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RS 19/6  
A Letter of W. J. C. Calder upon the  
existence of natives in unexplored parts of  
Tasmania in 1847.

Westbury Aug 13. 1847.

Sir,

Having lately heard that it is the intention  
of the Government to restore to freedom the  
original inhabitants of this island, I take  
permission in the most respectful manner  
to address you on the subject with a view of  
affording information of an interesting nature  
of what I have observed to be passing in some  
of the remote districts which I conceive may  
deeply concern the future well being of this  
people.

In my numerous rambles through the unsettled  
western districts many circumstances have led  
me to believe that there still exists at large or  
least one tribe of natives who have never been  
in captivity. Assuming this as a fact which  
I will proceed to show is much more than merely  
probable, permit me very respectfully to  
inquire if it may not be feared that a re-visit  
of their old haunts and renewal of acquaintance  
with these members of their old community  
may not in some measure be destructive of  
those amicable feelings which a long course of  
kind and considerate treatment has possibly  
engendered in our unfortunate prisoners: and  
whether some continuation may not take  
place from connection with the few who have  
had the address to wade the general doom  
of their race.

My belief in the existence of a tribe of  
uncaptured Blacks is founded chiefly on



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Circumstances falling accidentally under my  
own observation, and partly on the statements  
of a gentleman who may confidently be  
relied upon.

I will premise by stating that their complete  
withdrawal from the mainland was universally  
believed to have taken place in about 1833  
or 1834, and the feeling of security which  
followed was not much disturbed by the  
appearance of a few on the Dec in March  
1840 who were actually taken and  
conveyed in a cart to within a mile of  
Marlborough where they escaped, leaving  
their spears with their captor as the sole  
testimony of their achievement. These  
spears (10 or 12 in number) passed into the  
possession of W. Clarke the District Constable  
of Marlborough, with whom I saw them a  
few months after.

In December of the same year, I was instructed  
to cut a track to Macquarie Harbour. When  
I had proceeded about 20 miles from Lake  
St. Clair, I came to a small plain where I  
found a native encampment consisting of two  
wigwams (sufficient for 6 or 8 persons)  
which had evidently been deserted only a  
few days. Any person who has once seen  
the simple break-weather of the twigs of  
Tatnania will be at no loss to distinguish  
their very primitive erections from those of  
any other class of beings. The foot prints  
about them, though half obliterated by recent  
rain left no doubt of their being those of  
persons not tumbled with boots. That they



had been lately occupied was also to be inferred from the appearance of the fire place, from pieces of kangaroo flesh which were lying about only half decayed etc.

Soon after this as I was examining this quarter of the island when crossing a low open ridge which lay between two rather extensive plains, I picked up a natives spear, which judging from appearances must have been dropped there very lately. This I took to Marlborough and left it with W. D. C. Clarke.

I had opened the track as far as the lower ridges of the Frenchman when some circumstance which I forget recalled me to Lake S. Clair. I went with my confidential men John Thomas, leaving the rest of the party six in number, to open the track through the dense jungles of the Frenchman which I had previously marked out. On returning from the Lake we were overtaken by night at the foot of this mountain. Tired by a long summer's day's march and the carrying of heavy loads we were most unwilling at such an hour to scale the long and steep ridges which lay between us and the rest of the party. As it was growing dusk we proceeded to set up our little tent for the night, which we did in a thicket a stone or two yards away from our marked track. While we were employed in preparing our quarters my attention was called off by the sound of several voices



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2 persons approaching us. At first I thought  
it was only some of our men who had come  
down from the camp on the Peninsula,  
though I could not conceive why they should  
do so a what inducement could tempt them  
down this excessively steep eminence only  
to go up it again. I was the first to hear  
them and said to Thomas - "Why here are  
some of our fellows: what brings them  
here I wonder? ~~What~~ I'll stop them however  
and see what they want." By this time  
they were very close, and we both heard  
them distinctly. I called out pretty  
loudly to them, fearing they might go by.  
all was still in an instant. after waiting  
a few seconds I repeated the call: still  
there was no reply. In a moment the  
recollection of the newly dropped spears  
and the natives' butts came across my  
mind. The same with Thomas, whose words  
are still in my recollection very fresh.  
"It's none on chaps, I know: depend upon  
it, it's the natives." To snatch up a  
gun and cock it was an instant's work  
and I ran out on to the track, followed  
closely by Thomas with a Tomahawk, who  
is an excellent fellow to have with me  
at such a time. But whoever they were,  
they had stolen off and the darkness of the  
hour gave them every facility to escape.  
after a few moments absence we returned



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to the tent where we stayed the night. Desirous  
of having a look round us before joining our  
party, we went when morning broke on to a  
low open rise at the base of which we  
had encamped: and here our suspicions  
of the presence of natives were at once  
confirmed by finding another of their huts  
which they no doubt were about writing  
for the night when I interrupted them.

In an hour or so I rejoined my men, none of  
whom had been away from their <sup>main</sup> encampment.  
Had I in the first instance suspected who  
the voices proceeded from, I might have  
easily satisfied myself about the matter  
by keeping quiet, for we had not yet lit our  
fire. So there was no smoke to scare them  
away.

I may mention that during my examination of  
the western districts I was often led to the  
top of very high land which I used to visit  
to acquire knowledge of the country and  
the best routes to follow. On these occasions  
I more than once saw smokes in quarters  
which left no doubt in my mind of their  
proceeding from the encampment of some  
solitary horde of these barbarians.

Those unacquainted with these districts may suppose  
that such might be the work of white people, but I beg  
very respectfully to say that they present no temptation  
to any one to visit them. Their wild and forbidding  
character - the ruggedness of the numerous hills and  
mountains - the darkness of the firs where these  
signs occurred - the inaccessibility, and above all the



course and worthless nature of the herbage of their vast  
masses, all invite to repel rather than invite visitors,  
and to unfit them for aught but the occasional visits  
of wandering tribes.

Similar evidence to the last, of there being natives yet at  
large in the island, I gathered in 1845 when I had been sent  
by the Lieut. Governor to examine the unsettled  
country between the widely separated stations of  
Deloraine and Iron Bay. I then on one occasion  
ascended the Mountain known as Poland's Repulse  
looking from thence in a southerly direction I saw several  
fires in a part of the country which is quite uninhabited  
and has never been visited till lately, except by the  
Surveyors of the V. D. L. Company in the early days of the  
Colony. The quarter I allude to has recently been  
entered by some gentlemen from Bothwell, under the  
guidance of an expert bush traveller, Mr. Lavelle.  
From this gentleman, whom I have alluded to in the  
earlier part of this letter, I learned that in going  
across country from the 19 Lagoons to the head of  
the North River, they saw several native huts and  
other indications of the present occupation of that  
country by their people. So apparent were these  
that the party with him felt the necessity of keeping  
a sharp look out for them while they were beyond the  
settled districts. He also told me that a short time  
preceding his own visit a person of the name of Pitt  
of the Hunting Ground (who has a sheep station  
at the 19 Lagoons) had made the same journey,  
and that in reaching either the Mercury or the  
North Aboued numerous prints of naked feet  
on a small sand beach of the river. In endeavouring  
to collect some information as to their number by  
comparing the foot marks, Mr. Pitt was led to infer  
that there must have been 10 or 12. Not knowing who  
Mr. Pitt was I enquired if he were given to exaggerate  
when I learned that his statements might be



7 implicitly depended upon as he was a strictly correct young man.

Since looking through the draft of this letter I have read in a late number of the Hobart Courier that a party of men who had just visited Launceston reported that they had a short time since seen 8 natives on the West Coast.

It is here necessary to notice that since the date of my visit to the Western Country a few were taken somewhere about Cape Grim, I think in 1843. These it may be said were the same whose hats etc I saw. But this is altogether uncertain for we know absolutely nothing of what is passing in the Western half of the Island. But without forgetting the late capture, still the subsequent observations of Mr. Forrester and Pitt in 1845 & 1846 are strong proofs that some yet remain at large. Not again to bring forward the report of the recent appearance of 8 already mentioned, ~~it~~ it must be remembered that of the inland parts of the Western half of the island scarcely any one has ever had scarcely even a sight. Who is to say that no native is not now to be found there? My own observation goes far to prove the contrary.

Mr. Calder goes on to express his belief that the captured blacks will return to those not captured and recover their old spirit with the added powers of doing harm learnt from white people. That the kangaroo hunters and stock keepers are a most degraded race, and that intruders will begin again. The Lieut. Governor did not incur in the conclusions of Mr. Calder, and there the matter ended.