

# NAMING THE HIGHWAYS

## Cunningham Highway No. 17

When the Road Plan for Queensland was being formulated it was decided that as far as possible the Highways and Regional Developmental Roads would be named after the explorers who were associated with the areas in which they are located or which they serve.

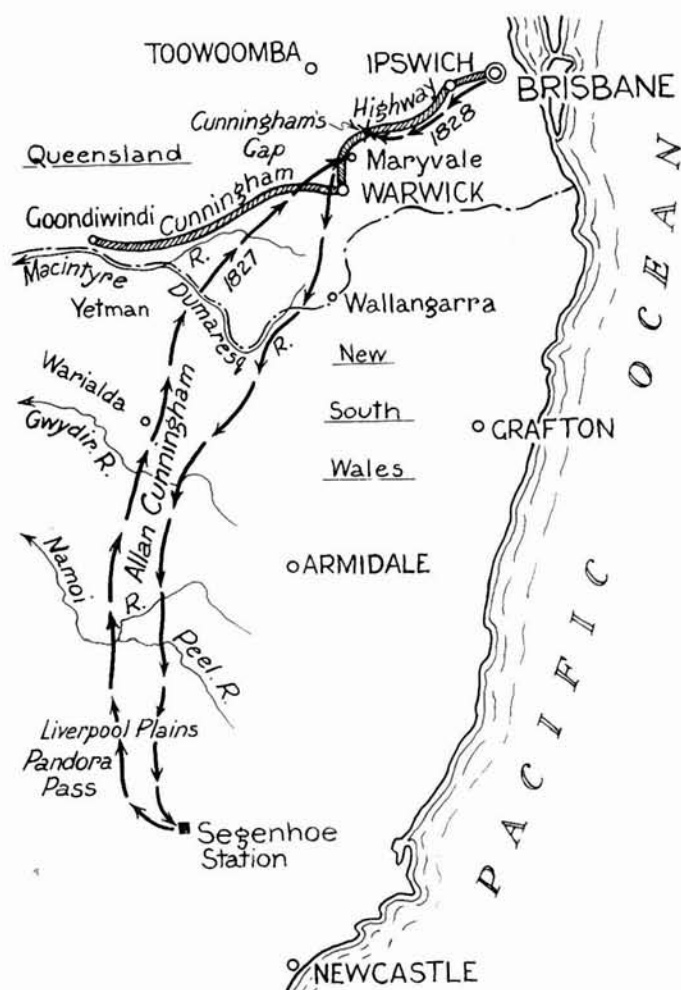
It is therefore proposed, in this and future issues, to give brief accounts of these early explorations which have associations with these road names.

The Cunningham Highway as now declared under "The Main Roads Acts" starts at Brisbane, runs through Ipswich and passes close to Amberley where a World War II Elementary Flying Training School base, at which much of the original construction was carried out by this Department, has been developed into a major Air Force Station. It then continues through the rich agricultural areas of the Warrill Creek Valley and the Fassifern Valley to cross the Great Dividing Range through Cunningham's Gap. Skirting Maryvale it traverses the southern edge of the Darling Downs to Warwick on the banks of the Condamine River. From Warwick the Highway continues south-westerly through sheep grazing and agricultural lands to Inglewood, then through the tobacco areas of Yelarbon, on to Goondiwindi and across the McIntyre River into New South Wales.

It is appropriate that the name of Cunningham should be perpetuated in this important Highway which traverses the region of his great journey of exploration and serves so much of the country made available for settlement as a result of his efforts. For the historical notes which follow free use has been made of material published in "An Australian Encyclopaedia" and in "Gaps in History", being an address presented by Mr. H. G. Krause to members of the Post Office Historical Society, Queensland, in 1955. The full texts are available in the Queensland Public Library and the Oxley Memorial Library.

Allan Cunningham (1791-1839) was born in Wimbleton, Surrey, educated at Putney and trained for the law by a Lincoln's Inn conveyancer. Being bored with law, he became assistant to the Manager of Kew Botanical Gardens who recommended him to Sir Joseph Banks (remembered for his association with James Cook) as a botanical collector. He was ordered to proceed to New South Wales and arrived at Port Jackson on 20th December, 1816. There he was attached to Oxley's expedition of 1817 and then transferred to King's surveys of the Australian Coast.

In August, 1822, he returned to his botanical researches in New South Wales but in 1823 resumed his explorations during which he discovered Pandora's Pass across the Liverpool Ranges connecting the Mudgee district with Liverpool Plains.



The journey which was to prove of such importance to South Queensland began on 30th April, 1827, when Cunningham left Segenhoe on the Upper Hunter. According to a plan discussed with Governor Darling, Governor of New South Wales, of which Queensland then formed a part, he was to proceed north, westward of the 151 deg. meridian to Moreton Bay and then return by a route farther to the west. The journey was to begin at latitude 31 deg. south where Oxley had terminated his survey in 1818.

Cunningham took with him six men and eleven horses and his equipment comprised a sextant, pocket compass, pocket chronometer, an odometer and a barometer which had been compared with Dr. Mitchell's (the Surveyor General) before leaving Sydney. He reached Liverpool Plains (near the present Gunnedah) on 12th May and crossed the Gwydir (near Gravesend) on 21st May.

In his journal he makes frequent references to severe drought conditions which affected his horses and slowed his progress because of his need to be assured of water supplies at all stages of the journey. In spite of this, however, he reached the Dumaresq River on 28th May.

He then recorded difficult northward journeying mostly in mountainous country in the grip of severe drought. On 5th June he wrote in his journal that he set out in an ENE. direction and after two miles crossed a rocky creek with pools of good water and green grass on its margin and "from the pitch of the ridge" above it he obtained "a most agreeable view" of open country which from its aspect he felt would reward him for his toil and crown his labours.

This was in fact Cunningham's first view of the Darling Downs, the sight of which in the distance "revived the drooping spirits of his people wonderfully".

On 6th June, 1827, he camped on the banks of the Condamine River (which he named "in compliment to the Officer who is A.D.C. to the Governor") in latitude 28° 9' 30" south (by observation at noon on 6th June) and longitude 151° 41' 30" east at a mean elevation above sea of 1,402 ft.

The "extensive tracts", which he named Darling Downs in honour of His Excellency the Governor of New South Wales, "of a rich black and dry soil clothed with abundance of grass . . . stretched in an E.-W. line constituting a range of sound sheep pasture convenient to water but beyond the reach of floods. Such is the character of the Darling Downs which comprise little short of 28,000 acres".

Continuing north from his camp on the Condamine, Cunningham on 7th June camped at the base of a flat topped mountain (which he named Mt. Dumaresq) at "a narrow creek with the finest patch of meadow pasturage I have seen in New South Wales". He climbed this mountain the next day and from its summit viewed the surrounding country. To the north of the Darling Downs large clear patches of land (Clifton Plains) were named Peel's Plains, whilst those to the south and SSE. were christened Canning Downs. The lofty ridge bounding them to the south he named Herries Range.

On the southern side of Mt. Dumaresq a grassy valley extending north-easterly from the Downs to the foot of the Main Range was entitled Millar's Vale. (Mt. Dumaresq is just to the south of the present Highway near Clifton Vale.)

Rain delayed the journey at this point and on 10th June Cunningham, endeavouring to get to the high ranges to the east, had to deviate to the south-east to skirt a large mountain which he named Mt. Sturt in honour of Captain Sturt of the 39th Regiment. Then travelling north-easterly again he entered a valley which he named Logan's Vale in honour of Captain Logan,

Commandant of the settlement at Brisbane. The place at which he set up his camp was near the present site of Swanfels.

He climbed the range on 11th June, recorded in his journal as "a morning of sharp frost 30 deg.", from where he observed "through some hollow part of the extreme range about 1½ miles away"—near the present site of Maryvale—"portions of the country in the vicinity of Brisbane River at north-east, also parts of more distant lands at the base of the Mt. Warning Ranges, the cone of which we saw distinctly crowning a group of mountains about 60 to 70 miles away".

Had the day continued fine, Cunningham proposed to climb to the highest ridge "to have observed how far a passage over these lofty ranges could be effected by which the country passed over could become accessible from the shores of Moreton Bay or Brisbane River. We, however, noticed from the station to which we had climbed a very deeply excavated part of the main range bearing from us NNE. two or three miles to the pitch of which there appeared a tolerably easy rise along the back of a forest ridge from the head of Millar's Valley. So remarkable a hollow in the principal range I determined not to leave unexplored since it appeared it might prove to be a very practicable pass from the eastern country to the Darling Downs and thus form the door of a very considerable grazing country".

The "deeply excavated part of the main range" was in fact the pass which is now known as Cunningham's Gap through which passes the present Highway, which on the western side generally follows Cunningham's "tolerably easy rise along the back of a forest ridge from the head of Millar's Valley".



The Great Dividing Range and Cunningham's Gap from the Fassifern Valley.

Mt. Cordeaux is on the right of the Gap and the twin peaks of Mt. Mitchell on its left. Spicer's Gap, first discovered by Cunningham's party, is on the southern end of Mt. Mitchell.