

## **CAPTAIN CADELL'S COLLAPSIBLE CANOE**

Bill Fyfe Hendrie

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COCKENZIE on the shores of the Firth Of Forth and Goolwa in Southern Australia are geographically about as far apart as any two small communities can be, separated by over 12,000 miles of ocean. But this summer inhabitants of both towns are looking forward to celebrating the 150th anniversary of the triumph of the explorer they are proud to share as their most-famous son.

Francis Cadell was born in 1822 at Cockenzie House which still stands on the edge of the East Lothian town and where government commander Sir John Cope spent the night before he was rudely awakened by the defeat of his troops at the Battle of Prestonpans. Cadell was the son of one of Scotland's most innovative and enterprising merchant families.

The spacious 17th-century mansion in which he spent his childhood years had been purchased by his grandfather, John, in 1779, 34 years after the Jacobite victory, from the profits made originally from importing iron and small quantities of steel. When supplies of these metals were disrupted by enemy naval action just at the time when they were most required to provide munitions during what became known as The Seven Years War, he capitalised on the problem by expanding Scotland's iron production most famously at the new Carron Iron Works, near Falkirk, in 1759 where he was partner.

John Cadell's son, Hugh, in his turn, had three sons including Francis who, when still a boy, joined the Royal Navy as a midshipman. His ship was amongst the fleet which set sail for the Far East and in 1839 he fought in the Opium War. Later he was involved in the siege of a Chinese port and, when the city fell, was rewarded with an officer's share of the captured booty. By the time he was 22 he was a captain in his own right, in command of a small sloop. Soon afterwards, however, he resigned his commission and returned home to study shipbuilding, first at Newcastle on the River Tyne and later on the Clyde. There he took a particular interest in the development of steam propulsion.

Before long he was off on his travels again and in 1849 reached Australia. With his interest in the sea, ships and shipbuilding, he soon recognised the potential which river transportation offered in the development of this vast land. In particular, he realised the opportunities presented by the possibility of opening up the mighty Murray River, which flows for 2,250 kilometres through New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.

Using his knowledge of boat-building he constructed what he considered the ideal craft, a 21-and-a-half-foot long, 3-feet 8-inch broad, flat-bottomed, wood-framed, canvas-covered collapsible canoe with a blunt bow, which he named Forerunner. As soon as it was completed he folded it up, put it on the back of a sturdy horse and, in the coolest of the Australian winter weather, set out in July 1852 from Melbourne for the overland trek to Swan Hill, approximately halfway down the course of the Murray.

En route he paused briefly in Bendigo to hire four well-built "diggers" who agreed to abandon their mining explorations to become his crew for the long voyage ahead. When they reached the banks of the Murray in August, Cadell treated his new-found sailors to a celebration meal of mutton chops, with the ulterior motive of using the grease from the frying-pan to ensure that Forerunner's canvas skin was leak proof before launching her on the

river. With her draught of only one foot eight inches and her proportionally-broad beam, Forerunner proved ideal for the task ahead as Cadell and his crew began their voyage downstream to the sea. Aboard they carried almost a ton and a half of provisions, which they supplemented along the way by shooting rabbits and kangaroos.

As a result of the weight of her cargo, Forerunner's bottom often scraped against the riverbed, and Cadell and his crew spent several days painstakingly repairing her canvas hull. Progress was also slow because Cadell took great care to chart every rock and obstacle along their course. Eventually three months and 850 miles later they finally landed at Goolwa, then a small settlement at the mouth of the Murray.

As a result settlers, including many Scottish emigrants, were encouraged to establish sheep stations along the Murray's banks.

Realising that river boats would soon be required to ship the first fleeces down river to the ocean, the shrewd Cadell wrote home to persuade his father that it would be worth investing in a paddle steamer to develop this new trade. Cadell Senior purchased a Scottish-owned steamship, the *Lioness*, and engaged the services of several seamen from Cockenzie and the small neighbouring harbour of Port Seton to sail her on her long 12,000-mile voyage down under. The *Lioness* appears to have undertaken most of this long voyage under sail, with her paddles and paddle boxes stowed below decks to keep them safe from rough ocean waves and weather.

On arrival in Goolwa, Cadell supervised the reconstructions of the paddles and then, using supplies of wood from the red gum trees which grew in profusion along the shores of the river to fuel her hungry engine, introduced steam power to the Murray. The *Lioness* proved so successful in developing the river trade that Goolwa became one of Australia's busiest shipbuilding centres and 37 similar paddle steamers, plus 23 barges for them to tow, were constructed there between 1853 and 1913.

By then river transport had been largely superseded by the development of the railways.

Several of the early paddle steamers to join the *Lioness* in Cadell's fleet on the Murray were captained by the sailors who had originally brought her out safely from Scotland and they went on to become well-known riverboat skippers carrying both cargo and passengers between Goolwa and Swan Hill.

Soon the Cadell vessels were challenged by a rival fleet belonging to William Randell and there were many battles amongst crews, none fought more fiercely than that to be the first to sail a paddle steamer safely all the way up river as far as Swan Hill. Cadell himself took the wheel of his latest ship, the *Lady Augusta*, while Captain Randell was on the bridge of his equally new vessel, *Mary Ann*. Cadell was the more daring, rigging a large lantern in the bows of the *Lady Augusta* so that his crew relied on his knowledge of the river to sail her on through the hours of darkness. In the end he proved victorious by being first to dock at Swan Hill.

For the first few years Cadell made handsome profits, but later they declined and he left the Murray to seek his fortune elsewhere by becoming involved in pearl gathering off the coast of New Guinea. There his adventurous life was brought to a tragic end when, commanding a pearl fishing boat called the *Gem*, several of his native crew tried to raid its valuable cargo. While defending it he was fatally wounded.

Although Captain Cadell died far from Goolwa, the inhabitants always remembered the Scottish adventurer who made it his home; the town's main thoroughfare is still named Cadell Street. The most important event on its annual calendar is a wooden boat-building competition.

This year, to mark the 150th anniversary of Cadell's original opening of the Murray to navigation by commercial traffic, the parade of boats will be led by a reconstructed version of his collapsible canoe, while at the same time another replica of the Forerunner will also be launched on the Firth Of Forth. Forerunner II, as the new Scottish craft has been christened, has been built by East Lothian artist Kenny Munro with financial support from the local community council and the involvement of pupils from Cockenzie Primary School. Kenny had already worked with them on the mural erected overlooking the harbour as a tribute to the town's fishing fleet.

During the summer Forerunner II will become a familiar sight as, following her appearance at Cockenzie and Port Seton Gala Day on 8th June, Kenny plans - with the aid of an experienced adult crew - to set off to paddle her from a point near Aberfoyle all the way down river to the Firth back to her home port where she will be greeted by direct descendants of George Bain-Johnston who helped sail the Lioness to Goolwa. Of her seaworthiness and handling abilities Kenny has no doubts, as last year he traveled out to Goolwa to help crew her sister, Forerunner III.

For his voyage down the Forth, Kenny is being sponsored by Scottish Natural Heritage to undertake a study to examine the potential for linking people in different towns and villages through participation in a range of arts and science projects all with the common theme of boat building, navigation and dependence on rivers and the sea. Priority will be given to involving schools.

After Forerunner II returns to Cockenzie, it is planned to display her in the Power House at Prestongrange Industrial Archaeology Museum.

Captain Cadell celebrations will also include displays of work by pupils at local schools about his life and adventures, and an exhibition is planned in Cockenzie Public Library about the local boy who became a maritime hero on the other side of the world. For further information contact: Cockenzie and Port Seton Community Council, c/o Port Seton Centre, King George V Park, South Seton Park, Port Seton, East Lothian or e-mail: kenny-munro@beeb.net.