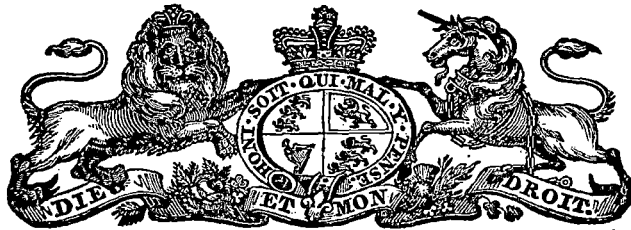


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1876.

T A S M A N I A.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

MOUNT BISCHOFF.

MR. SPRENT'S REPORT ON COUNTRY ROUND.

Laid upon the Table by Mr. Crowther, and ordered by the Council to be printed,
September 19, 1876.

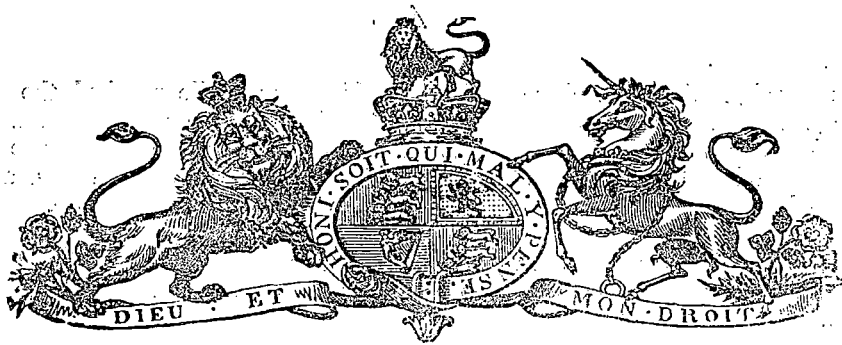


Table Cape, 3rd May, 1876.

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to forward you the following Report on my recent explorations between Mount Bischoff and the West Coast. It was at first intended to send a party round to the mouth of the Pieman, and to boat the provisions up the river as far as it should prove navigable; but as the craft selected for the purpose was not available, and time was pressing, I was instructed to go by way of Mount Ramsay.

I much regret that the first plan fell through, for had I boated up the Pieman I should have been able to have examined a great extent of country on both sides of the river: as it was, more than half our time was occupied in carrying tools and provisions backwards and forwards.

I left Table Cape on February 1st, and proceeded to Mount Bischoff by the Table Cape track, arriving at Waratah on February 2nd. On the 4th I went out to the Ramsay River, and commenced building a depôt for my provisions. Went on to Mount Ramsay, and reconnoitred the country. By the 8th I had received my provisions and secured them in the depôt, and on the 9th we commenced cutting a track on the course selected. My party now consisted of four in all—myself, Jones and Burke, my usual companions, and F. H. Long, who accompanied me as a prospector on behalf of some private individuals. We crossed the Ramsay River about half a mile from the depôt, and ascending a steep hill covered with horizontal scrub we came on an open myrtle forest, extending for two miles or so on our track. At the termination of this forest we came on the granite country, extending over a large area of country, between Mount Ramsay and the Meredith Range. The granite is of a coarse, micaceous nature, frequently traversed by thin seams of tourmaline. In many places we found immense masses of quartz and tourmaline. Tried the wash in several places, but only obtained some zircon sand and quantities of tourmaline and iron sand. At the commencement of this granite country the scrub is very dense indeed, and consists of celery-topped pine trees, myrtle trees, and an undergrowth of horizontal scrub, cutting grass, richeas, and tea-tree. Track-cutting in this scrub is very slow work, the more so since it is impossible to see what sort of country is ahead.

On the 14th we came on a track, partly cut, going in a westerly direction, and, thinking we would be better able to avoid the gullies by getting on higher ground, I left instructions to cut this track out, and taking Long as a companion I went on ahead to examine the country and cut the track from a more remote point.

About six miles from the Ramsay we came to a small stretch of basaltic land, about a mile long, and a fine stream draining the east side of the Meredith Range. This stream I named the "Wilson River." Crossing the Wilson River we came on the granite again, and climbed over a succession of spurs covered with horizontal richeas, celery-topped pine, and myrtles. About two miles from the Wilson I again altered the course to S.S.W., and after travelling four miles through the same description of country to that just mentioned, we came on a change, in the shape of gum timber, tea-tree, richeas, bauera, and cutting grass. This sort of country extended for about a mile in our course, and was very wearisome travelling. Amongst this bauera scrub we found a fine stream running, and along its banks quantities of large pine trees of the Macquarie Harbour species. Some of these trees were upwards of three feet through, but all of them were dead, killed by some fire many years ago. Half a mile from this river we came on a long narrow plain of button grass. This plain, which I named the "Yellow-band Plain," is about five miles long, and about half a mile in its widest place. It is drained by several streams, one of which, the "Yellow Stream," is a fair sized river, difficult to cross in winter. The plain is fringed with peppermint trees, and contains several belts of timber: the walking is good, the plain having been burnt off some two years ago.

The bare tops of the Meredith Range are close to this plain, on the west and south-east sides. Made a camp on the plain, and started up the Meredith Range. Just as we reached the summit a heavy storm of rain came on and obscured the view, so that we were forced to return. The following day I proceeded down the plain for about three miles, and finding an opening towards the "Parson's Hood" determined to go up and obtain a view. Accordingly, we selected a route where the fire had cleared off the scrub and button grass, and made for one of the peaks on the Meredith Range. Following up the bed of a creek, I noticed that the granite is traversed by many veins of finer granite, frequently containing much iron pyrites, and in one instance the grey granite was cut

by a wide vein of red granite containing small seams of iron ore. We reached the summit of the Meredith Range without much difficulty, and had a fair view for a few moments, when, as on the previous day, fierce storms of wind and rain came on, and completely obscured the view; indeed, so strong was the wind that one could not stand upright on the bare granite rocks, and for an hour or more we stayed under the lee of the pinnacle waiting for the wind to moderate.

By the 29th the track was cut from the Ramsay River to the top of the Meredith Range, and leaving Jones and Burke to carry out provisions, I went on again with Long to examine the Parson's Hood.

The Meredith Range, so named by the late Mr. Gordon Burgess, extends from the Parson's Hood in a northerly direction up to Wombat Hill. As far as I could see, the rock is all granite; slate might be found on the north and west side, and I think sandstone on the north-west. The summits are covered with tea-tree and bauera scrub, with occasional patches of button grass, easily got rid of by firing it in summer. This range is well worthy the attention of prospectors.

By March 6th we had cut our track through a dense scrub of tea-tree and bauera, and reached the Parson's Hood, where we camped for a time. I found the Parson's Hood to be a long flat-topped mountain, the southern bluff of the Meredith Range. Approaching it from the north, we ascended a steep granite spur burnt off by Mr. Joseph Harman some two years ago, and found ourselves on a bare granite top. Going along the top of the mountain found the granite and tea-tree scrub continued for about a quarter of a mile, then changed to a hard metamorphic rock, and an open forest of myrtle and tall richeas. Another quarter of a mile further on the granite showed again, and a nasty scrub of horizontal, tea-tree, cutting grass, and richeas; then we lost the granite altogether, and came on hard slate rock, in some places containing iron pyrites. The travelling was now much better, being through myrtle forest and ferns, with here and there stringy-bark and blackwood trees. This sort of country continued to the base of the "Hood." From the Yellow-band Plain to the top of the "Hood" the total rise is about 1500 feet, and from the top to the base on the south west the fall is 1770 feet. In the vicinity we obtained zircon sand and a little platinum. The platinum might be worth examination, but I am afraid that the place is too difficult of access to offer much encouragement to prospectors.

On the west side of the Parson's Hood I am informed the formation is quite different, and consists of serpentine, diallage, hypersthene, with iron ores, asbestos, copper, and platinum, and in some places gold. A large creek drains the south-west side of the Parson's Hood. On the north side of this creek the rock is slate, on the south side sandstone and quartz. About a quarter of a mile from the base of the "Hood" we came on a complete change of country in the shape of low hills covered with button grass and heath. The formation here is slate, of all degrees of hardness, and quartz veins.

On March 10th we set fire to the open country, and succeeded in getting a very good burn. On the 11th showers of rain checked the fire, so we went through it, and made our way to a long, narrow ridge of hills, which extended for a great distance in a south-west course. Towards evening the smoke cleared off, and we saw the Pieman River just beneath us; heavy rain came on, and we camped in a bauera and tea-tree scrub.

On Monday, 13th, we started again, and followed the ridge down until we came close to the river; then, cutting through about twenty chains of bauera, tea-tree, and horizontal scrub, we pitched our tent on the north bank of the Pieman, some 2100 feet below the summit of the Parson's Hood, and about seven miles of walking from its base.

The Pieman River, where we crossed it, is about 80 yards wide, flowing very gently, and almost without any sound. At its lowest level shallow bars appear, and rapid water for short distances; but, as a general rule, the water is deep and quiet. The banks are scrubby, and the edge of the river is lined with snags and logs. I am almost certain a light boat could be brought up from the Coast to a point about south of the Parson's Hood; possibly it might be taken much further if it were lifted over the bars. The Pieman is subject to heavy floods. I have seen it rise fifteen feet in as many hours: at such times the current is very rapid indeed, and it would be impossible to cross or navigate the river. Very fine eels are to be obtained in the river, also native trout and lobsters, but I never caught any blackfish. I never saw any kangaroo in the vicinity, and only the traces of wombats.

Our provisions were exhausted the day after we reached the Pieman, so on the 14th we started back again. The day being warm and windy, we set the button grass on fire and made a line of fire about four miles long. Reached the Yellow-band Plain that night, almost exhausted. Meanwhile Jones and Burke had been carrying out provisions from the Ramsay River to the Yellow-band Plain, and by making frequent trips had brought out all the stores. I cannot imagine any work more tiring than carrying heavy loads over such rough country day after day. It was by far the hardest part of our work.

On the 18th March I went into Bischoff and obtained the services of Mr. F. R. Lempriere, so that I might divide my company into two parties. After various delays, caused by wet weather, we reached the Pieman again on the 25th.

Long had incurred a violent attack of dysentery, through drinking bad water at Mount Bischoff, and on the journey out was very ill indeed, so much so that I feared he would die of exhaustion; however, he managed to reach the Yellow-band Plain, where we had some chlorodyne, and a few doses set him right again. He joined us at the Pieman on the 29th.

On the 29th heavy rain set in, and the river rose rapidly. The night of the 30th was very rough; rain came down in torrents, and a heavy gale set in, which sent the limbs of trees flying in all directions; one tree struck the guy rope at the corner of the tent. Rain continued up to the 7th of April, and as it was impossible to cross the river we did some prospecting on the north side. As all the gullies were flooded we could not try the best places, but wherever we managed to reach the bed rock we obtained gold. The wash is mostly quartz and slate; in some places a kind of micaceous cement. The gold is scaly, similar to that obtained on the Hellyer. The rocks in the vicinity are soft slates, micaceous slates, and quartz.

Seeing that we should run a great risk if we crossed the Pieman, I determined to fetch up more provisions, and leave some on the south side in case of floods cutting off our return. Took Burke with me, and went to the Wilson River for flour. On the way met Jones and Lempriere, who were travelling in a westerly direction. Returned to the Pieman on the 12th, and crossed it on the 13th.

Found the country on the south side of the Pieman to be similar to that on the north side, but not so hilly. About half a mile from the river tried some of the creeks, and obtained gold in every instance; in one spot obtained about five specs to the dish, and about an ounce of tin. The wash is quartz, tourmaline, and slate, very much waterworn, apparently a former bed of the river.

Continued our course in the direction of Mount Heemskirk, and found the walking very good. The gullies are very deep, and filled with bauera and small gum trees; but by keeping on the high ground these are avoided, and time saved.

On the 14th we reached Mount Heemskirk, and went up one of the peaks. Found Mount Heemskirk to be a group of hills, some of them slate and others granite, quartz, and tourmaline—a very promising locality for minerals. Finding that we were now about five miles from the beach and the country all flat between us and the sea, and thinking we were now in well-known ground, I determined to devote my attention to examining the country north and south of the Pieman in its immediate vicinity. Camped near the foot of Mount Heemskirk, intending to go in the direction of Mount Dundas. During the day observed that Lempriere and Jones had fired the country west of the Parson's Hood, and that the fire was travelling rapidly, in a south-west direction; during the night the reflection was very bright.

On the morning of the 15th found that the barometer was falling fast, and the wind coming in strong gusts from the north west. Fearing a flood I determined to go back to the Pieman, and pushed on so as to reach there by evening. Set fire to the country as we went along. Sunday, 16th, was wet, and the river began to rise, but towards evening it fell again, and although rain fell on Monday it did not prevent us from recrossing the Pieman and examining the south side. On Monday night rain fell in earnest, and a heavy flood came down the river. Rain continuing, the river rose nearly twenty feet; and, thinking it was too late in the season for further work, I determined to return to Mount Bischoff on the first opportunity.

On the 20th April we struck our camp on the Pieman, and went as far as the summit of the Parson's Hood—the most wretched journey I ever made in my life. Rain set in as we went up the Hood, and when we reached the summit we encountered a perfect hurricane of wind and rain; everything was wet through, and we spent a weary night sitting in a tent full of smoke. I never remember such a gale in Tasmania. Reached our tent on the Yellow-band on the 21st, and managed to get our things dried. Furious squalls of wind and rain continued, and we were obliged to remain until the 23rd. Arrived at my cottage, Waratah, early on the 24th.

Messrs. Lempriere and Jones, after separating from my party, proceeded to examine the country in a westerly direction, and in the first stage of their journey ascended the peak to the west of the Parson's Hood. This peak is about the same height as the Hood, of slate formation, although the junction of the slate and granite is not far to the northward. The button grass was fired and a great extent of country cleared; but rain prevented the fires extending as far as they might have done in fine weather. Leaving the ranges they then followed the button grass hills in a westerly direction, and found that the country was precisely similar to that already described.

Approaching the Pieman the course was altered to south west; and after passing through some four miles of forest, the river was struck at a point where a large tributary joins it. At this point they report the water slightly brackish, and the river very deep and wide, with no current to speak

of. The formation in the vicinity is talcose and micaceous schists, quartz veins, and iron ore. One mass of iron ore was found weighing between four and five tons. The weather was too wet for prospecting, and accordingly they returned to Bischoff, arriving there on the 26th.

The entire country from the Ramsay River to the west coast is utterly worthless for agricultural or pastoral purposes; nor do I think there is any large quantity of valuable timber. The Macquarie Harbour pine grows in the vicinity of the Pieman and a few of its tributaries, but the trees are few and far between.

There are, however, sure indications that this part of Tasmania abounds in mineral wealth, although it may be that the search will be arduous and slow. As in the case of the Hellyer River so it is with the Pieman; wherever the softer schists occur gold is found in small quantities, and I have not the slightest doubt but that in both rivers gold will be found in paying quantities, both alluvial and reef gold. Tin and gold occurring together in some spots near the Pieman in what is called "made" ground would indicate that the country higher up the river is worthy of examination, and I would recommend prospectors to try the vicinity of Mount Murchison and the Murchison River.

I do not think it advisable to open up horse-tracks into the west country until there is something to warrant the expenditure, but I would advise the Government to cut tracks fit for men to travel with loads on their backs. The route I adopted presents so many natural difficulties that I cannot recommend its adoption; but would suggest a route to the westward of the Meredith Range.

To completely open up the west coast to prospectors three tracks are required.

First.—Burgess' track from Knole Plain to a point west of Mount Cleveland. This track would not require much clearing, as it has been partly opened up on various occasions.

Second.—A track from the termination of Emmett's track from Circular Head to the Arthur, to join Burgess' track. This track to be continued in a southerly direction towards Macquarie Harbour.

Third.—A track from Lake St. Clair to some point on the west coast, crossing track number two. This track is of importance, since a prospector might be on the south side of the Pieman and unable to cross on account of floods be obliged to make out in another direction.

These tracks would not be expensive affairs as they would pass through much open country. They could all be cut and marked by a good party during the next summer.

I would respectfully suggest that a party be fitted out early next summer and sent round to the mouth of the Pieman by sea. Proceeding up the Pieman in a boat, the party would establish a depôt on the open country and search out and cut a track towards the Arthur River and towards Macquarie Harbour. A couple of men from Mount Bischoff could then cut out Burgess' track so as to meet the other party. Time permitting, the party would push on towards Lake St. Clair by way of the King River and Collingwood Valley. It would be useless to call for tenders to cut tracks in such a country, and further examination is not required.

A good party would examine the route and cut the necessary tracks, at the same time furnishing much valuable information on the topography and resources of the country.

Prospectors will find it extremely difficult work to examine the western country by "swagging" from Mount Bischoff, and I would strongly advise them not to attempt it at present. Four days would be spent in reaching the Pieman and three in coming back, so that a party encumbered with tools, bedding, tents, &c. could not carry sufficient provisions to enable them to make a systematic search. By boating up the Pieman the work would be easy and pleasant.

I may conclude with mentioning as an inducement to prospecting the western country, that over three hundred ounces of gold have been obtained in one season from the Hellyer River, and that a party of Chinamen have done exceedingly well there during the past season. Copper has been discovered on the Arthur in several places; and copper, lead, tin, gold, and platinum have been found in the vicinity of the Parson's Hood and the Pieman, not to mention the discoveries at Mount Bischoff and Mount Ramsay.

I append a sketch map to illustrate the above Report.

I have the honor to be,
Sir,

Your obedient Servant,
CHAS. P. SPRENT, *District Surveyor.*

The Hon. the Minister of Lands and Works, Hobart Town.



SKETCH MAP
 OF THE
 RIVER PIEMAN AND VICINITY
 ILLUSTRATING
 M^r SPRENT'S RECENT EXPLORATION.

Scale. Two Miles to an Inch.

M^r Sprent's Track shown thus

Lithographed at the Lands & Works Office, June 1876.