

1842.

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Excursion to Macquarie Harbour

From Lady Franklin
to her sister.

~~Lady~~^{was} Simpsinson. April. 1842

On board the "Breeze"
Expectation Reach.

Gordon River, Van Dieman's
Land. 22^d April 1842.

My dearest Mary.

I have been under the necessity of letting two or three ships for England sail without taking advantage of them, owing to my absence from Hobart Town in a part of the Colony, remote and uninhabited, and where communication with the civilized districts can scarcely be kept up. We are on the point of reaching Macquarie Harbour by land, an expedition which we have been contemplating & preparing for at different periods for the last two years, but have never yet been able to effect.

Macquarie Harbour is the only port on the W coast of V.D. Land extremely difficult of ^{access} excess by sea, and totally inaccessible by land, the country between it and the civilized (or settled) districts, a distance of about 80 or 90 miles, consisting of impenetrable forests, rugged mountains, tremendous gullies, impetuous Rivers and torrents, and swamps and morasses. Macquarie Harbour was a penal settlement, or a place to which the prisoners of V.D.'s Land

were sent for increase of punishment, in the time of Colonel Arthur, but was abandoned in the year ¹⁸³¹ ~~1830~~, chiefly I believe, on account of the difficulty of keeping up the supplies by sea. During the time it was a penal settlement, various attempts were made by the prisoners to escape by land, but they perished in the forests, except 2 or 3 who, utterly worn out, gave themselves up as soon as they arrived at a human habitation. There is a shocking story told, and a true one, of 2 men who having first killed and eaten their companions, were ~~watching~~ ^{watching} each the other, though overcome ~~with~~ ^{with} sleep, in order to thrust him on the head also, and make a last repast. This was effected by one of them, and the surviving madman, got into the inhabited country, gave himself up and was hanged.

It is thro^{ugh} this wild country made barely practicable for us on foot, that we have been wandering for the last 5 weeks. We set off in beautiful weather, and in a season of unusually prolonged ^{drought} ~~drought~~, but had scarcely commenced it, when the rains came on which made the bogs in a shocking state, and flooded all the torrents and rivers. We were confined a week in our tents in a nook under a snowy mountain, and again were impeded by a wide impetuous river which the surveyor

had called the Franklin. It was 70 or 80 yards wide, too wide for any fallen trees to cross it, as we had crossed all the others, and where in consequence the pioneering party had constructed a rude kind of raft which they had fastened by a rope across the River. On our arrival the flood had carried away the warp but the raft remained, on this after the river had subsided a little, two men (Prisoners) volunteered to cross, a measure almost of necessity to effect soon, as the "Breeze" which was waiting for us here to take us back by sea, was to leave by order on the 18th, and if gone, we should have to make our retreat by land with increased difficulties through the country we had already traversed.

The two men on the raft were whirled round in an eddy as soon as they pushed from the shore, and, unable to cross, ^{were} ~~were~~ carried down the river, over some rapids and disappeared to our eyes in a bend of the stream. Sir John declared, however he had no doubt of their safety, (they had been Thomas, and Bridgewater Bargemen), and in half an hour afterwards their voices were heard on the opposite side Coo-y-ing, (the universal colonial cry learnt from the natives) and having given us this notice of their existence and safety,

they darted deep into the forest on their mission which was to arrest the "Breeze" in its departure.

We remained six days on the banks of the Franklin to get up provisions, (salt, pork, flour, brown sugar ^{and} tea) which as well as our bedding, blankets, and tents were all carried in large knapsacks of Kangaroo skin, on the backs of the men, and to build a double canoe, which with such rude instruments as we had, was hollowed out of pine trees on the banks of the river. This canoe which I ^{named} the "Eleanor Isabella" was taken in tow by the raft, and the latter which had floated down to a smooth part of the river moved across by a double warp and blocks obtained from the "Breeze". Arrived at our tiny little schooner (the name of which should be familiar to you, if you have read ^{Mr. Macdowell's} ~~Mr. Macdonnell's~~ diatribe upon it ^{and} us in his own newspaper) we part from our comest companions about 20 in number and commit ourselves to the ocean.

Our party consists of Sir John and myself, Mr. Bago, Lt. Milligan ~~and~~ as medical attendant, and naturalist, Mr. David Burn, a settler lately returned from England where he put various articles into the Colonial Magazine on N. D. Land, an orderly, and my maid, ^{and} Mr. Calder

the Surveyor and the immediate master of the 20 convicts I have mentioned.

The crew of the "Breeze" consists only of 5 persons, and a stranger to this country (particularly if he was a member of the former ^{Trans}portation Committee) would take it for granted that 20 stout able bodied convicts (chosen expressly for this service because they ~~were~~ ^{are} such) would find it an easy matter to overwhelm the resistance of 13 persons of whom two are women, and, taking possession of the "Breeze" carry her off as masters and free. No such idea probably entered any one of their heads; With the exception of trying whenever they could, to get more than their due share of our scanty provisions, and which probably many freemen of their rank in life would have done equally at home, in similar circumstances, they have behaved admirably well, and we have all encamp-
ed together, at night within a few yards of each other, in open tents, without a guard, and without a fire-arm amongst us, or a single instrument of defence, against the axes and tomahawks which were continually in their keeping. You may think it was because the Governor was of the party, and that they

had ^{all} much to hope from him even tho' under the
circumstances, they could have little to fear, and this is
true, for they all look for to indulgence for this service
that is to say some alleviation of sentence, according to
law, and were promised it on good behaviour, but as far
as safety is concerned the sense of security would have
been enjoyed, just as much I believe, by any other set of
Travellers as ourselves. Our expedition has been a
rough one, and perhaps rather an anxious one, but on this
^{very} account, it has afforded a very salutary change to our
thoughts long harassed by recent political matters at
head quarters. Sir John was less in want of it than
usual, for the removal of Mr Montagu had done him
a world of good, and every thing is going on even unusually
well in our little political world. *See below.*

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Your most affectionate Sister
Jane Franklin

The enclosed papers include all the remaining official papers of
which I have copies, respecting Mr Montagu's affair, including the
humble & supplicatory letter which he wrote at the last to lead Sir
John to revoke his decision (just at the time he was applying
to me through Dr Turnbull) with Sir John's reply. There ^{was} not a dissenting
voice in the Colony now I believe, as to the propriety of Sir John's not
yielding to this letter. When Sir John had thus confirmed his
decision, Mr Montagu lost not the first opportunity of declaring
~~that he meant nothing by it.~~ that he meant nothing by it.