

NOTES ON THE RIVER GORDON AND ON THE NEED FOR RESERVATION OF LAND ALONG ITS BANKS.

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The River Gordon is about four miles distant from Sarah Island. Its entrance is narrow, with a bar, upon which there is a depth of water of about two fathoms, deepening almost immediately to 10 fathoms. The entrance to the river has now been well beaconed, and renders navigation safe. Approaching the Gordon, the surrounding mountain scenery is very grand. Away to the south the D'Aguilar Range and Mount Direction stand rugged and picturesque, the next in importance being the Elliott Range, its southern trend gently sloping until lost in the billowing ranges which separate it from the D'Aguilars, while its eastern extremity ends in high, broken abruptness.

Following the Elliott Range eastward, we next notice an elevated flat belt of open country, called the High Plain. Across this plain came Sir John and Lady Franklin and party, on their memorable overland journey from Hobart in 1842, piloted by the late Mr. James Erskine Calder, afterwards Surveyor-General of Tasmania. They reached the Gordon about 10 miles from its entrance, at a reach of the river called "Preservation Inlet," where the relief vessel the "Breeze" lay awaiting them. Following the High Plain are four fine-sized mountain peaks, called by Lady Franklin "The Craycrofts," after relatives. One or other of the Craycroft peaks shows nicely in some of the Gordon scenery. Directly eastward from the Craycroft Range the tops of the Engineer Range are just visible.

Entering the river, its extensive shallows on either side are broken by rushes and driftwood, forming pleasing foregrounds to the glorious panorama which stretches from north-east to west. This is a scene to be remembered, if caught under favourable conditions—a clear early morning and a dead calm. The great West Coast Range, terminating here, shows Mounts Jukes, Darwin, Sorell, and Strahan, grouped up in great grandeur, while farther westward the harbour is closed in by Grummet and Sarah Islands, and the distant background of the wall-like ranges terminating at Table Head.

The general scenery of the Gordon represents high gorges, densely wooded to the water's edge, with long reaches and beautiful bends. There are stretches of open country in parts, but for 24 miles, until the River Franklin is reached, it retains the character I have indicated.

There is a fine outcrop of limestone at Limekiln Reach, 12 miles from the river entrance, which in the early days was quarried and burned by a party from the Sarah Island establishment.

About two miles further along brings us to Butler's Island, a peculiar rock close to the eastern side of the river. It received its name from the officers of the Sarah Island establishment, Captain Butler, of the 40th Regiment, being one of its best and most energetic commandants. The high rock to the west of the island I named Cuthbertson's Head, after Captain Cuthbertson, who was the first commandant of Sarah Island, and who was drowned at the entrance to the River Gordon.

Pining, as carried on in the Gordon and vicinity today, is mostly confined to the creeks and small rivers which flow into the main stream. All the pine timber which grew so abundantly at one time along its banks, and in the adjacent flats, has been worked out years ago, and it will take a century at least for the young forest trees to mature and be fit for use.

Among the surroundings of the higher waters of the River Franklin, in the vicinity of the Frenchman Range, where the country is excessively steep and rugged—roads are quite out of the question, and the work of pining is both difficult and dangerous, most of the pine

being found on the top and sides of the precipitous hills. When felling is completed the tree is trimmed and barked, head cut off, and end pointed, ready for "shooting." Jacks of the Trehwella pattern are used to start the tree down hill, when it "shoots" into the river bed below, and there awaits the winter floods to carry it onward to the Gordon. The Franklin is navigable for twenty miles from the Gordon for small boats, and in that distance there are 150 rapids, some very high and dangerous, and in surmounting them the boat has often to be carried on shore round them before progress further can be made. In view of the annually increasing scarcity of suitable timber for the world's requirements, it would appear to be a matter deserving of great attention at the hands of the Government to endeavour by every means within its power, not only to conserve the existing forests, but to take every step possible to increase the supply of so valuable a timber, with possibilities in the future of considerable magnitude.

Gould's Landing, a well-known Gordon landmark, is 20 miles from the river entrance, and about one mile above Butler's Island. The river is fairly open from the island to the landing, which is situated on a river flat, but to this point from its junction with the Franklin the Gordon flows through fine gorges, and is very impressive. Gould's Landing may be said to mark the limits of safe navigation for large craft, although the river can be navigated as far as the first rapids, one and a-half miles above the landing. Here is the first obstruction to the safe navigation of the Gordon. Two groups of heavy rocks lie across the river, separated some little distance from each other. They are known as the first and second rapids. These once negotiated, the river continues unobstructed to the junction of the Franklin, about two miles distant. The River Franklin junctions with the Gordon at 24 miles from Macquarie Harbour. At its entrance is Pyramid Island. The Franklin takes its rise from Lake Dixon, near Lake St. Clair, and from its source to its junction with the Gordon waters is very confined, rough, and dangerous. Floods in this river are exceptionally severe, the water rising during the heaviest floods as high as 60 feet above normal level, ordinary floods reaching 30 feet. The flood waters develop a tre-

mendous velocity, racing to the Gordon at 20 miles an hour.

Returning now to the Gordon. Above the Franklin the Gordon is obstructed by numerous rapids. For 10 miles its course is through low country, about fifty rapids being met with in that distance. Following up the river, deep gorges are met with up to the Wilmot Range, 25 miles from Gould's Landing, and expert boatmen are able to reach this point.

The source of the Gordon is in Lake Richmond, under the shadow of the King William Range, whence it flows through picturesque surroundings in the Rasselas Valley, making a long and graceful sweep round Mount Wright, which is known as "The Great Bend." From here its course is past the Thumbs Range in deep and rugged gorges to the eastern side of the Wilmot Range, 20 miles distant, the last few miles being through low button-grass country. From Lake Richmond to the Great Bend is about thirty miles, and the total length of the river from its source to Macquarie Harbour about 95 or 100 miles.

Floods on the Gordon occur in April generally, and are usually heavy. There is a break of frosty weather, in June particularly, then, from July to November, floods are always prevalent. In heavy floods the river rises to 30 and 40 feet, and in ordinary floods to 20 feet. These heights apply above Gould's Landing, where the river is narrowest. From the Landing to the mouth of the river, the flood waters reach the height of from 16 to 8 feet. Below Gould's Landing the current attains a speed of approximately 8 to 10 miles an hour, although in the narrower parts the velocity is very much greater. At the second rapids, for instance, where the river is narrow, and has an acute bend, as the waters career down they dash into the bank at this bend, producing a scene of the wildest confusion.

Apart from the aesthetic side of the Gordon's attractions, its scientific aspect, as contributing a unique display of our West Coast flora, must become apparent to all, and should alone warrant beyond question its rigid protection against axe and fire. It is necessary that urgent measures be taken in bringing about this protection, for already whispers of the erection of a saw-mill are in the air, and this, if once established without

restrictive precautions, would undoubtedly mean the "beginning of the end" to the beauty of the Gordon. Surely we must see to it that such a menace should not for one moment be allowed.

Some attempt at protection has, I believe, already been made, the Government having reserved a strip of land five chains wide on each side of the river, for a distance of 16 miles from the entrance at Macquarie Harbour. This is totally inadequate to fully protect the river from the depredations of the timber hunter. The area must be greatly extended, and my proposition is that all the hillsides immediately fronting the river should be reserved, allowing five or ten chains on the flat parts of the river, reservation to commence from the Macquarie Harbour entrance, and end at one milè beyond the Franklin River Junction, which would give a total length of 25 miles, and would effectually protect the whole of the beautiful scenery of the river. This reservation cannot interfere with the pine industry, no pine being available now on the banks of the river, nor would timber-getters suffer inconvenience, as their sphere of labour, would lie outside the reserve.

The economic value of this reserve to the state, apart from aesthetic or scientific considerations, may be regarded as practically "nil," the land being worthless for settlement or agriculture, and no minerals have, I believe, been discovered within the proposed area of protection, so that, under such circumstances, the Government lose nothing by its reservation, but, on the contrary, would gain, now and in future years, the approbation and esteem of all right-thinking people of this state.

The preservation of scenery in other parts of the world is receiving the greatest attention, and even in England a society has been formed for the preservation of Swiss scenery. How much greater is the necessity existent in a country like Tasmania, relying so much upon her tourist traffic, to preserve by every means within her power attractions without which such a traffic would diminish rather than increase, to the serious loss of the state. One hesitates to put this selfish aspect of the case before a learned society, but "necessity knows no law," and, after all, a public awakening may be better aroused by a proposition in this form rather than from a more scientific standpoint.