

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

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

(p. 447-448)

**LIEUT.-COLONEL PATERSON TO GOVERNOR KING. (King Papers.)**

Sydney, 11th August, 1801.

Dear Sir,

I herewith enclose you an extract of my journal to Hunter's River, which I hope will prove satisfactory. The weather being unfavourable prevented me from obtaining more information respecting the interior parts of that country, and the advantages that might be derived hereafter from forming a settlement.

The two rivers may become objects worth the attention of Government, one for wood, and the other (Hunter's River), from the excellent soil in its neighbourhood and not subject to floods, would, in my opinion, be a very fit situation for forming a settlement for the cultivation of grain or grazing.

With respect to making salt at the mouth of the river, I should recommend that work to be carried on, not within the harbour, but upon the sea coast, from the conveniency of getting coal, and in summer it may be got with very little trouble.

Should Government ever find these few observations in the least useful, I shall feel myself highly flattered in having had this opportunity of communicating the same to you.

I am, &c.,

W. PATERSON

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## LIEUT.-COLONEL PATERSON'S JOURNAL AND DISCOVERIES AT HUNTER RIVER

June 14, 1801 – Lieut. Grant and Mr. Harris left the vessel at ½ past 10 a.m., to examine the passage into Hunter's River. They landed on the island, which I named Coal Island. [Coal Island is now known as The Nobbys.] About an hour afterwards I observed the new Union (which they carried with them) hoisted on the top of the island.

On their return the boats were sent ahead to tow the vessel, and with the assistance of the sweeps, got barely under the lee of the island where they could bring to with safety, and were then obliged to let go a second anchor to prevent being drawn into the surge.

June 15. - Early in the morning warped the vessel into a safe birth, round what is called Pirate Point, where there is [a] small bay and fresh water, which I named Freshwater Bay. Landed and examined the point of land where the coals are, and likewise the sea coast to the southward, where there is a continuation of the same strata, with this difference, that as the land becomes higher a fourth stratum makes its appearance, and much superior to the other three ; but, unfortunately, from the constant surfs it is not possible they can be conveyed from where they are but by land carriage. The point of land where I put the colliers to work I have called Colliers' Point. From this to the southward for some miles the hills are covered with excellent verdure without trees, except in the valleys, and they are chiefly Banksia new, or what is commonly called the white honeysuckle, but grows much larger than that found in the [neighbourhood] of Sydney. Those hills are so much alike to what I have seen sheep feeding on in England, that I have named them Sheep Pasture Hills. The soil is a light black mould about a foot and a half deep, after which is the stratum of stone and clay above the coal, as it appears in the accompanying sketch.

June 16. - Went up a creek that opens from the south'd into a bay about two miles above Colliers' Point, where it divides into several arms. The ground is low, and apparently subject to floods; the soil blackish, mixed with sand ; the trees very lofty, mostly blue gum (Eucalyptus) and Casuarina. From the great quantity of driftwood all over this place, and the country for many miles being low and intersected with creeks, I am convinced that the floods here are much higher at times than what has every been known at the Hawkesbury.

June 17. - Went in company with Lieut. Grant to examine the above creek, which is called Mangrove Creek, but did not reach the end of it. The higher we got up the wider it became, and divided into many branches. From there being no driftwood here it is evident that no river falls into it, nor is there any highland nearer than the sea coast. Some of the people where employed to-day hauling the seine. Found quantities of fish and great variety.

June 17. –[it will be seen that the date, “17th,” is duplicated. It is so in the original.] Went up the river about five miles to the N.-west to an island called Ash Island, which takes its name for a very excellent wood, similar in quality to ash, and grows as large. This is not the only good timber that is found here. There is a species that resembles box, which grows to

a large tree. Here I enlarged my collection of plants, many of them quite new and beautiful. The leaf of one of the trees stings much worse than the Roman nettle. The circumference of this island is about six miles.

June 18. - Employed in arranging my collection.

June 19. - Went again to Ash Island for the purpose of pointing out to the sawyers the proper wood for cutting down. I saw some natives at a distance, but could not get near them, nor have we yet had any connection with the inhabitants of this neighbourhood. Accompanied by Mr. Harris went up Mangrove Creek. After rowing about four miles there was so little water that we were obliged to drag the boat over the flats. As soon as we got over found tide setting the contrary way, and perceived an opening into the main arm, where the vessel was at anchor opposite the south end of Ash Island, and at the entrance of what we suppose to be the principal river, which we traced about nine miles. Found the water rather fresh, and the country hilly, interspersed with high trees, mostly of the blue gum.

Went to Coal Island to examine the strata of coal while Messrs. Grant, Harris, and Barrallier were sounding the entrance of the river. Found the base of the island a complete stratum of coal, from 18 to 22 inches deep, of an excellent quality. There is anchoring ground at the inner side of the island near to where the coals are, and a vessel might be loaded in a short time ; but the preference must be given to Collier's Point, as the work can be carried on to any extent and at little expence.

Mr. Harris and myself went to Ash Island ad to determine its circumference. Took some water with us for the sawyers. After rowing the greatest part of the day, we began to suspect that we had passed the channel that separates it from the other islands, which really was the case. At 3 p.m. we found ourselves in a large river, and the water so fresh as to be fit for use. Here the tide meeting the stream we had a heavy swell. About eight miles from where we returned the two rivers meet and divide again in different branches forming several islands, as will appear from Mr. Barrallier's survey. From the herbage, which is very luxuriant, and the quantities of oysters on the mangrove trees, those islands in my opinion would answer well for the purpose of rearing swine. This day I added some plants to my collection, particularly a species cocas, intirely new, from 60 to 80 feet high. From the several excursions I made during the time that the Lady Nelson lay in Freshwater Bay I am of opinion that Government might derive many advantages by forming a small settlement at this place. In the 1st instance, the coals are a principle object. 2nd. Boiling salt, which could be done with little labour. 3rd. Burning shells that are here in great abundance. Besides, salting of fish might be carried on with considerable benefit if some industrious fisherman could be found for that purpose, as the fish are plentiful and good. There is excellent pasture for cattle, but until where the rivers meet is not fit for cultivation. What I term forest land is remarkably fine soil. After getting the vessel as far up as Needle Island, there was not water enough for her to proceed any further. I now commence my observations from Needle Island, which is so named from its length and narrowness.

June 29. - Accompanied by Mr. Harris and Mr. Lewin, I left the Lady Nelson with the launch to carry our provisions and what we thought necessary for an excursion of seven days, and a little boat belonging to Mr. H., which we found very useful ; indeed if it had not been [for] it we could not have proceeded as far as we did. This day we got on about 16 miles, and rested the night on a rising ground which I called Greenhill. The soil is good but does not extend to any considerable distance. Here the water is fresh enough for use. The tide rises

about four feet. Nearly half a mile above this the river, which your Excellency has done me the honor to name Paterson's River, formerly called the Cedar Arm, falls into Hunter's River.

June. 30 - Proceeded about 14 miles, the country generally low, covered with wood ; very little of it fit for cultivation – not from the soil but from the lowness of the situation.

July 1. - This day we concluded ourselves 12 miles higher up, and as the banks of the river in most places are very low and swampy, we fixed upon the first dry ground for our headquarters, where we built a small tent hut, thatched with grass which grows luxuriant. Here is an extent of country for about three miles to the southward with several lagoons and rather low, but except on the banks of the river not subject to floods. The soil in most places is good, thinly interspersed with fine lofty trees. This I named Shanks' Forest Plains in honor of Captain Shanks, the projector of the Lady Nelson, a gentleman much interested in the prosperity of this colony. The wood generally known by the name of cedar does not abound much in this place.

July 2. - Sent the launch back to the vessel. Mr. Harris attended me on a short excursion up the river about 6 miles. We found the stream in some places so exceedingly rapid that we were under the necessity of dragging up our little boat.

July 3. - Set out again early in the morning up the river till 2 o'clock, pulling over some rapid streams. The country now became much higher, with good soil, and the banks of the river covered with cedar, ash and what is called box. The extent of our journey to-day was to a beautiful green mount, from which we had a very extensive view of a low country almost surrounded with a high chain of mountains, bearing from N.E. to E.S.E., and about 20 miles distant. This I named Mount Anne, in honour of Mrs. King, being the first mountain commencing a range that extends about 9 miles. A remarkable mountain, in shape not much unlike the Peak of Teneriffe, which I named Mount York, bore S.S.W. This is a good landmark for the entrance into Hunter's River, and is seen at a great distance. Returned to head quarters in the evening.

July 4. - Having fixed on Shanks' Forest Plain as our place of rendezvous, in the neighbourhood of which is a large lagoon reported to be 9 miles across, and as the weather was very variable, I thought it better to convince myself of the nature and extent of this large sheet of water as described, and supposed to be the source of the Paterson River, than to undertake a larger journey towards the mountains until the weather became more favourable. About a mile higher up the river is a deep creek to the right, which from its direction gave us every reason to believe that it had communication with the lagoon.

July 5. - We dispatched the boat with three men up the creek while we proceeded by land in expectation they would be able to join us. After traveling about 3 miles, and passing some ponds with quantities of wild ducks in them, but exceeding shy, we had from the top of a rising ground a view of the large lagoon, and was much disappointed in its appearance and extent. It is merely a chain of large ponds, and forms several small islands covered with reeds. The circumference may be 12 or 14 miles, but no part of it is 1 mile broad. From the number of black swans and wild ducks we saw here, we had no doubt of killing many, and with the assistance of the boat, provided it arrived, we should be able to get them out of the water. After waiting till late in the day, and neither hearing nor seeing anything of our people with the boat, we considered they had met with some difficulty in getting up the creek. We

therefore returned to our hut after traveling from 9 in the morning till half-past 3 in the afternoon without resting or having the least refreshment. To-day we heard some natives, and saw a new canoe on the banks of the creek where we expected to have met our boat. From what I observed of trees cut down by the natives, which must have been a much sharper edged tool than what their stone maga is, and from their shyness, I have little reason to doubt but that some of the European deserters are among them. The country round this lagoon is tolerable soil, and certainly affords food for the natives. The surface is much grub'd up, particularly where roots of ferns, orchises, and a species of arum grow, which had nearly been fatal to some of our people. Later in the evening the boat returned, but could not find any communication the creek had with the lagoon. The men said they had seen very fine trees of cedar and ash.

July 6. - Rain. Attempted to carry Mr. Harris's boat overland, but found our forces insufficient.

July 7. - Rain. As our provisions began to get rather short, and a probability of our being here for some time longer, we made another attempt of getting the boat to the lagoon by sending her again up the creek, to a place which is not 200 yards from it, and near to where we had seen so many black swans and wild ducks, of which we hoped for a seasonable supply. Mr. Harris with three soldiers attended the boat, which, with some trouble, was removed from the creek into the lagoon, and Mr. Lewin remained with me at the hut preserving birds that were shot the day before, and collecting wood to keep up a fire for the night. In the evening, on Mr. Harris' return, we found him much disappointed in his expectations, having only brought in 1 duck and 6 young black swans. The latter were alive, but died soon after. Continual rain.

July 8. - This morning fair but very cloudy, and as every one was anxious to trace the river as far as we could, and a probability of the weather clearing up, Mr. Harris and Mr. Lewin went to order the boat to return that we might take the earliest opportunity of prosecuting our intended plan of discovering, if possible, the source of the river. In the evening the boat came back, and Lieut. Grant joined us with two boats, and brought us a supply of provisions, which enabled us to proceed further up the river with more comfort than we otherwise could have done.

July 9. - Very showery. Reached about 4 or 5 miles above Mount Anne, crossing several rapid runs, which we had to drag our boats over. In the night some very heavy showers, which made our situation exceedingly uncomfortable.

July 10. - Continued our course up the river, winding between high hills to almost every point of the compass, getting wider as we proceeded, but in places very shoal. About 1 o'clock p.m. came to a very high hill, where we halted on purpose to reach the summit, where we might have an opportunity of seeing what we had to expect in prosecuting our journey further. This hill we called Mount Elizabeth. It is the termination of the chain of mountains called King's Range, of which Mount Anne is the commencement. The range forms two-thirds of a circle, and, as I observed before, about 9 miles in extent, and their height from 5 to 700 feet. Mount Elizabeth is the highest, from where we had an extensive view of a low country for many miles. The chain of mountains before mentioned, particularly to the westward, were more visible and appeared very rocky and perpendicular. Observing the river winding through this immense plain in many directions gave us no hopes of reaching the source of it for some days, and knowing that the Lady Nelson was only victualled to the 1st Aug't, we reluctantly agreed to return, and on [our] way back to examine Hunter's River

before we reached the vessel. From Schanks' Forest Plains to the extent of our journey, the ground on both sides the river is good soil, and where the banks are low there is abundance of useful timbers ; indeed, the cedar, ash, and box are only found in low situations. The flood at this part of the river rises up 30 to 35 feet. I observed several large pieces of coal washed up – a proof of its being in the interior as well as on the sea coast.

July 11. - On our return we stopped at Mount Anne to refresh ourselves, and in the evening arrived at head quarters.

July 12. - Messrs. Grant, Barrallier, and Lewin left us to return to the vessel. As one of [the] oars was broken, it took us the greatest part of the day to make a new one.

July 13. - Continued going down the river, and in the evening arrived at Green Hill, where Paterson's River and Hunter's River meet.

July 14. - Mr. Harris accompanied me about 6 miles up Hunter River, which is very deep and about 200 yards wide. The ground on both sides for the first 3 miles is low and swampy. Many parts are covered with a new hibiscus, which the natives use as flax for making their nets and for other purposes. This plant is much superior to the carradgan [kurrajong], which is of the same species. As we got further up Hunter's River the country became higher and very beautiful, mostly forest ground, but very thinly interspersed with lofty trees, and sometimes, indeed acres, without a tree, the soil in general good, and the grass luxuriant. At the extent of our journey to-day we came to a high hill, which I named Mount King. From its summit we had a very extensive view of the mountains before mentioned to the westw'd, the round hills off the opening of Port Stephens to the eastw'd and nor'w'd, Ash Island, the Harbour, Coal Island, and Collier's Point to the eastw'd and southw'd. On our return to Green Hill in the evening, we found Mr. Barrallier with seven days' provisions, for the purpose of going on with the survey of this river.

July 15. - Mr. Barrallier left us early in the morning. As my object was to examine the country as much as possible, Mr. Harris and myself went in the small boat, continuing our journey up the river. After passing Mount King at 2 p.m., we came to another high hill, which I called Mount Grant, but the weather was so very foggy that we could see but very little of the country. We proceeded on in very heavy rain until 5 o'clock, and remained for the night on a rising ground near the bank of the river. From the quantity of rain that fell, we passed a most uncomfortable night.

July 16. - Still heavy rain. Waited till noon, expecting the weather would clear up ; but no appearance of change. We were now even determined to persevere, and rowing on a few miles, passing several creeks on both sides, the river began to narrow and shoal, forming small islands. Until to-day we had seen no appearance of the river overflowing its banks, but here it does in places where it is confined by high land from 10 to 15 feet. Great part of the water must be carried off by the creeks into the lagoons, of which there are a great many, and consequently does not affect the river lower down. At 2 o'clock we met Mr. Barrallier on his return, who informed us he had been 4 miles higher up, and was prevented proceeding any further on account of a fall of the river which he could not get his boat over. At this place the trees are remarkable for their height – chiefly blue gum and a species of casuarina. One tree of the latter I measured, which was 10 feet in circumference, and we judged it to be about 160 feet high, and perfectly straight. On this river there are neither cedar, ash, nor box. From Mr. Barrallier's information, and the weather being very bad, together with the uncertainty of our

receiving a supply of provisions which I had written for, I thought it better to return and leave the source of this river in doubt until a future period. We kept rowing down for four hours, and rested on the banks of the river for the night. Still very heavy rain.

July 17. - The weather continued just as bad as yesterday. At half-past 7 in the morning put off with the boats, and rowed the whole of the day till 5 o'clock in the evening, when we got on board the Lady Nelson, having come a distance of about 30 miles.

W. PATERSON