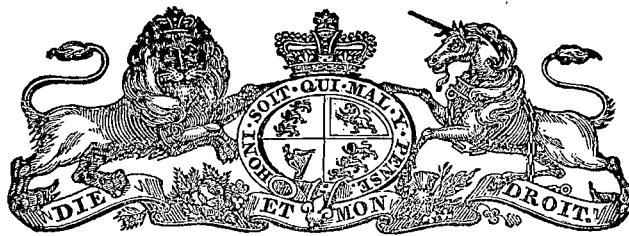


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T A S M A N I A.

H O U S E O F A S S E M B L Y.

EXPLORATION IN WESTERN COUNTRY.

**LETTER OF THE HON. J. R. SCOTT, M.L.C., TO THE MINISTER
OF LANDS AND WORKS.**

Laid upon the Table by the Minister of Lands and Works, and ordered by the
House to be printed, October 25, 1876.



New Town, 10th October, 1876.

SIR,

I HAVE lately received a letter from Mr. Sprent on the subject of cutting tracks in the "Western Country" to enable parties to explore its mineral resources, which contains some valuable suggestions, so that I take the liberty of addressing you on the matter, with extracts from his letter and a few notes from my own experience.

The letter, *inter alia*, states as follows:—

"Mount Bischoff, 16th September, 1876.

"As you are aware, I went out to the West Coast last summer, and from what I saw on that occasion I am extremely anxious to see the country opened up for prospectors. I expect you have read my report on the journey, so I wont allude to that. Mr. Moore informed me that he intended going in for cutting tracks in various directions * * * We had an exceedingly rough time of it, we had to cut our way through 16 miles of bauera and horizontal, and carry on our backs swags which amounted on the whole to 1200 lbs. We were out 3 months. * * * I like the appearance of the country very much, and from the small quantities of gold, tin, and iridium I obtained, I think there is a valuable metalliferous country out there. I think an expenditure of about £1000 would thoroughly open up the north portion of the West Coast; and this is how I would propose doing it.—A pack-horse track goes from Circular Head to Emmett's Diggings on the Hellyer (where Wedge crossed);—I would start from there and get on the open country at once, and burn and cut a track so as to pass on the west side of the Meredith Range, and by keeping on the open country, go across the Pieman, pass between Mount Dundas and Mount Zeehan and reach Macquarie Harbour. I would then cut a branch track from Knole Plain somewhere in the direction of Burgess' track until I came to the main track. Another track might then be cut from Lake St. Clair to the King River and on to the main track. If the work were given to me I would send a vessel round to the Pieman with provisions, and pack-horses to the Hellyer. I would make a start from the Hellyer and cut my way across to the Pieman, and getting a fresh supply there would have no difficulty in reaching Macquarie Harbour. If I started in December, I think I could cut all the tracks before the season broke up. * * * Several parties are going out to the Pieman this summer, but I am afraid the roughness of the journey will frighten them all home after the first few weeks out there. In fact that part of the country is not safe to travel in just now. I was almost cut off by the Pieman, having been obliged to beat a hasty retreat from Mt. Heemskirk; two days after I re-crossed it the river was 20 feet deep and running like a mill-race.

CHAS. P. SPRENT."

The above bears evidence of practical acquaintance with the country and the work to be done, and, should track-cutting in the Western District occupy your attention, I would join my recommendation of the several routes he suggests, with one in addition, and believe they would open up most of the north west of Tasmania, and form a sufficient network whereby prospectors would enter and examine that part of the country with confidence, knowing they could not get lost, but would have choice of Mount Bischoff, Circular Head, or Hamilton, to which to beat a retreat if the rivers rose and continued flooded.

But neither should the south west be neglected. For want of access this has been far less prospected than it ought to have been. I will speak of it presently, and suggest three routes which will form a similar network.

Of the means of getting to a starting point from the North Coast, water carriage and the main road *via* Emu Bay are practically the only ones; the old V. D. L. Cos' road to Surrey Hills (and thence to Bischoff) being hardly known, and impassable in comparison with the conveniences offered by the others.

I. Mr. Sprent's suggestion of starting from Circular Head I accept therefore as the best, although I do not know that country, more especially as he proposes to miss the rugged Meredith Range and its ramifications, which I know. His general course would in that case be almost due south to Macquarie Harbour, crossing however the Pieman and other rivers dangerous in flood times. Hence the value of his suggestion of another base line.

II. Eastward from Macquarie Harbour to Lake St. Clair, thence of course reaching Marlborough, Ouse Bridge, and Hamilton. Of that I can speak as an easy and inexpensive one, with no rivers but what are bridged or can easily be crossed at all seasons. (Possibly the bridge over the Derwent would require repairing.) Mr. Gould's track from Lake St.

Clair towards Macquarie Harbour is at present easily followed (being chiefly through open country only requiring fresh stakes erected), and would be available for about 52 miles from the lake, viz., to the western side of the West Coast Range at Mount Lyell. As far as that the road was engineered by Gordon Burgess, and cleared and staked; but there Gould's marks end, he having steered straight through the scrub for the mouth of King's River. From his frequent descriptions of that country to me, I think there would be not much difficulty in getting a good course a little north of west, hitting the coast near the mouth of the Henty River. Besides, from this track of Gould's one diverges southerly along an open spur into the Collingwood Valley, five or six miles off, and if that were accessible I have no doubt attention would be directed to it on account of the granite discovered by Mr. Tully. (See his Report, published in the *Hobart Town Advertiser* of 26th April, 1859.) Another diverges northwards to the Murchison, which forms part of the cross track I suggest in addition to those in Mr. Sprent's letter.

These would form the two base or main lines, the first generally south about 100 miles from civilisation at Circular Head, joining the second, generally east about 80 miles to the nearest civilisation at Marlborough.

III. The next of Mr. Sprent's, that from Knole westward to join the main line, creates a subdivision of this little known district, and is particularly to be recommended as affording facilities to the Mount Bischoff neighbourhood and its practical miners, and would probably be as much used as that from Circular Head.

IV. The additional cross route that I suggest has the same advantage, and would lead from Knole *via* Netherby southerly to the St. Clair line. I am convinced an easy route could be got by way of Hellyer's, Cranbourne Chase, and Brougham River to the terminus of Gould's northern branch track, above mentioned, at the Murchison River, from which there is no difficulty in following his line. This opens up the northern slopes of the Eldon Range, Mount Murchison, and the granite district shown in Gould's Report round Victoria and Sophia Peaks.

The St. Clair route is important as affording a means of getting from Hobart Town and the south into the Eldon and Pieman districts direct.

For the purpose of opening up the south part of the western country, by which I mean all to the south of Macquarie Harbour, the Frenchman's Cap, &c., I would point out what my own observation and experience with the knapsack suggest as the natural routes, as well as the cheapest by reason of their having already had passages cut through the densely timbered outskirts, which merely require to be re-opened.

V. I would recommend, as a base line or main track, to re-open the old road from Dunrobin Bridge to the Gordon Bend, thence south of the Thumbs across the Wedge and Serpentine Valleys, past the Wilmot Range, and to the south end of Macquarie Harbour at Birch Inlet. This was Mr. Gould's means of communication with Hamilton when at the Gordon and Franklin Rivers, and his messenger once took letters from the Gordon Camp to Hamilton in three days. The first portion, Dawson's Road, was laid out with easy gradients and formed for carts,—in fact, took nearly seven years to construct; and it is lamentable to see such a piece of work gradually being obliterated. I went along it in March this year, and found it so grown over with ferns and scrub for several miles as to be almost indistinguishable from the bush around; still there are many miles of side-cutting, metalling, and myrtle forest, where the only difficulties were fallen logs. The bridge over the Florentine is still passable for foot-passengers, one of the logs being left. If this bridge and some culverts were repaired, the rest of the road would be as cheaply cleared for pack horses as for foot passengers as far as the Gordon Bend. The rest of the route would be comparatively easy to stake and cut, as I burnt the whole of the open country almost to the Wilmot Range. A foot-bridge should be put across the Serpentine, and then there would be no rivers to fear. The direction would be like the letter V, first S.W. and then N.W. From the Gordon Bend or Denison Plains access would be given to the large unknown region west of the Denison Range and south of the Frenchman's Cap.

VI. From the end of the last, at Macquarie Harbour, I would recommend another main line southerly along the open patches of country a mile or two back from the coast to Port Davey as the terminus, where there are inhabitants, provisions to be had, and frequent communication with Hobart Town by sea. This also passes through a region almost unknown, and there are no rivers to be feared.

VII. As a cross track to subdivide that large area I would suggest that the road now existing from Victoria up the valley of the Huon be extended to join the first-mentioned (No. V.) about 4 miles north of Lake Pedder. The heavily timbered country extends to the Craycroft, and through it a road has been made, of which 23 miles or so would have to be cleared of fallen logs; not an expensive work as it was thoroughly done in 1870. The open country beyond could be easily staked, much of it having been burnt out by me. On this line there is the Picton to cross—like the Pieman, impassable in flood.

There is another route, a track cut for Sir John Franklin's overland journey to Macquarie Harbour, starting from Marlborough, past Mount Arrowsmith and through the Loddon Plains over the spurs of the Frenchman's Cap to the Franklin River. I do not think it would be difficult to reopen; but I doubt if it would give access to much unexplored country, and could not easily be continued into any of the foregoing routes to form part of a general system. Mr. Calder, who engineered it, could no doubt give you some valuable information as to any advantages it may possess.

What little prospecting has been done in the south west has been almost solely for gold, and all have been disappointed as to payable quantity, though its presence appears to be wide-spread. Other valuable minerals *may* exist there, but certainly have no immediate prospect of being discovered unless tracks induce miners to explore. The track-cutting parties also by their fires would open up the country to the right and left, and leave it accessible for 6 or 7 years, a benefit as great as the tracks they would be making.

The above recommendations refer merely to tracks for men on foot; and if Mr. Sprent's estimate of £1000 is a fair one for the three he suggests, I think £2000 should do all I have named above. To make pack-horse tracks in that district would be very expensive, as nearly the whole of the open country, so easy to burn off and stake out for men, is of a boggy spongy nature, impassable for horses in its natural state, and demanding much labour to make sound.

The approximate distances, as nearly as I can guess, would be:—

No. 1. Circular Head to Macquarie Harbour.....	100 miles.
2. Macquarie Harbour to Lake St. Clair.....	65
3. Knole Plain west to No. 1.....	20
4. Knole Plain south to No. 2.....	35
5. Repulse River to Macquarie Harbour.....	90
6. Macquarie Harbour to Port Davey.....	65
7. Victoria to No. 5 at Serpentine.....	80

For Mr. Gould's tracks and all the south-western district, whether as guide if required, or to give you a good idea of what the cost ought to be, I can find a man thoroughly conversant with the country, the passes, belts of scrub to be avoided, &c.

I must apologise for having extended these notes so much further than I anticipated when I began; but any further information or explanations in my power I shall be happy to give personally, knowing that many of the places I have mentioned are not laid down on the official maps of the Colony.

I have the honor to be,
Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

JAMES R. SCOTT.

To the Hon. C. O'REILLY, *Minister of Lands and Works.*