

**AN ANONYMOUS ACCOUNT OF A JOURNEY
FROM AUGUSTA TO THE VASSE IN 1833**

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Before the settlement of the Vasse District in early 1834 a number of intending settlers from Augusta undertook exploratory excursions to the area. John Garrett Bussell passed through the Vasse District on a trip to Perth in March 1831. Lieutenant William Preston, in company with Augusta residents Charles Bussell and Lieutenant McLeod, led an expedition to the area, in April/May 1831. J. G. Bussell led at least two other exploratory parties to the Vasse shortly after. The events and the outcomes of these forays are well known, the various accounts being published as part of Volume 1 of the *Exploration Diaries*.²

During research on Georgiana Molloy one of the present authors [Lines] uncovered a number of documents in a notebook in a folio in the Molloy Papers.³ The first document recounted, in journal form, a journey from Augusta to the Vasse District and return. Because this account appears to predate Vasse settlement of Busselton and does not accord with any of the known expedition accounts we believe it documents a previously unrecognized exploratory expedition from Augusta to the Vasse District. Verification of this claim, dating of the document and consideration of its authorship follow.

Two Aboriginal word lists followed the expedition account. The handwriting appears to differ among the three documents and none are in the hand of Georgiana Molloy. Nor are the documents clearly dated. On the basis of handwriting analysis, one of the present authors [Gerritsen] identified the compiler of the first word list, previously unpublished, as Captain John Molloy.⁴

The author of the second word list, the third and last document, remains unidentified. The list is a transcript of the first two instalments of a word list published in four weekly instalments by Robert Menli Lyon in the *Perth Gazette* between 30 March and 20 April 1833. Because of the apparent chronological order of the three documents we have concluded that the journal account (the first document in the notebook) was probably written before April 1833.

The journal refers to the expedition led by "Mr Preston" in April/May 1831 and so must have been written after that date. The probable date can be further narrowed. Each entry begins with the name and number of the day, commencing with "Monday 7" and ending with "Friday 18". Between May 1831 and April 1833, "Monday 7" fell on 7 November 1831, 7 May 1832 and 7 January 1833.

The anonymous account makes several references to "Mr B" and "Mr Bussell". J. G. Bussell mounted an expedition from Augusta to the Vasse in November 1831, one of the possible months.⁵ However the commencement and finishing dates and details of the Bussell expedition do not correspond with the anonymous account. Bussell led another Vasse expedition in October/November 1832 but again dates and details do not correspond with the anonymous account.⁶ This process of elimination leaves May 1832 and January 1833 as the likely dates. Internal evidence

favours the latter as there are two references to uncomfortably warm weather: "the day being very sultry" (Tuesday 8th) and "Found the day oppressively hot" (Saturday 12). Other comments also imply that it was summer: "...proceeded up the bed of the Vasse following it for a short distance found it to divarigate into a series of small winter streamlets..." (Tuesday 15th).

Furthermore, the author writes about getting underway in daylight at 5.30 a.m. (Tuesday 8th). In May it is still dark at 5.30 a.m. This, and other references to summer, lead us to conclude that the expedition took place from 7 to 18 January 1833.

As previously stated, we were initially unable to identify the author of the anonymous account. Handwriting analysis was of little immediate assistance as the document was not very legible. It was probably written "on the road", originally in pencil, but then overwritten in ink. As "Mr B" and "Mr Bussell" is referred to on several occasions in the third person it appears unlikely that one of the Bussell brothers was the author. We noted, however, a statement in the very first line of the account that the author "left the Island" on Monday 7 January 1833. The only island occupied by the colonists in the Augusta district at that time was Molloy Island, then owned by Captain Molloy.⁷ This pointed to the author being Captain Molloy. Furthermore, closer scrutiny of the more legible parts of the document revealed some similarity to a sample of Captain Molloy's handwriting. When compared with a known example,⁸ particularly distinctive words, such as 'the', and word initial letters, such as 'I' and 'y', were apparent. Further confirmation that Molloy had indeed made a trip to the Vasse at the time in question is provided in a letter written by his wife Georgiana to Margaret Dunlop on 12 January, 1833: "Molloy went last Monday [7 January, 1833] to view his large grant on the Vasse...".⁹ This coincided with the day we deduced the first entry was made in the journal.

We have since discovered that there is another account of this journey held in the Cumbria Records Office in the United Kingdom,¹⁰ in which Molloy reveals he was accompanied by Alfred Bussell.

Given that the document was found in Georgiana Molloy's papers, that there was a physical connection with Captain Molloy, that it appears it may be in his handwriting and that we have established he visited the Vasse at the time in question, we conclude that Captain John Molloy was the author of the account.

Although the authenticity of the document does not appear to be in question, especially in light of the foregoing evidence, reference on two occasions (Friday 11 and Monday 14) to the dual mouth of the Vasse Inlet offers some degree of validation. The dual mouth, noted by Collie and Preston in 1829,¹¹ Lieutenant Bunbury in 1836,¹² Surveyor Ommanney in 1838,¹³ and appearing on early maps of the area,¹⁴ had been become a single embouchure by 1871.¹⁵ It seems reasonable to conclude from this that the document is authentic.

The full transcript of the anonymous account, which we hope will be of value to local historians and researchers interested in exploration during the early colonial period, now follows:

Monday 7. Left the Island at about 1/2 passed 5 for Mr B --- breakfasted, prepared for our intended excursion --- Took Boat as far as the Chapman River arrived about 12 o'clock. Halted an hour and proceeded 8 miles en route having passed through a thickly wooded Country. Soil various sand prevailing, passed two running Streams and found Water at other places in swampy parts --- we found shelter in one of the road huts, after taking Coffee returned to fish.

Tuesday 8th --- along the road --- Breakfasted at day light and moved about 1/2 5 over the same style of country with the land occasionally often alternating with ... but confined spaces of plain for the ... miles at the end of which we halted at a small streamlet to refresh, continuing our march we crossed a broad belt of ... thereafter rising over our heads of this which it flowed would scarcely ... that --- (3 miles an hour) at 3/4 of a mile distant. The trees were more dispersed and the land tolerably good of ... and of native construction for taking kangaroos it would form a many sided figure [DIAGRAM] octagonal as well as I can recollect in the centre the ... of an inconsiderable ... of fire remained from ... days of cutting work which readily constructed thus intermediate spaces filled up by a species of ... de Coup 9 inches wide and about eight deep : the soil changing from the sandy loam to a blue coloured clay --- came to crossing jingling stream running over a bed of pebbles almost the same pace as the last one at a more constant pace ... another mile by marked trees and then took the northerly course by the stream for two miles --- saw two native women who fled on our approach, the day being very sultry halted about 11 o'clock and remained until after 3 then continued for about 1/2 a mile farther. Came to an extensive landscape small streams flowing thro' it. B. concluded it was the Leuwin, his object was to cross it at a place more practicable and distant. On passing it we halted for a brief party to the West ... took the Eastern direction ourselves paused to reunite after making a reconnaissance up and down the Leuwin after following the course about a mile came upon the rapids Returned joined by our comrades. took coffee and ... --- marched at 1/2 5 in the first hour passed through an open forest country the elevated parts covered with ... of ... sandstone. On the lower ground, the same sort of country surface ... passed two water ... in which we found over good water --- ... of this ... day --- at 1 1/2 miles reached our bivouac. The land and ... to ... red loam to ... halted for a span at what we considered the last suitable point of meeting with water until we reached the Vasse and another mile and fell in with two other streams or it is possible it may be the same or on presenting itself to us in its course On proceeding 3/4 mile further entered an open and rather a swampy sort of country. I should think in the winter season --- we halted for some time Mr B. having indicated that he had left his telescope at our last halting place, he returned in search of it and was back in 2 hours having ... We resumed our march passing over much good open forest land --- Mr Preston's 1st day bivouac could find no water --- halted for ... space -- passed over some extensive plains. Came on open forest land. The soil apparently good, the country picturesque and park-like. Made about 5 1/2 miles from P's bivouac to the Vasse Drew up for the night having bagged

four birds with the aid of a few onions and a camphor ... Fabricated some soup.

Thursday 10 bagged 2 cockatoos. They appear very abundant. Breakfasted -- followed the course of the river for 4 miles diverging occasionally from its banks. The land open and grassy with what I should deem to be the confless accacia abounding in patches --- some larger trees occasionally interspersed. Arrived at the sand flat and followed an inlet for about 500 yards which terminated in large tract of swampy land the indication of two small streams which contained fresh water ... in the sandy part of the must have been running. Reached our bivouac about 2 o'clock.

Friday 11 --- moved this morning after breakfast to the mouth of the Vasse. Took some refreshments of fish newly taken from the river --- Caught and killed 3 waterfowl, after breakfast followed the line of the estuary to a small river in our course. Made the Southern outlet, forded and continued our march along the beach to the ... and made the 2nd inlet : from thence continued for about 3 miles along the bay and turned inland reached our bivouac at 5 o'clock and dined.

Saturday 12 After breakfast proceeded up the right bank of the Vasse to find a passage over. Came to a path leading to a ford. About 3/4 of a mile up crossed and followed another path for some distance which led us to the head of the location branch of the estuary turned it and took our departure from the Vasse walking due north we reached the beach in 3/4 of a mile. Walked a short distance along the beach Cape Naturaliste bearing N.N.W. --- 3020 another extreme point --- 300. Found the day oppressively hot. We repaired to our ... by another route which brought us on the ... about 3/4 from it, a mile from our quarters.

Sunday 13 . Mr Bussell read prayers after breakfast --- in the evening moved 3 miles up the river for the convenience of wood.

Monday 14 After breakfast 6 o'clock started in a E.N.E. direction for 4 miles. Came in contact with a small river --- changed direction N.E. 500 yards then north 2 1/2 miles. Passed through in the early part a sandy forest country latterly more open while Green found the convolvulus and some luxuriant herbage --- at a small distance came to the banks of a river flowing S.W. about 30 yards wide (killed 3 ... caught 3 fish) and moved up the river in search of a passage. At 3/4 of a mile distant it contracted to a sort of mountain stream-bed old red and stone --- a small ... of after crossing we changed our direction to north and rounded the head. Open clay bed of blue mud having a general direction to the S.E. crossed a narrow strip of grass land encountered a river of water which we endeavoured to cross at the point of contact but found the mud would not support us. We crossed higher up and continued our course until we came to a large stream of water which we forded. Supposed it to have its origin a river to the S.W. In continuing our course we arrived at a sort of natural canal running parallel with the coast and joining the northern mouth of the Vasse at 1/2 a mile distant from us. The stream at the Vasse mouth bearing S.W. by W the beach there about 30 yards distant along which we walked for about 3 miles wading over both the Vasse outlets ---

Tuesday 15th. After breakfast proceeded up the bed of the Vasse following it for a short distance found it divarigate into a series of the beds of small winter streamlets some the principal of these branches we followed in a direction varying from S.E. to W for about two miles -- - then struck into the Country to the East and then took a Northerly woody course home --

Wednesday. packed up to Return --- Marched about 5 o'clock and retraced our former route with variations. Halted at the rapids.

Thursday 17 Marched at 6 o'clock. Bivouacked at 3 o'clock on the Chapman.

Friday 18 Marched at 5 o'clock arrived at The Adelphi at 8 --- Breakfasted and moved off for Augusta about 11 --- arrived there about 3.

REFERENCES and NOTES

¹ We would like to thank J. (Ron) Gerritsen for his assistance in obtaining copies of the relevant documents.

² *Exploration Diaries*, WASA [Battye Library]: PR 5441, Volume 1.

³ Molloy Papers, WASA: Acc. 3278 A/1.

⁴ Rupert Gerritsen, *Early Records of the Wardandi Language* (Canberra, 1998), Appendix 1.

⁵ J. G. Bussell, 'Mr Bussell's Journal of an Expedition to the River Vasse from the Blackwood', in *Exploration Diaries*, op. cit. pp. 302-318.

⁶ J. G. Bussell, 'Report of an Excursion to the Northward from Augusta', in *Exploration Diaries*, op. cit. pp. 348-354.

⁷ William J. Lines, *An All Consuming Passion* (Sydney, 1994), p. 168; Alexandra Hasluck, *Portrait With Background* (Fremantle, 1990), p. 89.

⁸ Molloy, Capt. J. 'Letter from Captain Molloy to Scotland, 18 July 1846', in "Collection of Western Australian Letters 1806 - 1862", National Library of Australia, MS 6649.

⁹ 'Letter from Georgiana Molloy to Miss Margaret Dunlop January 12, 1833'. WASA: Acc. 501A/1.

¹⁰ Cumbria Record Office, CRO D/Ken/3/28/7.

¹¹ Mr Collie and Lt. Preston, 'Observations on the coast etc. from Cockburn Sound to Geographe Bay 17th and 30th Nov. 1829 by Mr Collie and Lieutenant Preston', in *Exploration Diaries*, op. cit. pp. 267-281.

¹² Lt. H. W. Bunbury, *Early Days in Western Australia* (London, 1930), pp. 99-100.

¹³ WAS Survey Field Books - H M Ommanney CONS 3401 H M Ommanney 9-2/5, pp. 76-7.

¹⁴ For example Wellington Map 25 (1850).

¹⁵ See 'Plan by surveyor Campbell Carey, Railway, Wonnerup to Yoganup, Sept. 1871', WASA: PR4/R/83.