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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA.

PICTON AND PORT DAVEY:

REPORT OF CONSERVATOR OF FORESTS.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by His Excellency's Command.



REPORT OF CONSERVATOR OF FORESTS ON PICTON AND PORT DAVEY DISTRICT.

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to report, for your information, the result of my recent visit of inspection of the country lying between Victoria, Huon, and Port Davey. In submitting my report to you on this subject, I include several observations of the country I passed through which I consider may be of use to the Department.

The object of the expedition was—

- 1st. To inspect the state of the track (Scott's) between Frying-pan Creek, 19 miles from Victoria, and the Craycroft, distant about 40 miles.
- 2nd. To inspect the pine beds on the Picton River.
- 3rd. To inspect, for the Lands and Works Department, a track cut by Schnell from the Huon, near Tea Tree Hill, to Mt. Anne and the Weld River.
- 4th. To pass over the Arthur Range, from the Craycroft to Port Davey, through country part of which has never before been explored.

I, with Mr. Eyre as companion, left Hobart by coach for Victoria, Huon, on Thursday, the 20th February, and remained at Victoria for that night to make arrangements for my inspection. The following morning Mr. Schnell, who had just completed cutting a track from the Huon, near Tea Tree Hill, to Mount Anne and the Weld River, joined us, and we started to drive up the south side of the Huon for a distance of eight miles. We here availed ourselves of the services of the horse to pack our swags as far as Frying-pan Creek, another 11 miles—the furthest point, I may mention, either a cart or horse can be taken in this direction at the present time. Camped here that night, an early start being made the following morning, so as to arrive in good time at the junction of the Picton and Huon Rivers. An attempt was made the same day by Schnell and myself to reach the Pine Forest on the Picton River, 12 miles distant, and, after four hours had been spent in the vain endeavour to attain this object, a return was made to camp.

Sunday, the 23rd February, we started early for Tea Tree Hill, leaving the track and following Schnell's new track for half a mile to the Huon River. The following day was spent inspecting Schnell's track to Mt. Anne and the Weld River, giving us a heavy walk of 17 miles.

Tuesday, Harrison's Opening was reached, and, after a heavy four hours' walk, we decided to camp here for the night.

Wednesday, 26th February.—Arrived at the Craycroft, after the longest and heaviest day's journey we had yet had here. We were obliged to remain for two days on account of the boisterous weather. The track up to this point, 40 miles, is very bad in places.

From Picton to the Craycroft the country passed through is very rough and hilly, densely covered with stringy-bark, celery-top pine, sassafras, blackwood, red tea-tree, and cat-head ferns. Patches of land in all the gullies passed through were in most cases of a very superior description, suitable for small farms. All the rivers, especially the Craycroft, abound in native trout, quantities of which were caught from 5 to 7 inches in length.

There is some very good land, but in patches, on Schnell's track, north side of the River Huon, with heavy beds of stringy-bark, myrtle, blackwood, eucalyptus, box, lancewood, celery-top pine, very large red tea-tree, old man and cat-faced ferns.

Saturday, 1st March, found us early on the move for the Arthur Range; the track, which runs in a north-westerly direction from this point round the northern end of the range, was departed from, a course being taken for the high quartz spur running to the S.E. from the range, and covering the Gap. This spur was scaled by noon, and we were enabled to obtain a good view of the Gap, the prospects of getting through which were discussed whilst we had our lunch. The task we had undertaken was of a very arduous description, and it would require considerable time and patience to overcome it, consequently the greater part of the afternoon was spent getting through into the gully leading to the Gap. After some time a spot was chosen to camp, all of us being wet through from head to foot.

The next day (Sunday) we started soon after daylight, arriving at the Gap a little before noon. For a short distance down the western side of the range the walking is very good. The hopes entertained of easy walking to the Plains were, however, suddenly damped by meeting with impenetrable scrub. The only way to make any progress at all was in the bed of the creek, a tributary of the Old River; at times we were turned out of this, and obliged to climb over ridges covered with heavy scrub and moss-covered logs, rotten and slippery. Again, after some trouble, a camping-place was chosen at dusk.

Sunday and Monday, the 3rd and 4th March, proved two days' severe walking through heavy tea-tree scrub, vines and creepers, cutting-grass and dead timber; wet through every day. One night was passed in some tea-tree on button-grass land, the leeches being very troublesome.

There is a good area of land on the western side of the Arthur Range of very good quality, but only to be obtained in small patches; it is well watered by numerous small creeks, and covered with stringy-bark—some of the finest trees of this description I have yet seen, not so much for their girth as for their length of barrel and quality of timber—gum-topped stringy-bark, sassafras, eucalyptus, box, red tea-tree of large size, and cat-head ferns.

Tuesday, 4th March.—Very difficult walking, round steep ridges of loose gravelly quartz, was now experienced. It was hardly possible to maintain a footing at all in some places. On arriving at the top of one of these razor-back ridges the junction of the Old River was seen far below, with Harry's Bluff to the westward, distant about three miles,—the very point I started for on leaving the Craycroft. Camped that night on the Old River, about five miles from the bay, at which place we arrived the following morning at 11.30 A.M., 24 hours sooner than anticipated on leaving the Gap on the Arthur Range.

Arriving at the bay, Eyre, one of the party, *said* he was knocked up, and, I regret to say, was of little or no assistance, the work he *did* being of the very lightest character.

Thursday, 6th March, was spent looking about the ridges for best place to make signal-fires on the morrow, as it was expected the *Koonya* would come in the next day.

Friday, 7th March, was spent by Schnell and myself making fires; and the day being fine and the wind in the right direction, thick clouds of smoke formed on the Raglan Range and surrounding country.

As I have given a detailed synopsis of the time passed between the 6th and 23rd March to the various newspapers throughout the Colony, I respectfully request to be relieved of making it a subject of official report. I desire to state, however, that the *Koonya* not putting in for us, although fires were made each Friday, every endeavour was made to reach the Heads (so as to be able to draw the attention of passing vessels to our situation), and Eyre's conduct alone prevented us from accomplishing this end.

Pine logs of large size and good quantity were seen on the beach extending from the mouth of the Old River to the Spring River, and they could be very easily secured, as small vessels of light draught can haul in close to the beach. This will form a subject for future report.

I would respectfully recommend that the track from Judd's Creek to the Craycroft, which is well marked, should be re-opened by repairing the small bridges and clearing off the young scrub and dead timber with which it is now choked up in many places, rendering it almost impossible for a man to carry a pack of any weight on his back along it, or for a horse to get through.

The Picton House—a very good four-roomed verandah cottage—could be put in thorough repair at a very small cost; a few shingles and boards (which could be got in the vicinity), half a dozen panes of glass, and some nails being all that is required. An acre of land round the house was cleared some time since, and upon this a dense scrub is now growing. The ferns are growing through the floors and in at the windows, and will cause considerable damage if they are not removed. In case of a fire the whole place will be swept away, and cause a pang of regret to many a weary traveller.

The bridge (a wire suspension) over the Picton is in excellent order, and supported by four posts, two at each end of the bridge. One of these posts has split, and allowed the centre of the bridge to fall down on one side, rendering it impassable. A new post and re-straining the wire is all that is required to make this work complete.

The re-opening of this track will enable the selector to have a better idea of the Upper Huon in respect to fitness of the land for settlement, and the prospector will have a wide extent of country open to him to prosecute his researches in the discovery of minerals. Should it ever be thought desirable to connect Frodsham's and Schnell's track, a large extent of land will be opened up fit for selection, and give facilities to the prospector hitherto unknown in this wild region.

To the tourist these tracks should prove favourite resorts for expeditions to the Upper Huon, Mount Anne, Florentine Valley, and Russell's Falls,—charming walks being met with, through magnificent beds of timber, flowers, and ferns. The rivers produce English and native trout, and the views of the wild west, in all its desolate grandeur, can hardly be surpassed in the world.

Having failed to visit the pine beds on the Picton River, it is my intention shortly to start on an expedition in this direction, it having been represented to me that a large bed of King William pine, four miles square, exists in that locality, and can be got to market if the Government will allow it to be opened out.

With regard to the unfortunate termination of the expedition (which I looked upon as a most successful one up to the time we arrived at Bathurst Harbour), it is said by some,—

- 1st. The party were lost.
- 2nd. The arrangements were bad with regard to the *Koonya* calling in for us.

The idea of being lost was not entertained by me for one moment, for I have no fear whatever of being lost in Tasmania with my intimate knowledge of the bush and with a compass and chart in my pocket.

The day before I left Hobart I met Captain Cordell on the wharf, and asked him if he would call in and pick me up at Port Davey on a day appointed, to which he replied, "Certainly." I then enquired if he could get through the Narrows, and he replied in the affirmative. He requested me to call at the office and let the agents know of the arrangements made between us, which I did on my way up to town. I certainly concluded, as a business man, that such an understanding as this would have brought the *Koonya* through the Narrows every time she passed on her way to Hobart, but she failed to come the distance agreed upon.

I have the honor to be,
Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

WILLIAM T. H. BROWN,
Conservator of Forests.

The Hon. the Minister of Lands and Works.