

## DOCUMENTS RELATING TO THE HISTORY OF HUNTER'S RIVER

Exerpts from *Historical Records of New South Wales. Vol. IV. Hunter and King. 1800, 1801, 1802. Edited by F.M. Bladen. Sydney: Charles Potter, 1896.*

(pps. 404-409)

### HUNTER RIVER

14th June, 1801

REMARKS, &c., on board His Majesty's armed surveying vessel, Lady Nelson, in Hunter River, 1801.

By LIEUT. GRANT, COMMANDER

Sunday, 14 June, 1801. Wind S.E. by E. to W.N.W. At 6 a.m. bore up and made all possible sail, the Coal Island [The Nobbys] (an island in the entrance) N.N.W. 6 miles. At half-past 10 I went on shore with Dr. Harris, to examine the entrance, which we found very narrow. On the left-hand side going in was a reef of rocks from the island, with much heavy surf breaking on it; on the right was an extensive flat, with a tremendous roll of sand breakers over it. The channel in was troubled with much heavy swell, and did all but break, so that I hove the boats head round and pulled out again; sounded 5 fms. On considering the risk we run of bringing the vessel in without well ascertaining the channel, I pulled in, carrying from 5 to 4 and 3 ½ fathoms close to the island. On our getting on shore we climbed up this steep island and hoisted a flagg as a signal this was the right place. It was then the first of the ebb and calm; therefore hastened on board and towed the brig in. At noon the Coal Island bore W.N.W. 3 or 4 miles. The latitude they observed in was 32°37'34" south. [Probably a copyist's error for 32°57'34"S.]

Monday, 15 June, 1801. - Wind W. P.M. [Lieut. Grant in this journal followed the nautical method of reckoning time, i.e., the day commenced and ended at noon, e.g., 15th June would be from noon on the 14th to noon on the 15th civil time: hence it is that each day's entry commences with P.M., except in the case of the first day's record, which starts from daylight on the 14th, when off the river's mouth.] - at half-past 1 a light air sprung up from the eastward, which with the boats ahead and sweeps enabled us to stem the tide, the Francis schooner towing in after us. On getting nearly abreast of the island and close to the reef, found the tide running so strong that we could not stem it. Let go the best bower, but not having room to veer out of any scope of cable, found the vessel draft. Let go the small bower and brought her up. From the strength of the tide was obliged to steer the vessel to it. Warped the vessel under the island. Here we found the tide run very strong and in eddies, which I am of opinion is occasioned by the heavy surf which breaks between the main and the island meeting the outside surf, which must make this place a very unsafe roadstead for any vessel to lay in when it blows from the eastward, more especially as there is no room to veer out any scope of cable, nor ought *any vessel to stop here unless necessity* requires it. Let go at the strength of the tides during the night a second anchor under foot, and steered the vessel to it. At daylight weighed, it being low

water, and towed up abreast of a saw-pit, where Mr. Meehan had laid during his stay here. Came too with the small bower within 30 yards of the shore in 3 fathoms water, and steadied with a warp fast to a tree ; schooner in company. Here the native, which Dr. Harris brought off with him, as before mentioned, left us.

Tuesday, 16 June, 1801. - Wind W. to N.W. P.M. – moderate and cloudy weather ; employed occasionally. A.M. – rain with lightning; at daylight fair and cloudy. Colonel Paterson and I went on shore to examine the coals ; took the miner with us. At the place where he had been before at work on, we found a strata of coal 22 inches thick, and of good quality. As this was on an elevated situation, and not very easy of access, we found at the foot of the hill and on the reef at low water, plenty of excellent coals in beds of different thickness. Made the necessary arrangements for setting the people to work.

Wednesday, 17 June, 1801. - Winds W. to N.W. The Colonel and myself went to Ash Island to examine its situation, &c. Here we found plenty of different sorts of wood, and the ash trees of considerable magnitude in general with some very large ones interspersed, yet they are not so plenty as from the name of the island one is at first led to suppose. One of the woods (of which I brought on board a few lengths) much resembles the hickery in its present state, not only in its colour and close grain but its toughness. There are here several pithy woods, very light and white, with close grain, and some of the leaves of which sting like nettles. There are gum-trees, swamp-oak, the tea-tree, and mangrove in abundance.

Thursday, 18 June, 1801. - Winds W. to N.W. We walked a short distance inland, and found in the vicinity of the coal mines the soil black and good (with plenty of water at hand). It is mostly pasture land, covered with short grass, which would answer any sort of cattle but more particularly sheep. From its elevated situation it is dry and healthy, nor can it ever be overflowed as it rises high above the source of the river and shows a steep front to the sea, which in some places is rocky. There are also vallies sheltered from all winds and nevertheless well elevated, though it is to be understood that they are not of extensive magnitude, for they are only in the vicinity of the coal stratas, and I suppose might be comprised within the compass of six or seven hundred square acres. I am the more particular on this head from it being so near the sea, as the cold bleak winds are often as pernicious to some constitutions and vegetation in general as swampey confined damp grounds are, of which there are no scarcity in this harbour. After leaving this spot the ground gradually falls and gets more of a light, sandy soil, covered with brush and trees interspersed, until it reaches the hills, the nearest of which are of no great distance nor of any height. The low land all around this place is more or less subject to be overflowed, and is full of swamps, some of which are of considerable magnitude.

Friday, 19 June, 1801. - Wind W. We proceeded a considerable distance up an extensive arm, wherein there was deep water, but we found no passage for the vessel into it, as at the entrance there was barely water for the boat, with a rapid tide running. We proceeded to the opposite, or northern shore, and found it full of flats, some of which we were obliged to get out and drag the boat over. Between these flats are gullies of deep water, but without any regular channel. On the shore we found large banks of excellent shells, which lay in some places nearly three feet thick, washed up by the tides or floods, as also all the roots of the trees by the water side stuck full of oysters. From this circumstance lime would be very easily got at this spot. Nevertheless, the oyster shells are to be found in abundance all round the harbour.

Monday, 22 June, 1801. - Wind west. Colonel Paterson wishing to examine the island in the entrance, as from its appearance he expected to find coal in greater plenty, and perhaps

superior quality, Mr. Barrallier and myself wishing to ascertain the soundings in the entrance, the weather being favourable for that purpose, we went together, taking the miner with us, and while the Colonel and miner examined the island, I sounded the entrance of this harbour. The strata which appeared like coal on the island proved to be of much inferior quality to those on the main which we had been digging, though at the foot of the island and on the reef were several beds of good coals ; but these were covered with large stones which the flood and tide had rolled up and were overflowed every tide; therefore, however well it may appear to some that coals may be more easily got, and more expeditiously shipped from this spot, when I consider the risk run and the very small portion of labour saved, *if any there may be*, I am confident it will fall much short of giving that satisfaction which might be expected from such a measure, and one single accident (of which they are liable to more than one) might be of more serious consequence and greater loss than all the coals in this small spot are worth, more especially where they are to be had in abundance, *without risk*, within little more than musket shot of the same place. Having obtained the different points before mentioned, we returned and went to haul the sein. We observed a stranger making up to us, which we could perceive was none of our party. It proved to be a man named John Loft, who had been unfortunately wrecked out of a boat belonging to Underwood of Sydney. She was cast on shore to the norw'd of Port Stephens. They were three in number, and he had been 32 days in traveling to this place from where she was wrecked. His other two companions, one he said was killed by the natives, the other eat a toad fish – which he complained of for some days – and died. He had a bag with a few small shell-fish on which he had chiefly subsisted. It was fortunate we were here, as I think it would have been impossible for him to have reached Sydney on foot. The emotions that he felt on meeting are much better imagined than described; the laugh and the tear had their repeated place in turns, and his first utterance was, “I am starving with hunger.”

Tuesday, 23 June, 1801. - Wind, W.N.W. P.M. – strong breezes and clear weather. At sunset our different parties returned. Mr. Barrallier and the second mate having penetrated a little way into the woods, they met with a native which they brought on board with them. He was a little elderly man, strait made, and spoke not one syllable that was intelligible. He had all his fore teeth in, and spoke a jargon of simple sounds. As I particularly observed, few words that came from him were composed of more than one syllable. He could eat nothing; but two crows which some of the people had shot being given him, he stuffed them in the fire feathers and all, which after burning off, and heating them a little, he eat. In the morning, after using him kindly, the Colonel gave him a tomahawk, which he seemed much pleased with, and shewed that he perfectly understood the use of it. He was put on shore near the place where they met him. On the return of the boat they informed me he was out of their sight in an instant.

Sunday, 28th June, 1801. - Wind, N.W. P.M. – moderate and cloudy weather. At 4 p.m., the tide serving, we dropped up into the entrance of Paterson's River, and at 6 came too in 3 fathoms water for the night. At 7 in the morning we dropped up into 9 feet water, and was informed by the second mate, who was ahead in the boat sounding, that he had only 7 and 6 feet. I immediately brought up. In order the better to satisfy myself on this head, I went with Colonel Paterson in the boat at the top of high water, and found no more than two, three, and four feet at most, a little further above where our boat had been. We then returned, and sounded the other entrances to this arm, but found no more water, and in many places less. Judging that the vessel might touch at low water where she lay, the rise of the tide not being less than four or five feet, I got up the anchor and brought her back into two fathoms water, giving up the idea of getting further up this arm with the vessel. We moored with the kedge.

Saturday, July 4th, 1801. - Wind, S.S.W. I this day visited the coal miners, and found them hard at work. They had found a strata of coals nearly four feet in thickness and of excellent kind. It was entirely from side to side through the hill – that is to say, from the harbour side to the sea on the opposite side; and on the low side which faces the harbour the miner informed me they were not above ten yards down. This consequently will yield a supply of coals for a great length of time. The miner informed they were equal to any bed of coals he had ever seen in England. I saw a lump of them. It was clear and transparent, free from earth and smut, and no doubt will answer for any use whatever.

Tuesday, 7 July, 1801. - Wind S.W. Previous to my leaving the ship I ordered Mr. Murray to visit the colliers frequently and see they did their duty, to haul the sein as often as possible in order to save salt provisions, and to salt as many fish as cou'd be spared.

Wednesday, 8 July, 1801. - Wind, S.W. The distance we were from the ship might be 15 or 16 miles. We started at daylight and proceeded onwards. So far, the ground on each side appears to be less or more overflowed every fresh, and is full of lagoons and swamps. The soil is black and good ad full of brush, with trees of great magnitude and of different kinds. The grass is thick and long where it grows, but so far the ground is low and swampy, though, no doubt, from the height of the hills inland there is good ground free from all floods. We breakfasted about nine miles further up on a rising ground clear of brush and swamp. The ground appeared open, the grass luxurious and long. I travelled a mile and a half on this sort of ground, and came to a pleasant rising mount which afforded an extensive prospect. It was covered with long luxuriant grass and very large trees of different kinds ; some rocks are interspersed on its top, with plenty of water at hand. The land here is high above the source of the river. Here is plenty of land for agriculture. The soil is black, but mixed with a sort of sand or marley substance. However, its natural productions warrant it fit for anything. A creek that boats might lay in clear of the violent floods runs along the foot of the mount. The cedar grows here in plenty about the sides of the river, so that there is plenty of wood and stone with water and ground much preferable to any I have seen about Sydney for agriculture. This is the first spot for cultivation we have yet met with since we left the ship that is desirable about the waterside. The evening brought us up to the Colonel, where we found them in a comfortable hut and a good fire. This place might be nine or ten miles further up. In the morning the Colonel and Dr. Harris in his boat, and Mr. Barrallier and myself in our small boat, proceeded up the river to a mount, similar in productions and soil to the above described, but much higher and of greater magnitude. The view was extensive and picturesque, as it commanded a great extent of country. Colonel Paterson had before visited this place and named it Mount Ann. [Named Mount Ann by Colonel Paterson in honor to the Governor's wife, Mrs. King.] On our passage up we had passed five rapid falls, which we were obliged to drag the boats over. We proceeded onwards, and after passing four more falls, some of which were very rapid and troublesome from the trees being in many places washed right across there, we took-up for the night about three miles above Mount Ann. On the opposite side was a lagoon, where we shot a brace of ducks in. We saw several traces of the natives, both young and old, and passed some canoes, which are small and rudely put together. Here the river still was extensive and wide, but the freshes had left their marks in many tops of trees not less from the source of the river than 25 feet perpendicular height. The next day brought us to the foot of a high hill, [Colonel Paterson named this hill Mount Elizabeth, in honor of his wife] which was still higher than Mount Ann, and connected to the same by a chain of lesser hills forming a semi-circle nearly. From the top of this we could see the island in the entrance of the harbour, all the range of blue mountains which we had now got to the nor'w'd of, and also the river for a great way inland winding in various ways. The production and soil here is nearly what I have before described,

and, like the first, is steep on one side. Here we found some new plants of the fern tribe, and others, particularly a sort of balm which grows here to a great size, the stem of it approaching nearly to the texture of wood, and is of a sweeter smell than the common balm. This mount was named Mount Elizabeth. On it will be found a tree with the letters W.P., J.G., J.H., F.B., [These initials evidently stood for William Paterson, James Grant, John Harris, Francis Barrallier] with the year 1801. In another tree we cut a piece of the wood from it, which will stand a long time visible. We saw that the river took so long a sweep and returned to nearly the same place, that it would take us the next day to get almost to the place we were ; [it would appear from this that they went up the river to about the spot where Singleton now stands.] therefore we determined on returning, as our stock of provisions would not allow a longer stay. The country we saw from this hill is an immense level, extending from hence to the Blue Mountains, which we saw until lost to the eye, stretching in a northerly direction into the interior. I presume this is about 15 or 16 miles higher up than the hut. We passed the night, as usual, on the banks of the river, and next day proceeded downwards. On our passage up from the hut we passed in all fourteen different falls. We again visit Mount Ann, and arrived at the hut in the afternoon. Mr. Barrallier, it is to be observed, had obtained the survey so far as we had been up. Cedar grows along the banks of the river in great abundance and great magnitude. The ash, gum-trees of all sorts, the swamp-oak, and tea-tree is also in great plenty and very large, together with various other woods. Of minerals there appears not to be any great variety; those that are about the river in general are volcanick. Birds and plants nature has been bountiful in bestowing here ; fish also are plenty, and I suppose, from their leaping, are of the trout kind. Of shells we found a black sort of bivalve and much resembling the shells I have seen searched for in the river in Scotland, particularly the Doun, which in general are found to contain small pearls. Having now seen as much as I could up this arm, I was anxious to return. The colonel wished much to examine the other arm of this extensive river, which runs in a northerly direction and branches out apparently towards Port Stephens. [Doubtless the Williams River.]

Saturday, 18 July, 1801. - Wind S.W. P.M. – fresh gales and rain. At 5 p.m., the Colonel and Dr. Harris, with Mr. Barrallier, returned on board, Mr. Barrallier having surveyed up the arm until stopped by a cascade, which he could not pass. The Colonel had been up and met with another chain of mountains, one of which he named Mount King, and another Mount Grant. I now ventured to name my little mount, and called it Mount Edgerton, in obedience to the particular wish of my friend Captain Schank. A.M. – got the yards and topmasts up.

Sunday, 19 July, 1801. - Wind S.W. to calm. In the morning Mr. Barrallier and Dr. Harris went to survey for the last time, the survey being completed in its most material points.

Thursday, 23 July, 1801. - Wind S., S.S.E., E.S.E., S., S. by W. P.M. – blowing strong from S.S.E. to S.E. Saw a sloop-rigged boat standing along the shore. Observed her go into the Coal River. At midnight much sea and nearly calm. At daylight, light airs inclinable to calm. Got the bedding up to air and cleaned below. Extremes of land at sunset N.E. ½ N. and S.W. by W., distance 5 or 6 leagues, the Coal Island W. 10 or 12 miles. A.M. – light airs inclinable to calm. At noon the Coal Island bore N.W. by N. 4 or 5 leagues. Latitude observed, 33°11'S.

JAMES GRANT