

First Coach to Woods' Point

November 1864 - Gillies' Coach

Wood's Point Mountaineer, 7 Nov 1864 (from Rev George Edwards' research notes)

This morning information was received that a coach had arrived at Matlock and that it was coming down to Wood's Point. Such an arrival at Matlock was considered extraordinary, but the bringing a coach to Wood's point by the present road was generally looked upon as a physical impossibility. However, about 4 o'clock on Tuesday evening, all doubt on the subject was dispelled as the vehicle made its appearance, decorated with flags, amidst the assembled crowds who came out to welcome the remarkable visitor. Guns and pistols were fired off in the principal streets to join in the hurrahs of welcome with which the enterprising conductor of the coach, Mr Gillies, was received. We are informed that the same enthusiasm was exhibited at Matlock. A number of ladies were invited into the coach and were driven around the town accompanied by a band of musicians who played "See the conquering hero comes". Mr. Gillies' health was then drunk in innumerable bumpers of champagne. On Wednesday morning, as Mr. Gillies was about to start his backward journey, an impromptu meeting was got up in front of Power's Commercial Hotel, and Mr. John Whitelaw was called to the chair. In a few brief remarks the Chairman informed Gillies that the inhabitants of Wood's Point were anxious to record their appreciation of the valuable services he had rendered to the whole district by piloting his way over these mountain tops to the unapproachable region of Wood's Point. The practicability of a short and easy journey to Melbourne was now no longer a matter of doubt, it only remained for the Government to spend a few thousand pounds in clearing the road and cutting some sidlings, after which the journey could be performed in one or two days. Husbands, wives, children and sweethearts hitherto separated by the almost insurmountable difficulties of the road would then be brought together. Their thanks and best wishes were due to Mr. Gillies who had so nobly encountered and overcome the difficulties of his journey.

Mr Whitelaw the presented Mr. Gillies with twelve sovereigns which had been collected in a short time, and requested that they might be

invested in some tangible form with the inscription of the circumstances which had led to the present issue, and kept as an heirloom in the family. Mr. Gillies, standing up in his coach, said he felt very proud of the manner in which he had been received both at Wood's Point and Matlock. He could assure the meeting that no reward had been promised, neither had he made any bets on the subject as had been reported; that the coach and horses were his own, and all expenses of the journey were paid by himself. He begged to thank the inhabitants of the place for the great kindness and hospitality he had received. He had considerable interest in mining operations in the district, and intended to reside here. He hoped to see soon a regular line of coaches along the road which he had been the first to travel, and that the inhabitants of Wood's Point might be greatly benefitted thereby. After Mr. Gillies had taken a glass of wine with the meeting, he started up the hill with his coach and two horses amidst the cheers of the assembled crowd.

We have never seen Mr. Gillies before, but he appears to be a quiet, sensible, unostentatious, intelligent man. The journey he has just performed is a very remarkable one. He had six days of actual travelling. The Black Spur he describes as being the worst part of the road. On the Watts River he came to a tree laying across the path four feet in diameter, to get over which he erected a bridge of saplings. He describes the road along the Yarra Track as very bad, especially from Fisher's Creek to the Stephens [the Steavenson. At this time the town was just being named Marysville and this was not widely known]. He is however, of the opinion that two side drains would carry off the water and make a sound bottom. Most of the money already spent on the road by the Government he considers almost useless, as a great amount of labour had been bestowed to taking out large stumps, which were not in the way. From Ligar [renamed Bellell] River to Paradise Plains [Paradise plains is not at this point] is a bad part of the road, but could easily be improved. Mr. Gillies met with no accident coming up; he did not even break a strap or buckle.

February 1865 - Gillies' Coach with passengers

The Age, 28 Feb 1865

The Mountaineer, of Friday last, says: — It must be a source of gratification to all now residing in the Wood's Point district, and also to those wives who are anxious of joining their husbands, and settling in a part of the colony offering such great inducements, to learn that the Yarra track is now open regularly for the conveyance of passengers, by Mr Gillies' coach. On Tuesday afternoon, a coach full of ladies and children was brought to the Reefers' Hotel, direct from Melbourne, its passengers experiencing no more fatigue than used to be felt in the old days when coaching from Melbourne to Sandhurst. This is saying a great deal, and speaks volumes for the energy shown by the Government in opening up what must be a main road of the colony, through most difficult country, in less than nine months, and reflects great credit upon Mr Gillies for having shown that, inspite of adverse opinions, the Yarra track is available for coach traffic. We now learn, on the very best authority, that no less than six hundred men, under the control of Mr Wilks, are busily engaged making the road, so that, when the weather sets in wet, it will still be available for the transmission of machinery. By all we hear, there is every probability of a daily coach being driven into Matlock within a very few weeks. It is a rare thing to be able to point to Government action as something prompt and business like, but in this case credit is due, and we cheerfully give an instance where the Government stroke has been deviated from in a manner which must prove highly advantageous, not only to the Upper Goulburn district, but to the whole colony.