

THE KENNEDY EXPEDITION

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The Kennedy Expedition through the wilds of Cape York Peninsula is one of the most tragic yet inspiring dramas in Australian exploration—the true facts of which are still too little known.

Edmund Besley Court Kennedy is a man of mystery to most people, and his early life has been as obscure as the full story of his Cape York expedition of 1848, which was his second expedition, his first being an exploration of the Lower Barcoo late in 1847; in the previous year he had been with Sir Thomas Mitchell on the first exploration of South-west Queensland. Assistant Surveyor to the New South Wales Government at twenty-two years of age, Edmund Kennedy was but thirty years old at the time of his death. He was born in the Channel Islands on 5th September 1818, and was the third son of Colonel Thomas Kennedy, a veteran of the Peninsula War. Edmund Kennedy was a man of fine character, determined and practical, and deeply religious, who inspired confidence in his men which some of the earlier explorers were never able to attain.

Kennedy's party, when it landed at Tam O'Shanter Point on the uninhabited shores of Rockingham Bay, nine hundred miles north of the infant settlement of Brisbane, on the 24th and 25th May 1848, consisted of Edmund Kennedy himself, William Carron, botanist, and subsequently second-in-command of the expedition, Thomas Wall, naturalist, C. Niblett, James Luff, William Costigan, Edward Taylor, Edward Carpenter, (shepherd), William Goddard, Thomas Mitchell, John Douglas, Denis Dunn, and the faithful blackboy, Jacky-Jacky.

There were 28 (twenty-eight) horses, of which one died on board ship and one was lost on landing, one hundred sheep, of which eleven were lost on the voyage, and three carts. Provisions consisted of one ton of flour, six hundred pounds of sugar, ninety pounds of tea, and twenty-two pounds of gunpowder, one hundred and thirty pounds of shot, and a quarter-cask of ammunition was also carried by the party.

Most historians and others have for thirty years accepted Dr. Robert Logan Jack's description of the route Kennedy followed. Dr. Jack relied on a book published in 1849 by William Carron containing his diary, other data, with a faulty map, and from this material and his own knowledge of the country, he delineated a route that was purely theoretical.

Kennedy's journal was lost when he met his untimely death, and only damaged sketch maps and a few damaged notes were recovered from the hollow log in which Jacky-Jacky had hidden them. In 1850 the Surveyor-General, Sydney, plotted a plan from these sketch maps. On the separation of Queensland from New South Wales, a copy of this was supplied to the Surveyor-General, Brisbane. Both plans are extant; to aid research workers at the time of the Kennedy Centenary celebrations in 1948, the latter official very kindly had a new tracing prepared in which the details were made clearer. Until the Mitchell Library, Sydney, had Kennedy's fragile sketch maps photoprinted in 1948, they had lain undeciphered for a hundred years. By courtesy of the Oxley Library, Brisbane, the writer was able to study these photoprints before setting out on an expedition into Cape York Peninsula, following Kennedy's tracks.

In the main, Kennedy's route is now clear, and this will be the first time a description has been published, and the writer hopes it will be of benefit to students and others.

For that portion of Kennedy's route from Rockingham Bay to Princess Charlotte Bay, Dr. Jack's description in his otherwise valuable work, "Northmost Australia" (1922) must be discarded altogether, and throughout the remainder, his dating and assumptions must be accepted with reserve.

William Carron, when publishing his "Narrative of an Expedition in Cape York Peninsula" (1849) gave two accounts of the data he had to compile the history. (A): "I could only secure an abstract of my journal except that portion of it which I have from 13 November to 30 December." (B): "In narrating the particulars of our journey I am obliged to trust largely to memory and to very imperfect memoranda." On this flimsy data, Dr. Jack attempted to describe Kennedy's route in full.

Rockingham Bay to Mitchell River

Kennedy's expedition was assisted across the tidal Hull River by Lieutenant Simpson of the H.M.S. "Rattlesnake," who with his men, rejoined the ship on 6th June.

Kennedy had spent a week after landing in trying to find a way through the swamps to the north and west. Eventually, a way to the south was found, and Kennedy adopted it on 5th June, according to Carron's reckoning, but Captain Owen Stanley of H.M.S. "Rattlesnake" said it was the 4th June.

Travelling south, in the opposite direction to which they desired to go, the expedition blundered into impassable mangroves and had to return to the beach. They camped on the bank of a large tidal river—the Tully, then spent two days in crossing it, making the drays into rafts by means of tarpaulins. They continued southward along the beach, much time and energy being spent in crossing another tidal river. The natives remained friendly. One of the men, Carpenter, then disappeared with some of the foodstuffs, and two days were spent in searching for him and bringing him back. By 15th June they were still straggling along the beach southward, ever further from their goal, Cape York.

It was not until 26th June that Kennedy was able to get away inland on firm rising ground, a few miles north of where Cardwell now stands. The days of battling through the mangroves and crossing tidal rivers had taken toll of men and horses alike. Luff and Douglas were taken ill with ague on the 28th, and no forward movement was made until 6th July, and all the time it rained.

The party turned northward on 7th July, keeping to the west of the ranges. On 14th, one of the carts broke down and was abandoned, and the other two carts became hopelessly bogged. Kennedy then decided to leave the carts behind, and on 18th July the expedition set off again, all that could be carried being packed on the horses.

The explorers progressed at the rate of only three or four miles per day, every yard of the way having to be cut through dense, dark, sodden tropical jungle.

Towards the end of July Kennedy found himself hemmed in by a river on his right, by a mountain range on his left and directly ahead the great curve of

a river he had been following, with an awe-inspiring uncrossable gorge, choked with jungle and all of a thousand feet deep. The range he was crossing was the four thousand foot high Cardwell Range, and the river was the Tully. No record exists of Kennedy having named any natural features, so perforce the inland nomenclature used herein is that applied subsequent to his journey.

On 29th July Carron wrote in his diary: "Mr. Kennedy proceeded to explore the range to ascertain the best spot to cross it, it being covered with thick scrub. . . . I dug up a piece of ground near the edge of the scrub and sowed seeds of cabbage, turnip, rock and water melons . . . and cotton." Carron was the first man to plant seeds in North Queensland away from the seashore, and he had also sown seeds at Tam O'Shanter Point on 27th May.

Tradition has it that local blacks once pointed out the trail Kennedy cut up the jungle-clad Cardwell Range, the track still being traceable by the rotting trunks of trees felled by Kennedy and his men so many long years ago. Dark jungle creeks were crossed and the roar of waterfalls heard, obscured by the giant trees, ferns, and vines. The men were never dry, and were plagued by leeches. There was no grass and the horses became poorer and poorer.

On 9th August, sixty-six days after leaving Tam O'Shanter Point in Rockingham Bay, the explorers crossed a swiftly running river—presumably it was the Tully, just above the falls—and at last they were out of the jungle and in the open forest with abundant grass. After all those weeks of hard work and privation, the party were only about ten miles latitudinally nearer their goal than when they landed at Tam O'Shanter Point.

On 24th August Carron recorded: ". . . All the creeks now seem to rise in or near the coast range and appear to run westerly across the Peninsula into the Gulf of Carpentaria." He was not to know that these watercourses ran into the Herbert River and discharged into the Pacific about forty miles south of Tam O'Shanter Point.

Day after day the intrepid band struggled onward, and one by one the horses became weaker and had to be left behind. Carron was placed in charge of the

stores, and as well as botanist he was also second-in-command and had to take time for Kennedy's observations. Obviously, William Carron was a man of many parts. He also took an interest in Wall who, although classed as a "naturalist" was not well acquainted with such work.

Through fine open country strewn with basalt boulders, Kennedy and his men rode on, crossing the now-named Millstream between Ravenshoe and Mt. Garnet of to-day. When camped in the vicinity of Mt. Garnet on 23rd August, Goddard and Jacky-Jacky went out to shoot wallabies, and the former became lost for nearly two days, causing his companions no little anxiety.

They camped on the headwaters of Emu Creek, in rough granite ranges south-west of the later site of Irvinebank, on 25th August. They were now on Gulf waters but were probably unaware of it for some time. They followed Emu Creek down to its junction with the great Walsh River—a broad bed of sand with fine paperbark trees. The explorers camped here on the 30th August in Lat. 17 deg. 10' 46".

Kennedy thought the Walsh River might lead him to Princess Charlotte Bay far to the North, so he and his men followed it in its tortuous course, its bed filled with great boulders and timber. The precipitous banks forced the travellers into the river bed where the weak horses continually fell on the slippery boulders.

Carron wrote: "As Mr. Kennedy and myself were walking first of the party, looking for the best part for the horses to travel in, I fell with violence, breaking Mr. Kennedy's mountain barometer which I carried."

I have traversed this country, and realise to the full the tremendous difficulties Kennedy was forced to surmount. It is nearly as wild and just as rugged as it was one hundred and six years ago. North of the Walsh River impassable sandstone ranges tower line upon line to the river bank, ending in unscalable cliffs. Southward, precipitous foothills of more desolate ranges, known to the pioneers as the Featherbeds, crowd down to the river forming a shallow rock-strewn gorge along which it seems impossible that a train of weak horses could stumble. At intervals, boiling springs bubble up from between volcanic rocks, yet as

can be seen from Kennedy's sketch maps, these indomitable explorers followed the Walsh River until 9th September.

Kennedy climbed a hill and saw numerous creeks and small rivers falling to the westward. He was in the vicinity of where the road from Mungana railhead to Wrotham Park Station now crosses the Walsh River. Kennedy noted that the river was continuing to run far to the west, so he left it and struck out in a northerly direction over barren ridges, emerging on to well grassed black soil flats, crossing west-flowing creeks. These were the Nolan and Elizabeth, which, in 1873 became part of Wrotham Park cattle station, now one of the finest in the North.

On 15th September according to Carron, the party arrived at and crossed a river running to the south-west. They camped in Lat. 16 deg. 27' 5". One wonders if Kennedy recognised it as the Mitchell River of Leichhardt—which it certainly was. Dr. Jack, on the other hand, tries to prove that it was the Palmer River that was reached on this date.

Mitchell River to Weymouth Bay

Civilisation, in the year 1848, was a long way from the Mitchell River—one of the truly great rivers of North Queensland. White settlement in Kennedy's day extended but a short distance north of Brisbane, over one thousand miles away. There was no retreat, and in the waiting ship at Cape York alone lay salvation.

It was on the Mitchell River that the explorers had their first serious experience with the warlike aborigines of Cape York Peninsula, although a slight skirmish had occurred when leaving the Walsh River. It was a token of sad things to come. The natives kept out of range of the white men's guns when they attacked the camp on the Mitchell River, and they fled, frightened by the roar of the muskets. They attacked five of Kennedy's men fishing in the river but again fled when fired upon. Next day they again attacked the camp, and a shower of spears went through one of the tents, then they set fire to the grass and danced and screamed with rage.

"We kept three men on watch this night for fear of the natives," wrote Carron.

Leaving the Mitchell on the 18th (Kennedy's dating) another river was reached on the 20th. As the

camp for the night was in Lat. 15 deg. 59' 21", this river would, by this calculation, be the Palmer which they crossed the following day west of the present Frome Station, and they continued northward through a gap in the Conglomerate Range (the Great Dividing Range at this point).

There are three gaps through the range north of Palmerville Telegraph Station. Two cannot be made to agree with Kennedy's sketches, whereas the third gap, a little further west, with Big Creek, Frome, and sundry other creeks on the south side, and the Kennedy River or one of its branches on the north, has almost similiar details to those shown on Kennedy's rough sketches, so it is with much confidence that the writer of this paper states it must be the gap that Kennedy used.

After passing through this gap on 22nd September, Kennedy must have realised he was at last on the Princess Charlotte Bay watershed. From the Mitchell River onward to Princess Charlotte Bay, at least, Carron's chronology was two to three days out compared with the dates shown on Kennedy's sketches and list of latitudes.

From 25th September to 30th September, when tidal water was reached, the course was approximately due north over the flat, well grassed, well-watered country forming the fertile delta of the now named Normanby, North Kennedy, Hann, and possibly the Annie Rivers and other creeks. The explorers then followed the curve of the coast northward, crossing the Annie and Stewart Rivers—the latter on 7th October—as it was thought impossible to get through the mangroves to the sea. As Kennedy had been delayed so long on his journey, he concluded that the H.M.S. "Bramble" (Lieutenant Yule) which was to have waited for him in Princess Charlotte Bay would have long since departed. Actually the H.M.S. "Bramble" had kept the appointment and had waited a fortnight.

On the eastern slopes of the McIlwraith Range the expedition again encountered the dense jungle (rain forest) entailing days of hacking with machetes, a terrible task in the men's weakened condition. They crossed the Rocky, probably the Nesbit, Chester, and Lockhart Rivers, and numerous creeks, and they travelled over a piece of country that had recently been

swept by a cyclone. As the explorers ascended the valley of the Nesbit River, the blacks were burning the grass behind them.

Douglas, Taylor, and Costigan were very ill, and the twelve remaining horses were too weak to carry heavy loads. West of Cape Weymouth, Kennedy's sketch map has two poignant notes—"Nimrod died" and "Tommy died."

In the ranges about the southern end of Lloyd Bay, Kennedy's men saw the first cassowary seen by white men in Australia. Carron states that on 4th November 1848—actually it may have been a week earlier—"Jacky went to examine a scrub through which we wanted to pass, and while out shot a fine Cassowary; it was very dark and heavy, not so long in the leg as the common emu, and had a larger body, shorter neck, with a large red, stiff horny comb on its head; Mr. Wall skinned it, but from the many difficulties with which he had to contend, the skin was spoilt before it could be properly preserved." The great naturalist, John Gould, in his handbook, "Birds of Australia," gives further particulars, obtained from the "Illustrated Sydney News" of 3rd June 1854.

The 11th November found Kennedy and his men, ragged, starving, and ill, at the mouth of the Pascoe River, one hundred and forty miles south of Cape York. Only nine horses now remained. As one by one they had become too weak to travel, they had been sacrificed for food and for weeks the explorers had practically lived on this diet of horseflesh. Provisions were now pitifully low—46lbs. flour, 1lb. tea, and 75lbs. of dried horseflesh.

Kennedy now decided to divide his party, leaving William Carron with seven men near the Pascoe River estuary, while he, and four men, including Jacky-Jacky, pushed on to Cape York where he still expected to find H.M.S. "Bramble" waiting for him. On 13th November, farewells were said.

At Shelburne Bay further north, Kennedy was forced to leave three men—Costigan, Luff, and Dunn, while he and Jacky-Jacky made the fatal dash to Cape York. Kennedy could spare only enough of his scanty provisions to support the three starving men for a matter of days. Costigan was seriously ill from a gunshot wound when a musket had accidentally exploded;

Luff and Dunn were also ill from weakness, exposure, and ague; the three men were so weak that Kennedy and Jacky were forced to kill a horse to provide them with meat.

These unfortunate men were never seen again. They either fell victims to the blacks or perished from starvation in that great loneliness. The dates quoted earlier—11th and 13th November—are as shown in Carron's book and they also appear on a plan prepared by the Surveyor-General in Sydney; At present it cannot be said if they are correct.

The Death of Kennedy

Picture, if you can, this scene—a white man and a blackboy alone in the wilds of untamed Cape York Peninsula; two alien wanderers in a savage land, pitifully clinging to life while there was a glimmer of hope.

The white man is but a living skeleton in dirty rags, often leaning on the wasted shoulder of his black companion for support; hollow-cheeked, weak from illness, exhaustion, and starvation; a fierce determination in the shrunken, bearded face. He is spurred on by willpower and the knowledge that eleven starving men stranded in two camps back along that trail of agony look to him for succour. If he fails, then the doom of those eleven is sealed. . . . The curtain is beginning to fall on one of the greatest dramas in Australian exploration—an epic of endeavour as great as that of those other gallant explorers, Burke and Wills, in a different setting, just twelve years later.

On 26th November 1848, Edmund Kennedy had but four horses left out of the original twenty-eight, but so wretchedly poor that it was as much as they could do to stagger along under the explorers' pitifully small belongings, let alone carry either Kennedy or the blackboy, so for three days Jacky-Jacky carried Kennedy, procured food for him and nursed him. They ate dried horseflesh, and possums, pigeons, and scrub rats that Jacky-Jacky killed . . . they hid in a patch of scrub while a score of savages filed by . . . they stumbled on in the rain without sense of time or distance.

Early in December 1848 they camped by a mangrove swamp near the mouth of the Escape River. They breasted a sand-ridge at mid-day. The rain had temporarily ceased, but the heat was stifling. There at last was Port Albany and its sheltering isle—emer-

ald green in the cobalt sea of Torres Strait. Salvation seemed to be almost at hand—so near, yet beyond reach.

Mangrove swamps and gluey mud, stinking and sinister, barred the way. Crocodiles were in hundreds, and the swamp stretched for two hundred square miles. Kennedy and Jacky turned inland, following the south bank of the river. There was no food left at all.

Blacks were converging from all directions, like crows waiting . . . waiting . . . Jacky knew this, but Kennedy believed they were friendly; He gave them fish-hooks, but at night, Jacky watched while Kennedy slept. From a distance came the roaring of crocodiles.

Next day Jacky begged Kennedy to leave the horses, but he would not agree. Jacky thought they could better elude the blacks if they were not hampered by the horses. They reached a belt of scrub jutting out on to a plain at the far side of which were three large ant-hills. The blacks were now following quite boldly.

In the gathering dusk, came the spears of death. Kennedy fell forward, a cruel stingray barb in his back! While he lay helpless, two more struck him. Jacky pulled out his old muzzle-loading musket, and fired at the blacks, who made off. Kennedy's powder was wet and his musket would not fire. A spear had struck Jacky a glancing blow over the right eye.

Edmund Besley Court Kennedy died in the arms of Jacky-Jacky, the faithful blackboy from the Hunter River in New South Wales; For over an hour Jacky mourned over his dead master who had become like a father to him. He then carried the body into a nearby ti-tree scrub and dug a shallow grave with his tomahawk; Then, with Kennedy's journals hidden in a hollow log, and with his notebooks in his hand, the faithful blackboy melted into the primeval jungle. On a river now called the Jacky Jacky, he hid the notebooks. These were recovered in May 1849 but the journals, like the explorer's poor broken body, were never found.

Without food or sleep, the exhausted blackboy crept on towards Cape York. Starving and exhausted, he was taken on board the schooner "Ariel" waiting at Port Albany, on 23rd December 1848. Gradually, the

whole tragic story was pieced together, Jacky's own "statement" being taken down by Dr. Adoniah Vallack on board the "Ariel."

The Rescue of Carron and Goddard

William Carron with Wall, Taylor, Carpenter, Mitchell, Douglas, Niblett, and Goddard, camped beside a commanding hill near the mouth of the Pascoe River in Weymouth Bay with fresh water within reach. They had 28lbs. of flour, half a pound of tea, and two worn out horses which were to be killed for food. Kennedy told them to make their supplies last them six weeks, but three weeks after Kennedy left, these eight men were face to face with starvation. It was then December 4th.

Death stalked that lonely strand during the last days of 1848. Douglas died on 16th November; Taylor died on the 20th; Carpenter died on the 26th. On the 19th, a mob of blacks appeared and threw spears at the white men. They were driven off by musket fire.

On 1st December, the sails of H.M.S. "Bramble" were sighted. She was sailing southward. Carron recorded: ". . . I went up the hill, just in time to see the ship passing the bay. I cannot describe the feeling of despair and desolation, which I, in common with the others, experienced as we gazed on the vessel as she fast faded from our view. On the very brink of starvation and death . . . our hearts sank within us in deep despondency."

Mitchell died on the 13th December. On the 21st, the kangaroo dog was killed and eaten. A blue-tongue lizard provided the survivors with a meagre Christmas dinner. Both Niblett and Wall died on December 28th. "They had abandoned themselves to calm and listless despair."

In these days of wireless and aeroplanes, it is difficult to realise what Kennedy's men suffered in that camp of death on a hostile shore, isolated by one thousand four hundred miles of wilderness from the nearest white settlement—Brisbane. The "Bramble" had sailed by, and now, after seven weeks, it seemed that the lion-hearted Kennedy upon whom their lives depended, had himself succumbed; if a searching ship ever came, it might well come too late. After seven weeks, only two men remained alive out of the original eight, and they were at death's door.

Carron wrote: "I did not quite despair, but I knew we could not live long. Our shot was almost consumed, not having more than eight charges left."

At the eleventh hour, deliverance came; Carron described it thus: ". . . Goddard went into the bush to try and shoot a pigeon or two . . . before he returned they (natives) came into the camp and handed me a piece of paper very much dirtied and torn. I knew then there was a vessel in the bay. The paper was a note from Captain Dobson of the schooner 'Ariel.' For a minute or two I was almost senseless with the joy which the hope of our deliverance inspired. . . . A great number of natives now came running from all quarters, armed with spears and yelling, and our newly awakened hope was already beginning to fall, when we saw Captain Dobson, and Dr. Vallack, accompanied by Jacky-Jacky and a sailor named Barrett approaching us, across the creek."

Both Carron and Goddard owed their lives to Jacky-Jacky, and but for contrary winds the "Ariel" would have reached the camp some days earlier. The date was 30th December 1848.

Poor Carron was a pitiable sight indeed. He was reduced to a skeleton, ragged and unkempt. A tangled beard framed a pain-racked face; his right elbow and hipbone protruded through the skin and his legs were swollen to three times their normal size. Goddard walked to the boat, but Carron had to be carried. A botanist to the last, Carron regretted having to leave all his rare specimens behind. He praised his leader to the end, and his journal concludes with high praise for the faithful Jacky-Jacky.

The "Ariel" left the tragic spot on 31st December, with Carron and Goddard safely on board. Sydney was reached on 5th March 1849, and the first news the public read of the tragic events appeared in the "Sydney Morning Herald" the next day. This report was reprinted in the "Moreton Bay Courier," files of which the writer has studied.

Aftermath

The brig "Freak," Captain Simpson, was chartered by the Government of New South Wales and instructed to ". . . call on the way to Port Essington at Shelburne Bay and Escape River to ascertain, if possible, the fate of the three men left at the former place, and recover

the papers of Mr. Kennedy secreted by Jacky-Jacky." Jacky was on board as guide.

The whaleboat of the "Freak" in charge of the second officer, with four seamen and Jacky-Jacky, landed on 5th May 1849, at three places near where Luff's camp was supposed to be situated. A pistol holster which Jacky recognised as having belonged to the party, was the only trace ever found of poor Luff, Costigan, and Dunn. We will never know how they died. They paid the price demanded of many of those fearless men, the explorers of Australia.

Captain Simpson and his men, accompanied by Jacky, sailed up the Escape River in the whaleboat and landed at the spot where Kennedy died. Jacky led them straight to the place, but although a long search was made, the grave was not located. It is possible that Kennedy's remains were not disturbed by the blacks, but still lie in a shallow grave in that lonely corner of the Far North. The party found the trough of an artificial horizon and a small bottle of quicksilver; broken-off spears marked the scene of Kennedy's last brave stand.

On 11th May, Jacky led the sailors to where he had hidden Kennedy's maps and notebooks. Captain Simpson recorded: "A river which runs into the centre of Newcastle Bay (the Jacky-Jacky River) was next examined, and the place found where Jacky had concealed the small papers in a hollow log, but a rat or some animal had pulled them out where they had been exposed to the weather, and were quite saturated with water. They consisted of a roll of charts, on which his track was laid down; these, with care, may possibly be deciphered . . ." A century was to elapse before this was done.

The "Freak" visited Carron's old camp, and transported the remains of Wall and Niblett to Albany Island, off Cape York, where they were buried on top of the highest hill on the island, on 13th May 1849. Captain Owen Stanley of H.M.S. "Rattlesnake" erected a wooden monument over the grave. To save it from complete destruction by bushfires, it was recently removed to the Quetta Memorial Cathedral on Thursday Island. The remains of poor Douglas, Carpenter, Taylor, and Mitchell, still lie in unknown graves by that

lonely tropic shore. Captain Simpson's report was published in the "Moreton Bay Courier" in June 1849.

William Carron ultimately recovered from his ordeal, but his terrible privations had undermined his health, and he died at the age of fifty-three, on 20th February 1876, then holding the position of Forest Ranger on the Clarence River in New South Wales. Many new plants were brought to our knowledge by Carron's exertions, not the least amongst these being the Pitcher Plant of Cape York, (named by Baron von Mueller 'Nebenthes kennedyi' in honour of Kennedy), and several plants bear Carron's name.

One of the native grasses of Cape York was named 'Galmarra' which was Jacky-Jacky's tribal name. On the mural tablet in St. James' Church of England, Sydney, erected in memory of Kennedy and his men, Jacky is also honoured, as he is shown supporting the dying Kennedy while hostile blacks lurk in the background. On his return to Sydney in the "Ariel," Jacky was presented with an address, a brass plate, and a purse of fifty sovereigns. On his subsequent adventures, history is silent.

In Cape York Peninsula, Kennedy's name is well represented in the names later given to geographical features. At the suggestion of the writer, the Historical Society of Queensland made successful representations that the bush track from Laura to Portland Roads—which one day will become a highway—be named Kennedy Road. It is fitting that the first declared main road in all the Peninsula should be named after the first white man to traverse the country, but no honour is too high for courageous, unselfish, Edmund Besley Court Kennedy.

Mystery of the "Kennedy Trees"

Here it is of interest to record that during the latter part of 1948, the writer of this paper, then being engaged on Kennedy Research, visited the Mitchell River where it joins the Hodgkinson River some thirty miles north-west of Mt. Mulligan, to investigate a report of the existence of a branded tree or trees. The few men who had seen them had always attributed the markings to Kennedy.

After considerable search, a very old grey-box tree, still green, was located, bearing this faint inscription:

K E Y

15 SEP. 1848

Unfortunately bushfires had badly charred the old blaze mark, and it was difficult to trace the letters in chalk for photographic purposes. Members of this Society have already had the opportunity of seeing these photographs. However, the date on the inscription had escaped charring and was perfectly clear although evidently rather crudely executed. Apparently when the inscription was first seen by my informant, forty years ago, it was much clearer, including the word, "Kennedy."

I was unsuccessful in locating an ironwood tree, reputed to be situated three miles down the Mitchell from the Hodgkinson junction, and alleged to have been marked:

E. K.

18

48

However, I did find, on an open river flat in the vicinity, a dead box tree plainly marked "C." It had been branded when green and had been dead a long time. Fifty yards away was a large outstanding iron-bark tree marked with script "K," which was also quite distinct, but the branding was very old.

To whom can these brandings be attributed other than E. B. Kennedy? Bushmen who first told me of them always believed this to be so. A Mr. Johnstone of Brisbane, who contacted me through this Society, stated that he was head stockman on Brooklyn Station (in which this area is situated), some thirty years ago, and local blacks had told him that Kennedy and his party, or someone described as such, were responsible for marking the tree dated "15 SEP. 1848." The first recorded exploring party in this area, other than Kennedy's, was that of J. V. Mulligan in late August 1875, so the latter party could not have marked the tree. The date, "15 SEP. 1848" corresponds, strangely enough, with that given by Carron of the party's arrival on the Mitchell River, and stranger still, Carron's description of the country also tallies very well with that

around the dated tree. Apparently Dr. R. L. Jack thought the same, for he believed the Kennedy Expedition crossed the Mitchell where it joins the Hodgkinson near where I found the dated tree.

It points to Kennedy having been at this spot, yet his own plans studied in conjunction with present day maps for the first time, reveal that he crossed the Mitchell River many miles below the Hodgkinson junction. According to his sketches, Kennedy reached the Mitchell River in Lat. $16\frac{1}{4}$, Long. 143 deg. 50', whereas the tree dated "15 SEP. 1848" is situated in Lat. $16\frac{3}{4}$, Long. 144 deg. 40'.

It is significant that the longitudes given by Carron are up to forty miles nearer east than those given by Kennedy, thus placing the expedition's route almost on the spot where the tree was found. Yet it has been proved, on other parts of the route, that Dr. Jack who calculated by Carron's positions was wrong. Herein lies the crux of the matter. Something, and someone is wrong, and I believe the old box tree away out in the wild country of the Mitchell, holds the key to the answer. Perhaps time will tell, but meanwhile it remains a mystery which the minds of all historians in future may do well to dwell upon and consider.