

A HOLIDAY TRIP TO CAMDEN HAVEN. N.S.W.

Ninety years ago, Mr. Alfred Sharp who apparently came from New Zealand made the sea trip to Camden Haven for a holiday. As you read this reprint from The Illustrated Sydney News of 6.12.1890 you find a picture of a very different Camden Haven to ours.

NEW SOUTH WALES, like New Zealand, is full of interesting districts, of which the general public have heard but little, or else never heard of at all; and among such is Camden Haven, situated about 180 miles north of Sydney.

Briefly, Camden Haven is one of the strongholds of the northern timber trade, there being three or four mills there. These mills give employment to a small army of puntmen, snaggers, river men, lumberers, coasting seamen, sawmill hands, wharf labourers, engineers, teamsters, splitters, shinglers, et hoc genus omne. It possesses the finest timber lands on the New South Wales coasts, the timber from which is easily got at by the large navigable rivers and lakes forming the river system of the district.

Having received a cordial invitation from the largest firm of the district sawmill owners, that of McKay and Bibby, now Bibby Brothers, one fine sunny morning in September saw me on board the good ketch "Endeavour" of Sydney spanking down Newcastle Harbour before a westerly breeze, with all my personal and sporting impediments safely stowed within one of the numerous recesses of her cabin. Of that cabin nothing more need be said than that it was hit off to a T by Lord Byron when he wrote:-

"Hoy day! Call you this a cabin?
Why, 'tis hardly three feet square!
Not enough to stow Queen Mab in -
Who the deuce could harbour there?"

The crisp morning breeze fell light when we were half way to Port Stephens, and the evening shades were closing over us when off that harbour, showing a decidedly dirty look to windward. Another ketch that had started from Newcastle at the same time as ourselves, bound also for Camden Haven, thought discretion the better part of valour, and put into the Port for shelter, but the "Endeavour" steadily went on her way, and towards morning, caught another favourable breeze and the same afternoon was off the south head of Camden Haven called Perpendicular Head - a sheer bluff, projecting out into the sea, and forming a pretty bight to the north, well sheltered from all southerly gales. The rocks are conglomerate, with marks of volcanic action and fire discolourations over large areas, and rise perpendicularly about 150 feet above the ocean. Looking at them, one can readily understand how the singular and well-known Nobby Head at Newcastle was formed: for, if the high sandy hills forming the neck of the promontory were blown away by some great storm, Perpendicular Head would be almost the 'very moral' of Nobbys, only higher, grander, and more rugged. * By-the-way I have been unable to discover why the southern headland of Newcastle Harbour is called Nobbys. My researches have brought to light no reason for such a name, and no sponsor for its baptism; so I have come to the conclusion that it is a corruption of the word 'knobs'. Seen from the sea, the headland, the port, and the small town between, form three hummocks or knobs. Hence the name, as I believe.

CROSSING THE BAR.

=* But to return. Sailing in to the end of the bight, under the lee of the well-wooded promontory I have described, and with a low, sandy, bush covered beach stretching away to the northward for many miles, a tug came out of the Haven to meet us. Taking the ketch in tow, it headed for a wall of white tumbling water and foam right ahead, and while I was wondering if we were not going to do the 'Orpheus' shipwreckover again on a small scale, the tug suddenly turned at right angles, and pausing a moment to let the ketch do likewise, we slipped sharply round into a clear green channel, scarce twenty yards wide, with the ocean surf thundering between us and the sea on one side, and the same surf breaking heavily on the sandy shore one hundred yards off on the other side. As the little vessel was rapidly towed up the channel through this bar, the huge green rollers would lift her up

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and carry her bodily along, sideways, as if to dash her on the shore. It was very exciting to me, but, fortunately, the channel is only one hundred yards long, parallel with the coast line, and at the end, with another abrupt turn we rounded off into the river, and sweeping round a low wooded headland, with two or three pilot cottages on it, made fast to a small wharf just inside where the ketch proceeded to discharge the cargo of coal she had brought for the use of the tug boats.

THE HEADLAND'S DELIGHTS.

Whilst she was doing so I roamed about with gun and sketchbook, shooting some small birds I had not seen before, and taking several sketches thereabouts. I went as far as the heads, and on my return had to submit to the process of having one or two ticks hauled off my neck, and one that had half buried itself in my flesh had to be cut out. Ticks are very numerous in the scrub lands of the district, and you will notice that any neighbours you meet after being in the bush, curiously scan your neck for any sign of these pests, so as to do you a friendly act by hauling or cutting them out for you. If allowed, they would soon burrow deeply in your flesh, and cause great local inflammation and pain, but, strangely enough, their bites, and even their burrowings, cause no pain when actually proceeding.

At this place I also came across two men engaged in burning off the low, matted shrubs on the sea side of the hills. On my pointing out that such an act laid the sand bare, and often caused sand-drifts they said they could not help that, but that burning was necessary to keep the snakes under. In fact, from subsequent experience, I verily believe that the bush would be scarcely habitable with safety if it were not for the constant use of the fire-stick in New South Wales, which destroys the snakes wholesale. Nature seems to have foreseen this necessity, for she had made Australian trees so hardy, and protected their trunks so thoroughly by thick bark, that unless the fire is unusually fierce, the trees suffer very little, or else sprout out other branches afterwards, either from the trunks or roots and soon regain their former vigour and size.

THE GRAVES.

I also visited the graves of an officer and four seamen who were drowned in crossing the bar some years ago. It is a square enclosure, picket fence, about twelve feet square, planted with geraniums inside, and now dilapidated and neglected.

While I was watching the evening sun setting in crimson and gold behind the crest of the bold and striking North Brothers mountain, a pretty little pleasure boat came down the river for me, and after a genial welcome from my hosts, who had come to meet me, we started for Laurieton, the mill township, about four miles up the river. Landing at the mill wharf, I was conveyed to the hospitable home of the junior partner, and made quite at home in the bosom of his family by a genuine Australian bush welcome.

The present river mouth, of course, had not been created at the time Mr Sharp voyaged here. Before the training walls and klondyke were constructed it seems the river's course was to the seaward side of Gogley's Lagoon's present expanse.

LAURIETON AND ITS MILL.

Next morning (as was usual in those days) was clear, and bright, and cloudless, and I was up betimes to view my new surroundings. The pretty little village of Laurieton lay before me, nestling under the shadow of the North Brothers, 1800 ft. high, which towers steeply up to the summit. There are three mountains, nearly the same shape and height, in the district, each standing up distinct and disconnected from the mountain chains and hilly ranges around, and they are called North, South, and West Brothers respectively. They are all covered with dense forests, and are the haunts of snakes, kangaroo and wallaby.

Though I was up very early, my host and hostess were earlier still

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for an appetizing breakfast was awaiting me, to which I did ample justice, and then we started to look at the settlement. There were about two dozen cottages, scattered picturesquely about amongst towering eucalyptus that had not been thought worth felling, the whole being backed all round on three sides by the mighty walls of the living forest, while the river, two hundred yards wide swept past the front.

The mill is a fine establishment, and turns out splendid timber of all sorts, principally blackbutt, tallow wood, and flooded gum. It has heavy breaking down saws and several circular saws, besides planing tonguing and grooving, and moulding machinery. The rapidity with which the huge logs were hauled up the inclines from the punt below, broken into fitches, and sliced into boards, scantlings and palings was something wonderful. I was told that snakes were often cut in two by the break-down saw. They get into the hollow existing in the centre of all large gum trees, technically called 'the pipe'

After being duly impressed with all I saw, I watched the rapid loading of the two or three ketches which were taking in cargoes of timber at the wharves. I also admired the lively way in which the large steam punt drawing only eighteen inches of water, paddled about with large log-punts in tow, containing from nine to twelve logs each, ranging from three feet to five feet in diameter, and from twenty feet to fifty feet long. These logs are collected over an immense area of magnificent forest lands. One branch of the river leads into a pretty lake, about three and a half miles in diameter, having several large navigable creeks branching from it, where the steam punt tows up the log punts to the various landings at which the logs brought down by the bullock teams are left to be measured and rolled onto the punts. It is romantic work burrowing up these creeks, which are so narrow in places that the punters have hard work keeping the projecting logs from catching on the trees on the banks; the trees often meet overhead, and native bears and iguanas look down on you as you pass beneath.

THE MAIN RIVER.

The main river goes up about four miles above Laurieton, and then opens out into another lake, about twelve miles long by two to three miles wide, having several navigable rivers branching from it. One, called St. John's River, is navigable right up to its head, about twenty miles from Laurieton, and large numbers of fine logs are placed on the punts and towed down from that place, including beech logs. The Camden Haven River bends to the west, between North and West Brothers mountains, and burrows away among the tumultuous sea of back ranges for fifty miles or more.

These lakes are literally alive with black swans, in flocks of many hundreds, feeding on the water weeds and marine insects on the shallow bottoms. They are easily shot by sailing straight down on them, with a good wind astern. They have a difficulty in rising from the water with the wind, so they rise against it, of course towards the boat, whence they are dropped easily by good guns and large shot. Ducks abound in all the creeks and in the small lagoons of the swamps, and the rivers teem with fish which you can see disporting in myriads in the transparent creeks that branch from the lakes. I thought what a paradise it would be for a net fisherman, if there was any way of getting the fish fresh to the markets. In fact, the whole district is a paradise for the sportsman, who can slaughter parrots innumerable, of all sorts, kangaroo, wallabies, swans, ducks, teal, sea-birds, iguanas, swamp pheasants, lyre birds, brush turkeys, pigeons, dollar and rifle, and myriads of small birds of wonderful plumage, varied with native bears, bandicoots, kangaroo rats, possums, snakes and hawks.

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PORT MACQUARIE.

Suffice it to say that during the fortnight I spent there, I was right royally treated, my knowledge of the fauna and flora of New South Wales greatly extended, and my organ of destructiveness fully satisfied.

My hosts took me a twenty eight mile drive to Port Macquarie, to show me the magnificent virgin forests that spread along nearly the entire distance. The trees, of all sizes, from mere saplings up to others 10ft. in diameter and over 250 ft. high, all rose up straight as rulers, and soared towards the sky, while a solemn hush brooded around, and a diaphanous, amber light pervaded the dim recesses of the forest greenery, as yet untouched by man.

At Port Macquarie I was taken over the magnificent vineyards there, and duly sampled not only the wine, but also the spirits distilled there from the grape refuse, for fortifying purposes. They were both scrumptuously good. I have not yet seen, in Australia, anything like the healthy luxuriance of the vines there. And no wonder, for they are carefully cultivated, and the soil is that deep, red, volcanic soil which the soul of the vine loveth. There are large areas of such soil between Camden Haven and Port Macquarie, lying useless and untouched for want of the hand of man.

Coming back to Camden Haven next day, darkness settled down on us while still some miles from our destination, and I was treated to my first sight of fire-flies. A small brush gully crossed the road, covered with wattles and lilipilli growing under the towering gum overhead. And there they were. In and out, among the undergrowth, they were darting, or, rather, dancing in a peculiar parabolic motion, or else whirling round each other. It was a most interesting sight to me, who had never seen anything of the sort beyond the motionless glow-worms and fire gungi of New Zealand.

ADIEU

After a fortnight of unalloyed delight among the mountains, the rivers, the lakes, the pasts, the people and with a well-filled sketch-book, and a gun case that seemed to say 'Oh, give us a rest' I bade adieu to my kind entertainers, and embarking on the "Dolly Walmsley", another of the timber vessels regularly employed by the firm, on the evening of the second day I was safe in Newcastle again, bronzed, bearded, and jolly, and with the bulk of my original impedimenta greatly increased by sundry and diverse natural curios which were subsequently duly distributed unto my friends in New Zealand, where "animiles", and "snakes" and "sich like cusses" are unknown and where even birds are scarce.