

Crossing the water

Surrounded by waterways and the National Park, the land south of metropolitan Sydney – later to become Sutherland Shire – was not easy to access.

The extension of the Illawarra Railway Line to Sutherland in 1885 was a boon to the eastern part of the district, but farmers at Menai were forced to ford their cattle across the Woronora River. Built in 1912, the bridge over this river served the community until 2001 when a high-level bridge was built.

Menai farmers also relied on the old Lugarno ferry to transport produce to market. This survived until it ceased operation in 1974. By this time the Alfords Point Bridge had been opened to traffic in 1973.

Although the punt service across the Georges River between Tom Uglys Point and Horse Rock Point had been upgraded in 1910, there were severe delays crossing the river. A ferry service was established at Taren Point in 1916, but visiting the Shire was still a slow business, until after the Georges River (Tom Uglys) Bridge was completed in 1929.

Downstream Captain Cook Bridge opened in 1965. While this took pressure off Tom Uglys Bridge, by 1987 traffic congestion was again so great that the construction of a parallel bridge was necessary.

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Surrounded by waterways and the National Park, the land south of metropolitan Sydney that would become Sutherland Shire, was not easy to access in the 19th century. Unlike the Illawarra district further south it had very little agricultural land and no coal deposits to speak of. In addition, Port Hacking, with its ever-shifting sandbars, was a port in name only.

The extension of the Illawarra Railway Line to Sutherland in 1885 was a boon to the eastern part of the district, but farmers at Menai west of the Woronora River were forced to ford their cattle across the river at low tide. They wanted a bridge. It was eventually built in 1912 – the first traffic bridge in Sutherland Shire. It served the community until 2001 when a high-level bridge was built over the Woronora River.

The farmers at Menai also relied on the old Lugarno ferry – used spasmodically for 50 years before Menai was settled in 1896 – to transport produce to market. This survived until it ceased operation on 12 December 1974. By this time the Alfords Point Bridge further upstream had been opened to traffic in 1973.

In 1910 the punt service across the Georges River between Tom Uglys Point and Horse Rock Point in the south was upgraded to cope with the increasing traffic. However, by the 1920s the volume of traffic was so great that delays of six and seven hours to cross the river were not unusual. Another ferry service was established downstream at Taren Point in 1916 to replace a private service that had operated there. Nevertheless, visiting Cronulla – or anywhere in the Shire – remained a slow business for many years.

The situation was relieved after the Georges River Bridge Act was passed in the NSW parliament in 1923, allowing Sutherland Shire Council to raise an overseas loan to finance bridge construction. The Georges River (Tom Uglys) Bridge was completed in 1929, a toll bridge that brought an ever-increasing flow of motor transport into the Shire, as tourists flocked to Cronulla.

In the post-war years, as the population of Sutherland Shire rose dramatically, Tom Uglys Bridge could no longer cope with the worsening traffic. It was the fulfilment of a dream the Council had since 1912 when the Captain Cook (Taren Point) Bridge opened in 1965, thus taking the pressure off Tom Uglys Bridge. But by 1987 traffic congestion was again so great that the latter was duplicated by the construction of a parallel bridge.

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