

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/result?sortby=dateAsc&l-state=Northern+Territory&q=STOCK+FLEET&l-australian=y>

*Northern Territory Times and Gazette (Darwin, NT : 1873 - 1927) Friday 6 February 1874*

There is very little known here apparently of Port Essington, although it is so close to Port Darwin, and is, moreover, a place which possesses quite a little history of its own on account of the settlement which was formed there in 1838, and which existed for 10 or 11 years. The exact position of Port Essington is in latitude 11.10, longitude 180.5, and it is situated in an inlet more than 20 miles in depth, which is comparatively narrow, and contains both an outer and inner harbour, the mouth of the latter being 15 miles from the open sea.

It was on the Western shore of this inner harbor that the settlement was formed by H.M.'s ships Alligator and Britomart in November, 1838, and which was broken up in December, 1849, by H.M.'s ship Meander, when the garrison was removed to Sydney and the buildings were mostly destroyed. This settlement had been formed merely as a naval and military station, and the inner harbor was selected on account of its superior capabilities for the erection of defensive works. But it is generally believed that the situation proved to be unhealthy, owing to the inner harbour which is a very fine one-being almost land-locked, and thus deprived of the advantages of the sea breeze. We find, however, from Mr. Earl's book on the subject, that although the inner harbour was not so good in a sanitary point of view as the outer harbour, yet the settlement did not suffer from any sickness of importance. He says-" At Port Essington our kangaroo hunters, generally non-commissioned officers of marines, were exposed almost daily during the hottest season of the year to long-continued exertion on foot; nevertheless they were always the healthiest men in the garrison."

The Coburg Peninsula in which Port Essington is situated is 120 miles in circumference-that is, from a point on one side to a similar point on the other side. Geologically, the Peninsula is crossed by a number of parallel ranges of sandstone from 80 to 300 feet high, running in a N.N.W. and S.S.E. direction, between which there are numerous ports and inlets. Fresh water is abundant, either in permanent pools, or is accessible by digging to the depth of a few feet. On the outer coast rocky points and sandy beaches, backed by open forest country, are the general features; and on the shores of the inlets nearest the sea, the sandy beaches alternate with patches of sandstone cliff, but at the heads and on the upper shores of the inlets the belts of the mangrove are universal.

The Coburg Peninsula is the first land made by the trepang fishers from Celebes and Sumbama, who come with the westerly monsoon towards the close of the year ; but they frequently pass on to Blue Mud Bay, in the Gulf of Carpentaria, where they can pursue their labors with little interruption from the monsoon until the month of March, when they commence the return voyage with the first spurt of the south-east trade wind. We learn that they fish along the north coast until their cargoes are completed, when they assemble in small fleets at some part on the north side of the Coburg Peninsula, and refit for the voyage home, starting in May or June.

A few miles to the eastward of Port Essington there is Port Bremer, which is a deep inlet and affords excellent anchorage; but it is not frequented by either the trepang fishers or by the

natives, as the malaria is said to be so great that a few days' residence on its shores is nearly certain to be attended with an attack of fever. There is also Raffles Bay, which was used as a place of settlement even before Port Essington. This place is more open and of less depth than the other harbors; but it resembles them in its general features. An establishment composed of troops and convicts from Sydney was formed on the eastern side of this Bay in June, 1827, but was broken up in March, 1829, subsequent to the occupation of Swan River, to which place most of the stock were removed; but a portion was left to breed and occupy the country. The buffaloes which were originally brought from Timor soon increased to many hundreds, and it is from these that the stray animals came which have now and then been met with along the coast, and even in the interior.

The writer of this article, in fact, saw tracks of buffaloes, a year or two ago, as far inland as the head of the Roper.

Perhaps if some little trouble were taken the Malayan industry which has been so long carried on near Port Essington might be made useful to ourselves; for probably the fleets would occasionally put in here if they were assured of a good reception, and the prospect of doing a little trade. Besides, there is no reason why steps should not be taken to make these Malay fisheries contribute towards the revenue of the country, if they are really so valuable as some persons have represented.