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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

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WESTERN COUNTRY.

REPORT OF THE GOVERNMENT GEOLOGIST.

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*Geological Survey Office, 16th June, 1863.*

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to report the return of the remainder of my party from Macquarie Harbour.

In a former letter I stated my intention of continuing to prospect the King's River as long as the season would permit; and I have now the honor to inform you that I did so, after the departure of the schooner "Ann," until the 18th day of May.

I regret that, although the appearance of the country was more favourable than that presented by any other part we prospected, and although drift Gold was discovered by the party, as in previous cases, in small quantities in the river drifts, we were unable to meet with it in anything like paying quantities.

I beg to offer a summary of the proceedings of the party throughout the whole period.

Having received instructions from the Colonial Secretary, upon the 29th of October, 1862, I engaged a party consisting of thirty-one individuals besides myself, and including Mr. Gordon Burgess, Surveyor, and second in command, Messrs. A. Ibsen and Feneker as assistants, and a number of highly qualified miners and diggers, besides bushmen, messengers, &c.

I arranged with the owners of the schooner "Blanche" for the conveyance of one portion of the party, the remainder proceeding in the schooner "Ann," which I had engaged for the term of six months to be at the service of the Expedition, with the intention of employing it as a despatch boat, or depôt, as circumstances might determine.

The "Ann" sailed on the 20th November, and the "Blanche" on the 22nd same month, and both vessels reached Macquarie Harbour on the 5th December.

Mr. Burgess was in command of the "Ann," and Mr. Ibsen of the "Blanche;" and both had received full written instructions to enable them to act independently of each other in case of their arrival at different dates. The proposed system of operations was, to commence and carry on, simultaneously, tracks up the banks of the Gordon and Franklin Rivers; and I therefore indicated as the position of our Depôt the nearest suitable place to the junction of the two rivers, upon the north side or right bank of the former.

I availed myself of the delay which I was aware the necessary preliminary steps would necessitate, and which I confidently entrusted to Mr. Burgess, to proceed overland myself with two men, with a view to re-examine a portion of the country passed over last season.

My own arrival at the harbour did not, therefore, take place until the 19th December; and very heavy weather further prevented my reaching the Depôt until the evening of the 23rd December.

I found that, in spite of the time occupied in the transshipment of stores and tracking the vessel up the Gordon, the Depôt was completed, and the rations stored. A succession of bad weather for some time from this date, conjoined with the difficult character of the country, somewhat impeded the operations of the party; and it was not until the 2nd of January that Mr. Burgess reported that he had succeeded in completing his track as far the Franklin River, after traversing the elevated and scrubby land lying in the angle between the Franklin and Gordon Rivers.

A cursory examination of this portion of the country convinced me that it would be useless to waste labour in prospecting it; and I therefore still employed nearly the whole force of the party in pushing forward the main track towards the Frenchman's Cap.

The point where the Franklin was struck (marked as the Franklin Camp on Chart about to be published) is about a quarter of a mile higher up the river than the great fall, which was the extreme point reached in last year's exploration. The limestone rocks jutting in great masses into the river, streaked with calcareous spar and quartz, and sparingly affording indications of lead, contract its channel, and cause a precipitous fall varying from five to six feet according to the depth of water in the river.

This is the first important obstacle to the navigation of the river by boats; for the ten or twelve rapids or minor falls existing between it and the island at the mouth of the Franklin present no great difficulties during moderate weather, and I was enabled to forward supplies of rations by boat to the vicinity of the Franklin Camp.

At this stage I detached a portion of the party under Mr. Ibsen across the Gordon River, to commence a track in the direction of the Wilmot Ranges and the Great Bend; while a third party, consisting of experienced miners, were still engaged, as they had been since their arrival in the harbour, in prospecting a promising line of country extending along the shores of Macquarie Harbour upon the south side from Liberty Point to Birches Inlet.

Mr. Burgess, with the advance party, continued cutting a track along the right bank of the Franklin River.

Desirous of investigating the country lying to the northward and eastward of Expectation Reach, I endeavoured to trace the old line of route pursued by Sir John Franklin in 1842, but was unable at this time to discover the commencement of the track.

On making a visit of inspection to the party working at Macquarie Harbour, I found that no gold had been discovered; and after satisfying myself of the thorough efficiency of the trials made, withdrew it to the Franklin.

I next endeavoured to follow a track leading from Kelly's Basin towards the Frenchman's Cap, which had been commenced by a party that visited the harbour under the superintendence of Mr. Smith in 1855, and which was stated to have been completed for about ten miles. The length of time elapsed had, however, rendered the first part of it impracticable; and I therefore left a small party to clear and remark it as far as the tributary to the Franklin, which had been crossed at some distance from the harbour.

I myself returned to the Depôt on the 7th January; and after inspecting the progress of the different works, revisited Kelly's Basin, taking with me a small party for the purpose of examining the country in that direction. Following the old track we arrived after a tedious march of two days at the tributary to the Franklin, which I found to be an unimportant stream of about one and a half chains in width, neither deep nor rapid. The bed of the river was occupied by fossiliferous limestone; evidently identical with that occurring in the Gordon. Upon scaling a very lofty hill with rugged quartzose summits, bordering the river on the north, I obtained a good insight into the structure of the country round the Frenchman's Cap. The densely scrubbed valley of the river that I had passed appeared to extend in a north-westerly direction, without any great rise of ground, almost to the open marshes bordering the King's River: and had it not been for the smallness of the stream I should have considered this to have been the continuation of that river, which it appeared hardly possible could, in any other direction, have found a passage through the lofty and precipitous range that extends to the southward from Mount Owen.

The general strike of the rocks was in a curve, sweeping round the west side of the Frenchman; and the main body of the Franklin River rushed far below me through a narrow gorge, hemmed in for long distances by precipitous cliffs. As far as the eye could judge, there was no possibility for the Surprise River to traverse the line of country towards the King's River in the direction indicated on previous maps; and my own impression is, that the Surprise, in place of being a tributary to King's River, constitutes in fact the most important of the branches of the Franklin.

The general character is wild and rugged in the extreme, much more so than the northern side of the Frenchman.

I only tested the smaller river upon this occasion, where the men found fine gold in small quantities—obtaining it even from the bottom of a hole sunk and abandoned by the previous party: it was not in paying quantities.

Leaving a small party to cut a track down the southern side of this river to join the one which was being carried forward up the Franklin, I returned by way of Kelly's Basin and the Gordon River.

But little matter of interest occurred during the next month ; the prosecution of the tracks was conducted by Mr. Burgess, and stores conveyed forward as rapidly as the weather would permit. For the purpose of saving the labour of transporting the rations in knapsacks, I determined upon conveying them if possible by boat; and personally accompanied the first boat on its passage up the river. We succeeded in conveying them in this manner a distance of about twenty-five miles from the Depôt, ascending, upon a rough calculation, about seventy falls and rapids. In not a few instances we were compelled to entirely unload the boat, and convey everything across the rocks, hauling the boat out of the water, and carrying it also across the portage.

I subsequently adopted this as the regular method of conveying the rations, and, with a little experience, succeeded in doing so without much difficulty. The service was, however, laborious, injurious to health from the incessant exposure to wet, and not unattended with danger. In several instances men narrowly escaped being drowned; and a boat hardly ever made a passage without sustaining very serious injury; and it was only the necessity of economising labour which caused me to adopt this in preference to the safer but more tedious mode of conveying stores by land; and I feel pleasure in referring to the spirit and zeal with which the parties engaged in this unpleasant service sustained the discomforts of their position, and overcame the difficulties that from time to time arose.

On reaching a point about twenty-five miles up the river, Mr. Burgess fell in with traces of the track originally pursued by Sir John Franklin; and on following these up, I found that our camp of that date was within a short distance of the Eleanor Ferry, the crossing-place of Sir John in 1842.

Coincident with the progress of the track, parties were engaged in testing the banks of the river at short distances apart, and special attention was directed to the creeks falling into it; but while fine gold could always be obtained in small quantities from the river alluvium, it was never discovered in any of the tributary creeks; proving to my mind, satisfactorily, that it was not derived from the sandstone and grit formation underlying the limestone, and which rises into hills of great elevation upon the western bank of the river, but must have been derived from some other source. The bed of the river throughout this distance was formed by limestone, which rises at many places into high cliffs, and projects in rocky bars across the stream. The dip is easterly at a high angle, and there is some evidence of contortion and faults, although not to any great extent. From the Eleanor Ferry the track was carried on for some two miles, where it was abandoned in consequence of falling in with high precipices; it was then carried back across a very broken line of country a few miles distant from the river, and the branch of the river coming down from the King's River Marshes struck in a distance of about ten miles. There was considerable labour in conveying stores to the latter point; but having amassed sufficient for a month, I set a strong party at work prospecting, while another, under Mr. Burgess, continued the track towards the Frenchman. I had also in the meanwhile traced for some distance Mr. Calder's track towards Mount Arrowsmith, and had established two small parties at distances of two and four miles from Eleanor Ferry to prospect that portion of the country: both found gold, though not in paying quantities. The most distant party, which was working on the banks of the Acheron, stated that it was rather coarser than that before met with. The results of the operations on the tributary of the Franklin were equally unsuccessful; large paddocks were put down and the bed rock exposed, but only an inconsiderable amount of gold obtained.

Crossing the branch of the Franklin, the track was continued under great difficulties to the branch running immediately under the Frenchman's Cap, where the river is hemmed in for considerable distances between perpendicular cliffs. Here all traces of gold were entirely lost, although bars and ledges of rock and similar positions, which lower down the river invariably yielded it, were carefully searched. The difficulty of conveying rations to this point was so great, and the indications so unfavourable, that I abandoned the search in this direction. A small party, which had been detached, and had proceeded for some ten miles up the other branch of the Franklin, had also failed to obtain any increase in the quantity of gold; and as the results of my inspection of the country between the Eleanor Ferry and Mount Arrowsmith had not led me to entertain any hopes, I determined upon withdrawing the whole party and testing elsewhere.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ibsen had completed a track for a distance of about thirty-five miles in the direction of the great bend of the Gordon. Finding the country near the river impracticable, he had been compelled to adopt a route through the open country well to the southward of it; and, as the country traversed proved to be to a great extent occupied by formations which appeared from our investigations at the Franklin to be almost barren, I thought it inadvisable to attempt a very detailed investigation of it, and contented myself with despatching two parties to prospect the Rocky River and Badger Creek, tributaries to the Gordon, and situated respectively at the distance of six and nine miles from the depôt. They were unsuccessful in obtaining gold.

Not perfectly satisfied with the trial that had been made of the locality west of Settlement Island, I dispatched a fresh party, with instructions to try at several points. They did, however, not succeed any better than the previous ones.

The only point remaining to be tried was the country about King's River; and having despatched a party under Mr. Burgess, with directions to commence a track from the highest navigable point of the river, about five miles from the mouth, I made a selection of the most experienced miners, and arranged for the return of the remainder of the party by the schooner "Ann."

Mr. Burgess, on the completion of his track as far as it was practicable, united himself to the remainder of the party, took command of those on board the schooner, and returned to Hobart Town, sailing on the 18th of April.

Those remaining with myself were ten in number. We continued at King's River as long as our supplies and the weather would permit us, and then returned to the Depôt, and started to proceed overland by way of the Great Bend on the 28th May, arriving in Hamilton the 4th June.

The character of the slates met with in the King's River was much more promising than those existing elsewhere in the District, and I at one time entertained hopes that the favourable appearance might have been confirmed by results. This, however, was not the case, for although what gold we obtained was slightly coarser than in other localities, the quantity was inconsiderable.

In summing up the results of the Expedition, I may briefly state my opinion, that the whole of the country tested by the Expedition does not contain gold in sufficient quantities to form a paying Gold-field; the only possible exception is in the case of the country about the King's River, where, as I have before stated, slates of a more promising appearance exist, although, however, they only occupy an inconsiderable area.

I beg to speak in terms of high commendation of the men composing the party, and to tender my thanks to Messrs. Burgess, Ibsen, and Feneker for the efficient manner in which they carried out my instructions.

I shall shortly furnish you with a sketch map of the country tested; to which I will append a few general remarks supplementary to this Report.

I have the honor to remain,  
Sir,

Your very obedient Servant,

CHARLES GOULD.

*The Hon. the Colonial Secretary.*