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Edward John Eyre

Excerpt

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JOURNAL OF EXPEDITIONS
IN
CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN AUSTRALIA,
IN 1840.

CHAPTER I.

ORIGIN OF THE EXPEDITION—CONTEMPLATED EXPLORATION TO THE WESTWARD—MEETING OF THE COLONISTS AND SUBSCRIPTIONS ENTERED INTO FOR THAT PURPOSE—NOTES ON THE UNFAVOURABLE NATURE OF THE COUNTRY TO THE WESTWARD, AND PROPOSAL THAT THE NORTHERN INTERIOR SHOULD BE EXAMINED INSTEAD—MAKE AN OFFER TO THE GOVERNOR TO CONDUCT SUCH AN EXPEDITION—CAPTAIN STURT'S LECTURE—INTERVIEW WITH THE GOVERNOR, ARRANGEMENT OF PLANS—PREPARATION OF OUTFIT—COST OF EXPEDITION—NAME A DAY FOR DEPARTURE—PUBLIC BREAKFAST AND COMMENCEMENT OF THE UNDERTAKING.

BEFORE entering upon the account of the expedition sent to explore the interior of Australia, to which the following pages refer, it may perhaps be as well to advert briefly to the circumstances which led to the undertaking itself, that the public being fully in possession of the motives and inducements which led me, at a very great sacrifice of my private means, to engage in an exploration so hazardous and arduous, and informed of the degree of confidence reposed in me by those interested in the undertaking, and the sanguine hopes and high expectations that were formed as to the result, may be

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ORIGIN OF THE EXPEDITION.

better able to judge how far that confidence was well placed, and how far my exertions were commensurate with the magnitude of the responsibility I had undertaken.

I have felt it the more necessary to allude to this subject now, because I was in some measure at the time instrumental in putting a stop to a contemplated expedition to the westward, and of thus unintentionally interfering with the employment of a personal friend of my own, than whom no one could have been more fitted to command an undertaking of the kind, from his amiable disposition, his extensive experience, and his general knowledge and acquirements.

Upon returning, about the middle of May 1840, from a visit to King George's Sound and Swan River, I found public attention in Adelaide considerably engrossed with the subject of an overland communication between Southern and Western Australia. Captain Grey, now the Governor of South Australia, had called at Adelaide on his way to England from King George's Sound, and by furnishing a great deal of interesting information relative to Western Australia, and pointing out the facilities that existed on its eastern frontier, as far as it was then known, for the entrance of stock from the Eastward, had called the attention of the flockmasters of the Colony to the importance of opening a communication between the two places, with a view to the extension of their pastoral interests. The notes of Captain Grey, referring to this subject,

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were published in the South Australian Register newspaper of the 28th March, 1840. On the 30th of the same month, a number of gentlemen, many of whom were owners of large flocks and herds, met together, for the purpose of taking the matter into consideration, and the result of this conference was the appointment of a Committee, whose duty it was to report upon the best means of accomplishing the object in view. On the 4th, 7th, and 9th of April other meetings were held, and the results published in the South Australian Register, of the 11th April, as follows:—

OVERLAND ROUTE TO WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

“At a Meeting of the Committee for making arrangements for an expedition to explore an overland route to Western Australia, held the 7th of April, the Hon. the Surveyor-general in the chair, the following resolutions were agreed to:—

That a communication be made to the Government of Western Australia, detailing the objects contemplated by this Committee, and further stating that the assistance of the Government of this province has been obtained.

That a communication be made to the Hon. the Surveyor-general, the Hon. the Advocate-general the Hon. G. Leake, Esq. of Western Australia, with a request that they will form a committee in conjunction with such settlers as may feel interested in the same undertaking, for the purpose of collecting private subscriptions, and co-operating with this committee.

Resolved, that similar communications be made to the Government of New South Wales, and to the following gentlemen who are requested to act as a committee with the same power as that of Western Australia: Hon. E. Deas Thomson, Colonial Secretary; William Macarthur, Esq.; Captain Parker; P. King, R.N.; Stuart Donaldson, Esq.; George Macleay, Esq.; Charles Campbell, Esq.

That this Committee would propose, in order to facilitate the progress of the expedition, that depôts be formed at convenient points on the route ; that it is proposed to make Fowler's Bay the first depôt on the route from Adelaide, and to leave it to the Government of Western Australia to decide upon the sites which their local knowledge may point out as the most eligible for similar stations, as far to the eastward as may appear practicable.

That a subscription list be immediately opened in Adelaide to collect funds in aid of the undertaking.

That R. F. Newland, Esq., be requested to act as Treasurer to this Committee, and that subscriptions be received at the Banks of Australasia and South Australia.

E. C. FROME, Chairman.

CHAS. BONNEY, Secretary.

The Committee again met on the 9th April—the Hon. the Assistant Commissioner in the chair. It was resolved that the following statement head the subscription list :—

“Several meetings having taken place at Adelaide of persons interested in the discovery of an overland route to Western Australia, and it being the general opinion of those meetings that such an enterprise would very greatly benefit the colonists of Eastern, Southern, and Western Australia, it was determined to open subscriptions for the furtherance of this most desirable object under the direction of the following Committee :

G. A. Anstey, Esq.
 Charles Bonney, Esq.
 John Brown, Esq.
 Edward Eyre, Esq.
 John Finniss, Esq.
 J. H. Fisher, Esq.
 Lieutenant Frome, Surveyor-
 general
 O. Gilles, Esq.
 Captain Grey
 J. B. Hack, Esq.
 G. Hamilton, Esq.
 Ephraim Howe, Esq.

John Knott, Esq.
 Duncan M'Farlane, Esq.
 David McLaren, Esq.
 John Morphett, Esq.
 Chas. Mann, Esq.
 R. F. Newland, Esq.
 Dr. Rankin Esq.
 G. Stevenson, Esq.
 F. Stephens, Esq.
 W. Smilie, Esq.
 T. B. Strangways, Esq.
 Capt. Sturt, Ass. Com.
 John Walker, Esq.

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TO THE WESTWARD.

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The very great importance of the undertaking as leading to results, and in all probability to discoveries, the benefits of which are at present unforeseen, but which, like the opening of the Murray to this Province, may pave the way to a high road from hence to Western Australia, will, it is hoped meet with that support from the public which undertakings of great national interest deserve, and which best evince the enterprise and well-doing of a rising colony.

That Captain Grey, being about to embark for England, the Committee cannot allow him to quit these shores without expressing their regret that his stay has been so short, and the sense they entertain of the great interest he has evinced in the welfare of the colony, and the disinterested support he has given an enterprise which is likely to lead to such generally beneficial results as that under consideration.

CHAS. STURT, Chairman.

CHAS. BONNEY, Secretary.

LIST OF SUBSCRIPTIONS RECEIVED YESTERDAY.

The Government of South Australia	.	£200
His Excellency the Governor (absent at Port Lincoln)		
and the Colonists	.	£349. 10s

Such was the state in which I found the question on my return from Western Australia. All had been done that was practicable, until answers were received from the other Colonies, replying to the applications for assistance and co-operation in the proposed undertaking.

Having been always greatly interested in the examination of this vast but comparatively unknown continent, and having already myself been frequently engaged in long and harassing explorations, it will not be deemed surprising that I should at once have

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turned my attention to the subject so prominently occupying the public mind. I have stated that the principal object proposed to be attained by the expedition to the westward, was that of opening a route for the transit of stock from one colony to the other—nay it was even proposed and agreed to by a majority of the gentlemen attending the public meeting that the first party of exploration should be accompanied by cattle. Now, from my previous examination of the country to the westward of the located parts of South Australia, I had in 1839 fully satisfied myself, not only of the difficulty, but of the utter impracticability of opening an overland route for stock in that direction, and I at once stated my opinion to that effect, and endeavoured to turn the general attention from the Westward to the North, as being the more promising opening, either for the discovery of a good country, or of an available route across the continent. The following extract, from a paper by me on the subject, was published in the South Australian Register of the 23rd May, 1840, and contains my opinion at that time of the little prospect there was of any useful result accruing from the carrying out of the proposed expedition to the Westward :—

“ It may now, therefore, be a question for those who are interested in the sending an expedition overland to the Swan River to consider what are likely to be the useful results from such a journey. In a geographical point of view it will be exceedingly interesting to know the character of the in-

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THE NORTHERN INTERIOR.

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tervening country between this colony and theirs, and to unfold the secrets hidden by those lofty, and singular cliffs at the head of the Great Bight, and so far, it might perhaps be practicable—since it is possible that a light party might, in a favourable season, force their way across. As regards the transit of stock, however, my own conviction is that it is quite impracticable. The vast extent of desert country to the westward—the scarcity of grass—the denseness of the scrub—and the all but total absence of water, even in the most favourable seasons, are in themselves, sufficient bars to the transit of stock, even to a distance we are already acquainted with. I would rather, therefore, turn the public attention to the Northward, as being the most probable point from which discoveries of importance may be made, or such as are likely to prove beneficial to this and the other colonies, and from which it is possible the veil may be lifted, from the still unknown and mysterious interior of this vast continent.”

On the 27th I dined with His Excellency the Governor, and had a long conversation with him on the subject of the proposed Western Expedition, and on the exploration of the Northern Interior. With his usual anxiety to promote any object which he thought likely to benefit the colony, and advance the cause of science, His Excellency expressed great interest in the examination of the Northern Interior, and a desire that an attempt should be made to penetrate its recesses during the ensuing season.

As I had been the means of diverting public attention from a Western to a Northern exploration, so was I willing to encounter myself the risks and toils of the undertaking I had suggested, and I

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therefore at once volunteered to His Excellency to take the command of any party that might be sent out, to find one-third of the number of horses required, and pay one-third of the expenses. Two days after this a lecture was delivered at the Mechanics' Institute in Adelaide, by Captain Sturt, upon the Geography and Geology of Australia, at the close of which that gentleman acquainted the public with the proposal I had made to the Governor, and the sanction and support which His Excellency was disposed to give it. The following extract is from Captain Sturt's address, and shews the disinterested and generous zeal which that talented and successful traveller was ever ready to exert on behalf of those who were inclined to follow the career of enterprise and ambition in which he had with such distinction led the way.

“ Before I conclude, however, having drawn your attention to the science of geology, I would for a moment dwell on that of geography, and the benefit the pursuit and study of it has been to mankind. To geography we owe all our knowledge of the features of the earth's surface, our intercourse with distant nations, and our enjoyments of numberless comforts and luxuries. The sister sciences of geography and hydrography have enabled us to pursue our way to any quarter of the habitable and uninhabitable world. With the history of geography, moreover, our proudest feelings are associated. Where are there names dearer to us than those of the noble and devoted Columbus, of Sebastian Cabot, of Cook, of Humboldt, and of Belzoni and La Perouse? Where shall we find the generous and heroic devotion of the explorers of Africa surpassed? Of Denham, of Clapperton, of Oudeny, and of the many who have sacrificed their valuable

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CAPTAIN STURT'S LECTURE.

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lives to the pestilence of that climate or to the ferocity of its inhabitants?—And where shall we look for the patient and persevering endurance of Parry, of Franklin, and of Back, in the northern regions of eternal snow? If, ladies and gentlemen, fame were to wreath a crown to the memory of such men, there would not be a leaf in it without a name. The region of discovery was long open to the ambitious, but the energy and perseverance of man has now left but little to be done in that once extensive and honourable field. The shores of every continent have been explored—the centre of every country has been penetrated save that of Australia—thousands of pounds have been expended in expeditions to the Poles—but this country, round which a girdle of civilization is forming, is neglected, and its recesses, whether desert or fertile, are unsought and unexplored. What is known of the interior is due rather to private enterprise than to public energy. Here then there is still a field for the ambitious to tread. Over the centre of this mighty continent there hangs a veil which the most enterprising might be proud to raise. The path to it, I would venture to say, is full of difficulty and danger; and to him who first treads it much will be due. I, who have been as far as any, have seen danger and difficulty thicken around me as I advanced, and I cannot but anticipate the same obstacles to the explorer, from whatever point of these extreme shores he may endeavour to force his way. Nevertheless, gentlemen, I shall envy that man who shall first plant the flag of our native country in the centre of our adopted one. There is not one deed in those days to be compared with it, and to whoever may undertake so praiseworthy and so devoted a task, I wish that success, which Heaven sometimes vouchsafes to those who are actuated by the first of motives—the public good; and the best of principles—a reliance on Providence. I would I myself could undertake such a task, but fear that may not be. However, there is a gentleman among us, who is anxious to undertake such a journey. He has calculated that in taking a party five hundred miles into the interior, the expense would not be

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more than £300. and the price of ten horses. At a meeting held some time ago, on this very subject, about half that sum was subscribed.—His Excellency the Governor has kindly promised to give £100. and two horses—and I think we may very soon make up the remainder ; and thus may set out an expedition which may explore the as yet unknown interior of this vast continent, which may be the means, by discovery, of conferring a lasting benefit on the colony—and hand down to posterity the name of the person who undertakes it.”

On the same day I received a note from the private secretary, stating that the Governor wished to see me, and upon calling on His Excellency I had a long and interesting interview on the subject of the expedition, in the course of which arrangements were proposed and a plan of operations entered into. I found in His Excellency every thing that was kind and obliging. Sincerely desirous to confer a benefit upon the colony over which he presided, he was most anxious that the expedition should be fitted out in as complete and efficient a manner as possible, and to effect this every assistance in his power was most frankly and freely offered. In addition to the sanction and patronage of the government and the contribution of £100. towards defraying the expenses, His Excellency most kindly offered me the selection of any two horses I pleased, from among those belonging to the police, and stated, that if I wished for the services of any of the men in the public employment they should be permitted to accompany me on the journey. The Colonial cutter, *Waterwitch*, was also most liberally