

## THE LATER MARITIME PROSE

The scenery here exceeded any thing I had previously seen in Australia—extending for miles along a deep rich valley, clothed with magnificent trees, the beautiful uniformity of which was only interrupted by the turns and windings of the river, which here and there appeared like small lakes <sup>1</sup>

The philosophically intriguing qualities of maritime texts are clearest—however skeletally limned in—in our region's earlier exploratory prose or navigation studies and chronicles. Yet similar elements are still present in subsequent maritime texts, even in those constructed in seemingly a more familiar time and ordered navigational age. The unknown and unknowable and so dangerous element is most evident in the texts recording early landings—where white vulnerability and (mercantile) opportunism are both at that time peculiarly heightened. In the later works of the period, the initial undertone of danger becomes blended with the construction of a coastal zone with its own colonial or administrative demands and social patterns of duty. The maritime prose in this chapter has been chosen comprehensively, yet archival searches beyond the scope of this study are likely to yield more.

Brief journeys, where one's interest and mindset clearly lie elsewhere, must position the passing region as but a conduit with minimal distinctive or savoured features. Yet even within such over-confident acceptance of the unfamiliar, with a life-style elsewhere, the unknown can severely disrupt. Accidents experienced as well as the natural phenomena described, can always emerge as fresh and exciting to fracture the stable construction. Minor difficulties are suppressed in the texts—resulting from the large number of practical journeys undertaken. When such a calamitous event eventually occurs, the texts describing it reveal the degree of an underlying fear and awe which was, presumably, present in most of these 'external' recorders.

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<sup>1</sup> John Uniacke, in George Mackaness, *The Discovery and Exploration of Moreton Bay and the Brisbane River (1799-1823)*, 2 parts (Sydney: G. Mackaness, 1956) II, 19-40 (p. 22).

## LATER LANDINGS

## Thomas Whyte

After Flinders, the next officially known text of a North Coast landing is from the voyage that was undertaken in 1817 by Thomas Whyte as commander of the *Lady Nelson*.<sup>2</sup> Whyte's task was to investigate various transmitted reports of the wreck of the *Trial* somewhere to the north of Port Stephens. He made a formal report to Captain Wallis (Commandant at Newcastle), the text of which was only once published.<sup>3</sup> His background was that of master mariner, one who had been transported for fourteen years in September 1815. Within two months he had been appointed as the master of the *Lady Nelson*, and after a further fourteen months he received a conditional pardon, conferred only eleven days before setting out in pursuit of the *Trial* runaways. He was clearly a competent mariner and zealous in his service, but he also was familiar with the likely doings of the average convict, and, one suspects, less constrained in dealings with that other group excluded from power—the Aborigines.

Whyte's text has the formal details of dates, times, winds, currents, as well as those of the ship's operation, and it stands as the first known surviving text to engage closely with the actual land mass of the North Coast. The movement is initiated by an echo of Cook's observation and of his interest in Smoky Cape—'observed Several Native smooks ahead', going further with 'Made all sail towards them ... [then] hauled around a high headland into a fine spacious Bay'. The prose presents us with an unusual boldness and confidence in approaching so much closer to the land than did the earlier (and larger) ships.<sup>4</sup> Flinders' movement around the (more northern) Solitary

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Whyte, Extract of Proceedings of the Ship from 12 to 28 Jan 1817 During a Search of the Coast, AONSW Reel 6066; 4/1806 p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> James Jervis, 'Notes on North Coast Exploration', *JRAHS*, 26 (1940), 268-272. See Appendix A for my transcription, which varies that of Jervis to restore original spelling, capitalisation and punctuation. The two full length local histories omit the account, both using the later emotive summary from the *Sydney Gazette*. See Marie H. Neil, *Valley of the Macleay* (Sydney: Wentworth Books, 1972), pp. 18-19; and Caroline Carey, *Tales of Trial Bay: An Early History of South West Rocks*. ([Kempsey, NSW]: [n.pub.], 1993), p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> The *Lady Nelson* with its sliding keels was specially designed and brought to the colony for safer coastal navigation. See W.S. Campbell, 'An Historical Vessel—The *Lady Nelson*', *Royal Australian Historical Society Journal*, 3:10 (1916), 483-506 (pp. 484-487).

Islands seems over-cautious in comparison with Whyte's perfunctory 'at 1 P.M. passed between an Island and the Main'.<sup>5</sup>

The landing and examination of the fragments of the wreck are presented purposefully and the actual findings are decisively reported. After they inspect the wreck and the nearby tent, the analysis of the situation appears accurate and authentic, seemingly based, as it is claimed, on close observation. A confident estimate is given for the time elapsed since abandonment of the boat; shoe tracks are found and described; and the wreck is recorded as having damage that could not have been done by the surf, but only by tools working the timbers for other purposes. The deployment of soldiers and the extensive inland expedition each have appropriate military efficiency. The party cover 'from 15 to 20 miles of country that evening', and '20 to 30 miles' the next day. Allowing for exaggeration this working group is presented as one most confident in an unknown land, but rather than possibly just a rapid foray intent on a capture, these journeys have distinct suggestions of human engagement with the land and with its people.

Unlike Flinders at Shoal Bay, here there is reported actual contact with the Aborigines. After they 'fell in with some natives' they are able to determine the known history of the pirates. The following day further communication with a 'Native Boy' corroborates the expected escaped convict numbers. This would require considerable skills in racial communication for such a short encounter with a new language. From Whyte's viewpoint these communications were productive, and we can assume pleasant. While the Aborigines may have had some prior interaction with the English-language speaking absconders, or with whalers, this is an important achievement of inter-cultural communication. Not only does the *Trial* incident mark the first record of Europeans communicating successfully with North Coast Aborigines, but Whyte's account reads well as an introduction to positive contact between the races on the North Coast.

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<sup>5</sup> Most likely Fish Rock.

As the purposes of the voyage are limited to a short foray, the text has a shipboard focus, rather than one on Port Jackson. The confident detail in reporting activities and the findings suits the administrative purposes, but the whole is undercut by the ease of expression—as though not willing to appear too eager. Similarly the lineation in the surviving holograph version adds to this effect. Each new day begins a new line (not as clearly indented as in this transcript), but significantly after a line that is generally filled to the right hand margin.<sup>6</sup> The effect is of a subtle snub at the administration's report requirement—as though suggesting the actual words are irrelevant to the likely readers, and rather that it is filling the space which counts. More positively there is a clear sense of the importance and cohesiveness of the company, and this is what is positioned as maintaining successfully both the group and its activity in the unknown land. Unlike the alarmist accounts of this report published in Sydney,<sup>7</sup> here there is no suggestion of fear for the fate of those heading south. While the recorded 'shoetracks going to the Southward, but very much spaced' indicated speed in the absconders, there is a relaxed note to the whole report. It is as though the writer imagines that the 'pirates' could accommodate themselves to this land in the same way as did his group—a message unwelcome to the penal colony's officials.

This text posits the North Coast as a close shore that is navigable, and the land as traversable, knowable and a potential field for future activities. In all there is the suggestion of co-operation and co-existence with the Aborigines—the early expression of which makes the general overlooking of this text an especial loss to recent studies of race relations.

### John Oxley

While Oxley's first journey to the North Coast was overland,<sup>8</sup> a later journey by sea in 1820 took him into the Macleay with the *Prince Regent* schooner. The report of

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<sup>6</sup> Jervis' transcript runs all into the one paragraph.

<sup>7</sup> See note 3 above.

<sup>8</sup> Treated in detail in the following Chapter.

this voyage shows a detailed description of the movement from sea to otherwise unexplored land:

[30th November 1820] In the evening... I anchored in a small Bay about 3 Miles, N.W. off Smoky Cape... well sheltered from all prevailing Winds and quite secure for Vessels of our class.

... The first Inlet to the North of Smoky Cape was the only one we could enter with the Vessel: in sailing in we found from 10 to 12 feet water on the Bar, at or near high Water, and on which there is frequently a considerable Surf within the Bar; the Inlet spreads to the South, S.W. and West, into extensive Shoal Arms, being fresh Water about five Miles S.W. from the entrance; the Body of Fresh Water in this inlet is very considerable, derived from Marshes and swamps, which extend to the distance of at least 20 Miles Westerly from the Sea Coast, when the Country rises gradually into extensive and lofty ranges of Hills; on the North, tho' still low and Marshy on the shores, the Hilly forest Country is not so remote, approaching from 1 to 3 or 5 Miles. The Soil, where we had opportunities of examining, was sandy and unfertile, the Timber small, even in situations where better might have been expected to grow...

There is nothing in the local Situation of this Inlet or the quality of the surrounding Country that can at present render it an object of any Interest. In Trial Bay, Vessels, prevented by unfavourable Winds and Tides from entering Port Macquarie, will find Shelter<sup>9</sup>

This is maritime navigation prose unlike that previously used to describe the Macleay river mouth. In addition to the technical aspects of the water there is a familiarity with the details of (Australian) land. Over it all there is the confidence of voice of one well experienced in this type of landscape—even the description of trees not growing well where he would have expected it is made to seem like a failure of the land and weather rather than the observer lamenting. The river is mistakenly dismissed as merely an inlet, with its fresh water coming from extensive marshes—a comment verbally echoing Oxley's earlier failure with marshes which prevented his further journeys on the Western Rivers. His summation is from the viewpoint of utility, of 'Interest', and it is a negative one, presenting a swampy unfertile land closely bound by the ever-present mountains, i.e., devoid of interest as even a passageway to lands beyond.

This model of an unsustaining uninteresting wilderness might have been qualified if there were descriptions of its Indigenous inhabitants. However, there is no mention of the Aborigines—an omission which is particularly surprising considering the long overland journey which he had recently undertaken and the close familiarity with similar (North Coast) territory and its people that this would have brought. Surely

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<sup>9</sup> John Oxley, 'Report by John Oxley on his examination of Trial Bay, Port Macquarie, and Hastings River', 27 Dec. 1820, *Historical Records of Australia*, Series 1 Vol 10, pp. 487-492.

within the ten days that were now spent on the Macleay and Nambucca there would have been some encounters, and their lack of mention would seem a notable omission from this text. As it remains, Oxley's text is one which reinforces the earlier public view of the *Trial* absconders—a positioning of the Macleay valley as a land where one would readily perish. The very erasure of the Aborigines from notice relegates them to part of a still lurking sense of menace.

### John Uniacke

In 1823, as part of John Oxley's first maritime journey to the Moreton Bay area, John Uniacke had maintained a journal which contains the first close description of the Tweed River.<sup>10</sup> Neglect of this specific text by local historians may stem from the repeated journeys of Oxley (and thereby the difficulty in isolating one 'lesser' visit from another of heroic explorer stature). Also the much later settlement and development of the Tweed has perhaps delayed close attention to this early text.<sup>11</sup> Without the burden of command, that important shaper of the majority of these early texts, Uniacke is free to give a less formal account—one which is bound rather by cultural than administrative expectations.

On the northward journey from Port Macquarie, the wind had caused the vessel to come closer in to shore, thereby enabling the sighting of the river entrance as well as a large island of some interest. Thus the text is constructed in two sections located on the river (Tweed) and the island (now called Cook Island, off Fingal Head), and the chronological narrative alternates its attention between the two locations. On the island we are given geological detail, including a waterspout. There is praiseworthy

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<sup>10</sup> In George Mackaness, *The Discovery and Exploration of Moreton Bay and the Brisbane River (1799-1823)*, Australian Historical Monographs XLIII (New Series), 2 parts (Sydney: G. Mackaness, 1956) II, 19-40. The maritime section concerning the Far North Coast is found on pp. 21-23.

<sup>11</sup> Keats' compendious overview of the three northernmost valleys is the only text to quote extensively from Uniacke's account. Unfortunately the sections on Turtle Is. are omitted, those on the Tweed River are out of order, and there is the added description of the Aboriginal man as 'old' (seemingly from Oxley's log, but unreferenced). Norman Charles Keats, *"Wollumbin": the creation and early habitation of the Tweed, Brunswick and Richmond Rivers of N.S.W.* (Point Clare, N.S.W.: N.C. Keats, 1988) 64-69.

comparison with the similar British formation—the Giant's Causeway. Adding to the generalised scientific description there is considerable ornithological detail, including the shooting and eating of young birds. At the tidal zone, sponges and rock spinach are collected. The capture of seven out of the twelve turtles found asleep on the island is described with glee. So large and 'unwieldy' is one turtle:

that we were obliged to cut its throat on the spot, otherwise we should not have been able to have brought it on board at all'. (p. 22)

For modern readers the recurrent violence of the engagement with this environment can be readily foregrounded. The text expresses the delight of discovery, at first scientific but then it moves quickly to joy in the natural abundance and its suitability as provisions.

The last change in the island section is one of tone to the warmth of fellowship and shared achievement. This builds on the general description of the company as 'we'. Next most common is 'Mr. Oxley and I'. Other principals are named—'Mr. Penson', 'Mr. Stirling'. The text has an ease of fellowship that permits the easy mention of a non-European presence—'accompanied by a native black of the name of Bowen, whom we had brought from Sydney' (p. 22) —admittedly qualified in this phrase by the separation from the group (not part of 'we') in addition to being merely a passenger or luggage. Subsidiary to the action, and performing no useful task until sent for assistance, the inclusion of the named reference is almost ancillary to the overall description.

Discovery of part of a wreck makes the leap of belief to the inference that it must be from the long-lost La Perouse. Eventually artefacts are collected, and while not aiding identification of the ship, the whole adds to a sense of past European historical presence in this land. Rather than a degree of despair that one's own discovery is not the first, such fragmentary detail of others hints at many unknowable past events, where the responsibility of primacy of contact doubtless lies.

Travelling inland on the river, there is an enthusiastic but generalised natural description:

'The country on either side was very hilly, and richly wooded, and the view altogether beautiful beyond description'

and

The scenery here exceeded any thing I had previously seen in Australia—extending for miles along a deep rich valley, clothed with magnificent trees, the beautiful uniformity of which was only interrupted by the turns and windings of the river, which here and there appeared like small lakes, while in the background, Mount Warning (the highest land in New South Wales) reared its barren and singularly shaped peak, forming a striking contrast with the richness of the intermediate country'.

Drawing as it does on elements of the picturesque, here there is an expression of artistic satisfaction in uniformity and surprise, closeness and expanse, contrast and in the overall grandeur to the scene.

Similarly there is some degree of ease in the description of the native inhabitants. First cited is one man and a family group. As an object of observation he is noted for his heavily scarified body. The reactions of the aborigines are foregrounded—first in their self-control as the party landed, for they 'did not appear so timid as the Indians usually are' (p. 23), and then the most prominent figure

'talked very loudly for some time, using much gesticulation and frequently pointing to the other side of the river, where we had observed a number of native huts. We could not, however, obtain from him any information with regard to the object of our search'.

Within a vague generalised European purpose (the 'object' as revealed in the text is nothing more than the search for beauty), there is a claim of an attempt to communicate, later added to by the offer of food—'some biscuit which he tasted and instantly spat out again'. Central to this benign record is the lack of evident Aboriginal hostile intent. There are no weapons visible, bar a stone axe tool, suitably disparaged as 'wretchedly crude', 'hanging at the back' so not intended for ready use, and least hostile—as being on the body of a woman. This account can be seen as akin to the idealised version of Cook's first encounter at Botany Bay, the initial record of European landing and Aboriginal reaction, and hence another first negotiation and symbol of the hoped for forthcoming inter-racial relationship. The perfection of this sylvan setting needs its counterpart in the description of the inhabitants, and so here is given the classical type of noble savage, in family group, much as can still be seen in the artwork of the period.

On the following day, even the assemblage of a large warlike group, all armed, is heavily undercut.<sup>12</sup> It appears in the text almost as an afterthought, where the central action has been the launching of the boat, the change in wind, and the decision to return to the ship and proceed north:

In the meantime a number of natives, amounting to about 200, collected on the shore opposite the vessel, and we could perceive with the glass that they had all spears. They continued quietly watching us till they saw the square sail hoisted and the vessel underway, when they set up a loud shout, and continued dancing and shouting while we were within hearing. (p. 23)

A more nervous recorder may have sensed the potential ambush that most likely had awaited them, and mused thereafter upon their narrow escape from this danger. Yet the aim of this text is to present a benign landscape in all its features. On the return journey, there is no landing on the mainland here, but rather a return to the rich supplies of the island which were welcome to alleviate the scurvy affecting Oxley, Penson and some crew members. (p. 39)

### **Capt. Henry Rous**

A parallel for Uniacke's text is that written by Henry Rous<sup>13</sup>—a writer whose higher (aristocratic) class and various social activities gave him considerable stature in colonial society for the period of his stay.<sup>14</sup> Fresh from duties in India, his activities appear as a local colonial validation of the grand imperial endeavour. In his exploration of the mouths of the Tweed<sup>15</sup> and Richmond rivers, in 1828 in the

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12 Keats (1988) follows the order and tone of Uniacke's account: 'The main body of the Aborigines had apparently kept from view when Oxley and his party traversed the river; but now sensing that the "Mermaid" was about to depart with these strange beings aboard, appeared on the neighbouring beach', (p. 69) and he summarises the Aboriginal response as 'passive first acceptance'. p. 70.

13 [H. J. Rous], 'A Description of the Rivers Clarence and Richmond, in Latitude 28 deg. 9 m. and 28 deg. 53 m. Respectively, &c. in New South Wales. From Recent Observations', *Australian Quarterly Journal of Theology, Literature and Science*, 1 (1828), 352-355. For ease of reference, included herein as Appendix B.

14 Note the glowing account of his farewell dinner, which appears in the same journal issue as the published text of his journey to the north coast. His imposing 6' 3" height must have added to the impact of his innovations in horse-racing and sailing.

15 Rous called this river the 'Clarence', unaware of Oxley's prior naming as 'Tweed'.

*Rainbow*, understandably there is less of a sense of the awe, as would be likely at this date, of engagement with an unknown coast.

The careful but confident movement from sea to land (predominantly water surrounded by land) is well charted in this text. At one level the text records a probing from the sea into the estuaries, recording depths, bars, access details, with all leading to a longer narrow probing of the land via inland waterways—tendrils of the familiar culture moving into the land. In these almost land-locked waterway settings, descriptions are predominantly those of a cautious journey—a quick succession of bearings of location, directions, passageways, impediments and of their being overcome. For the Tweed, the reasonable limit of navigation is located in general terms at 30 miles, but the point of turning (the necessary failure of the probing journey) is effectively disguised. The final recorded branching of the route implies a reduction in the water clearance, and the debris which 'choaked' the passages suggests a permanent physical impediment to progress. But then it is noted that the water deepens beyond this point, i.e., measurements are taken beyond the limit. At this turning point attention moves to the main interest of the report—the vegetation borders to the journey. Its density is noted and the variety listed. Detailed as to its species, and attractive to merchants as a listing of timber products, the list also evokes the lush greenness of the riverbanks, with 'thick foliage' and 'native vines' evoking a rich bounty, combined with 'impenetrable'. There is no reflection on the limited on-shore skills of a maritime explorer, but rather a positioning of the landscape as a challenge to future entrepreneurs. All that then remains is to turn the eye towards the widest possible frame that can be viewed—in effect mapping an inland semi-circle of 'thickly wooded hills' and 'lofty mountains'. The prominent navigational aid, Mount Warning, is located with bearings, and it is suggested that the major river arises from its base, a concept which re-inforces the mountain's pre-eminence both within as well as an outside marker for the region.

For the discovery of the Richmond River there is the added element of filling in the gap in Flinders' chart—an echo of Flinders' own search for gaps in Cook's chart.

As if to stress this new discovery, there is considerable detail of measurements and conditions of the entry to the river. The major waterway is followed for twenty miles, at which point, quite unexpectedly it remained fully navigable. For completeness, two large branches are identified and explored to their limits. Again there is a listing of tree types—tea tree, mangrove, swamp oak, followed by Moreton pines, cedar, yellow wood, palms and gum trees—but here growing on gentle banks and flats of rich soil. As no mountains could be seen that would confine the land or the limit of this passage, the (controlled) surprise of such vast coastal areas is expressed only in the comparative wealth of detail (sufficient to enable land choice to be made from a map) and in the summative understated description—'a remarkably flat country'.

So extensive is this land that the text can readily admit the Aboriginal inhabitants, who appear indirectly by way of their houses—noteworthy at thirty feet in length. There is no attempt to position the Aborigines in this land—even their large number is reduced to four words within the total— 'Many natives were seen'. In this text the Aborigines neither react nor speak in any way.<sup>16</sup> Rather the text maintains a deep silence—as though the crew, the Aborigines and perhaps the land itself are in quiet awe of the commander/writer and impassive in the face of his imperial mission. In contrast to even the distant observations of Cook and Banks, and despite the inland penetration, this text constructs a static land, without fauna or any movement other than that of the mapping observer.

Yet Rous's eye is not the first European one to engage closely with this land. While he was unaware of Oxley and Uniacke's prior visit, his own ship's log records the voluntary surrender of runaway convicts to his own party—a total of nine individuals at three different times—while the published text overlooks their presence, and especially the potential benefit of their detailed information about and prior experience of this land. Two of the convicts were from Port Macquarie, being dropped

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<sup>16</sup> Alternatively, the Log records the late afternoon theft by Aborigines of a survey marker, followed the next morning by a massive exercise [of retaliation?] 'firing four rounds for 22 guns [most 32 pounders] at a mark and marines and small arms men 720 rounds firing at a target.' 28-29 August 1828. [Rous, Henry John], *Log of the Rainbow*, [19-22 Aug 1828], ML PRO 5752, ADM 51/3381.

off at that location on the return journey. Their North Coast knowledge must have been extensive, including detail of the Richmond River to the south of where they were taken on board, but not acknowledged in Rous's account of his subsequent entry. Similar in effect is the anonymity of the published account, which itself works to valorise the explorer figure and bestow on his mission a remote dignity.

At the widest margins of this text's mapping, the rivers are positioned within the nearness to the always close mountains—with the surprising exception of the Richmond. The account of exploration moves to conclusion with what is a virtual listing (separated by paragraph breaks or dashes) of a series of minor river entrances within the region,<sup>17</sup> again echoing Flinders with the charting of a dangerous feature of the Solitaires, before leaving southwards. The final summative comment on the extensive drought suggests that the rivers had less water than usual, but the expression opens itself to wider interpretation—'the rivers must have appeared to disadvantage.' The *advantage* in this text is a mix of commercial usage with the depiction of a North Coast that is a Romantic spectacle for even the determinedly dispassionate observer.

This prose engagement with an unknown coast, where its mapping includes early inland probings, completes the major coastal exploration of the North Coast region.<sup>18</sup>

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### BRIEF PASSAGES

With predominant exploration interest moving elsewhere (to the hinterland, beyond the ranges) there is a gradual increase in maritime texts where the engagement with the North Coast of New South Wales is limited to fleeting impressions, or the confident noting of features, that are found in brief passages within longer works. In

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<sup>17</sup> Including 'Shoal Bay', the entrance to the still unmapped Clarence River.

<sup>18</sup> Oxley, on his journey to Moreton Bay, meets up with runaway convicts, Pamphlett, who produce texts that are vaguely referent to the region. Important as further evidence of European close experience of this North Coast, the actual texts are limited to generalities.

these texts there is some (novelty) interest in recording the few dominant navigational markers/features. Familiarity with the general nature and features of the landscape that is to be passed through encourages a text that is confident, brisk, unreflective, and even derivative beyond intertextuality to cliché. The centre for such writing is often the departure, the destination, or the immediate shipboard surroundings. While the texts of brief passages begin with the relative certainty in several of Flinders' repeated passages (near to shore there were still unexpected rocks), this section will now pass to the later comforts of regular scheduled shipping services with texts formed within a context of business and, eventually, for tourism.

### Alfred Stephen

With the establishment of regular shipping services, the texts of such brief maritime passages introduce a different form of distancing as well as differing constructions of the North Coast. Judge Alfred Stephen made regular circuit tours, including coming to Grafton as acting judge in 1875. He recorded his impressions in a series of diaries,<sup>19</sup> and the section to be considered more closely is from this North Coast visit in early 1875. (See Appendix C.) The diary form had undergone a literary efflorescence in the early nineteenth century with many (always posthumous) publications, and while the social and literary Stephens would have been aware of this,<sup>20</sup> his own record is brief and unpolished. It is more in the manner of the women's diaries to which recent critical attention has been given<sup>21</sup>—where a broadening of the 'literary' can gain much that is not otherwise readily signified.

Unlike the previous official documents considered, the most immediate audience for this work is the writer himself. From this record he can return to a particular date or event and thereby check details—an *aide-mémoire*. There is always

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<sup>19</sup> Sir Alfred Stephen, Diary, 1837-1893, ML MSS 1-126B MSS. 777/2. Herein included as Appendix C.

<sup>20</sup> See *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1991) entry 'Diaries', and *A.D.B.* entry 'Alfred Stephen', vol 6.

<sup>21</sup> See Clarke, Patricia and Dale Spender, eds, *Life Lines: Australian Women's Letters and Diaries 1788 to 1840* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1992).

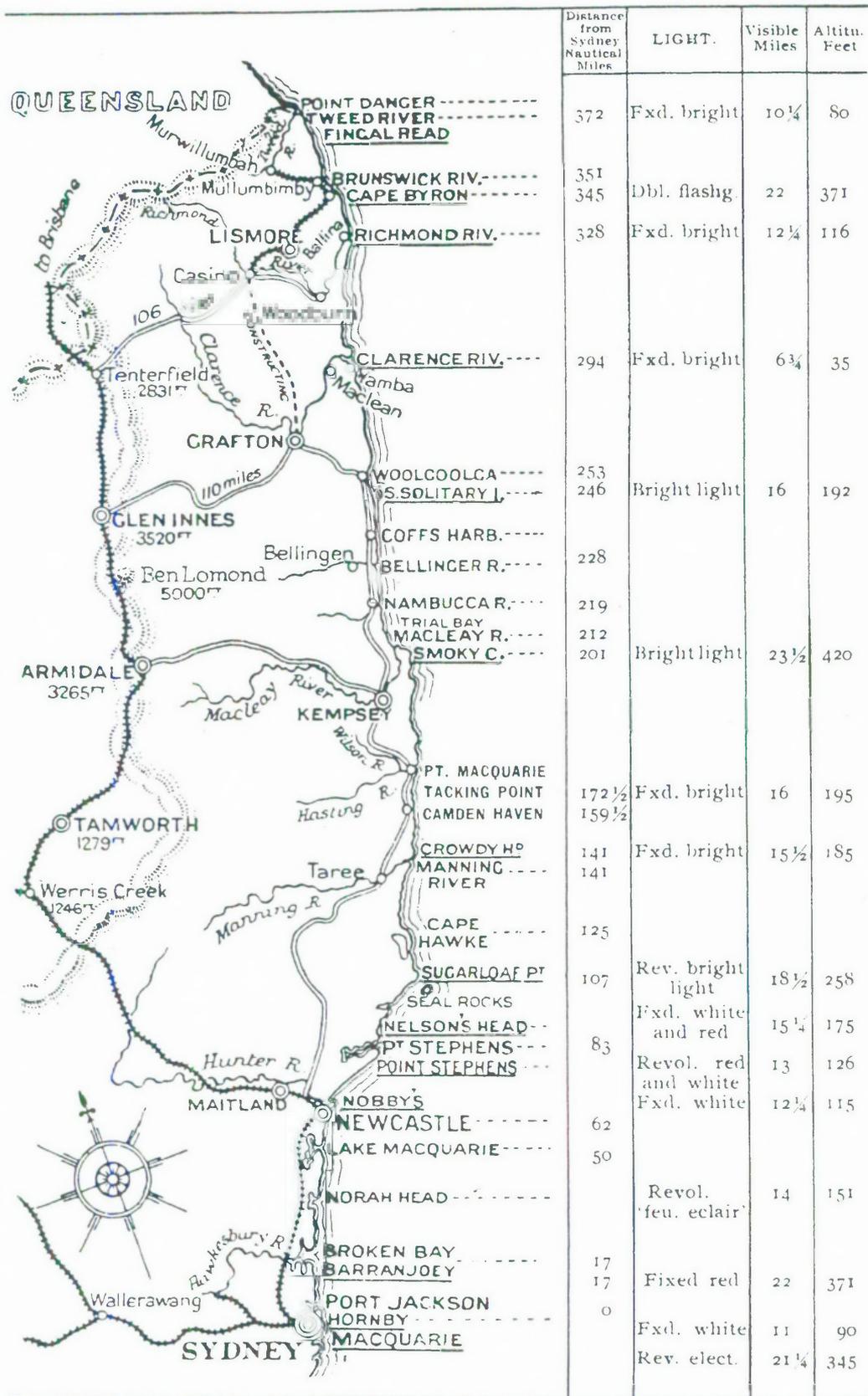


Diagram of the North Coast of New South Wales, showing points of interest to travellers by sea.

Original map from "North Coast Guide" 1909.

the possibility that an entry in the diary might be formally, even publicly, used as evidence. Beyond the self, the other likely audience is the family, and through their mediation, perhaps a broader one of a benign posterity.

The actual text works to put on record the ship's name,<sup>22</sup> times of departure and arrival, weather, and conditions on-board. In a wider sense the simple and factual becomes a record of those aspects for which those in authority are responsible, or to which they must respond. When at sea, coastal features are cause for minor concern—'Passed close to Shore at Port Stephens & at the "Seal Rock". (21 April) Whatever else of the coast that may have been visible is not recorded. Nor is there an expression of interest in the land and people that are being passed. In the opposite of Cook's text, here all is centred on the passage.

Just as navigational details have a wider eye to responsibilities and consequences, so the curt record of names made by a gregarious man,<sup>23</sup> suggests relationships and the exercise of power. 'Capt Sidney' and 'Bowden MLA' need to be taken account of, while on land only two are named—'the Mayor (Page) & another'; 'Captain Sinclair and the Magistrates'. On land the landscape is purely social—people and their buildings. Certainly throughout there is total omission of the Aborigines. Most often the positioning of the writer is remarkable for its certainty and enclosure, a comfortable assertion of role and values, generally cocooned within the cabin of the ship, or within his societal role to be played in Grafton. Beyond the general sense of accountability is one of progress—the movement over bars, penetration of the land, pausing at wharves, all working to define this land through its link with the distant great city and wider civilisation. On the return journey the largest section of prose details the goods taken on board:

May 1 (Saturday) Embarked on board the Agnes Irving  
at 8 a.m. Stopped at all the  
wharfs down the Clarence taking  
on cargo. 1060 bunches of bananas  
8 tons of sugar, 3 tons of tin-ore,

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<sup>22</sup> See illustration in *Early Days on the Clarence: Compiled from Records in the Clarence River Historical Society*, 4th edn ([Grafton, N.S.W.]: [Clarence River Historical Society], 1989) p. 35.

<sup>23</sup> *A.D.B.* entry 'Alfred Stephen', vol 6.

1700 bags (3 1/2 bushels) of  
maize, several cwt of oysters-  
etc. Passed the bar at 2

Unrelated to his specific role, this is the normal style of the farming diaries of the period. Beyond a record of the responsibility taken on by the Captain (overloading?), so positioned in the text this account of loading becomes the North Coast's offering to the city. Just as his welcome records appropriate respect, in a wider most generous sense, it is a payment for his visit.

At sea, even in the 'commuter-like' prose, there is the revelation of occasional danger, introduced here by the hesitant dashes and medial comma:

- As yet, - fine —  
But about sundown the  
wind came from the S.E. & so  
wind gradually increasing  
in strength all night - accompanied by squalls & a  
heavy sea.

2 (Sunday) All day in bed - till the  
evening. Wind changed in the morning to NE but the  
sea continues high & the  
rollers from the E & S. —  
Ship rolls much till evening -  
Abreast of the Seal Rock  
at 3 p.m. 100 miles from  
Sydney. At midnight  
continued rain heavily

Perhaps the lineation captures the rhythm of long hours in a heavy rolling sea. From his bed on the ship—all day denied the distraction of his gregarious habits—and with the elements taking the ship to the limits of human control—the text records the unease of such travel.

Ultimately this text posits the North Coast as a minor part of the larger world of civilisation. It is a place with rewards for those who pursue them, but socially limited, and where nature can still be dangerous.

### **Percy Clarke**

Whether as part of employment or for other purposes, the text of travel becomes that of a tourist when the dominant mode becomes gleeful coverage of scant

in general an unremarkable landscape (echoing Banks), undistinguished by significant features. The text by Clarke<sup>24</sup> is characteristic of the explosion in travel narratives of the second half of the nineteenth century. To give the impression of comprehensiveness for a likely British reader it has a broad sweep over the eastern colonies, and in this overview the North Coast is included only as part of a brief passage from Sydney to Brisbane.

The section recording the North Coast part of the journey is introduced by the perception of the dullness of the location. This is done with a paragraph of appropriately flat style—three sentences all commencing with 'The...!'. Similarly, Cook's image of headlands appearing as islands—from safely well out to sea—is here deflated to 'a long series of low bush-covered hills' and, furthermore, despoiled as 'cleared here and there'. Further detail considers the agricultural richness of the New England<sup>25</sup> and the fauna and nettles of the inland. In all, this is a moving beyond the immediately perceivable to reflections upon evidence seen elsewhere, or to stories told by others (possibly on the vessel). A return to the visible and immediate comes with the consideration of fishing settlements, or rather their lack—'One is astonished to find along the shores of Australia, comparatively speaking, so few fishing townships'. This local observation prompts a quite long and a short paragraph on the fishing industry and its market. Again the immediate is used merely as a starting point for a longer general disquisition.

Despite the North Coast maritime authorial position, the text presents what is largely an inland view, one which is eager to overleap the visible coastline, working towards a larger appreciation of the land within. By omission, the local is disparaged, and even the examples of fishing details are drawn from other regions. These too are expressed in slighting terminology—the sea-slug 'well earning their repellent name', and the drinking by fisher folk with 'the inevitable whiskey-flask' that leads the writer

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<sup>24</sup> Percy Clarke, *The "New Chuan" in Australia*, 2nd edn (London: J.S. Virtue, 1886). The North Coast section covers pp. 244-246, included herein as Appendix D.

<sup>25</sup> Of relevance to the New England, this fertility is juxtaposed against the aridity of the further inland. Without any transition zone (for modern readers this would be most of the continent) 'the most heaven-forsaken, sterile, sandy deserts of the interior rub shoulder with the most fertile spots under the sun.'

and the drinking by fisher folk with 'the inevitable whiskey-flask' that leads the writer to make humour of the intense pain caused by a sting ray. At least this region avoids the final insult which is delivered in the last maritime section (just beyond our North Coast)—The approach to Brisbane lacks in dignity. . . .' In total this is a text which avoids the North Coast, as being beneath serious interest. Other than as a possible site for fishing enterprise, the landscape provides merely a pause in a journey, the significance of which is elsewhere.

### Hume Nisbet

The expansive travelogue gives way to a brevity that verges on commuting a distancing that might be paralleled in a text covering the modern rapid passage of an aeroplane. Only a few years after Percy Clarke's text Nisbet's account<sup>26</sup> is at pains to express speed. In this the salient points of the coastline are listed with a breathless rapidity:

We certainly did not loiter on the way between Sydney and Brisbane under the management of our energetic captain; never had the engines so much work to do, or the piston so many strokes to make up and down. If he was keeping farther out to sea than was his usual custom, he meant to make up the extra distance by extra speed, for we literally boiled along the blue opposing waves.

Past Newcastle, the chief shipping-port of New South Wales, with its fixed white lighthouse of Nobby, which we can see plainly as we pass, it being night time.

Sometimes we lose sight of land altogether as we cross a bay, but we always make up again close enough to the points to let me get good sketching. Past Port Stephens, Sugarloaf Point, Cape Hawke, Crowdy Head, Port Macquarie—one of the most picturesque seaports all along the coast, and centre of a large planting district, the outcome of the productive lands about the Macleay, Hastings, and Clarence Rivers.

Point Korogoro looms up boldly as we shave it, then Trial Bay, where they are making great harbour works, and which is intended to be the main centre of the New England District.

We next sight Smoky Cape, Solitary Island, with its lighthouse, Fish Island with the white waves breaking against its barren sides, Trial Bay, with the very small white granite station of Arakoon, Capes Byron and Danger. We are now in the vast colony of Queensland, and in the region of the great squatting paradise, the Darling Downs. (pp. 13-14)

Added to this traveller's pride in speed is an aim to record (however sketchily) the names and stories of the places passed. It matters not to the recorder that the names

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<sup>26</sup> Hume Nisbet, *A Colonial Tramp: Travels and Adventures in Australia and New Guinea* (London: Ward and Downey, 1891). The North Coast voyage is given in pp. 13-14, with background on pp. 1-13. Nisbet was a prolific author of narratives with settings ranging across the British Empire.

of sites are listed out of order. The sequence in the final two paragraphs above reveals an idiosyncratic mapping, with the disorder centred on Trial Bay (listed twice).<sup>27</sup> This North Coast is defined largely by the slight but repeated danger of travelling close to the headlands—'Point Korogoro looms up boldly as we shave it, then Trial Bay, . . .'. Cook's 'islands' become mere frisson for a tourist's delight.

The total section of the text empowers the writer (and reader) to participate in the seemingly informed gossip of the traveller looking for diversion. The parallel or ideal for this type of text would have been a North Coast that was a strip sketch, such as drawn by Robert Brown on Flinders' voyage. Rather this is a text which posits the North Coast as a series of names, occasionally with a note added. Travelling perhaps as close as did the *Endeavour* there is no reference to the Indigenous inhabitants. Nor do the general reflections on farming or fishing mention them, not even in disparagement. For this text they are beneath observation. Despite its illusion of an accurate record, its aim is merely for brief amusement along the way.

\* \* \*

### INTERRUPTIONS

All maritime journeys are fraught with danger. Only in the texts of disasters is the normally sub-textual fear allowed fuller expression. When disasters actually occur then the texts produced explore the human reaction to the vast forces of nature. This may consist of the heroic positioning of as many characters as possible, named so as to attest in semi-legal style the good character of one's fellows *in extremis*—the style of such texts foreshadowed in the clipped note form of (Judge) Stephens, treated earlier. There is also the potential for a text that attempts a melodramatic sweeping description.

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<sup>27</sup> The sketching of headlands that the writer was also undertaking on this journey may be the cause of the disorder here. The prominent public works at Trial Bay may have taken attention away from the written record. These sketches are not included in the text.

### James Watkin

On the evening of 1882 occurred the loss of the *New England*, which was recorded at length by James Watkin in a diary.<sup>28</sup> The two Wesleyan ministers, the author and his father, were passengers on on this vessel. The ship was wrecked in attempting to cross the bar at the Clarence River on its way to Sydney.<sup>29</sup> Although this event is close to the safety of shore, and on the scale of such disasters a small number of lives were lost (eleven) this prose has a full melodramatic treatment.<sup>30</sup>

The text begins in expansive style and layout—handwritten across the double page. Calmly it sets the scene of apparent security and order, including the movements of the major participants—the captain and the pilot. It has the abbreviations (Str, &, Capt) characteristic of private or informal writing, but by the end of the page the writer clearly has on his public 'singing robes'. The crisis is upon them and this is expressed in rhetorical questions:

'shall we pass the danger? Shall we reach the deep sea \_ No!' (p. 128/129)

The change of page accompanies a change of rhythm, with a series of short, compounding utterances:

strikes \_ she trembles. The  
shouts of men are heard \_ the  
men turn aft, the mainsail  
is hoisted to the wind \_ tis all  
in vain \_ Again and yet  
again the labouring groaning  
vessel grounds upon the spit  
her steerage [gear] is gone

<sup>28</sup> Rev. James Entwistle [1882] Watkin, *Family Papers and Correspondence, 1749; 1822-1925*: ML MSS. 713/12 Part 1 CY POS 317. Included herein as Appendix E. Published with some variation in text as: William J. Watkin, 'The Wreck of the *New England*', *New Zealand Wesleyan*, 10 February 1883, pp. 83-84. Recently re-published in *The Wreck of the s.s. New England*, edn by Frank Mack, 3rd edn (Grafton, NSW: [Clarence River Historical Society], 1998) pp. 68-72.

<sup>29</sup> J.K. Loney, *Wrecks on the N.S.W. North Coast* ([Geelong, Vic]: Marine History Publications, [n.d.]), p. 66. See also Eleanor H. McSwan, *A History of Yamba and Iluka* ([Yamba, N.S.W.]: Maclean District Historical Society, 1978), pp. 27-29. The heading in the latter mistakenly gives the year as 1885.

<sup>30</sup> Possibly it was written with the vast loss of life of the earlier wreck of the *Dunbar* (1857) in mind.

her bottom bursts, the  
water floods the engineroom  
with one convulsive effort  
the siren horn gives out  
its expiring groan \_ the fires  
die \_ the ship is cast away (p. 130)

Accordingly the layout changes to single page only, and so on for the remainder of the account.

Throughout, the lineation of this prose strains towards the dignity of poetry, and comes closest to this with a series of dashes at the ends of lines (p. 138). A struggle between good and evil is positioned early with the danger of 'the purpose of the Capt.', the water 'rough [and] the current & the screw [which] drove'. Against this is the innocence of 'the willing ship' and 'the helmsman [who] obeyed orders'. (p. 128/129) Later this struggle becomes focused and personified:

old Ocean has  
her at his mercy \_ he  
comes in wrath and rolls  
his heavy billows at her. She  
rises with half a hope to  
do as she had often done to  
ride triumphantly over \_  
she cannot rise \_ she's helpless,  
beaten, broken, dying \_ The  
green seas rise and rush  
and burst upon and over  
the illfated New England \_ (p. 130)

Even within the convention of describing ships as female, this is a remarkable dwelling upon allusion to rape/death, particularly before the conventional Christian moral message that dominates the last three pages of this text. Subsequent detail continues the Homeric or Virgilian personification, with:

'access ... forbidden by the water' (p. 132)

[the tide] 'took full possession' of the craft (p. 133)

[the waves] 'as if purposing to overtake and prevent the scape' (pp. 133-134)

[the] 'sails lifting and smiting the waves only making them more angry (p. 135)

[and], 'the sea ... means to swallow her' (p. 137).

In positioning the sea as dangerous/violent/bestial/male, there is a parallel locating of the good as the land modified by the human—with the hospitality of hotels and private houses, and particularly the (gendered) hearth of a:

Christian woman named McLean  
... [where]  
the fire was made to  
blaze, the cold wet garments  
displaced by warm & dry ones —  
words — tears of sympathy were  
heard and so truly wo-  
man's heart full of instinctive  
kindness  
suggests and sustains in the min-  
istry of help ... (p. 142)

Respect for womankind earlier led to a positive (or at least neutral) description of the stewardess in the water who 'seizes the leg of a Chinaman', with the danger of drowning both. It is noted that :

he, with human  
fellowship instinct did not try to dis-  
engage himself but strug-  
gled on and soon was  
dragged with his companion  
into the lifeboat. (p. 137)

Rather than express respect for the Chinese man, his courage, skill and determination are denigrated to 'instinct'. A further expression of seeming multi-cultural acceptance appears as bathos when the rescuing boat is:

pulled  
by the Italians, steered by the  
Frenchman, carrying the Eng-  
  
lishwoman, the Chinaman  
the Englishman and the  
Irishman (ask if the Engineer was  
a Scotchman) So does the faith [in god]  
save men, European, Asiatic - any  
man (pp. 138-139)

This text clearly presents a North Coast that is dangerous. Even on the subsequent safe departure 'the dark wreck rests under the restless tide' (p. 144). The only safety presented is the network of fellowship, strength, gallantry and hospitality. The

Christian basis of such links provides a human mapping of the North Coast very different from those previously considered.

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### John McCulloch

Only four years later occurred a disaster with much greater loss of life, but vastly more restrained expression. This was the collision of the *Helen Nichol* and the *Keillewarra* which happened on 8th December 1886, at night, in the vicinity the Solitary Islands.<sup>31</sup> McCulloch recorded the event in a journal,<sup>32</sup> in a style that is more public than private, anticipating the sequence and clarity of detail that might be required by a court.

Such a text details a sequence of the unexpected and catastrophic, the prompt heroic (but misplaced) actions of some, the cool-headed judgement and action of some (including the writer), the fearful ladies who need protection and assurance, the frantic passenger who is stopped by 'a good shaking', and finally the still-dangerous ship escorted to safety. In confronting the dark unknown (both immediate and in possible consequences), the text utilises maritime terms liberally (implying skilled appraisal), and a style of short delineated and definite utterances (suggesting confidence in judgements made and actions taken). The narrator is presented as particularly active and effective—stylistically reinforced by the occasional movement to the first-person plural implying a unified team-effort. Those positioned as 'other' are the women (safely separated and inactive), the distraught passenger who is an irritation to the actions of the company, and the willing but incompetent man at the wheel, who is quietly removed from this task.

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<sup>31</sup> A fuller description of the collision is given in Mike Richards, *North Coast Run: Men and Ships of the N.S.W. North Coast*, 2nd edn (Wahroonga, NSW: Turton and Armstrong, 1980 [1st edn 1977]), pp. 30-32.

<sup>32</sup> John Broadbent McCulloch, *Account of the Collision between the Helen Nicol and the Keillewarra and the Subsequent Sinking of the Latter, 8 Dec. 1886; with Notes on the McCulloch Family 864-1507*, (ML DOC 1145, 1886). Included herein as Appendix F.

In its construction of a North Coast this text relies upon a man-made network, mapping a grid of frequently passing ships (tragically intersecting in this case), and locating a series of safe havens, interspersed with natural dangers. Foremost amongst these dangers are the Solitaries, against a long background of the protruding headlands (as in Nisbet's text above). Perhaps surprisingly, the sea itself is described with little fear; here it is a known or given on which the best efforts of mankind can operate.

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These more early landings, trade-oriented and personal maritime texts of the North Coast of New South Wales partly reveal a discrete zone with its links with the wider world. Certainly there is no evidence of the urgency of early settlement or of the incorporation into the Empire that is focussed upon so prominently in recent scholarship with its larger nationalist or (anti-)imperial core. Rather there is a body of writings which is characterised by a range of individual ambitions and perceptions, with their omissions, mistakes, and attempts to map a location or tell a story with which either their official employer, or individual human imagination, can feel comfortable. In common amongst these works is a light probing of the land. Even under the exaggerated dignity of command of Rous, or under the voluble piety of Watkin, there is an underlying sense of the land not being truly known.

## THE PROSE OF LAND EXPLORATION

The forest hills and other rising grounds in the neighbourhood are covered with large kangaroos; and the marshes, which in some places border on the port, afford shelter and support to innumerable wild fowl. <sup>1</sup>

At the outset it is acknowledged that the North Coast region must have had recounted and, perhaps orally transmitted, traditions of travelling there, accounts progressively developed over millennia, and that their long repetition and vast symbolic or cultural meaning must dwarf the responses of the texts under current consideration. In the words of the editors of *The Oxford Book of Australian Travel Writing*:

For Aboriginal Australians, identity was—and for many still is—bound up in the travelling of the land; possession was confirmed not by title deed but in the very movement from place to place.<sup>2</sup>

In this the contemporary editors implicitly acknowledge their—and our—limitations in ever possibly coming to grips with the Indigenous texts and so they move quickly on to their selected English language works. While similarly limited for the texts pre-written record, a regional study offers some opportunity to move further towards a new shared cultural understanding, first through detailing the *de facto* possession of the land and a feeling for its possibilities, as enacted through the journeys of the Europeans, and secondly through the accounts of actual contacts between the early cultures that were recorded in these texts.

There is some blurring of the chronological or progressive classification as the maritime texts merge into those that are predominantly land-based. As is to be seen in Rous's journal, the maritime prose contains accounts of actual landings, and while the

<sup>1</sup> John Oxley, *Journals of Two Expeditions into the Interior of New South Wales: Undertaken by Order of the British Government in the Years 1817-18* (London: John Murray, 1820 [Australiana Facsimile Editions No.6, Adelaide. 1964]), pp. 328-329.

<sup>2</sup> *The Oxford Book of Australian Travel Writing*, ed. by Ros Pesman, David Walker, and Richard White (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996) p. ix.

eye gradually focuses on and penetrates the land, there is, in this prose, the maintenance of a certain distanced maritime or sea-based positioning. Conversely, the texts of land journeys considered in this chapter (those of John Oxley and Governor Macquarie) preserve small elements of a maritime perspective—as if the true or most significant view of the North Coast had lingered long as being one from the sea. All in all, these several discernible characteristics reflect the gradual movement of a European sensibility, from a comparatively slight and distanced view of the coast into a closer appreciation of the land—marking also the early stages of its appropriation. Oxley' and Macquarie's texts were selected for their pre-eminent detail and influence.

As the local perspective is usually focused essentially on a particular river valley, such a treatment necessarily draws upon a small part of the texts of the overall journeys, as well as a small number of perceptions and descriptions that can be common to the whole region. So while there may be close engagement with the details of a particular incident—such as Oxley noting the prior presence of Europeans<sup>3</sup>—such evidence is given little consideration as to its place in the wider sphere of national or, more particularly, regional histories. Even within the locality, rather than publication of the whole local section, or large parts thereof, there has generally been a highly value-charged selection of what is deemed to be significant detail of the most distinctively local. Thus in the Hastings Valley there is considerable use of Oxley's Balboa-like description of the ocean and valley itself as first glimpsed from Mount Seaview—the first European particularisation of this valley, and one coupled with his expressions of joy. It should be noted that Oxley's text is considered in local histories in a degree of particular detail that exceeds all other writers considered in this current study. Thus his journey is summarised in narrative by Frank Rogers,<sup>4</sup> while McLachlan quotes him sequentially with close commentary. It must be added that Blomfield, with his main interest in the massacres of later decades, quotes only

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<sup>3</sup> Iain McLachlan, *Place of Banishment: Port Macquarie 1818-1832* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1988), p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> *Port Macquarie: A History to 1850*, ed. by Frank Rogers (Port Macquarie: Hastings District Historical Society, 1982).

Oxley's positive encounters with Aborigines, thereby leaving a misleading peaceful impression of the explorer and his progress.<sup>5</sup>

On the topic of 'colonial' journeys (usually by land) there has been considerable recent theoretical interest shown. Starting with the special 1991 issue of *Australian Cultural History*,<sup>6</sup> studies of texts of travel, particularly those of the nineteenth century, have been increasingly seen as vital sites in what Mary Louise Pratt<sup>7</sup> calls the 'large-scale effort to decolonise knowledge'. This interest is widespread and merges into the analyses to be found in the literature of modern tourism.<sup>8</sup> The work of Van Den Abbeele<sup>9</sup> is a particularly detailed and useful analysis of travel as used as a metaphor in texts. He describes an 'economy of travel' which attempts to balance the insecurity or 'menace of irreparable loss' with potential gain in 'greater riches, power, experience, wisdom ...'. In this, a home must be posited as a reference point, and this

'privileging of the *oikos* in the economy of travel... underpins the ethnocentrism and imperialism that have consistently marked Western thought even in its best efforts to "comprehend" the other.'<sup>10</sup>

All journeys have some element of need, a want that is prompted by a lack or inadequacy in the home, or by whatever is positioned as the home within the particular text. This is applicable to the North Coast land travellers under consideration and it provides an amplification of the approaches taken in earlier chapters. In addition to the transgressive nature of much travel, there is an emphasis upon the transient perceptions of journeys and upon the eye to the 'home'—evidenced in the two North Coast journeys to be considered here. The detailed journal of John Oxley stands alone in this early period, while that Governor Macquarie has been selected from a range of

<sup>5</sup> Geoffrey Blomfield, *Baal Belbora: The End of the Dancing*, rev. edn (Chippendale, NSW: Alternate Publishing Co-operative, 1986 [1st pub. 1981]), p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> See in particular: David Goodman, 'Reading Gold-Rush Travellers' Narratives', *Australian Cultural History*, 10 (1991), pp. 98-112; Alan Mayne, 'An Italian Traveller in the Antipodes: an historical rite of passage', *Australian Cultural History*, 10 (1991), pp. 58-68; M.N. Pearson, 'Pilgrims, Travellers, Tourists: the meanings of journeys', *Australian Cultural History*, 10 (1991), pp. 125-134.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Donald Horne, *The Intelligent Tourist* (McMahons Point NSW: Margaret Gee, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Georges Van Den Abbeele, *Travel as Metaphor: from Montaigne to Rousseau* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Van Den Abbeele, pp. xvii-xviii, xxv.

(more constrained) brief works written by officials. Both texts selected evidence a predominant concern with the exploration and appropriation of the land for the Crown, and a desire to present all activity as an orderly progress.

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In military terms, land is not won until traversed or occupied by the infantry. As might be expected from the British services' background of many early and later Australian administrators, their role in approving, planning and memorialising for later use the exploration of our country shows a long continuing if sporadic emphasis on the land journeys. After the initial acknowledgement of (brief) maritime contact—especially by Cook—the valorisation of explorers has been constructed with an essential emphasis on the land. By way of example, the 1958 canonical Fitzpatrick edition of excerpts, *Australian Explorers*, took this trend even further and chose to cite only the land expeditions.<sup>11</sup> Recent works which have addressed the texts of exploration, including the wider view of their constructions and uses, are those by Dixon, Carter and Ryan.<sup>12</sup>

In the early nineteenth century the major cultural model for the great New World journey was the Lewis and Clark expedition across the continental U.S.A., undertaken from 1804-1806, the published journal of this transit appearing in 1814 and becoming widely read—by both a global and colonial readership. This background source is used in detail by Robert Dixon in his analysis of colonial textual culture, through examination of the texts of Macquarie and Oxley, and to those of the later Australian explorations of Sir Thomas Mitchell. This recent book argues convincingly that, so influential was the publication of this journal, a new standard of exploration prose was set, with conventions and tropes established, which while it was not

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<sup>11</sup> *Australian Explorers: A Selection from their Writings*, ed. by Kathleen Fitzpatrick (London: Oxford University Press, 1958).

<sup>12</sup> Robert Dixon, *The Course of Empire: Neo-classical Culture in New South Wales 1788-1860* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1986). Paul Carter, *Living in a New Country: History, Travelling and Language* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992). Simon Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye: How Explorers Saw Australia* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1996).

slavishly followed, could not be readily ignored. Carter considers the production of exploration narratives in the context of a nationalist perspective, with such an appeal to contemporary readers that soon the standard publication of this sort would become two volumes of up to six hundred pages. He notes the mixture in style of veracity and romance, and points out that revisionist biographies alert readers to the constructed nature of the self in these journals, particularly in the finally published versions. Ryan then subjects these views to a finer scale and stresses the use of the explorer's selective (and conditioned) eye to construct a land and people as expected by a European viewer. Ryan's work clearly sets out to 'interrogate the writings of those figures — the explorers — who are icons of the discovery of new lands to be occupied.' <sup>13</sup> He shows the choices made, including the necessary spaces and omissions signalled within the texts themselves, in addition to the cultural forces that shaped their production and publication.

Yet even with the open probing of these modern critical examinations, there is a limitation to the traditional (nationalist) canon of exploration—those who first landed, circumnavigated, crossed the mountain barrier, essayed the riddle of the western rivers, or who endured and, perhaps survived, the Centre. A regional perspective permits a similar 'against the grain' reading of the same texts that are part of the continuing dominant nationalist discourse, from a theoretical base that reveals much of that discourse, but also from a base of regional significance. So there is an opening or window of hitherto marginal or minor works for our serious investigation. In the nationalist discourse it is rare for many of the actual texts of early journeys to be culturally, let alone totally, preserved as 'icons'—rather it is merely the names of the leaders—preserved still in names of highways, local administrative bodies, motels and the like. While the briefest of outlines of their travels continues to be transmitted in (compulsory) education, the texts, as detailed documents to peruse, are generally forgotten. Of those treated in this section, and indeed this whole work, only Oxley has

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<sup>13</sup> Simon Ryan, p. 3.

such status that might both nationally and regionally remind one of Cook, whose own standing remains however unassailably global.<sup>14</sup>

Another modern work, not Australian but relevant to the nineteenth-century writers under consideration, reflects the revisionist sweep of post-colonialism. In it the specific detail of observation of nature has been closely linked with the very concept of Euro-centric expansionism:

natural history asserted an urban, lettered, male authority over the whole of the planet; it elaborated a rationalising, extractive, dissociative understanding which overlaid functional, experiential relations among people, plants, and animals [and] created ... a utopian, innocent vision of European global authority.<sup>15</sup>

The closer engagement with the natural history of the North Coast by several travellers can be useful in the light it can cast upon such claims: the comparatively small regional scope can be a sample test of the larger global claim as to male records of exploration, traversal and penetration.

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### Lieut. John Oxley

Oxley is best known for his (failed) pursuit of the inland rivers, and the dominant nationalist discourse of exploration generally overlooks his return from the second inland journey, to the North Coast of N.S.W., and then south to Sydney. That journey by land from the west of the ranges to Port Macquarie in 1818 is his first visit to the area, pre-dating the maritime visit which was considered in the previous chapter, with its distracted uninvolved text more notable for its omissions. The land route he chose on this occasion took him via the hitherto unknown Liverpool Plains, over a

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<sup>14</sup> Despite the wide distribution of Eric Dunlop, *John Oxley*, Australian Explorers (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1960), even in schools of the North Coast region, Oxley's journey to Port Macquarie is generally overlooked. The exception is the Mount Seaview prospect, and his explorer icon status in New South Wales rests largely on his journeys to the western rivers. Oxley's role in the discovery of Moreton Bay and its subsequent settlement has given him wider recognition in Queensland—an example of a region (state) drawing formative identity from early exploration.

<sup>15</sup> Pratt, pp. 38, 39.

rugged section of the Dividing Range, down into the Hastings River valley, and finally back southwards by the coastline to the small settlement at Port Stephens, and then on to Newcastle and Sydney. It was a journey that necessarily brought him into a much closer contact with the land than was the case with the earlier European maritime visitors. The prime measurement of the maritime mapping, the angle of the sun at its zenith, now gives pre-eminent place to co-ordinates, bearings, triangulation, inclinations, and declinations. This was an official journey by the then Surveyor-General, although the decision to proceed directly to the coast across the mountain barrier was made by Oxley alone, by taking a wide view of his instructions, and without any such specific reference or direction from Sydney. There is, to be sure, some nervous justification, but the author is mostly confident in his determination to proceed into unknown coastal lands. Oxley then proceeds in a manner likely to gain official approval— giving copious detail, in a literary style, and praising the qualities of his team under various hardships.

Despite its perhaps deceptive appearance of simple daily recording—David Malouf somewhat trustingly accepts this seemingly diurnal construction: 'Each day, like a dutiful schoolboy, he writes up in his journal the country he has crossed',<sup>16</sup> —yet the major text appears only after the lapse of a considerable time for any revision deemed necessary. In fact, a shorter early version exists as Oxley's initial letter to Governor Macquarie.<sup>17</sup> The major text produced has a substantial coverage of both expeditions inland, as well as the long awkward coastal conclusion to the latter, publication reaching the (London) readership within two years of the events described. The cultural context of the text's production and the shaping of the journey to an acceptable model is interestingly bound up with that of two earlier writers previously

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<sup>16</sup> David Malouf, Boyer Lectures, Lecture Two (of six): 'A Complex Fate', broadcast Sunday, 22 November 1998, ABC Radio National. Transcript from: <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/boyers/98boyer2.htm>, accessed 23 Jan. 1999.

<sup>17</sup> The major text is John Oxley, *Journals of Two Expeditions into the Interior of New South Wales: Undertaken by Order of the British Government in the Years 1817-18* (London: John Murray, 1820 [Australiana Facsimile Editions No.6, Adelaide. 1964]). The shorter version, the letter dated 1 November 1818, is included as an Appendix to the major text, pp. 381-387. With some variations the letter also appears as Oxley, John, letter to Gov. Macquarie, 1 Mar. 1819, *H.R.A.*, Series I, Vol. IX, p. 30.

treated. Flinders' substantial text was published (in London) only three years before Oxley's first expedition, that writing then setting a new standard of heroic (seemingly lone) investigation of an unknown largely uninhabited land. Oxley transfers the earlier quest (Flinders' search for a navigable river) into an inland setting. Just as Flinders himself was desperate to emulate Cook's astounding discoveries, so—nearly twenty years later—Oxley wished to emulate the, by then, similarly near deified figure of Flinders. Even Flinders' coinage 'Australia' was acknowledged and increasingly used by the Governor in the period immediately before this second journey by Oxley.<sup>18</sup>

In Oxley's early journey, it appears that whatever glory remained for the actual discovery of an inland sea was within the reach of that expedition. And so, on Oxley's longer second voyage, as the text struggles to find new success to assuage the previous failure,<sup>19</sup> it should be no surprise that Flinders is quoted, and corrected, and that his charts are a clear presence throughout. The second writer of influence is now Sir Joseph Banks, the powerful President of the Royal Society, formerly the patron of Flinders, and now more closely linked, on Oxley's first journey inland, as the patron of Allan Cunningham—the botanical collector for Kew gardens.

For an ambitious young man such as Oxley,<sup>20</sup> imitation of the textual models of continental exploration by the earlier Lieutenants, Cook and Flinders, was only part of the answer. It may have been with some pride that eventually he could be linked with these two earlier navigators by the flourish of the title page of his published journals which declared him—'Surveyor General of the Territory and Lieutenant of the Royal Navy'. But such links were small and inadequate, and outdated, for a new model for such a vast continental exploration had emerged—one being land-based, covering a

<sup>18</sup> *H.R.A.*, Series I, Vol. IX, p. 747.

<sup>19</sup> M.H. Ellis, *Lachlan Macquarie: His Life, Adventures, and Times*, 4th edn (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1965), p. 434-435.

<sup>20</sup> See his early letter to his brother: John Oxley, 'Letter to his brother Henry', JOL MSS OM81-3, 15 Nov. 1810. Also see his struggles with limited qualifications to gain appointment as Surveyor-General, his failed attempt at marriage to John Macarthur's daughter, and his support for Macquarie turning quickly to criticism when the balance tipped against the Governor. E.W. Dunlop, 'Oxley, John' in *A.D.B.*, Vol. 2, 1967, pp. 305-307. On the methods he used in pursuing this ambition, Elizabeth Macquarie's view is described thus: 'among the plotters, she saw Marsden and that Iago, Oxley, as the two most artful'. John Ritchie, *Lachlan Macquarie: a Biography* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1986), p. 164

long period (1804-1806), with a large company, and led by two Captains Lewis and Clark. Recording that epoch-making continental expedition, its surging westwards, its claiming the land and negotiating with its occupants, confronting vast natural difficulties, were the journals of this North American expedition, as written up by Biddle and published in 1814. Anticipated for several years after the 1807 publication of Sgt. Gass's brief journal from the same expedition, these fuller journals caused amazement through their broad scope and details of skill and perseverance, and such an impact did they make that many of their elements became the inevitable tropes for subsequent journeys of exploration in other lands. Indeed, Robert Dixon traces this cultural influence through Lord Bathurst to Governor Macquarie, and on to Oxley.

With his ambition, Oxley is more than likely to have responded readily to any hints in this direction. Also likely is the influence of the Lewis and Clark expedition through Biddle's 1814 volume being reviewed in extensive detail in the *Edinburgh Monthly* and the *Quarterly Review*.<sup>21</sup> The volumes containing these reviews were actually part of Oxley's library.<sup>22</sup> The *Quarterly Review* in particular shows the general background of international knowledge and exploratory competition that would have stirred Oxley to greater efforts. The review itself takes an Imperial stance against the United States, claiming that the success was partly due to the British expedition of Carver fifty years earlier which is, indeed, one source freely used by Lewis and Clark, but without acknowledgement.<sup>23</sup> The honour of the King is brought to bear and the American Revolution disparaged:

The promotion of such discoveries is one of the glories of the present reign: government approved the enterprize, and it was on the point of being realized when the troubles in America began. (p. 318)

Pride in scientific achievement and its published product is added to the chauvinistic and deprecating tone of the account of the endeavour:

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<sup>21</sup> Anonymous reviews of Lewis and Clark in *Quarterly Review*, 12 (1815), 317-368, and *Edinburgh Review*, 48 (1815), 412-438. Note also, that Flinders' publication is reviewed in the same volume of *Quarterly Review*, 12 (1815), 1-46.

<sup>22</sup> John Oxley, Personal Papers, Auctioneers Catalogue of John Oxley's library and effects, ML A5322, CY3658, 1828.

<sup>23</sup> *Quarterly Review*, 12 (1815), 317, 319.

Had the expedition been executed under the auspices of the British government, it would have been fitted out with characteristic liberality; draftsmen and naturalists would have been attached to it, and the official publication might have vied in beauty and excellence with that of Cook's voyages. (p. 318)

Here is ample justification and direction for an ambitious young official then about to undertake continental exploration for England. A British expedition could expect glowing reviews and praise from this reviewer. Yet there is also notice of the need for caution with texts. The repeated use of the minor journal of Sgt. Gass for cross-checking, and subtle undercutting of the leaders' work, acts as a reminder of the qualifying power inherent in any texts written by subordinates.

This general background indicates the increase in the political and literary value of such journals from James Cook onwards, and Oxley's journal is the first to deal with Australian material after the publication of both Flinders' and the Lewis and Clark texts, with their mix of factual and literary approaches. Robert Dixon traces the specific tropes from the United States edition through time and space to Mitchell's journals, and it is reasonable to agree with him that there had emerged by then a recognisable genre of sweeping continental exploration, and that it may have been more broadly shared than was formerly considered. Some specific tropes which he notes, within a series of prospects, are: the westward journey; the 'mouldering pile' of an earlier habitation as evidence of an occupation in the past that failed; new coastal settlements; barriers to progress; the mountain pass; and finally the 'garden' of the interior. Dixon locates several of these in the first and early part of the second journeys (that is, before the North Coast section), but then proceeds to examine Oxley's journal as it refers to the tablelands as being interesting, particularly for its variation from the expected pattern of continental exploration. Frustrated by the geography, Oxley's journal continues in a political and literary attempt to re-develop the figurative constructions anew. Instead of moving westward, the tropes are inverted to the east, and the journal reaches its climax with the first ecstatic prospect of the ocean from Mount Seaview. Yet to stop here, as does Dixon, is to ignore much of the latter part of the journal, and how the received model fares when the people and lands actually

encountered do not accord with its approach. After the failure in the west to re-enact or to expand on the expected models, the North Coast section shows a lone attempt to pare the pattern to its essentials, to respond to the unknown land and, ultimately, to empower new coastal metaphors.

Coming from the discoveries of the fertile Liverpool Plains—a discovery that is so positioned as to justify the whole journey—Oxley's arrival on the North Coast is foreshadowed in repeated anticipation during the difficult progress towards an already determined coastline. This journey is a forerunner of many like later ones by escaped convicts or by the earliest squatters—the audacious approach to the North Coast, via its towering western boundary, down towards the rugged drops and spectacular waterfalls that mark the transition from high country to the low coastal land. The suddenness of these cliffs and cataracts presents an area that is difficult but spectacular, dangerous but also sublime. Seemingly belying the lack of (non-local) attention given to the North Coast section of Oxley's journal, both Robert Dixon and David Malouf have quoted Oxley's description of waterfalls as early examples of the recognisably magnificent in an Australian response to the land. In general, Dixon saw Oxley as 'drawn to the sublime wilderness as the most challenging and, potentially, the most rewarding field of endeavour.'<sup>24</sup> In the waterfall description he specifically saw a style:

'designed not primarily to record facts but to convey the essential qualities of sublimity: incomprehensible size and power, obscurity, and an impression of danger that approaches a state of delirium.'<sup>25</sup>

Malouf goes further, locating a change after the description of a kangaroo chased by dogs to its death over the cliff prompts a comparison with Wordsworth:

Next day, Oxley's whole literary apparatus swings into action at last, and it is the appearance in the landscape of that literary ghost, the enabling image of Wordsworth's hart, as much as the country itself, that brings the landscape he has encountered into the realm of what he can now express.

"Quitting this place," he writes, "we proceeded up the glen, into which many small streams fell from the most awful heights, forming so many beautiful cascades. After travelling five or six miles we arrived at that part of the river at which, just after passing through a beautiful and level though elevated country, it is first received into the glen. We had seen fine and magnificent falls, each one of which excelled our admiration

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<sup>24</sup> Dixon, p. 98.

<sup>25</sup> Dixon, p. 99.



Map of Oxley's Overland Journey

in no small degree, but the present one so surpassed anything we had previously conceived possible, that we were lost in admiration at the sight of this wonderful natural sublimity." And there it is at last, the Australian sublime. No sense here of that limiting of local possibility in which the earliest of our poets, Barron Field, finds that the only rhyme our language offers for Australia is 'failure'.<sup>26</sup>

So the boundary of the North Coast marks a liberation in both exploration prose and in the sensibility of record. It provides the opportunity to echo the text of Lewis and Clark at the Great Missouri Falls, a description highlighted in both the reviews in Oxley's possession. Malouf's quotation from Oxley stops immediately short of the geographic limit imposed on the sublimity: 'scarcely to be exceeded in any part of the eastern world'.<sup>27</sup> This is a clear reminder of the vast falls recently announced/described in the 'western world', and an indication that this writer is concerned to be seen to be participating in the same discourse of exploration and wonder—at a world-wide level. Furthermore, the reference to Wordsworth adds a contemporary literary awareness,<sup>28</sup> one which was likely to impress the N.S.W. Judge Advocate, Barron Field—perhaps seen as a sort of literary patron—who before leaving England had had a small but direct involvement in the Romantic poets, and whose admiration for Wordsworth was clear.<sup>29</sup> In sum, at this western boundary of the North Coast, there is placed in the record a literary justification for the whole journey, and indirectly for Oxley's unexpected choice to proceed directly to the sea. The imperial explorer is empowered by both his discovery of features, which are traditionally described in terms of the sublime, and by his discovery of the language in which to express this construction. Barron Field's role is not one that can be contrasted to Oxley (as by Malouf above), but rather, particularly in this region, is Field's role one which helps to liberate and articulate the local possibilities.

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26 The quotation is from Oxley, p. 299.

27 Oxley, p. 299.

28 Wordsworth was published in the same journals held by Oxley.

29 *Barron Field's 'Memoirs of Wordsworth'*, ed. by Geoffrey Little ([Sydney]: Sydney University Press, 1975), pp. 8-9, 12. Earlier in the same journey, Oxley had named 'Field's River, in honour of the Judge of the Supreme Court', Oxley, p. 282. A closer textual link between Oxley and Field on the journey is a private letter sent from the Macquarie River, following a copy of the journal to be kept secret from Governor Macquarie. John Oxley, 'Letter to Barron Field', JOL MSS OM79-17/36, 21 June 1818.

Local histories usually echo Oxley's excitement on his first sight of the sea, thus distinguishing this point from a blandness of inland journeying, and they begin their committed discussion of the region from this point. In effect such works attempt to mark the arrival (by land) of Europeans within the valley. The emphasis on the prospect from Mount Seaview shows a remarkable outward looking view, and encoded within it is the persistence of a maritime centred North Coast—as if the most distinguishing feature of the region was still the link with the ocean. M.H. Ellis notes Oxley's affinity with the sea, yet overstates it somewhat:

[they] turned their contemptuous backs upon the riches of the west and made pell-mell for the ocean.<sup>30</sup>

Dixon continues this outward-looking view in his discussion of Oxley's text which ends at Mount Seaview. He points out the link between Oxley's description and the motif of 'gateways' found in Lewis and Clark's journey, and that the prospect 'heralds his deliverance from the mountains'.<sup>31</sup> Within the context of the arduous journey, and its inland failure, the coast represents a relief for the progress of the company, and it affords the opportunity for further useful discoveries. At this point, for Oxley (as a former naval officer), there is a mix of delight in the sea, the joy of finding a sudden panorama, the first viewing of this land by European eyes (from the ranges), the prospect of less onerous progress for his group, and with appropriate literary echoes, and indeed together they form an understandable achievement. Yet Oxley's overall text presents a backward-looking view—a means to enter the inland from the coast. From the Apsley River onwards:

the principle which governed the direction of our course had been to endeavour to make a port on the coast laid down in lat. 30. 45. S., and which I had an idea might probably receive this river, now increased by a multitude of smaller streams, and if so, that it might serve as a point of communication with the fine country of the interior. ... I consider it every way important to know into what part of the coast these waters are discharged.<sup>32</sup>

Thus this early section underpins later description of the river and the port. It is a view that has been downplayed, and eventually lost, as political structures, land-use patterns

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<sup>30</sup> M.H. Ellis, p. 436.

<sup>31</sup> Dixon, pp. 102, 101.

<sup>32</sup> Oxley, p 305.

and centralising modern transport have all developed an almost permanent focus on Sydney.

The actual description from Mount Seaview reveals an early regional definition, and this is implicated in the formative concept of the region. From Oxley's shorter text, consider the brief letter of 1818:

On the 20th of September, we gained the summit of the most elevated mountain in this extensive range, and from it we were gratified with a view of the ocean, at a distance of fifty miles; the country beneath us being formed into an immense triangular valley, the base of which extended along the coast from the Three Brothers on the south, to the high land north of Smoky Cape.<sup>33</sup>

The triangular description which he imposes upon the valley is useful for his surveying method—triangulation with a base of two known points—but it also reflects a poetic and cultural response to the background. The broad sweep of his view claims far greater land for the Hastings valley than is its watershed—including the Camden Haven, and parts of the Manning and the Macleay in the joy of this expansive vista.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, of all possible features this description forms its maritime base from the only two sites named by Cook (nearly half a century earlier), adding to these his own inland apex. Such a structure reinforces the impression of his and an initial white primacy in and over the region, and its wide expanse gives the feeling that it is possible for a European mind to encompass large sectors of this vast (even if outward-looking) land. In the fuller text, the same description, including the features named by Cook, appears in Oxley's journal entry made a fortnight later from a smaller hill, much lower into the river valley.<sup>35</sup> Together, then, these texts reveal the importance of the signifier and its cultural messages, over that of the signified, even in what purports to be official literal prose. The fuller journal describes the Mount Seaview experience:

Bilboa's ecstasy at the first sight of the South Sea could not have been greater than ours, when on gaining the summit of this mountain, we beheld Old Ocean at our feet: it inspired us with new life: every difficulty vanished, and in imagination we were already at home.<sup>36</sup>

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33 Oxley, p.385.

34 Howell implies a geological justification for this broad inclusive description—but perhaps simply uses Oxley's view as the starting point for a section on geological history. Ron Howell, 'Port Macquarie—The First Thirteen Years', *JRAHS*, 74 (June 1988), 22-31 (pp. 23-24).

35 Oxley, p. 320.

36 Oxley, p. 309.

The mis-spelling of 'Balboa' survived into print, and perhaps Oxley's eagerness for world-wide (even American) comparisons was not matched by any detailed knowledge of their source. Far from being the formative text of the Hastings, this text erases the whole valley in its eagerness for the link with 'home'. The group is imaginatively positioned at 'home', and thereby, in retrospect, inward-looking as they contemplate the view via this new passageway. Notice of 'pleasing valleys [and] a small stream taking it (sic) course to the sea' understates the possibility of disappointment, for the textual construction of ease of passage needs to be maintained. Providential justification for the route (as with Lewis and Clark) is implied through the recording that: 'To the north and south the country was mountainous and broken beyond any thing we had seen'. A path revealed to the group so fortuitously must therefore not be too closely queried as to its later usefulness (for access or settlement).

While the view of the sea causes enthusiastic statement, the text itself contains an underlying darkness regarding the considerable and closely occupied land yet to be traversed—a space where dangers are not part of the fragmentary knowable context. A pleasant description is first given:

Numerous smokes arising from native's fires announced a country well inhabited, and gave the whole picture a cheerful aspect, which reflected itself on our minds; and we returned to the tents with lighter hearts and better prospects.<sup>37</sup>

This is immediately followed by the horrific description of a pack-horse—its fate induced by the precipitous setting:

A mare, one of the strongest we had, in bringing up a very light load, not a quarter of her usual burden ... literally burst with the violent exertion which the ascent required. In this shocking state, with her entrails on the ground, she arrived at the tent, when, to put an end to her agonies, she was shot.

Together these descriptions suggest that, whatever their hopes, dangers may be unexpected and possibly have ghastly consequences in this new awesome land. For the remainder of the journey there is a wariness in the text, a caution that holds one back from closer engagement with the land. Ultimately the justification for their journey is the potential for later travel or settlement in the reverse direction, and the final entry

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<sup>37</sup> Oxley, p. 310.

for this day presents an inward-looking view—that the mountain 'I should think might be distinctly seen by ships at some distance from the coast.'<sup>38</sup>

Oxley's progress through the Hastings falls into two sections: the journey to the river's mouth, the triumphal climax to the whole journey; and then the unexpectedly awkward coastal journey to the south and out of the region. In moving down the Hastings River there are many accounts of pleasant country, characteristic of which is his reference to 'open forest land ... abundantly covered with good grass'.<sup>39</sup> Chief interest is still in the river—it increasingly appearing to be one described by Flinders as a lake with a bar at the entrance, but Oxley 'could not help entertaining the strongest hope from its appearance that it would prove navigable, whatever its entrance might be.'<sup>40</sup> Gradually emerging as a fact is the widespread presence of lagoons, swamps, marshes, thick brush, deep minor streams and a difficulty in progress near to the river, all of which have ominous textual echoes of his own earlier failure in the Macquarie marshes. In a sense these echoes prompt the need for some expression in the text of the fact of the triumph of discovery or of feats of endurance—that now manifested triumph of what is within (here British and Imperial) mankind. The latter is depicted in the cutting of 'roads', determined travel, the construction of a bridge, and in the confident encounters with the Indigenous people. The arrival at the sea is savoured with 'great joy and satisfaction', followed by the understated view of the river's entrance that '(with no small pleasure), formed a port to the river', and then the triumphal claim that it 'would ultimately throw open the whole interior to the Macquarie River, for the benefit of British settlers.'<sup>41</sup> On the following day, as he tells us:

I indulge the hope, that the knowledge we have obtained will be beneficial to the interests of the colony; and facilitate the settlement of a rich and valuable tract of country.<sup>42</sup>

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38 Oxley, p. 312.  
39 Oxley, p. 316.  
40 Oxley, p. 321.  
41 Oxley, p. 327.  
42 Oxley, p. 328.

Here the expression has the calmness of reflection, but the direction of thought is just as surely pointing towards the future use of the inland.

Interspersed with this description, and that to the south, is the ever-continuing naming of features. Carter reminds us that such topographic naming is implicated within the spatial progress of the journey, and that, ultimately, there is an arbitrariness to all naming.<sup>43</sup> As Oxley has moved east he continues to apply the names of powerful administrators/officials, as if to gain support from these figures, or at least to position himself as respecting the breadth of British power. He makes the link quite clear, unlike the more discrete (and sometimes ambiguous) method used by Cook, Oxley identifies the source for each, naming:

- 'fall and river ... Bathurst and Apsley, in honour of the Noble Secretary of State for the colonies' p. 300
- 'Croker's River, in honour of the First Secretary of the Admiralty' p. 301
- 'Hastings River, in honour of the Governor-General of India' p. 314
- 'Forbes River, in honour of the Marquis of Hastings' nephew' p. 315
- 'Ellenborough River, in honour of the Chief Justice of England' p. 316
- 'King's River, (after my friend who is now surveying the coast of this continent)' p.323
- 'Port Macquarie, in honour of His Excellency the Governor, the original promoter of these expeditions' p. 329
- 'the haven , (which we named after Lord Camden) p. 333
- 'Watson Taylor's Lake' p, 334
- 'Harrington Lake, in honour of the noble earl of that title' p. 340
- 'Farquhar's Lake, after Sir Walter' p. 340

In attempting to draw support from the general body of administrators, the formulaic 'honour' adds a sense of respectful protocol, building to the climax of the port, that newly assumed gateway to the west, where Oxley echoes the naming of the rivers, 'Lachlan' and 'Macquarie', those which had formerly promised so much as the likely first 'roads' inland. Governor Macquarie was Oxley's most immediate superior and the political success and general further reputation (including the literary) for this journey would depend upon his good will. In the 'Introduction' there is some consequent fulsome praise:

His Excellency Governor Macquarie, with that promptitude which distinguishes his character, resolved not to let slip so favourable an opportunity of obtaining a farther knowledge of the interior. <sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: an Essay in Spatial History*, pp. 46-47, 137-138  
<sup>44</sup> Oxley, p. ix.

and so now he is honoured most appropriately by the naming of what is presented as the major useful discovery of the expedition. After Port Macquarie there is a noticeable relaxation in the diplomatic and career-enhancing choice of names and in the wording of the performative act of their application. The bestowal of names is at times a daily occurrence—a mapping of the land according to the progress of the company—forming almost a secular/administrator's version of a new almost 'liturgical' calendar by which to claim the new land. For the inland section, what the names selected do reveal is an anticipated highway of powerful administrators, with Macquarie as its beginning and end. 'Watson Taylor'—an unacknowledged inclusion by Oxley was the Secretary of Lord Camden, whom he follows in the list. The subtext to Taylor's appearance is that he was the intermediary at the Colonial Office for John Macarthur, when the latter was desperate to avoid the consequences of his earlier behaviour.<sup>45</sup> To add this champion of the Exclusivists, identified by first and surname, was a pointed mark of allegiance, disguised as an afterthought following his master, Camden.

Part of Oxley's background to this naming exercise would have been the prose of the *Quarterly Review*, which had devoted considerable effort to the ridicule of Lewis and Clark's naming practices:

Of all people who ever imposed names upon a newly discovered country the Americans have certainly been the most unlucky in their choice: witness Bigmuddy River, and Littlemuddy River, Littleshallow River, Good Woman River, Little Good Woman Creek, Grindstone Creek, Cupboard Creek, Biscuit Creek, Blowing Fly Creek, *cum multis aliis* in the same delightful taste.<sup>46</sup>

The review had then proceeded to give fifteen lines of verse in mock homage to the land, incorporating the baseness of the new names in heroic couplets. As shown above, Oxley's controlled, even elegant, naming can be seen as presenting itself as a further Imperial contrast to the (cultural) disorder of Americans—those pedestrian name-bestowers who were seen as lacking foresight and dignity.

<sup>45</sup> M.H. Ellis, p. 446.

<sup>46</sup> *Quarterly Review*, 12 (1815), pp. 335-336. For a later view of Lewis and Clark's naming, see George R. Stewart, *Names on the Land: a Historical Account of Place-Naming in the United States*, 3rd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1945), pp. 214-218.

Closer European engagement with the land by this expedition is largely characterised by the description and collection of plants. Species variety is noted indicating a profusion of flora, with only some reference to the highly sought-after cedar. Rather than the scientific naming of the plants it is the naming of the collector that is a marked usage in Oxley's text. While 'Mr Evans', 'Dr. Harris' and 'William Blake' are identified by name, Charles Fraser is not. Rather, he is repeatedly indicated, simply by his science, as 'the botanist' or 'our botanical collector'<sup>47</sup>—a usage that highlights the presence of a skilled botanist on this Imperial scientific mission. In a general sense the usage is an answer to the chauvinistic aside, in the *Critical Quarterly* review, on the fuller scientific scope of His Majesty's expeditions over those of rebellious Americans. In a more particular sense the usage is a reminder of the role played by this specific science in the colony—a science that lent its name to the original colony as 'Botany Bay', and a science that was then powerfully presided over by Sir Joseph Banks.

Oxley's text gives quite detailed accounts of the characteristic plant life and carefully records its general variation throughout. Note is made of tree distribution, from the blue gum and stringy bark of the higher country, changing to blue gum and apple tree, then on to the richer collections of the lowlands. To some degree this is an attempt to impose a limiting or controlling sense of order upon the variety. Earlier in the hills, within a section of text that has several thrusts, Oxley confesses his inability to describe exactly the numerous species:

we were obliged to leave the horse which had failed the day before, half-way, as he dropped through utter weakness, though unladen. These valleys and hills are astonishingly rich in timber of various kinds, many new, and their botanic supplies were inexhaustible. Indeed our cargo now principally consists of plants.<sup>48</sup>

At another point he adds the scientific names of several shrubs in a note—a token acknowledgement of the vast activity of the Linnaean classifiers.<sup>49</sup> Specific notice is taken of the presence or lack of the red cedar trees, and the hope expressed 'that this

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<sup>47</sup> Oxley, p. 319, 320.

<sup>48</sup> Oxley, p. 314.

<sup>49</sup> Oxley, pp. 316-317. For a critical view on botanical classification see Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: an Essay in Spatial History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), pp. 19-20.

valuable wood might ... be found in yet greater abundance.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, rocks are detailed and their distribution described, reflecting the author's overall responsibility for assessment and report on a wide range of scientific matters.

Particularly in this attention to the botany, Oxley is redressing a lack in the text of that earlier imitator of the *Endeavour* journal. Where Flinders' text (specifically referred to within Oxley's own writing and probably carried with him) maintained the navigational and cartographic approach of Cook, he struggled with ethnographic material and the botanical, largely leaving the latter to Robert Brown—the pre-eminent helper and successor to Joseph Banks. Alternatively, Oxley's land-based text is the work which more closely captures the balance of disciplines in the earlier *Endeavour* account.

The wealth of botanical and wildlife detail gives a sense of the plentiful land discovered. Prolific fauna and fish are notable inclusions. The text thus presents a picture of easy New World abundance, as Wayne Franklin describes it, serving the yearning and, indeed, the needs of Old World desire.<sup>51</sup> As Oxley's text is the last North Coast example of what a recent study calls 'the heroic age of natural history',<sup>52</sup> it marks a transition from a viewing of the land with imperial scientific disinterestedness, towards a predominant perception of its potential production. There is certainly ample textual material to provide evidence for modern day environmental histories, while for his contemporaries, Oxley's unqualified enthusiasm at points seems consciously designed to encourage imminent settlement. The generally objective description adds to the scientific respectability of the journey, but close detail on landform, water and soil type suggest possible landuse. Even descriptions of what is appropriate for the company's horses give implicit messages of appropriate land for settlers' grazing stock. A description given at the port perhaps best illustrates Oxley's vision of plenty:

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<sup>50</sup> Oxley, p. 317.

<sup>51</sup> Wayne Franklin, *Discoverers Explorers Settlers: the Diligent Writers of Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). See comments to Plate 1, after p. 209.

<sup>52</sup> Colin Finney, *Paradise Revealed: Natural History in Nineteenth-century Australia* (Melbourne: Museum of Victoria, 1993). The full title of Chapter 1 is 'The heroic age of natural history: England and Australia, 1790-1860.'

The port abounds with fish: the sharks were larger and more numerous than I ever before observed in any place. We caught one very large one, which we offered to the natives, but they would not touch it, making signs that it would make them ill: our people however found no bad effects from eating it.

The forest hills and other rising grounds in the neighbourhood are covered with large kangaroos; and the marshes, which in some places border on the port, afford shelter and support to innumerable wild fowl. Independent of Hastings River, the whole country is generally well-watered, and there is a fine spring at the very entrance into the port.<sup>53</sup>

Such statements of superlative supply, and of universal abundance, culminate in generalisation. These summative comments link with detail earlier in the text and prompt a broader glance across the valley. So the detail on prolific fish reinforces an earlier description: 'There appears to be plenty of fish in [the river]; we caught six fine perch, weighing above two pounds each, in a very short time.'<sup>54</sup> The detail of shark not being eaten by the Aborigines, in this description, suggests a complementary new occupation and use of the land and its resources. A measure of the overall sweep of this vision is that even the marshes, so frustrating in the west, can here be reclaimed and incorporated into this Eden-like view—one indicating a paradise yet available for practical settlement.

Oxley (as have many tourists since) presents the setting out upon the southern journey from Port Macquarie as: 'homewards, with all those feelings which that word even in the wilds of Australia can inspire.'<sup>55</sup> The journey along the coastline is unexpectedly difficult, due to the large number of lakes and rivers entering the sea. There has to date been a general neglect of this southward journey along the coast in what is a revealing omission. Of the works on Australian exploration, even those that actually trace Oxley's journey to Port Macquarie, most will end the expedition at that point.<sup>56</sup> With a dominant nationalist image of exploration as a series of steps encircling and then penetrating into the Centre, Oxley's North Coast land journey is necessarily marginalised, for its achievements may be undermining of the pattern of

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<sup>53</sup> Oxley, pp. 328-329.

<sup>54</sup> Oxley, pp. 317-318.

<sup>55</sup> Oxley, p. 329.

<sup>56</sup> Characteristic of the traditional marginality to historical interest of the North Coast region, one work delegates the whole eastern journey to Port Macquarie to the deputy-surveyor Evans. Marjorie Barnard, *Macquarie's World*, 2nd edn (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1961 [1st edn 1947]), p. 196. By omission of detail, another work leaves a seemingly inept Oxley at Port Macquarie, and puts Evans in charge of the whole southward coastal journey. This is a conflation of Port Macquarie and Port Stephens—the journey's end. M.H. Ellis, p. 436.

the hegemony of Sydney. This pattern is already comfortably served by Cook and Flinders for the coast between Port Macquarie and Port Stephens—and coastal land travel is irrelevant for the later recorders.<sup>57</sup>

At one point, Oxley discusses the failure, for his land journey purposes, of the only available (maritime) chart:

We had now fully experienced how little dependence can be placed on the best marine charts, to show all the inlets and openings upon an extensive line of coast. Perhaps no charts can be more accurate than those published by Captain Flinders, the situation of the principal headlands and capes, with the direction of the coast, being laid down with the most minute attention to truth; but the distance at which he was obliged to keep, although it did not prevent him from laying the coastline down with an accuracy of outline sufficient for all nautical purposes, did not allow him to perceive openings which, though doubtless of little consequence to shipping, yet present the most serious obstacles to travellers by land; and of which, if they had been laid down in the chart, I should have hesitated to have attempted the passage without some assistance from the seaward, or means wherewith to have constructed boats.<sup>58</sup>

Here is another surfacing of the maritime [world] view. At points there is to be heard the voice of the junior naval officer, giving respectful report on his illustrious maritime predecessor, but the land-based frustration is clear. The passage contains an awkward alternation between the maritime, where the coast can be a 'line', and the land view, where 'coast' may even be characteristically discontinuous. In effect the text expresses a negotiation between the two views. Perhaps a more land-based view would not be so surprised by the observed breaks in the coast line. A writer who had spent so long looking for rivers in the West, in estimating volumes and directions, should be aware of the cordillera directing the eastern rainfall in many rivers to the sea. For the dominant geographical feature of the North Coast is its rivers—one could say that it is characterised by them—the upper half commonly still known as the 'Northern Rivers'. The water must go fairly directly to the sea, and in a pattern repeated regularly along the long length of this coast. Oxley's surprise must stem from a view—of his, the authorities and even of his general readers—that is still essentially that of the marine

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<sup>57</sup> C.M.H. Clark, I, p. 300, includes the journey in the text, but omits it from the accompanying map, p. 301. An exception this pattern of omission and undervaluing is provided in a small text, largely prepared for schools' use. Eric Dunlop, *John Oxley*, Australian Explorers (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1960). Here the map (p. 23) includes the southwards coastal journey, and the text introduces the section: "Then began one of the most trying stages of the whole journey", and the treatment covers pp. 18-20.

<sup>58</sup> Oxley, pp. 337-338.

navigator and explorer—the coast as a straight line on a map, with only few gaps requiring checking. Here is evidence of how long-lasting is the maritime view, effecting even the long text of the journey that is intended to be the first to record this land in detail. By way of contrast, the later accounts of convicts travelling much further—proceeding down the North Coast from Moreton Bay—express a comparative ease of land travel,<sup>59</sup> unburdened by the restrictive perspective so often formed by the maritime cartographers. The easier passages of these convicts were, of course, more contingent on their relationship with the Indigenous inhabitants.

The endurance of the trek south, interrupted by the difficulties of the crossing of river entrances calls for stronger presentation of the group in heroic description. Throughout, the frequent use of 'we' gives the impression of group cohesiveness, despite the convention of only singling out the leaders (or 'gentlemen') for individual naming—yet the whole company is listed in an Appendix to the publication.<sup>60</sup> The first person singular pronoun is reserved for decisive statements of leader's strategy or tactics. The heroic positioning of leader and the others is seen in the following description (with Oxley first referring to a specific group as 'they'—then broadening it to include the whole company under command), as this reflects indirectly on himself and his sense of responsible leadership:

October 20.—At four o'clock the people set out to bring the boat, and at two o'clock they had brought her safely to the tent, having gone in that time upwards of twenty-six miles, thirteen of which they carried a twelve feet boat on their shoulders; a proof how much may be effected by a steady perseverance. In fact, I had no occasion to be anxious for the result of any measure which at all depended on their personal exertions.<sup>61</sup>

And three days later he writes:

... all our strength was immediately dispatched to bring up our little boat, as we found we could not cross without its aid. When the people returned with the boat, it blew with such violence that we dared not venture to cross in her. We however moved a little nearer the point of entrance, to be more conveniently situated when the weather should clear up. The men voluntarily undertook to carry the boat on their shoulders until we should pass Port Stephens—a service, reduced as their strength was by constant exertion, I should have been unwilling to impose on them, however it might facilitate our progress.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *The Australian* 5 July, 1826. *Sydney Monitor*, 21 July, 1826. For a longer journey see Richard Craig, discussed in *The Bawden Lectures*, with notes by R.C. Law, 4th edn ([Grafton, NSW]: [Clarence River Historical Society], 1987), p. 2 *et passim*.

<sup>60</sup> Oxley, p. 362.

<sup>61</sup> Oxley, p. 338.

<sup>62</sup> Oxley, p. 340.

The model is military (or, for Oxley, perhaps a naval one)—efficiency, discipline and cheery teamwork. As the text of this journey proceeds thus, taking its readers across the many difficult river entrances, there is a defining of the land/coast by its many gaps. These interstices give meaning to the long land sections, with a rhythm of repeated heroic activity. The portrait of the men cheerfully carrying the heavy boat over considerable distances is also perhaps symbolic of the way in which the strangers to this land persisted stoutly in carrying their prior perceptions. The maritime view was one that would generally permit escape. Avoiding close engagement with the local it was a distancing potential that was available at any time.

A slight undercutting of the heroic presentation is the in-text evidence that these are not the first European land travellers in this part of the region. There is the boat already mentioned as being carried, discovered thus:

... we found a small boat nearly buried in the sand, but quite perfect. It had belonged to a Hawkesbury vessel, belonging to one Mills, which had been lost some time ago, and the crew of which perished.<sup>63</sup>

One day's travel south was found:

the remains of a hut, which had evidently been constructed by Europeans, the saw and axe having been employed on it.<sup>64</sup>

This description echoes Whyte's evidence, of woodworking tools used by the *Trial* mutineers, of January of the previous year—a group that was reported as having travelled towards the Hastings.<sup>65</sup> Oxley gives no mention of these escapees in his text, nor in fact does he give any reflection on the likely origin or fate of the builders of the hut. Rather, the relics are presented in the manner of the literary device of the 'mouldering pile'—merely evidence of past failed attempts to live in this land, the stories of which would only be a distraction from the (soon to be successful) endeavour already underway. Soon a larger boat was found:

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<sup>63</sup> Oxley, p. 335.

<sup>64</sup> Oxley, p. 335.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas, Extract of Proceedings of the Ship from 12 to 28 Jan 1817 During a Search of the Coast, AONSW Reel 6066; 4/1806 p. 63. See treatment in previous Chapter.

.. we found the wreck of a small vessel, which was recognised to be the Jane, of Sydney, belonging to Mills, before mentioned as the owner of the boat in our possession.<sup>66</sup>

Again there is no reflection on possible links between findings—Oxley's interest is kept detached from such unofficial presence. On the following day there is still another wreck sighted:

On the opposite side to us we saw the wreck of the brig Governor Hunter, now nearly covered with sand, at high water the tide washing over her.<sup>67</sup>

The loss of this ship in 1816 was a mystery; it was last seen at Cape Howe well to the south and no word was ever heard of the crew,<sup>68</sup> yet Oxley's whole consideration of this corroboration of historical loss is limited to that which is quoted above. In all cases the prior presence of Europeans is downplayed, with no textual reflection upon their experiences or fate, indirectly attempting to wrest for his own expedition the impression of primacy. The almost perfunctory treatment of predecessors also works to reinforce the heroic stature of his group. The evidence of others indicates likely disaster in merely trying to survive in this land, against which Oxley's (Imperial and scientific) group struggles heroically and purposefully and so prevails.

Despite the heroic style/positioning, this section finds no place in any subsequent account. A likely reason for this omission would be in the evidence of earlier Europeans. One could consider also the contemporary (administrative) fear of convicts escaping overland to the north—the North Coast serving as a (land) conduit out of the colony. While the failure/disappearance of the *Trial* absconders when on land was reassuring, Oxley's journey showed that surviving such a long passage was indeed possible. At a time when the opening of a road to Newcastle led to frequent unwished for returns to Sydney, so there would be unease at evidence of people even farther afield—particularly when Port Macquarie was proposed as a replacement penal settlement.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, after the later penal settlements were established at Port

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<sup>66</sup> Oxley, p. 341.

<sup>67</sup> Oxley, pp. 341-342.

<sup>68</sup> J.K. Loney, *Wrecks on the N.S.W. North Coast* ([Geelong, Vic]: Marine History Publications, [n.d.]), p. 19.

<sup>69</sup> W.C. Wentworth, *A Statistical, Historical, and Political Description of the Colony of New South Wales, and its Dependent Settlements: with a Particular Enumeration of the Advantages Which*

Macquarie and at Moreton Bay, severe penalties were announced and enacted as attempted discouragement of escaping—yet such long passages became regular occurrences for absconders. So in the case of Oxley's seaboard journey, a possible reason for the omission is the persistence of an administrative erasure through one hundred and eighty years, later codified by its inclusion into what became a surprisingly rigid nationalist canon of exploration. The nature and power of this administratively sanctioned exploration canon was the starting point for Simon Ryan's *The Cartographic Eye*, and here a regional perspective can similarly show the canon's (regionally) inappropriate but overweening force. Considering the subsequent very considerable use in schools of 'exploration', as a topic for work in the Social Sciences and in History, then the formative power of the construction is hard to over-estimate.

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One cannot, of course, be fully heroic unless there is an 'other', against which self-definition can take place. For Oxley and other Europeans, the North Coast was largely an unknown wilderness to be mapped, and while well peopled by the natives, such presence was considered far from 'settled'. Immediately prior to entering the coastal area there are two significant descriptions concerning the Indigenous peoples. First is the absurd 'Ancient Mariner'-like encounter with an old crippled man.<sup>70</sup> The European approach is scientific/medical, and intrusive, while the individual's responses are relegated to the infantile: 'expressed his wonder in a singular succession of sounds, resembling snatches of a song.' Increasing evidence of Indigenous activity gave Oxley heart as he moved towards the coast, and what was to become Mount Seaview. In a model of fauna study, this evidence indicated more favourable conditions and a pathway to the sea. While there was the encouragement of many campfire smokes, visible contact was sparse on the journey into the valley, and this

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*These Colonies Offer for Emigration, a Demonstration of Their Superiority in Many Respects over Those Possessed by the United States of America; and a Word of Advice to Emigrants*, 2nd edn (London: G. and W.B. Whittaker, 1820), p. 114.

<sup>70</sup> Oxley, pp. 302-303.

avoidance continued until there was the seeming safety (for the locals) of the river reaches.

The early contact, then, is in the mode of complementary occupation of an Eden-like landscape, echoing the Tahitian section of the *Endeavour* journal. The approach of the first four is characterised by the terms 'shiness' and 'simple'.<sup>71</sup> with the only recounted awkwardness being in their (justifiable) flight at the sight of firearms. There is no discussion of what might have been their prior experiences with such weapons. A further occasion of flight is described when a company building canoes is discovered. This causes an awkward negotiation of conscience (seemingly of the whole white group) over the property rights of the Aborigines:

... they all fled in great confusion; leaving their arms and utensils of every description behind them. One of the canoes was sufficiently large to hold nine men, and resembled a boat; of course we left their property untouched, though we afterwards regretted we did not seize one of their canoes, which we might easily have done. We however determined to send back in the morning for the unfinished canoe, and try our skill in completing it for use.<sup>72</sup>

A further disturbing element on imperial attitudes to native property follows without comment:

The people returned in the course of the forenoon unsuccessful, as the natives had removed [the canoe] with all their effects in the course of the night, throwing down and destroying their guniahs or bark huts.

Unlike Cook and later Flinders, Oxley does not in actuality remove artefacts—but he is saved from such theft only through Aboriginal avoidance—a distancing itself reminiscent of Cook at Botany Bay.

Yet the water of the Camden Haven must be crossed and Oxley presents the physical situation with indirect praise for the Indigenous people, and a level of good humour:

The natives seem very numerous, but are shy: we saw many large canoes on the lake, one of which would be quite sufficient for our purposes. ... and immediately commenced our endeavours to construct a canoe: our first essays were very unsuccessful, but by Saturday night we had a bark one completed, which we hoped would answer our purpose; though I think if the natives saw it they would ridicule our rude attempts.<sup>73</sup>

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71 Oxley, p. 328.

72 Oxley, p. 332.

73 Oxley, p. 333.

There is an evident closeness to the land, prompted here through need, that suggests an openness to and willingness for inter-cultural communication. To rely on the resources of the land, as did the later (and some earlier) convict escapees, would necessitate a much closer negotiation with the original inhabitants. Oxley's own need is a momentary one, for the rudimentary craft is functional, and the group is determined to be self-contained and sustaining. Through the Hastings Valley there was no hindrance made to the passage of Oxley and his company.

As the group moves further towards the settled areas of the south, so there comes increasing assertion of ownership and resistance by the Indigenous peoples, combined with increasing aggression from the Europeans. Only when reaching the crossing of what is now the Tuncurry approach (by bridge) to Foster does the change become noticeable. The spearing of William Blake is presented as 'treachery', an assault upon a lone man, with the sole and quite venal purpose of gaining the victim's axe.<sup>74</sup> After the graphically described spearing, the removal of the company to the southern shore is presented as decisive, controlled and appropriate in action, as is the 'fortunate' removal of the two spears by the doctor. Adding to this heroic action of the whole group is the passive need to stay nearby in a close group overnight, seemingly surrounded by hostile Aborigines:

The natives before dark had assembled in great numbers, and we could count twelve or fourteen fires from their camps. United as we were, we had little to fear from their attacks, particularly in the night; and we remained so short a time at any place, that we did not give them time to make any concerted attack.<sup>75</sup>

The site is 'close to the wreck of the Governor Hunter', but, even at a somewhat wary rest in this situation, there is no thought expressed as to the fate of the lost crew. Rather, Oxley proceeds calmly to give a long passage of observations on landforms, the nature of the entrance, its suitability for small vessels, and the bearings of all observable features. The detached empirical view here provides a refuge from

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<sup>74</sup> Oxley, p. 342. This may be the same William Blake seemingly coached by Judge Bent in complaint against Governor Macquarie, with depositions taken and pursued by Marsden, all occurring immediately before Oxley's selection of his company. C.M.H. Clark, I, pp. 306-307, 314. The wider nature of 'treachery' may well have been linked in Oxley's mind with the person of Blake.

<sup>75</sup> Oxley, p. 343.

engagement with the land and with its people. On subsequent days the Indigenous people are numerous, but, as Oxley says: 'they evidently appear to shun us, and we have no wish for a farther acquaintance.'<sup>76</sup> Such mutual avoidance shows the cultural distancing emerging between the two groups.

This attitude only relents somewhat when, moving closer to Port Stephens, Oxley comes into close and friendly contact with a group that had been at Newcastle. Contact with European civilisation is assumed to moderate the excesses of native spirit, and much attention and many objects are given in friendship:

not without a hope, that our kindness might be of service to others, who might under different circumstances be thrown among them.<sup>77</sup>

So the expressions of his group's humanity are really towards future newly arrived Europeans—for perhaps those who would be cast ashore, as were those of earlier years and of whom there was ample evidence. Perhaps the lack of respect for their own civilisation, and the insincerity of the offers made, were indeed obvious to the Aborigines, for the next day there was another attack—also presented by Oxley as 'treachery'.<sup>78</sup> Rather than their encountering an increasing peace, as the group moves closer to the influence of the settlement, there is increasing violence. And Oxley's incomprehension of this is matched by a single-mindedness in proceeding with a military-style forcefulness:

I had determined if they had approached nearer to have made an example of them: and for the future, never to suffer them to come near us at all.<sup>79</sup>

While there is a model for such a strong (determinedly defensive) approach in the Lewis and Clark journals,<sup>80</sup> the otherwise general agreement and accommodation of the Americans with their Indigenous peoples that was evident in their journals, would stand as a stark contrast with the response which Oxley felt able to make. Still, it becomes more comfortable to have one's language suggest a possible (threatened)

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<sup>76</sup> Oxley, p. 346.

<sup>77</sup> Oxley, p. 347.

<sup>78</sup> Oxley, p. 348, repeated on p. 349.

<sup>79</sup> Oxley, p. 350.

<sup>80</sup> *Quarterly Review*, 12 (1815), p. 366.

affray, rather than any passivity in the observer, or certainly any authorial acknowledgement of a justified Aboriginal resistance in defence of their homeland.

Oxley ends his journal upon leaving the North Coast, which for him was the nearer unsettled regions to the north of Newcastle. At that point, he summarises the behaviour of the encountered Aborigines in a way that would prepare others for an aggressive approach:

They appeared to be as cowardly as treacherous: and I am convinced, that all the mischief they do, arises from a misplaced confidence in their seeming friendly dispositions. A single person off his guard is sure to fall a sacrifice to their thirst for plunder.<sup>81</sup>

Here is expressed the failure of the empiricist approach that promised so many rewards in the cartographic, botanic and mineralogic fields, but was always denied him in the ethnographic. The Aboriginal shunning of Europeans, and their slight material culture, meant that Oxley could not approach the rich variety of descriptions of native peoples and manners, that was such a feature of the Lewis and Clark expedition—in a sense, the Americans' early negotiations of their new place in the already inhabited continent. Sadly Oxley's concluding comments can be seen as an attempt to erase from any serious consideration the peoples and their culture that would not reveal itself to him. This final approach reflected a more widespread view, of the type described by Henry Reynolds in his *Frontier*<sup>82</sup>—one of the natives as essentially savages. It was a view that could too readily fill the uncomfortable vacuum of lack of any degree of detailed knowledge or understanding. Again the lead for Oxley may have come from the *Quarterly Review*:

Thanks, however, to these travellers, and to such as these, we shall be no longer pestered with rhapsodies in praise of savage life; it is now known, what never ought to have been doubted, that in that state the greater part of our virtues are never developed, and all the vices of brute man are called into full action.<sup>83</sup>

As an influential published text, from an official source, to some extent Oxley's work would have helped to form the simplistic and natives-dismissing mindset of

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81 Oxley, p. 351.

82 Henry Reynolds, *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987), pp. 108-109.

83 *Quarterly Review*, 12 (1815), p. 328.

subsequent settlers drawn to this area for its natural wealth. From his model of forceful progress, and the justifiable necessity of firearms and deaths, in this coda to the theme of endurance can be seen the proto-violence of justifiable if brutal dispossession, to be tragically echoed and amplified by all too many later arrivals in the region.

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As a struggle by text for his own greater recognition and prestige, Oxley's efforts were well rewarded. His journals were recommended by Macquarie for publication,<sup>84</sup> and on Oxley's own suggestion this was undertaken by the same publisher who produced the *Quarterly Review*—the influential, and avowedly Tory, John Murray.<sup>85</sup> Unsurprisingly his work was reviewed favourably in that journal's columns, and the review was then very pleasingly reprinted in Sydney for the colonial literary readership.<sup>86</sup> So Oxley achieved the distinction of prestigious publication and review—of a text, approach, and in part of a location—that all linked his work to that of Flinders and, earlier, to Cook's. In short, this is a reminder that exploration was not a simple record of individual heroic endeavour, but rather that its purpose was strongly inter-textual and concerned to control both its impact and, very probably, its own social consequences.

Dixon drew attention to the variations from the Lewis and Clark approach, particularly its inversion back to the east. Now in New South Wales, in the southward journey along the coast there is more than a variation of the expected approach. Particularly in its early part, it is an individual response, and to some extent an attempted reclamation of heroic continental exploration for the long coastal regions—

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<sup>84</sup> Macquarie, Lachlan, 'Governor Macquarie to to Earl Bathurst', 15 Dec. 1817, *Historical Records of Australia*, Series 1 Vol 9, pp. 731-732. This after the first of Oxley's inland expeditions, to which the texts of the second journey were to be added.

<sup>85</sup> R.B.P. [Prosser, Richard Bissell], 'John Murray' in *DNB*, Vol. 13, pp. 1287-1291. The entry quotes Southey, in 1817, on Murray: 'The "Review" is the greatest of all works, and it is all his own creation; he prints ten thousand, and fifty times ten thousand read its contents.' p. 1288. Barron Field was also linked with Murray, the publisher of his 1825 *Geographical Memoirs*.

<sup>86</sup> Elizabeth Dalton Newland, 'Forgotten Early Australian Journals of Science and Their Editors', *RAHSJ*, 72 (1986), 59-68 (p. 61).

posing for us a North Coast of struggle, with repeated impediments to the early heroic travellers. Yet ultimately it is a vain attempt, for this section is downplayed, overlooked, and omitted by later recorders. As a detailed appropriation of the bounty of the land the text was, however, to have longer-term consequences.

For Oxley the North Coast was to be a rich subordinate to the centre. And there is no doubt as to this centre. He 'proceeded on [his] journey up the coast' to Sydney,<sup>87</sup> where direction is indicated by the centralist and England-like 'up' still seen in modern Australian railway speech. Yet his greater vision was for an access to the Liverpool Plains and this North Coast valley is made to seem the conduit of the future, playing a service role to its hinterland similar to that played by Sydney. Ignoring the difficulties of the mountain route, ultimately this model and his enthusiasm for it are overstated, and this may have been to cover the inland failure. In the succeeding years, the gradual realisation of the inadequacy of his over-eager claim for the North Coast as an entry to the inland, may be the reason for the circumscribed, unemotional, seemingly distracted maritime texts he produced, and which were considered in the previous chapter.

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Clearly the scope of this current study does not permit such detailed coverage of all significant prose from the region in the long time span. The early texts in each section have a special role in the establishment of the first layer of a European mapping of this zone, and it is important for regional identity and its cultural history to consider closely the characteristics of this mapping, and how even these earliest works have strong elements of inter-textuality, implicit purpose and justification as well as of suppression.

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<sup>87</sup> Oxley, p. 334.

### **Governor Lachlan Macquarie**

Subsequent to Oxley's visit, and in view of later reports, the then Governor moved to establish a penal outpost at Port Macquarie. Only three years after Oxley's journey through the Hastings and beyond, Macquarie made a visit to the small settlement at Port Macquarie.<sup>88</sup> This was the final part of Macquarie's period of office—having offered his resignation three times before it was accepted. Still of consequence were the as yet (unknown) impressions and report to be made by Commissioner Bigge, who had set out to visit Port Macquarie with Oxley in the previous November.<sup>89</sup> The regular pattern of Governor's tours had now reached its final circuit, with elements of acceptance and accommodation to those around him. Gone is the period of rapid pledges of public works accompanied by the eager searching for approval, and even of the time of bitter recriminations, all now replaced in this text by calmer confirmation and celebration of whatever achievements there may have been. So as part of what he chose to be his final tours of the colony the Governor produced his own North Coast text, while waiting for his successor to arrive. Macquarie came to Port Macquarie 2nd November 1821 and, after some delay, left the settlement on 11 November. As the principal responsible for this journey, even for this particular settlement and its aims, Macquarie has a powerful controlling voice over the text produced.

This text is essentially a private journal, written in a fairly open manner, but still maintaining one eye on the possible later wider readership that, given the writer's position and the controversial circumstances of the time, might well be called upon as evidence or simply as persuasive background. Any such call for this text came slowly

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<sup>88</sup> Barnard, p. 233, omits completely the Port Macquarie tour, simply saying that 'Macquarie was out of town'. Similarly brief is the most recent work on Macquarie: 'Three days later the governor made his northern progress to visit the inhabitants of Port Macquarie and Newcastle. While he was away ...' John Ritchie, p. 185.

<sup>89</sup> C.M.H. Clark, I, p. 340. Oxley's role was not trusted, considered privately by Governor Macquarie to be 'intriguing and discontented'; and by Elizabeth Macquarie as 'one of the most artful of the Colony's villains', M.H. Ellis p. 435.

and it was not until 1956 that the journals of his tours were first published.<sup>90</sup> For local readers, the relevant North Coast section has been largely reproduced by extensive quotation by McLachlan,<sup>91</sup> thus making most of this text readily available—in itself a rare event for the significant prose of the region.

For a reader accustomed to the production of regular formal reports, many of these elements can be found to intrude into the text which Macquarie produced. After the seemingly easy elegance of Oxley's prose, the style appears somewhat stilted. But then it is one without either Oxley's revision or his keen eye as to models for ready publication. It has the characteristic mnemonic-markers and the self-assured assertion of private writing. As an *aide de memoire* it functions well, recording events, names of those responsible, locations, position of ships, weather and so on—the type of detail for which this text has long been mined by local historians. In essence, it is a text revealing the habits of command, but now somewhat reduced in status with the period of authority clearly limited in time—and certainly without the necessity of implementing change. So, despite being the highest authority in the land (then a wide area including the Pacific station), he has fallen victim to the co-ordinated efforts of his enemies, and his imminent return to Britain marks a time of loss and some consequent stress. Yet, in the twilight of his governorship, there seems to be a mellowing of the earlier judgemental single-mindedness—what Manning Clark later called 'the purblindness of the self-righteous'.<sup>92</sup> The North Coast section of the text is bracketed by storms and rough sea travel, an experience particularly disliked by Macquarie, and some of the peace of the Port Macquarie section comes from the larger progress of the journey—an 'eye of the storm' feeling amid the calm.

On land, Macquarie records the courtesies of welcome, an armed guard and the honorific turnout of convicts, their positioning indicating order and control. Seemingly spontaneously, there is a welcome of three cheers on the Governor's stepping out of

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<sup>90</sup> Lachlan Macquarie, *Lachlan Macquarie Governor of New South Wales: Journals of His Tours in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land 1810-1822*, 1956 edn (Sydney: Trustees of the Public Library of New South Wales). The North Coast section is pp. 204-215.

<sup>91</sup> Iain McLachlan, *Place of Banishment: Port Macquarie 1818-1832* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1988), pp. 67-73.

<sup>92</sup> C.M.H. Clark, I, p. 305.

the boat, suggesting a depth of warm feeling for the authority and its principal embodiment. The Allman family members give 'a hearty and friendly welcome',<sup>93</sup> including an invitation to stay in a room in their house. So begin the negotiations of living arrangements of sleeping and food, where the text notes offers and acceptances. In Macquarie's provision of the meals for the group including the Allmans in his tents, there is also a subtext marked by fine dining and easy conversation—even *bon vivant*, and beginning prior to the cheerful landing with the justification of a Wedding Day.<sup>94</sup> On land in the tents there is the added imperial charm of dining in the wilderness. In other circumstances this type of detail may not have required a record—but here it is an answer to the first complaint about the Macquaries, and therefore more cutting and distasteful to him—their provision of small dinners and stingy service.<sup>95</sup> In this there is some element of an attempt to reclaim his reputation with the officers and others around him—a small section of those who had somewhat distanced themselves over the troubled years of complaints and counter-complaints.

The text has a suggestion of the power of command by a forceful leader. The concerns expressed for the wreck of the *Lady Nelson*, and the repeated statements on this, have the feel of compulsion. The hard-working Nicholson labours on this task over several days, to the point of exhaustion, on what was merely a Governor's expression of 'sincere pleasure'.<sup>96</sup> The more formal aspects of the visit include inspections of the still small settlement, and an investigation with a view to potential production. The mental map of Port Macquarie that is presented is that of a very much demarked and bounded zone. There is no sight of the mountains beyond, or thoughts presented on the surrounding lands of the long coastline. Befitting the aim of an isolated prison, accessed only from the sea, Macquarie gives no expression to the possible 'inland highway' that so animated Oxley, nor even to Oxley's journey into the area. Certainly Oxley is considered, but as a further limiting of vision, as only an opinion within the actual settlement site. Oxley had recommended the site for the

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<sup>93</sup> Macquarie, *Journals*, p. 206.

<sup>94</sup> Macquarie, *Journals*, p. 205.

<sup>95</sup> C.M.H. Clark, I, p. 268.

<sup>96</sup> Macquarie, *Journals*, p. 207.

future town, and its southern limit was 'Oxley's Terrace', the other three limits being Allman's Hill, Shoal Arm Creek, and the harbour. Much infill detail is given, locating the major features of habitation and authority, in addition to useful natural features, including the

fine verdant hills immediately to the rear of the town, which afford excellent rich pasturage for cattle<sup>97</sup>.

Two short journeys are made to the inland, which draw the vision out from its small confines. The first is

to see a most rich beautiful tract of forest land... particularly well adapted for cultivation<sup>98</sup>,

when Macquarie's enthusiasm for the utility of this site is clear, and celebrated by the bestowal of the name Allman Plains. The second longer passage is for a single day's exploration of the river. The account almost fails to begin by lingering on a point near the journey's end, but then moves to an overview description:

we then returned and landed on the south bank of the river in a beautiful rich tract of forest land, where we remained for an hour and a half to rest and refresh our boat's crew.

The whole of this river, as far as we went, is very finely wooded on both banks, is a noble stream of water, and of a sufficient depth to admit of small vessels of 30 tons navigating it as far as the western end of Rawdon Island.<sup>99</sup>

The text takes on some of the content and style of maritime (riverine) prose for this part, noting the river's potential access but not remarking on any usefulness. Even the variety of timber specified by Oxley is made to appear uniform and minimally useful by comment on the landscape, 'very finely wooded'. In fact, the lack of detail in the accounts of these journeys reflects an implicit unwillingness to extend the account beyond the spatial conception of the port. The text is longer and more exuberant when telling of the two short landings, and also the phrasing of the second 'beautiful rich tract' inevitably draws one back to the 'rich beautiful tract' of the first, as if the perceived limits of this surrounding useful land need to be very close to the prescribed settlement.

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<sup>97</sup> Macquarie, *Journals*, p. 208.

<sup>98</sup> Macquarie, *Journals*, p. 207.

<sup>99</sup> Macquarie, *Journals*, p. 209.

A likely reason for this spatial limitation was the need to circumscribe the settlement as a well-chosen penal outpost—to be a place without attractions and one clearly set apart from any other future use. Another likely reason was the need to centre interest on recent events and characteristics—details that might deflect Commissioner Bigge's keen interest which had been shared with Oxley, and had led these two latter men to undertake an earlier voyage to Port Macquarie. In this way Macquarie could readily clarify or gainsay any report comment critical of the valley, its potential and its use. Much later—the day before leaving the harbour—the text shows more ease with announcing the existing range of the area's produce. The sight of a raft of logs, cedar and rosewood, prompts a call for specimens to be sent to him in Sydney, which will then be taken 'home' <sup>100</sup>where he knows the power of spectacle will work to vindicate many of his actions.

Despite such a sudden appropriation of the land of others, and the enormous change that the intended settlement would almost certainly have brought to them, there is only one reference to the local Indigenous inhabitants in this North Coast section of Macquarie's text. Despite the limitations of Macquarie's considerate policy to Aborigines elsewhere— a level of kindness that was not matched by the level of understanding—this North Coast example seems particularly and perhaps deliberately blinkered:

We saw some natives at a distance, but we were not near enough to speak to them. They have lately manifested a very hostile spirit towards our people here, by frequently throwing spears at the men employed up the river in procuring rose-wood & cedar, on which occasions a very useful man was killed, by a spear passing through his body, of which wound he immediately died. This violent attack and treachery only took place about a fortnight ago, since which the natives have been very shy, and never come near the settlement; concluding they would be severely punished, if caught, for their treacherous cruel conduct.<sup>101</sup>

The spearing of the man is described in echo of Oxley's North Coast text, also with Oxley's repetition of 'treachery', here added to by 'violent' and 'cruel'.

Unlike Oxley's description, no motive is suggested (nor is there thought given to any possible provocation), other than the habitual 'frequently throwing spears'. As if

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<sup>100</sup> Macquarie, *Journals*, p. 214.

<sup>101</sup> Macquarie, *Journals*, pp. 209-210.

to suggest the whites' innocence, and hence the culpability of the natives, the workers are described in passive voice, and the two species are noted—as if those under threat were simple naturalists. The final attempt to describe the consequences through Aboriginal eyes shows remarkable cultural ignorance—relegating the indigenes to the childlike stature of the shy, and the writer's telling but of simple sin and its punishment. Cultural differences eluded Macquarie, perhaps as did the nature of his colonial opponents. The offer and acceptance of pet kangaroos and a black swan for young Lachlan are markers of Macquarie's acquisitive idea of what is the relationship with this new land.

At the end of his stay there are problems in packing and departing, in crossing the shallow bar, and from the variable winds. Despite detailed examples of careful observation and of judgement, decisive action, and of co-ordinated work, as the delays are repeated, there is a sense of a general inappropriateness or inadequacy. The subsequent departure from the North Coast, marks a return to the political maelstrom of powerful competing ideas and passions—reflected in the long descriptions with a gale blowing, 'violent motion',<sup>102</sup> and the disruption of seasickness, uncertainty as to position, separation from smaller accompanying craft, and the final distress of a pet kangaroo dying. This reflective account of departure lends a sad and even elegaic tone to the whole text, with its hopeful eye to some self-justification built on such fragile grounds, as the small, and soon to be much restricted settlement, named after the Governor. The text has a distracted sense, where the centre for action of consequence is back in Sydney, and the centre for evaluation and judgement is in London, but from the text's minor tone of disdain (for the local), there is a suggestion that the true centre was the Governor himself—*L'État c'est moi*.

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<sup>102</sup> 'Violent', 'violence', and 'violently' occur five times. Macquarie, *Journals*, pp. 214-215.

Rather than simple statements of a calm and progressive possession, these two pre-eminent North Coast texts of exploration and appropriation are thus complicated structures of intersecting voices, aims and attitudes, each dependent upon other texts and more distant and potential political moves for their actual construction and likely interpretation. Similar to the construction of the early maritime works, these texts of land exploration thus mark a conscious drawing of the hitherto largely unknown land into the seemingly central web of (European) discourse. The distancing which accompanies such an approach becomes more difficult to sustain in the subsequent works of land journeys.