

William Charles Wentworth - Journal of an expedition across the Blue Mountains,
11 May - 6 June 1813
Safe 1/22a

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On the Eleventh of May our party consisting of M^r. Gregory Blaxland, Lieutenant Lawson and Myself with four servants quitted M^r. Gregory Blaxlands farm on the South Creek and on the 29th of the June Month descended from the Mountain into forest land having travelled as nearly as I can compute about 60 Miles from M^r. Chapmans farm on the Nepean River although I do not imagine that we made more than 40 Miles of Westing.

This newly discovered tract of country commences about 20 Miles West of Jamiesons farm on the Nepean River - From there the Height of our Situation enabled us to distinguish that it runs SW for at least 30 Miles - It stretches to the Northward for nearly the same distance - How far it reaches to the Westward we could not determine further than that we travelled in that direction for about 10 Miles and from the Top of a very high Mountain which we ascended on one of our early excursions could distinctly perceive that the summits of the Hills were covered with grass for at least fifteen Miles further - From means

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of Information so circumscribed it is evidently Impossible to speak with any degree of Certainty of the extent of this tract of Country I think however that it may be safely concluded at least equal in magnitude to that part of New South Wales which is termed the County of Cumberland - The whole of its East side and as much of its North and South sides as could be distinguished are perpendicular Walls of Stone from 500 to 1000 feet in Height - Whether it is entirely surrounded by such terrific barriers must at present remain mere matter of speculation - A country of so singular a description could in my opinion only have been produced by some Mighty convulsion in Nature - Those immense unconnected perpendicular Masses of Mountain which are to be seen towards its Eastern Extremity towering above the Country around, seem to indicate that the whole of this tract has been formed out of the Materials of the primitive Mountains of which these Masses are the only parts that

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have withstood the violence of the concussion. Their height, nature and productions which appeared to correspond with those of the adjacent Mountains further corroborate the probability of this conjecture. On our first discovering this Country we attempted during the greater part of the day to find some passage down into it but without success - I am therefore ignorant of the Nature of the Soil at its Commencement - But towards its Northern Extremity soil is of a very sandy nature, yet it produces an abundant crop of grass of an Excellent quality, and is I consider upon the whole superior as a grazing Country to any land on this side of the Mountains. This superiority arises in some Measure from the thinness of the Trees which are for the most part small crooked blue Gums and not half so numerous as the Trees are in the best Inhabited parts of the Country - Indeed in some of the Vallies which are generally of a mossy Nature and extremely rich there are spaces of from 50 to 100 acres without a tree. But the principal cause of this Superiority

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is the abundance of excellent Water, which is every where to be found - Independent of two considerable rivulets running one from the NE and the other from the Westward each of which is at least equal in size to the Nepean River at the Cowpastures this Country is intersected by rills in every direction - These two rivulets after their Junction with the addition of their numerous small rills form in my opinion the principal branch of the Western River - I have little doubt that another branch of it runs parallel with the Southern boundary of this tract of Country as there is every appearance of a river in that direction -

The greater part of the Country is very hilly but more so towards the Northward and Westward - The Hills are of very irregular form - and some of them nearly as high as the surrounding Mountains - They are nevertheless clothed with grass to the very summits - On these there are generally quarries of pink porphyry

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which with some granite that we discovered along the rivulets is the only kind of stone which we met with -

The cold there is much more severe than on this side of the Mountains - The grass which in the coldest Inhabited parts of the Colony yet retains a considerable degree of verdure is there completely withered; insomuch so that while we were travelling parallel with its Eastern boundary we were dubious whether the Hills were covered with grass or were merely beds of sand - This distrust rendered us indifferent about descending or we might perhaps have discovered a much nearer passage into it - From this appearance of the difference of the grass I am of opinion that the frost has set in there for these Ten Weeks at least altho' in this part of the Country it is only just now commencing - So great an alteration in the climate in so short a space is I apprehend occasioned in some measure by the bleak winds

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which constantly prevail [^](from the Westward) even in the middle of the day : but principally from the great quantity of Moisture with which the Atmosphere in this low Country is constantly surcharged - The fogs generally concealed it from our view til 11 or 12 of Clock and in one instance the cloud had not dispersed from it even at 2 of Clock -

So much for the Soil production, Climate &c of this newly discovered tract of Country - Our track to it is one continued pass thru the Mountains in some places not exceeding fifteen Yards in breadth and not more than a Mile in any - This pass is undoubtedly the main and indeed the only connected range of Mountain between the Western River and the Grose - On each side of this range there are inferior branches generally at intervals of about ½ Mile which mostly run at right angles with it - The three thin branches then are gullies terminating on the North side in the Grose River and

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and on the South side in the Western River - For the first twenty miles these gullies are really terrific being in some place nearly perpendicular for several Hundred feet - I consider them utterly impracticable for Cattle and should have pronounced them as impracticable for Man had we not discovered about 10 Miles West of Jamiesons farm a large pile of stones undoubtedly the termination of Bass' excursion - Nothing would have afforded a stronger proof of the indefatigable perseverance of the Man than His surmounting these almost insurmountable barriers - For the remaining 35 Miles the gullies are of tolerably gradual slope and of the same nature as the Swamps between Sydney and Botany Bay - It was the scanty fare which these swamps afford that enabled our horses to exist - Were it not for them I consider that the Mountains could not be traversed by Cattle.

The Country wherever we could see is of the most barren aspect imaginable

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The Soil throughout our track with the exception of a tolerable good patch of grazing land which is situated about 5 miles to the Westward of Emu Island is a coarse grit intermixed with great quantities of Quartz - It produces a scrubby brush extremely distressing thro' which we were obliged to cut a road for our Horses

upwards of 40 miles - consisting of pear tree, tea tree currant bushes honeysuckle peppermint and in general the same variety of small flowering scrubs which grow between Sydney and the South Head - The trees it produces are dwarf gums, stringy barks and blood trees all of which are generally withered on the Tops - The gullies however for the first 15 miles produce a tree very much resembling the Mountain Ash which grows very luxuriantly and is most probably a very valuable Wood - For the last 10 miles also which we travelled on this range the stringy barks and the gums were of more stately

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stately growth altho' there is no visible alteration in the Soil - This change arises most probably from some alteration in the Substratum - The rock with the Exception of a little free stone and pudding stone throughout the whole of this range is of a Silicious grit intermixed more or less with Quartz - It is to the gradual decomposition of this grit of which I consider this range of Mountain was formerly one entire [range?] that the formation of the soil is in my opinion attributable - In this supposition I am the more confirmed because we discovered in several places along this range detached pieces of grit sometimes 20 feet in height and more than two or three feet in diameter which were in a mouldering state and had every appearance of being the remains of some large masses of rock, round these detached pieces I likewise observed for a considerable distance great quantities of flat stones 1 to 2 Inches thick considerably Impregnated with Iron - On comparing

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them which I did in several instances with the Incrustation of the Tops of these detached pieces of grit which most probably indicate the original height of the Mountain I found them exactly the same Nature - A further proof in my opinion that the formation of the soil is ascribable to the gradual decomposition of large Masses of Stone of which these detached pieces are the remains.

The Water as is the case in most mountainous Countries is good and abundant in proportion to the barrenness of the Soil - It is however much more scarce and difficult to access for the first 20 Miles than for the last 40 - The (~~former~~) latter circumstance is occasioned by the superior ruggedness of the gullies. The former by the difference in the altitude of the Mountain; for latterly the clouds were clearly distinguishable every morning beneath us - It is the Moisture which the Mountains extract from the clouds

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which gives rise to the Innumerable small streams which every where pervade the Mountains and eventually furnish all the rivers on this side of the Country with a constant supply of water - To speak with any certainty of the exact height of the Mountain is impossible as we had no means of determining it - I consider however that our rate of ascent for the first 8 miles was about one hundred feet a mile, for the next 20 miles about 50 feet and for the remaining [...] miles about 20 feet making altogether the Height of the loftiest part of the range only 2440 above the Nepean River at Chapmans farm which I suppose at most not more than 100 feet above the level of the Sea - So that the Highest part of the Mountain (∅) which we attained is diminutive if compared with the Mountains in other parts of the World.

The Natives are not numerous either in the Mountains or in the tract of forest land which we discovered

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Towards the latter end of our track on this range of Mountain whilst we were one evening making our way we came unperceived within 15 yards of a Native who was busily occupied cutting a worm out of a tree with His Mogo - Not choosing however to molest Him as we had made a determination to avoid all Intercourse with them we shouted upon which he immediately retired and alarmed all the Natives in this

district; for in two or three days afterwards we [?...] the low Country Three camps of them within a short distance of one another at each of which there were seven or eight fires - from this I conclude that their numbers cannot exceed fifty or sixty - The animals both on the Mountain and in the low Country are extremely scarce - During the whole of our excursion we saw but very few Kangaroos and those mostly in the forest land - We saw however a few Kangaroo Rats bandicoots and brush Kangaroo on the Mountain but I do not think that either the Squirrel or Opossum frequent the Mountain at all.

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The track and holes of the Wombat are numerous but we never had a glimpse of the animal altho' we saw his Soil quite fresh in some places - The birds are not more numerous than the animals. A few Crows, black Cockatoos and small birds which mostly live in the brushes {some of them of very beautiful plumage} form the whole catalogue of the feathered tribe which we met with - We several times heard the pheasant sing but we did not see any of them - Before it can be determined whether on this Excursion we have actually passed the Mountains it will be necessary to ascertain whether the Western boundary of the forest land which we discovered is similar to the Eastern - But admitting that we have not traversed the Mountains we have at all events proved that they are traversable and that too, by Cattle - a circumstance by which those who were allowed to possess some local knowledge of the Country had been ^{hitherto} deemed impossible -

The Importance of the Country which we have

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discovered must be obvious - An extensive tract of good grazing land in the present confined limits of the Colony is an invaluable acquisition to persons possessing large herds of Cattle - But its Importance is considerably heightened when it is considered that the only pass to it altho' of easy access is through a country naturally so strong as to be easily defended by a few against the efforts of Thousands -

[Transcribed by Jacqueline Lamprecht for the State Library of New South Wales]