



Loutitt Bay (Lorne)

In 1864 the Mountjoy brothers arrived at Loutitt Bay after coming originally from Cornwall, England. They were primarily interested in growing wheat but, seeing the opportunity to establish a tourist business, they built a hotel (Erskine House) in 1868.

The Loutitt Bay Track (old Lorne Road) was constructed in 1872. In 1876 the Melbourne to Geelong Railway Line was extended as far as Winchelsea and the Mountjoy brothers now extended their enterprise to running a service of coaches to convey passengers and mail between Lorne and Winchelsea. Later, the Birregurra Station was preferred as it meant a shorter trip by coach.

The trip by coach from Lorne to Winchelsea took about 6 hours and it was necessary to change the horses for a fresh team and provide refreshments for the travellers along the way. The Deans Marsh hotel provided these needs and became known as “The Half-Way House”. The coaching business flourished, and at its peak, coaches were provided to seat 120 passengers each day. Every day 90 horses were fed at the stables at the hotel and 45 were stabled there overnight.

The coaches varied in size; smaller in winter (9 or 10 people) pulled by 3 horses, and large enough to carry 25 people and pulled by 5 or 6 horses in summer. In wet weather the road would become very muddy and often the passengers would have to get out and push. The trip was not uneventful, with beautiful views from the tops of the hills, with time to enjoy them, and the thrill of skidding down the steep slopes, where your life depended upon the efficiency of the brakes and the skill of the driver. After finally arriving at Lorne, the tired, muddy horses would be taken for a bathe in the sea. The last coaches ran about 1921, replaced by a service of motor cars from Birregurra to Lorne.

Extracted from Ron Millard's book, The Deans Marsh Story.