

EARLY ATTEMPTS AT SETTLEMENT IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY (1824-1870)

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Captain James Cook, regarded as the discoverer of eastern Australia, cannot be claimed as having any connection with the northern shores of this continent other than in Torres Strait. Rather the honour of discovery must go to any one of several shadowy figures—Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and Malay.

While the galleons of Portugal and Spain and the cockleshell yachts of the Dutchmen groped their way along an unknown mangrove-fringed coast, the triangular-sailed praus of the Malays already came down with the north-west monsoon from Java way to fish for beche-de-mer and to trade with the aborigines for tortoiseshell and pearlshell along the northern fringes of the Great South Land. The Malays called it "Marigi" or "blackfellows' land" and every cape, anchorage, and island from the Gulf of Carpentaria to the Gulf of Joseph Bonaparte, had Malay names.

Lieutenant Matthew Flinders, R.N., found part of a fleet of 60 Malay praus near the Wessel Islands, off the north-east tip of Arnhem Land, in 1802. The charts Flinders made are only now, in 1959, being brought up to date by a joint army-navy survey of the Northern Territory coast.

Captain Phillip Parker King, R.N., carried on where Flinders left off. In the "Mermaid" and "Bathurst," King sailed the treacherous coral seas, along the Great Barrier Reef and around the Territory coast to the west between 1817 and 1821.

Port Essington Chosen

Captain King advocated a settlement in the north, three thousand miles from Sydney, the convict outpost governed by Macquarie. King chose Port Essington as a likely site—a beautiful but sinister harbour he had discovered and named after an admiral of Trafalgar

days. He missed lovely Port Darwin altogether, paying more attention to Apsley Strait between Bathurst and Melville Islands.

On 23 July 1823, Captain William Barnes of the trading schooner "Minstrel" wrote to Earl Bathurst, Secretary for the Colonies, claiming that the Malays were ready to trade their cargoes of trepang—worth about £180,000 per annum—and that the Dutch already were preparing to set up a trading post on the unclaimed northern coast of this land that was still officially called New Holland.

Just as the spectre of a hostile nation inhabiting the Indies disturbed Australia in the last war, so did it haunt the Englishmen 136 years ago.

With surprising alacrity the British Government acted. In January 1824 it sent Captain Gordon Bremer to Sydney in H.M.S. "Tamar" to collect stores, marines, and convicts, with instructions to sail north to Port Essington and there establish a fortified outpost. While Port Essington was mentioned, Captain Bremer was also told to use his discretion in selecting a site "in that latitude wherever he saw fit." Captain Maurice Barlow was to be commandant.

At Point Record, in lovely Port Essington, Captain Bremer unfurled the British Flag and took possession of two thousand miles of uninhabited coastline from Cape York westward to the 129th deg. E. longitude in the name of King George the Fourth.

But Bremer could not find any fresh water at Port Essington, so within a few days the little fleet weighed anchor and sailed for Captain King's twin islands of Bathurst and Melville. In those days the island aborigines were a race to be reckoned with; they had the reputation of being the most savage and warlike of any North Australian tribe until the gallant missionary, Father Gsell, won their confidence in the years following the establishment of his mission station in 1907.

On 28 September 1824, the Northern Territory's "First Fleet" hove to off Luxmore Head in St. Asaph Bay, the northern entrance to Apsley Strait, and plenty of water was discovered on Melville Island.

On 2 October work parties of convicts were landed and trees were felled to commence the building of the first settlement in Australia north of the Tropic of Capricorn.

Fort Dundas and Fort Wellington

A log fort 75 yards long and 50 yards wide, surrounded by a 10 feet deep ditch, was built. Quarters were constructed within the walls for the officers and 30 huts with thatched roofs for the marines and convicts.

Brass cannon were mounted, and a salute boomed out on Trafalgar Day — 21 October 1824 — no doubt temporarily frightening the Tiwi tribesmen, lurking in the nearby pandanus scrub, out of their wits.

A storehouse and jetty were also built, and gardens cleared and planted. The settlement was named Fort Dundas.

Bremer sailed away, leaving Barlow in charge, and Captain William Barnes, the trader, visited the settlement in the "Stedcombe."

Early in 1825 he sailed for the Indies in search of cargo. He and his ship fell victim to one of the many pirate vessels which prowled the seas in those days, and he came no more to lonely Fort Dundas.

For twelve months no succouring sail broke the blue infinity of the Timor Sea. Grimly the little garrison ate their salt pork and dried peas, sweating through the days in thick parade-ground uniforms, fretting at the loneliness and monotony, sickening and dying—dying because there was no proper food or medicines.

Despite the plight of Britain's first settlement in Northern Australia, the Government, spurred on by merchants greedy for trade with the rich Indies, decided to establish another settlement in the North, in 1827.

Captain James Stirling, destined to win greater fame as the founder of Perth, picked a timbered ridge overlooking Raffles Bay on Coburg Peninsula, on the direct route of the Malay praus passing through Bowen Straits between the mainland and Croker Island, as the site for Fort Wellington.

Thus, a new settlement was proclaimed in grandiloquent manner upon a desolate shore, on Waterloo Day, 18 June 1827.

It is a curious fact that the Northern Territory's first two forlorn settlements, at Melville Island and Raffles Bay, were established on the anniversaries of Trafalgar and Waterloo.

Captain H. G. Smyth was appointed commandant at Fort Wellington, his charges comprising a motley crew of 30 soldiers of the Buffs, 14 Royal Marines, 13 Royal Navy men, and 22 convict labourers from Sydney.

There were clashes with the blacks, and Surgeon Gold was speared. The other surgeon committed suicide. At Christmas there were 50 sick men at Fort Wellington.

Smyth wrote frantic letters home — “the settlement is impossible, the climate deadly, the blacks treacherous, and there is no prospect of trade with anyone.”

But Smyth’s successor, Captain Collet Barker, soon improved conditions. Gardens banished the horrors of scurvy. The Malays came in 1828 and were traded with.

They came again in 1829 in increased numbers with goods to barter. But they found Fort Wellington abandoned, the redcoats gone.

On 31 May 1828, Major Hartley of Fort Dundas was ordered to abandon that settlement and transfer his men to Fort Wellington. Then early in 1829 came the order to abandon that also, and the remnant of the Northern Territory’s first garrison-settlers sailed away to the Swan River, Western Australia.

Fifty years ago, the famous buffalo hunter, Joe Cooper, began hunting the herds of Timor water buffalo on Melville Island, descended from the draught animals used at Fort Dundas.

A luxuriant tropical garden now flourishes where the garrison fretted and died—Garden Point Roman Catholic Mission, established in September 1940.

Over the mission on the morning of 19 February 1942 roared 110 Japanese bombers on their way to rain death and destruction upon Darwin—the first hostile bombs to fall on Australian soil.

The ghosts of Fort Dundas who in life had once guarded Northern Australia from just such an attack by potential enemies in Timor, must have stirred uneasily. . . .

Victoria, at Port Essington

It was the fear of the French who were thought to have covetous eyes on the north which prompted a third attempt at settlement.

For the second time in fourteen years a colonising expedition set sail across the world for Port Essington.

Once more the clang of convict chains was heard along the northern coast as the fleet furled their sails in this lovely harbour, eighteen miles long and five miles wide, with many bays and headlands of chalkywhite stone.

Captain Gordon Bremer was again in charge of the fleet. It sailed from Sydney in September 1838 and comprised H.M.S. "Alligator," H.M.S. "Britomart," and the transport "Orontes." Captain Owen Stanley, later to leave his name on a famous New Guinea mountain range, was in charge of the "Britomart."

Captain John McArthur was to be commandant of the new settlement.

Once again, in tropic heat, soldiers and marines sweated in thick uniforms, chokers, and crossbands to build a settlement in the untamed North, naming it Victoria after their girl Queen, only a year upon the throne.

Water was found near where Bremer failed to do so in 1824; convicts burnt shells for lime and built kilns and made bricks and mortar. Brick barracks, a brick Government House, and cottages with most untropical-like chimneys, were built. A stone pier was constructed out into deep water.

To-day, only the chimneys, part of the pier, a powder magazine, and a few bricks, in the overgrown scrub, remain. Deeper in the bush are the pathetic graves.

As at Fort Dundas, pioneers were wanting. What did professional soldiers care about abundant grasslands, fertile soils, wild goose swamps or sweeping blacksoil plains stretching into the heat-haze of an unknown land, terrifying in its loneliness and immensity?

Victoria on Port Essington was thirty years too early.

Yet a town covering 1,280 acres, divided into half-acre allotments on seven years' lease, was planned on paper. But no one was interested. The attempted land sales of 1841 and 1844, held in Sydney—the first sale of lands in the northern half of Australia—failed dismally. Then, as now, the vexed question of land tenures held back the advancement of the north. And 115 years ago Port Essington was one of the loneliest outposts in the world.

Unable to get white settlers, McArthur turned to the Malays. They inspected the adjacent country and

were greatly impressed by its apparent fertility, declaring that rice, cotton, bananas, pineapples, and all garden produce could be easily grown. But no Malay settlers arrived.

Hopeless Quest For Settlers

This quest for settlers for the Territory, of whatever colour, was to become a hopeless task during the 'sixties, 'seventies, and 'eighties; and even up to recent times people would not accept Northern Territory lands as a gift. Even the Japanese refused, back in 1879. In 1942 they tried to take it by force of arms.

Port Essington, like its predecessors, with no trade or settlers to sustain it, began to quickly wither and die.

A cyclone destroyed everything in November 1839. In those slow days of sail, it was May of the following year before the news of the disaster reached Sydney, and it was 12 July 1840 before a relief ship, the "Gilmore," arrived. The hardships that handful of soldier settlers endured during the intervening eight months can only be guessed at.

The brig, H.M.S. "Pelorus," had been driven ashore at Port Essington during that cyclone, and twelve lives lost.

Sickness reared its ugly head at Port Essington in 1843. Like Fort Dundas, no sea breeze was felt at the settlement, fifteen miles up a landlocked harbour. Fever, completely banished nowadays, was a deadly scourge in the Territory in the early days.

The gardens could not be tended by sick men; scurvy broke out. Buffaloes brought from Timor, and the Timor ponies, went wild, and all still roam the Territory bush in increasing numbers. There were no medicines, and not a sign of a ship's sail for a year. The only work was the digging of graves.

Captain McArthur, wasted and ill, covered with ulcers, crept about his work and wrote despatches that could not be sent for months. His officers fretted and raged and fought one another in an agony of rum, boredom, and hopelessness.

So the months and years dragged on, and Victoria on Port Essington remained and stagnated. McArthur persevered with plans of colonisation, but they were only dreams. At last, even he gave up hope.

Every morning those Marines who could stand drilled on the hard parade ground, in choking hot uniforms under a merciless tropic sun.

Then in December 1845, Dr. Ludwig Leichhardt and his ragged starving band came like spectres out of the heat-haze of the unknown interior. They joyfully hailed Port Essington as civilisation after 14½ months without seeing another white man. Opening its sickening arms, the settlement fed and nursed them. Soon all Australia was to ring with the deeds of Leichhardt and his men.

By 1849 the British Government had come to regard the Port Essington settlement as a failure, both as a colonising experiment, a trading post, and a port of call for ships. Dreams of a second Singapore were not realised.

At the end of that year Captain McArthur and his company thankfully sailed away, the friendly blacks wailing in grief.

Throughout the eleven years of the Port Essington tragedy the blacks had remained friendly and helpful. A pet of the officers was Jacky Davis, who died some 30 years ago. Right up to the last he cared for the lonely graves of Lieutenant Lambrick's wife and child who had died from fever.

A pioneer trader and buffalo shooter, E. O. Robinson, lived at the site of the old settlement from 1877 for many years. He was the friend of 400 wild blacks, and he traded with the Malays. But all is silent and deserted at Port Essington nowadays.

By 1859 Australia had been divided up by the five mainland colonies, but the huge area between Queensland and Western Australia was a "No Man's Land."

The times of colonisation direct from England had passed. The Australian Colonies were self-governing and self-supporting, flushed with the wealth of gold and abundant pastures. The pioneer-spirited Colonials already had shown they were capable of settling their own country.

A new era was dawning for this shadowy, unwanted land, the Northern Territory.

Augustus Charles Gregory and his expedition had landed at the mouth of the Victoria River on 18 September 1855, explored all the surrounding country, and made an epic journey across the Northern Territory and the then unborn Colony of Queensland to Brisbane, arriving there on 16 December 1856. This was probably the last major Australian exploring expedition sponsored by the Imperial Government.

South Australia's Attempt

John McDouall Stuart — one of the greatest explorers in Australian history—crossed the continent from Adelaide to the northern coast and returned, in 1862.

This was at his third attempt. On his first journey he had reached the centre of Australia on 22 April 1860, and on his second attempt he had got as far north as Newcastle Waters, 1,600 miles from Adelaide. The South Australian Government had fitted out his last two expeditions.

When Stuart and his men reached the northern coast at Chambers Bay, about 140 miles east of the later site of Darwin, they were the only white men in 3,000 miles of uninhabited coastline from Bowen in the east to Geraldton in the west. It was 24 July 1862, and Port Essington had been abandoned for 13 years.

Stuart recommended upon his return to Adelaide that the Northern Territory, then unclaimed by any Colony, should be annexed by South Australia.

South Australia was progressive, and had an eye to the future. On 6 July 1863, only eight months after Stuart's return, Letters Patent were issued by the British Government empowering the South Australian Government to annex the whole of Alexandra Land (as Stuart had named it) as that Colony's "Northern Territory." A country without a proper name it has remained ever since.

Prior to South Australia's annexation, Queensland had pushed its boundary westward from a line running south from the mouth of the Flinders River (the 141st meridian) to the 138th meridian, by proclamation on 23 June 1862. Had this not been done, Mount Isa and Cloncurry would be within the Northern Territory to-day.

On 1 July 1863, South Australia passed the "Northern Territory Act."

Thus that Colony, only 27 years old and with but 100,000-odd inhabitants, and without the mineral resources which had brought riches to Victoria and New South Wales, blithely took on the taming of another 523,000 square miles.

A Northern Territory Company was floated in England early in 1864. Where Captain McArthur of Port Essington had failed to interest people in far northern lands, 500,000 acres that were not even on

the man were sold to eager English families in search of freedom and sunshine, and a good investment. Soon £93,000 was collected.

South Australia thus embarked on the conquest of the North, where the Mother Country had failed.

For the fourth time in 40 years, ships of colonisation set sail for the untamed tropic North. But this time it was different. The stout little ships "Henry Ellis," "Beatrice," and "Yatala" carried pioneer-spirited men, not soldiers and convicts facing exile and worse.

Apparently the only man out of place among them was Colonel Boyle Travers Finniss, who had been appointed first Government Resident of the Northern Territory, and who seemed to be a left-over from the earlier days of military martinets.

Adam Bay, at the mouth of the Adelaide River, had become fixed in the minds of South Australian officials as the best site for a settlement, but Finniss was advised to use his own discretion which, according to all historical accounts, was unwise because of his complete lack of it.

The fleet arrived in Adam Bay on 21 June 1864. It was only an anchorage formed by the Cape Hotham Peninsula, but as it was not land-locked and open to sea breezes, it was healthier than Port Essington or Fort Dundas.

At Escape Cliffs, where Fitzmaurice and Keys of the survey ship, H.M.S. "Beagle," had narrowly escaped the hostile blacks in 1839, Finniss decided to build his capital. The stock — a few horses and sheep — were swum ashore.

Here landed the first true pioneers of the Territory, known as "the men of 'sixty-four." Many of them were surveyors and all were competent bushmen. They included J. T. Manton (chief surveyor), Stephen King and William Patrick Auld (both of whom had been with Stuart across the continent only two years previously), Frederick Litchfield, William and Gilbert McMinn, John Davis (who had been with McKinlay's expedition from Adelaide to the Gulf and Bowen in 1862), F. J. Packard, E. Ward (postmaster), and about 30 others.

The settlement was named Palmerston on 12 October after Lord Palmerston, the British Prime Minister.

Inland was a waste of mangroves, and at high tide Escape Cliffs and Cape Hotham Peninsula was prac-

tically an island. But Finniss was reluctant to explore or look for any other site. When he did finally stir into some activity, every other harbour seen was condemned. He convinced himself he had already selected the only possible site, at Escape Cliffs.

On 5 December 1864 the paddle-steamer "South Australian" arrived with more surveyors, including R. H. Edmunds and H. D. Packard. The first women also arrived. They were Mrs. Packard and Mrs. Bauer.

Jefferson Stow also arrived. He represented 200 land-order holders who were anxious to have their lands surveyed and allocated.

He declared that Escape Cliffs was the very last place where a settlement should have been made. He accused Finniss of "obstruction" and that he was "grossly selfish, inhuman, and abusive."

Certainly Finniss did not try to win the friendship of the natives, believing it the duty of everyone to shoot them down whenever they appeared. Fortunately, his ravings were ignored by most of the more level-headed surveyors and their men.

Finniss stirred early in April 1865 and cruised westward to Port Darwin while W. P. Auld rode overland. Auld was possibly the first white man to visit the later site of Darwin from the landward. The discoverers of the harbour had been Lieutenants Stokes, Forsyth, and Emery of the "Beagle" on 9 September 1839. They had named it after Charles Darwin who had once sailed the world as a passenger on the "Beagle."

But Finniss did not like Port Darwin—one of the most magnificent harbours on the North Australian coast—because, he said, it was "too landlocked."

A handful of disgusted men determined to get away from Finniss' camp at any cost. They were led by Jefferson Stow and, on 6 May 1865, set out for Perth in a 23ft. open boat.

That was one of the greatest open boat voyages in history, almost forgotten to-day.

None of the six men were seamen; they had only a pocket compass to guide them, oars, and a scrap of sail. They groped their way westward and southward for 3,000 miles, riding out mountainous seas off the wild Kimberley coast, and arrived, bearded and emaciated, at Fremantle, two months after leaving Escape Cliffs. As they stepped from their frail craft it capsized and sank.

On 12 August the indefatigable Stow arrived in Adelaide, to be hailed as a hero.

As a result of his report on the state of affairs in the North, Finniss was recalled and Chief-Surveyor J. T. Manton was appointed Government Resident in his stead.

Failure Again

Surveyor Frederick Litchfield has been hailed as the Territory's first own explorer. Some of his descendants still live in the Territory.

In May 1865 he left the Escape Cliffs settlement with a small party of five to explore the plains country east of the Adelaide River, and then circled southward and westward on to what is now Stapleton Station, west of Rum Jungle.

He found good grazing country; the grass was eight feet high, and the country was studded with lagoons, each alive with wild geese. He had to hurry back to Escape Cliffs when Stephen King became ill with fever.

Finniss examined the coastline in the schooner "Julia" to as far west as the Victoria River estuary in August and September.

Litchfield rode overland, discovered the Finniss, Blackmore, Reynolds and other rivers, and then struck the mighty Daly River. He followed this for 30 miles across fertile flats now producing crops of peanuts. The river was named after the Governor of South Australia.

To Frederick Litchfield goes the little-known honour of discovering the first gold in the Territory. He washed a few colours in the Blackmore River, inland from the head of Darwin Harbour, while on this expedition. He was also the first white man to traverse the uranium-bearing lands, the present ricefields, and to see the Daly River. He died in India many years ago.

John McKinlay had won great laurels as an explorer in 1861-62 when searching for Burke and Wills. At the end of 1865 this bearded Scottish giant sailed north from Adelaide in the schooner "Ellen Lewis" to explore the Arnhem Land country east of Escape Cliffs. He brought 32 horses with him.

Despite his reputation as an explorer, McKinlay displayed a strange lack of foresight, initiative, and indecision when he arrived in the Territory. He did not

seem to understand the climate with its two seasons, the Wet and the Dry, and this and other factors doomed the expedition to failure.

McKinlay did not leave Escape Cliffs for the swampy plains of western Arnhem Land until 14 January 1866, when the wet season was well started. But for the commonsense of his second-in-command, R. H. Edmunds, the party probably would have perished.

The party was too big for the work—it comprised 15 men—and to take a mob of sheep through such country was also utter folly. Up to 60 inches of rain falls in the three or four months of the northern wet season.

Horses bogged and were lost. For six weeks the men were marooned by floodwaters, tormented by mosquitoes and sandflies, with horses and sheep daily succumbing to the heat, grass-seeds, and crocodiles.

When the rain eased, they floundered southward, then north-eastward through speargrass as tall as sugar-cane, across bamboo-fringed creeks and granite ridges, to the East Alligator River. McKinlay thought he had found a new river, but it was already well known.

Although it was now May, the wet season over, and the country drying up so that the party could have returned overland to Escape Cliffs fairly easily, McKinlay seemed to give up all hope.

He was convinced he could only get back to Escape Cliffs by sea, so a raft was constructed. To do this, all the horses were ruthlessly slaughtered, and a crazy kind of craft was made from their hides, and saplings.

It sailed like a basket on a fickle current. On the river it was trailed by scores of crocodiles snapping at the hides, and at sea the men spent 15 days and nights of sheer horror. They had only saplings to steer with, had nothing to eat but rotten horseflesh, and their crazy ship stank abominably.

At last on 5 July the bearded, gaunt apparitions of men staggered ashore at Escape Cliffs. After so much privation, nothing had been accomplished.

McKinlay's only observation on country was that the Territory was "a great country for water." It was an ignominious finale for an explorer who, in a less tough region, had accomplished so much.

Meanwhile, 14,000 acres, mainly mangrove swamp and saltpans, had been surveyed around the Adelaide River estuary. J. T. Manton said late in 1866 they had not been worth surveying. He condemned Escape Cliffs as a site for a settlement.

He thought the South Alligator River estuary was superior. He visited Port Darwin in December 1866 and was impressed by the harbour and the easy access it afforded into the interior. John Davis, in searching for a tree marked by Stuart when he had reached the northern coast in 1862, discovered a new river, the Wild Man. Stuart's tree was not found until 10 December 1883, by Gilbert R. McMinn.

On 22 December 1866 the paddle-steamer "Eagle," with Captain Cadell, pioneer of steam navigation on the Murray, at the helm, arrived at Escape Cliffs with orders to abandon the settlement.

So the pioneering survey teams sailed back to Adelaide, with news of failure once again in the untamed North.

But the land-order holders were clamouring for either their lands or their money back, and in a desperate bid to stave off disaster, the South Australian Government decided to search for a better site for another settlement.

It sent Captain Cadell back again in the "Eagle" in February 1867, with orders to find a proper site for the survey of 300,000 acres of good land.

Cadell was the first white man to navigate the mighty Roper River. His work in the north was thorough, but his recommendation of the flooded plains of the Liverpool River as a site for a settlement only served to confuse matters.

Founding of Darwin

It seemed that the old jinx that had dogged the three attempts at settlement by Great Britain in the Northern Territory also dogged South Australia's brave but rather muddled efforts.

But there were stirrings in the air that forced South Australia to try again.

Plans were being made, and as frequently changed, to build an overland telegraph line across the continent to some point on the northern coast where a submarine cable could be landed from England by way of Java.

Queensland was in the race, already building a telegraph line over the ranges from Cardwell to Normananton and Burketown, at the end of the 'sixties. Bitter inter-colonial jealousies raged in those days, and South Australia was determined to forestall Queensland in this project. It became imperative to re-establish a Northern outpost.

South Australia had had to pay out enormous compensation to the English land-order holders for its failure to provide the lands they had paid for. This was to ruin the Territory's chances of settlers for many years.

Nevertheless, on 27 December 1868, yet another party of surveyors sailed from Adelaide for the north. In charge was George Woodroffe Goyder, the Surveyor-General of South Australia, who was to become the "Father of Darwin."

The party sailed in the steamer "Moonta" and schooner "Gulnare."

This time, their destination was well chosen—the glorious harbour of Port Darwin. The little ships anchored beside Fort Hill in that harbour on 5 February 1869—Darwin's natal day.

On the narrow neck of land formed by Fort Hill, at the foot of red-and-white sandstone cliffs, Goyder set up his camp in the shade of tamarinds and banyans. On Fort Hill, a brass cannon was set up, to guard this lonely outpost.

For want of a better name it was known as "The Camp" for the first few years of Darwin's history; it was the headquarters of the police and Government officials. Buildings with walls of pandanus trunks and saplings, and iron and bark roofs, were erected.

On both sides was the sweep of the harbour's deep blue waters, and 70 feet above was an extensive plateau overlooking the harbour—a plateau that afforded natural access into the interior.

Here, Goyder surveyed the city—straight streets two miles long across the peninsula, named after his surveyors. They were Smith, Knuckey, Mitchell, Daly, McMinn, Bennett, Wood, McLachlan, and Packard, with Cavenagh Street named after the Land Commissioner of South Australia. Several of Goyder's surveyors had been at Escape Cliffs, so they were no strangers to the north.

Survey work commenced on 4 March 1869 and continued smoothly—665,866 acres were surveyed into 320-acre blocks east and south to the Adelaide River for 70 miles and west beyond the Finniss River—a domain of laterite soils, ironstone ridges, rich flats and lagoons alive with wild geese; the land clothed in tall speargrass and paperbark, woollybutt, coolibah, and bloodwood trees. It was a paradise land for the dusky hunters of the Larrakeyah, Woolna, Brinken, and Wargaitj, now to be dispossessed.

Goyder tried to win their friendship, but Surveyor J. W. O. Bennett fell by a Woolna spear out in the wild-rice swamps, and was laid to rest on the top of Fort Hill.

Frederick Litchfield, Richard Burton, and A. J. Mitchell explored the country further afield late in 1869, the latter finding “a capital route for the commencement of an overland telegraph line southward and for a dray road to open up the interior.”

Goyder had vision and enterprise. He had great faith in the future of this land he laid out into counties and hundreds after the old South Australian pattern. His diaries, still preserved at the Survey Office in Darwin, confirm this.

Goyder made the imaginary acres reality for the settlers who would not come now. The Escape Cliffs debacle and resultant five wasted years had ruined the Territory's chances. No one wanted the land now it had been surveyed. Most of it was bought under freehold title in the early 'seventies, but mainly by people who had no intention of developing it. Some of their descendants own freehold acres near Darwin to-day—land they have never seen and which is still wilderness after nearly 90 years.

Inspired by a pioneer-spirited premier, Hon. H. B. Strangways, the South Australian Government persevered. It decided to reappoint a Government Resident in June 1869 and to open “Goyder's Town” to settlers as soon as the survey parties left. Goyder arrived back in Adelaide in October that year.

His work had helped to restore some public confidence, and a few gallant pioneers took the plunge.

In December they sailed from Adelaide with the Government party in the 300-ton barque “Kohinoor” (Captain Slater). This time they were staunch pioneers

with no illusions of what was in store. Many were already old Territory hands of three years' experience at Escape Cliffs.

First Permanent Settlement

On 21 January 1870, 60 men, women, and children stepped ashore at Fort Hill, pitching tents and occupying huts left by the survey party among the tamarinds and pandanus palms along the shore below the cliffs.

Among the settlers was Inspector Paul Foelsche, of the famous South Australian Mounted Police. With a handful of troopers he brought the first civil law to the Territory, and lived in Darwin until he died 44 years later. W. G. Stretton, who was to spend the remainder of his varied career in the Territory, in the public service, also arrived.

Mr. Milner, who had been at Escape Cliffs, was Acting Government Resident, in place of Dr. Peel who had acted in this capacity since Goyder's departure.

The schooner "Gulnare" arrived a few days later with livestock and stores, followed by the barque "Bengal" with more settlers, stores, and horses.

This new town, the fifth to be established in the Territory, but the only one to attain permanency, was named Palmerston, the same name as that of the ill-fated Escape Cliffs settlement. A Union Jack was run up on a pole on Fort Hill's flat summit, the settlers fired their guns, and gave three cheers for the Queen.

The first buildings of bark and saplings were erected in the town Goyder surveyed, early in 1870. The first hotel, the Commercial, was of bark. Later, substantial buildings of stone, quarried from the nearby cliffs, were erected. The first white child born in the settlement was Walter Reginald Gardiner.

Eastward and northward around Queensland the "Gulnare" had sailed from Adelaide to Port Darwin.

Now westward around the Leeuwin and the Bight back to Adelaide she flew before the wind in 7,000 miles of sailing around the continent to bring more settlers and Captain Bloomfield Douglas as permanent Government Resident for the Northern Territory.

He and his wife and seven children arrived on 24 June 1870.

Eighty-nine years ago these newcomers were awed by the lovely harbour and beaches and multi-hued cliffs crowned with tropical vegetation, but appalled by the incredible loneliness, isolation, and by the wild Larra-keyah warriors with bones through their nostrils and 12ft. spears in their hands who swarmed in friendly welcome from their camps.

The first Residency was a large log hut with a canvas roof. The Douglas daughters and the young surveyors and police troopers in the settlement provided a primitive social life, with riding parties to nearby beaches and lagoons.

Then suddenly the isolation was broken by the barque "Bengal" sailing in out of a blood-red tropic sunset after almost grounding on the treacherous reefs in the Vernon Islands. She carried wonderful news: South Australia was to build an overland telegraph line across the continent from Adelaide along the route of John McDouall Stuart, with an overseas cable to come ashore at Port Darwin.

So Port Darwin was not to remain in complete isolation. It was to be the "gateway of Australia"—a phrase that was to wear rather thin through succeeding years.

For months after the "Bengal" arrived the settlers eagerly scanned the empty sea horizon from the cliffs at Fannie Bay and East Point for sign of smoke or sail.

After three months of waiting and no news, the little steamer "Omeo" slipped in and anchored by Fort Hill one morning of blazing heat early in September 1870.

It was loaded with men, horses, drays, bullocks, and equipment for construction of the overland telegraph line.

This was one of the great moments in Northern Territory history, for the overland telegraph brought life and permanency to Palmerston on Port Darwin. With the completion of the line the spectre of abandonment which had hovered over the settlement's four predecessors vanished forever.

Hard times were ahead, and after nearly 90 years Darwin is still isolated, but it has in truth become the aerial gateway to Australia, and one of its most important cities, geographically speaking.

Progress has been spectacular since the last war. Darwin was proclaimed a city on 26 January 1959, when the population reached 10,000. It is the capital of the 523,000 square-mile Northern Territory which, with unrivalled agricultural, mineral, and pastoral resources, is only now coming into its own.

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