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978-1-108-04596-4 - Narrative of a Survey of the Intertropical and Western Coasts of Australia, Performed Between the Years 1818 and 1822: Volume 1

Philip Parker King

Excerpt

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VOYAGES FOR THE SURVEY
OF THE
INTERTROPICAL COASTS
OF
AUSTRALIA.

CHAPTER I.

INTENDED mode of proceeding, and departure from Port Jackson :
—Visit Twofold Bay :—Natives seen :—Passage through Bass Strait and along the South Coast to King George the Third's Sound :—Transactions there :—Voyage to the North-West Cape, and Survey of the Coast between the North-West Cape and Depuch Island, including the examinations of Exmouth Gulf, Curlew River, and Dampier's Archipelago :—Loss of Anchors, and Interview with the Natives :—Remarks upon Dampier's account of Rosemary Island, and of the Island upon which he landed.

AT the time that the Mermaid was ready to commence her voyage, it was the season when the westerly monsoon blows over that part of the sea which separates the islands of Timor and New Guinea from Australia ; it was therefore necessary, in order to benefit by the direction of the wind, to commence the survey of the coast at its western extremity, the North-West Cape : but, to do this, the passage was to be made, by taking

1817.
Dec. 21.

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1817. the western route, as it is called; that is, by
Dec. 21. passing either through Bass' Strait, or round Van Diemen's Land, and steering up the West Coast. In doing this, the vessel would, doubtless, have to encounter much bad weather; and, on her arrival might, probably, be more fit to return than to commence the survey of a dangerous and an unknown coast. The passage to the northward, through Torres Strait, would have been, on all accounts, the most advisable route, had the season been more advanced; and, indeed, it would have been even better to wait until March for that purpose; but this would be a loss of time in which much might be effected, were we only fortunate enough to make the western passage without accident: under all these circumstances, I was induced to prefer the route of Bass' Strait, rather than remain idle, after the vessel was completed.

Before we left Port Jackson, His Excellency the Governor was made acquainted with my intended mode of proceeding; that, having passed Bass' Strait to King George the Third's Sound, I should there complete my water and fuel: then, by steering up the West Coast, to commence my survey at the North-West Cape, and examine the coast easterly until the westerly mon-

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soon should begin to decline; upon which I ^{1817.} proposed to leave the land, and proceed as far to ^{Dec. 21.} the eastward as the remainder of the monsoon would allow; when I might examine the coast back with the easterly monsoon as long as my stock of water lasted; and lastly, if I could not get a supply upon the coast, to go to Timor, by which time my provisions would, probably, be so reduced as to oblige my returning to Port Jackson to prepare for a second voyage.

Having made our final arrangements, we left Port Jackson on the 22d of December, with a ^{Dec. 22.} fresh northerly breeze, which continued until the evening of the 24th, when we were abreast of Cape Howe. After this a heavy gale of wind from S.W. obliged us to run into Twofold Bay for shelter, and to repair some trifling damage which we had already sustained.

Twofold Bay was discovered by Mr. Bass in 1797; and, although it is for the most part too open and exposed to easterly winds for large ships, yet it has a cove on its northern side, in which small vessels find secure anchorage and a convenient place for stopping at, if bound to the southward; and hence its name of Snug Cove. It is completely land-locked, and it also conveniently affords both wood and water, and is neither difficult to enter nor to leave.

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1817.
Dec. 26 When passing Red Point, which is on the south-side of the bay, several natives were seen upon it; one of them came to the verge of the rocks that overhang the extremity of the point, and made violent gestures, but, whether they were those of friendship or hostility, could not be ascertained. Boongaree answered him in the Port Jackson language, but they were equally unintelligible to each other. The native had a spear in one hand, and either a throwing stick, or a club, in the other; both of which, with his legs widely extended, he flourished most furiously over his head. This man was quite naked, but a woman near him wore a kangaroo's skin over her shoulders. Several small parties of natives were seen in the other parts of the bay, but they appeared more anxious to avoid than to court a communication with us.

On anchoring in Snug Cove, I went on shore with Mr. Roe and Mr. Cunningham: Boongaree also accompanied us, clothed in a new dress, which was provided for him, of which he was not a little proud, and for some time kept it very clean.

Wood was abundant and near at hand, and the water, which is in a morass at the back of the beach, although shallow, and covered with a species of *azolla*, was both good and plentiful.

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The soil of the hills, contiguous to Snug Cove, ^{1817.} is very good, and covered with luxuriant grass. ^{Dec. 28.} The country appeared to be thickly wooded, but near the water the trees, which were principally species of the *eucalyptus* and the *casuarina*, were small and stunted.

In our strolls during the day along the beach, and over the surrounding hills, we did not encounter any inhabitants, although recent signs of them were visible at every step; several beaten paths were observed leading to the morass from different directions, on the banks of which were many shells (*haliotis gigantea*, Linn.) used by the natives for drinking-vessels.

In the evening, after hauling the seine on the beach without success, we were upon the point of embarking, when we discovered, at about seventy or eighty yards up the hill, the heads of three or four natives peeping above the long grass, evidently watching our movements, and probably awaiting our departure to allow them to go to the morass for water. Wishing very much to communicate with these people, we walked towards them, but they suddenly rose and scampered up the hill among the trees, which were so thick as soon to conceal them from our view. Boongaree called to them in vain;

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1817. and it was not until they had reached some distance that they answered his call in loud shrill voices. After some time spent in a parley, in which Boongaree was spokesman on our part, sometimes in his own language, and at others in broken English, which he always resorted to when his own failed in being understood, they withdrew altogether, and we neither heard nor saw any thing more of them.

27. The next morning, the wind being easterly, we left the bay. On passing Red Point, twenty or thirty natives came to the extreme point of the cliff, shouting and hallooing and making violent gestures; a large group of women and children appeared in the back ground, timidly concealing themselves behind the trees and bushes; another party was quietly seated round small fires on the rocks near the sea-beach, apparently engaged in cooking their fish; and at a little distance from the last group, two canoes were hauled upon the rocks.

The breeze being fresh from the N.N.E., we made rapid progress; and at three o'clock p.m., rounded Cape Howe, with every prospect of passing through Bass' Strait before the wind should again veer to the westward. In passing Cape Howe, we observed large fires burning

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on the hills, made by the natives for the double ^{1817.}
purpose of burning off the dry grass and of ^{Dec. 27.}
hunting the kangaroos, which are thus forced
to fly from the woods, and thereby fall an easy
prey to their pursuers.

The next day at noon, Kent's Group, in the ^{28.}
eastern entrance of Bass' Strait, was seen;
but, at one o'clock, the wind shifted suddenly
and blew a gale from S.W., with heavy rain:
after beating against it until the following day,
we bore up and ran under the lee of Great
Island, intending to pass round Van Diemen's
Land: at five o'clock, we passed close to the
Babel Islands, on which were heaped incredible
numbers of sea-birds of various descriptions,
each species huddled together in flocks separate
from the other. On another part of the island
many seals were seen, by the growl of which,
and the discordant screams of the birds, a
strange confused noise was made, not ill adapted
to the name the island bears.

By the following day, we had made some ^{29.}
progress along the eastern side of Van Diemen's
Land, but in the evening, the wind shifted to S. E.,
and induced us to try the Strait once more. In
passing the low north-easternmost point of the
land, called by the French, Cape Naturalist, we
had nearly run ashore from the darkness of the

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1817. night, and the little elevation of the land. Our
Dec. 29. sounding in seven fathoms was the first indication of danger ; and, on listening attentively, the noise of the surf upon the beach was distinctly
30. heard. The next morning we passed through Banks' Strait, and entered Bass' Strait ; but the wind was so light and baffling, that we made
1818. no progress until the 2d of January ; when, with
Jan. 2. a freshening breeze from the eastward, we moved rapidly on our way, and flattered ourselves with the hope of clearing the strait before night. In this hope we were not deceived ; but before it was effected, we had very nearly suffered from the careless look-out of the man at the mast-head. At four o'clock we were near Three Hummock Island, and steered so as to pass close to its northern point, in order that we might obtain a correct latitude for sights for the chronometers. Being within half-a-mile of it, rocks were suddenly seen outside and so close to us, that it was then too late either to haul up or bear away ; the rocks to windward and the land to leeward preventing us : nothing was therefore left to us but to proceed and take the chance of finding sufficient depth of water between the point and the rocks ; providentially there proved to be a passage of one-eighth of a mile wide, and the cutter passed safely through. These

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islands were examined by Commodore Baudin, ^{1818.} and an elaborate survey made of them by ^{Jan. 2.} his officers; but this danger is not noticed on their plan of the group. The rocks bear N. 30° W. (by compass) from the northernmost point of the island, and N. 8° E. (by compass) from the northernmost hummock. I do not think they extend far from the shore.

At sunset, we were in the meridian of Albatross Island, and by midnight cleared the Strait, when we steered a course for King George the Third's Sound.

Upon examining our bread, we found that a considerable quantity was spoiled from damp and leaks, which necessarily obliged us to go at once upon a reduced allowance of that article.

From a succession of westerly winds, the vessel was driven so near to the Archipelago of the Recherche, that we were induced to bear up for the anchorage in Goose Island Bay; but as we steered round Douglas's Isles, the wind veered ^{16.} back to the S. E., and we might have proceeded: we were, however, so near the anchorage, that I determined upon occupying it for the night; and steering in between Middle Island and Goose Island, the anchor was dropped off the first sandy beach to the eastward of the highest hill, at the north-west end of the former.

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1818. In the evening I landed with the botanist
Jan. 16. and Mr. Roe, but we found little that was
worthy of our attention. The basis of the island
is granitic, and covered with a shallow soil,
formed of decayed vegetable matter, mixed
with sand, which nourishes the stunted vege-
tation that thickly clothes the surface, particu-
larly on the north-eastern, which is its most shel-
tered side.

No animals were observed, excepting some
small quadrupeds, which were momentarily seen
by Mr. Roe, and, from his description, were
kangaroo-rats. On Goose Island, the bird from
which it takes its name appeared to be abun-
dant; but there was too much surf to permit our
landing upon it, and we were not so much in
want of fresh provisions as to induce our risking
any damage to the boats: we found the bones of
a whale which had been thrown up on the beach
where we landed.

The wind in the night veered to N. E. by E.,
to which quarter the anchorage is much exposed;
towards morning it blew fresh, but the anchor
17. held well. At dawn of day, (17th) we got under-
weigh and steered through the islands; at noon,
we were abreast of Termination Island, the lati-
tude of which we found to be $34^{\circ} 32'$. Our
friendly wind died away at midnight, and was