

PASTORAL SETTLEMENT OF FAR SOUTH-WEST QUEENSLAND (1866-1900)

[By K. T. CAMERON, Hon. Secretary of the Society]

This stretch of country, lying just west of the great mulga belt known as the "Channel Country," extends from the Grey Range to the South Australian and Northern Territory borders, and is traversed by the numerous channels of the Diamantina and Georgina Rivers, and those even more numerous of Cooper's Creek.

In spite of its low rainfall this is one of the best fattening and wool growing areas in the State.

In 1866 Alexander Munro occupied Nockatunga, and in the same year L. D. Gordon Conbar. The following year saw the arrival of the Costellos and Patrick Durack. The latter became the original lessee of Thylungra on Kyabra Creek. The Costellos securing Mobile on Mobile Creek and Kyabba (now known as Kyabra). John Costello, pushing further west in 1875 secured Monkira, P. and J. Durack in 1873 having secured Galway Downs.

In 1880 some enterprising carriers travelling out with waggons loaded with stores from the rail head of the railway line being built westward from Rockhampton, formed a depot at Stoney Point. Soon after a permanent store was erected on the site; thus grew the township of Windorah.

The Lindsays and Howes from the South Australian side in 1876 were responsible for the forming of Arrabury.

In the extreme western area in the 1870s James Wentworth Keyes settled Roseberth and Chesterfield on the Diamantina. The enterprising Patrick Drinan formed Annandale on the Mulligan River, still the most remote station in Queensland, and in this decade the pattern of pastoral occupation in the south-west was completed.

Three small townships had sprung up: Windorah, already mentioned, Birdsville and Bedourie; also a measure of prosperity caused by the demand for labour in the erection of the border rabbit-proof fence and the considerable improvements that the introduction of sheep called for.

There were in 1880 more people living in this area than in 1930.

The stock returns of 1895 (thirty-four years after Burke and Wills perished on Cooper's Creek) show in the arc radiating from the Northern Territory to the New South Wales borders, 1,000,000 sheep and 250,000 cattle, and 20,000 horses were depastured.

Many factors, however, were now working against the South-West. The financial crisis of 1893, combined with the low prices prevailing for wool and cattle had become a strain on the pastoralists who, in most part, had built up their holdings on bank overdrafts.

The drought years of 1897 to 1901 caused on many properties the loss of almost the entire herds and flocks. The ironic part of which was, after the local stock had perished, good rains fell that enabled the pastoralists of Central Queensland to save their sheep by securing relief country from their own drought-stricken district.

When in 1901 State-wide beneficial rains fell, owners in the Channel Country were already walking off their holdings.

In the first ten years of this century three-fifths of the South-West had passed into the hands of the Kidman interests.

The short addresses on pages 214-219 supported colour slides shown by Mr. D. Greenslade on "The Channel Country," on August 28, 1958.

HISTORY OF THE SOUTH-WEST CORNER OF QUEENSLAND

[By C. G. AUSTIN]

Some of the most inhospitable country in Australia is found adjacent to the South-West corner of Queensland. The drifting sand-dunes, some coloured a brilliant red, stretch across miles of country, and the rivers, except in flood, fight an unending battle against the shifting sand. Explorers, and particularly surveyors, had to fight against tremendous odds in performing their appointed tasks. The odds were too much for the exhausted Burke and Wills, who died not a great distance from this area.

The changing course of rivers, the absence of water (in times of drought) in rivers and lakes confused the explorers, who sometimes named a lake which later on was found to be a river bed.

The first exploring party under Captain Charles Sturt reached the sandhill country in September 1845 and followed the Mulligan River, but lost the course of this river, as 1845 was a dry year. After reaching a spot in approximately Long. $138^{\circ} 15'E.$, Lat $24^{\circ} 30'S.$ the party retreated to Fort Grey in north-western New South Wales.

Charles Sturt in 1845 gave the name of Cooper's Creek to the lower reaches of the Barcoo River, in honour of Judge Cooper of South Australia.

The next exploring party, Burke and Wills in 1861 passed through this area on the trip to the Gulf of Carpentaria, and re-crossed this region on the return journey to Fort Wills.

The ill-fated Burke and Wills party were not as far from civilisation as they imagined. In February 1861, Messrs. E. B. Cornish and Nat Buchanan (one of Queensland's greatest bushmen), who had travelled from Bowen Downs to examine the country of Western Queensland, crossed the tracks of the Burke and Wills expedition. According to the evidence of Buchanan's black boy, the tracks of Burke's camels and horses were still quite fresh.

John McKinlay, in 1862, in charge of one of the relief expeditions searching for Burke and Wills was the next explorer to cross this area. McKinlay found evidence that the Burke and Wills party were in desperate straits when nearing the end of their journey. McKinlay discovered Burke's favourite horse dead,

with the saddle on. Burke has been criticised for not removing the saddle, but anyone who has crossed this area and has seen nothing but seemingly never-ending sandhills can well imagine the feeling of despair and hopelessness which must have drained the fast-ebbing strength and spirit of the ill-fated expedition.

McKinlay continued northward for several hundred miles before he crossed the Diamantina River at the junction of Hill Creek River, where Cork Station homestead was afterwards established. McKinlay had already named the lower reaches of this river Burke's Creek, in honour of the explorer, and not realising this was the same river 400 miles north, named it the "Mueller," after Baron Ferdinand von Mueller, the celebrated botanist.

Landsborough, 100 miles north of the junction with Hill Creek, named the same river "Diamantina," being one of the Christian names of Lady Bowen, wife of the first Governor, and this name is now applied to the whole river.

Why the Georgina River was so named is somewhat obscure. Landsborough, near the headwaters of this river, to which point he had penetrated in 1861, called it the "Herbert," and for a number of years the entire river was known as the "Herbert." W. O. Hodgkinson surveyed this river in 1876, and two or three years later a map compiled by Surveyor G. K. Jopp, one of the departmental draughtsmen at Brisbane, shows the name "Herbert" crossed out, and "Georgina" substituted. The Survey Department does not know by whom.

Mr. S. E. Pearson advanced a theory that W. O. Hodgkinson was responsible for the change. Landsborough had already succeeded in having the name given to the Diamantina River, in honour of Lady Bowen, and as the two rivers combine just before they reach Lake Eyre, Hodgkinson thought the two great western watercourses should be named after husband and wife—Sir George and Lady Bowen, and the change from George to Georgina was a natural one.

The last explorer to visit this area, before the pastoralists arrived, was W. O. Hodgkinson, who arrived in 1876. Late in 1876 and early in the following year, the pastoralists started to take up their runs, and the South-West corner became better known.

After the explorers came the squatters, and with the squatters came the surveyors. We are apt to forget

that throughout the history of Queensland, the surveyors followed hard on the heels of the explorers. The surveyors of Queensland have not been given the attention they deserve, for they faced terrific odds and some were murdered by the aboriginals.

The datum point for the Queensland Border Survey was the Fort Grey corner in north-western New South Wales, near where Sturt had formed his depot in 1844. Early in 1880 Surveyor W. M. Barron carried on the survey that was to mark the border between Queensland and South Australia. Barron ran the border traverse along the 141st meridian from the Fort Grey corner to the Cooper, where he was relieved that year by Surveyor Augustus Poeppel, who carried the survey up through the Arrabury country to Haddon Corner on the 26th parallel of latitude. There Poeppel turned westward and ran the 26th parallel to its calculated intersection with the 138th meridian at the corner which has been named after him.

At the Poeppel Corner the surveyor turned northward, along the 138th meridian and carried the border traverse up to a point about due west of Sandringham homestead, where he was forced to desist owing to the severe drought of 1881. The traverse was afterwards taken up, in 1884, by Surveyor John Carruthers, who had Mr. L. A. Wells as second in command. Carruthers and Wells carried the border line through to the Gulf, completing the survey in 1886.

Up to the year 1862 the western boundary of Queensland was taken as being the 141st meridian, but a petition to the Colonial Secretary in London was granted in April 1862, and the western boundary was set back three degrees—from the 141st to the 138th meridian of east longitude. Queensland thus gained 120,000 square miles of country, including the Birdsville, Boulia, Cloncurry, Mt. Isa, Camooweal and Burke-town districts.

Birdsville was first known in 1881 as the Diamantina Crossing, and it did not receive its present name until after Surveyor F. A. Hartnell had surveyed the small township in 1885. The name given refers to the bird life of the district and the originator of the name is thought to have been Robert Frew of Pandie Pandie Station.

The aboriginal tribe which roamed through this area and further north were the Kalkadoons, respected as the fiercest fighters of all aboriginal tribes. This

tribe had access to a plant called Pituri, which was highly regarded by aboriginals as a drug. This plant grew on the Mulligan River and the young plants were guarded by medicine men.

It is believed that pituri was exchanged by this tribe for other commodities, and it is probable that definite trade routes were established. One interesting item of evidence is that on Ardmore Station further north is a rock carving showing a bow and an arrow, and as far as is known the bow and the arrow were not used on the mainland. If trade routes were established it is possible the bow and arrow were seen by one of the aboriginal traders.

Pituri is valued as a drug because it induces a sound sleep without dreams, but on awakening the taker feels refreshed and can face anything. It looks like dried tea-leaves, and is chewed into a mass and passed from one to the other.

It is not surprising to learn that the drug in pituri is the same as is used in the modern twilight sleep.