

## **Supplementary Material 5**

**Herman Beckler. Dispatch, Menindie 6 August 1861, 39 pp. Records of the Burke and Wills Expedition, 1857–75. State Library of Victoria. SLV MS 13071. Box 2082/1 (c).**

Transcribed by Beverley Wood.

**Dispatch, Menindie, dated 6 August 1861**  
**[Description of the Supply Party journey from Pamamero Lake to Bulloo,**  
**28 January to 4 April 1861]**  
**Herman Beckler**

[p1.]

**Menindee, August 6, 1861.**

To the honorable John Macadam M.D honorary secretary to the exploration committee.

Sir,

With this mail I transmit to you several papers. As I suppose that Mr. Wright's diary contains the notes of our daily stages I send you some descriptions unconnected by data which it is unnecessary to repeat.

Should the committee wish to have these notes also from my journal I shall be most happy to copy these from my note-books after my arrival in town where I hope to be as soon as possible.

The collection of plants and a small case filled with different objects of natural history by the late Mr. Becker will be taken down by the steamer which is now on her way to this place.

I have the honor to be

Sir

Your obedient servant  
[sgnd.] Herman Beckler

1.

[p2.] It is hardly credible at what disadvantage horses appear in comparison with camels when both have to do for a time without water.

**[28<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> January. Pamamero Lake to Gorgirga/Scropes Range]**

The first opportunity I had to see this was at Bodurga. The horses had travelled from Pamamero Lake to Gogirga [Scopes Range] during the night from the 28<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> of January.



Figure 1. Dry Lake Bodurga, 31 January 1861, Hermann Beckler, SLV H16486.

**[30<sup>th</sup> January – 31<sup>st</sup> January. To Pilpar [Bilpa], to Bodurga].**

Here we succeeded to get some water by cleaning and deepening a large native well and by digging in the rocky beds of the gully, yet we could give the horses no more than one bucket each (about seven quarts). The camels received less than that quantity. The horses not satisfied with what they had received rambled during the night and - left the mountains. They were found in the course of the following day and Mr. Wright and party succeeded in bringing them to a short distance from Pilpar whereto the caravan had moved during the day. Here the horses had on the following morning a bucket of water each, in the afternoon they reached Bodurga the last place between the Darling and Mutwanji ranges where we had stored water but most of the water here was gone although the waterbags were well covered and protected

from the sun. They had been stored at the wrong place, that is I mistook a certain depression for Mr. Burke's camping place when Smith and myself took the water out here, and so the waterbags escaped the notice of the horse - party altogether. At last they came up. What a change had the want of the precious fluid affected in

[p3.] these animals! The glossy appearance of their skins was gone, their formerly round forms were pointed and shrunk, their eyes dull and motionless lay hollow in their cavities and with their heads lowered they stood about the camp without making as much as an attempt to feed. Here I saw for the first time a symptom produced in horses by want of water. In several of them the orificium ani [anal orifice] was open to about 1" in diameter or more and through it one could see into a dark cavity the walls of which were to be seen here and there – parts of the mucous membrane dry, shining and of a dark purple color. I could not think that it was anything else but the effect of complete resorption of moisture from all tissues. Although there is perhaps nothing particular in this state it looked to me almost ghastly and more like a change produced by death than one in a living creature. At night they would ramble about notwithstanding their utter exhaustion and we had therefore to watch them.

These poor animals made regular rounds during the night from the flat on which our camp was situated to a low sand-ridge mound with the prickly Acacia from where we had to bring them back. They seemed to have lost their instinct and quite forgetful of their friendly dispositions they kicked and bit each other as often as an opportunity offered.

[p4.] Each time they passed the camp they examined every bucket and every pot. From there they went over to the still glimmering coals of our fire where they hoped to find something to drink, and searching for pots they plunged their noses into the mass of red hot coals. Some would even be so senseless and obtuse as to examine the qualities of burning coals slowly and the poor animals would burn themselves before one could get them off.

Then the whole troop would be again in motion under the sound of their bells and the rattling of their hobble-chains.

We had nothing to suffer, but that sense in waterless country during a calm and cloudless moonlight-night and where indigenous animal life was all but extinct, that dreary night with no other sound of life but that from the bells and the chains of some tortured animals tormenting each other in a fiendish manner as if their common suffering was yet insufficient – I remember still as the most melancholy one during our outward journey.

What are camels doing under similar circumstances? Not many nights before this they had been encamped about two miles from this spot. They had not had any water from the time of their leaving the

Darling except about three quarts at Gogirga [Scropes Range] each. Yet, they were squatting peacefully about the camp, ruminating their evening-meal, just as much as they could get from the later part of the afternoon till the moon set, as we could not leave them out longer that night for fear of their straying in search of water.

[p5.] They too like water if they can get it, and they were very thirsty when we arrived at Bodurga. Looking at these animals when they stood on the bank of the Darling to drink you would sometimes think that they were too obtuse to recognize a noble sheet of water, - here they made with wonderful skill the diagnosis of an empty pot and smelt at anything what had the mere resemblance to a water-bag. They would like much to get a drink but learning that they cannot get it they do without it and bear their fate with something like eastern equanimity.

## II.

### [p6.] **[From Pilpa [Bilpa] to Mutwanji [Mutawintji] Ranges].**

The whole of the country of Binjani - from Pilpa to Mutwanji ranges had not a very inviting appearance at the time we passed through. Out from Pilpa [Bilpa] the country is for an extent of from six to seven miles scrubby, the trees principally several species of Acacia, a Casuarina, a Flindersia (?) are all of small size not exceeding eighteen feet in height, on the last mentioned tree a species of Loranthus is seen very frequently. The shrubs are to the greater part species of Stenochilus and small round shrubs of Mimosa and large bushes of Atriplex on the base of which grows frequently a species of Rhagodia. The soil is sandy on the surface resting on a hard yellowish loam which mixes with the surface sand in different localities in unequal proportions.

The vegetation seemed to be more sparingly distributed over some tracts than over others and small salsolaceous plants from the greater part of it, yet I noticed tracts not without any apparent change in the soil which were almost destitute of salsolaceae plants and covered with the withered remains of grasses, composite and coniferous plants. The country is poorly timbered with the prickly Acacia growing to the height of from 15 – 18 feet. The greater number of them is dead, but they stand firmly in the ground and they are perfect skeletons.

### **[2<sup>nd</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> February. Mutwanji Ranges].**

There is in Mutwanji [Mutawintji] ranges a series of water reservoirs which will always be the most reliable spots for obtaining water between the Darling and the interior on the line of our track.

[p7.] All these reservoirs or basins are situated in a range of hills which form the eastern enclosure of a long valley. The hills which close the valley from the West are very different from those just mentioned.

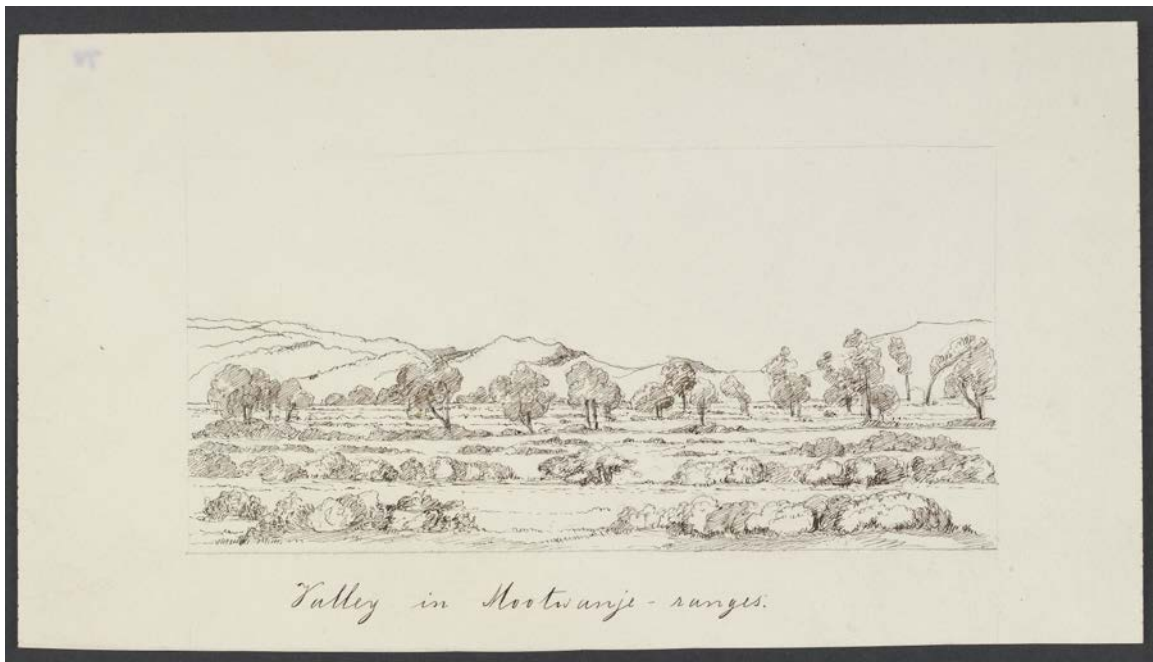


Figure 2. Valley in the Mootwanje ranges. [ca. 1861]. Unsigned [Hermann Beckler] SLV H16486.

The extent of the valley between the two ranges is rarely more than a mile.

The western range borders the valley for a length of from 3 – 4 miles with almost perpendicular rocky walls from the base of which a long undulating slope from 100 – 200 yards in breadth leads into the valley. These precipitous rocks are picturesque and of imposing height and appearance shelves over shelves exhibiting numerous shallow excavations which change their aspect continually as they receive each in its turn the full light of the sun. The color of the rocks is a rich warm yellow the more or less protruding shelves dividing the precipitous rocks horizontally (but not strata-like to all appearances) are frequently white. The texture of these rocks does not show much difference at a close examination both looking like a soft sandstone of rough granular appearance, sometimes more or less of a conglomerate character, the shelves and the cavities generally with smooth and rounded surfaces. To the eye of the observer not acquainted with the complicated processes of different agencies working steadily or suddenly on the crust of the earth the present appearance of these rocks seems to be the effect of water. A series of wrecks of hills runs through the middle of the valley, all of them of the same appearance and color as the rocks before mentioned

[p8.] and having apparently undergone the same changes.

The last of these rocky narrow ridges dividing the valley from south to north is a mere wall-like elevation of from 4 – 10 feet in height and sloping gradually down on the western side.

Soon after we have passed this we find the breadth of the valley diminishing, so as if there had not been at any time room for any hills or ridges between the rocky sides which border the valley east and west.

Where the precipitous and ruinlike character of the western hills ceases (passing them from south to north) they show only now and then a similar change in horizontal belts near their bases, but they are marked by curved lines running parallel and close to each other from the base towards the top, ascending from north to south and dividing terrace-like the less abrupt sides of the hills.

Quite different is the character exhibited throughout the length of the eastern range, large angular fragments of rocks some of a conglomerate character are overlaying each other in the greatest disorder and placed so, apparently by violent agencies, and the hill-sides are rough, broken and bold and covered with dense scrub comprising a varied flora whilst the western hills are partly bare and support principally small salsolaceous herbs and isolated groups of shrubs among which I noticed a thorny shrub of the Pittosporae and another of the Sapindaceae, *Dodonaea*?, all plants which are found also on the flats and in the valley.

It is the eastern range of hills where these larger and beautiful basins are situated,

[p9.] at short distances from each other, indeed five of them in the short space of eight miles. Each of them has its peculiar character and scenery, and if sufficient time was given to an artist it would not be difficult for him to fill a sketchbook with the scenery of and around these mountain-gorges.

I have seen four of them, the first two, are of a somewhat similar character. We enter a narrow gorge formed by precipitous rocks through which as it were a torrent of water turned into rock rushes down to the valley. At different heights this bed or water worn rock forms hollows and basins either depressions in the rock itself or basins formed by upstanding gigantic slabs leaning against the step like walls of rock. The rock though water worn is hard closely grained mostly of a dark grey color and in many places of a melted appearance, as if a whitish fluid had been poured over it, but this must have mixed quickly with the surface of the rock and seems to have been consolidated before it had time to run off. Some of these basins are so protected from the sun by perpendicular rocks close to them that the evaporation of these waters must be considerably less than that of others. I followed up the first of these gorges (Mutwanji) and I found it closed by perpendicular rocky walls of about 50 feet high and cleft by deep narrow crevices partly filled with fragments of rock and not accessible any further.

### ~~2.~~ III.

[p10.] The largest water basin and the grandest scenery are found near the heights of the second gorge (Mutwanji) distant from the first less than three miles. Approaching this reservoir for the first time we cannot look at that sight of imposing grandeur without a feeling of awe.

The sun was near the horizon and the shadows of night had already krept far up the solitary rocks, but their ruin like crests - naturally of a rich yellow color received the light of the setting sun almost metal like – the most striking contrast of light and shade I have ever seen in so limited a space. The eye strained by the vivid light above would descend and rest on the dark motionless sheet of water reflecting the still darker rocks around it. But how to describe scenery like this which even the artist would find extremely difficult to do justice to, the whole of the picture being so narrow and rising round us and before us to a height the true representation of which could not be brought under any rule of perspective!

The following day we took a bath in this reservoir and entering the narrow cleft between the rocks we found ourselves in a second basin, not as large as the first one, narrow and tortuous and the rocks rising perpendicularly on all sides to a height of probably more than 100 feet, and the towering masses of rock were only cut in two by a narrow strip of blue sky looking almost grey from the watery abyss in which we were.

The closeness of the place and the low temperature of the water made us feel uncomfortable very soon.

[p11.] The other two basins are of a different character; they are not of the same size nor do they offer any similar scenery, and whilst the two first basins are considerably elevated above the valley and the bottoms of the glens, these are at about the same level with the watercourses which they supply at a time of continued rain.

The following are the native names of the five reservoirs, commencing from the South, Langaverra, Mutwanji, Yulkurko, Bengora, Nothangbulla.

The vegetation of these gorges and still more of the whole range of eastern hills is rich, varied and contains no doubt several beautiful and yet unknown plants. In Mutwanji and Nothangbulla I found a luxurious shrub of *Acacia* which at our return was in full blossom. My well preserved specimens of this plant give only a poor idea of the extreme beauty of this shrub when in full flower.

Of those plants which were in flower or fruit were one or two species of *Dodonaea*, a *Cassinia* (a fine shrub attaining the height of from 7 – 10 feet and very frequent in the upper parts of the gorges), an exceedingly handsome species of *Dianella* (?), the largest plant I have ever seen of this genus, growing out from crevices between the naked rocks near the water basins and reaching the height of five feet and over. Shrubs of the genus *Stenochilus* are less frequent in these gorges than in the valley and the open hillsides.

[p12.] **[12th February. Arrived Duroadoo/Torowotto Swamp. Burke's camp 45].**

Duroadoo is a very fine place which deserves a few lines in our journal and our thankful remembrance. It is in fact, an oasis although by its character it belongs rightly to what is generally termed "swamps," localities with which we do not generally associate agreeable thoughts and pleasant recollections.

Yet in describing Duroadoo it appears hardly justifiable to apply the designation : swamp. There are parts of Duroadoo which would at any time deserve the name of swamp, but other parts would not.

Duroadoo is a depression of considerable area in midst the undulating country with a red sandy surface soil and extending in all directions for many miles. One cannot see anything of the "swamp" before one is close to it. The scenery of Duroadoo is not very striking, yet has some peculiarities and its first impression will for a certainty always be an agreeable one. By the time we arrived at Duroadoo the most modest of us who would content himself with the least change in the view around himself and, with the smallest amount of green, would be tired with the everlasting dry sandy undulating country with its profusion of dead mulga's and very little else besides the sickly greyish and whitish green of salsolaceous shrubs and herbs.

[p13.] Duroadoo appeared to us in its best light with miles of splendid green, plenty shadowy trees and an abundance of water.



Figure 3. Scenery in the swamp at Duroadoo, 1861. Hermann Beckler. H16486.



There was a very small quantity of water in Duroadoo at the beginning of December; the swamp was about that time filled with water from the same rains which caused the floods further south, Goningberri, Wonamente, Baldanmati and Nanthurungee Creeks, pouring its blessing over more than 100 miles. The same rains provided the country about Cooper's Creek with a temporary supply of water which opportunity Mr. Burke used for a start to the N [North]. Duroadoo was in a state of flood when I was out first (Decemb. 26) [rescue of Lyons and McPherson], it contained plenty of water during February, and when we finally left it on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March [refers to later in journey], there was still a sufficient quantity for several weeks, and no rain had fallen since the 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> of December. As long as the water in Duroadoo would last it would always be sufficient for a number of animals. This is its very character, a depressed situation with a labyrinth of waterbeds winding through the whole of it. These watercourses from four to eight feet in depth and of a [?] breadth varying from 8 – 14 feet (at a time where they are full, and without the intermediate ground being swamped) are throughout Duroadoo formed of a stiff clay retaining the water as long as evaporation will leave a drop upon them. After a flood the clayey banks of these beds cover themselves with a small sedum-like plant [?Nardoo] in such profusion that one cannot see the color of the ground at a short distance and the sloping banks have from that plant a color of blood diluted with water.

#### IV.

[p14.] In whatever direction one crosses the swamp the wanderer's progress is now and then stopped suddenly by one of these waters, at the time of our sojourn at Duroadoo from three to four feet in depth and of varying breadth forming sometimes sinuses of from twelve to twenty feet across.

Parts of the swamp are well timbered with a species of Eucalyptus (box tree) attaining a height from 30 – 40 feet, but generally of a more stunted character, their foliage is dense and of a lively green, and from their general growth they are picturesque objects. The banks of the water courses are more or less thickly overgrown and shaded by the same polygonum which is so frequent in the lakes (back-waters) near the Darling, their long curved branches and shoots bending in all directions and forming suckers wherever they touch the ground.

With all the apparent richness the vegetation is yet very uniform, but a limited number of species divide between themselves the refreshing carpet thrown over Duroadoo.

Besides the box trees there is only one(?) species of Acacia attaining a height of from 25 – 30 feet but mostly of lesser size. I am not certain whether a difference I noticed in apparently the same plant constitutes only a variety, certain it is that this Acacia has in different parts of the swamp a striking appearance owing to a curled and twisted-like character of the leaves.

To the north and east the swamp runs out into flats the soil of which is of equal color (a light yellowish grey) but different in consistency.

[p.15] That of the northern flats is loose and crumbles in small pieces and is - almost exclusively - covered with a species of *Atriplex* of which the camels became so fond that they would for the space of two weeks make for this flat every morning without ever straying from it.

The eastern flat has a harder more consistent soil, its surface does not crumble but marks and its prevailing vegetation is a large stiff wiry grass growing in tufts or bushes and its stalks bending outwards and downwards draw whenever the wind moves them to and fro, concentric circles in the hard and naked ground around the bushes, a very singular sight when our travels over an extent of such country, where nothing else can be seen than these grass tufts each having its own self-drawn line of demarcation.

There are some beautiful isolated shady groups of box trees on the northern flat but only the more central parts have the appearance of thickets, the eastern flats are less rich in trees and the low range of sandhills bordering and closing in Duroadoo from all sides is continually in sight.

The country around Duroadoo is undulating. Leaving our camp in a N.W. direction I found myself after the first sand hills on a large extent of country of a loamy and sandy soil, intersected by low sand ridges of from one to several miles in length, from 200 – 300 yards broad and generally laying in a direction from W to E.

[p.16.] The color of the soil is a fiery red similar to that of burnt bricks and on the sand hills the surface sand loose and apparently without any admixture reaches to the depth of 2 feet and more; yet the country has a richer vegetation than one might expect on account of the quality of the soil and the general dry character of the climate. *Salsolaceae* are prevailing, but I noticed different *Solanaceae*, *Malvaceae*, *Portulacaceae* and two kinds of *Amaranthaceae*, the latter very numerous on the low sandy ridges.

All herbaceous plants were at the time of our visit dry and withering, but the smallest shrubs and bushes still kept their vivid and cheerful green. The most interesting plant I saw on these sandhills was a fine tree of noble appearance which I noticed here for the first time. About 15 of these trees were growing on an area of from 25 – 30 acres and I was sorry not to be able to find even the dry fragments of flowers or fruits. From its general appearance the tree would seem to belong to the *Sapindaceae*.

### **[15<sup>th</sup> February. Left Duroadoo/Torowotto Swamp].**

The country from Duroadoo to our first camp from that place, distant about 20 miles does not change much in appearance. It is undulating for the greater part with only a few more remarkable depressions in which the vegetation is better or at least different in its character from the general character. Thin grasses

and composite plants are more numerous and isolated box trees make the difference still more marked. The soil of these interesting flats is loose soft and of a greyish color.

[p17.] On one of these flats boxtrees were numerous. For an extent of several miles (over the undulating sandy country) a *Grevillea* of a stunted character was frequent and here we noticed also a few isolated leopard-trees (*Flindersia* ?) a beautiful small tree very frequent on the sand hills near Pamamero Lake. At about seventeen miles from Duroadoo we descend into plain like country passing two long hills to our right. This country looked most luxuriant partly from a box tree flat bordering it and partly from a greater number of shrubs and large salt bushes than we had seen since leaving Duroadoo.

Here the tree we had first seen near Duroadoo was more frequent and shrubs of *Acacia*, *Stenochilus* and *Hakea* formed small thickets, and here we were again in a whole system of clay pans, some of considerable size, the first since Duroadoo. Many of these clay pans look quite as red as the country around and they are strewn with stones or angular fragments of rock, clay stone and siliceous sand stone; but they have not the glazed and cracked appearance of those farther to the right and near which we encamped.

H. V.

[p18.] During our first day's journey from this camp we had the first glimpse of desert-like country. The impression of the first sight of these regions was far different from what we ever before experienced on our route.

The unexpected variety of scenery in the mountains was an agreeable surprise and the ruin - like rock sides and the perpendicular walls of the gorges lost much of their formidable appearance clothed as they were with an abundance of green of every shade and resounding with the voices of the feathered tribe. From here to Duroadoo the neighbourhood of the creeks were the relieving points and the general view dry and uninviting as it was for the greater part of the journey still encouraged us to scout for the few scattered spots of a more genial character which were in our reach and man can content himself with little.

Here it was different. Suddenly nature turned her friendly features from us and looked - new and interesting indeed – but gloomy and repulsive. The day was hot the air was dazzling before we had left the camp and a strong northerly wind threw streams of heated air over us. For the first few miles there was still the same country. Gradually a range of barren hills came into view to our left, looking indifferent at first but soon forcing their stern features upon us. The plain before us opened more and more, the clay pans around us, marked in small polygonal fields which look very regular at a short distance, and

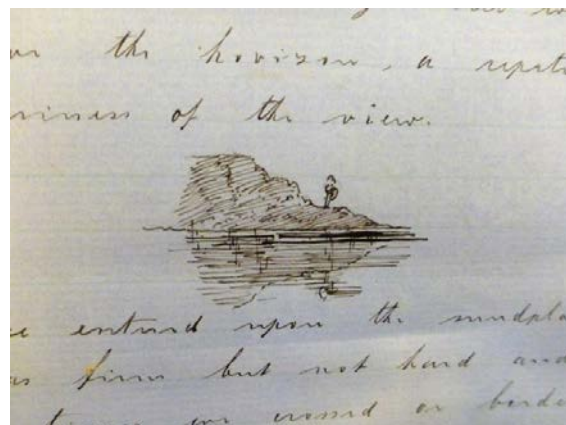
glittering like glazed pottery grew larger, the vegetation became thinner and poorer until we found ourselves on

[p19.] a large expanse of whitish ground divided into shallow basins or pans of irregular but rounded outlines by narrow ridges of a looser soil. These were from 1 – 2 feet high and covered with the dried and brownish remains of the poorest vegetation to be seen. For some length this ground was almost white and so hard that the tracks of our horses had left very faint impressions.

Gradually the soil changed not in color but in consistency and our feet broke easily through the even and unruffled surface to the depth of from 1 – 3 inches. To our left were the barren hills with an undulating outline and of the color of burnt bricks, but broad streaks of a glowing and darker red run horizontally across them and these rested on a base of somber pale green rarely interrupted by the more vivid color of a few isolated shrubs.

After having travelled for a short time we found the soil again improving for walking and the plain before us looked interminable, to the right were still some broken lines of brownish scrubby bushes between us and the horizon. On these baked mud plains we travelled for the rest of the day and as we went on we had around us nothing more than the interminable desert plain with the same disc-like horizon as one has at sea, only to the left we had still the red stony ridges which at some distance before us receded and projected again on the mudplains further on.

[p20.] Refraction wove its illusory sights so close to us that we could often not believe our eyes. The whole day a belt of timber of stunted growth or better a broad row of small trees with round thickly leafed tops walked before us at about half a mile's distance. They were nothing but the magnified and elevated images of small isolated plants of from 6 – 10" in height. We passed places where we saw small pans filled with water not more than one hundred yards from us and with all the refraction around us we still believed that it was water.

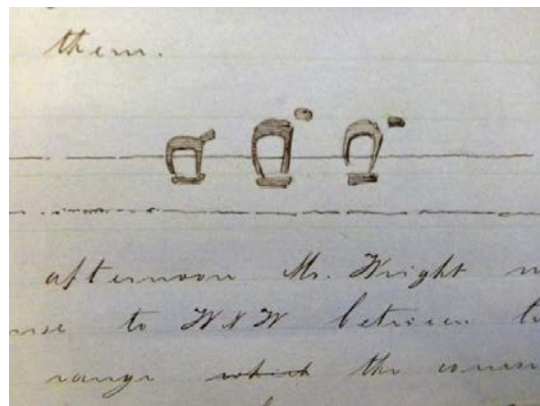


Further on the projecting points and sides of the ranges were resting on broad sheets of water of ethereal blue and they were plainly reflected in them. Before us and to our right a sharp and even line divided the spotless blue of the sky from the equally spotless field of light yellow color on which we moved. Now and then a yellow oscillating line would be seen floating about the horizon, a repetition which added to the dreariness of the view.

**[15<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> February. Mud Plain Camp].**

Once entered upon the mud plains proper the ground was firm but not hard and marked and blistered. At times we crossed or bordered for a length of several hundred yards a curved line of demarcation on the same level with the plains, apparently the mark of floods which had passed their waters over these regions. Beyond this line the soil was a shade darker but of the same character. These wave-like lines had their concave side towards the East.

[p21.] Camels seen on these plains at a distance of from 400 – 500 yards look so curious that it may interest you to see the caricature which refraction makes of them.



**[19th February. Rat Point].**

In the afternoon Mr. Wright met us and we changed our course to WNW between two projecting spines of the range the course of which took a wide semicircular sweep on the farther end of which we encamped. This place was Rat point.

[sgnd.] Herman Beckler.

## VI.

[p22.] [**Mud plains**]. These dreary mud plains whilst they are the most unlikely place for finding water have at least this advantage that one can quickly travel over them even at night which is more agreeable than during day-time after having once been satisfied with their cheerless but remarkable features.

If you know your course well there is nothing to stop you. Keep clear of the stony ranges to the west, which although low are plainly visible as a dark broad line. There are no stones, no bushes, no holes, no crevices, no watercourses, it is all smooth and soft ground yet firm enough for convenient travelling and as level as a cricket ground. The sky cloudless for weeks will allow the traveler to take his course by the guidance of stars, an easy matter on our course as we have to mind only our direction for crossing the plains. You are quite alone yet you feel as safe as you could possibly do anywhere. The only life about you are numerous rats rushing from the tufts of wiry grass on the roots of which they feed and which grass only grows on certain points near the projecting spurs of the stony ranges, but if you are fond of the mournful howl of dingoes you have nothing to do but to cooe and they will answer in a full chorus from the hills so readily at a moment's notice as if they were prepared and waiting for the signal.

Your ship of the desert moves along at a steady pace to which the tin pots on your saddle keep time with a low tinkling sound. There is no other sound to disturb the traveler in his reflections to which he feels himself particularly disposed in this vast solitude

[p23.] and no other ~~sight~~ sight to attract his attention than the slowly changing scenery of the world of stars. It is impossible to recall to our mind those nights passed in crossing the mudplains without thinking of the serene peace and that inward pleasure which we enjoyed on those occasions and which the common world around us is too poor or too rich to offer. In this way, hour after hour glides swiftly past us, the camel seems to be disposed for a short rest, the air is getting chilly and our glittering star dial shows that the morning is approaching, we have caught ourselves napping twice and we think it is time to dismount and to rest.

We stretch ourselves on the ground, keeping the nose string of the camel tied around our arm and we enjoy one or two hours sleep during which that tame companion of ours does not even give a jerk and both refreshed we complete the rest of our journey.

### **Leave the mudplain on "Rat Point" camp.**

Mr. Hodgkinson returned from rat point camp on the eight of March. The news he brought were not cheering. Mr. Wright and party had not yet returned from their tour. Mr. Becker and William were determined to leave the camp, and to walk to Duroadoo should Mr. Hodgkinson not arrive with a fresh

supply of water. Mr. Hodgkinson brought a note from Mr. Becker containing his suggestions as to what should be done

[p24.] in our present dilemma. We agreed that two of us should follow Mr. Wright's track as far as possible and do everything in their power to find out what had become of him and party. We agreed further that under the circumstances we would do better to establish our camp at Duroadoo and to bring all the provisions to that place leaving only those articles at the rat point camp which would be safe from the destruction from the numberless rats.

### **[10<sup>th</sup> March. Left Duroadoo/Torowotto for Rat Point].**

We left Duroadoo with all the camels and horses the former loaden with water, on the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, and arrived in the afternoon at the waterhole (a small place dug by Mr. Hodgkinson and myself to secure some surface water close to it). We were rejoiced in finding here Smith and Beloodch who had come down from rat point with the camels which were out with Mr. Wright and party.

The party had returned the day before to rat point camp. I was told to proceed to the camp as Mr. Wright had been attacked with dysentery and seemed to be very ill.

After having allowed the camels I wanted to take to the camp about one hour and a half's feeding I left and arrived at mid-night at the camp. Mr. Wright was very ill indeed, yet he thought he would recover so speedily that arrangements could be made for leaving the mud plain camp.

The arrangements were as follows:

The camels were to come up to the camp on the following day (the 11<sup>th</sup>).

[p25.] They were to leave the camp on the 12<sup>th</sup> and to camp at a spot pointed out to Beloodch previously, distant from the mudplain camp about twelve miles. That day all the horses were to come up from Duroadoo to the camp. They were to be packed and to leave the following morning, to get a drink at our advanced camp from where the horse party would push on to Puria Creek, whilst the caravan was to follow in less severe stages.

### **[13<sup>th</sup> March]**

Accordingly Mr. Hodgkinson, the cook, Beloodch and myself left with the camels and camped at the spot where Mr. Wright had desired us to stop. Early in the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup> I called up Beloodch and we both went to get the camels.

It was still too dark to see any distant object and by daylight we were more than a mile from the camp and could not see any thing of the camels. Soon after we found their tracks and it was plain they were one and

all en route for Duroadoo. Our position was then very critical. The horses which would come up that day to the camp we had left in the morning, would no doubt take a good quantity of water.

Mr. Hodgkinson and William had to stop at the camp, till [Beloodch] and myself would return with the camels, and what would be the quantity of water left for the remaining fifty miles which we would not hope to make in less than two days and a half.

[Beloodch] and myself did not return to the camp but we made straight for the mudplain camp

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[p26.] where we expected to find the party still and from which place we wanted to take some provisions and water to enable us to follow the camels to Duroadoo and to bring them back. We left at about 11 a.m. and after having walked a couple of miles we saw four camels. The rest of the camels were probably ahead. Beloodch now hit upon a very good plan.

He said the camels would bring up a large quantity of water if we would only have the water bags; saddles could be dispensed with for once; he was certain that the animals would not take any injury, besides we would only load half the number of camels and change them at a place half way between Duroadoo and the advanced camp.

### **[14<sup>th</sup> March. Duroadoo/Torowotto].**

Beloodch would follow the camels, so I took one of them to head back to the advanced camp, gave her two buckets of water with some flour and left again a little before sunset for Duroadoo. Beludsch had found the rest of the camels on the track to Duroadoo and they were quietly grazing on their favourite flat when I arrived there on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March at noon. With the pads and the pieces of oil cloth I had brought with me we made protections round the humps of the camels and left Duroadoo for the last time on the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> of March and arrived at the camp on the 16<sup>th</sup>.

During our last trip to Duroadoo and back nothing of interest occurred. The camels were very dry on their arrival at Duroadoo. They had not had any water since Sunday, and they

[p27.] certainly did not like to leave the famous swamp again so soon. Beloodch had not been troubled by the natives, only one of them came near his camp at midnight and exchanged a friendly “Nelgo” or good night with him. In the morning I gave an impertinent young Macquara who came up very friendly and offered to bring us ducks (Cultava) for dinner, an old veil. He was so changed in his manner that morning that I thought it best to encourage his friendship by a small gift and by the promise of more when we would return.



**[15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> March].**

We travelled during the night from the 15 to the 16, it was very dark and we had for a time some difficulty. Once on the barren mud plains we could keep the tracks easily. We made a short halt to rest ourselves and the camels, and we took the water bags off their backs. They lay there as still and as quietly as if they had been dead, and soon they stretched their long necks and heads, the lower side of neck and head touching the ground, and slept. After two hours rest we continued our journey and completed it without stopping.

**The country between rat point camp and Puria Creek.**

**(Distance about 60 miles.).**

Leaving that real desert camp the inhospitable nature of which is only increased by its being occupied by multitudes of rats from which nothing can be kept secure and which are so wild that they prey upon each other, we travelled in a northern direction, crossing first a far-projecting span of the range of stony hills mentioned already and found our

[p28.] selves again on the mud plains, still interminable to the East, but looking less discouraging towards the North. On their western limit the stony hills border them for some 14 – 16 miles further from the camp. At the base of these hills we noticed fragments of rock, quartz, sandstone and curiously shaped stones of a melted appearance and different colors, with many rounded small cavities and holes, the surface of the specimens being rounded, mostly smooth and their shapes so irregular and striking (some with two or more branch like parts, others looking somewhat like a confused mass of roots, and the unglazed parts apparently soft and much changed by the action of water:) that I regret not to be able to give them here their proper name.

The hills are of a deep red color contrasting effectually with the pale and whitish green of strips of low salsolaceous plants and isolated small groups of trees – the same three species I noticed for the first time on the sand hills near Duroadoo. The range recedes then somewhat to the West, our tracks keep its original direction and at a distance of eight miles from rat point camp the character of the soil shows a slight change. The ground becomes softer and takes a darker brownish color the surface is less even and many small watercourses all of the clay pan character and of no different prospect are noticed. This direction is North and South. To the south they gradually are lost sight of when we approach the mud plains. The surface of these beds is of a warm brownish clay-color and cracks in large

[p29.] thin pieces turned upwards on all sides, and of so perfect glassy appearance that we believed several times to see water before us.

Gradually vegetation commences to cover the less obstructive soil and shows itself even luxuriant, such as it is, on more favoured patches of ground. Shrubs and trees are isolated, very few and mostly of a low stunted character. On the small watercourse where we camped, larger and of a different character from those noticed, and running W. and E. some large shrubs of *Acacia* and luxuriant bushes of *Atriplex* and *Polygonum* grew on the banks. About here the country began again to be dotted with claypans from 20 – 80 yards through, and of a depth of from 18 inches to 2 feet and above, their character however had completely changed with the change of the soil, the beds being mixed with red sand in such proportions that the sun could neither fix the rest of the evaporating water as a glassy cover nor mark their surfaces. From this camp we entered after a few miles march level country the surface ground of which consisted of white loose sand, yet clay pans were frequent and their bottom of a better quality for retaining water than those we had passed before reaching our last camp. The vegetation was poorer than any portion of country on our route with exception of the mudplains. At a distance of 10 - 11 miles from the camp we came on better ground with water-courses of a temporary nature on the banks of which stunted box trees and thickly leafed *Acacias* were frequent. I saw also a kind of Mallee never



Figure 4. Balrumatti Creek, [ca. 1861], Hermann Beckler )

[Possibly present day Paldrumata Creek] SLV 16486.

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[p30.] noticed before during our journey. On the large white clay pans a small plant of the Salsolaceae grew isolated and attracted our notice by its habit which was that of miniature trees and which gave the accustomed sight of these shallow basins a new and striking feature.

The vegetation was almost exclusively salsolaceous.

One might suppose that there would be a tiresome sameness in the aspect of this inland-country with the same plants, the same or little different character of the ground, the never failing clay pans, and the more or less level expanse of large tracts, the straight horizontal lines of which are but rarely broken by a shrub or the top of a tree. Yet this is not the case, and traveling through these regions we cannot but be astonished at the many changes which nature produces even with so poor materials by ever changing combinations and by those slight differences which are local. These changes we find as soon as we begin to look for them and we shall be eager to search for them as soon as the superficial review of the country impresses us with its apparent monotony, but many of these changes are so slight as to defy their differential descriptions or to make their perusal palatable or instinctive, they are the undivided and unsurried pleasure of the traveller and they go far to compensate him for the cheerless solitude of the inland.

We passed through a tract of country where the clay pans looked exceedingly pretty. They were small, from 10 – 15 yards through, of regular oval outlines, of from 2 – 3 feet in depth and enclosed by bushes of *Atriplex* with an abundance

[p31.] golden blossoms and silver like leaves drooping from the heat and the drought. The forms were neat and rounded and the absence of anything like green and the unusually dark color of the many branches and twigs gave the whole a strange appearance, here nature had been pleased to show us some exquisite production of the most perfect workmanship in the silversmith-line.

The sun was near the horizon and we determined to camp near a group of trees a few hundred yards from us, just there and nowhere else about a heavy shower of rain of this afternoon had left a good supply of fresh water in the extensive clay pans. We had some water in the bags, but here we had at once plenty for ourselves and the camels, and we enjoyed that luxury accordingly..

### **[18<sup>th</sup> March. Cariapundi/Karriapundi Swamp].**

Leaving this camp we travelled for some miles over similar country, to the NW. a rugged and broken chain of mountains came in sight. Between us and the range distant from 12 – 14 miles from our track and about as many miles long an extensive swamp stretched to the north. The swamp (Cariapundi) was quite

dry at the time but it looked green and William who was riding on a camel remarked that it was a very fine sight. For some distance our track bordered the eastern limit of the swamp but soon we were too far from it to keep it in sight. In the afternoon we crossed an extent of flat swamp like country with polygonum and here and there a belt of Acacia. Here we had the very rare gratification to collect a few herbaceous plants full in blossom and from the whole appearance of the country it was evident that rain must have blessed this part a short time before our passing through.

[p32.] **[Towards Puria Creek]**

Towards evening we entered again sandy and rather barren country the richest parts of which were flats and clay pans with large bushes of Atriplex which were bordered by narrow sandy ridges of from 10 – 20 feet elevation.

We were now according to Beloodch's calculation about 15 miles from a waterhole from which we had to travel twenty miles further to reach Puria Creek.

The country from here to the waterhole was of the same character, flat with slight undulations, and during the whole day we travelled between two low, continuous ridges with a red sandy surface soil, running parallel with each other in a NNE direction and keeping the same distance, from 3 – 4 miles between each other. The flat country between them consisted chiefly of chains of extensive shallow pans (polygonum flats) which were bordered by beds of a looser soil with larger saltbushes. The herbaceous vegetation was completely dried up and for the greater part scanty. Composite plants have here probably the highest proportion of herbage fit for pasture.

The bottom of the clay pans was so hard that our horses had on many places hardly made any impression on it, their tracks, where we could see them, had only taken off the thin and glassy cover of the ground. Near the waterhole which is in the bed of a temporary watercourse the vegetation was improving. The waterhole itself contained only fluid mud, unfit for ourselves, yet the camels sipped from the surface with apparently great satisfaction.

[p33.] By allowing the fluid to percolate through bunches of grass and stalks into a small hole which was dug near the waterhole we succeeded in getting a good supply for the animals in the course of the evening.

Leaving this we passed through country more undulating and in its character very similar to the elevated sandy flats about Duroadoo.

**[20<sup>th</sup> March. Arrived Puria Creek].**

When about five miles from Puria Creek the sandhills to our right showed a greater elevation than we had seen before and we had again a characteristic scenery around us. Between us and the hills the country was

flat and full of extensive clay pans of a white and hard ground the surface of which reflected the rays of the sun towards evening like polished marble in long streaks and the isolated shrubs and bushes on the hills, to the greater part burnt by a recent fire but still retaining their rounded outlines dotted and lined the masses of red sand behind them with most beautiful shades of brown and tints neutral.

### **Puria Creek. [20<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> March]**

Puria Creek seems to be a tributary of Koorliatto Creek. South and S.W. from our camp are sandy ridges, from 100 – 150 feet high and distant about one mile. Near the base of these hills the water course begins as a shallow bed scarcely attracting our notice, a few hundred yards farther this is suddenly emerging into a bed of from 10 – 15 feet in depth and from 50 – 70 feet wide and the banks are lined with thickets of shrubs and small trees and box trees of large

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[p34] dimensions and varying from 40 – 60 feet in height.

We camped at the junction of two similar short watercourses terminating at short distances from the camp, the one mentioned comes from the SW, the second has an easterly direction, below the junction the creek follows a northerly course making a large bend to the East about two miles below the camp and turning again northwards. In three directions, North, East and West the country has for some miles the same features, successions of sandy ridges with long flats of very hard white clayey ground between them. The pastoral capabilities of this tract of country are considerable and we found even on our return journey a body of water in the main creek which allows the conclusion of its being permanent and a tributary of Koorliatto Creek. The banks are strewn with shells and during our stay here we had thanks to the exertions of Messrs Wright and Hodgkinson frequently numbers of fish.

The sandhills have the same vegetation as those about Duroadoo. The thickets lining the banks consisted of large salt bush, polygonum and small trees of Acacia which I had seen only once before growing isolated on a dry water course about 60 miles from Duroadoo between that place and Puria Creek. One or two species of the sapindaceous family, small trees of noble growth and foliage were also frequent in the thickets, they reminded me at once of their more noble brethren in the eastern coast-forests in comparison with which they were poor representatives of a high order of plants on the ungrateful soil and in an equally uncongenial climate.

[p35.] The acacias were full of bushes of two species of Loranthus of which genus I found a third one which was quite new to me, reaching from the branches of a box tree and from a height of about 15 feet to near the ground.

The banks are very similar to those of the waters at Bulla, clay of ashen grey color and like them without any vegetation on the clear, smooth mostly gentle slope to some 5 – 6 feet elevation above the surface of the water. Here and there luxuriant bushes of a species of *Polygonum* grew on the water's edge reaching sometimes far into the creek. The vivid green masses formed one of the greatest ornaments of the creek the water in which was of the same dead-grey color as the banks.

Near our camp the bank was for some length covered with the confused mass of the dry rhizomes and stems of the same plant, from which the numberless rats rushed out [?] at night in all directions towards our fire place. Between the camp and the long easterly bend of the main-creek and farther on in the same direction the country is flat, timberless, the clay pans frequent and extensive, many of them are deeper than any I had seen before. Their steep and abrupt sides of a soft white sandy soil exhibit watermarks of different heights which allow to suppose that the whole of that country is subject to inundations. The aggregate extent of the utterly barren clay pans must amount to a considerable part of the whole area.

### **The country between Puria and Koorliatto Creeks.**

[p36.] **[30<sup>th</sup> March. From Puria to Koorliatto Creek. Passed Burke's camp 51].** For the first few miles we travelled over undulating country consisting exclusively of low sandy ridges and claypans. The sandy undulations as well as the clay pans show differences in the surface-soil part of the former being red or reddish, part of white color, the surface of the latter – the clay pans – is red and sandy, or white hard clay, or further on towards the plain of a loose partly crumbling soil of a deep, gloomy yellow color. The character of the white claypans with a hard surface has been noticed above, the red clay pans although firm are less hard and take easier the impressions of the tracks of animals. The yellow pans have the softest and least coherent surface of all. Corresponding with the difference of color and the degrees of firmness we notice a difference in the marking of the surface after the water has been evaporated. The reddish pans mark their surface oft in more or less regular fields, generally pentagonal or hexagonal, the surface remains even and no crust detaches itself from the ground, as is the case in the white clay pans where the less regularly marked surface has a thin glassy cover, the fractured pieces of which are slightly uneven. The yellow claypans have when marked a more crumbled appearance and the fragments on the surface are convex.

The country is not barren, but at the time of our passing through, everything was dried up. The sandhills have no new features, their shrubs and bushes preserve their surprising freshness, whilst the herbaceous vegetation has long been dry.

[p37.] At about six miles from the camp the country becomes more flat and uniform and the vegetation to the greater part consisting of composite plants seems to be scanty at all times.

Near the dry and shallow watercourse on which Mr. Burke had had his 51st camp, the country extends to the N and E. in plains and the sandhills limiting it to the W are very low. We saw no more claypans, the soil is soft of dingy grayish and brownish color with a scarcely hardened surface-crust and of that description which colonists call "rotten ground." It is full of holes and crevices and intersected in all directions by numerous and well-frequented paths, probably those of rats which abound here. The plains may be said to be timberless, but there are isolated box trees of a stunted character, seldom more than from 8 – 10 feet in height.

Mr. Wright thought this very fair pastoral country during good seasons, it did not look promising at all when we passed through. Towards the creek the vegetation is improving and there is some extent of country on both sides of the creek timbered with box trees and an Acacia the largest of which I saw about 45 feet high and 12 inches through at three feet from the ground. Here I saw, for the first time since we had left Melbourne a branchy and densely-foliated stunted tree, a species of Capparis.

The same or a similar species is frequent on some parts of the Darling north east from Menindee, and known to the colonists under

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[p38.] the name of "Native orange-tree". This tree looked quite a stranger here.

**[4<sup>th</sup> April. From Koorliatto Creek to Bulla/Bulloo/Wright's Creek]**

From Koorliatto Creek to Bulla there is no change observable in the soil or in the appearance of the country. To the west low sandhills limit our view for some miles. To the East we have more or less parallel with our track the almost unbroken and prominent line of timber on the banks of the creek distant from 3 – 4 miles from our route. Farther on, the sandhills to the westward disappear, and a range of considerable hills, apparently stony but not barren extends for many miles in a northerly direction and at a distance of 5 – 7 miles from our track.

We crossed some dry watercourses the sides of which were here and there densely covered with bushes of Polygonum, shrubs of Atriplex and small Acacia trees.

The whole country had the appearance of being frequently flooded; the same I observed on the plains which we crossed running to Koorliatto Creek and which extend from there in a southerly direction for some 15 – 16 miles.

To the E. we could not see their limit.

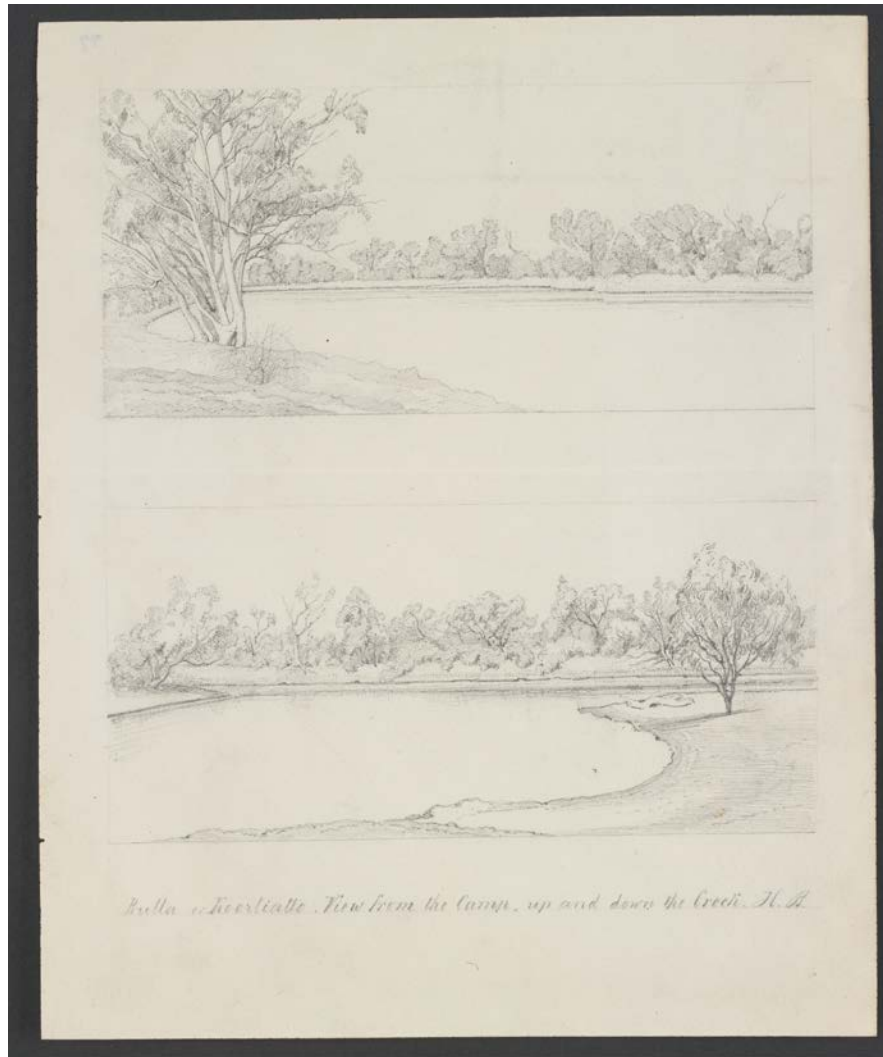


Figure 5. Bulla or Koorliatto: view from the camp up and down the Creek [ca. 1861].

Hermann Beckler. SLV H16486.

Arriving at Bulla I thought the scenery around the camp with its broad sheet of water enclosed by the smooth clear and light colored banks and the forest-like belts of gum-trees, box trees and Acacias on both sides of the water exceedingly pleasing. Of the country around, I have seen too little to be able [p39.] to say anything about it.

Our other recollections of that place are so painful that we cannot look back with pleasure to its sober, but smiling and peace-breathing scenery, and we take our leave from it with this hope that the graves of those whom we have buried there, may protect their earthly remains for so long as Christian humanity deems sufficient.

[sgnd.] Herman Beckler.