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Supplementary Material 2

In 'The Exploring Expedition,' (From Dr. Beckler). The *Argus* (Melbourne), 4 December 1860, p. 6 only. http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/5694347

Transcribed by Beverley Wood.

THE EXPLORING EXPEDITION.

The following despatches were received from the exploring party yesterday morning, and were read at a meeting of the Exploration Committee of the Royal Society yesterday:-

(FROM DR. BECKLER)

[Report of a trip to the Scropes Range, 5 – 13 November 1860]

Sir– I left Bamamero Creek on the 5th of November [1860], with Mr. Hodgkinson and Peter, an Australian native, to visit some hills to the north of the Darling. We crossed the dry bed of the lake, which covers a considerable area, the longer diameter running north and south. The bottom of the lake consists throughout of a very soft clayey ground, which forms little hillocks, looking like the undulating surface of water in motion. At present the ground is quite dry and much cracked from the heat, as it probably is for the greater part of the year, and so soft (colonists term this quality "rotten" ground) that the hoofs of the horses and cattle leave deep impressions at every step. I think we had been riding over some four or five miles when the soil took a different character. It was quite as soft as the ground of the bed of the lake, but no more of that undulating appearance, and it was more fertile. Groups of box trees of a stunted growth, gum-trees of an average size, now and then an acacia, and sometimes a cluster of a poor kind of casuarina, formed the vegetation; whilst that of the bed of the lake is almost restricted to a woody wiry-looking kind of polygonum, one of the very few plants which the colonists call by their right name and a few salsolaceous plants, the greater part of the surface being quite bare. Only small spots were met with covered with a modest and poor cloth of some composite plants and a goodenia. The adjacent country, with soft, white clayey ground, is very limited in extent, at least in a northern direction, being bounded by a low range of red sand-hills, along which we rode for some distance, until we arrived at a certain point, where our guide wanted us to cross, in doing which we rode partly through dense scrub, with different species of acacia and

cassia, but the principal ornament was a small tree, full of blossoms and shining leaves. I took it to be a myoporum. There was also a larger kind of acacia, which I do not recollect having seen before. Now and then we crossed a narrow belt of larger timber, box-trees, casuarinas, and pines; then, again, small openings, alternating with the scrubby parts, and of the same character as the near plains. The ground was now very good for riding, it was hard enough to give a good footing, level, and only in spots covered with pebbles, mostly quartz.

After a ride over some 15 or 16 miles of country, large plains opened before us, with the still distant view of the mountains which bordered the horizon from west to north, sloping gradually at their western limit, but falling abruptly with their northern end. To the N. E. and E. we could not overlook the extent of the plains. The nearest part of the mountains from us seemed to be that to the west, whereas the central portion and the northern hills appeared to be more distant, as if their general direction was a sweeping line from W. through N.W. to N.E. The northern hills seemed to be of greater elevation, but too far to make for; besides, we were obliged to follow the native, who thought he might find water, our only supply being a goat's skin bag of water, half of which we had lost during our ride.

As soon as we had advanced a little distance on the plains we had a magnificent view. The northern hills were bathed in sunlight and mirage, and I never saw that beautiful phenomenon to such advantage. Looking in a certain direction it presented itself like a large glittering sheet of water lying between plain and mountain, and enclosed from all sides, dark distant trees forming charming avenues to it. It was as if we were actually with our eyes open approaching a fairy land. From the mirage, the transparent state of the atmosphere, and the blinding light, we under-rated our distance from the hills, and we had still six or seven miles of plains to ride over when we thought to be only four miles from them. At last they were close before us, and we came between two hills into an open glen, where the vegetation indigenous to this part was more luxuriant than at any other spot between the hills.

The hills close in upon the glen from both sides; farther on, the ground of the glen rises, and runs in a north-easterly direction. Towards the north it opens into a narrow gully, both sides of which present bold features in their precipitous rocks.

At the entrance to the gully the hills project from both sides in acute angles, with large boulders and broken rocky surfaces, making a very picturesque scenery.

Here we found a native well, with a sufficiency of rather muddy water. We discovered, however, soon after, some splendid rocky waterholes, in the gully before-mentioned.

Entering the gully, we saw to our right a cave, or rather a grotto, and we resolved at once to make it our camp. Mr. Burke's party had also been here, as we found their mark, with the number of the camp (36), painted on one side of the cave. It is large enough to give shelter to a few travellers and as picturesque and wild as if its design had been borrowed from the imagination of a Salvator Rosa.

Figure 1: View of the gully with the rocky waterholes, Gogirga Mountains, 7 November 1860. Herman Beckler. SLV H16486.

Figure 2: Grotto, at the entrance of a gully, Gogirga Mountains, 7 November 1970. Herman Beckler. SLV H16486.

Numerous swallows have made their home here; their nests, which hang in groups, covering part of the roof. The nests are made of the same red sandy loam which forms the surface-ground of the glen, and although constructed after the same principle–the fundus, or body, bell-shaped and wide, tapering gradually towards the neck, which ends in a circular, well-defined opening– they show some variety, according to the form of the particular spot to which they are attached. Some have the neck shorter, in others the neck is turned to one side, others have the entrance looking downwards, although most of them have it upwards-looking. Some seem to have been out of repair, and are partly covered with an additional coating of dark-coloured mud, in the shape of a belt round the neck, or the upper part of the body.

They are much of the same size, from 10 to 12 inches long, 4 to 6 inches broad in the lower part, and about 2 inches in the neck. The cave contains also numerous marks from the natives, which look rather strange. These marks are the outlines of hands, large and small ones, with outstretched fingers, the fingers always tending upwards or sideways, the hands often in the natural colour of the rock, the space around bespattered with white, red, or yellow.

The colours, our native says, are obtained from different ochres, and made into a paste with water, the syringe used to produce the peculiar appearance being the most simple. The natives take a mouthful of colour and spout it over the hand held close to the rock. The colours are always so chosen as to produce some contrast, or at least to define the impression of the hand well from the surrounding space. There are red hands with white spattering, forming a cloudlike background, the white colour being thickest between the fingers, and gradually vanishing around the sides of the hand and the tops of the fingers, yellow hands with red spattering, dark brown or blackish hands with red, white, or yellow, and different other combinations. The grotto is situated in the prominent part of the rocky hill to the right side of the entrance to the gully, and its base is some 20 feet above the level of the glen. It opens to the S.W. and faces the rocks of the opposite hills, closing in the gully, so that it is protected from W. to nearly N., whilst the prominent rocks overhanging the right side of the cave, and large detached rocks lying at its entrance, protect it from S.E. to nearly S.

Standing at the entrance, the open view to the south, with far-stretching plains, bordered on the distant horizon by forest, and intersected to the right by a few narrow belts of timber, is very nice, with the rough lines of near rocks enclosing the distant view, and right before us the glen, with its profusion of yellow acacia blossoms, amidst the vivid green of bushes and herbs–a picture which one would hardly expect to find in the unoccupied back country of the Darling. The greatest height of the grotto is from 12 to 14 feet, its depth about 25 feet, but one cannot conveniently penetrate so far, as the protruding rocks fill up more than half its depth to more than half its height. The roof is a little overhanging at the entrance, but its height does not vary considerably inside the cave. The rocks inside show concavities of different form and extent, and have generally a rough appearance, their colour being different, red, yellow, and grey, of many shades, with blackish smoke-like streaks, corresponding for the most with the prominent lines of the rocks.

The structure may be said to have something of architectural principles if you look closer at the dividing lines between the rocks. It is as if the main part of the roof, a gigantic piece of rock, rested in the back ground of the cave on those forming its side walls, but from the middle of the cave to its entrance the sides of this key-stone rise and leave the more or less horizontal lines of the rocks on the sides, and large rocks, one at each side, fill up these yawning angles, fitting so well that nothing intercepts their joining surfaces. Looking at this, one might almost be tempted to think that nature sometimes breaks up her own structures in the same way as men try to erect theirs and to give them permanence. The rocks forming the sides inside the cave are smooth, as if waterworn, or as if made so artificially, and different spots are of different colours. They have evidently been painted by the natives, and I found more than one place with several coatings of different colours. The cave must be one of their favourite spots when they are in the mountains, so they would naturally try to make it as nice as possible. The rocks forming the sides, and the large boulders at the entrance, are sandstone, very close and fine-grained, of a brownish grey, with quartz pebbles imbedded, and narrow veins of quartz running through them. Towards the roof they are of a coarser texture, like conglomerate, and some look like masses of pebbles held together by cement. From none of the higher points which I ascended, and which I would take to be from 450 to 500 feet high, could I get a view to show the extent of the ranges in their shorter diameter; I therefore tried to cross them in a northern direction, their longer diameter evidently running through north to the east and west. The distance across is from six to seven miles, and I was well repaid for the walk by a few beautiful distant views and some plants.

The more central parts of the hills are not rocky, at least the rocks are nowhere exposed, but undulating swellings of some extent with long gentle slopes, divided from each other by shallow drains, or by small gullies of little depth.

After having found some plants, new to me, on the rocky parts near the gully, I hoped to find a greater variety still between the hills. In this I was mistaken, the vegetation of the central parts being much poorer than the rocks and the gullies on the circumference of the mountains.

The soil is a red loam, profusely covered with quartz pebbles. Proceeding farther, I found it of the same colour, but much softer, and covered with angular, mostly flat, pieces of rock, apparently sandstone, of different texture, grain, and colour. Groups of a small kind of casuarina cover parts of the hills; the ground being covered with different salsolaceous plants, which prevail all over the hills. I found a good few different herbs of the Malvariæ, a few grasses, two or three species or varieties of a genus of the Saxindarias, a shrub with a beautiful blossom, like a Styphilia, and some composite plants–one of which, growing on rocks and in crevices, exhaled such a disagreeable odour that I could not stand near it for many minutes without feeling my head ache.

Figure 3: View of a distant range of mountains, seen from Gogirga Hills. 1860. Herman Beckler. SLV 16486.

At about three miles from the gully where the cave is I came to a rise, from which I saw the distant plains, both to the W. and N.E. Those towards W. were bordered on the horizon by a long considerable range of mountains. It extended by compass from S. 60 W. to N. 50 W. The greatest elevation was like table land, bearing W. The range seemed to be distant from 35 to 70 miles, and I have attempted to give you an idea of the view in a sketch. The hills or mountains I was on appeared to be here no more than from three to four miles in breadth. Following my course I arrived at last on the top of a sloping hill, from six to seven miles distant from the cave, where the mountains are bordered towards the N.W., and to the N.E., by plains, another small range rising before me, and running, as it seemed, in a N.N.E. direction. Looking around, I could see here and there, between the tops of the hills, bits of distant views - to the W., the long range of mountains noticed before; to the N.N.W., plains and flat timbered country, with inconsiderable hills at a distance; to the N.E. and E., plains, partly timbered, and bound by a series or chain of hills of little extent, and with few prominent points, the highest perhaps 200 feet high, distant from 10 to 12 miles. The principal drainage of water from the hills is to the south and east – the gully, with the cave to the south, being the most important of them, as can be seen easily by the marks which rushes of rain water have left in the glen. Shrubs of acacias lay bent to the ground, and are covered with rubbish and pieces of rocks of several pounds weight, and the highest watermarks extend over 15 feet to both sides from the middle of the water course.

Perhaps it is owing to this fact that the vegetation in the glen is so rich. The sides of the hills seem to suffer more from the north than from the south, the marks of decay being more distinct and frequent on that side.

The northern side of one of the hills, apparently sandstone, of a light, almost white colour, appears to be in the full process of a rapid decomposition.

I could nowhere find strata the dip or bearing of which I might have taken, although only in a rough manner, by means of a pocket compass.

Most of the shrubs growing in the hills are just now in blossom. I collected as many specimens as I could, and I hope I shall soon have an opportunity of sending them to you.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

[sgnd.] HERMAN BECKLER.

Bamamero, November 13,1860.

To John Macadam, Esq., M.D., M.L.A., Honorary Secretary Exploring Expedition.