

THE FORLORN HOPE

A Sea Saga of the Sixties

BY

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This story of Seven Men in a Boat is adapted from the narrative of J. P. Stow, which was published in the *South Australian Advertiser* in 1865, and later printed in the Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, London, Vol. 10. An enlarged version was published as a book in 1894, but this has long been out of print. I have told the tale anew, making some use of Stow's descriptive phraseology, but without quotation marks, deeming this general acknowledgment fully sufficient.

F.C.



THE FORLORN HOPE

It was a hopeless proposition from the beginning.

In July of the year 1863 the Colony of South Australia annexed unto itself 523,620 square miles of country in North Australia, naming it "The Northern Territory."

This ambitious land-grab was a direct result of John McDouall Stuart's exploring expeditions, culminating in his complete crossing of the Australian continent, from south to north, in 1862. This great feat won Stuart the prize of £2000 offered by the South Australian Government. Actually, Burke and Wills had beaten Stuart in the transcontinental race, but they did not

live to tell the tale or to claim the prize. Nobody could grudge the award to Stuart, who thoroughly earned it by crossing the continent not once but twice. He returned on his own tracks through the arid Centre, and arrived back in Adelaide on the same day as the dead bodies of Burke and Wills—which were brought in from Cooper's Creek by Explorer William Howitt.

Stuart had reached the Northern Coast and had laved his hands in the waters of Van Diemen's Gulf in July 1862.

The coastline had been previously charted, in 1839, by Commander Wickham, in H.M.S. Beagle, who had named the Adelaide River and Port Darwin. Something also was known of the Northern Territory's interior, since Leichhardt, in 1845, and A. C. Gregory, in 1856, had rapidly traversed parts of it.

But when Stuart arrived there from South Australia, on 24 July 1862, the vast Northern terrain had no white inhabitants. In earlier years British military garrisons had been posted temporarily at Melville Island and Port Essington to deter foreigners from aggressing, but those garrisons had been withdrawn—after suffering severely from the climate—long before Stuart arrived.

Something had to be done about that Empty North—and South Australia decided to do it. The lure of acquiring half-a-million square miles of land, just for the trouble of taking it, was too big for the South Australians to resist.

They bit at the bait and got hooked.

South Australians were extremely land-conscious. Their Colony had been founded in 1836 as the direct result of the theories of Edward Gibbon Wakefield, a land-crank who urged that virgin earth should be sold at £1 an acre and the proceeds devoted to encouraging immigration, thus creating a perpetual boom. The

Colony went bankrupt in its first few years, until the "fixed price" theory was dropped. Then the colonists, starting work in earnest, paid off their debts, turned the corner, and have never looked back since.

It was the fertility of the South Australian soil and the hard work of the pioneers which saved the situation. Wealth comes from sweat, not speculation.

But cranky theories die hard. By the year 1863 the Colony of South Australia was well "set," but there were still thousands of people there who held fast to Wakefield's idea of land as wealth-in-itself.

They believed there is some magical law by which land simply must increase in capital value when people settle on it, and that those who get in first with titles of ownership can't fail to make a fortune out of "development."

To the people who had this idea the Vast Open Spaces of the "Empty North" made an irresistible appeal. Stuart's journeys clinched the matter. There was unbounded enthusiasm among the land-crankers of Adelaide when South Australia annexed the "Northern Territory" in July 1863.

OCCUPYING THE EMPTY SPACES

Although Stuart had blazed an overland trail, the difficulties of the 2000-mile route through the Centre were too great to be overcome in the initial stages of populating the North by migration from the South.

It was decided to send advance parties by sea to survey the Promised Land and to do the necessary spadework.

In April 1864, the pioneer party, consisting of 41 Government employees, was ready to set sail from Port Adelaide in the ship *Henry Ellis*. This party was under the command of Colonel Boyle Travers Finniss, who

had the title of "Government Resident of the Northern Territory of South Australia."

Finniss was to be Dictator Absolute, for the time being, of the New Possession. His task was to occupy the site of the proposed new capital city, which was to be named "Palmerston" as a compliment to Britain's Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston.

The site of Palmerston City was pre-selected by the Government of South Australia before Finniss departed. His main task was to survey town blocks at "Escape Cliffs," on the estuary of the Adelaide River, which flows into Van Diemen's Gulf at Adam Bay.

It was a coincidence that the Adelaide River, in North Australia, 2000 miles from Adelaide City, in South Australia, had been named after Queen Adelaide, the Consort of King William IV, but explorers have a fancy for royal nomenclature—which explains the coincidence.

The Adelaide River had been explored by a boat-party from H.M.S. Beagle in 1839, and was shown on



the charts as navigable for a considerable distance inland. At Escape Cliffs, on the banks of the estuary, a comic incident had occurred, when some jolly jack-tars from the *Beagle*, who had landed without weapons, were ambushed by aborigines carrying poised spears. The jack-tars danced a sailor's hornpipe to appease the natives, and so averted the attack by amusing the aborigines so much that they forgot to throw their spears.

All omens were propitious as the *Henry Ellis* sailed from Port Adelaide with the pioneer party on board. At a banquet before sailing some wag remarked that the Latin word "finis" had a punning resemblance to the surname of Colonel B. T. Finniss. To avert this ill-omen, it was suggested that the motto of the pioneers should be FINIS CORONAT OPUS, meaning either "The End Crowns the Work" or Finniss is the Man for the Job—take your pick.

The Adelaide River was only 2000 land-miles from Adelaide City—but there was a desert between—so the *Henry Ellis* had to sail 4000 sea-miles to reach her destination, going eastabout, with calls at Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Thursday Island. After a voyage of two months, the pioneers of Palmerston anchored in the Adelaide River on 21 June 1864.

Stores, tools, tents and baggage were landed, and a camp was built at Escape Cliffs. Then the *Henry Ellis* sailed away, leaving the pioneers to get on with their job of surveying the city.

Then their troubles started.

The map-makers of the *Beagle*, being mariners, had correctly charted the estuary of the Adelaide River from a sailor's point of view, but had not looked at the banks with landlubbers' eyes. The site of Palmerston City, shown on the *Beagle's* charts as forested land, was a morass of mud and mangroves!

What was Finniss to do? Being a soldier, he decided to carry out orders, mud or no mud, mangroves or no mangroves, so he instructed the surveyors to get on with their work—which they did, pegging out the city blocks in the ooze.

Meanwhile, the land-cranks of Adelaide got busy selling options on the blocks to a gullible public, eager to get rich without working. Mugs in hundreds bought Mangrove Allotments "on spec," thinking themselves lucky to be in on the ground floor. The options were marketed also in London, where the soft-hearted British investors also fell for the lure of the inevitably-coming land-boom.

Marooned in the mangroves, and macerated by mosquitoes, Boyle Finniss had no quick means of communication with his superiors in South Australia, to inform them of the real state of affairs and get fresh instructions. His men grew mutinous and quarrelsome, but Finniss was a military martinet. He kept them at their futile work and carried out his original instructions to the letter.

DISILLUSIONMENT

A second colonising party departed from Port Adelaide in October 1864, six months after the pioneers. This party travelled by the chartered steamer South Australian, and also went eastabout, via Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Thursday Island. They arrived at Adam Bay in December.

The new arrivals, 40 in number, were nearly all Government officials, but three of them were private settlers seeking a fortune and experience.

One was a German scientist, who was accompanied by his wife and child. He was mainly interested in meteorology. The other two free settlers were Mr

Stuckey and Mr J. P. Stow, experienced South Australian colonists. A surveyor of the Government service also brought his wife and child with this party.

High were the hopes of the newcomers when at last they anchored in Adam Bay, and saw the tents and huts ashore at Escape Cliffs shimmering in tropic midsummer haze.

Then came the disillusionments a-plenty.

The steamer had to anchor a mile and a half from the shore, and when the tide went out a desolate mud-flat lay atween. A party of the pioneers came out in a dinghy to welcome the reinforcements with a lugubrious tale of mud, mangroves, mosquitoes, malaria and mismanagement.

Escape Cliffs, 30 feet above sea-level, was a hillock—the only high ground in a morass of swamp. The wet season had set in, and most of Palmerston City was under water. In the steamy air the newly-arrived hopefuls gasped for breath—and gasped still more in despair and astonishment at what they saw and heard.

But hope springs strong in the hearts of empire-builders. The Second Contingent landed and the steamer which had brought them steamed away. Now there were four-score whites in the theoretical city of Palmerston. Mangroves-bound, the little community was isolated and left to fend for itself. The next relief-ship was not due for several months.

There was no way of escape and no practicable means of communicating with the civilised world. Horses and equipment were not available for any attempt to reach Queensland or South Australia by overland routes. The wet season made it impossible for the Palmerstonians even to probe the inland regions of the Territory, where Explorers Gregory and Stuart had reported good pastoral country. They were simply bogged down in the mud

of their malarial metropolis, and had to stay there—meals for mosquitoes. A small party in a dinghy went up the Adelaide River at Christmas time, looking for a healthier camp-site—but found only more mud and mangroves, for miles and miles.

There was no escape from Escape Cliffs. The nearest white settlements were at Cape York, 600 miles to the east, and at Camden Harbour, 600 miles to the west, where a chartered company of colonists from Melbourne was making an experiment of its own in tropical land-development. To reach either Cape York or Camden Harbour would have been a good idea if the Palmerstonians had possessed a seaworthy boat—but they had only dinghies, and Boyle Finniss kept a close guard on those. They were Government property.

Months of maddening monotony went by.

FIASCO

On 8 April 1865, H.M.S. *Beatrice*, a naval surveying vessel, arrived from Adelaide with mail—and with instructions to Boyle Finniss to look for another site for the City of Palmerston.

The Resident immediately despatched a party on horseback to examine the foreshores of Port Darwin, where the *Beatrice* also proceeded. The scouts returned eight days later with gloomy faces. They reported that the land around Port Darwin was useless for pasturage or agriculture, and that its possibilities as the site for a metropolis was distinctly limited. Boyle Finniss thereupon decided not to shift camp from Escape Cliffs.

This decision plunged the pessimistic Palmerstonians into incurable gloom. Most of them now had only one thought—how to get out of the Northern Territory, by hook or by crook. It was plain that the colonising project was a fiasco. More than £40,000 had already been

sunk in the ooze of the Adelaide River. This represented more than half the cash that had been raised by advance selling of "Land Orders." Obviously the investors would lose all their money, and there would be ructious repercussions. The tropical Paradise of Palmerston had turned into a Purgatory for doomed shareholders.

EXODUS

On 20 April the relief-ship Bengal arrived from Adelaide with mails and provisions, including a flock of sheep. She was on her way to the Netherlands East Indies. For sixteen days she remained at anchor in Adam Bay, discharging her cargo by lightering it ashore.

The temptation was too great for some of the Palmerstonians to resist. Thirty of them booked passages by the Bengal to Singapore, intending to make their way from there back to Adelaide. It was a roundabout way of getting home—but better than staying at Palmerston, the deserters reasoned.

Of the fifty remaining colonists about forty had made up their minds to leave at the first favorable opportunity, but thought the route via Singapore too circuitous. They consoled themselves by writing blistering letters to the newspapers and to the Government in Adelaide, exposing the fiasco of Palmerston and the futility of Finniss. These scorching epistles would be carried by the Bengal and would reach Adelaide a couple of months later.

Among those who did not book passage by the Bengal was Mr. J. P. Stow, a Justice of the Peace, who had "J.P." both fore and aft of his monniker. He was one of the three free settlers who had arrived by the South Australian in December. Four months of mud-squatting had dampened his ardor, but had not completely killed

it. He still had hopes that good country could be found by exploration along the coast.

To Mr Stow, seated in his tent, wistfully looking at the anchored Bengal, came a man with a proposition. The visitor was Arthur Hamilton, a fed-up young surveyor in the Government service. His proposal was that a whaleboat should be purchased from the skipper of the Bengal, and that a party should be made up, led by Mr Stow, to explore the coast westwards for 600 miles, as far as the settlement of Camden Harbour.

"It's rather a forlorn hope," said Mr Stow, "but I'm willing to try it!"

THE FORLORN HOPE

Five other mangrove-sated colonists were invited to join the boat-party, and accepted the invitation with alacrity. Two of them were seamen, the other three employed in the Government Surveying Service. All were of good physique and stout-hearted.

Going aboard the Bengal—still at anchor in the bay—Stow negotiated with the skipper, a simple-minded Swede, for the purchase of a boat. The skipper was not as simple-minded as he looked. His price was £60, take it or leave it—a staggering sum in those days of cheap labor and cheap commodities—but the buyers were at the seller's mercy, so the deal was done.

The boat, like the skipper, was made in Sweden. She was 23 feet in length, 6 feet across the beam, and 2 feet deep, with two masts and spritsails, and three pairs of oars.

On May 4—two days before the Bengal sailed away—the purchase was completed and the boat brought ashore.

Energetically, the seven men made ready for an early departure. They fitted washboards and some decking at

bow and stern, also a jib-sail, and made lockers to hold provisions.

Then they named her—THE FORLORN HOPE.

There was much head-shaking among the onlookers at this name of ill-omen, but the satirical seven were satisfied that the name was appropriate, so they kept it.

On May 6, after the Bengal's departure, the Forlorn-Hopers put their luggage and provisions aboard their little vessel. They had 200 lb of biscuits, 120 lb of tinned beef, 70 gallons of water, and some firewood. The gear included a camp-oven and an iron bucket for cooking, also several shot-guns and ammunition, fishing-lines and hooks, maps, charts, compasses and sextants, a small medicine-chest—and two bottles of beer.

Towards sundown of that same day, the whole population of Palmerston—except the Government Resident, Boyle Finniss, and a couple of his senior officials— assembled on the shore to bid the seven sturdy adventurers God-speed. They were leaving on the tide, which was nearly full.

The Palmerstonians were also full, as they toasted the Forlorn Hope and her crew in beer which the Bengal had brought.

After many cheers and beers, the sturdy seven went aboard. Their names were: J. P. Stow, J.P., leader of the party; Arthur Hamilton and William McMinn, surveyors and navigators; John White and James Davis, seamen; Charles Hake and Frank Edwards, surveyors' chainmen.

John White, who had been in the pilot service in Victoria and South Australia, was appointed Sailing Master—and a good man he was, too, at handling a boat.

All aboard, and renewed beery cheers came from the Palmerstonians on shore as the flag of the Forlorn Hope was raised to the masthead.

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It was a pennant with a strange device: FINIS CORONAT OPUS.

With all sails set and colors flying, the staunch little vessel moved away slowly from the shore in a light breeze, amid a chorus of "hoorays" from the Cliffites.

"They are bound for the coral reefs and the mermaids!" wailed a Palmerstonian pessimist, overcome by emotion and beer. Soon the oozy city was out of sight.

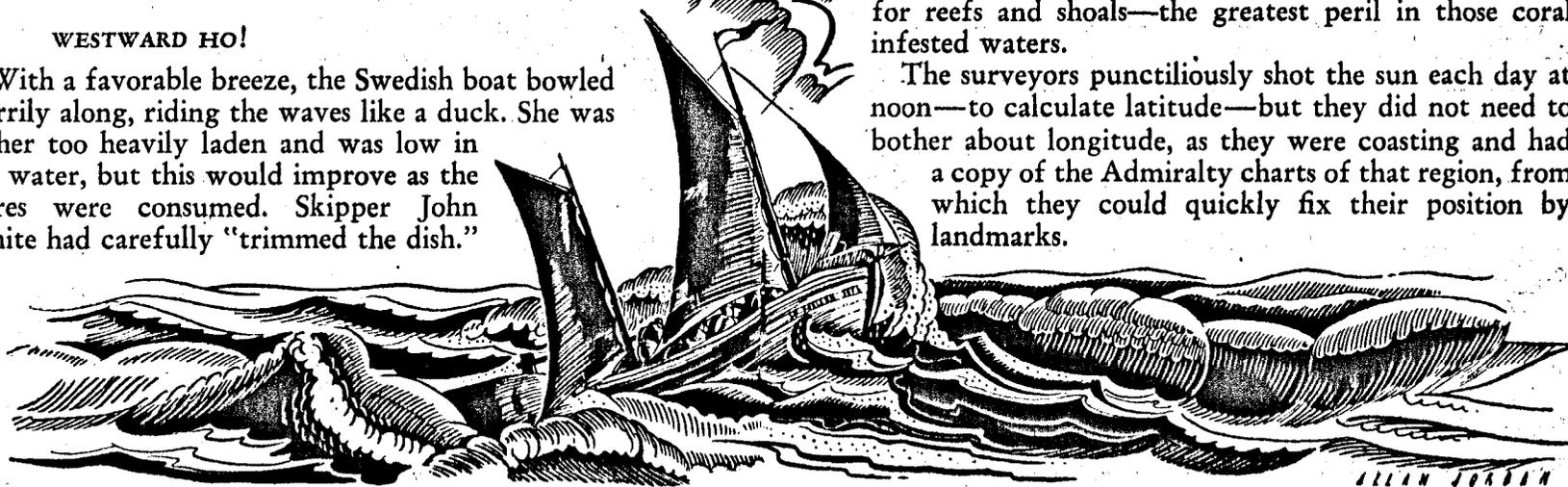
Darkness fell as the Forlorn Hope reached the mouth of the Adelaide River and anchored awhile near the camp of a party of surveyors who were futilely engaged in laying out the boundaries of a macabre suburb named "South Palmerston." The boatmen went ashore and camped that night with the surveyors, sharing their sandflies, which voraciously nibbled nightlong.

Next morning, 7 May 1865, the two bottles of Barley Extract were boozed as a final farewell toast.

Then the Forlorn Hope sailed through the Narrows at the river-mouth, and was soon tossing on the open ocean.

WESTWARD HO!

With a favorable breeze, the Swedish boat bowled merrily along, riding the waves like a duck. She was rather too heavily laden and was low in the water, but this would improve as the stores were consumed. Skipper John White had carefully "trimmed the dish."



The two casks of Adam's Ale, 35 gallons each, and a case of photographic apparatus—which belonged to Hamilton and Hake—were placed and secured so as to make admirable ballast.

With the two spritsails and the jib bellying in the breeze, she bowled along beautifully, White and Davis taking turns at the tiller, while the other five lazed in the shade of the sails.

It was a perfect picnic. Early in the afternoon they passed the Vernon Isles, taking the inner channel and going over shoals cautiously, but without mishap. Then heigh-ho for the open sea again! Night fell, the moon rose and spread its silvery light on the waters gently lapping in the pleasant breeze. The wanderers dozed and dreamed, rocked in the cradle of the deep.

Next day the five land-lubbers in the crew took lessons in handling the helm and the sails, so as to ease the work of the two seamen and safeguard their strength for emergencies. Throughout the voyage, one man was constantly posted at the bow on the lookout for reefs and shoals—the greatest peril in those coral infested waters.

The surveyors punctiliously shot the sun each day at noon—to calculate latitude—but they did not need to bother about longitude, as they were coasting and had a copy of the Admiralty charts of that region, from which they could quickly fix their position by landmarks.

Passing Port Darwin and Patterson Bay, the seafarers steered for Anson Bay, where they intended to land and do a bit of exploring. Rough weather came up and they had to anchor frequently amid shoals, particularly at night-time. There were plenty of fish to be seen—but they wouldn't bite, and so the poor sailors got none. Their diet was bully-beef, stewed in the bucket which was hung above the camp-oven, in which a fire was kindled.

On May 13—after being six days at sea—the party landed at Anson Bay and boiled the billy on the beach. They spent two days ashore, exploring up to five miles inland, but found no good pastoral prospects, only swamps and rank grasses, with plenty of "paper-bark" trees and giant anthills. The gunmen shot some pheasants, plover, teal and snipe, which were grilled, and made a delicious variant to the bully-beef diet.

All aboard again on May 15, and the Forlorn Hope sailed along the coast thirty hours, then anchored at a sandy beach between Cape Domber and Cape Hay, within sight of the Barthelemy Hills, near the border of Western Australia.

At sunrise on May 17 the boat was beached. Stow, McMinn, White and Davis went exploring, trying to reach the Barthelemy Hills, but got bogged in rushes and reeds, where they were bitten by leeches and stung by wasps. After floundering for hours they gave up the attempt and returned to the boat, shooting some plovers on the way.

That was the end of their land-exploring ambitions and of their hopes of finding good country in South Australia's Northern Territory.

"Home, sweet home" was now the motto, as they launched the Forlorn Hope and set a course which would take them out of sight of the land across the

wide mouth of the Cambridge Gulf, into Western Australian waters. They were bound now for the settlement at Camden Harbour, an outpost of civilisation.

Phosphorescent animalcules illumined the sea. As the Forlorn Hope sailed on, westward into the night, she left in her wake a pathway of pale fire, with myriads of blue sparks, a ghostly iridescence.

TURNING THE CORNER

The passage across the wide maw of Cambridge Gulf took a day and a night of close-reefed sailing, for the seas were high and mighty. The boat seemed to stand on end as she climbed the mountainous waves, then nose-dived down the other side—but the Swede who had built her knew his job. He was probably a descendant of Vikings.

At dawn on May 19 the Forlorn Hope was safely across Cambridge Gulf and, scudding along the north coast of Western Australia at a great bat, passed Cape Londonderry's bold promontory and came at nightfall in sight of Cape Bougainville, the corner-peg of north-western Australia, where the coastline trends away to the south-west.

Now they were all set for a fast run to Camden Harbour—so they thought—but, instead, they had a slow run into Cape Bougainville's archipelago.

Islands, islands everywhere! The Forlorn-Hopers had hoped for a picnic cruise through this archipelago, with pleasant strolls ashore on an island here and an island there, as fancy might dictate, for a feed of turtle-soup or a turtle-omelette, and perhaps a bathe in a fresh-water rill, 'neath murmuring palms.

Alas for the harsh difference between fantasy and reality! The islands were surrounded with mazes of razor-edged coral reefs, on which the breakers boomed.

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They were almost unapproachable, except with infinite care and at a great risk. Trying to get away from the shoals near the coast, Skipper White stood out to sea. Twelve miles from Cape Bougainville, the Forlorn Hope struck on a coral reef and stuck fast, with breakers all around.

Bump, bump; grind, grind, went the Swedish soft-wood on the fierce coral teeth of the reef—but the seamen with masterly handling got her off and away, just in time. They sailed back eastward into Vansittart Bay and anchored for the night of May 20 on a sandspit, in five fathoms of water, about half a mile from the land.

Next day they tried again, but, as the sea was rough, they ran into the lee of Troughton Island and, finding a beach, they put the boat ashore and went for a stroll on terra firma. Alas, no turtles! There were plenty on the other islands, but not on this one.

The weather moderated, and the Forlorn-Hopers started again on May 22 to thread their way through the coral maze, or around it. They steered north all day into open water, then made a westering run at night—and ran slap-bang into another reef. Getting the boat off, they anchored until daylight, then saw islands, islands, islands everywhere around and ahead of them.

There was nothing else to do except run the gauntlet, sailing among the shoals and keeping a keen lookout, tacking, backing and filling—rowing whenever the sailing got too dangerous—risking disaster all the time.

For five days they plodded warily through the archipelago on a south-westerly course, passing hundreds of islands and islets. Some were several miles in extent, others mere jutting rocks, columnar, square, smooth and fretted; some had vegetation, others were quite bare; some were rangy, some conical, some round or oval, some flat-topped; some sloped gently to the water's

edge, some were bold and cliffy; some had sandy beaches, easy of approach, others were guarded by barriers of reef.

Infinitely diversified were these islands, but infinitely lonely. No sign of life appeared on their shores, scarcely a sea-bird hovering. They seemed abandoned by Nature to everlasting desolation. Onwards the mariners toiled, anxious for open ocean again. Turtles and fish cavorted around the boat, but couldn't be caught. Provisions were almost exhausted. There was nothing left except some tea, sugar, and a packet of maize-meal.

At nightfall on May 28, after passing over a reef that boiled like a cauldron, the weary wanderers anchored under a ridge of dark rock in eight fathoms, with soft bottom. They calculated that they were near Camden Harbour, but the charts which they had were utterly unlike the reality they were encountering; and they didn't know where the harbour might be.

Next day they rowed through a narrow and tortuous passage between islands, and came out on a broad stretch of land-locked water. In the distance they descried the sail of a small boat.

Camden Harbour!

They had reached their destination—civilisation at last—after a journey of 23 days from the mangrove metropolis of Palmerston.

CAMDEN HARBOUR

Approaching the strange boat, they hailed it and lay alongside for a pow-wow.

It was manned by a crew under command of Mr Cowle, surveyor, who was taking soundings of the harbour for chart-making.

The crew had a remarkably dull and despondent look, which greatly surprised the travel-weary refugees from

Palmerston. They had expected to find a thriving and prosperous settlement at Camden Harbour; but despondent Mr Cowle soon disillusioned them. The situation at Camden Harbour was worse, if anything, than that at Palmerston. Another great scheme of colonising the "Empty North" had gone phut—or was on the verge of phutness. "The sheep are nearly all dead, the country worthless, and the whole settlement a failure," said pessimistic Mr Cowle.

Sailing up the harbour towards the settlement, the hungry Forlorn-Hopers passed the wreck of the Calliance, a vessel which had struck on a reef outside and had foundered half a mile from the landing-place inside the bay.

The settlement came in sight, a collection of huts and tents on a red cliff, with a range of mountains in the background. A crowd quickly gathered at the landing-place as the strange boat approached. A young man in a dinghy came out and boarded the Forlorn Hope. He was the son of the Government Resident, Mr Sholl.

"Where do you come from?" he asked.

"Palmerston City," answered Mr Stow, J.P.

"The devil!" exclaimed young Sholl. "Are things so bad there that you must come here? Then things at Palmerston must indeed be very bad!"

"They are," said Stow. "In fact, they couldn't be worse."



"Wait till you've seen *our* settlement," said young Sholl, despondently.

After the first surprise the wayfarers were made cordially welcome. Mr Stow and the two surveyors were invited to stay at the Government Resident's house, while the other four men were hospitably welcomed in settlers' homes.

For five days the Forlorn-Hopers remained at Camden Harbour, listening to the colonists' tales of woe. This venture of Melbourne land-speculators was utterly doomed. The people there were merely waiting for the first chance of getting away from a spot where they had met with nothing but disaster and ruin. There had been several deaths from sunstroke and a calamitous mortality among the sheep that had been brought from the South. The tropical grass was rank, but lacked nourishment value for stock. The few sheep that remained alive were in agony from the heat. Their feet seemed burned by the stony terrain. At night their panting was like roaring. Another idealistic attempt to populate the Vast Open Spaces of the Empty North had collapsed in fiasco.

Instead of waiting for the relief-ship—which might not come for months—the Forlorn-Hopers decided to resume their open-boat voyage and to make for the next settlement, at Nicol Bay, some hundreds of miles further south.

They obtained provisions sufficient for this journey and got a new anchor and rudder fitted.

On June 3 they set sail, but did not clear Camden Harbour until 4 a.m. next day. Setting their course west-south-west, they stood out to sea. The land receded, and was soon out of sight.

"Heigho for Nicol Bay!" sang the seven merry mariners—but then came a storm which blew them 200

miles out to sea, and they were all alone on the vasty deep of the Indian Ocean. At sunrise on June 9 they were in a dreadful cross sea, laying-to with a leg-o'-mutton sail and baling for their lives as wave after wave splashed into the boat, half-filling it at times. The sea seemed terribly grand in its elemental power to the seven men caught in its grip. The long swell, the mountain wave, the deep hollow, the white foam—as far as they could see was a wild watery disorder. Up one moment poised upon the crest of a mighty wave, then down they slithered to a churning chasm which seemed certain to engulf them—but the bowsprit just kissed the water—and up rose the Forlorn Hope to a new giddy height, riding the bucking White Horses of Old Man Neptune.

Snakes were floating on the billows—real ones, up to five feet in length, yellow with black spots. For four days the storm continued unabated. The seven men in the boat were cramped with rheumatic pains, wet through, scarcely daring to change posture for fear of disturbing the boat's precarious balance—not daring to sleep, expecting at any moment that the walls of water would swallow them.

They cut off the mainmast and let it float away.

On June 12, during the day, the storm abated and the victorious Forlorn Hope scudded along in a strong breeze under a close-reefed foresail, making for the land.

At noon on June 14 the coast was in sight, latitude 19 degrees 45 minutes 54 seconds. At nightfall the anchor was dropped in four fathoms, off a long sandy beach on which the surf pounded.

It was too risky to attempt beaching the boat through the heavy rollers, so the salt-soaked seven slept on board and up-anchored at daylight, steering west-southwest. They rigged a jury-mast from an oar and sailed

for three days and three nights along the low-lying sandy coast within hearing of the heavy surf.

On June 19 they entered Nicol Bay in the afternoon, and sailed along its rocky shores looking for the settlement. Night fell and they anchored, unable to find a safe landing-place. Next day they searched for the settlement, but found it not—so they beached the boat and landed. It was the first time they had stood on terra firma since leaving Camden Harbour seventeen days previously.

After distending themselves with porridge and scones the Forlorn-Hopers trudged inland for two miles across a plain, and climbed a hill which gave a wide view—of desolate and barren country, with no sign of a settlement. There were white men's tracks, but they were old. Next day they sailed across the bay and explored its southern shores. Still no sign of the settlement, so they landed again and attempted to question a friendly tribe of aborigines, using sign-language—but the natives could tell them nothing about any European settlement in that vicinity.

Actually there was no settlement at Nicol Bay, 50 miles to the north, and they had passed by it at night-time on their way down the coast.

Now they were in latitude 20 degrees 47 minutes 18 seconds, and there was nothing else to do except put to sea again and make for the port of Geraldton, in Champion Bay, a long and rugged journey down a dangerous coast.

After a feed of oysters and grilled pigeon, the persistent seven up-anchored at daylight on June 23 and steered for the open sea and for its perils, known and unknown.

Confident of the wave-worthiness of their vessel, the voyagers were worried now mainly about their food

supply. They had only 60 lb of flour and 22 lb of weevily rice—not much to feed seven men for a journey which might last a month if weather became adverse. They decided to ration themselves to half a pint of mixed flour and rice per man per day, making skilly in the billy so that it would seem more.

Snakes and porpoises followed the boat, sea-birds hovered, and an occasional turtle came tantalisingly near—but not near enough to get into the skilly-pot. The winds were variable and progress slow. On the fifth day they landed on an island and got three fish-hawk's eggs and some firewood. Into the pot went the eggs, giving the skilly a tasty flavor—more taste than nourishment.

Now they sailed across the mouth of Exmouth Gulf and approached another continental corner-peg—the North West Cape, where the coast trends from southwest to due south. They rounded the Cape at noon on June 30—a week after leaving Nicol Bay—and ran down the coast at a distance of about eight miles from shore.

On July 2 they were in latitude 24 degrees 22 minutes and were fairly out of the tropics. The nights were now cold, with dew, and the winds eddied all around the compass. Next day they neared Dorre Island, and Stow shot six shags—some on the wing and some on the wave. Ravenously the mariners eyed these rank-fleshed birds as they gathered them into the boat. Jack White baited a hook with the head of one of the shags and caught a queer fish, weighing 12 lb. It had no scales, but a shiny skin with black spots. It looked poisonous. Quickly re-baiting, White caught two more of the spotted horrors.

A hungry belly has no conscience, so the starving seven decided to land on Dorre Island and make a shag-and-spotfish stew.

As they anchored a shoal of schnapper came around the boat. With a spotfish bait, White caught one—then another—then another. The schnapper snapped as fast as the line could be hauled in and thrown out again. In 28 minutes they had 28 beauties averaging 5 lb each.

Throwing away the spotted horrors, but keeping the six shags, the Forlorn-Hopers hastened ashore and gorged the schnapper, grilled and boiled, till they could gorge no more. Then they lay down and slept for hours—no wonder, as they estimated afterwards that they had eaten about 7 lb each at that delicious meal.

For the next three or four days they dined on Schnapper Princes—varied with schnappers' roes—as they kept on coasting southwards. The sea had been cruel and stingy—but now it was generously bestowing its abundance on the men who had trusted themselves to its bosom. The uneaten shags were still in the bottom of the boat in case of emergency.

Sailing across Shark Bay, the schnapper-sated seven saw Dirk Hartog Island on July 5. They decided to pass by it on the seaward side as they were unsure of the channel between the island and the main.

A sleepy, good-tempered whale spouted alongside them—and they let him spout in peace. Shark Bay lived up to its name as sharks swarmed around the Forlorn Hope and drove away the schnapper. Snakes still floated on the billows, and now albatrosses soared effortlessly overhead.

The schnapper supply being now exhausted it was decided, on July 6, to cook the shags which had been shot three days previously. Stow and Davis cut up the birds and stewed them with rice. The flesh was red and rank, the odor overpowering. It hung about the boat for days, and all creation seemed to be flavored with shag. Two of the crew abstained; but the other five

guzzled a bucketful of shag stew and said it was delicious—far preferable to the insipid schnapper.

JOURNEY'S END

So the seven men in a boat sailed past Gantheaume Bay and Houtman's Abrolhos, then came on July 8 to Champion Bay, the haven of their desire. In the distance they saw the solid houses and cultivated green fields of a settlement that was no mirage but a prosperous reality. In the sixty-three days since leaving Palmerston's muddy shore they had travelled a sea-route of 1600 miles, lengthened to 2000 miles by the deviations they had made here and there on the way.

The bearded and wave-weary wanderers were warmly welcomed by the people of Chapman Bay settlement, who thought at first they were ship-wrecked mariners. Fifty willing hands helped to drag the Forlorn Hope onto the beach, and soon the seven schnapper-and-shag specialists were warming themselves with a rum-toddy in Barton's Hotel on the beach.

Then came a policeman, with scowling mien. Western Australia was at that time still a British Crown Colony, pioneered with convict labor. The policeman was taking no chances. He was sceptical of the story that the Forlorn Hope had come from Palmerston, and deduced that the visitors were convict runaways.

"Are you the ringleader?" he scowled surlily to Stow.

Stow scowled back and growled: "Chop off the first syllable and I'll answer your question!"

"Well, the *leader*, then?" amended the law's minion.

"Yes."

"Have you any papers to prove your identity?"

Triumphantly, Stow produced the Forlorn Hope's clearance from Camden Harbour, and the zealous copper retired in confusion.

The striving and thriving seaport where they had landed was named Geraldton. It consisted of about 60 houses, nearly all built of stone, with two hotels, several churches, stores, a gaol and a jetty, a flagstaff, and a prosperous hinterland of farms, with a couple of copper mines for good measure.

What a difference from the farcical tropic settlements of Palmerston and Camden Harbour! After sprucing themselves up, the newcomers rushed to the Mechanics' Institute and eagerly read the newspapers. They were several months in arrears, and soon were sated with sensations as they read of the assassination of President Lincoln in the U.S.A., and of the bushrangers Morgan, Ben Hall and Gilbert in N.S.W. Bloody deeds had been done while the Forlorn-Hopers sweltered on the lonely seas, far from civilisation's sensations.

After recuperating for a week in Geraldton, five of the party sailed for Fremantle as passengers aboard a timber-barge—a slow-sailing old tub. They took the Forlorn Hope with them as deck-cargo. The two photographers, Hamilton and Hake, remained in Geraldton and started a fizzog-taking business there.

Five days' slow sailing brought Stow and his four mates to Fremantle, where they sold the Forlorn Hope to the skipper of a merchant vessel, who promptly capsized it in the harbour—which shows there is a knack in handling a boat.

Up the Swan River by steamer to Perth, 12 miles, then across country by coach, 255 miles, brought the refugees to Albany, where they boarded the steamer Rangatira, and so arrived back at Port Adelaide on August 12—just over three months after their departure from Palmerston.

In the ensuing ructions, Boyle Finnis was recalled. Palmerston City was abandoned to the crocodiles and a

new city surveyed at Port Darwin. This was also a "flop" at the start, and the London shareholders insisted on having their money refunded.

Things looked up in 1871, when the Overland Telegraph Line was constructed from Port Augusta to Port Darwin—but the Northern Territory didn't really begin to boom until the Air Age made Port Darwin into "Australia's Front Door"—and then it boomed still more when the Nips started knocking at the Front Door with bombs in 1942.

Today—in 1945—the Northern Territory is no longer lonely and remote. It is quickly accessible by strategic highways, and can be reached by air from South Australia in a day. Tens of thousands of Australian troops stand on guard in what was once "The Empty North." The heartbreak—and backache—of the pioneers is almost forgotten.

Yet a tribute of memory is due to those sturdy men of the 1860's—the forerunners who failed—for their mistakes showed late-comers what to expect and what to avoid.

The voyage of the Forlorn Hope was a great feat of seamanship, courage and endurance, considering all the circumstances in which it was made. Though not comparable in dramatic interest with the open-boat journeys of Bligh, from Tahiti to Timor in 1789, and of the Bryants, from Sydney to Koepang in 1791, the voyage of the Forlorn Hope makes an appeal of its own to students of Australia's history and terrain. It was crowned with success, and made without serious mishap—but is none-the-less meritorious for that. There are some historians who emphasise only the tragic aspects of Australian exploration—gloating over the failures and glossing over the many successful feats, which were achieved by good management, skill and endurance.

Well did the seven men of the Forlorn Hope live up to their motto—FINIS CORONAT OPUS. They took a big chance, and they knew it. If anything had gone wrong there would have been none to succour them in those unfrequented and then little-known waters—but they battled through to victory against the long odds.

That's the spirit that made Australia what it is, and what it will be. The Knockout Ends the Fight—FINIS CORONAT OPUS.



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