

CAPTAIN CADELL'S EXPEDITION.

South Australian Register Monday 28th October 1867

Early in the month the Government received the subjoined telegram from Captain Cadell, who, as was expected, reached Port Burke towards the end of August. It will be seen that the Liverpool has been examined, that another river has been found in the same locality, and that good pastoral land is spoken of as being plentiful in the neighbourhood. As regards the health of the expedition the telegram speaks favourably; but one of the party, a blacksmith named George Frazer, has accidentally shot himself, and a black boy has been drowned. There have been numerous casualties too amongst the horses; and, to make matters worse, the steam tender Firefly has been sunk through running into the Eagle. Altogether, the telegram does not show that much has been gained by this expedition on the western shore of the Gulf, for as Captain Cadell says he was unable to penetrate the country to any great extent. We suppose that the second part of the campaign will now be carried out, and that the Adam Bay country and the Victoria will be visited. The telegram is as follows: —

The Hon. the Chief Secretary,
Bowen, October 1, 1867.

“We arrived at Sweers Island on the 22nd August. We anchored in East Arnheim's Land on the 22nd May. Landed all my horses in good condition on the Liverpool on the 7th. They got rushed by alligators the first night they were ashore, and two of them were never recovered. I went to Mount Morris Bay, but was unsuccessful in procuring buffalo or a native interpreter. Very good land is to be found on the Liverpool and its immediate vicinity, commanding easy water carriage, as it is a fine deep estuary. The moderately elevated land presents a healthy site for a capital, with good water and stone in abundance. It lies almost dead in the track of all ships coming through Torres Straits, and is exactly equidistant to our Queensland and Western Australian boundaries. The mosquitoes are the greatest drawback. I have discovered a fine river near the Liverpool, in long. 134° 35'. lat. 12° 5'. The Firefly has been up it 40 miles, the depth there being five fathoms, and its breadth 60 yards, with no indication of its increasing or diminishing. The natives were exceedingly numerous. East Arnheim's Land, which has hitherto been considered part of the mainland, is a perfect Polynesia. The Eagle entered a strait 30 miles long in lat. 12° 3' long. 135° 40', and came out in Arnheim's Bay. The entrance of the Roper is barely navigable for steamers of light draught. I have explored it for 45 miles to Leichardt's position, and the country seemed good. A solitary white man with a beard to his waist is or has been living with the natives. He was absent turtle-hunting when we were there, but I will endeavour to get on his tracks. 'Whilst coming to off the north of the Roper last week the Eagle grounded, and the Firefly being in tow ran into her, when the screw of the former being outside the stern-post cut the bows out of the latter, which sunk her shortly after. I have left my 13 working horses on Maria Island, off the Roper. Two were lost the first night, and two were drowned in the river. One also dropped dead; two were turned out. I have been unable to penetrate far into the interior on account of the sandstone ranges and swamps, the state of the horses, and my examination of the coast. The expedition has been healthy, and on excellent terms with the natives, who have assisted in wooding and watering the Eagle and Firefly.

George Fraser, blacksmith, accidentally shot himself dead with his carbine, and one Cape York black boy was drowned in attempting to desert. Pastorally speaking for the present it is a cattle country I have explored; feed most luxuriant, but too coarse for horses, and too much grass seeds for sheep. It is an undulating open forest, subject to very heavy floods in the north-west monsoons. Samples of the soil have been taken. Surveying operations are only practicable during the south-east monsoons. Maximum of thermometer, 90°; minimum, 54°; the average being much cooler than South Australia. We have had a good deal of difficulty in coming here against the monsoon and in getting wood for fuel for the Eagle, which is abominably dull (? slow). A good many uncharted dangers have been discovered. We will be fully two months on the coast yet. I have forwarded this message to Bowen by special messenger. It will be two weeks ahead at the post. Despatches with fuller details and tracings will reach you in a fortnight after receipt of this. I have not received a single letter from South Australia, which I attribute to the bad postal arrangements. I imagine that I must now proceed to Adam Bay and the Victoria.

F. C. Cadell.

Burke Town, via Bowen, Sept. 26.

CAPTAIN CADELL'S REPORT

The conclusions as to highly valuable discoveries which have been drawn from the telegram do not appear to be supported by the full report which has now been laid before the House of Assembly. The very fact, indeed, that the explorers had determined to renew their examination of the coast, and to proceed upon further voyages of discovery in regions so comparatively well known as Adam Bay and the Victoria, was of itself a proof that no very excellent site for a settlement had been found in the neighbourhood of the Liverpool: for if such a site had been found the object of the expedition would have been attained, and the explorers could have rested complacently on their laurels. But there is no evidence of such a site having been found, and Captain Cadell himself says not a word in confirmation of the rumours which have gone abroad relative to the alleged discovery of exceedingly valuable country. Those rumours, indeed, must have originated with some of his followers, who, according to the report, were "enjoying" themselves somewhat freely after their explorations at the Burke Town public houses. Writing from that place on the 26th of August last, Captain Cadell gives a record of his proceedings. He shows that he reached the Liverpool on the 5th of May; that he found a 'splendid estuary' to that river; that the natives were overjoyed to see the white men; that the horses belonging to the expedition were landed; and that on the same night they were rushed by the famous alligator which has been mentioned in previous reports. Then the Captain describes his visit to Mount Norris Bay, where he was disappointed in not meeting with Bob White, the native who could speak English, and where the explorers were unable to capture the buffaloes which they wanted, though they succeeded in wounding two. Then the report describes how the party returned to the Liverpool, which river was partly examined—the result being that luxuriant feed was found on the banks, and that good land was met with in some places. After this there is an account of a new river named the Blyth, 'flowing into Boucaut Bay,' a few miles to the eastward of the Liverpool. This, it is believed, may turn out a valuable discovery; but there is nothing at all in the report to show that the new river is more important than many others which are known to exist on the same coast. The next portion of the report relates to the examination of a part of the country near Blue Mud Bay in East Arnheim's Land. This is the country which Captain Cadell in his telegram spoke of as a 'perfect Polynesia,' and much credit has been claimed for his discovery of its true character.

From such credit no one would think of detracting; but after all it does not appear that the examination of this Polynesia has done anything towards discovering suitable land for a new settlement in North Australia. Captain Cadell's report is certainly not at all complimentary to the character of the said Polynesia, for he reports, under date July 20 — "We had been passing through a wretched sonderbund, or collection of islands, tenanted apparently by alligators. They (the islands) were fringed with narrow but luxuriant belts

of mangroves, whilst their interiors — dead flats — were occupied by claypans, or supported scanty salsolaceous plants." After this excursion amongst the islands, the explorers in August examined the Roper River. The report says:— "A party proceeded up the Roper for about forty miles, when they were stopped by a sandbank stretching right across the river — a bar, on the inner side of which was a fine freshwater river, with the uniform depth of two fathoms. The banks were much bolder than usual, without the everlasting mangroves, whilst the adjacent country partook of the nature of open plains." Granite and quartz were found in the course of the exploration, and it was up the river that "the bearded white man was heard of." The report says — "A native made signs from the opposite bank, and finally waded across to the boat. Before reaching it, however, he began telling the men, in his own pantomimic way, about a man — 'one man' — with a beard down to his waist, who was or had been in the neighbourhood, but had since gone a long way up another branch of the Roper seeking turtle." In reference to this rather vague report the Captain draws the following conclusion : — "I am not without the suspicion that the man is silly, as the natives appeared to show that this 'lone wanderer of the wilds' was constantly going about prodding the ground with a spear.' The proof of silliness, however, is not very clear; for the 'lone wanderer' might have been in search of hidden treasures, and might therefore consistently go about prodding the ground just as Silas Wegg did in the territory of 'Boffinses Bower.' In other parts of the report Captain Cadell describes the accident by which one of his men lost his life, and states that the party were unable to make many journeys into the interior owing to the impracticable character of the country and the unsatisfactory state of the horses. A great many natives had been met with, and on the whole they had been friendly, though one hostile encounter of a trifling character had taken place. Malay proas, too, had been seen, and trepang had been found in considerable quantities on several parts of the coast. In summing up his report Captain Cadell guards himself most carefully from attaching too much importance to the results of his explorations, and, in conclusion, he says : — " I must crave that you will extend to me your extreme indulgence for this hastily-written narrative, thrown off in the public room of a bush inn on the very ultima thule of civilization, with rather more than its full share of all the interruptions and *désagrémens* incidental thereto, intensified, I regret to say, by my own 'liberty men, who, true to their country and their calling, are enjoying (?) themselves after a few months of my tolerable discipline." Taking the report altogether, its most valuable contents are apparently those which relate to the new river, the examination of the mouth of the Roper, and the exploration of the Polynesia in East Arnheim's Land. On these points there are unquestionably facts of interest and importance, though they may have but very little bearing on the question of founding a settlement in North Australia. As regards the rivers mentioned by Captain Cadell, the mouth of the Roper has not hitherto been well known, though Leichhardt examined the stream further up. He came upon this river in the month of October, about twenty miles from the sea, and found the country along its left bank well grassed and openly timbered, chiefly with 'the Australian box.' Waterfowl, especially ducks and geese, were exceedingly numerous, and the river abounded with fish, which the natives, who possessed iron cutting implements, caught in traps made of the wild rattan.

Mussels were also abundant, and formed an important article of consumption among the natives. Leichhardt followed the river up in a westerly direction for several days, the country rather improving as he ascended. A strong sea-breeze blew up the valley of the river every afternoon, and proved very refreshing to the travellers. In reference to the new river — the Blyth — it appears that it is only three or four miles to the eastward of the Liverpool, which has long been supposed to be the most important watercourse in the neighbourhood. This latter river, in fact, has been carefully examined by previous explorers, and it is not likely that Captain Cadell will be able to say much that is new about it. Captain King, who discovered and explored this river (the Liverpool) in 1819, reported that it was easy of access; that the estuary was four miles wide, with a depth of from ten to fourteen fathoms; and that the banks were lined with mangroves to a distance of fourteen miles from the mouth, when the country stretched out into large plains. This report seems now to be continued by Captain Cadell, who seems generally to be as favourably impressed with the Liverpool as some previous writers have been. One of them has said "that the Liverpool River may hereafter prove to be a point of great importance; for although other rivers of equal magnitude may be discovered on the north coast, its central position must always secure the preference. There is every reason to believe that its valley extends far inland, as Leichhardt when crossing its meridian experienced a steady breeze from N.N.E. during the afternoon and early part of the night, which he thought to be the sea breeze blowing up the valley of the Liverpool, and there is every reason to believe that he formed a correct opinion." Whether on the strength of these facts, and the generally favourable report of Captain Cadell, the Government will now try at the Liverpool the experiment which has been tried at the Adelaide is a matter upon which there is no information at present; nor does the report which is before Parliament say anything at all conclusive as to the best situation for a new colony.