

ILLAWARRA IN 1836

The following article was recently unearthed by Ray Brown of Bulli. It describes a trip from Appin to Illawarra via the old mountain road at Bulli in August 1836. It was published in *The Saturday Magazine*, London on 5 April 1837. As yet the author, who simply signs himself/herself as 'M' is unknown. It was possibly a member of the Macarthur or Macleay family, but recent research indicates it may well have been written by William Macarthur.

THE Saturday Magazine.

N^o 307.

APRIL

15TH, 1837.

{ PRICE
ONE PENNY.

AUSTRALIAN SCENERY

The district of Illawarra, or, as it is frequently called, the Five Islands, is latitude between 34 and 35 degrees south, on the east coast of New Holland, is about 40 miles to the southward of Sydney, and possessing many of the characteristics of a tropical country : its magnificent scenery is an object of great interest in the colony itself.

The following is a brief notice of an excursion into that district:-

Having sent forward two "*Natives*" on horseback, and a man with a pack-horse, we commenced our little tour into Illawarra. Our first day's journey, from the district of Appin towards the coast, presented nothing remarkable; nor did we see any fine specimens of plants, excepting the Warratah, Blandfordia, and some others, common about Sydney.

The night closed in, and we encamped, or rather bivouacked, sheltered from the wind and dew by a few green boughs, so disposed as to form a rude tent, and with a sparkling fire at our feet — chanting

Under the greenwood tree,

Whoso loves to lie with me, & c.,

were soon sound asleep.

Bright Chanticleer had no sooner given due notice of the approach of day from some settler's farm, than we were up and stirring; — horses sought for, and brought in, and tea-kettle and frying-pan in requisition. A refreshing dip in the neighbouring stream sharpened our appetite for the savoury things in preparation; and, after doing full justice to an excellent breakfast, by seven o'clock we were once more

on the line of march. A ride of nine or ten miles over a sterile district, brought us gradually upon an elevated table-land. Travelling along this some miles, we came to a gentle eminence, terminating the table-land, and forming the summit of the Illawarra mountain. The alteration which here takes place in the soil, vegetation, and landscape, is most remarkable. So instantaneous is the change, as to resemble rather one of those transitions we read of in fairy tales, than the ordinary course of nature. A single step, and you pass at once from a dreary waste, — from the stunted arid vegetation of the sea-coast barrens of Australia, to a region clothed in the richest luxuriance and verdure of the tropics.

Everything combined to make the change the more conspicuous and delightful: a soft breeze cooled the air, which had been somewhat sultry and oppressive; and, at the same time, wafted to our ears the murmuring sound of breakers, denoting that, although hidden from sight by dense masses of vegetation, the sea was not distant.

Deviating a few paces from the path, we found ourselves at once upon the very verge of a rocky precipice, from whence there burst upon us one of the most magnificent spectacles that can be conceived. The mountain, which is upwards of 2000 feet in height, at this spot, approaches within less than a mile of the beach. The glorious ocean was literally close beneath us, and spreading far and wide in boundless distance. The point on which we were standing is the northern extremity of a mountain-crescent; the southern extreme being about 30 miles distant, between Kiama and Shoal Haven. The country between this sheltering crest of mountains and the sea is of great beauty and fertility, and, in many places, quite tropical in its character, resembling, it is said, the interior of Ceylon. After gazing over this extended and beautiful region, and again searching the vast expanse of waters, to catch the faint outline of a passing sail, or trace the rapid flight of some ocean-bird our attention reverted to objects in the more immediate neighbourhood. And if the distant prospect excited admiration, what language can depict the grandeur and novel magnificence which surrounded us. The eucalyptus had almost entirely disappeared, and in its place enormous trees reared aloft their gigantic trunks, and spread forth branches covered with the richest foliage. Here were growing intermingled nearly all the varieties of tree, shrub, or climber, remarkable for beauty, that I had yet seen in the colony, besides many that were entirely new to me. The myrtle, no longer a shrub, reared its massive trunk to more than one hundred feet, before it expanded into a canopy of leaves. The lilly pilly, pittis forensis, sassafras, Illawarra-plum, and others too numerous to mention, each assuming a proportionate magnificence of height, in turn struck us with astonishment. After proceeding for hundreds of yards under a vaulted roof of foliage, so dense as to be impervious to the sun's rays, and seeming, as it were, the majestic dome of a stupendous temple,— a narrow opening would present itself, displaying a prospect of the ocean, or deep vistas through the forest, so disposed as to give full effect, in the distance, to some lofty palm, with its graceful slender stem. Climbing plants, and dendrobiums, too, were her in all their beauty. Where a dead trunk occasionally intervened, it presented no vestige of decay. Immense clusters of the stag's-horn fern, and of the still more graceful asplenium, together with numberless gigantic climbers all contributed to conceal or adorn the ruin. Nor were these beautiful vines and parasites confined to decayed trees alone. Frequently converting the stems of the

palms, and other trees, into verdant columns, and twining amidst their top-most branches, they flung themselves in wild luxuriance to neighbouring trees, forming a succession of festoons, or rather vast arches of foliage, for hundreds of yards together. Nor let me omit the delightful and varied fragrance, which seemed to pervade every portion of this magnificent way.

At length we began to descend the mountain - and such a descent! Sometimes down an almost precipitous inclination, into depths of shadow occasioned by the gorgeous canopy of foliage, of which so feeble a description has been attempted, at others winding under lofty precipices, adorned from top to bottom with fantastic and ever-varying wreaths of verdure. Now overshadowed by groups of palm of of the tree-fern, now under the shade of the most gigantic specimens of the gum and turpentine tree. Numerous birds of brilliant plumage were flitting from branch to branch, and ever and anon, amid the sharp shrill whistle of the parrot, arose the deep melancholy tones of the wong-wonga:—

And, from afar, the bell-bird's plaintive chime,

A note peculiar to Australia's clime.

The Bangalo-palm now first made its appearance. This beautiful variety does not attain nearly the size of the cabbage-palm, but is far more graceful. Of the latter, we noticed some trees, from 100 to 130 feet high. There were whole acres of the Port Macquarrie *Hibiscus*, so justly prized as an addition to our shrubberies; and some parts of the road were thickly strewn with the Illawarra-plum, and other showy berries, which had fallen to the ground. A species of *sterculia*, of lofty growth, at this season out of leaf, was covered with splendid masses of scarlet blossoms, at the height of from thirty to forty feet above the ground.

Our attention was next forcibly arrested by a group of lofty trees, with massive stems, which rose to a great height, without a branch, and then spread forth their ample shade over a wide space. These, upon a nearer approach, we found to be the banyan or figtree.

Not far from this magnificent clump of forest-timber, we came upon a secluded scene of exquisite beauty. Picture to yourself a rich grassy glade, almost free from wood, and of several acres in extent,—watered by a little murmuring rivulet, at once cool and clear, — now gliding over moss-covered rocks, now settling into still transparent pools: palms, acacia, casuarina, and other graceful plants, fringing the banks, and forming a varied foreground, — whilst on three sides, the open space was shut in by the steep acclivities of the mountain, clothed in dense and shadowy vegetation

.....*The champaign head*

Of a steep wilderness, whose hairy sides

With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wild,

Access denied : and overhead upgrew,

Insuperable height of lofties: shade —

Cedar, and vines, and fig, and branching palm.

A sylvan scene; and, as the ranks ascend,

Shade above shade, a woody theatre

Of stateliest view.

Above this, in the opening of the stream, a bold projecting precipice of gray rock, with a diadem of rich verdure, reared its rugged form to the height of 1500 or 2000 feet, the summit being partially enveloped in clouds. On the sunny side

of the meadow, a flock of forest-kangaroos, six or seven in number, were basking and enjoying themselves. Disturbed by the noise of our approach, they bounded swiftly away, and were soon concealed from sight amidst the adjoining thickets.

In this sequestered and beautiful spot we took our lunch. After which, having travelled a few miles through a somewhat uninteresting forest, we halted for the night near the sea-shore, on an open space affording good grass for our horses, and sheltered, by surrounding thickets, from the cold night-wind. Our encampment was not more than 100 yards from the surf. "*Johnny*," a native, of the Cow Pasture tribe, who accompanies us, had never until now been so near the sea. It was quite beyond his comprehension. No persuasion could induce him to approach the breakers. "*What*," — exclaimed he, gazing over the expanse — "*all that water; where are the trees? — there is no end to it.*" A vessel under sail, in the distance, he said was "*a cloud moving on the water*," or "*may be the wind itself.*" The night passed away in undisturbed repose. After several days spent happily amidst similar scenes, and having made a good collection of plants, seeds, and bird-skins, we turned our horses' heads once more towards home, and bade farewell to Illawarra

Paramatta, New South Wales,

August, 1836

M.