

PORT STEPHENS SURVEYED IN 1795.

The multiplicity of affairs at Sydney rendered the surveys of the harbours or bays along the coast very slow work. About the 3rd March, 1788, Phillip explored Broken Bay, and actually entered the channel of the Hawkesbury River, but had not time to examine it carefully. About the 7th of June, 1789, he explored the river, which he named after Lord Hawkesbury, then the head of the Council of Trade and Plantations. Not having traced the river to its source, he set out on the 29th of the same month for another excursion, which was to last 21 days. He explored the river as far as Richmond Hill. In January, 1794, he established a settlement at the river at a place now known as Windsor, and he caused the Government boats to go up and down the river regularly every week. All this time the northern coast remained unsurveyed, although Lieutenant Shortland's voyage, which contains a request for the survey of Port Stephens, had been published in 1789, and circulated in the colony in September, 1791, by the officers of H.M.S. Gorgon. It was

not until February, 1795, that any effort was made to place any of the northern harbours on maps of the colony. In that month Lieutenant-Governor Paterson, directed the Deputy Surveyor-General, Mr. Charles Grimes, to proceed in the colonial vessel Francis to Port Stephens and survey it. The vessel had for some time previously been running to the Hawkesbury River, in order to supply the settlers on the banks with provisions. About the 19th February, 1795, the Francis left Port Jackson, and reached Port Stephens on the 21st, anchoring at the entrance to the port, near a point which was called Salamander Bay. One week was spent in exploring the port. Colonial Secretary Collins says in his diary: "Mr. Grimes reported that he went into two fresh water branches, up which he rowed, until at no very great distance from the entrance he found them terminate in a swamp. He described the land on each side to be very low and sandy, and had seen nothing while in this harbour which, in his opinion, could render a second visit necessary." Lieut.-Governor Paterson, writing to the Right Hon. Henry Dundas, from Sydney, under date 21st March, 1795, says: "Wishing to obtain some information which I could depend upon respecting the harbour of Port Stephens (30 leagues to the northward of this place) I sent the colonial vessel thither, under the direction of Mr. Grimes, the deputy-surveyor. He remained in it about a week, and from his report I have no reason to conclude that it will ever be necessary to send a second time to it." According to the plan which accompanied this letter, Mr. Grimes describes "the north side of the harbour as covered with shoals." He fixes the latitude 32deg 28min S., and records the tide at the entrance as two knots, and speaks of high water fall and change at 10 o'clock with a tide which rises 7ft. He writes: "The country to the south and west is a mangrove swamp. On the north side there are a few hills but the ground is very bad—sandy and stoney. There are mangroves and

oysters growing as far up the river as we could go, though the water is perfectly fresh. The rivers appear to be more supplied from the swamps on each side than from the high land at their heads, for we never found the ebb tide run more than a quarter of a mile, nor did the trees on their banks appear bent by floods." He found a bar across the mouth of the harbour of three fathoms at low water. The port in appearance resembles a pair of spectacles, and at the centre there is a small island which he called "Direction Island," and the south point "Friendship Point." One of the rivers was traced by Mr. Nichols (as far as the vessel's whaleboat would go) through a swampy country.

CONFLICT WITH THE PORT STEPHEN NATIVES IN 1795.

The expedition was not without the usual skirmish between the old and new masters of the soil. Captain Collins, in his diary, states that the navigators were welcomed on shore with a dance, that "the natives joined hand-in-hand round a tree to express, perhaps, their unanimity; but one of them, afterwards drawing Mr. Grimes into the wood, poised a spear, and was on the point of throwing it when he was prevented by young Wilson, who having followed Mr. Grimes with a double-barrelled gun levelled at the native and fired it. He was supposed to be wounded, for he fell; but rising again he attempted a second time to throw the spear, and was again prevented by Wilson. The effect of this second shot was supposed to be conclusive, as he was not seen to rise any more. Mr. Grimes got back to his boat without any other interruption." Captain Collins in his diary further remarks that the natives were so very unfriendly that Mr. Grimes refrained from making many observations about them. Mr. Grimes thought they were a stouter and taller race of people than the Port Jackson blacks, and their language was entirely different. Their huts and boats were larger than the gunyahs and canoes of the Sydney natives, but their weapons of warfare and fishing

T gear were the same as used at Sydney and Botany Bay. The young man Wilson was acquainted with the habits, customs, and language of the Hawkesbury blacks, with whom he had cohabited for many years, but he failed to understand the language of the Port Stephens natives. Grimes' party was not the only party of Europeans in the Port Stephens district at the time; the runaway Sydney convicts, John Tarwood, George Lee, George Cannoway, and John Watson, were within the neighbourhood of the adjoining river, and were much mortified to hear of the conflict when then returned from their inland journey. The Colonial Secretary, Captain Collins, writes:—"They were at some distance inland when Mr. Grimes was at Port Stephens, but heard soon after of the schooner's visit, and well knew, and often afterward saw, the man who had been fired at, but not killed, at that time as was supposed by Wilson." We are told that the schooner was only 14 hours on her return voyage from Port Stephens to Sydney, and further, that on the return voyage Captain House ran his vessel close along the shoreline, but saw no place of shelter for any ship or vessel throughout the voyage. How he came to miss the discovery of Port Hunter is most extraordinary, and it proves that the coast "making like islands," in the vicinity of Nobbys, must have been very deceptive.