

# Exploration

The Brisbane Valley was explored from two directions — up the Brisbane River and from the Darling Downs. Explorers were interested both in navigable rivers and fine pastoral country. Matthew Flinders in 1799 and John Oxley in 1823 both sought out the Brisbane River for these purposes. Because of the apparent fertility of the surrounding country, the slowness of the current and depth of water Oxley thought that the river would be navigable for fifty miles and considered that it promised to be a significant development focus in the future. On his second trip Oxley travelled up river by boat and camped one mile above College's Crossing. Together with surveyor Robert Hoddle, Alan Cunningham, and Butler, he walked to Pine Mountain, where a hoop pine ('Araucaria') was identified. The party climbed Mount Crosby, took bearings of the surrounding country, and walked to Sapling Pocket.<sup>1</sup>

In the September of the following year Major Edmund Lockyer of the 57th Regiment navigated the Brisbane River. Lockyer was instructed by Governor Bourke to explore the river for minerals, assess the fertility of the land, and describe the animals and birds. He travelled twice as far up-river as Oxley, going beyond the junction of the Brisbane and Stanley Rivers, and explored the foothills of Mount Brisbane and also went six miles up Lockyer Creek which he described as a 'deep clear flowing creek'. He failed to find the illusory tribe of white men with bows and arrows that Pilot John Gray of the original Redcliffe settlement had allegedly seen at the mouth of England Creek near Fernvale Bridge. They called the site, 'Gray's Mistake'. Lockyer did, however, discover coal outcropping above Kholo Crossing.<sup>2</sup>

The most extensive trip up the Brisbane River was led by Cunningham in 1829. In May he had sailed on the *Government Schooner Isabella* from Sydney to Brisbane Town and departed from Limestone Hills (Ipswich) to advance north along the Brisbane River. Travelling northwest the party was blocked by impenetrable forests in the Glamorgan Vale area. They retreated south to the Rosewood area and moved west to the Little Liverpool Range and Laidley where they were confronted by the Aborigines. The party ventured west as far as Murphy's Creek before heading east again to the Lake Clarendon area.

Cunningham advanced up the Brisbane River reaching the high mountains near the present day town of Esk on 5 July 1829. He climbed Irwin's Peak and noted Major Lockyer's Brisbane Mountain to the north-northeast and, at its base, a dense line of mist clearly indicating the Stanley river. His party had climbed the Irwin Range at Esk on 5 July. He then took a short cut across Mt Esk Pocket, a loop in the river, and travelled north to a lush plain watered by a beautiful creek, Cressbrook Creek, which had been the limit of Major Lockyer's trip in 1825. The explorers camped there on 7 July but the Aborigines had recently burnt the plain and next day the Aborigines commenced following Cunningham's party. An Aborigine approached Cunningham's cattle with a spear but did no harm; Cunningham, however, would not communicate with them except by gun and in the Harlin area fired to disperse them.

Cunningham went as far as Lister's Peak east of Linville and northeast of Moore on 11 July 1829. The stagnant pools convinced him that what he was seeing was the eastern watershed of the Brisbane and Stanley Rivers. The party returned safely to Mt Esk Pocket after camping at the junction of the Brisbane and Stanley Rivers where they had found the blue gum cut down by Lockyer. For lack of provisions, they were unable to explore the Stanley River which Cunningham considered the main stream, naming it the MacDougall River after Lady Brisbane's family. They followed the Brisbane River downstream, camping at the Lockyer Creek junction and naming the spot Pedal Blight; they eventually reached Limestone Hills on 21 July 1829.<sup>3</sup>

There is considerable debate about the circumstances which terminated the next exploration trip to the region. That was Captain Patrick Logan's expedition in October 1830 to chart the winding course of the upper Brisbane River before his regiment's return to India. On 9 October 1830 Captain Patrick Logan, accompanied by a servant and five prisoners, proceeded to Mt Irwin and Mt Brisbane. Near the Pine Range the party was attacked by Aborigines but they continued on their trek. On 17 October 1830, returning in the vicinity of Mt Irwin again, they once more encountered the Aborigines. It is very likely that

## History of the Shire of Esk

the Aborigines were very wary of whites after their experience with Cunningham's intrusion into their area in 1829.

The official story is that Logan separated from the party planning to meet up with the remainder later. He was supposedly surprised by attacking Aborigines, speared as he galloped away and fell from his horse as it attempted to jump across a gully in an area noted for its quicksand. His party searched for him without success and returned to Limestone Station next day. Logan's body, apparently attacked by Aborigines, was discovered in a creek, later named Logan Creek, and was buried on a ridge above.

The alternative scenario was well known in the community twenty years later. Old contemporaries of Logan doubted the truthfulness of the official reports and hinted that Aborigines were either bribed or incited to murder by convicts who had escaped into the bush to avoid the severity of the Commandant's administration. Logan's expedition is commemorated in the Shire by Logan Creek and the naming of the road bridge the Captain Patrick Logan Bridge by the Main Roads Department in 1982.<sup>4</sup>

The demise of Logan and the change in

administrative policies of the Moreton Bay Settlement meant that there was no further exploration into the Brisbane Valley in the 1830s. The headwaters of the Brisbane and Stanley Rivers and the fine Cressbrook Creek flats had already been assessed, but the upper reaches of both Cressbrook and Cooyar Creeks had been ignored. That was left for the pastoralists.

### ENDNOTES

1. G.A. Wood, 'Governor Macquarie' RAHS *Journal* Vol 16 Pt 6 (1931) pp412-413; HRA Ser 1, Vol 11 p221; J.G. Steele, *The Explorers of the Moreton Bay District 1770-1830* (St Lucia, University of Queensland, 1972) p127.
2. *ibid* p179; ADB Vol 2 pp123-124; R. Whitmore, *Coal in Queensland, The First Fifty Years: A History of Early Coal Mining in Queensland* (St Lucia, University of Queensland, 1981) pp1-5.
3. J.G. Steele, *op. cit.* pp325-347; T. Pugh, *A Brief Outline of the Moreton Bay Settlement from the time of the Discovery of the Bay by Captain Cook down to the Present Times*, compiled from various sources (1859); R.C. Hamilton, 'Allan Cunningham, With Special Reference to his work in what is now Queensland'. RAHS *Journal* Vol 4 Pt 6 (December 1960).
4. HRA Ser 1 Vol 16 pp58-59; T. Pugh, *op. cit.*; The Esk Shire Council and Mr Doug Jolly of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland have commemorated Logan's trip and his death by erecting a plaque in Esk in 1984. The plaque was financed out of a donation of \$1,000 by Mr Jolly to the National Trust of Queensland.

The verandah of Cressbrook house showing the slabs of the dining room built in the 1840s, and the first extension. The 1893 and 1955 flood heights are also visible on the wall.

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