The Journey in 1815
Imagine yourself travelling from Sydney to Bathurst in 1815. You would be either on horseback, in a wagon or walking. The road had been completed in January 1815 and was used by Governor Lachlan Macquarie on his first trip over the mountains in May of that year when he travelled west to proclaim the township of Bathurst. Your total trip from Sydney would take at least 10 days and cover 137 miles on a 12 foot wide road crossing many new timber bridges constructed by William Cox and his party of convicts.

The journey on the new road commenced at the Nepean River near Penrith and mostly followed the general direction of the present day road from Glenbrook to Mount Victoria. It then followed a different path into Bathurst via Mount York and Cox’s Pass. Examples of Cox’s construction techniques are still visible today as you descend Mount York.

Upon reaching the valley floor you then proceeded in a westerly direction following ridge lines where possible and passing by the present day localities of Hartley Vale, Glenroy, Mount Blaxland, Pitts Corner, Phils Falls, Mount Olive Rd, Carlwood and Sidmouth Valley to a point 2kms south of O’Connell.

You continued westerly, not crossing the Fish River, but meeting the Campbells River 1500 metres north of the present bridge crossing at The Lagoon (Apsley). You then ascended to another ridgeline continued north arriving at Bathurst via Gormans Hill concluding your journey overlooking the Macquarie River near the present day memorial in the Peace Park.

Why Was It Constructed?
Governor Macquarie needed new lands to extend and consolidate resources to support the growing settlement of Sydney. Severe droughts, especially the one in 1812, and England’s extended conflict with France and the United States all placed pressure on the continued support and existence of the settlement.

The History of Cox’s Road
After consultation with Governor Macquarie retired Lieutenant William Cox JP of Clarendon near Windsor was put in charge of building the first constructed road out of the Sydney Basin “across the Blue Mountains to the Macquarie River and a centrical part of the Bathurst Plains” commencing on 14 May 1814. Cox’s party consisted of thirty convicts, with a guard of eight soldiers. Within six months they had completed over 100 miles of road and associated bridges from the Nepean River to the then un-named site of Bathurst.

Governor Macquarie instructed that where possible the road was to follow Surveyor Evans’ 1813 survey. Full permission was given to deviate from this line where in Cox’s opinion a better route was available.

Governor Macquarie stated that the road was to be made “at least 12 feet wide so as to permit two carts or other wheel carriages to pass each other with ease. The timber in forest ground to be cut down and cleared away 20 feet wide, grubbing up the stumps and filling up the holes, so that a four wheel carriage or cart may pass without difficulty or danger. In brush ground it is to be cut 20 feet wide and grubbed up 12 feet wide. I conceive this to be a sufficient width for the proposed road at present, but where it can with ease and convenience be done; I should prefer the road to be at least 16 feet wide”

Cox’s party assembled on the banks of the Nepean River near Emu Plains on 17 July 1814. Ascending the Blue Mountains they arrived at Mount York on the edge of the western escarpment on 1 November 1814. After deciding on his path to the valley floor, 38 days of exhaustive work produced a road involving 1.6 kilometres (1 mile) of steep graded descent. Governor Macquarie at this point on his way to Bathurst in April 1815 said “The Pass constructed here by Mr. Cox and his party I have named Cox’s Pass in honour of that gentlemen and as a just tribute due to his indefatigable zeal and meritorious exertions in constructing and finally completing this grand and important pass”

After such a difficult section the remainder of the construction across the foothills to Bathurst must have seemed relatively straightforward. Prevailing wet and stormy weather conditions at the time of construction though, necessitated the crossing of many swollen streams by bridges, and is one reason why a Fish River crossing was not attempted. Cox’s constructed road remained in regular use till 1827, serving as direct access to the Government settlement at Bathurst.

Restrictions placed on the use of Cox’s Road.
Governor Macquarie provided the means to access Bathurst but placed strict control on the use of the road. With military guards placed at strategic points, government permits were needed to allow travel on the new road. These remained in place until Governor Brisbane replaced Macquarie in 1824.

First recorded discovery of gold in the Colony.
While undertaking the survey of Cox’s Road on 15 February 1823 Assistant Surveyor James McBrian made the first
recorded discovery of gold in the colony of New South Wales at Phils Falls on the Fish River. The find was recorded by
the Government at the time but not disclosed to the public, possibly for fear of creating undue pressure on the newly
discovered land.

Alternate entrance to Bathurst
In his survey of 1823 Assistant Surveyor James McBrien devised an alternate entrance to Bathurst (Kelso) diverging from
Cox’s Road at O’Connell Plains. This road crossed the Fish River allowing easier access to the Kelso settlement and the
present day road closely follows the original route.

Travel times from Sydney to Bathurst
1815 – Governor Macquarie's 1st visit - 10 days                           1821 – Governor Macquarie's 2nd visit - 7 days

First coach trip to Bathurst
In March 1824 James Smith and Thomas Fuller of Parramatta established the first conveyance from Parramatta to
Bathurst, undertaking to do the journey in four days with passengers and five days with baggage. The fare was twenty
shillings and mail was also transported at a cost.

Cox’s Road loses importance
In 1829 Lockyer had constructed a new road from the Blue Mountains and by 1830 Major Mitchell’s line of road, 'The Great
Western Road’ via Mt Walker, Meadow Flat and Browns Hill was adopted and soon became the preferred route to Sydney.

Cox’s Road loses bridge
Around 1930 the later Fish River Bridge at Phils Falls was washed away and Cox’s Road finally lost its importance as a
link to Sydney.

Access Today
Public and crown roads cover the current position of Cox’s Road with sections also on private property. Parts of the road
accessible from Bathurst are:
* from O’Connell along Carlwood Road via Sidmouth Valley and on to Carlwood.
* From Carlwood via Mount Olive Road to Fish River at Phils Falls.
* Cox’s most recognised work at Cox’s Pass is well signposted and is a pleasant, if somewhat steep walk where
examples of construction methods are clearly seen.

References
* Early History of Bathurst and Surroundings by Grace Hendy-Pooley, read before The Australian Historical Society, 28 November 1905
* Cox's Way – A Bicentennial Project April, 1987
* Cox's Way – Cox's Road Trust by G. Karskens, 1988
* Journal of the Institution of Engineers, AUSTRALIA. February & March, 1938
* Research by Alan Carey undertaken in conjunction with a Cox’s Way walking track proposal, 1988

Special thanks to Kevin Boole for his extensive research.                 For more facts and maps go to www.coxsroad.com

Cox’s Road completed 1815 - Mount York to Bathurst

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