

(No. 1.)



1856.

T A S M A N I A.

H U O N R O A D.

M E M O R A N D U M.

Laid upon the Table by Mr. Nairn, by Command, and ordered to be printed,
11 December, 1856.



MEMORANDUM with reference to the direct Line of Road to the Huon, for the information of His Excellency.

TRAVELLERS starting from Hobart Town to the Huon, either on foot or by horse, proceed at present by Sandy Bay to Brown's River, or by another road which is a little shorter, and from its extremely rugged and difficult character is very properly termed the "Stony Steps Road." These two roads unite about a mile from Brown's River, and form the proper Huon track or road: this track, which is nothing more than a single horse can travel in, is, for a distance of ten miles, the most rugged and difficult imaginable, fatiguing in the highest degree to a pedestrian, and can only be travelled on horseback at a walking pace. On reaching to within seven miles of the Huon the track suddenly assumes a different character; the country becomes nearly level, and so continues to its termination at the Ironstone Creek on the Huon River. The track through this part widens into a good cart road, and is used for this purpose by the settlers in the neighbourhood.

The distance from Hobart Town to the Ironstone Creek by Brown's River is about 28 miles,—by Stony Steps Road about 3 miles less; and, to demonstrate in the strongest manner the difficult character of the road, a traveller cannot reach the Huon on foot or by horse by either road under from 6 to 7 hours.

It has long been believed that a better and more direct line of road from Hobart Town to the Huon was quite practicable, and recent explorations of the country in this situation appear to leave no doubt of the fact.

The distance from Hobart Town to the Huon in a direct line is under 17 miles. About 5 miles of road have been opened from Hobart Town in the direction which it is desirable the road should run; and at the other end of the line another road has been opened starting from the Huon to the distance of 6 miles, and leaving but 7 or 8 miles of road to be opened.

The country in this situation is covered with so dense a forest that it is very difficult to pass through it; and, from the quantity of moisture prevailing there, it has never yet been cleared out by bush fires.

I have with difficulty penetrated a considerable depth into this forest, and I have carefully surveyed the country from several elevated points. From the observations I have made, no doubt remains upon my mind that a good road can be made between the termination of the road already opened from Hobart Town and the commencement of the road made in the same direction from the Huon.

The land situated to the right of the road now projected going from Hobart Town is of a very superior description, consisting principally of the finest garden mould, and is sufficiently level for ordinary culture; and, although the underwood is very thick, the number of very large trees is comparatively small, which very much diminishes the cost of clearing.

I have no hesitation in stating that, if this road was properly opened and constructed, it would make available for sale full 20,000 acres of valuable land now in the possession of the Crown; and, from its close proximity to town, with a gradual descent the whole way to bring produce,—the valuable splitting, sawing, and ornamental woods that abound there,—the superior quality of the soil,—abundance of moisture and equable climate

which it enjoys, with other advantages which I need not enumerate, it would be sold with the greatest readiness, and would produce a large sum to aid those objects to which the Land Fund is applied, and likewise materially augment the general prosperity of the Colony by adding considerably to our exportable produce.

From a careful consideration of the proposed road, and consultation with those competent to judge in the matter, I am of opinion that the whole line from Hobart Town to the Huon could be completed for £5000. I believe that in no part would the ascent be more steep than in some parts of the road to Launceston; and that, when completed, it will be quite practicable to ride or drive from Hobart Town to the Huon in two hours.

To show the important bearing of this road upon the future opening up of the crown lands of the Colony, I may mention that Ironstone Creek, when passengers either cross the Huon or take a boat to go to their destination on the river, is distant from

Port Davey	about 55 miles.
From Rasselas Valley, at the bend of the Gordon River, to the commencement of the Great Western Plains ..	45 "
From Research Bay	50 "
From Macquarie Harbour	85 "

It is close to the flourishing Township of Victoria, of which it forms a part. In this situation is to be found some of the best land in the Colony, occupied by a body of independent and industrious farmers, who contribute largely to the wealth of the Colony, and who are now reduced to the bi-weekly communication to town by the steamer, or to travel by the wretched and dangerous road which now exists. The settlers on the north bank of the Huon, proceeding upwards from Ironstone Creek, occupy land for a distance of nine miles; and a very rich tract of agricultural land, known as the "She-oak Hills," is reached by a track from Ironstone Creek, at about nine miles distance. The position of Victoria points out clearly that it will ere long become one of the most important interior townships in the Island; and it is obvious that this road will constitute the nearest approach to the hitherto unexplored western country, and will bring persons desiring to select land to within an insignificant distance of the most extensive and most valuable tract of waste land now in the hands of the Crown.

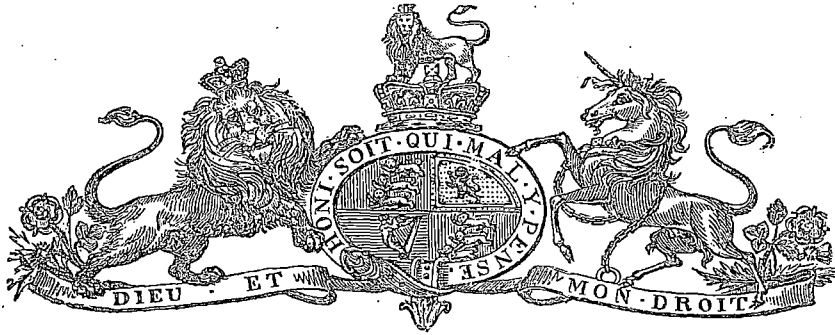
With regard to the cost of constructing this road, I have already stated that about £5000 would complete the whole. Of this sum I would guarantee subscriptions to the amount of £1000; and I have no hesitation in stating that, immediately on the completion of this road, and the survey of the land into small sections, the Government would readily sell 5000 acres at from £1 to £5 per acre. I am also of opinion that, if the road was properly surveyed and let out in separate portions by contract, the whole would be fit to travel on in 12 months. It will be remembered that of the whole distance—say 17 miles—about 11 miles are already opened, and only require widening, draining, levelling, and broken metal to make it passable at once. One or two creeks have to be bridged over; but, with abundance of timber on the spot, this would not be tedious or costly.

For the purpose, then, of at once ascertaining the best line of road through the seven or eight miles of country yet unexplored, I have to request His Excellency will order that 12 prisoners of the Crown and two constables as overseers be appropriated to this duty. Six men and an overseer could commence at each end of the line, and work on until they would meet: when the opening is once made the best line of road can be easily ascertained, and the work can be put in progress without delay.

I am of opinion that the work of cutting this road would not occupy more than a month; and the cost of the men, provisions, and tools could be charged to the fund appropriated to the road when sanctioned in the usual way.

The men would require rations for a month, bedding, 12 axes, and a few cooking utensils.

W. CROOKE.



IN submitting the accompanying Report of Mr. Calder's, of the nature of the country in the vicinity of the line of Road recently surveyed by Mr. Ballantyne between Hobart Town and the Huon River, I have to observe that the vast resources of the Huon District are unquestionable: it presents a wider field for the Labouring Classes, with a certainty of success, than any other part of Tasmania; and, if assistance be afforded in the opening up of Roads to the rich tracts of land and superior beds of timber lying back from the Huon River, I have no doubt the District in question will soon become thickly populated, provided the lands be made available in small sections and upon easy terms.

R. POWER,

Surveyor-General's Office, 6th December, 1856.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary.

Hobart Town, 2nd December, 1856.

SIR,

IN accordance with instructions to examine and report on the tract of country in the neighbourhood of the line of road lately marked from hence to the Huon River, I beg to acquaint you that I completed that duty on Thursday last, and reached town at noon of the following day.

In drawing up the report I have now the honor of offering, I have not confined myself to a naked description of the character of the soil and forests it is to pass through, but have taken the liberty of drawing a comparison between the southern and the pastoral districts' exports, and of offering a few observations on the former places.

I commenced my examination at Mr. Alfred Hall's southern boundary, and concluded it on reaching the valley of the Mountain River, beyond which place I knew that the surface was level, and moreover almost wholly occupied, and as such demanding no notice from me.

But, before reaching the boundary in question, the road passes into one of those tremendous forests so common to several parts of the Island, but which more peculiarly characterise the southern districts. The forest in question is mostly composed of enormous gum trees, with the usual underwood of musk, sassafras, brown wattle, fern trees, &c., &c., excessively difficult to enter from their uncommon closeness, and the amazing quantities of fallen timber everywhere scattered over the surface. The soil that the forest under notice grows in appears to be of somewhat an inferior quality,—though there must be fallacy in a supposition so forcibly contradicted by the rank and gigantic vegetation it produces. It is also somewhat steep, and not unfrequently stony,—though about half of it is not so much so as to impede cultivation very seriously. Several small streams of very excellent water flow through it. Its width in the direction of the track is about 3 miles, and it extends northerly to the bases of the last rises of Mount Wellington, beyond which—having reached the region of the mountain tea tree—I followed it no farther.

In this neighbourhood large quantities of ornamental woods are found, as well as those more especially adapted for the useful purposes of life. The musk is plentiful, and a very large supply of myrtle trees, of the largest proportions and finest description; but the latter are most abundant as you approach the higher grounds of the mountain range. This wood is amongst the handsomest cabinet timber we possess; and if it has not yet come into very extensive use, this is probably attributable to its growing mostly in remote situations, from whence it cannot be easily conveyed. I was therefore agreeably surprised in witnessing its abundance within 5 miles of Hobart. The trees are quite as large as any I have met with in the west coast districts, which are generally considered their favourite locality, or at least where they attain their most perfect development.

Emerging from this forest, the road is directed along the side of a stony and rather open hill, the soil of it being an inferior clay, and here the stringy-bark and peppermint replace the gum trees. This style of soil and forest continues about two-thirds of a mile, when we again plunge into a second forest of very lofty gum trees, larger, and more beautiful and valuable, than those of the one before described. Nearly every one is almost as straight as a ruler, and well adapted for all purposes of building and fencing. The underwood is of the most formidable kind, but the soil, though hardly so stony as that about Hall's, and somewhat superior to it, is nevertheless not what one would consider very good,—though it is impossible to speak unfavourably of it, when so vigorous a growth of every thing that denotes excessive productiveness stares one in the face at every step. It continues in the direction of the track till you reach Mr. Cooney's cultivated land, which is very flat, and too imperfectly drained, to enable one to form a fair judgment of its yielding powers. I found this description of country extending well up Mount Wellington, that is about 4 miles. Beyond Mr. Cooney's the land rapidly deteriorates, and still continues to do so as you descend into the valley of the North-west Bay River, where its barrenness cannot be surpassed.

Crossing this river—near to which are some very indifferent but perfectly open hills—we pass through the cultivated lands of Messieurs Stocks and Coombs, and once more enter a noble forest precisely similar to those before described, which continues with little change till we commence descending into the large valley of the Mountain River, where the trap boulders, so common in these forests, give place to freestone, and the soil becomes sandy, though by no means inferior. The prevailing underwood of these districts is also supplanted by what is commonly termed the native willow, or more properly, I believe, the Croton-tree. This forest also reaches nearly to the top of the Wellington range.

We next descend into the valley of the Mountain River, where an extensive tract of nearly level land occupies the entire bottom; but its soil, as is unusual in such situations in the southern parts of the Island, is of a very inferior quality,—namely, a poor white clay alternating with white sand. This space is very sparingly covered with trees. There is, however, a pretty fair swarth of grass here; and any one occupying the large flat, and the hills on both sides of the river, would command a pretty good sheep run. A few small plots of fertile land are met with near the banks of this fine little river.

Returning to the track, I continued on it till I had passed through the land of Mr. Parsons, where, as before stated, I terminated my search.

The quantity of land available for occupation within four miles of the line may probably be thirty or forty thousand acres; but it is useless pretending to exactness in this respect,—for these forests are so wonderfully dense, and therefore unfavourable for close examination, that nothing more than a rough guess will be expected of me. Moreover, they are in some places so stony, especially as we ascend, to the higher grounds of the mountain range, that it is not possible to assign the extent of these tracts except in a very imperfect manner.

If the soil be not naturally good, as one would certainly infer from its appearance, there must nevertheless exist some compensating causes which produce all the effects of excessive fertility. This is possibly traceable in no small degree to the very large quantities of rain falling in all these districts that lie to the westward of the great range, which, commencing at the extreme western bluff (near Chudleigh), terminates at Mount Wellington, where double or treble that which is experienced in the eastern districts annually descends. The causes of this I endeavoured to explain—and I think successfully—in my report of 1st December, 1845, and which I shall therefore not repeat. Now, as we have more than sufficient warmth here to perfect the growth of anything the temperate latitudes will mature, it seems but reasonable to suppose that, in those situations where Nature provides a copious supply of moisture also, they must possess the chief elements necessary to draw forth all the productive powers of the soil; and if that be but tolerable—which is

the case with most of the tract I have described—we want little more. This will probably account for the extraordinary magnitude of the forest trees here, where the land, though certainly not first-rate, supports a most amazing vegetation. Cultivation is only commencing here; but at Hall's, Stocks', and Coombs', everything they grow flourishes most luxuriantly,—perhaps proving that a first-rate soil is not actually indispensable to the most perfect success, where every other essential is present.

Though it formed no portion of my instructions to offer any opinions on the line of road lately cleared from hence to the Huon River, it may not be amiss to devote a portion of this letter to a description of it, and to some reflections naturally connected with it.

Though susceptible of considerable improvement, as is always the case with new lines when directed through districts abounding in the most formidable difficulties to exploration, it does the greatest credit to those who first traced it out, and thus showed the possibility of successfully overcoming what I, for one of hundreds, always considered a hopeless task, namely, the discovery of a direction where a thoroughly good line may, I believe, be found; and, whenever the time arrives for forming the road, the best that can be found will probably be nowhere five hundred yards from Walton's track. In tracing out *first roads* through a hilly district, the great mistake that is always made is that of keeping *short cuts* too constantly in view,—as if the saving of a mile or two in twenty were a sound reason for sacrificing the very best level that is to be found. For a bush foot-path, or even a bridle road, this may be all very well; but where there is *draught* to deal with all such considerations must be set aside, and it then becomes more desirable to consult levels than straight lines, combining them of course where no sacrifice of the first is made to the second. Mr. Walton has fallen into this error, though perhaps in a less degree than four in five would have done; but even his may be so improved as to be little inferior to the southern portions of the main line of road itself, except perhaps where it descends into the valley of the Mountain River,—but even here I question whether it will be inferior to Spring Hill. As it is, too much credit can scarcely be awarded him for what he has done,—possibly not having a first-rate line in view.

In dealing with the question of the propriety of forming a road to unite the metropolis with the Huon, the subject of its cost and character, and the existing necessity of the undertaking, naturally present themselves for discussion.

I have placed these subjects in something like an inverse order, and will go through them as they stand, as well as I am able to do.

Of the first, however, I must speak in very general terms; for unless it were measured and the necessary sections taken, it is quite impossible to state the amount of labour its construction will necessitate. At present, therefore, there is no arriving at even an approximate estimate of its cost. That it will be very considerable I think there can be no doubt of, but it will possibly be less than may be imagined, when we look at the inequalities of the surface of the tract under notice; for, though there must be a great deal of side cutting, yet I think it likely solid rock will not often be met with,—appearances at least seem to favour this idea. Several small bridges will be required along the line, besides those wanted at North West Bay and the Mountain Rivers, whose channels are about thrice the breadth of the Hobart Town stream.

The character of a road will necessarily depend on the importance of the places it is designed to unite. If these are either insignificant, or if there be not much intercourse between them, it will be obvious that their means of communication need not be very perfect. But, in the present instance, the reverse of all this is the case; and where it is intended to connect the metropolis of the country with its most important districts and market, the chief thoroughfare, I respectfully submit, should be of a very perfect character. That the principal item of our exports is now derived from the southern parts of the Island, is proved by official statistics, which show that wool is no longer the main source of our wealth, but that it stands considerably below timber, which takes the first place. Thus in the years 1853 and 1854* they are as under:—

	Wool.	Timber.
1853.....	£326,096	£443,161
1854.....	325,384	306,857
	<hr/> £651,480	<hr/> £750,018

the difference in favour of the last being £98,538, or £49,269 per annum. True the pastoral districts supply a *portion* of the meat we consume; but do not the timber districts

* In the following year all articles are confounded under the general term "Exports."

provide *all* the building and fencing material we require, amounting to a very large sum in the year? and while we may assign an approximate limit to our wool supply, it is quite impossible to fix any to the timber as long as we possess forests as inexhaustible as ours are. Viewing then the wool and timber interests with impartiality, we are constrained to acknowledge the superior importance of the latter to the country: and yet, while the pastoral districts have received every benefit an enormous public expenditure could confer on them, to nurse them, as it were, into their present mature condition, nothing whatever has been done for the others, which have been left to rear themselves; for I know no part of them where a single yard of road* has been perfected to assist communication, or where there is a bridge across one of their numerous streams except of the most trumpery description.

Even abandoning all considerations of the fertility of the soil, producing the amazing forests which abound in these quarters, and viewing them as we do the wool countries with reference only to their exports, we can no longer regard them with indifference or consign them to neglect; and, whether the sale of the land in the neighbourhood of the principal thoroughfare will return the cost of a good road or not, I most respectfully submit it ought to be undertaken. That large quantities will rapidly pass into private hands, we need have no fear of whenever they are made approachable; and, if this be a condition of its formation, it will be undoubtedly attained.

If I may take the liberty of offering an observation or two on the description of road which should be formed, it will be to urge the propriety of discouraging any imperfect line, but to discover and adopt the very best that can be had, and to perfect it in the most finished style. That an excellent one may be found without deviating half a mile from Walton's, I am pretty positive of; and, though it will necessarily be a circuitous one, it will not be, I imagine, inferior to that between Pontville and Jericho.

There will, I hope, be no impropriety in suggesting that the time has arrived for ceasing to consider Hobart Town as one of the terminal points of the main line of road, or in saying (looking at the wealth the Colony now derives from the Southern Districts) that it should be extended through them; and that, if only a fourth of the labour be expended here which has been devoted to the pastoral ones, there can be little doubt they will rise to far higher importance than they have already reached. Extensive tracts are yet to be explored and occupied that lie far beyond the great river that drains so much of our Southern lands, abounding in forests of trees unequalled in magnitude, and perhaps in value, in the world, whose ultimate good effects on the fortunes of the country need not be dwelt on. The value of such countries cannot be exaggerated; and I would therefore seriously, but most respectfully, urge on the Government the propriety of devoting every energy to turning them to account.

It may possibly be said of these Districts, firstly, that they possess facilities of communication by water, which render roads less necessary to them than to other places; and secondly, that the value of their exports may after all prove only temporary: but such assertions will have very little weight with most persons, who will speedily see that a circuitous water route is not all that is required to perfect the means of intercourse between two such places as Hobart Town and the Huon, and the countries lying beyond either. A good overland road is quite as necessary, and its influence in raising the value of those now unapproachable Districts will probably be as great, as it will certainly be permanent.

As for the value of the exports of our timber-producing Districts being likely to decline again in any considerable degree, it is an idea which will not be received by those who know anything of the condition of Victoria. This and other settlements will probably long create a demand for this staple article of export; and who can meet it more easily than ourselves? And, though that great Province is not without some excellent forests, they are, I believe, mostly so far inland as to be of little advantage at present, and possibly not for years to come; and, as it will probably be very long before she will be in a condition to supply all her own wants from these sources, the position and circumstances of Tasmania will certainly enable her successfully to compete with all others who would undertake to satisfy the demands of her market.

I remain, Sir,

Your very obedient Servant,

J. E. CALDER.

The Surveyor-General.

* The Brown's River Road leads *from* rather than *to* the principal of them, and could never be successfully extended to the Huon and the countries beyond.