

## FERRY to BRIDGE

Compiled by Marie Newman 1990

Today marks a very special moment in the history of Coraki when the citizens of the Richmond River Shire come together to celebrate the opening of a new bridge crossing the Richmond River.

It is a time to congratulate the Government of New South Wales who, in co-operation with the Richmond River Shire Council, found the necessary funding to build a bridge to replace the ferry that has been in operation for 92 years. The building of the bridge at Coraki follows many years of overtures to governments by Council, local organisations and citizens of the district.

Its building follows agreement between the Roads and Traffic Authority and the Richmond River Shire Council which offered to construct the bridge at a cost not exceeding the annual cost of operation of the ferry, and with the objective of being free of debt after a period of ten years. This joint venture between State and Local Government will bring a new meaning to Coraki as a place where roads meet as well as rivers meet.

My congratulations go to the Engineering Staff of Council, ably led by Mr. Bill MacMahon, who in co-operation with the Roads and Traffic Authorities' Bridge Engineer, Mr. Terry Doolan, and his bridge gang, undertook the task of building the \$1.5 million structure.

It will be seen as a lasting monument to them and one in which we, as citizens of the district, can take immense pride.

David Parkinson.

President, Richmond River Shire Council.

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It is with some sadness that the R.T.A. farewells its last ferry on the Richmond River. Ferries have played a major part in the development of the Northern Rivers area and as such became an integral part of the lifestyle.

The R.T.A. (formerly the D.M.R.) has been proud of the service it has provided and the standard of vessel operated on its various ferry crossings. Our ferry operators have become respected members and friends of the communities they served and their passing along with the ferries is one of the prices we pay for progress. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all employees, both past and present, for the loyal service faithfully given, which made the ferry the dependable and cherished vessel for which it will be remembered. At the same time, the R.T.A. is very proud of the bridge that now replaces the ferry.

The design and construction was very much a local initiative and the R.T.A. is grateful to the Richmond River Shire Council for the initial securing of the loan for the bridge. Without this offer, funds could not have been provided for this magnificent structure. State funds are necessarily limited and accordingly projects of greater priority would always dictate policy.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members of my staff and Council staff involved in the building of this fine new bridge and am sure that it will provide reliable service for at least as long as that provided by the ferries.

R.L. Smythe.

Divisional Engineer, Roads and Traffic Authority.

Coraki's new bridge is constructed with a combination of pre-cast pre-stressed components and formed on-site re-enforced concrete. It consists of seven spans at 26.0 metre intervals giving an overall length of 184.3 metres. The roadway is two lanes of 4.0 metres each and the overall width of the structure is 9.2 metre. One unique design feature incorporated in the structure is the use of the span over the navigation channel, which naturally has to be able to withstand accidental impact, as the point at which the bridge is fixed thus allowing expansion to take place each way towards the abutments. This allows the other piers and the two abutments to be more slender and thus less expensive.

The bridge has been funded initially by the Shire but repayable by the Roads & Traffic Authority over a set period. Construction work on site has been undertaken by a very competent Roads & Traffic Authority bridge gang and all pre-cast pre-stressed products used in the bridge were manufactured by Council staff at its pre-stressing plant north of Casino.

W. McMahon,

Engineer, Richmond River Shire Council.

#### HISTORY of the FERRIES.

A permanent settlement was established at Coraki in 1849 when William Yabsley was able to obtain the lease of Brook Station. With the passing of the Robertson Land Act in 1861 many new settlers arrived and a plan for the Village of Coraki was made in 1866. From then on the settlement grew and along with it the need for a public means of crossing the river

A letter to the "Clarence and Richmond Examiner" (9-10-1866) the first paper published in the North Coast area at Grafton even highlighted the fact that such a service would shorten the distance from Grafton to Ballina by 40 miles instead of taking the usual route through Casino.

The Rev. John Thom the first Presbyterian Minister on the Northern Rivers and a respected member of the community at Coraki who has been "energetic in the matter of obtaining a ferry service" was drowned while crossing the river at Coraki on 2nd September 1869.

This gave an impetus to petitions for a government funded ferry service. However it is hard to ascertain from records available to us when such a service began operating and when it became partially or fully funded by the government.

Reading from the diaries of William Yabsley Jnr. such a service was operating in the 1870's and we do know that a new ferry for this service was built and launched by him in August 1879. It ran from a point near the present Police Station to the point now known as McDermott's Point.

By the 1880's both Yabsley and Yeager had established successful shipping enterprises and Coraki was a busy inland port. There was obviously a huge increase in the use of the ferry as by the 1890's the leases were publicly auctioned and the competition for them was keen.

In 1891 "Scrubby" Nolan obtained the lease for 10 pounds. The next year it went to Patrick Gillick for 53 pounds and two years later the successful tenderer was J. Hutchinson who paid 93 pounds so the service had become a lucrative one. However complaints about its operation were numerous. The very early ferries had no gates or side rails. The ferry approaches were rather steep and very slippery in wet weather.

The local member Mr Pyers continually received requests for a better service. During 1895 several meetings were held to petition for a bridge over the south arm. Another suggestion was for a ferry crossing to East Coraki below the Coraki Hotel. Eventually to help quell this discontent it was agreed to run another cable across the North Arm to join up with the one from the South Arm. This really did little to improve the service as there was a longer waiting period for the ferry and the propellers of boats going to Lismore sometimes became entangled in the ferry cables causing delays.

However changes were about to take place. John McKinnon noted in his diary 10th February, 1897 that Council had decided to take over the ferry at Coraki as offered by the Minister for Works, provided the Government established another ferry at the foot of Adams Street.

The Public Works Annual Report 1898-1899 notes that a new hand ferry punt crossing was built at Adams St. Coraki in 1898. In that year the tender for the Adams Street ferry went to P. Roche for 50 pounds 7 shillings and 6 pence and the South Arm ferry to J. Hile for 40 pounds.

During 1903-1904 the bridge over the South Arm became a reality. Arrangements for and a full description of the bridge appeared in the Richmond River Herald and the first pile was driven in September 1904. Although the building of the bridge was in progress, dissatisfaction with many aspects of it were voiced, especially regarding its approaches and the site chosen, some saying that had it been on the site of the ferry, it would have been "an ornament to the town".

However the bridge, sometimes referred to as the Pyer's bridge, but never officially named so, was completed within 8 months and opened for traffic on 4th May 1905, all for the cost of 9500 pounds and the South Arm ferry ceased running.

During 1904 the Government announced that it would endeavour to convert all ferries to steam, but this was not accomplished in Coraki until September 1910, when a steam ferry built in Ballina went into operation.

Responsibility for roads, bridges and ferries was in the hands of the Department of Public Works from the late 1850's. Later, when local Government bodies were formed they took over. In 1925 the Main Roads Board assumed the responsibility. This became the Department of Main Roads in 1932 and in January 1989 the Roads and Traffic Authority. Unfortunately little information was available from these sources about Coraki ferry.

Museum photographs graphically portray the menace the water hyacinth became on the river and its lower tributaries at the time of World War 1. Gladys Hunt (aged 94) speaks of the long waiting periods experienced while the ferry rope was cleared to allow its passage across the river. After

individual and council efforts to clear the hyacinth, a severe drought followed by a flood was most effective. A board formed by Woodburn Shire Council continued its efforts for many years to prevent a re-occurrence.

The steam ferries were at first fired by coal delivered from Newcastle by North Coast Steam Navigation ships, but later when road transport replaced shipping to a great extent, then wood was used. Lionel Clifford of Empire Vale recalls that he had the contract for the delivery of wood to the Coraki ferry. He and "Blue" A. Giggins cut and loaded it at Dungarubba and delivered it for ten shillings (\$1) per cord (128 cubic feet). A Coraki ferry notebook dated April 1937 shows "firewood for the month of April, eight and a half cords."

The life of the ferryman was not an easy one as it entailed continuous shift work in all weathers. However, it was a secure job paying five pounds a week, which was good money in the forties. Most of these men on the steam ferries had obtained their qualifications and experience on ships. Each shift had its extra duties to perform besides attending to the usual traffic. The day shift had to polish all the brass, copper and windows. The afternoon shift had to attend to lanterns and navigation lights, clear the boiler tubes and remove the ashes. The mid-night shift had to wheel barrows of coal or wood aboard, wash and clean the deck and benches and clean and fill the lanterns.

Ringling the bell for the ferryman was regarded as against the rules, except in the case of child-birth, or sudden accident or illness, such as snake bite. In the days when child-birth was not openly discussed, the ferryman would discreetly inquire about the expected arrival date, make note of it, and when not needed, stop on the east side as the time drew near, especially at night.

Floods created special problems for the ferryman, and inconvenience for those who used the ferry frequently. Because of Coraki ferry's position just past the junction of the two main arms of the river and its relative up stream position, the ferry would cease running when the river rose six feet (1.8 metres). The ferryman on duty would then have to secure the ferry and man the ferry rowing boat. Marcia Bernie (nee Cavanaugh) recalls that her father, a ferryman from 1936 to 1946, almost severed a finger in this tying up operation.

There was much protest from local communities when the Department of Main Roads decided in 1953, because of the dangers, to discontinue the use of the ferry rowing boat for emergency crossings. Bill Tarplee was a ferryman at this time and recalls the angry reaction of users to this new situation. Len Gallagher operated his own boat at this time, but a labour union protested. In 1955 Ken Thomas was appointed Controller of the Civil Defence in this area (this later became the State Emergency Service) and this organisation took over responsibility for this service, so vital for the supply of food stuffs and medical aid in the days before helicopters were readily available.

Big jobs on the ferries have been carried out at Ashby on the Clarence, or the Riley's Hill dry dock. The latter had at one time a gang that worked almost exclusively on the ferries- among them Jack Male, Peter Bolton, Cecil Tegge and Bill Dann. For jobs like repairs on site, a gang came from the D.M.R. Depot at Ballina. It was quite surprising how often people managed to break the boom. This happened twice in 1975, first in July, then not a month later in August.

The only tragic accident off the Coraki Ferry was the accidentally drowning of Angus Robert Arthurton in June, 1960. There were a few, who drove their vehicles (one a low loader) into the water but escaped.

Bill Tarplee can recall working at the Riley's Hill Dock when ferries were converted from steam to diesel power during 1959. When put into operation this meant much less work for the ferryman as the diesel fuel is delivered onto the ferry and this does not even interrupt its operation. Lights too are now automatic and a motor is supplied for the boat if needed.

It is interesting to note that statistics in the December 1948 Journal of the Department of Main Roads reveal that the Coraki steam ferry could accommodate eight vehicles, made an estimated 740 trips per week, and carried 646 vehicles. There was no estimate for cattle. During 1989 the ferry could accommodate six vehicles, made 1218 trips per week and carried 1260 vehicles.

Ferries are not named but numbered. This last ferry to run at Coraki is Number 92, which will go to the Clarence as a relief ferry when the bridge is opened. Since the 1940's it has been the policy of the Department of Main Roads, to replace ferries with bridges, depending on the volume of traffic and whether it would be more economical. For many years residents, especially those on the east side have hoped for a bridge. Some can remember the late Paddy Roche canvassing for signatures to a petition for such a bridge many years ago and Ken Thomas, a local councillor for 25 years, has constantly brought it to the notice of council.

However, this bridge has not resulted so much from public outcry, as was the case in 1904, but rather from the decision of the Richmond River Shire Council and the Roads and Traffic Authority that the provision of a bridge would prove less costly in the long term, than maintaining ageing ferries and providing the wages of men to run them. The opening of the new bridge will be a great event for the district and will mark the passing of an era lasting more than 100 years. The ferries have been part of our river history and have provided a wonderful service and were the source of many stories, both humorous and sad, and many kindnesses shown, and much news and gossip exchanged by travellers.

JACK PINKERTON (aged 97). I was reared in the Coraki area. My father had that farm along the north arm (Wilson River) that Addie Kelly now owns. I can remember crossing the first ferry when Jack Hile was the ferryman, and the building of the bridge on the road to Lismore.

My parents always said that quite by accident, they were first to drive across it. My father dealt in cattle and my parents were making a day journey to Ballina in the sulky to pay Mr. Lang, the auctioneer there, for some cattle. They crossed the new bridge at 6a.m. and were informed that they were the very first to drive across. They also used to say that Louisa Yabsley was the first to walk across. An official opening was never ever held for that bridge.

Researchers of the Historical Society found what Mr. Pinkerton said extremely interesting. Jack Hile was the last ferryman at the first ferry site.

Regarding the bridge, the "Richmond River Herald" tells us that a committee was formed to plan an official opening. One person even suggested that the Governor should be invited "to Coraki, the hub of the universe" to perform the ceremony! Careful study of further editions of the paper failed to find a report of this official opening.

It is also evident from reading the papers that there was quite a deal of discontent with the siting of the bridge, the approaches and the state of the roads.

Also at this time Mr. Pyers lost his parliamentary seat. Perhaps these factors led to the abandonment of the official opening. It was interesting to hear Mr. Pinkerton verify this fact.

Extracts from the diaries of Wm. Yabsley Jnr. reveal that Ethel, his youngest daughter, walked across the bridge at the end of April. Perhaps Louisa was there early on the 4th May !

TOM ROCHE (aged 92 years) My father Paddy Roche worked on the ferry when it ran from the Police Station to what is now called McDermott's Point.

When the bridge was opened for traffic (May 1905) he had the lease of the Adams Street ferry. At first it was a hand punt, then a small oil engine. He was not qualified to work the steam ferry when it came in so he got a job as a "lumper" on the wharves in Coraki.

We lived just by the ferry approach at East Coraki. Mother had a small shop there. There was quite a township on that side of the river in those days. I remember that people used to leave their horses and sulkies in our yard, and come across the ferry on foot for the pictures and shopping.

GLADYS HUNT (aged 94 years) My sister-in-law Chris had come down from Dyraaba to await the arrival of her second child, with her little daughter Gladys, (c. 1924) and as was usual in these circumstances we kept the pony shut in the stock yard all night in case the call came in the hours of darkness. Sure enough, the call did come one night about mid-night. Chris came in to announce the hour had come. Mabel and I got up and dressed, harnessed the pony and with poor little Chris wedged in between us, set off for Coraki.

When we got there, we found the ferry was off, (we were just recovering from a flood) and the ferry was not yet in service, so we rang the bell and the ferryman came over promptly. A very silent little party, no conversation. About half way over the river, our oarsman broke the silence by asking "Is one of yez sick?" To which enquiry we replied, "Yes". One didn't talk to men you didn't know very well on delicate subjects. He had a fair idea, of course, just what was going on and helped little Chris out of the boat with great care.

Safely on the Coraki side of the river, we set out to walk around to Nurse King's in Martin Street. It was not very far, up Adam Street, past the Manse and right into Martin Street, the first house in the row, I think. "She is not at home, she is at that house down there; you can see it all lit up. She is delivering a baby." So Chris and I sat on the stairs while Mabel ran down the street to get Mrs. King. They were soon back and we delivered poor little Chris into Mrs. King's hands. Chris was a good little soldier, and took all these strange happenings very bravely - "as game as an ant" as my brother George would have said.

Next day, Father and Mother decided they had better go in and see how little Chris had fared. By this time the ferry was running again and they could drive around to Nurse King's. They found Chris had a dear little daughter and going along quite well. As they came home they told the Ferryman (the same man as on the night before) the whole story, and he said, "Yes, that was how I thought it was." Chris got home after a fortnight at Nurse King's, and after recuperating for a few weeks, went home to Dyraaba with her two little daughters.

Another story from Gladys- Jack Boland a neighbour of ours at Tuckurimba, had a lovely bay mare called " Kathy", who used to pull their sulky to church every Sunday. Always running late for Mass, Kathy would be first off the ferry, dashing in fine style up Adam Street to the Catholic Church.

My father, the late Herbert Hunt coveted Kathy, and finally Jack Boland sold her to the Hunt Family. However Kathy and other ideas. The Hunts were Methodists, and the Methodist Church was in Bridge Street. When Kathy got to the intersection of Adams and Bridge Street, she would prop, circle and refuse to go down Bridge Street. The only way to get her to the Methodist Church, was to go down Richmond Terrace and around that way. She was never happy with us, and finally bit me, so we had to sell her.

WILF CLARK (aged 88 years) When I was a baby we lived at Oakland and my father worked in the saw mill there.

Mum told me on late shopping night she would wheel me in the pram to the ferry and leave the pram at the approach until returning. They had a large collie dog, who lay under the pram to wait for us. One night a bloke called Hughie Nelson thought he'd play a joke by hiding the pram, but the collie dog almost tore the trousers off him.

After we moved to town, as a boy, I crossed the ferry each day to get a billy of milk from Mrs. Roche. As I remember it Paddy Roche operated the hand ferry then by himself.

Years later when I worked for Sheridan's Store I crossed the ferry many times as we rode the district collecting orders from the many small farms. One of our trips took us almost to Casino, then across the ferry at Tatham, and down to the Coraki ferry on the other side.

BERNIE EAST (aged 82 years) We came to live on a farm at Oakland in 1919 and I went to work in the Coraki Post Office in 1923.

It was a steam ferry then, later replaced by a larger steam ferry. The ferry master was Joe Nix who also lived on the east side along the road to Woodburn. As for other ferrymen, I can remember Ted Sheather, who lived on the main road on the hill in Coraki opposite the shop, Ted Coombes, Dave Williams and a man called Fairhall. In the 20's when the ferry went to dock for overhaul it was replaced by a small petrol engine ferry. This engine was very unreliable and often a motor boat was put on to help it across.

I do remember one crabby old ferryman, who stayed at the hotel and had his midday meal delivered on a plate with the four corners of a tea towel knotted around it. He once ran the ferry so far up the bank it could not be refloated and they had to wait for the "Australasia" on the return trip from Lismore to tow it off the bank. This same man stood one day making uncomplimentary remarks about the old "Platypus". She had been a sailing ship with very tall masts, converted to steam and she was putting against the wind and the falling tide. However, as he made these remarks, she picked up the ferry rope and stripped it from the ferry. He was not pleased about that!

At one stage in the 20's (I went to work in Grafton in 1930) they instituted a timetable - the town side on the quarter-hour and the east side on the half-hour. This was very unpopular.

A Methodist Minister at the time went along and rang the bell, regarded as only for use in emergencies. The ferryman informed him that he could only cross if he was a doctor. "I'm a Doctor of Divinity", he said, "so please take me across."

I have known Mrs. Rita Brooks of Coraki for years. She too was brought up at Oakland. Neither of us thought we'd live to see a bridge in Coraki, and if we did we'd surely be in wheelchairs. However, it does seem now, God willing, we'll be able to walk across on opening day.

JEAN RAYNER (Nee Kennedy) HORSE and SULKY DAYS ( C.1910). My father prided himself on having the fastest sulky horse in the East (East Coraki that is). Unfortunately a lady from that side of the river had the same opinion of her horses. If ever they met on the road the race was on - the worry of my mother's life. Even if my father was going in the opposite direction and came upon the said lady, he would turn his outfit around, give the horse its head while she, by this time was urging her horse on too, and so the race continued until my father came level with her or passed her.

One occasion he was bringing my sister and brother to the dentist in Coraki. He and the lady driver met at the Oakland turn, and the race was on. Roads were rough then. My father reached the ferry first, or always said he did, after a very fast drive and a rough one. He looked to his two passengers for a word of praise, only to find he only had one. "Where is your sister?" says he." She fell out back at the second house," says my brother, who survived the ride only by hanging on for dear life himself.

They turned and retraced their steps, met my sister who had picked herself up and was trotting along the road hoping she would catch the same ferry. My father was so carried away with the race he hadn't even noticed she had bounced out and hadn't any idea my brother had tried to tell him.

GEORGE MITCHELL. Having been a commuter of the Coraki ferry since 1922, one is inclined to take for granted the everyday workings of the ferry. If the ferries that have serviced the district could talk, what tales they could tell. Think of the amount of milk taken across by horse and cart to the local condensery, the cream taken to the Coraki Butter Factory, the pigs and cattle to the local sale yards and grain to the North Coast Steam Navigation Company's wharf for shipment to Sydney.

My early recollections are of steam powered ferries and the ferrymen in their dark clothes and little black caps; men such as Buckland, Fairhall, Joe Nix, Ted Sheather, Ted Coombes and Dave Williams.

I remember when the steam ships blew their sirens down river as a signal to the ferrymen to cease operations and drop the ropes to the bottom of the river to enable the ships with engines idling to drift across without damaging the ropes.

In those days the ferries were fired with coal, delivered by the North Coast Steam Navigation Company, and unloaded in a coal bunker that was situated where the eastern approach of the new bridge now stands. In later years the fuel changed to wood supplied by local contractors and stacked where the approach on the town side now stands. The ferrymen then had to wheelbarrow the coal or wood from the stockpile to the ferry. What a welcome change it must have been for them when all the ferries were converted to diesel power.

Floods were always a hazard, both for the ferrymen and the public. When the ferry ceased operations the driver had to man a rowing boat to convey the public to and from town.



I remember the ingenuity of Bert Pinkerton, who delivered our bread for many years. One flood caught him unawares on the town side, but not to be beaten, he and his boss took the wheels off the delivery cart, put it on a rowing boat and rowed to the east side. They then returned and collected the wheels and harness and swam the horse across behind the rowing boat.

There are memories of the many head of cattle driven from the Casino district for agistment in the Tuckean swamp area during big droughts. They would circle many times at the ferry flap and sometimes it would take an hour to get them on board.

Then there was Bill McCormack droving cattle, collected from the farms between Woodburn and Coraki, to the sales in Coraki. Bill was a master at ferrying cattle. No doubt it was because he always had a good dog and in the school holidays a team of would-be drovers and some extra special words for any animal that was obstinate.

There are many who are going to miss the ferry; especially those professional people who wrote up their notes while waiting for or travelling on the ferry, and those of us who took the opportunity to catch up on the local gossip with friends and neighbours.

Appreciation must be expressed for the 24 hour, 7 days a week service provided by our ferries at no cost to the user, and to all the drivers who gave dedicated service to the public over the many years of operation.

(Many agree that George Mitchell, who has spent 68 years on the east side of the river and been involved in many community organisations, has probably crossed the ferry more than anyone else.)

THE ARTHURSON FAMILY. Men of the Arthurson family must surely qualify for some special record, for at one stage, three brothers manned Richmond River ferries. Jack was on Bums Point, Angus (Spark) on Woodburn and Andy on Coraki. These men had all previously worked on the river boats, as had their father before them.

"Spark" was on the small relief ferry when it sank in the February 1951 flood in Woodburn. Cattle being moved from low land crowded to one end of the ferry. This made the flap sink under water and the ferry to nose dive, resulting in water entering the hatch holes and filling the hull. The tragedy of the sinking was the drowning of a local woman, who was in the passenger cabin.

Sadly "Spark" himself was accidentally drowned on 20th June, 1960 when his car plunged off the Coraki ferry into the Richmond River.

ROY GOLLAN The biggest fright I ever had, happened in the 50's when the brake cylinder blew out at the top of the ferry cutting as I went on with a truck load of pigs.

Andy Arthurson was on the ferry and Spark (Arthurson) was there too. I had three passengers in the cab with me, including my daughter Joy, who shouted, "Hit the side of the ferry, Dad!" This I did and it slowed me down and I was able to change gear.

PAT BOLAND. Seeing the new bridge being built in Coraki, reminded me of the days before cattle were moved in trucks, and we used to take them across the ferry on horseback.

I remember well a day in 1935 (I think) when my brothers Tom, and Jack, Cecil Ronan, Paddy Gray and I took 300 head cows and calves across the Coraki ferry. They were going from Tuckurimba to Tom Boland's place at Fine Flower. The cattle had been dipped in an arsenic dip as well as the fact that it must have been the hottest day of the year. We cut out about 100 head, which was a load for the ferry and one man went with them to hold them just out of town.

I went across with the next load and when I reached the other cattle they were all lying down with their tongues out and three were already dead on the bitumen road. A very nasty old man came along and lectured me about ill-treating animals. I told him what to do and where to go and he headed off for the Police Station. In a few minutes a Policeman arrived on a motor bike. He must have been a Christian, that man. He said, "You have a problem. mate. What can be done?" I told him the cattle had been affected by the dipping and the heat and if we didn't get a storm we could lose the lot. However, God took over. We got a big storm, which cooled things down. We had to pay the Council to take away the dead ones and next morning Paddy and Cecil continued the journey and had no more trouble.

LYNDON EVERINGHAM. I spent two years on the ferry in Woodburn and twenty in Coraki, starting in May, 1964.

In some cases there were children I ferried across to school in Coraki, whose children I also ferried to school in my latter years.

I soon learned that many people around Coraki were related, so you had to be a bit careful about what you said. There wasn't a great deal of rejoicing when the ferry had to be taken off the ropes and securely moored during flood times, especially at all hours of the night, what with the rain, mud and flood debris.

However there was always a bit of humour around. I recall an East Coraki local came home late one night from the Golf Club much the worse for wear. I put him across the river and about ten minutes later he came walking back to the ferry. "What's wrong?" I asked. He said, "I want to go over the Police Station and report that someone has let all my tyres down." I said, "You can't do that. They will book you for D.U.I. (Driving Under the Influence)". I convinced him he shouldn't go and offered to walk down the road with him and look at his car. There it was. He'd run off the road into the long grass and soft ground, and as he couldn't see the tyres he thought they were all flat.

Then there was the time when there was an escaped crocodile known as "Hector" in the river. During the 9 a.m. peak hour, with the school bus, Favas' cream lorries and general shoppers' traffic, the ferry broke down in the middle of the river. I had to get the boat out and row to the shed for fuel and a new feed pipe, but before leaving, I told one of Favas' drivers what the trouble was. Apparently when I rowed off he went along the line of traffic and told everyone that Hector the croc was lying in the sun under a nearby willow and as the ferryman did not wish to disturb him he'd rowed over to ring the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

I didn't know a thing about this and when I returned and got the ferry moving the people on board started to give me a real roasting about stopping for this stupid croc. when they were anxious to get across the river.

The ferry also played its part as a delivery service. One day a local grocer left a box of groceries on the edge of the driver's cabin, and told me Mrs. So & So would collect it soon. I forgot all about the box and it was there for quite a while. During this time I ferried a truck load of cattle across. The truck parked close to the cabin and apparently one of the bullocks had its rear to the cabin and half-filled the box with a very sloppy mixture. I didn't notice this until I picked up the box to carry it to the lady as I saw her walking down the ferry approach. Stuck for words, I said, "The grocer said that is the best he can do for greens to-day" She was not impressed!

People on the whole were very kind, and I especially remember the late Sarah Roche, who lived near the ferry approach. She would often bring down some pikelets, or cake for the ferrymen, and if she crossed to town for shopping on a hot day, would bring an icy pole on her way back.

I congratulate the powers that be for at last getting around to building a bridge as a hundred years or more of ferry service must have cost an enormous amount of money - surely enough for several bridges.

JEAN THOMAS. My father Percy Bruce Connor worked on the river boats in the Clarence and then on the Grafton ferry until the bridge was opened in 1932. He then came to Coraki where he worked on the ferry from 1933 to 1938.

WALLY GREBER (Former Ferryman). The thing I remember most of my days 1961-62 on the Coraki ferry was the friendliness of the people. If you were having a bit of trouble, they'd be out trying to help you, and if you did what they considered a good turn for them, they'd bring you something - mostly a bottle of beer. When I packed up to leave after 18 months, I had five dozen bottles of beer!

DOT ROBSON (Nee Watterston). When I rode my horse to school in Coraki. I hated to be on the same ferry as a certain bus driver. He'd get out of the bus and tie my horse's tail in a knot! I'd try to avoid too, a mob of cattle going on to the ferry. The drovers would usually insist that you not make yourself late by waiting, but that you go on with them and you stay in a corner. I'd be scared stiff, sitting on my horse, with all those cattle around.

#### FERRY BOAT BLUES

If I count the years in numbers, it comes to thirty five,  
my working life depended, on a ferry to arrive,  
to cross the Richmond River, and ship me on my way  
to make a useful dollar, alas no work, no pay.

If you are a mathematician check carefully this sum,  
fifteen, three quarter hundreds, weeks of feeling glum.  
Thirty five times forty five, fair as average weeks,  
and half an hour per day, this grim equation seeks.

Close to four thousand hours, give or take a bit,  
that's nigh a hundred working weeks, impatiently I sit.  
At times I'm philosophical, at times I'm feeling bad,  
Alas it makes no difference, TWO YEARS I never had.

Some ferrymen were good, some ferrymen were sleepers.  
How in the wee small hours, to open up their peepers?  
At times a whack upon the wire, would bring them into action.  
He who tolled the bell, unpopular his faction.

Put in positive perspective, possibly a safety valve,  
a chance to practice patience, to tired nerves a salve.  
'Cause he really was the boss, a working ferry master,  
No amount of nasty curses, would make his wheels go faster.

Graham Smith

For the unbelieving  $35 \text{ by } 45 = 1575 \text{ by } 2.5 = 3938 \text{ divided by } 40 = \text{Say} - 2 \text{ working years.}$

BILL McCORMACK. In the days before the cattle trucks, I'd leave here on horseback about daylight with, perhaps, 20 or 30 head of cattle, take them across the ferry at Woodburn and turn them out the road.

I'd canter down to Tom Boland's, collect seven or eight, then to Dick Pickles for a few more and take them across the back way. Then I'd go on through Dungarubba, picking up some here and there along the way. I'd often meet up with Bill Mitchell and sometimes others from around that area bringing a few along. Perhaps I'd have a hundred or even two hundred on a big sale day by the time I got to the Coraki ferry.

Whoever was there, often Bill Mitchell, would give me a hand to get them on the ferry. Then if it was a hot day I'd get the ferryman to stop about 100 yards short of the town side, make them jump in the river and swim to the bank to cool down. Then I'd turn them down towards the Butter Factory; there was a dead end lane there, and leave them there while we got another load across. I'd pick them all up and drive them to the sale yards. At first they were behind the top pub (Commercial - later burnt down) and later behind the middle hotel, the Club.

After the sale Frank and Jock Gollan, and Tom Boland from Woodburn would probably have bought some and it would be back over the ferry again. I'd leave them out around Buckendoon about 9 p.m. and distribute them around their owners the next morning. I was glad when the days of the trucks came as I was getting a bit older.

(Bill Mitchell speaks highly of Bill McCormack's ability with cattle in herding them and in sorting them out for their rightful owners before and after the sales. He recalls too, the wild ones they had at times, an occasional beast that would run up the stone face of the cutting, or wouldn't board the ferry but swim alongside all the way over.)

RUTH MITCHELL. CATCHING THIEVES AT THE FERRY (C. 1980). It must be 30 years or more since Bill and I were holidaying on the Gold Coast and saw these ornamental ducks; a mother duck, just like a Muscovy, and three little ones. I thought they'd be just right for our lawn and we bought them. They'd sat out the front of our house not far from the road really, for years. They were such a familiar sight to people who passed regularly, that some told us they were an East Coraki landmark. They had a lot sentimental value for us, as we have pictures of our girls when they were very young, sitting on the mother duck's back, and a picture too, of the daughter of some dear friends, little Leanne Beck, who died when she was a child.

About 10.30 p.m. one night a car pulled up outside our house and after a few minutes drove off again. Bill got up to investigate, then said, "Ruth. they've stolen our ducks." "Oh, they couldn't!" I said and got out to look too. I sat on the end of the bed and started to cry and said, "We have to get them back." Bill could see the car going towards the ferry and told me to ring Alan Hancock, the local Constable, while he got the car out and followed them to the ferry. There was the car waiting at the ferry in front of us. Alan Hancock arrived on the ferry that came into the bank. Well, these young men had the ducks wrapped up under the front seat. They were charged, and we had to go to the Police Station the next morning and make a statement.

I had another cry. I had my car stolen about a month before, but I felt it could be replaced, but the ducks couldn't. They had to hold the ducks at the Police Station until the case came up about three weeks later but Norm Dean, the Sergeant tried to cheer me up by saying, "Never mind, Ruth, I'll feed them!" Apparently they usually hold stolen goods for a certain time, but when the magistrate heard my sad story he said I could have them back straight away. So they're back sitting on our lawn, in town now, and we have photos of our grandchildren sitting on mother duck's back.

We'd never have caught those thieves and got our ducks back if we'd had a bridge then.

BILL MITCHELL. On cold winter's nights, after a dance or the pictures we'd board the old steam ferry and get on top of the boiler to warm up before galloping home on our horses.

LOLA CLARKE. I have crossed the ferry at least twice a week for 44 years. One of my earlier memories concerns a neighbour, Albert McLean who had an accident and I was called upon to take him to the doctor.

I was all nervous and the car stalled as I drove up the ferry approach. However I did manage to get my patient there. It was some time before I regained my confidence about driving on and off the ferry. You had to be careful too, as there was just enough room for two cars abreast with six inches to spare each side.

I look forward to the convenience of the new bridge, remembering the wasted hours waiting, often in the hot summer sun, and especially in the days before the stock transport trucks, when cattle were driven across and the ferry had to be washed down completely before you could drive on.

However, in another way, it is sad too. Many of my visitors, especially the children, enjoyed the free ferry ride and I must say I'll miss the many chats with friends and neighbours. It was a great place for gossip.

NORM NEWMAN. During 1949-50 I worked with the P.M.G. (now Telecom) as a linesman. We were camped in the Coraki showground buildings and at that time were putting up telephone lines at Marom Creek, which meant crossing the ferry each day. The old ganger, Harry Wallbank, was a hard boss, and the day was long - 7.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. Most of the gang were ex-servicemen, who knew all the tricks in the book, so we often postponed the start of the day by asking the ferryman Sandy Davis, a question, such as, "How far's a knot, Sandy?" Sandy would immediately switch off the motor stopping the ferry in the middle of the river while he gave us what he considered a satisfactory answer. (Much to old Harry's disgust) This once backfired on us. Returning early one Friday afternoon, when we were anxious for a beer and Harry wanted to catch his bus home to Lismore, Sandy insisted on elaborating on a question we'd previously asked him. No amount of heated words

from Harry or us would prevent him "If it's good enough for you to ask a question, it's good enough for me to give a satisfactory answer!"

NITA HAYNES. One of my father's favourite stories (the late George Hunt) was about Tom Donohue who worked for the late Walter Threlfo at Tuckurimba. Tom was a great one for riding around the local dances. One night some of the local lads (among them the late Herb Threlfo, and Norman Paff) decided to try a trick on Tom. They hid at the bottom of Tuckurimba Hill and tied branches onto their arms, and when Tom came riding along on his way home from a dance at Bungawalbyn or somewhere, they slowly rose in front of him, making wailing noises and waving their arms. Tom was so terrified, he rode back over Coraki Ferry, up the Ruthven Plain, over the Wyrallah Ferry and down to Tuckurimba, arriving home in time for the morning milking. He never let on why he was so late home!

The dances at Tuckurimba and Dungarubba were very popular, and the Coraki ferry was in great demand as the local lads used to arrive over in cattle trucks hosed out clean for the occasion.

JIM AND MARGARET LEESON ( Nee Watterston) who were both reared on the other side of the river and spent the early years of their married life in this area, wrote these recollections of the ferry.

In the days of the big regattas the ferry was a great place from which to view the races and was tied up on the town side for the event. In earlier times, when Coraki suffered some large town fires, the ferrymen played an important part, blowing the whistle continuously until everybody turned out to fight the fire.

The ferry was a great place to leave a parcel to be collected or if you wanted a lift home, to sit and wait until someone going your way came along.

During the war years no lights were allowed, and there was great excitement when an electric light pole was erected on the "other" side of the river for a light there.

HELEN TRUSTUM (Nee Maxwell): I will remember - My Dad, George Maxwell and I taking cattle from Delelvin to Ellangowan. We'd take them to the dip yard near the ferry and leave them overnight. Early next morning we'd take half across the ferry and hold them down near the butter factory while the rest were brought over. We'd stand with our horses on the ferry flap - I wasn't keen about doing that. Then we'd round them all up and head off down Adam Street and out past the hospital to Ellangowan.

-The time the driver reversed the ferry at full speed instead of braking and we went backwards across the river.

- Waiting for the ferry, and that dear old gentleman Paddy Roche coming across for a chat.

- Rushing to the ferry to beat Fava's cream trucks and the school bus.

- The fire on the floodboat and the quick exit of my father, into the rowing boat, as he could not swim.

- Picking up Mrs McNamara, who would be walking to town. With her feet firmly on the running board, she would hang on to the side of the truck with one hand, and hold her hat on with the other.

I know my father, now gone, would feel mighty proud of this new bridge, and would think what a great asset it will be for Coraki and the cattlemen in times of flood. Our boys, not living here, have thought a ride on the ferry a luxury. When they talk about it in years to come the next generation will ask, "What ferry?" I'm glad I'm present to see the new bridge and have my memories of the ferry.

DOSSIE HALCROW (Nee Whipps) - During big floods the ferry would be secured and the ferryman would man the boat to make deliveries around the farms. I remember Andy and "Spark" Arthurson were often on it, and they would always ask my father, Harry Whipps, to go with them as he knew the area so well. It would be such a worry to my mother as they would leave at first light and sometimes not return till after dark. It was so dangerous really with so much floating debris and all those submerged fences and such to cross.

FAVA BROS. - Nat, Paddy and John began operating a carrying business (cream, milk, farm goods etc) on the east side of the river on the 1st June, 1936. Although Nat and John died during the time, Paddy and his employees continued to operate this business until the 24th December, 1979, Paddy recalls the many, many ferry crossings they made, with some trucks crossing four times a day and sometimes more.

MICK ESGATE - would also have made many ferry crossings. Mick drove Kirkland's bus from Broadwater, through Riley's Hill, Woodburn, Coraki, and thence to Lismore from 1946 until the late 70's. It was a passenger and freight service as well as taking many children to the schools in Woodburn, crossing the ferry there, and picking up children on that side of the river for the two schools in Coraki where he made another ferry crossing. These people will have fond memories of Mick, his bus and the ferry ride. Now, small feeder services have replaced this service, but this present generation will remember the ferry trip too.

David Martin of East Coraki will have no trouble remembering the year the bridge was opened as it is his Higher School Certificate year at Trinity College, Lismore. Erin Battese, John Dolby, Jason, Beth and Matthew Schaefer, Sarah Spargo, Kate Verrell and Lyndal Watson will have memories of the building of the bridge and their last ferry ride as they cross each week day for school in Coraki. Amy Spargo and Ben Boland will remember it well too, as their very first year at school.

FERRY OPERATORS. An attempt has been made to compile a list of ferrymen in order to record their contribution over the years. No such list was available from any government source, so names have been gleaned from old newspapers, ferry note books and people's memories and do not necessarily appear in order of their service. Some worked for short periods and some for many years. Some were cheerful, friendly and obliging and some were not, but all played their part in making life more convenient for the uses of our ferry service.

#### THE FIRST FERRY.

Ferryman mentioned by Wm. Yabsley Jnr.

Sparrowe  
Wm. Tunstall  
W. Watt  
John McVicar  
Nelson  
Charles Sharpe

From other sources

Bloom  
Gillespie  
"Scrubby" Nolan  
Patrick Gillick  
N. Manlow  
J. Hutchinson  
P. Roche  
J. Hile

#### ADAMS STREET FERRY

Paddy Roche  
Joe Nix  
Jack Day  
Ted Sheather  
Fairhall  
'Dad' Roberts  
Ted Coombes  
Dave Williams  
P.B. Connor  
H. Louis  
J. McIntyre  
C.J. Cavanaugh  
T. Andrews  
Murray  
C.S. Smith

C.A. Gillum  
D.S. Rosman  
P. Orchard  
A.V. Bottrell  
Max Saxon  
J. Evans  
A.L. Arthurson (Andy)  
A.R. Arthurson (Spark)  
"Sandy" Davis  
H.V.F. Richards (Foggy)  
C. Gilbert  
Neil Wallace  
F. Webber  
H.L. Morton  
W. Greber

J.R. McFadden  
A.J. Winslade  
W. Tarplee  
Reg Black  
Lyndon Everingham  
Stan Everingham  
J. Nightingdale  
M. Chaffey  
S.R. Ryan (Ollie)  
J. Haynes  
C. Sauer  
M. Milligan  
W. Robinson  
J. Gollan  
A. Wilkes