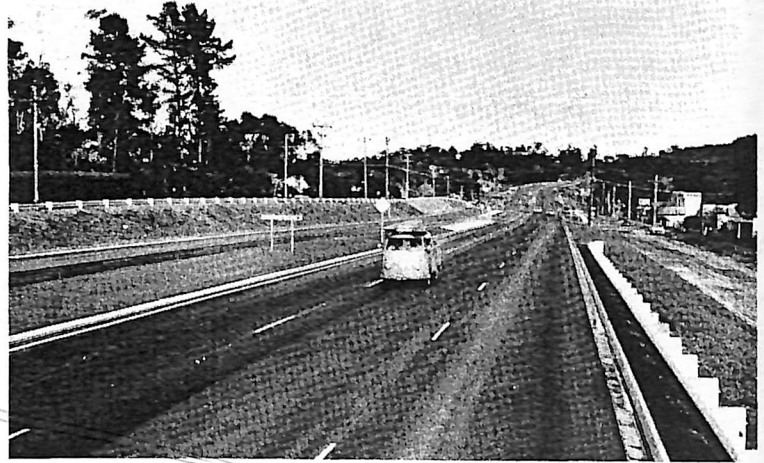
DANDENONG DIVISION

Maroondah Highway now has dual carriageways from Shipley Street, Box Hill (one quarter of a mile west of Station Street) to just before Hull Road (one mile west of Lilydale), a distance of almost 14 miles.

Most of the duplication work has been carried out over the past 8 to 10 years and included these major undertakings:

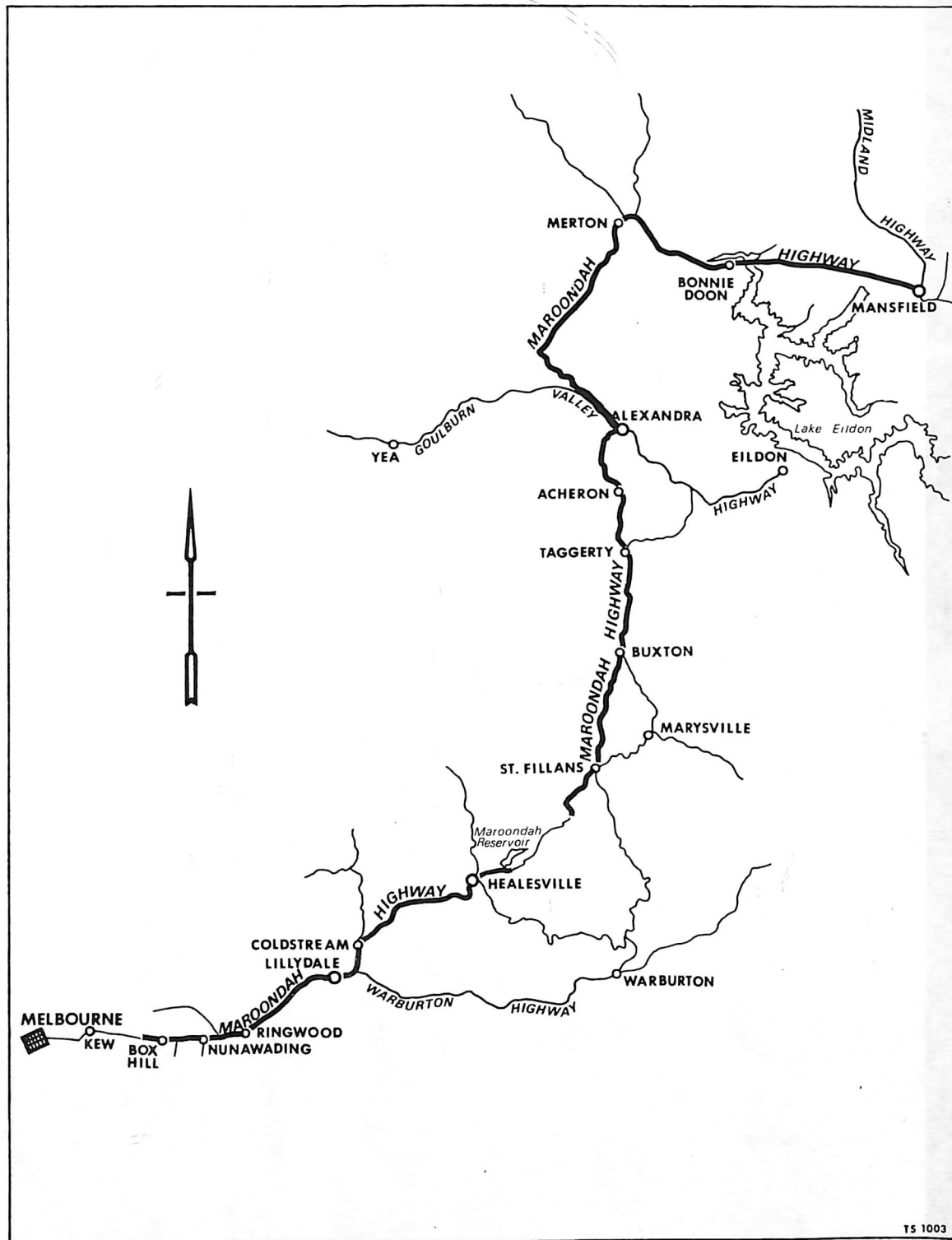
- Replacement of the old three-lane 33-ft. wide pavement between Middleborough and Heatherdale Road, a distance of four miles, with dual carriageways, begun nearly 10 years ago at the cost of approximately \$300,000 a mile.
- Construction of dual carriageways through Ringwood from Heatherdale Road to Mt. Dandenong Road, a distance of 1½ miles which commenced about the same time and cost \$500,000.
- Between 1966-68, a further section of 2.3 miles was converted to dual carriageways from Mt. Dandenong Road to Stirling Road, Croydon to replace the original 24 ft. seal, at a cost of \$1,020,000.
- In 1967-69 the dual carriageways were extended a further 2 miles out to Brushy Creek east of Dorset Road, replacing the original 24 ft. sealed roadway at a cost of \$1,200,000. This work was carried out as a "Special Project" and charged to the Roads (Special Projects) Fund.

Work is now in progress on the construction of a 2.2 mile four-lane divided section east of Brushy Creek to Hull Road at a cost of \$750,000. Here, the urban type kerb and channelled central medians make way for the more rural unsealed shoulders and depressed median in keeping with the environment. This work, which includes replacement of the original 24 ft. wide seal with its steep and winding path up Blacksprings Hill on the Melbourne side of Lilydale, is scheduled for completion in April next year.



Right: Dual carriageways at North Croydon.

Below: Map showing the route of the Maroondah Highway.



MAROONDAH HIGHWAY SUPPLEMENT (Continued)

When preparing the design for the work now in progress, the Board was happy to cooperate with the Croydon Historical Association in preserving the 115-year-old cypress tree which stands immediately outside the factory of Black and Decker Pty. Ltd.

Few Maroondah Highway travellers would have even noticed the existence of this rather undistinguished dusty tree and fewer would know that it was planted by Hugh O'Rourke in 1855, outside his hostelry, the Brushy Creek Hotel. The tree stands in solitary state in an island around which flows highway traffic and traffic in and out of the company's factory.

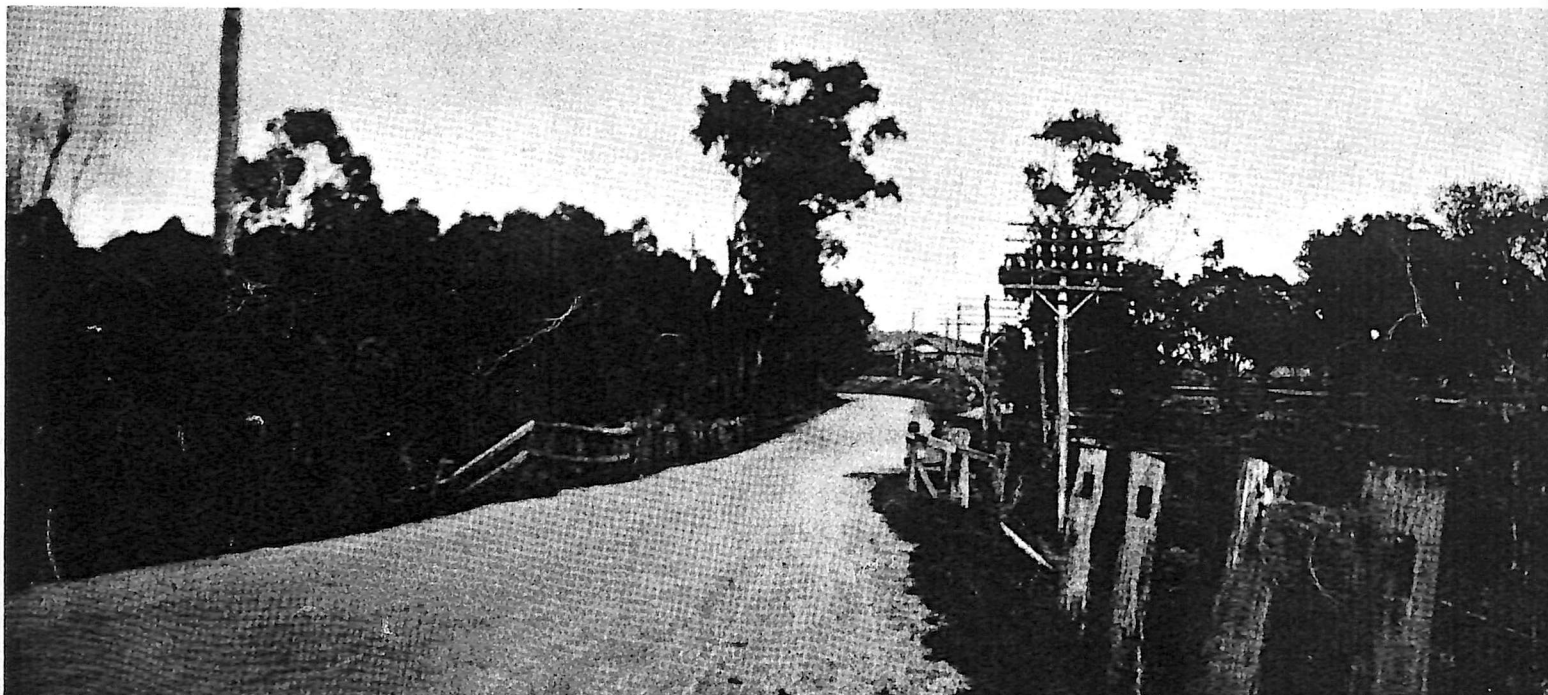
It is hard to realise it now, but in the 1870's horse races were held outside the Brushy Creek Hotel on a course which crossed the road that was to become today's Maroondah Highway. Brushy Creek in those days was a thriving and relatively populous settlement.

From Hull Road the C.R.B. is now investigating the possibility of extending the dual carriageways to the Warburton Highway.

Immediately beyond the Warburton Highway, a Board's gang is currently reconstructing and realigning the Rosemont deviation to provide a 24 ft. wide seal at a cost of \$220,000. The deviation will replace the old 20-24 ft. wide seal with its poor alignments.

Between mileages 26.3 and 33.3 a 7-mile length of two-lane highway through Coldstream was recently re-surfaced with bituminous concrete at a cost of \$120,000, to increase the life of the original pavement and to improve its riding qualities generally.

Below: Maroondah Highway. Brushy Creek bridge looking west in 1925, Shire of Lilydale.



The length between the 33 and 35 mile posts known as the Maxwells Hill deviation was recently completed at a cost of \$370,000 including a new concrete bridge over the Yarra River. This project provides a 24 ft. wide seal on a 70 m.p.h. alignment and incorporates an additional 10 ft. climbing lane westwards from the Yarra River for slow moving vehicles. To replace the old 20 ft. wide pavement on a tortuous alignment, it was necessary to excavate through rock, cutting to a depth of 75 feet. Batters were pre-slit by drilling and blasting to produce a well-defined batter slope.

The old section of highway beyond Healesville to the M.M.B.W. watershed with its poor horizontal alignment and sealed width as low as 18 ft. has been recently reconstructed at a cost of \$300,000 to provide a 45 m.p.h. alignment.

These improvements to beyond Healesville have been made necessary by the large volumes of weekend and holiday traffic visiting the many attractions north-east of Melbourne — in particular the Maroondah Reservoir, the wild life sanctuary, snow resorts at Mt. Donna Buang and Lake Mountain and holiday resorts such as Marysville and Lake Eildon.

As previously mentioned, the next section, including the Black Spur climb as it is popularly known, will become the responsibility of the C.R.B. next July and proposals for the improvement of alignment standards are currently being examined.

Between 1963 and 1968 a total of 13½ miles of the highway was reconstructed from just north of Narbethong to just north of Buxton at a cost of more than \$1,000,000.

BENALLA DIVISION

From the 69 mile post just south of Taggerty to Alexandra the highway has been completely reconstructed over the past decade and was finished only last year. The work included the Acheron cutting which provided a new alignment to permit safer driving conditions. The cost of the Acheron cutting work was \$300,000.

Also completed last year was a new southern approach to

Alexandra with a new bridge over the Goulburn River.

Beyond Alexandra the Board considers the highway to be satisfactory for the volume of traffic using it.

A major proposal now in the planning stages is an overpass to replace an old bridge over the Mansfield railway line near Yarck. Property is now being acquired and construction on an improved alignment should be commenced in this financial year.



Above: One hundred and fifteen-year-old cypress tree at Brushy Creek.

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John,

Here is the article I told you about on the phone today. It was found by Marie Mitchell, here at Vicroads.

I hope it will be of interest and use to you.

Michael

