https://doi.org/10.26749/rstpp.106.1.141

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF THE CENTRAL PLATEAU

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"Glendessary", Western Junction

EXPLORATION AND PASTORAL

The First Overland Journey

The first approach to this region was made by Lieut. Laycock in 1807 when, with several men, he ascended the Lake River to Wood's Lake and proceeded to the Derwent along the Clyde. Thomas Toombs, a ticket-of-leaver informed Calder the surveyor, years after the event, that he had seen the Great Lake in 1815. No doubt, many such men, attracted to the wild, lonely plateau came hunting for the more elusive creatures, thought to be living there.

Penetration from the South-East

John Beamont the Naval Officer and Robert Jones a settler on the Jordan, made an expedition to the Great Lake in 1817 at the instance of the new govenor, Sorell, anxious to find new areas of pasture land beyond the settled districts. Beamont first set out from Cross Marsh (Melton Mowbray) and going through Black Brush, climbed the hills to the Clyde. Following the Blackburn Rivulet, they came to the Lagoon of Islands where they found cider gums, some of them destroyed by the natives endeavouring to extract the sweet liquid (if kept for a time the juice ferments in a most satisfactory manner). On the fourth day, Beamont forded the Shannon and proceeded seven miles, but on the following day they could not break camp, as snow and hail driving in from the south prevented them. On the sixth day they reached Swan Bay on the Great Lake, crossing the Ouse on the way. On day seven, they saw several small lakes fringed with huon pine, probably the source of the Little Pine and the Nive. Next day they passed north of Lake St. Clair, but were forced to walk knee-deep in snow. Leaving the pack horses, Beamont pressed on to cross the Canning, a swift-running river which he thought to be the Gordon. Shortage of supplies then caused them to turn back. On the Den Hill they had seen some of Edward Lord's wild cattle. Later these beasts would reach the Great Lake where an area is still graced by the name, "Mother Lord's Plains." Jones established a hut

on St. Patricks Plains, probably in 1820, and stationed a shepherd there with a flock and some cattle during the summer months.

Sorell himself now paid a visit to the Clyde and beyond and was delighted with the soil he found but for himself selected "Norton Manderville" in the Hamilton district.

At the Shannon the notorious Michael Howe met his end. For three years he had terrorized the settlers, having first joined Peter Geary's gang. They held up the town of New Norfolk and then set out to destroy the farm of the magistrate, A.W. Humphrey, against whom Howe had a grudge. During a fight with the police, Whitehead, one of the gang, was killed and Howe cut off his head, so that a reward could not be collected. Because of the doings, Colonel Davy the Govenor, declared martial law and two of the gang were lynched. When Colonel Sorell became Govenor in 1817, as the gang was still harrying the lower midlands, substantial rewards were offered for their capture. One of the gang, Watts, and an accomplice, Drewe, secured Howe, but the latter managed to break free, stabbed one and battered the other. Yet the end was near, for three others enticed Howe into a hut and, though he broke away, at last clubbed him to death.

The earliest settlers on the Shannon were Sarah Smith (who had a grant at Tea-Tree), Myles Patterson and his wife Katherine who built "Hunterston" and Dr. James Ross, LL.D., who took up "The Hermitage". Dr. Ross was born at Aberdeen in 1788 and arrived in Tasmania on the "Regalia" at the close of 1822. He had been superintendent of a sugar plantation at Granada in the West Indies, but returned to England where he opened a school, first at Sevenoaks in Kent and later at Sunbury in Middlesex. Good reports of Van Diemen's Land and the demands of a growing family brought the decision to migrate. He described his four-roomed cottage as a romantic residence, as indeed it is, though affected by the ravages of time. The old two-storeyed house higher up the bank was erected by Walter Synnot, and is wonderfully well preserved. On either side of the square dining-room are built-in cedar bookcases and cupboards which still look very inviting after so many years. Under the house is a large cellar, as cold as a refrigerator. In his almanack of 1836, Dr. Ross gives an engaging account of his trek up-country to take up his land in 1822. His trials and

tribulations as a settler gain our sympathy, for his first splendid crop of wheat was lost in a few minutes when it was invaded by six hundred wild cattle belonging to Edward Lord, which swept down over his new fences early one morning. It had been hard enough keeping the kangaroo at bay while the crop was small. Another day a stock-keeper staggered in, with spears trailing from his body. The man had a raging fever for days, but survived. Although on good terms with the natives himself, Ross was in constant fear of their fires wiping out his farm. Another severe loss was the escape of two working bullocks which, in spite of diligent search, were never found. However, prospects gradually improved on his farm as flocks and herds yielded good profits. Dr. Ross was, however, a literary man and having obtained a position as Editor of the Hobart Town Courier, he sold "The Hermitage" to Walter Synnot, before 1830.

Jorgenson the Dane was despatched by Edward Curr of the V.D.L. Co. to try and find a track from the Shannon overland to Circular Head, in 1826. He claimed to have come in sight of St. Valentine's Peak, but it is doubtful if he reached much further than Lake Echo (which received its name from a curious echo made by a gun-shot at a spot at the northern end of the lake). The following year Wedge penetrated some of the difficult country along the upper Derwent, without reaching Lake St. Clair, which was reached three years later by Sharland, another surveyor.

At the Steppes, which he named from a little place near Glasgow, once lived James Wilson who, having immigrated to New Zealand, was offered, in 1864, the position of Superintendent of Police at South Longford, which included most of the highland area. He found a small cabin awaiting him and a staff of one, a mounted trooper. His duties were to keep order in this far-flung outpost of the Queen's dominions, to distribute mail to the few scattered inhabitants, to collect rates for the road trust and the board of works and to act as bailiff if these same rates were not paid. He extended the buildings and eventually married and had two daughters. Loving the place, they carried on the Post Office after their father's death until quite recently. One of them was a gifted artist. The log cabin and cottage, hewn from the surrounding forest, are still there. The huge stone fireplace and baking oven are sights now seldom seen; and the very furniture was hand-made on the site.

Another isolated farm near the Shannon is the rustic "Wyarrigee", a word compounded of the names of the sons of the owner.

In 1831 G.A. Robinson the Conciliator of the aborigines was searching the Central Highlands for signs of the natives, some of whom, belonging to the Great Lake Tribe, he found had been present at the murder of Capt. Thomas at Port Sorell. Robinson camped at the site of the future dam at Miena, where he saw large numbers of swan, a number of light-coloured kangaroo and signs of platypus. He was fascinated, as were many others, with th'melliferous cider tree', but it appears that the holes made to drain off the sweet fluid often allowed the tree to bleed to death. Robinson was not a little astonished to find that on the maps of the time, the Great Lake was shown twelve miles too far to the west! During this journey the party visited the huts of Mrs. Burn and Mr. Roadknight, occupied by their stockmen.

Aboriginal names such as Breona (a fish), Miena (lagoon-like), Liawenee (fresh, cold water), Monpeelyata (Chief of the Big River tribe), Poatina (a cave), Tarraleah (brush kangaroo), Waddamana (cascades of water), have been applied by the Hydro-Electric Commission and others to areas of the Plateau developed by man.

Development from the North

At the same time as settlers were taking up land on the Shannon, others were moving up the Lake River. In 1820 grazing licences were held by Col. Geils, James Brumby, and James Hortle, whose stockmen depastured flocks among the foothills of the Western Tiers. A hut and a stockyard would be erected, where each night the man and his sheep would take refuge; lambs needed protection from devil, tiger and wild cat. Lack of fences required sheep to be yarded at night and stockmen were fearful of attacks by natives. Cattle belonging to Edward Lord and William Field wandered at will, to be mustered once a year, when marketable stock were selected for sale and all calves branded, often irrespective of ownership.

Some of the early settlers who obtained location orders for land along the Lake River a year or two later, soon became discouraged by the odds against them. William Urquhart gave up because of attacks by natives, Thomas Abraham could not cope with tigers, devils and native dogs,

and Christopher McRae was mysteriously murdered. However, Joseph Archer bought "Burlington" and "Woodside" from James Brumby, and his brother William acquired "Palmerston" from Thomas Palmer and was granted "Saundridge", where a chapel was built as at "Brickendon". But they did not live on these properties themselves, employing stock-keepers until they were able to hand over control to members of their families. Abraham Walker, who lived at "Home Vale", near Longford, was granted "Creekton". Other absentee owners of land in the Poatina area were Henry Clayton of "Wickford", Longford, William Saltmarsh of Longford, William Field of Launceston, Thomas Walker and Alex. Clerke both of Longford. Thomas Curling did live on his grant, "Rockthorpe" (which he called "Guilton") but according to Wedge was not very good at farming. William Young built his house, "Pisa" of compressed earth and later sold it to the Gatenbys. Thomas Cookson Simpson of "Newham Park" was a man of substance and preferred to live in Launceston, leaving his overseer, Robert Thirkell to run his farm. Eventually Thirkell acquired this property as well as "Leverington" and "Darlington". The first surveys in the area were done by Thomas Scott in 1821. He and G.W. Evans were severely criticised by Govenor Arthur because they measured more land for some of the settlers than they were entitled to.

In 1825 surveyor Wedge was sent up the Lake River on Laycock's track to search for suitable pasture land. He had several prisoners assigned to him and a bullock dray to carry their gear. They found the going very tough as they climbed the tier, the pole of the cart being broken as they struggled among the rocks. They finally reached Wood's Lake and saw some of Capt. Wood's cattle grazing on Regent's Plains. Joseph Johnson of Kempton also had stock in the area. The weather was very wet, so Wedge always had his tent pitched. One wonders how the men fared; perhaps they just crawled under a tarpaulin. The dray got bogged and one of the poor bullocks had such sore feet that at last the party went on without the cart twenty miles to the west across the Little Pine River and on to the vicinity of the land of a hundred lakes, now part of the Cradle Mountain Reserve. One evening on his return to camp, he found it in the possession of Matthew Brady and his gang. His men had been bound all day awaiting his return. The bushrangers took possession of a telescope, all fire-arms and ammunition, besides a good portion of the party's provisions. Brady's Lookout commemorates the event. Wedge spent most of the next few months in pursuit

of the outlaws who in revenge later wrecked his tent at Elphin, near Launceston.

James G. Parker was also favoured by a visit from Matthew Brady, who likewise numbered Chris. Gatenby of "Bicton" among his victims. A son of J.G. Parker once lived at "Hanleth", but it was sold to the Thirkells. "Tallantyre" was a grant to Thomas Fletcher, chief constable of the district, who had a family of boys, all landowners. "Rockthorpe" was sold by T.O. Curling and now belongs to Mr. R.E. Lawrence.

Robert Lawrence in 1832 took over the management of "Formosa" from his father, W.E. Lawrence, and the following year made a journey into the mountains, exploring and gathering specimens for Hooker at Kew in London. They also saw Johnson's cattle and killed one for rations, as they were very short. His father had built a slab house at "Formosa" in 1824, but soon afterwards, Brady, who had a grudge against him, set fire to house and stacks. Robert, who married a niece of surveyor Wedge, lost her in childbirth. He was so bereft and melancholy that he himself soon died, and the 11,000 acre property fell to his younger brother William. "Billop" was later separated from the original holding.

"Connorville" was granted to Roderick O'Connor, as a reward for services rendered to Government as Director of Public Works and land commissioner. His son, Arthur, a noted horseman lived there and married a daughter of J.G. Parker of "Park Nook", an adjoining estate. He was aged 75 in 1885, but having no family, left the property to his nephew. "Connorville" was quite a village, with a flour mill, smithy and various other trade buildings; some 88 men all told worked there and a store supplied all their needs. The present house was built in 1923 by Roy O'Connor and was visited by the present Queen.

Attacks from the South-west and South

Another development gave exploration a fresh impetus in 1828. The savage discipline and bleak climate of Macquarie Harbour induced the prisoners there to make desperate attempts to escape. Brady and his friends had successfully stolen a vessel and landed in the Derwent, but many others essayed to travel overland and suffered fearful privations. The

story of Alexander Pearce (Gabbat) is too well-known to repeat here. One of the few to reach the settled districts (successfully) was James Goodwin who as an expert bushman was to be of great assistance to later expeditions. With his companion he had penetrated to the Western Mountains and crossed turbulent streams roaring through deep rocky gorges, subsisting on grass roots and mushrooms. They passed the peak of Teneriffe (now Wyld's Craig), and reached the Ouse River, giving themselves up to the authorities. Goodwin's written account was of great interest to Frankland, the Surveyor General, engaged in filling up all the empty spaces in his new map of Tasmania. So during 1828 he and Scott made a visit to the upper Derwent, but snow and rain prevented them from following in Goodwin's steps. In 1829-31 exploration centred on the Huon area, but in February 1832 Surveyor Sharland commenced an inspection of the country beyond the Ouse; it had been visited by others but none had been aware of its possibilities. Sharland discovered the Nive, the Nivelle and Lake St. Clair. The country round Marlborough, now Bronte, was spoken of as the new country and was the last stretch of open range to be made available for grazing. From the lake he continued westwards over Mt. Arrowsmith, traversed the Franklin River and climbed Frenchman's Cap, although the highest point eluded him.

His report aroused a good deal of interest among land-hungry settlers, so Frankland despatched John Darke to investigate the country along the Nive. Crossing the Derwent, they reached Wyld's Craig which they climbed. From the top they sighted the Gordon, though its identity was not then known.

An expedition to the Huon-Gordon-Derwent area was organized by Frankland and left Marlborough in February 1835 for Lake St. Clair. They climbed Mt. Olympus, obtaining a tremendous view in every direction. The whole party then descended along the Derwent along either bank, until they reached Mt. Hobhouse, where they left the river and struck north-east through forest to the Nive. Wedge, McKay and others were sent to the Dee to plan a new track to the settled districts, and from there the whole party made for Wyld's Craig. From the top Surveyor Calder could see range after range of mountains to the west, which he was later to explore. In April 1842 Calder was to lead a party, including Sir John and Lady Franklin, from Lake St. Clair to the lower reaches of the Gordon, thence to the old prison settlement at Macquarie Harbour.

During the 1840's in an effort to open up the country, road stations were established in Victoria Valley and at Marlborough, with gangs of prisoners. Butler Stoney tells of this period, when a boat was purchased by public subscription and placed on Lake St. Clair for the use of visitors. The millionaire, W.J.T. Clarke, founded his estate at 'Bronte'.

Tracks were beginning to appear through all the lake country as settlers took up land to provide summer runs for sheep and cattle, providing a welcome change from the parched midlands. Such names as Cathcart's Bluff, Archer's Rivulet, Miller's Bluff and Mother Lord's Plains have their origin in those early days.

EARLY SCIENTIFIC EXPLORATION

Robert Lawrence's collecting trip of 1833 has been referred to earlier but he was not the only early naturalist to visit the Plateau. A number of other naturalists collected botanical and geological specimens on the Plateau at various times. George Frankland, the Surveyor-General, had a rock collection including material from near Quamby Bluff which he gave to Charles Darwin in 1836. Captain W. Lonsdale, who played an important part in early Melbourne also collected. Surveyors Calder and Sharland made observations and collected specimens during their surveys.

During his sojourn in Tasmania, Count P.E. von Strzelecki traversed part of the Plateau, presumably across Norfolk Plains (Longford), up the Lake River to Bronte and so to Macquarie Harbour. In 1843, W.H. Breton, a police magistrate, made a journey to the Western Mountains which is reported in the second volume of the Journal of the Tasmanian Society. Other members of this society who were collecting on the Plateau at that time, or a little later, were William Archer of Cheshunt, and Ronald Campbell Gunn who was now Joseph Hooker's principal agent here in collecting specimens for Kew.

During the next thirty years not much interest seems to have been shown in the area, partly because of mining development and exploration in other parts of the island. Charles Gould commented on "bunyips" in upland lakes in 1872. R.M. Johnston renewed interest in the area in 1880 and it was visited by Geoffrey Smith in 1908.

MINES, FISH AND POWER

Through the period of the gold rush in Victoria and the depression of the sixties, the high country was left very much to the shepherd and his family, but the introduction of the trout to Tasmanian lakes brought hundreds of visitors to the highlands in the nineties. Sir James Youl, after several failures, finally introduced trout from England, sending them as ova packed in moss, kept moist by melting ice and prevented from becoming waterlogged by drawing off surplus water. Later shipments carried better in the eye-stage. They were developed into fingerlings at the Salmon Ponds at Plenty and some fry were sent successfully to New Zealand. Many varieties of salmon and trout were finally imported and in quite a short time became acclimatized in our lakes and streams. Until the flow of the Shannon River was interrupted, the famous Shannon Rise brought thousands of anglers each year to see the hatching of the snow and caddis moth, and to join in the sport. Gradually the new lakes formed by the H.E.C. are being stocked as the food supply builds up. But it does seem that pollution in some of our streams in inhibiting the sport.

With the coming of the mining boom in the west, many fossickers set out from Bronte to seek their fortune at Zeehan and Queenstown; others from the north made a pack-track from Golden Valley up to the Great Lake and on to Bronte, later to be known as the Missing Link, until a motor road was completed some thirty years ago. Two companies were projected in Launceston to build railways from Mole Creek over the mountains to Queenstown and the Great Western Railway to link the Derwent Valley with the Wild West was quite seriously considered.

The road from Golden Valley to the Rainbow Chalet at Breona in 1920 was described as 'very rough for motors', but the enthusiasm of anglers soon got it improved. It was imperative to extend it to Miena once the power scheme at Waddamana was under way.

In September 1932 the West Coast Road was opened, followed shortly after by the Marlborough Highway, thus paving the way for the other power developments in the highlands. Since then the Hydro-Electric Commission has established its own road construction branch, putting in many miles of highway to connect its various works.

Following the establishment of the Duck Reach Power Station at Launceston in 1895 and its subsequent expansion in 1906 and 1919, the Hydro Electric Power and Metallurgical Co. built a small dam at the outlet from the Great Lake in 1911 and by the construction of canals and pipelines conveyed the water to Waddamana where it was intended to generate 10,000 horse-power for the treatment of complex ores. In 1914 the Government acquired the assets of the company, and by May 1916 two 5,000 H.P. turbo-alternators had been installed at Waddamana station and generated power for the treatment of ores and for domestic lighting and running the tramways of Hobart. In 1919 a multi-arch dam was erected at Miena to increase the Great Lake storage and the Waddamana station was expanded to supply 66,000 H.P.

The first undertaking of the Hydro-electric Commission formed in 1930, was to utilize the controlled flow of water from Miena and the drop to the Waddamana canal. Accordingly, an earth dam was built to divert water from the Shannon into a canal and thence through steel pipes to the Shannon station 258 feet below. Thus 14,000 H.P. was added to the system in 1934.

Work began on the Tarraleah scheme on the Upper Derwent in 1934 as the demands of industry continued to grow. Completed in 1938, Tarraleah added 63,000 H.P. to our resources and since then the provision of six generators has brought the total output there to 126,000 H.P.

The next undertaking was the duplication of the Waddamana canal and the construction of a second station, making the output 132,000 H.P. The old wood-stave pipes were replaced by steel, electrically welded throughout. The three sections of this station were completed between 1946 and 1949.

With the end of the war, work began on the 200-foot high Clark Dam at Butler's Gorge which was completed in 1949. It was built above the intake of the Tarraleah Canal, and in 1955 a second canal was put in from Lake King William above the dam direct to Tarraleah. The Butler's Gorge station came into operation in 1952.

Work on the Trevallyn and Tungatinah schemes was started in 1948 to meet the tremendous expansion of the post-war period. Trevallyn was finished in 1956, ready to supply Comalco at Bell Bay, while the first stage of

Tungatinah was ready in 1953. The Lake Echo station completed this section in 1956. Another project brought Wayatinah into service in 1956 and Liahpootah in 1960. The Catagunyah undertaking was ready in 1962 and since then the lower Derwent stations have been finished and the complex network of stations of the Mersey-Forth scheme almost complete, the Fisher station alone awaiting completion.

The conservation of water in this island may find other important uses as time goes on. It is becoming a rare commodity in Australia and industry may have to move Tasmania to gain access to it. The new lakes will be marvellous play-grounds and may even modify the climate. The use of irrigation is growing and will become a paramount need by the end of the century.

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