

# 'Geringong' Boat Harbour

## Early Years – Up to the Late 1830s

On 19<sup>th</sup> April 1770, Lieutenant Zachery Hicks, a member of Captain Cook's crew aboard the Endeavour, sighted the east coast of Australia.

On that day Cook notes in his Journal: *'The Southermost point of land we had in sight... I have named it Point Hicks because Lieutenant Hicks was the first who discover'd this Land'*.<sup>1</sup> [Point Hicks is located on the northern Victorian coastline, 45 kms east of Cann River.]

Bearing north, Cook then sailed the Endeavour along the coast sighting and naming various places as he went.

For Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> April 1770, part of his Journal reads: *'On about 2 Leagues [c. six miles] to the Northward of Cape St. George [off today's Jervis Bay] the Shore seems to form a bay...The North point of this bay, on account of its Figure, I nam'd Long Nose'*.<sup>1</sup>

As the winds to the north were then favourable, Cook, rather than closely investigating the shoreline, headed farther out and sailed the Endeavour at a distance of about eight miles from the coast. As he did so, he would have passed the then unnamed Gerringong Boat Harbour in the distance.

Twenty seven years later, *'Mr Bass, the surgeon of the Reliance, a young man of much ability in various ways out of line of his profession, solicited, during the repairing of the Reliance, that he might be allow'd a boat, and have her man'd from the King's ships. He was desirous of tracing the coast along in the boat, and to make what observations he might be able relative to harbours or anchorage. I fitted out a good whaleboat for him, victual'd her, and manned to his wish.'*<sup>2</sup>

On 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1797, George Bass and his crew of 6 naval ratings travelled from Sydney down the South Coast on their epic journey to Westernport in the un-named 28ft. whaleboat.

The day after exploring around today's famous Kiama Blowhole, Bass sailed south past today's Werri Beach and Boat Harbour and notes in his diary: *'Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> P.M. At 1 passed LONG NOSE POINT,<sup>4</sup> to the southwards of which this coast bights back considerably to the Westwards and forms a long Bay.'*<sup>3</sup> [for many years this section of beach was called Gerringong Beach – today: it is known as Seven Mile Beach].

Bass then continued down the bay to a river [today: Crookhaven] which he named Shoals Haven and camped in the protected area around today's Goodnight Island.

From there he spent three days exploring the open land SW of today's Pyree, Numba and Terara and explored the Shoal Haven River.

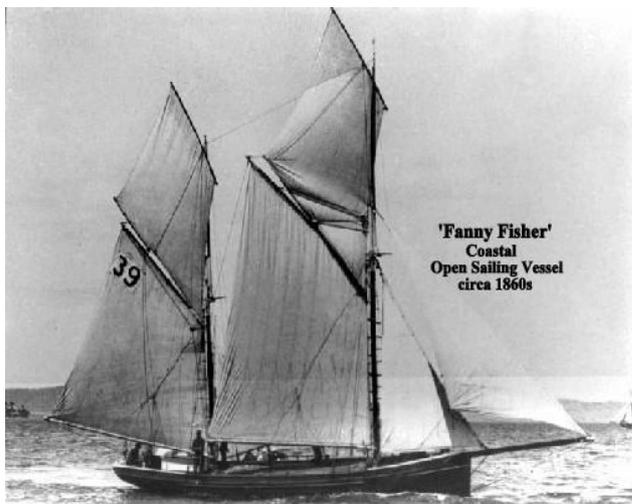
His diary then notes: *'The vicinity of that body of Mountains called the Blue Mountains [today: Cambewarra, Jaspers Brush, Berry, Foxground and Saddleback] does make a little contribution towards keeping this part of the low lands wetter than it would otherwise be.*

*From Long Nose Point they run inland about SW and form to the country here as complete a barrier*

to the North & West as they do at Port Jackson to the South & West.’<sup>3</sup> [Bass may have confused Long Nose Point (Blackhead - Gerroa) with today’s Mt. Pleasant or else he deliberately chose to start the mountains from the point he thought at the time, Captain Cook had previously identified as ‘Long Nose’.]<sup>4</sup>

Today however, we more precisely identify Mt. Pleasant - Saddleback [the GERRINGONG VOLCANICS] as the coastal point for the volcanic basalt flow from the mountains to the sea and not Blackhead (Gerroa) which was formed separately by volcanic ash from an offshore underwater eruption.]<sup>5</sup>

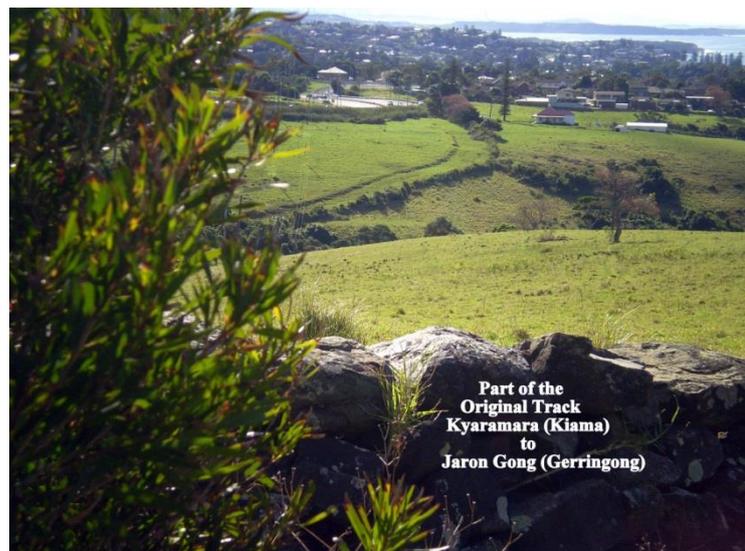
*‘Here indeed their southern extremity, that is, that point of them which is formed by their turning off sharp to the Northwest is perfectly distinct. Whereas there is every reason to believe that we are completely shut in to the Northward as to the Southward, though that part has not yet been traced’.*<sup>3</sup>



By the 1810s, sailing ships such as the ‘Speedwell’<sup>6</sup>, (‘Endeavour’, ‘Mary Anne’, ‘William and Ann’ ‘Geordy’, ‘Windsor’, ‘Cumberland’, ‘Mercury’, ‘Mary’, ‘Three Bees’, ‘Hawkesbury Packet’)<sup>7</sup> and ‘Trial’<sup>8</sup> were regularly plying the Five Islands (Illawarra) coastline [In those days, the Five Islands district started at Bulli and went down as far as today’s Shoalhaven River] transporting men and provisions to the cedar fields of the Shoal Haven before returning to Sydney with cedar.

When the first European settlers eventually came to this locality [Gerringong] from Sydney by horse and by foot in the mid - 1820s, they followed the existing Aboriginal tracks as much as possible.

These narrow trails mostly avoided the dense mountainous forest and cedar brushes by forging their way through the lighter coastal brush. The trail south from *Kyaramara*<sup>9</sup>(Kiama) traversed numerous creeks and ridges as it meandered its way to the headland (Mt. Pleasant) from whence it came straight down the slope to the north end of today’s Werri Beach before continuing along the sandy foreshore and then up over the south headland.



When the first legitimate cut of local ‘Alne Bank’ cedar was ready to be transported to Sydney in the late 1820s, the bridle trail from *Gerringong*<sup>10</sup> to *Kyaramara* and its harbour – then identified as the principal port for the cedar trade in the Illawarra<sup>11</sup> – proved to be almost impossible to negotiate

with any kind of heavy load, *'so that water carriage is the only means settlers have of sending their produce to market.'*<sup>12</sup>

About two miles south of the Mt. Pleasant headland, a slightly protected small inlet seemed the ideal site for the establishment of a harbour.

The location was certainly large enough to accommodate most of the small coastal sailing boats in use at the time, however, there was an enormous degree of uncertainty - mainly due to the vagaries of the weather, we all now know only too well, - as to whether this small cove could perform its primary role as a safe and functional anchorage for facilitating the loading and unloading of vessels.



With no other nearby location on offer, the early pioneers with sheer grit and determination set about *'affording the opportunity of conveyance of produce by water, which is of the utmost importance to the Settler, and an advantage to be met with on fewer other Estates in the Colony.'*<sup>13</sup> A mooring buoy was positioned some 250 feet from the shore and *'Gerongong'* now had its harbour.

The first ships to frequent the new harbour in the late 1820s were light, open, shallow-draught vessels - ideal for manoeuvring in and out of the many coastal inlets.

The majority of these small un-named and unregistered boats were owned by various individuals who eked out a living by specialising in transporting the cedar.

The more substantial vessels were named and registered to wealthy Sydney timber merchants such as Thomas Hyndes<sup>14</sup> and Mr. Lord<sup>15</sup>. (Hyndes who had a land grant nearby was the owner of the 19t. vessel *'Charlotte'*, which was named after his wife. The vessel was wrecked off Five Islands in 1830.)<sup>16</sup>

All of the small cedar-trade vessels of the day were usually manned by three or four men and although some of the craft were very basic and extremely unstable in heavy seas and howling gales, they provided a service that few today would dare contemplate.

Depending on the prevailing weather conditions, the journey to Sydney in either direction could sometimes take up to four days and over the years there were frequent newspaper reports of boats being shipwrecked or simply disappearing shortly after leaving port.<sup>17</sup>

The Masters of all vessels visiting Geringong in those early days would have been familiar with the intricacies of the immediate coastline. With no weather forecasting, satellite GPS, motors or local Mercator maps available to them, the safety of each boat and its crew depended entirely on the navigational skill of these courageous men as they guided their small craft south using a simple pocket compass and their own acquired knowledge of the coast.

As each boat approached Red Cliff (*'The Bluff'*), its final tack to the harbour was visually lined up with a fig tree on the hill just south of today's *'Alne Bank'*.<sup>18</sup>

With sails trimmed, the vessel drifted slowly into the harbour before casting its anchor in the expectation it would take.

The boat was then secured to the positioned buoy for both safety and navigational purposes before the ballast – usually rocks (maybe Sydney’s quarried sandstone waste) - was literally thrown overboard into the water. *‘The effects of this are becoming more and more apparent, and, if permitted to go on, the harbours everywhere will in a short time, be choked up.’*<sup>19</sup> [Note: an interesting aside – many of the blocks used in the existing Alne Bank barn (circa 1838) are of Sydney sandstone.]<sup>20</sup>

In the early 1830s, we know that Thomas Hyndes was transporting cedar out of Kyarmara as well as Geringong<sup>21</sup> and further south Alexander Berry was shipping cedar from the Shoal Haven. The Hindmarsh fitched cedar for pick-up was hauled by pack horse and sled down to the harbour and stacked on the pebbly shore to wait for any available vessel for transportation to Sydney.

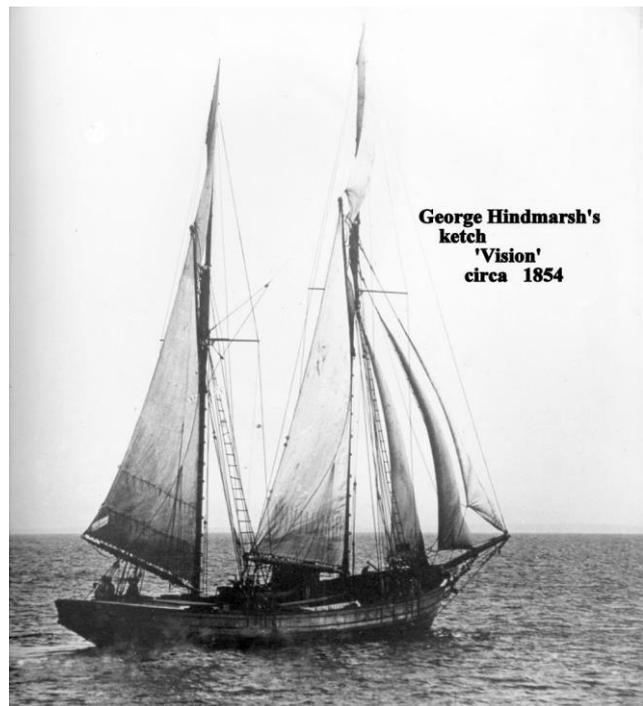
Depending on the prevailing winds, tide and surf conditions, the cedar fitches (planks) were either carried or floated out the short distance from the shore by lumpers - (Michael Hindmarsh’s convict labourers) or else *‘dogged -tied together- to form a raft and then towed a distance into the harbour by bullocks before being hauled to the boat by ropes’*,<sup>22</sup> where they were unlatched and loaded. This process was laboriously slow and extremely dangerous. If conditions proved too boisterous, the whole operation was called off and continued later, when conditions improved.

By 1831, the volume of extracted cedar had increased to such an extent that Hindmarsh had commenced transporting the timber to Sydney in his own ship (*‘The General Bourke’*).<sup>23</sup> This enabled him to have more control over the local industry.

The shipping records of the 1830s list the harbours of the ILLAWARRA as Wollongong and Illawarra. Since the harbours of Kiama and Geringong were worked by the same vessels at the time, the two locations were combined and simply listed as ‘Illawarra’.<sup>24</sup>

Some of the small registered ships servicing the Illawarra in the 1830s were *‘Jane 24t –Schoober’*: Master, *‘Sally 17t - Steele’*, *‘Charlotte 19t - Brown’*, *‘Bee 14t - Friend’*, *‘William 12t - Kingsnorth’*, *‘Hope 14t - Browne’*, *‘Alice 19t - Clavell’*, *‘Fanny 25t - Reid’*, *‘Brisbane 18t - Marsapin’* and *‘Mary Ann 11t - Crumpton’*.<sup>25</sup>

By the 1840s, although some cedar was still being extracted and carted by bullock wagons from Foxground and Broughton to the Geringong Harbour, the ‘glory days’ of the cedar industry in the



immediate area had come to an end. The harbour, now also known as *Jerringong*,<sup>26</sup> was ready to move into its next interesting phase.

1. Reference: *Captain Cook Journal – Mitchell Library*
2. Letter Governor Hunter to Secretary Nepean 3 September, 1789
3. Reference: *George Bass Journal - copy held in the Museum of the Kiama & District Historical Society*
4. **Bass was later to clarify in A MEMORANDUM, the relative positions relating to what he called Cape George and Long Nose Point. Bass states that at the time, he was using Capt. Bowen's sketch of Jervis Bay and its nearby areas which positioned Long Nose differently to Capt. Cook's original positioning of Long Nose. Bowen's sketch showing the location of Long Nose was incorrect.** *Historical Records of NSW Vol 111- Hunter 1786-1799, Ed . F.M. Baldwin NSW Govt. Printer, p332*
5. 2010 Geology Talk given by Peter Clarke to members of G&DHS
6. *Sydney Gazette & NSW Advertiser, 4 January, 1812*
7. *Cumpston J. S. Shipping Arrivals & Departures Sydney, 1788 – 1825 pp. 82-95*
8. *Sydney Gazette & NSW Advertiser, 23 July, 1814*
9. *Sydney Monitor 13 April, 1827*
10. *Sydney Gazette & NSW Advertiser, 4 June, 1829*
11. *Bayley, W.A. Blue Haven p. 16*
12. *Hindmarsh, Michael of Alne Bank, 1945 p.20*
13. *Sydney Herald 27 October, 1834*
14. *Sydney Gazette & NSW Advertiser, 11 December, 1823*
15. *Sydney Gazette & NSW Advertiser, 2 October, 1802*
16. *Sydney Gazette & NSW Advertiser, 6 July, 1830*
17. *Sydney Gazette & NSW Advertiser, 13 March, 1813. ibid, 11 November, 1820. ibid. 5 May, 1821. ibid. 27 September, 1822. Ibid. 11 September, 1823*
18. *McCaffrey, Frank History of Illawarra & its Pioneers, 1922, John Sands Ltd p. 172*
19. *Sydney Gazette 9 September, 1830*
20. *Hindmarsh David, 13 February, 2012*
21. *Bayley, W.A. Blue Haven p. 16*
22. *Brisbane Courier 1 July, 1933 p.19*
23. *McCaffrey, Frank, The Land Newspaper, 1921*
24. *Cumpston J. S. Shipping Arrivals & Departures Sydney, Vol 2, 1788-184: -1831, pp 63-89*
25. *Australian 30 October, 1829 – Ibid. 20 November, 1829 – Ibid. 24 February, 1830 – Ibid. 24 July, 1830.*
26. *Sydney Herald, 23 March, 1842*

Reference: Miller Ken, Early History of Gerringong Shipping – Gerringong & District Historical Society.

Photos: Ken Miller Collection      Kiama and District Historical Society

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