

“PHOTOGRAPHS IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

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Dictionary of South Australian Photography 1845 – 1915 by R.J. Noye

<http://www.sapf.org.au/wordpress/upload/Dictionary%20of%20South%20Australian%20photography.pdf>

HAMILTON, Arthur Richard

On 29 April 1864 Lieut. Colonel Boyd Travers Finniss led a government expedition to the Northern Territory to survey land and establish a settlement at Escape Cliffs on Adam Bay, at the entrance to the Adelaide River. Among the forty officers and men who sailed north with Finniss in the Henry Ellis were Arthur Hamilton, deputy surveyor, and Charles Hake, a survey hand, who, together known as Hamilton and Hake, took the earliest known photographs of the Northern Territory.

What are presumed to be some of their photographs which had been sent to Adelaide were described by the Register on 14 December 1864. We have seen three photographs forwarded to the Government by Mr Finniss, Resident of the Northern Territory. One of these presents a view of the first encampment of the expedition on the Adelaide River, and whatever its imperfection it certainly shows that an abundance of grand timber exists in the locality. Another of the views shows nine members of the party mounting guard and a third portrays a group of naked aboriginals whose stature appears quite imposing. The views are not well executed, and the last mentioned shows the figures as indistinctly as if it was a negative. The only one of the guard party who is recognisable is Mr McMinn.

On 20 February 1865 the Advertiser reported that on the first page of the Melbourne Post there was ‘a view of the first camp on the Adelaide River, Northern Territory, from a photograph by Arthur Hamilton, the sketch having been drawn by Mr W. Wyatt, of the Adelaide Audit Office, although not so stated by the Post’.

Finniss, the leader of the expedition, was ‘fated to do nothing that was right and everything that was wrong’, and it was not long before his initials B.T.F. were taken to mean ‘Bloody Tom Fool’. There were complaints about the choice of site for the settlement; land surveyed for sale was found

505 Observer, 30 July, 17 September 1881. 506 Quoted in Nancy Gemmell, *The Hambidge Sisters, The Author, Strathalbyn*, 1993.

to be under water during the rainy season; serious clashes occurred between whites and Aborigines; problems arose with sanitation, food and discipline. Eventually an atmosphere of confusion, quarrelling and disorganisation descended upon the camp, and by the time this state of affairs had become known in Adelaide and Finniss relieved of his duties, most of the members of the expedition had decided to leave by whatever means was available.

On 20 April 1865 the passenger and cargo vessel Bengal arrived at Escape Cliffs. Thirty of the eighty people in the camp left on her bound for home via Singapore, and of the remaining fifty, forty had decided to leave at the first favourable opportunity. One group of men, organised by a private settler, Jefferson Pickman Stow, purchased a 23-foot open boat from the master of the Bengal, their intention being to sail around the coast of Western Australia until they found a ship which could take them on to Adelaide or Melbourne. Their small craft was dubbed the Forlorn Hope, and their journey became one of the epic sea voyages of Australian history.

Among the seven men who sailed in the Forlorn Hope were Arthur Hamilton and Charles Hake, and among the supplies stowed away on board was their chest of photographic apparatus. The Forlorn Hope left Adam Bay on 7 May 1865 and, after a voyage fraught with danger, arrived at the small, desolate settlement at Camden Harbour on 29 May, where they were received by Mr R.J. Sholl, the Government Resident. Stow, Hamilton and McMinn were accommodated in the Resident's tent, but the four 'men' in the party, including Hake, apparently had to make their own arrangements. In an official dispatch dated 2 June Mr Sholl said, 'Mr Hamilton took some photographic sketches of the camp, which are very good, taking into consideration all disadvantageous circumstances. I do not send copies because I fear that the mail-bag may become wet during the passage. Mr Hamilton will, however, I have no doubt, be willing to furnish you with copies.' An advertisement in the Register for 26 February 1866 said, 'Card photographs of the Northern Territory and Camden Harbour, taken by Messrs Hamilton and Hake, on sale by the Adelaide Photographic Company'.

After a short stay at Camden Harbour the Forlorn Hope sailed on to Champion Bay (Geraldton) where, after three months and an eventful 'coasting voyage of 2,500 miles' since leaving Escape Cliffs, Stow and four others went on to Fremantle in the Sea Bird, leaving Hamilton and Hake behind to take photographs at Champion Bay.

In 1955 two views of the Escape Cliffs camp were reproduced in Jack Cato's *The Story of the Camera in Australia*, in which he told how some of Hamilton & Hake's photographs had been resurrected: 'For nearly ninety years their pictures appeared to be lost. Various collectors advertised for them in newspapers without avail. But a few years ago Mr E.M. Christie of the Royal Victoria Historical Society discovered a considerable number of them in a private collection. They were faded and in poor condition, but he took them to George Marchant of Melbourne [son of Edwin Marchant and formerly of South Australia] who copied them with great cunning and produced a set of new negatives from which perfect prints have been made.' Another of their photographs was reproduced in Pike and Stringer's *Frontier Territory*⁵⁰⁷, and a description of some of their surviving photographs is given in *The Dictionary of Australian Artists*.⁵⁰⁸

Charles Hake Bio

<https://www.daa0.org.au/bio/charles-hake/biography/>

Design & art Australia on line

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On 20 April 1865 the passenger and cargo vessel *Bengal* arrived at Escape Cliffs. Thirty of the eighty people in the camp left on her bound for home via Singapore, and of the remaining fifty, forty had decided to leave at the first favourable opportunity. One group of men, organised by a private settler, Jefferson Pickman Stow, purchased a 23-foot open boat from the master of the *Bengal*, their intention being to sail around the coast of Western Australia until they found a ship which could take them on to Adelaide or Melbourne. Their small craft was dubbed the *Forlorn Hope*, and their journey became one of the epic sea voyages of Australian history.

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¹Glenville Pike and Col Stringer, *Frontier Territory*, Corey Books, Darwin, 1980, p. 10.

²Joan Kerr (ed.), *Dictionary of Australian artists, painters, sketchers, photographers and engravers to 1870*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1992, p. 339.

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