



Pioneering Days: Thrilling Incidents

Across the Wilds of . . .
Queensland with Sheep to
the Northern Territory

In the Early Sixties



— BY —

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By GEO. SUTHERLAND



NO. 1

Few of the early pioneers of Western and North-Western Queensland are now in the land of the living, and to collate any reminiscences of the distant past, of men and matters—the dangers and hardships they underwent through droughts and floods, savage blacks, hunger and thirst, &c., &c.—may be of interest to many readers of the present day and to a certain extent illustrate the hard conditions of life in those wild regions at that period.

The aim of our party was to buy sheep and start out with them in quest of new country. At that time there was a big rush for runs if the quality of the country was at all favourable. When two or more discovered the same piece of country a race took place between them to Brisbane, as the first applicant's tender secured the country. It was no joke to ride hundreds of miles and then a slow boat trip, perhaps, to Brisbane, but the hot fever of securing runs was rampant and travelling magnificent distances no object so long as the land was safely secured.

Alas! Sad to relate that a few years after the rush out a crash came, a depression previously unequalled in Queensland, when stock and wool dropped to zero, causing ruination to thousands of graziers, in all parts of the colony, and especially to those far inland. Bad enough to have to endure the hard and dangerous life even if a fortune was in sight; but to struggle on from year to year and then have to bow to the inevitable—after all their pluck, energy and endurance—was intensely cruel and galling.

By the people of the present generation there is not much thought given towards the old explorers and pioneers. To them it is oblivious old times, and may say, "What fools they were to risk life and limb to penetrate the wild wilderness; was it not with the view of advancing their own interests." Yes, to a certain extent, just as the gold digger tramps out beyond civilisation in the hope of discovering a new Eldorado, or like the mariner voyaging away into unknown seas hoping in his adventures to drop across a new and profitable land. The world to-day would be much poorer only for those brave adventurers by land and sea

II.

In the latter end of '63 our boss bought some 8000 sheep in the vicinity of Rockhampton: horses, drays, stores, &c.—a general outfit—and a start made Northwards, across Connor's Range, by Colloray and Nebo and thence on to Suttor Creek Station. This run was owned then by Kirk and Sutherland and carried a few thousand sheep, having been stocked some two years previously. Here a halt was made to lamb and shear and cart the wool down to Port Mackay, some 130 miles distant. Nothing eventful happened between Rockhampton and Suttor Creek, the country intervening being pretty well occupied right through. The writer afterwards came over from Melbourne to join the party, and landed in Rockhampton in the beginning of the big '64 flood. Rockhampton was then but a small hamlet, and owing to the heavy rain the streets and roads were in a fearful condition. Bullock teams from Peak Downs and Springsure way were bogged in rows in the streets, and the whip-cracking and loud language of the "bullockies" made the township a little inferno. Then the drinking and rowdiness made night hideous. The few police had not much chance in coping with so many, all vying with each other to turn the town red.

In the middle of the '64 flood the writer left Rockhampton for Port Mackay (or the Pioneer River, as the place was then generally called) in a small, cranky steamer named the *Diamantina* (Captain Champion). She took some four days to reach Mackay. The old tub was slow, and the rough weather and head winds made her slower. However, "all's well that ends well," and we were very glad that we "ended" at all—on land.

Mackay then, of course, was a very small place. There was a very thick jungle in places, and the river bank a mass of mangroves. Here I met the teams from Suttor Creek—the stations' teams and our party's teams down with wool and loaded with supplies for the up journey, also a team belonging to Anderson and Trimble, who were also spelling on Suttor Creek to shear and lamb (afterwards they took up Crowfels on the Lower Flinders, and many years afterwards Trimble owned Magour, lower down the Gulf). This loading was to be our last supply till settled down—where or when we did not know. As it happened eventually, many hundreds of miles from Suttor Creek, and many a long month on the road to our final stopping place. All the people on Suttor Creek were out of rations, so the teams would be anxiously looked for, but owing to the fearfully heavy rain it was no joke to travel, especially with heavy roads and a bush track in the state of nature. However, the five teams pulled out of town, and the journey commenced. The ground everywhere was a perfect bog, and the rain kept pelting down with increased volume, creeks and gullies running bankers, but still we kept moving slowly, sometimes only a couple of miles a day. Then we reached Sandy Creek, which was bank high. Here we were compelled to stay for two days, when the creek lowered. Determined to proceed, we bridged the creek, carried rations, cases, cans, &c., across, yoked up the bullocks, and fastened them to the point of the poles of the empty drays, with a dozen chains, so that the

leaders landed on ~~the opposite bank and got~~ a footing before the dray got into the stream. Thus we got everything across safely, re-loaded and off again, generally bogging and double-banking a dozen times a day. At last we reached Denison Creek, a large watercourse with flooded flats on both banks. This creek was in high flood, and rising fast when we reached it. We camped a short distance from the bank of the flat. That night was as dark as Egypt, and to our surprise and discomfort soon after dark, we found the water rushing in between the drays. Still rising rapidly, we had to fasten the drays to trees with bullock chains, were shifting perishable goods up on the guard irons, for in a short time we were up to our waists in water, and dreaded that our cattle would be washed away. However, it is a long night that has no ending; the morning broke, and the rain, at the same time, ceased. We had a wretched night, and, of course, soaking wet, but by this time we were getting amphibious, as wading in water and wet through night and day was our lot all the way from Mackay. We had enough of this flood, and devoutly wished for no more floods like the '64 one. At any rate, not on the road with teams and breaking our hearts to get home to supply the unfortunate starving people there with food.

III.

Lambing finished, sheep shorn, and supplies to hand, the next move was a "move on." The sheep were in good order, bullocks and horses mud fat; we were quite prepared to make long stages and make for the Flinders, as no good country for sheep, well-watered, was likely to be found anywhere nearer. Sutherland (of Kirk and Sutherland, Suttor Creek), just came in from the Flinders and told us track out was drying up fast in places, and a long stage or two without water between the Cape and the Flinders. This hurried matters more, and, worse still, the Earls of Yacamunda (lower down the Suttor) were almost ready to start some 700 cattle out the same track; so if they got ahead of us, probably the small waterholes en route would be destroyed by their stock. Mr. Earl, senr., came to our camp and mentioned they were starting the cattle in a few days, and would pass the sheep quickly. However, the jumbucke beat them easily. The Messrs. Earl took up and stocked Ifley on the Lower Saxby.

All ready, a start was made. There were two strong teams, a two-horse dray the cook had charge of, which always followed the sheep, and, all told, twelve men. From our camp on Suttor Creek we crossed over by the head of the Suttor River, a place afterwards taken up and stocked by the Messrs. Murray Bros., near Rockhampton. They called it Point Lookout. We camped on the bank of the river, a narrow, sandy watercourse, at a large waterhole, and very deep. Passing by there many years after, I was surprised to see the hole had disappeared, and from bank to bank levelled with sand. The next place we struck was Conway, very recently stocked. The tableland between the Suttor and Conway was very bad country to ride over, being full of big holes. Sometimes several sheep would be fast in these holes, and had to be

lifted out. Conway was on ~~Rosch Creek~~, but I forget who owned it then. The teams camped here a night, the sheep being a day ahead, the two drivers and myself with them. After dark, one of the drivers, a big, fat fellow, not long out from London, went across to the hole for water. Hearing a fearful yell from him, we rushed to our firearms, and ran in his direction, thinking the blacks were murdering him. To our surprise, we found him heels up in one of the big water-worn holes. He stumbled in a small hole, and then head first in the big one. The two of us got him out, and, finding he wasn't hurt, couldn't help laughing at such a predicament. Passing on towards Mount McConnell, we crossed country where a lot of gold, silver and asbestos was afterwards found, but all very barren country for stock. On a little creek near Mount McConnell, I saw the first wild black. He was busy, several feet up a big box tree, hanging on by his big toes and point of fingers, chopping a hole in the tree with his stone tomahawk. His back towards me, he did not notice me, so I stood some distance away watching him. Presently he finished the hole, put his hand into it, after dropping the tomahawk, and pulled out an opossum, knocked him against the tree, threw him down, and then came down himself. As he landed on terra firma, I gave a big yell, and pretended I was to rush him on horseback. He turned round and then rushed off like lightning, leaving 'possum and weapons behind. How he could cut a neat oval hole inches deep in a hard tree standing up in his own notches with a stone tomahawk was beyond belief till one saw the operation.

IV.

On reaching Mount McConnell we heard the blacks were in large mobs ahead and very aggressive, killing stock and attacking the men on Natal Downs. Mr. Kellett, manager and part-owner of Natal, was at the Mount trying to get help from there to disperse the black assailants, and told us to be very watchful travelling up the Cape, especially at night, when the niggers were more likely to make a raid. Leaving Mount McConnel we got on to Cape River at its junction with the Belyando, and followed it up to the junction of Amelia Creek. The Cape at that time held splendid waterholes right along, but, like Suttor, many years after I could hardly find a hole: all sand, but plenty of water a short distance underneath. Natal Downs being off the river, we did not see it. Neither did we see any blacks, but plenty of tracks. Coming to Amelia Creek we followed it up for some distance, and then on to Billy Webb's Lake—only a fair sized waterhole. Within a mile or so beyond the lake was a belt of poison bush. The stock had to be carefully and hurriedly driven through this belt. Camping at the lake, next morning we rushed the sheep through in a canter, flock after flock, and did not lose a sheep. The track was white, however, with the skeletons of a former lot, where some thousands succumbed to eating the bush. These sheep belonged to Alexander, a Burnett squatter, and were in charge of Reginald Halloran, who took the remnant of the mob down below Donor's Hills, and settled on country there. Leaving Webb's Lake, our trouble commenced for want of water till we got to

Flinders. The longest dry stage was, however, 35 miles, and the weather, being cool, we negotiated the distance fairly easy. The last water before reaching the Flinders was in a creek called Skeleton which I suppose ran in to the Landsborough. On this creek I spent a peculiar night. The teams came on and camped where the track crossed the creek. It was near dark when the teams were unyoked, and the water was some three or four miles below us. The fat driver and myself started down for the water with the bullocks and horses. The creek was as crooked as a ram's horn, and very scrubby in places. The night was dark and cloudy, so we hardly knew where we were going. However, the animals were perishing for water, and apparently knew by instinct that water was ahead of them. On they went, clinging closely to the creek, while we simply followed the bells. All at once we came on the water, and a big mob of blacks with no end of fires camped on the banks. The bullocks and horses marched unconcernedly right through their camps, and rushed in to the hole. The niggers made tracks at full speed, knocking against the scrubby bushes in their flight, and sending showers of sparks flying from their fire sticks. Now the question arose, "What were we two to do?" My companion, who was the most frightened man of blacks I ever met, wanted to start back to the camp at once. That was easier said than done on such a dark night, for if we got off the crooked creek we might never get on it again, and if we went to strike across for the track, we might pass it without seeing it, being almost invisible at times with daylight. At last he took my advice and we rode out about half a mile to the open with the intention of staying there till daylight. Although quite secure from an attack there, Denis began weeping, wailing and raving all night, getting madder and more mad, wanting my revolver to shoot himself before the blacks would kill and eat him, as he was sure they would, and so on. How glad was I when daylight appeared, and this madman was again sensible.

We struck the Flinders somewhere about opposite where Prairie is now. I know there were some open downs and plains about it, for the next morning after we reached the river, I went out at daylight with one of the drivers to muster up the bullocks and horses. The morning was mild, and I was only rigged in thin moleskin pants and a Scotch twill shirt. I suppose through sheer cussedness, the animals scattered themselves as much as possible, for long before we got to camp with them, a cold weterly wind blew up—my first experience of the downs' chilly breezes, which nearly perished me, although not so very long away from "Caledonia's stormy breezes."

V.

From some of the hills on the Hughenden run, one gets a magnificent view of the open, almost treeless downs, a perfect panorama which resembles looking across a vast expanse of ocean, and especially charming at first sight is this ocean of plains. The wayfarer may travel far and wide throughout the West, but such an expansive and glorious view he will not meet with; once seen, never forgotten.

Hughenden Station was then owned, and still is, by Mr. Robert Gray. (Mr. Gray sold out a few months ago.—Ed.) He is the oldest station owner on the Gulf waters. The same station all the time for nearly half a century, so he has seen many vicissitudes during that long period of squatting life—the “smiles of fortune and the frowns of fate.” Like the majority of old-time squatters, the latter probably predominated. At the time we passed the station (the first place we saw after leaving Mount McConnell), it was only stocked with a small herd of cattle, but soon after Mr. Gray introduced sheep, and the country was an ideal sheep run, only the dingo and the eagle hawk pest always caused a decrease owing to its proximity to the range country and the basalt tablelands. It was in the month of June we struck the Flinders and the grass very dry, and water, even in the river, very scarce.

The country between Hughenden Station and Telemon was swarming with bush rats. They were in millions and a perfect nuisance to us. At night they would run over and gnaw away at saddles, boots, rations, &c. Dingoes were also numerous and as poor as crows, probably through feeding on the rats. They would sneak round the sheep when in camp, but appeared too frightened to make a dart at them, not knowing what sheep were. Perhaps at breakfast time a dingo would come along; then plates and pannikins would be put away and a rush made after the dingo on foot with firesticks, axes, or anything handy. The dog would go as fast as he could, but that was very slow. His legs continually going down in the deep black-soil cracks, and his mangy poverty, made him a quick victim to his pursuers, and the latter greatly enjoyed the hunt—the only sport we had. So far we saw no blacks, although plenty of them must have seen us, going down the Flinders especially, as they were generally on the other side of the river about the tablelands and basalt walls. The writer's work was each afternoon to ride ahead, find water, and select a camp for next day. In going along, a smoke signal would start on the other side; soon another signal further on. The niggers could speak to each other by those signals, which were made in a hallow tree with a hole near the bottom. This hole would be fitted with grass or dry leaves, and when fired a column of smoke would rise in the air. The dry grass would emit whitish smoke, but now and again bunches of green leaves would be added, making the smoke black, which betokened something special to the party in the distance. Although invisible themselves, their tracks were plentiful at almost every waterhole, and one had to be very watchful when having a drink, especially if in the deep bed of the river.

Telemon Station: This fine run was taken up and stocked by Mr. Robert Stewart, who had then his homestead, a small hut or two, on the bank of the Flinders. The place was stocked with a few thousand sheep, and water on the run was very scarce at the time. Mr. Stewart was a splendid specimen of the genus homo, a fine-looking man, an ex-British army officer (and so is Mr. Gray, of Hughenden Station), and a real gentleman in every way, but somewhat careless when on the station in his dress and ablutions, which caused him to be called a certain vulgar

epithet. Years after he sold out of Telemon and Southwick, on the Burdekin, and went home to Scotland with a lot of money, which, unfortunately, he mostly lost through the suspension of the City of Glasgow Bank.

VI.

On to Marathon, owned then by Kirk and Sutherland, the owners of Suttor Creek. They were afterwards joined in Marathon by Mr. Carson (now of the big wool firm of Winchcombe, Carson and Co.). Marathon, like Telemon, is grand country, but at the time I speak of, water was the great drawback. There was hardly a drop anywhere outside the river valley, and on account of the dryness of the season, very little there. There was any quantity of unoccupied country; in fact all the country unoccupied was owing to the want of water, and splendid country too. How different then to now! Miles of running water in every direction, the dry desert turned into a garden—a paradise compared to its original state. Marathon was stocked with sheep—a small lot owing to want of water. The owners held it for some few years, and then sold out that and Suttor Creek. Mr. Kirk took up a mercantile business in Townsville, and died there. Sutherland, a sea captain, went to Melbourne, bought a schooner there, and traded for some time in the South Seas, but the venture was premature, so he sold out and started mercantile business in Normanton. He explored a good deal of the Flinders country when at Marathon, took up Cambridge Downs, and sold it again without stocking it. He also took up a number of blocks lower down the Flinders, and, being a great admirer of Byron, named them "Manfred," "Lara," &c. Carson went South, and some time after joined the firm of Winchcombe, Carson and Co.

The next station on our route was Richmond Downs owned by Bundoock and Hays. They were Richmond River people, hence the names "Richmond Downs," "Wyangarie," "Clarence Downs," &c. Walter Hays managed and they took the cattle to stock the property from the Richmond River. Like those above them on the Flinders, the want of water was the great drawback. They held the station for many years and then sold out. Mr. Hays started business in Townsville, and died three years ago, and so did Mr. Bundoock.

Leaving Richmond Downs the next station on our way was Lara—a long distance down the river. Off the Flinders there were no runs taken up at that time except Afton and Dalgonaly on the west side; and no country occupied on the east side of the Flinders between Mount Emu and Millungera. This latter station was owned by Mr. Gibson—an immense area of territory, low down the Flinders and the Saxby. Mr. Ranken owned Afton, but he was starved out for want of water, and he had to abandon the country. He followed us to the Barclay Tableland afterwards, but of that later on.

On our way to Lara we fell in with a Gulf notable, who went by the sobriquet of "Greasy Bill." He, years after, was the discoverer of gold at Woolgar, a place to which a big rush took place and where much gold was obtained. "Greasy" prided himself in travelling about without

blankets or a stitch of clothing **except what he stood in, and was never known out there to wash himself.** Although never owning a swag, he never went about without two or three good horses. Always a "hatter," the blacks came on him in the Woolgar ranges and killed him. There is a creek there named after him.

Lara was owned by Mr. Edwin Donkin, who had sheep on it, but the country was not suitable for that class of stock. The grass coarse and rank, and the most of the run very low. The '70 flood came—the biggest flood ever known in the gulf—and swept nearly all his sheep and horses away. He and his men had to roost on the top of the huts for days. The Flinders ther had no channels to carry flood waters away, consequently the flats across, for miles, are one vast sheet of water. Donkin deserved a better fate, for he was energetic and tried his utmost to succeed; but—he went down.

VII.

We were now nearing the sea coast and at the end of our tether to secure decent, healthy sheep country. Landsborough some time before when on a searching expedition for Burke and Wills spoke very highly of the Barclay Tablelands, so our boss of the party thought that was the locality to make for. The idea was, as a settlement was forming on the Albert River, that the Gulf would open up a large trade with Batavia and other northern places, in wool, corned meat, &c. So far this never happened, worse luck. The Herbert River (now the Georgina) was a long way off, no road or track to follow, nothing but Landsborough's diary and steer by compass a good part of the way when there was no watercourse to follow. However, the venture was decided upon and a start made with the best intentions and ardent hopes of success.

Further on than Lara was Canobie, owned by Mr. Edward Palmer. Most of this run was on the lower Cloncurry, Dalgonaally higher up, owned by Duncan and Donald MacIntyre—both cattle. There was also on the Flinders a run newly taken up (at the junction of the Cloncurry) by Mr. Murdoch Campbell, which he called Sorghum Downs, but afterwards owned by Mr. Walker. Messrs. Jack and Tom Brodie settled down on Donnor's Hills, and Mr. Halloran (who lost most of his sheep in the desert through poison bush) still lower down towards the coast. We turned off the Flinders before reaching Donnor's Hills and steered across for the Leichhardt River. The whole country between the last stations mentioned and the Gregory River was occupied by Captain Towns and J. G. Macdonald—thousands of square miles—and known as the "Plains of Promise," the homestead camp being on the Leichhardt Falls. They also owned Inkerman, Jarvisfield, and other stations on the Burdekin, Carpentaria Downs, &c., on the Gulf waters. Mr. Macdonald did a lot of exploring. He came to grief at last like many of the early pioneers, and had to accept a police magistrate's position.

Ever since we left the Suttor fever and ague were rampant, and every day some one of our fellows would be ailing. A chest of medicine

was aboard, but on account of the large call made on it certain drugs were getting very low. The want of vegetables was telling on our constitutions, and of course fruit of any kind was out of the question, notwithstanding the rough life (much worse was to come) all appeared cheerful and fairly content.

We reached the Leichhardt in due course without anything eventful happening. Crossed the river at the upper end of a 10-mile-long water-hole, and camped there for a time whilst the boss of the party, another man and a blackfellow went ahead to explore and spy out the way, and the land in front of us, for now we were on our own resources to find our way forward, as there were no tracks of any kind to guide us. Floraville's immense territory is chiefly low-lying plains as flat as a flounder, but consists of very rich, deep alluvial soil. The grass at the time was very high and rank—no stock to eat it. Whilst camping here trips were made up the Leichhardt and Fiery Creek, but although the country was all open for the newcomer, no suitable sheep country could be found—too much grass seed, the main bad feature. Before we left this camp Mr. John Rankin, who had to abandon Afton Downs for want of water, came along with his sheep and camped above us. He was on the *qui vive* for a run. There were also camped on the west bank of the Gregory Messrs. Lyne and Steiglitz, also with sheep and in quest of the same thing. Mr. James Cassidy with sheep was also waiting somewhere in the neighbourhood on the same errand. More run hunters were reported en route down the Flinders with stock to take up country.

VIII.

On, on, on, the exploring party returning with very favourable reports regarding the Barclay Tableland, but unfavourable in respect to the rough country we would have to traverse to reach it; we struck camp and forged ahead. So rank, long and coarse was the grass on the plains between the Leichhardt and the Gregory—some 40 miles—that we had to get the teams in front of the sheep, with logs slung crossways behind the drays to break down the grass and make a track. Thus the sheep moved on in a string, flock after flock. All the drovers were on foot in those days, no horses. One person had to pilot the teams, steering by compass, and the rest followed. Although this great crop of grass was pretty dry, it was not sufficiently so to burn. If it was and the niggers set it alight, woe betide us. Some distance to our left they had the ranges blazing everywhere. We were all very pleased indeed to strike the Gregory and get away from this grass jungle, which in many places was a man's height.

The Gregory! the most beautiful perennial stream in Queensland, and the largest. No drought ever affects the volume of its running waters, which is a lovely stream of pellucid water from its head to the sea. Its banks fringed with tall, straight cabbage tree palms, enormous Leichhardt trees, and a variety of others. The only drawback is its inaccessibility in places for stock to water owing to steep, precipitous banks.

We struck the Gregory where the Plains of Promise and the ranges meet, and the long distance across this rangy country, and its roughness for vehicles were likely to give us trouble. However, we had to make the attempt and push through as best we could. We followed up the river to its junction with the O'Shannassy River, another large flowing stream. A mile or two from the junction the range came in to the outer channel of the Gregory. A wall of precipitous rock on our left and the deep main channel to our right, so that there was only a narrow passage through, and that very broken ground and scrubby; an ideal spot for the niggers to attack us. Here a tragedy nearly occurred. The night was dark; one man's watch was up, so he woke up the next, and they walked round the sheep. The other man walked round the opposite side. They met in a broken, bushy place very suddenly, and neither expecting the other to be there the revolvers were immediately drawn to shoot the "blackfellow!" One shot was fired before the mistake was discovered, but fortunately without grave results. This episode caused a good deal of fun in the camp for some time after.

By the number of the humpies, old and new—allowing a family of four to each gunyah on an average—there must have been a large tribe of blacks about the junction of the rivers. Large heaps of ashes were also everywhere along the banks; also large quantities of kangaroos' and emu bones, fish and fresh-water crocodile bones, &c. The darkies had nets set in special places on the side of the range where the kangaroo and emu had pads in and out to water. These nets were long and wide, very neatly made and very strong, the fibre being chiefly the bark of the Kurrajong, a pretty shady tree, growing all round here. For dillibags and fishing lines the bark of the wild flax plant—growing luxuriously on the banks of the rivers—was utilised. No doubt the niggers lived well hereabouts—on velvet compared to their skinny brethren in the waterless deserts further inland. Plenty of flesh and fish, and they had only to tear armsful of bark off the paper li-tree, which supplied them a good material for sleeping on at night, for a covering in cold weather, and make gunyahs of. Their fishing lines were very neatly made, sometimes one strand twisted and some three strands. The hook, generally, the wishbone of a bird. One side of the bone was left the full length, and the other side half broken off, the stump neatly rasped down to a fine sharp point and barbed. The cabbage tree palm supplied them with plenty of "cabbage"—a luxury to a hungry white or black, so long as not too much was partaken of at a time. We had no means of knowing whether they were cannibals or not, nor had we seen any "corroborree" grounds such as the Suttor River blacks formed—by making a large circle on a piece of flat, loose soil, banking the earth outwards, and smoothing down the ground inside the ring.

IX.

Here (at the junction of the Gregory and O'Shannassy) it was necessary for our party to divide. Along the O'Shannassy the country was too rough to attempt taking the teams that way, and out further back there was danger of not sufficient water for the sheep, so the

main party started off up the river with the sheep, and I with a blackboy took in hand the piloting of the teams and finding a passage through the rough rangy back country. By Landsborough's diary we would have four large watercourses to cross—the Seymour River, the Douglas River, the Thornton River, and Harris Creek, all named by him—before striking in for the O'Shannessy, towards a part of the river where we were likely to meet the sheep.

Starting from the junction we steered by compass for the Seymour, here and there zig-zagging in and out to avoid the rocky ridges and the beastly old man spinnifex, which grew in big tussocks and skinned the bullocks' and horses' feet. Striking the Seymour—a sandy, gravelly watercourse—no water could be found, so had to take the animals back to the junction to get a drink; a long way over broken stones and spinifex. Following up the Seymour we found a small hole of water in a cave, which supplied ourselves, but we had to take the cattle on to the Douglas—another long way for a drink—once there we had plenty of water, also in the Thornton and Harris Creeks, but the way execrable. One place, the "Devil's Elbow" the drivers called it, gave us a lot of trouble, being a long wall of rock without a break to allow us to pass, so we had to make a sloping bank of stones, timber and earth to get the drays over. Crossing Harris Creek we followed it down to the junction, where we found the sheep had passed up the O'Shannessy, and in a day or two came to their camp.

The sheep party camped waiting for us at the fountain head of the O'Shannessy. This is a natural big bore, rising in the bed of the river in a deep pool, the water bubbling up just like an artesian bore, and more springs right through the broken country. A short distance out on each side of the stream are high walls of limestone rocks, and the open downs of the famous Barclay Tablelands start from the river. Footsore after the journey over rocks and broken stones, and their legs raw with the prongs of the old man spinifex, we had to spell the bullocks and horses for a day or two before tackling the long, dry stage to Mary Lake on the Herbert. Meantime mention may be made of the huge ant heaps all over the spinifex country. Some of these heaps are built up to about ten feet high, and after rain, the termites, not contented with the bulk and height of their castles, keep adding more stuff on, chiefly grotesquely narrow spires, rising some feet above the dome-shaped mass underneath. Inside the main body of earth is mostly hollow and full of cells and empty spaces, which they appear to keep as a granary to garner their grass seeds and other vegetable matter. There must be millions of these little insects in one home when they carry up out of the ground hundredweights of earth to establish and build up such a colossal structure, which stands all weathers.

It is a peculiar feature with many Australian watercourses that they divide the conformation of country. On one side may be rolling downs or plains with rich, heavy soil; on the other stoney, barren soil with scrubby timber. Such is the case with the upper part of the O'Shannessy River. On the left bank the rich, heavily-grassed tableland comes right in on to the limestone cliffs of the river bank. On the other side the quality of the country is ridgey, stoney, and inferior.

Still, although this latter country was despised in the early days of settlement, it has long since been occupied and stocked.

From the O'Shannessy we made another move on to the end of our destination, the Herbert River of Landsborough, afterwards called the Georgina (after a Governor's wife), as there was another river of the name of Herbert on the north-east coast. The distance we had to travel over waterless downs to the Herbert was some 35 miles. The weather was extremely hot and parching (month of November). We watered the sheep about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, carried all the water possible, and drove on most of the night and all day following. At dusk that day we struck the head of Landsborough's "Chester Creek," where there was a waterhole. The "hole" was there all right, but the water had vanished—only wet mud. The sheep smelt it, however, and gave us no end of trouble to drive them away from it. We were now some six or seven miles from Lake Mary, and intended to camp till daylight, as the shepherds (on foot) were completely knocked up, and so were the dogs, but the sheep, with the usual crankiness of "monkey" nature, would not think of resting for the night and rushed down the creek baa-ing and bucking for all they were worth in search of water. Nothing else could we do—we on horseback—but let them rip, the whole lot in a string following the leaders and persistently keeping within the banks of the dry creek. At last they reached the junction of the creek and the Herbert, Mary Lake being only about a mile lower down the river. Down they went and smelt the water. Then there was a terrific baa-ing and galloping. On the left bank of the river at the lake, the ground was high and rocky. Fires were burning in scores right down to the water's edge—a sure sign of a large camp of blacks. On rushed the sheep through fires, blacks, and all other impediments to quench their thirst. The unfortunate niggers had a terrible time of it. To be roused up out of their sleep at midnight by some 8,000 sheep rushing madly and tumbling over them was chaos, was something demonical to the simple natives, who never saw, or heard of jumbucks before. Of course the whole tribe took up their beds quick and smart, and ran. To this day the Georgina blacks have a corroboree indicating "the rush of sheep to water at night."

X.

After a journey of some thirteen hundred miles which took some seven months' travelling, we at last reached our destination and made our camp on the left bank of Mary Lake, called the station "Rocklands" and the present homestead is on the same spot, and the property bearing still the good, hard old name.

After the fright the blacks got on the night of our arrival to rob them of their country, we thought the poor wretches would give us a very wide berth, and not likely to molest us for many a long day. In this we found ourselves very much mistaken. Landsborough found them anything but friendly when passing through, and actually deemed it dangerous to camp near the waterholes. I never saw any body of natives in any part of Australia to surpass physically the Rockland blacks, and few indeed to equal them.

Only a few days' grace they gave us when a cow-attack was made in the dark, as usual with the sneaking savage, who never thinks of anything like fair play. The attack was quick and sudden, and how a whole dozen of us escaped with our lives and uninjured limbs was really a miracle. We had only calico tents rigged. These were some distance away from the waterhole, and the cook to save carrying buckets of water so far made a fireplace of stones and a bough shade of branches halfway between the tents and the water, which served all hands as an eating place. On the day in question, one of the bullock drivers took in a load of wood and dumped it down alongside of the fireplace. That night we were just finishing tea, when all of a sudden deafening yells arose from behind the wood heap and in an instant a shower of spears, nulla-nullas, and other waddies came flying in all directions. Unfortunately only one of the whole party had any firearms, all left in the tents. The one possessing a revolver fired twice at the niggers, haphazard in the dark. A spear went through the rim of his hat, carried it away, and the pointed half of the spear was found next morning stuck in a tree with the hat impaled on it. The other part of the spear was lying at the foot of the tree. Of course all made a rush to the tents, to secure firearms, but in the dark these were not easily found, and had the savages followed us up, they could easily have massacred the lot of us. However they didn't, but grabbed and took everything they could lay hands on, about the fireplace—pannikins, knives, forks, billies, etc., and actually carried away two camp ovens, which, however, they found too heavy and clumsy, so they dropped and cracked them on the rocks.

Although thankful of our lives being spared and so providentially escaping even a wound from the shower of spears, it was a grievous loss to lose nearly all our kitchen and table utensils, owing to the impossibility of replacing them for many a day to come. However this was only the fortune of war. That night we kept a sharp watch in case the niggers would make a second charge. All armed and ready for battle, but we were not molested, and when daylight appeared, horses were quickly got up and some half-a-dozen of us, well-mounted, made a sudden raid after the blood-thirsty assailants. Their tracks crossed over the river at the lower end of the waterhole, and from there they followed the river up for some miles. All travelling in Indian file, till they reached broken, scrubby country. Here we found the remains of their camp, and by the number of gnyahs and fires, a large mob must have camped there. But they vanished and made tracks, and quick marching over towards the heads of the Gregory, many miles in the night and morning, and as we were unprepared for a long pursuit, we had to return to camp again. The lesson they gave us made everyone very cautious and watchful, so that the revolver was fully loaded, ready for action at a moment's notice. Settled down as we were now, all spare hands had to go to work, building up sheep yards of stones and brush, anything that came handy to fold the sheep, and put an end to watching them on a camp night.

The next move was to explore the country, roughly fix on the mileage of blocks and area to be taken up. We were quite ignorant of

where we were, South Australia or Queensland, but when a survey was made (many years afterwards) the Rockland blacks were mostly in the former colony, so that we were really the first party to stock any part of the Northern Territory.

Landsborough called the two lakes "Mary" and "Frances" after his nieces, daughters of James Landsborough, who then owned Raglan station, near Gladstone. Although two fairly large holes they hardly came up to the definition of "lakes." On Mary Lake we camped and Frances Lake is some four miles lower down, both in the shallow, grassy bed of the Georgina. Landsborough, finding no traces of Burke and Wills, only travelled some thirty miles down the river from Lake Frances (where Camooweal is now) and returned for want of water. Had he gone a few miles further he would have struck a large water-hole. However, his ideas were to return to the Albert River and there replenish his stores from the schooner "Firefly," which was sent round from Sydney to form a depot for him, Mackinlay and Walker, all of whom were in search of the lost explorers. Leaving the Albert River, Landsborough crossed the Plains of Promise, struck and followed up the Flinders to near where Hughenden is now situated, then got on to the southern waters and made for the Darling River, naming all the places en route.

XI.

With the exception of a small waterhole in a watercourse named by Landsborough "Don" Creek (junctioning with the Herbert, some 10 miles below Lake Frances), we knew of no other water but the two lakes, and they were only about a third full. The river could not have ran for many years as its bed was overgrown with grass and no sign of any debris. Its course being so flat it was very hard to judge which way the water ran, when it did run; which, apparently was very seldom. The only thing which guided one was the bent timber growing in the river bed. Landsborough expressed the opinion that the river did not run for years previous to his journey, and certainly there was no flood between his visit and ours. The two waterholes, Mary and Frances, were a good deal supplied by a small creek running into each, heading from the hard country which a thunderstorm would flood. The one running into the latter ran up the river for about half a mile before reaching the hole, thus showing the flatness of the river bed. There was abundance of splendid grass and herbage everywhere, although very dry. The want of more water was what gave trouble. Of course, the everlasting stream in the O'Shannesey was always there, but the dryness of the long stage of it prevented anything but a final dried out rush. Observing blacks' smoke about due west from Rocklands, another and myself assayed a short journey of exploration, contemplating the fire could only be some ten miles distant, but bush fires on those vast downs are very deceptive, as we found out in this instance. Taking three of the best horses with us, rations and two full tin canteens of water, we struck out, travelling by compass. The loose, heavy soil of the downs was very severe on the horses, the country in its virgin state and not been trampled hard by stock. We kept going, but no

sign of water indicated by the smoke. However, we kept travelling and at last came in sight of a creek. This we saw several miles ahead from the crest of the high downs and could notice some trees in the coolibah bed denude of any foliage. This was a good sign of water as the cockatoos and other birds stripped the small twigs of the timber near and around water. This gave us hope, but before reaching the creek we struck the head of a small gully in which we found a small supply of water, left, apparently, by a light storm. Of course, the first thing to do was to have a long drink ourselves, fill our canteens and then allow the poor famishing horses to drink their full. Whilst the quart pots were boiling for a much needed snack I walked down the gully through an acre or so of emu berry bush trying to find more water. Around the small waterhole where we camped were many fresh tracks of blacks, and as I walked through the low bushes all at once I saw part of a nigger's body lying flat under a bush. It gave me a start, thinking a mob of natives were in ambush, so my revolver was immediately in evidence expecting a sudden rush, but standing still and looking more closely at the dark apparition before me, I found it was only a young boy newly dead. Probably his people spied me coming, and in their haste to vanish left the little boy unburied.

No more water to be found in the gully or neighborhood. After refreshing ourselves we saddled up and made for the leafless part of the creek, but too late! Water was there a few days before, but now only soft mud. Trusting to the little hole we left holding out for a time we pushed on, striking out in the same direction, but although crossing one or two large creeks, no water was to be found with the exception of two small gutters. Thus, unfortunately, we very reluctantly had to retrace our steps in case the small supply of water we knew of might dry and so leave ourselves and horses to perish. The rivers we crossed were afterwards named the "James," Rankin and Lorn, but more of these later on. On returning there was just enough in the small holes to enable us to get back to Rocklands by the skin of our teeth.

Weeks and weeks now passed since we arrived at Rocklands and the question was how or where to secure rations, as our stores were running very low and our medicine chest almost empty. As stated, our last supply of rations were loaded at Port Mackay many months before. Burketown, on the Albert River, was now opened as a township, and one or two storekeepers there, but they had never any large supply on hand, simply because they could not secure it at any price. The only vessel trading to the Gulf was despatched by Captain Towns and Co., Sydney. This old tub was rotten, generally overloaded and partially wrecked on the Barrier reef or elsewhere before rounding Cape York. When she did reach the mouth of the Albert her cargo was mostly damaged; the flour sent up half rotten and full of long maggots, the sugar (in casks) black and tarry, the tea no better than gum leaves. Notwithstanding all these drawbacks we were glad to get it, otherwise starve. I may say here that we had to live weeks at a time on mutton, blue bush and pig weed, not even a smoke of tobacco, or a grain of salt. At times it was impossible to buy a shirt or a pair of pants of

any sort, and some of the men had to turn tailors and make suits (not too fashionable), out of an old blanket. But one case of Blucher boots, which arrived from Sydney (consigned to our firm) took the cake for absolute dishonesty. These looked well enough till worn a bit, then it was found the sole, composed of a thin, skinny piece of leather outside, and next to that a thick piece of bark. Such were the troubles of early pioneers, or rather some of them. The present generation of bushmen even are in clover compared to the hard and dangerous lot of those who went through the fire in the early days of settlement. Selecting the freshest of the draught horses and a light dray, the driver and the writer started for Burketown to make a hurried trip for supplies, and return with every expedition as our people at Rocklands would be out of all supplies before we could return. Our track out to the Tablelands was still visible to where we struck the Plains of Promise, thence we had to follow the Gregory down some distance to an outstation of Floraville, then newly taken up; from there a dray track or two guided us to Burketown. The blacks, so far, did not molest us. We camped one night at the debouchure of the Barclay from the Gregory. Here a large mob of blacks were camped. They appeared very excited and saucy. We had to keep watch all night in case of a surprise. However, they made no attack till daylight, when about twenty of them advanced yabbering, and going through no end of gymnastics. A shot from a carbine made them rush back to where the rest were camped. Leaving the horse driver at the dray with his carbine loaded, I walked out to collect the horses, having my six chambered revolver fully loaded, and ready for battle.

Fortunately, the horses were handy, and jumping on the back of one, I galloped back and made a rush at the niggers, who, on seeing the horse, made a bound into the river, swam across and cleared. This Barclay stream is one of the most peculiar in Australia. It takes a good deal of water from the Gregory, flows for many miles through the level plains, an everlasting flowing stream, very sluggish, as there is no fall in the country, and just resembles all along a big ditch made by human hands. The blacks here seemed to have revelled in abundance of fish by the heaps they left on the banks where I scared them away. Their mode of securing the fish was peculiar. They made a rope out of grass, twisted, about as thick as a man's thigh, and long enough to reach well over each bank, having a sort of weir ready in the shallow place below. At a deep hole, half a dozen niggers would grasp this rope on each side, starting from the upper end to the deep water, they would sway the rope backwards towards the bottom, working down towards the weir, and so frightening the fish into their net, where they were speedily clubbed and thrown ashore, perhaps ever so many more than they could eat, but the aboriginal nature is the nature of the dingo; he kills every animal he comes across; flesh, fish, or fowl, and never dreams of saving or keeping things alive for a rainy day when starvation may stare him in the face. To-day is sufficient for the darkey, to-morrow he does not think of, so he makes no preparation of any sort.

XII.

Burketown was now an established township—of a sort—very rough and unhealthy. Landsborough was acting as Government Resident, when we reached there, Sharkey as Land Commissioner, and George Phillips, Government Surveyor. Two public houses were quickly erected, as also two stores. Many criminals from the south made their abode there to get away from the police, and so to speak, made it a city of refuge. But these characters did not leave their vices behind them, and so helped to make the little township a place only fit for demons. Some short time after the "Jaemel Packet" arrived from Batavia, carrying with her a terrible fatal fever, known then as "Yellow Jack," which nearly decimated the small population, and gave Burketown a very bad name. Of course, there was no doctor, no medicine, and no proper food, and the poisonous grog dispensed helped the heavy mortality. Burketown is situated on the left bank of the Albert, a tidal river, very crooked, narrow, and of not much account for safe navigation. The entrance from the sea is still worse, owing to its shallowness. When the tide is out (only one tide in the 24 hours), one can walk over the banks of sand for some distance seawards. The absence of deep water along the coast over the unnavigable rivers are the great drawbacks to navigation all along the Carpentaria Gulf shores.

Having secured a small quantity of supplies required we hastened back on our return trip, and the starved Rocklanders were very pleased to see us.

The water in Mary Lake was drying up very quickly, and no sign of rain, and at last dried up very suddenly, the bottom of the hole being quite flat (we found the same remark applied to the Frances waterhole), so we had to shift our main camp to France's Lake. We were only a short time there when the water vanished, and a shift of quarters was imperative. Fortunately a heavy storm fell between us and the O'Shannesy, running Don Creek. To this creek we shifted and remained there for some months, till Lake Frances got half filled, when we took up our residence there again. On Don Creek the blacks gave us trouble from the first, and got more and more saucy every day. At last, to protect ourselves and stock, necessity forced us to battle royal. Lyne and Steidletz were camped for some time with their sheep on the lower Gregory, and the former came up to Rocklands, looking for country to fake up. Noticing several blacks' fires near us, we deemed it fully time to make a raid, and drive them back. The boss, Mr. Lyne, and myself made for the fires, and before reaching them we met a large mob of the niggers making straight for our camp, fully armed, and all painted for war. This was at the Herbert River. We tied our pack-horses to a tree in the river, and as the darkies advanced at a trot, we waved to them to stop, but they would not, so advancing in front of them we were prepared to stand our ground and fight the battle out. When they realised our movements they suddenly stopped, but the chief or ringleader made signs and motions for his fellows to advance. Seeing that our position was now getting critical, one of our party raised his carbine to his eye. As soon as he did the foreman

of the tribe instantly made a target of his boomerangs, and waddies, at the same time going through all sorts of fantastic gestures, and strange evolutions for his men to back him up and keep advancing. Our man fired, and the bullet struck, apparently, in the very centre of the leading champion's network of boomerangs, sending them in splinters amongst all those behind him. All fled back for their lives, but to frighten them we kept trotting behind them to give them a further scare and make them understand we were their masters. It was really surprising how deftly those wild blacks, when even in full swing racing away for life, could pick up in an instant, and without stopping, a stone with their toes, off the ground, catch it up quickly with their hand, and, with hardly stopping, hurl it with terrific force and as straight as an arrow at the enemy.

Mentioning the name of Mr. Lyne. He went out one morning from our camp, to look for country about the heads of the Gregory. He camped out a night. Next morning his two horses were gone. In wandering about looking for them he lost his bearings. Luckily he followed a gully which led him to the river. This he followed down to within 30 miles of Burketown, some 300 miles by the windings of the Gregory, on foot, without any food but cabbage tree. How he escaped the armies of wild blacks was a miracle. On getting back again to New South Wales he became a member of Parliament there, and for some years holds the title of "Sir William" Lyne.

Although chasing back one tribe of niggers on our Western side, Don Creek appeared to be the favorite habitat of those Myalls, who were much more ferocious and warlike than those we expelled. They gave us much watching, anxiety, and trouble. To catch birds they had the habit of breaking down small twigs of the Coolibah trees, and plant them closely all round the waterhole, saving one small area. This little spot was with flat stones, made a small causeway of, the stones an inch or so above water level. A blackfellow would scoop out a small hole alongside of this, lie there coiled up snake fashion, quietly holding in his hands a pole, with a net affixed. The thousands of pigeons, galahs, cockatoos, etc., famishing for a drink would alight all along the shores of the waterhole, but the little twigs planted along the edge prevented their entrance to allay their thirst, so in flocks they would fly around to the blackfellow's causeway, then the nigger in his hole makes a sudden dart, down comes the pole carrying the net, and results generally in the nigger securing anything from two or three to twenty birds in one haul. Of course, this easy style of snaring could only happen when water was scarce. In an ordinary drought the inland blacks made much easier living than during rainy weather. Continuous wet weather causes their starvation, being unable to secure any food, but the Herbert River natives made a small provision for a rainy day in collecting grass and other seeds, preserving it in bark or dilly bags and storing it away in the forks of trees, till pressing hunger required, when the grass was ground down between two hollow stones, mixed with water and baked in the ashes something similar to a white man's damper.

XIII.

Before the whites invaded Australia were the dusky aborigines of the great continent a happy people? This question is very hard to answer with any degree of certainty. That the males lead a happier life than the unfortunate females goes without saying. The greatest fear and dread a tribe sustained was from its own neighbors—generally an everlasting feud which, now and again, broke out with fearful bloodshed and cold murder, not on innocent men alone but on women and children. When the slaughtering idea got into one tribe's head they would not hesitate for a moment, if strong enough to kill every one of a neighboring family—men, women, and children—they would generally commit the brutal deeds without giving their enemies the slightest warning, their minds and mode of assaulting equal to the tiger or the dingo. From where did the Australian come from? Is he a special creation of this vast, ancient continent, like the marsupial and the emu? Of course, scientists make out, or try to make out, that every tribe of the genus homo must have been created anywhere else to where he and aeons resided in some other country before reaching the land they now inhabit. A Victorian professor recently averred that the blackfellow only inhabited Victoria for a period of about 1,000 years! Had he come to the conclusion 10,000 or a 100,000 years he might have been more accurate. The Australian blackfellow is the same type wherever you go—from Port Phillip to Port Darwin, from Swan River to Cape York—all the one and the same breed; the same traits and characteristics; using practically the same style of weapons; the same style of hunting; the same style, without hardly any material variation of building his gnyah. If not the produce of the Australian soil he must have struck the coast somewhere as one type and family; and, at his slow growth of populating the vast continent must have taken countless ages to spread so far and wide. It is useless relying on any of his traditions or legends. He can only count up to the number of his fingers. He has no religion worthy of the name, and you cannot Christianise him. You may think you can, but it turns out in the end a big failure. He is, however, an adept at picking up all the evil doings and unChristian language of his white brother. Passing away at such speed to the happy hunting ground of the future, it is only a question of years when the last of him will vanish—the Truganini of Australia.

Whilst on the blackfellow subject I may mention two or three more incidents of a very narrow escape by one or two of our party. The one who had his hat carried away on the point of a spear at Mar Lake had another close shave at Frances Lake. Our camp at the time was at the latter waterhole, and the niggers still kept up their game of planting twigs round the hole. One day two of them came boldly up and started work as usual. The person in question walked down and waved them off. Of this they took no notice. He walked up to them, revolver in hand. They started away and he turned round to walk back. As he did one of the myalls swung round and hit him a terrific blow on the back of the head which rendered him insensible for three days. Fortunately

the deed was noticed from the camp and two or three rushed down on foot and fired, but the niggers got clean away.

Soon after this incident the writer had occasion to visit Burketown all alone—a lonely road and dangerous. Having two good horses I travelled fast. All went well going down. Coming back, however, I got a couple of surprises. At a lagoon on the edge of the Plains of Promise and the range country, I camped an hour or two after dark some half a mile from the water. Hobbling the horses out, I lay down near there and fell asleep. Something woke me up suddenly. A lizard running over dry leaves would wake one when always on the watch for the darkies. For a few minutes nothing wrong could be seen or heard. Then all of a sudden a small glare from the bank of the lagoon was noticed, then almost instantly a glare in another direction, and then in another. It took but little time to catch and saddle the horses and make a bolt, but now a fire was visible ahead of me, and then another. The horses began to sniff and snort, and discern something uncanny all round us. Making a dart forward, however, we passed unmolested, between two moving fires, the horses going at their best. No doubt the wretches saw me coming from the hills miles away across the plains, and prepared for an attack, as I was surrounded by them.

The crow is neither a favorite with white or black—the most cruel and evilly-disposed bird in the whole bush. When a poor animal gets sick, maimed, or bogged, the crow comes from afar to feast on the living skeleton; its first morsel, the helpless creature's eyes—a dainty mouthful for the voracious demon looking crow. How its horrible grated voice annoyed the sickly bushman lying under a tree or trying to pass a few minutes in quiet sleep. Still from an incident that happened him, a crow probably saved the writer's life. Travelling all night from the lagoon where the Myalls surrounded me I camped to spell my horses for an hour or two on the left bank of the Thornton, on a clear open spot a short distance from the water. Having boiled my quart and partaken of a snack, I half lay and half leaned against a tree with my revolver handy. I was only a few minutes in camp when the ubiquitous crow made its appearance, cawing, cawing, and wailing as usual in an adjacent tree, then it flew down and sidled along nearer when I thought of having a shot at him, but powder and bullets were precious with us in those days, and so I refrained making a target of the wretch, although it annoyed me so much. I soon dosed into a light sleep. All at once there was a terrifying yell from my black tormentor which instantly awoke me, when I saw three or four black heads racing down a shallow gully, making for the river as fast as their legs could carry them. They were no doubt sneaking upon me within spear throw, but they frightened the crow, which providentially gave me the alarm.

Speaking of the crow I may mention a battle between a large iguana and a carpet snake which I witnessed on Don Creek—the only one I ever saw during some 45 years' bush life. They were at the foot of a tree, the soil from which was washed away. The iguana had the snake by the neck, the latter's tail coiled round a root. The snake,

although wriggling and twisting, had undoubtedly the worst of the fight. Tracking lost sheep I had no time to wait, but I would give anything to watch the performance from start to finish.

XIV.

From one extreme to the other. The water in Don Creek (where we shifted to when the lakes dried up) was getting very low and a move on again was compulsory. Fortunately a storm put some water in Frances Lake (from the little creek already mentioned) after being so long dry, and to this hole we shifted. Mary Lake was still waterless, the grass and weeds flourishing where the water should be. We were camped only a week or two at the former hole when down came the rain, a big flood was imminent, and it came, the first in the Herbert for many years. Our camp was fixed on the right side of the river out of reach of any flood as we thought. We were greatly mistaken, however. The river having no proper bed the water spread all over the flats till the whole river valley was one sheet of water. We had to shift all our goods and chattels to higher ground in the pouring rain and at times knee deep in the black soil. The river kept rising and the water spreading. The second time we had to make for higher ground, but the water followed, so that for the third time everything had to be humped away further out. After so many troubles for want of water we got plenty of it now in all conscience.

We were for some six months at Rocklands before being followed up by any one in search of country. The first to arrive was Nash, who took up "Stony Plains," some 40 miles down the river. Then came John Lorne Campbell Ranken, and his cousin Lorne. They took up country on the Ranken and the Lorne (these watercourses are still called after them). Steiglitz Brothers followed, and squatted down below Nash. The latter had a partner named Gregg, and Mrs. Gregg and her little daughter accompanied their husband and father—the first woman to live on the Barclay Tableland, and a rough life they must have experienced.

Time passed on, but nothing occurred to help the struggling pioneers. The expected opening of trade with Batavia and other Eastern places seemed as far distant as ever. There was no outlet for surplus stock. Wages were very high and station hands almost unprocurable. Wool was low in price and the cartage of it to Burketown and then the high freight to Sydney round Cape York was prohibitive. Besides, the rotten old schooners running in the trade at the time, leaked and destroyed the cargo. But there was no redress. You had to ship by them or set fire to the wool off the sheep's back, and in many instances the latter would be found cheaper. Supplies from Sydney by the same unseaworthy tubs were very expensive and always more or less damaged—generally more. Notwithstanding all these heavy drawbacks the owners were game, and hope still held sway in their brave and manly breasts. They stuck to their guns and to their hardships till fate compelled them to abandon their holdings and drove

their stock back hundreds of miles to, perhaps, near to where they started from. An exodus took place from the Georgina, and the country was again in the possession of the blackfellow. Many of the Gulf runs followed suit.

"Look upon that picture and on this." The owners of those runs at the present day are making fortunes, besides living in ease and comfort. Such is life!

Before closing these papers relative to the early pioneers of the sixties, who took up runs on the Herbert (now Georgina), I may be allowed to add a few lines more referring to their career since and whether now dead or alive.

The first to follow up Landsborough's exploring track and settle at Rocklands was John Sutherland. He is still alive and active. For many years he has resided at Kyanga Station, near Banana. Nash and Greig, when they abandoned Stoney Plains, took their sheep to the Flinders, bought Cambridge Downs from Sutherland, Marathon, and settled there for a time. Greig died at Cambridge and is buried there. For years Nash carried on a financial agency business in Brisbane, but I cannot say if still alive. John Ranken in partnership with the late Hon. Bowie Wilson, carried on a large land agency business in Sydney, but died years ago, as also his cousin, Lorne Ranken. Von Steilitzce took up country between Townsville and Cardwell, and, I think, is still alive, as also James Cassidy, who resided for some time on the Leichhardt, sold his stock and took up land near Ingham, and also country near Richmond. He died some three years ago. Pat Cassidy (well known in the Gulf then) died many years ago.

XV.

On my way to Sydney (via Burketown and Townsville overland). So farewell to Rocklands! With all the hardships endured from such a hard, rough life—constant watching of the blacks, the want of proper food or none at all, but above all, the occasional dreadful sufferings from want of water—these and many others helped at all times to make our lives unhappy. But we were a happy family notwithstanding, and tried our best to look at things as brightly as possible. For instance, the fascination of short exploring trips was viewed with much delight and pleasure. There was also something romantic in the nomadic life we led, and certainly much pleasure was derived by the early pioneers, as well as trouble and hardships. The pioneers are almost now forgotten by the rising generation. Many lie in grass-covered graves, neglected and lost to remembrance, who, in the years that are gone, endowed the Australian of to-day with his peerless heritage.

In visiting Burketown this time, changes were few in that small hamlet. Progress was not visible. In fact the place, like the cow's tail, appeared to be growing downwards. There was very little trade, but still much sickness. To add to its decline a port was opened on the Norman River, which drew away many people from Burketown. Then

the Norman was reckoned to be a much better seaport than the Albert. Landsborough had left Burketown, and Sharkey and George Phillips soon after. A short time only elapsed when the place was almost quite deserted.

Luckily, meeting with a gentleman going South, we started from Burketown, and having plenty of good horses, we did long stages. We travelled from Floraville, Neumayer Valley, etc., on to the Flinders. We camped for a day at Sorghum Downs, and here a peculiar incident occurred. A ration carter was working in the store. There was an extraordinary drapery case standing against the wall, open side outwards, nearly full up with trousers, shirts, etc. On the top of these a piece of loose calico. The little store was rather dark. We were sitting on a box near the door. The station carrier pulled a cork out of a turpentine can. As he did so some of the stuff splashed up in his face. He went to the case and pulled out the piece of calico to wipe his face. As he did, in an instant a snake darted at him. He felt the brute as he pulled the calico, and jumped back instantly. He made sure he was bitten, and turned as white as a sheet. As we saw the snake's head come only within two or three inches of his face, we assured him he was not touched, but he had a narrow escape and a terrible fright. On killing and opening the snake we found five mice inside of him, newly swallowed.

Further up the river we were the observers of something ludicrous, although not very funny to those in the "swim." They were washing sheep in a rather small but deep lagoon. This was, of course, what was known as "hand-washing." Yards were erected on the banks of the waterhole, a race made into a yard in the water where the performance took place; men on the platform with "crutches" did the work. This erection was built of smallish saplings, and very shaky at all times. Something on the bank gave way, and pop goes the staging, and all hands on it, flop into the dirty water—full of yolk and sheep dung. Fortunately all the fellows could swim, but they were nearly choked and poisoned before they could reach the surface, owing to the sheep swimming above them. It took them some time to get the taste out of their mouths.

In travelling up the Flinders I was surprised at the memory one of my horses possessed. He was a pack horse, and generally in the lead of the others when travelling. He would stick to the track for miles, and then suddenly make a bolt slantingly in for the river. At first I did not grasp his motives, or what induced him to act in such a capricious way. However, I shortly found out his object in behaving in such a peculiar manner. He was making every time for one of our camps when coming down the Flinders some three years before, and not one old camp did he miss!

The Flinders by this time was dotted with shanties—sly-grog selling, of course. They were hells on earth, and gloried in such names as the "Dead Finish," "Sudden Death," etc. The characters frequenting them were the scum of the colony, so the devilish carousals carried on would disgrace Dante's Inferno. One's horses were not safe if camped

near those abominations, so we took good care to put many miles between them before resting for the night.

We left the Flinders on Telemon run and travelled up Beit's Gorge, Fairlight run. Mr. Beit was then manager and part owner. We passed Mount Emu, then owned by Thompson Muirison and Jamieson. The former's sons still hold this station and others. We camped a night at Reedy Springs, and were very hospitably entertained by Mr. and Mrs. Anning and family. The third generation of Annings now own the station. We reached Dalrymple (on the Burdekin) on Christmas Day, 1868. There was a small public house there then run by William Mark, now owner of Gainsford station, and till lately of Saxby, on the Saxby River. We had Christmas dinner at Mark's, and then travelled slowly to Townsville, as our horses were very sore-footed after the stoney country we travelled over from the Flinders. We had a stay in Townsville for a few days for a boat to Sydney. We sold our horses,, and disposed of our revolvers, as there was now no further need for them. I was sorry in a way parting with my shooting friend, which stood me in good stead day and night for years in the savage wilds. When soon after located in Southern Queensland, how sweetly and peacefully one slept in camp without any fear of a spear or a nulla-nullah from the hand of a nigger.

There was only, I think, a fortnightly boat at the time running between Sydney and Townsville, the old A.S.N. Company the traders. But we were in luck. A steamer called the Havilah arrived in port, and immediately after her the Boomerang, Captain Lake (Lake's Creek on the Fitzroy is named after him). The Boomerang was told off by the A.S.N. Company to run the stranger off and carry passengers and cargo for next to nothing sooner than that the Havilah should secure a footing in the trade. At any rate we got a saloon passage to Sydney for £1 10s. by the Boomerang. Some of the passengers asserted they paid nothing. At any rate, we were satisfied, for only for the Havilah we would have had to pay £15 to £16.

