

2.3 ...John Eyre's "Water Witch" at Moorundee...Explorers, Overlanders, Pastoralists, Paddle Steamers and Gold diggers

...Water Witch at Moorundee...

"See Jack, just over there at the end of the billabong, half hidden in the long thin trees, and reeds." Jack was as blind as a bat, anyway he was busy swatting the mozzies, as well as using the oars of the Paddle Steamers dinghy to keep us stationary, and not being swept along by the current.

"Ah yes now I see it."

It was the mast of the remains of the *Water Witch*.



John Eyre's Moorundee?

"We had better tie up and have a quick dekko before the *Albury* catches up with us," said Jack."Remember Captain Johnson said we could take this dinghy and explore down here whilst Captain Cadell, the Governor and his party organized their horses and luggage so they could ride to Adelaide, but when the *Albury* was 2 miles from here he would blow the steam whistle in 5 long blasts, and that we had better be ready to be picked up or else."

"I know I know," I said impatiently.

I quickly jumped over the bows, tied a rope off to a small tree and took of up over the river bank. I excitedly plunged through small clumps of reeds and shrubs. There it was.

The mast sticking straight up, and the deck practically level with the mud of the billabong. Grass, weeds and bushes were growing everywhere. A vine was even climbing up the mast.

"Jack, look at that," I exclaimed." Mr. Charles told me the cutter was built in Hobart in 1835. It was the first boat to ever sail into the Murray River mouth. Our South Australian Government owned it for all sorts of work. It was last used by John Eyre when he was exploring

our south west coast. He brought it up here when he purchased a lot of land around here and he became the Governments Aboriginal Protector.”

Jack didn't say much. So I told him a little more.

“It was about 50 feet long and about 10 foot wide weighing about 25 tons, and sank in 1842. Big hey!” Jack still didn't look to impressed.

What a dilapidated scene for such a famous boat. Even the buildings were abandoned long ago and had fallen over, just a couple of brick fireplaces and only a few stones along the bank were showing where this small village of Sturt, at Moorundee had a small jetty. After Eyre left, Police manned the village of about 25 persons, then that was terminated because Blanch Town was created.

Explorers,Overlanders,Pastoralists.Miners

What were we doing here at Moorundee, just south of Blanch Town?

Well, Captain Cadell wanted us to leave Morgan and get to Blanche Town quickly. The Governor felt he should be back in Adelaide as quickly as possible, so after dinner we steamed downstream at night using lamps to see forward.

During that night standing in the bows of the steamer, on watch, peering forward, Charles the Assistant Surveyor in the Governors party told me a bit more about the Overlanders.

“Who were the Overlanders Mr. Charles?” I asked.

“Hmm, do you really want a history lesson young Andy?” he replied.

Well there would not be much to talk about or do, during our watch up the bows of the boat, just peering ahead and singing out to the Steersman about branches, trees or anything ahead that might get us into trouble. So I nodded yes.

“Here goes then. First you must understand that we all know all lot more about Australia now, than what the Overlanders knew in the late 1830's to 1840's. The reason for their efforts, and you must remember that they were helped by quite a few other cattle drovers and sheep herders on their journeys, was that was the colonists of South Australia found it hard to get reasonable and regular amounts of live cattle and sheep for their use. The only way it could be supplied was by irregular small amounts that could be carried on sailing ships from Sydney or Melbourne. So the Overlanders, bought the herds and sold them for profit at their end destination.



“The Graziers and Pastoralists in NSW, west of the great dividing range and Sydney, started to grow larger and larger herds of cattle and flocks of sheep. More probably, than Sydney could take and it meant passing over the Great Dividing Range to get to Sydney.”

“Early explorers, one of whom was Captain Sturt, who later worked as Surveyor general in Adelaide, Mr. Hume and Captain Hovell, Major Mitchell, McMillan Strezlecki and others proved that the middle of Australia, NSW in particular, and most of South Australia was relatively flat and that the rivers flowed west wards and then mostly joined up to make the Murray bigger on its way down to its mouth at Encounter Bay.”

“Joseph Hawdon and his brother John had a cattle run at Goulburn, and in 1836 drove cattle to Melbourne for sale. On the way they learn’t from Major Thomas Mitchell’s party of the Howlong crossing so they followed the Major’s line to the Goulburn river on the way to Melbourne.”

“Next in quick succession Hawdon and his friend Charles Bonney set out for Adelaide with a mob of cattle. John Eyre, the 21 year old Parsons son, set out from the Limestone Plains south of Goulburn also set out for Adelaide, and after serious miscalculations finally arrived in Adelaide.”

“Captain Charles Sturt, also when living at Mittagong in NSW drove 400 cattle to Adelaide.”

“William Adam Broadribb in 1837 became a partner in a Monaro cattle run. He was the second person, after Hawdon, to overland cattle to Melbourne.”

...Paddle Steamers and Gold Diggers....

“As for gold diggings, in Australia, you should know that Edward Hargreaves, after returning to Australia after the California gold rush, saw similar countryside around Bathurst. Well that started everyone looking at the ground all over the country, hoping to find gold for free. People from all over the world flocked to Australia, mostly to Victoria to become rich. They all needed feeding, that’s why cattle and sheep are so important to the Australian population, and this river system with Paddle Steamers plays an important part in selling and buying trade items.”

“There you are that’s enough History, you will have to learn more yourself if you are interested.”

“Wheee! Wheee! Wheee! Wheee! Wheee!

“Crikey that’s the *Albury*, awful close Jack!”

Quickly we ran to the dinghy and scrambled aboard. Jack rowed and pointed us upstream and suddenly there she was charging down to us. I was in the bows and luckily caught the rope that was flung to us from the bows of the steamer. The men on the Steamer quickly pulled in the rope and as the bows of the Steamer surged past us it quickly jerked us sideways and then pulled us parallel to the of the Steamer. The Captain was reluctant to stop because the Barge he was towing could have run up to the Steamer causing damage.