

ACCOUNT OF AN EXPLORATORY TOUR FROM PORT  
ESPERANCE TOWARDS ADAMSON'S PEAK.

By J. R. SCOTT.

(Read September 10th 1872.)

According to promise I send, for the Royal Society, specimens of an *Alsophila* tree-fern, which I found near Port Esperance, and of which R. C. Gunn, to whom I applied for its name, wrote as follows:—

Newstead, 1st August, 1872. . . . “Your fern is an *Alsophila*, but does not agree well with my specimens of *A. Australis*. It may be *A. Leichardtiana*\* a very slender species.” The specimens consist of—(1) the extreme tip of a frond; (2) one of the pinnæ from near the base of a frond; (3) a pinnule; and (4) a piece of the rachis of the frond showing the prickles. I beg you will particularly understand that I did not go “botanising” or take any appliances for collecting plants. My sole object was, by way of exercise, to reach Adamson’s Peak, sometimes called “The Cow and Calf,” and go farther if possible. Accordingly specimens (1), (2), and (3), were carried in my pocket memorandum book, which will account for their damaged condition, and (4) has been subject to all sorts of rough usage, knocking about in my knapsack. It has contracted in drying, and they have all lost their natural bright green colour.

The individual plant from which these were taken was growing among *Dicksonia* tree-ferns by the side of a small creek, probably without any stream in the summer, and in a spot shaded from the sun by trees and underwood, just such as naturally suits the *Dicksonia*, whereas the *Alsophila Australis*, although nominally “shade-loving,” is often seen in Tasmania in open situations where a *Dicksonia* would not attain perfection. I was made aware that this was not an ordinary tree fern by suddenly finding my hands hurt by the sharp spines when breaking down branches &c., to make a track through the scrub. The spines become smaller and blunter after passing the second pair of pinnae from the base, and gradually disappear. The fronds were from 8 to 10 feet long, and more graceful in appearance than *Dicksonia*. The trunk was about 6 feet high, very similar in proportion and appearance to *Dicksonia*, being fibrous, and the marks of

\* Mr. Abbott writes me that a description of *Alsophila Leichardtiana* will be found in the *Gardeners' Chronicle* of 20th October, 1866, where it is said to be synonymous with *A. Moorei* and *A. Macarthurii*. I have not addressed Mr. Gunn, again, knowing his time to be much occupied.

fallen fronds not more conspicuous. The other tree ferns in the same neighbourhood also attained a height of about 6 feet only, so that no criterion of the average or extreme height of this *Alsophila* can be obtained from this specimen. The situation was not high, (probably 150 feet, or so, above sea level), and just at the foot of a low ridge or spur extending easterly from Adamson's Peak, and from which several small streams run to join the Creekton Rivulet. A short account of my trip will possibly best explain the locality, and the reason why I did not search to ascertain if there were any more specimens near.

I started from Port Esperance on the 15th of March last, with one companion, Frank McPartlan (well known as a good "bushman") and, passing Andrewartha's mill, followed the Southport road for about three miles beyond the bridge, until, at a small plain recently burnt, the peak was almost West. We then steered for it by pocket-compass, deviating occasionally as a spur or other natural feature promised more easy walking.

The first piece being burnt, was easy enough for about quarter of a mile; then a short piece of *Bauera* scrub, under trees, brought us to the Creekton Rivulet, which we crossed; and pushing through or rather over, some very tall *Bauera*, we reached a long plain clear of large timber. The first hundred yards was over heath and button-grass, a relief after the *Bauera*, but the remainder (half a mile at least) was a dense mass of tea-tree and very tall cutting-grass, with blind creeks and hidden spurs under foot, the pleasantness of which can be imagined. After crossing this we entered timbered country, which continued all the way. The creek where I found this fern was just within the timber. The trees are principally stringy-bark, with sassafras, blackwood, &c., and the most frequent under-growth is either *Bauera*, or else the fern *Lomaria procera*, with plenty of dead timber and fallen logs.

After being detained a couple of days by rain at this creek, we took into consideration the nature of the country and vegetation, the weather, and the heavy loads we carried in anticipation of a more extended trip beyond the Peak, and determined to mark a track by which we could return quickly. Our system was to start unimpeded in the morning, and cut and break down the under-wood for about six hours, then to return and bring the knapsacks, tent, &c., to the farthest spot along the route suitable for camping. We had but one tomahawk, which McPartlan carried, while I used hands and pocket-knife on the smaller obstacles; and when so employed laid hold of this fern.

The spur continues at a nearly uniform height of about 500 feet to the foot of the steep ascent, at the top of which is a plateau or table land about 3,000 feet high,—the Peak itself, 4,017 feet, rising above it. Our course led us up and then along this spur, crossing numerous small runs of water flowing to the Creekton Rivulet. The shrubs we had to cut through were chiefly pepper, *Anopterus*, *Correa*, *Eucryphia*, &c. We had also to cross several extensive patches of *Weinmannia* or horizontal scrub (*Anodopetalum*), where our track will be seen for considerable distances a long way above the ground;—the peculiar growth making it easier for us to walk along the top, like monkeys, than to cut or force a passage below. The stems invariably grew from the roots down the slope of the hill, never inclining upwards. Most of them were at least 60 feet long, sending out their thin, tough, perpendicular branches every yard or so, but the sight of the luxuriant growth of the *Prionotes* repaid the whole of the toil: in large patches, along a distance of two or three miles, this prince of heaths grew in profusion, covering every prostrate log, twining up large trees and shrubs, and, at the height of 10 or 20 feet, bending over so as to resemble festoons from tree to tree, covered with long red flowers, in all shades from flesh colour to bright carmine. The effect was enhanced by the sun's rays being able to penetrate to these spots, an unusual occurrence along the rest of our route.

At the foot of the steep ascent were a few beech, and blue gum took the place of stringy bark. The *Anopterus* disappeared, and *Cenarrhenes* and *Agastachys* were found in place—*Bauera*, *Correa*, &c., still continuing. About half way up, we passed through a thicket of *Richea pandanifolia*, palm-like plants, 30 to 40 feet high, generally growing upright, a few almost horizontal. Those upright were almost all clothed down to the ground with the dead leaves, and looked like thick posts, instead of presenting their usual graceful appearance. Some had the *Prionotes* twining up to the very top.

After scaling two sandstone cliffs we got among stunted timber and bushes of tea-tree, &c., and soon reached the Table-land, which, about 3,000 feet high, extends to the base of the Peak, and beyond westerly nearly level, to the Picton Valley, stretching northward to the Hartz Mountains, and southward to Mount La Perouse. There are here many shallow pools and springs and clumps of dense bushes, chiefly tea-tree, and dwarf *Richea*. The *Eucryphia*, here a round bushy shrub, was at this time a mass of white blossoms, and very conspicuous. The common mountain shrubs were present, such as *Gaultheria*, *Decaspora*, *Bellendenia*, *Persoonia* and others, but I did not see a single plant of the Waratah,

although we passed many spots favourable to its growth. There were many tracks of kangaroo, some of large size.

A short walk brought us to the Peak, which is of trap rock, very much laminated, many large stones being not more than an inch thick, and the exposed boulders all showed signs of regular cleavage. Many were clothed with the native cherry, *Exocarpus humifusa*, like a covering of moss. The Peak is surmounted by a trigonometrical-survey Tower of stones, telescope shape in two tiers, with 6 or 7 stakes fixed on the top, altogether about 20 feet high. I remarked that the stakes and also all the shrubs on the Tableland have a decided leaning towards the south-east.

The view from the top is very extensive. Mount Wellington and its range to Mount Field West, with the Dromedary showing through a gap. Mount Picton and the Arthur Range seemed quite close, and the broken mountain scenery from La Perouse to the south-west was very grand. On the other side was the Huon at Victoria and Franklin, and the southern part of D'Entrecasteaux Channel, a coast line remarkably beautiful, but almost destitute of signs of civilization. But for a few bush fires and small green specks near some point or bay I could hardly realise the fact that I was looking over a district so long inhabited.

We would not have been Britons if we had not marked our names; and accordingly they may be found, written on paper and corked up in a bottle, under a heap of stones at the base of the Tower, on the eastern side. We found a line of stakes placed in crevices of the rocks, evidently to mark a track, leading to the south-east. They were well bleached by the weather, and must have been there a long time.

The weather frustrated my intention of proceeding farther west, so we returned by the track we had cut, reaching the main road by a walk of 8 hours. We were out once on the Table-land during a wet windy night, under the lee of a bush, having left our camp and rugs at the foot of the hill, and being overtaken by darkness before we could get back. Except on that night leeches and mosquitoes were abundant and voracious as usual. The birds were very tame and confident, especially a yellow-breasted honey-eater.

I have tried to keep this paper short, a most difficult task in writing about scenery or personal adventures, as one feels inclined to expatiate upon incidents and mention occurrences of little interest to any except the members of the party. With regard to the fern, which has been the cause of my writing, —if it proves to be an *Alsophila*, and not the *A. Australis* (the only species hitherto known to inhabit Tasmania), I will be delighted, in summer time, to conduct any gentleman,

who likes a little "roughing," to the spot to obtain better specimens and a more accurate description; as I did not pay much attention to the plant, feeling certain that, although it might be new to me, Mr. Gunn could at once supply its name as one long since discovered and described.

I cannot conclude without asking for the origin of the name, "Adamson's" Peak. Who and what was Adamson? In an old MS. chart in my possession, made by Captain Welsh in 1827, I find Port Esperance designated Adamson's Harbour; which latter appellation I am happy to say has not been adopted, and the Port still commemorates the visit of Labillardiere in retaining the name of the ship *Esperance*, commanded by Captain Huon Kermadée, as *Recherche Bay* still bears the name of the sister vessel.