

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO THE HISTORY OF HUNTER'S RIVER

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

(pps. 627-628)

MR. M. MASON TO GOVERNOR KING (King Papers.)

Hunter's River, 21st November, 1801

Sir,

I am sorry to hear of your Excellency's indisposition, and sincerely wish you better. I have 3,820 baskets of coal at hand, or 190 tons, if the baskets hold one hundredweight each. With three minors and three carriers I rais 180 baskets, or 9 tons a day. They can do this in five hours. One mine is 34 yards under ground ; one do., 31 ; one do., 27 ; one do., 10. I can set nine more minors to work immediatly, and with one drawer for each can rais 190 tons per week. The strata of coal we are now working is 30 foot high, out of which there is 14 inches of clay and other rubbish, so we have but 22 inches of neat coal ; over this there is a strata of 18 inches good coal. In Fresh Water Bay I can open a mine where there is a strata of 3 foot neat coal under the above two stratas ; the coals are of supereor quality. I send one cask as a specimen by this conveyance. I can open mines to set twenty men to work in Fresh Water Bay ; if there are not minors in the colony then many ruffens may be made good minors, and a wharf may be run out to reduce labour, that the schooner may be laden by twelve men in twelve hours if she can lay in the same situation where Mr. Palmer's sloop loads. Plat is a good working minor ; I believe him to be a good man, but he cannot see much further into the ground than his pick cuts. Leveling and dialing are two necessary accomplishments for exploring those hills and conducting mines to save labour and carrey of the water. In boath I am deficient ; but if your Excellency will allow me James Meehen (who is with Mr. Grimes) for two or three months when Mr. Grimes can best spair him, I can acquire it, and at the same time learn to survey either a known or unknown country. I have not mentioned this to Mr. Grimes least he may suppose I wish to interfear with his department. That is not the case ; it is to serve myself and inable me to ascertain where to open any of the hills to the most adv't'g. Nothing can be done at fishing with hooks and lines worth the loss of time. The aidagong [aid-de-camp] Kirkwald went up the river with Mr. Grimes and Barallear ; he returned sick. The small boat is still employed in the survey, so we have but one boat, and if the schooner returns cannot load her without it ; here are but eight working hands, so that nothing hath been done. If lime be an object I can have a shipload at any time without the ashes being mixt with it. The report of the country is rather unfavourable. Mr. Grimes and Barallear has found the natives disposed to be hostile. Between sixty and seventy came in here (men, women, and children) without spears, and manifested the most friendly dispositions. I fel in with a party some distance up the river who seemed to oppose our landing. I ordered the boat to pull from them, and called to some in their knoes [canoes], one of which had paid us a visit. We landed with him, and soon had an interview with his friends, about thirty men, women, and children, but many of them trembled when they shook hands with me. They saw we would ground the boat, and two of them came after us and paddled

before us in their knoes [canoes] to shew us the deep water, and then pushed the boat over a small bank of mud. One of them came in here and stoal two blankets ; he had been drinking sperits when he came in. The mistry is where he got the sperits. The soldiers went after him. I posatively charged them not to shoot him ; we suspect there are white men with them. We have about eight days' provisions in store after this day's issue. I have issued forty-eight pounds of flour and twenty-four of pork to Mr. Palmer's men. The storekeeper has sent the receipt to the Commissary's Office. I put two of them to public labour one week, as they were not at work for Mr. Palmer. We are in want of lamps with covers to prevent spilling the oil when they are upset in the mines, oil and candles, soap, a whip saw, door locks and hinges, bricks for chimneys, unless your Excellency directs them to be made here. The soldiers have applied to me for grates and a man to fetch them coals and water. I have allowed Corporal Wextead the woman he brought with him, and the privates one woman to wash for them. George Plat, one of the soldiers, has applied for two blankets in lieu of them stolen by the natives. I wish to have for my own use a fusee, if there are any in the store, two pounds of gunpowder, six pair of small brass hinges and three small locks, 200 brads, a little glue, and a pair of scrues to make a press for flowers.

I have, &c.,

M. MASON.