PART TWO: CLAIMING THE LAND

Imperial rhetoric and the literature of exploration 1800-1850

Part two explores the imperial rhetoric of exploration literature which worked subtly to incorporate Australia into the British vision of empire. Through contemporary ideas of progress, aesthetics and science, explorers described and understood a new landscape and its people. Belief in progress allowed them to envision a land of settled communities that were industrious and socially refined. Aesthetic theories of the picturesque and romanticism placed the landscape within the bounds of European understanding and appreciation. The conventions of the picturesque validated explorers' descriptions of an improved landscape suitable for settlement while romanticism added an emotional response to the environment. The pursuit of scientific knowledge was an important part of the imperial mission. Through the collection and systematic description of specimens, explorers incorporated Australia into a global web of scientific knowledge. Scientific societies and organisations such as the Royal Geographical Society, the Royal Society and the Royal Gardens at Kew encouraged and legitimated their journeys. While these contemporary ideas have been covered separately in the next three chapters, it should be stressed that they are often combined within passages of text in a symbiotic association that enriched the imperial rhetoric contained in the accounts.

Chapter Four
"a great reserve provided by nature":
Progress and the cultivation of idealised land

> We had at length discovered a country ready for the immediate reception of civilized man ; and destined perhaps to become eventually a portion of a great empire. Unencumbered by too much wood, it yet possessed enough for all purposes; its soil was exuberant, and its climate temperate; it was bounded on three sides by the ocean; and it was traversed by mighty rivers, and watered by streams innumerable. Of this Eden I was the first European to explore its mountains and streams – to behold its scenery- to investigate its geological character – and, by my survey, to develop those natural advantages, certain to become, at no distant date, of vast importance to a new people.[1]
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> T.L. Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, 1839.

No philosophy was more central to the maintenance of the British Empire in the nineteenth century than the idea of progress. In the epigraph above Mitchell predicted the future of Australia Felix but he also revealed the nature of British progress as imperial in character, guided by Providence and motivated by economic incentive. Moreover, Mitchell considered himself the harbinger of progress to an untouched land that had been set aside by God for British use. He described an idealised land which he likened to the biblical Garden of Eden, abundant and still to be occupied. It encompassed all the attributes necessary for the establishment of civil society and merely awaited British settlement to develop to a more advanced state. Through individual initiative and industry, the landscape would advance to a commercial society within the Empire. As a consequence of this economic understanding of progress, explorers, like Mitchell, considered the landscape uninhabited. While explorers did not necessarily discount the presence of Aborigines or their prior use of the land, they considered them as living in a stage of savagery. Aborigines were a part of the idealised landscape like its exotic flora and fauna. Through their understanding of the ideology of progress, explorers dispossessed Aborigines of their land and claimed it as an important part of a progressive empire.

This chapter examines the rhetoric of imperial progress in early nineteenth century accounts of exploration. It focuses on the explorers' self-perceptions and their belief in the inevitability of progress and how Providence not only guided them to land suitable for settlement but also anticipated its future. Furthermore, it considers the economic rationale of progress, namely that human industry in pastoralism, agriculture and commerce was the means whereby the Australian landscape would advance to a higher

[1] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.2, p.171.

stage. The chapter also looks at the explorers' understanding of the natural law of economic and social progress that underlay their descriptions of Aborigines. Their contemplation of the theory of progress prompted some explorers to question its benefit, as it would destroy the innocence characteristic of the savage state. Finally, the chapter discusses the explorers' assessments of the desirability and viability of the British civilising mission to advance Aborigines towards a higher stage of development.

Progress and nineteenth century accounts of exploration

The intellectuals of the Enlightenment conceived a world governed by scientific rationalism and free from superstition. In their increasingly secularised world, the scientific reality of human progress could be defined with laws and principles developed to chart the progress of society. The Scottish model of progress as expounded by Adam Smith in the *Wealth of Nations* set out economic factors as the driving force of progress. He considered that individuals were innately selfish and sought to better their own situation, but it was understood that in the process of individual advancement, benefits flowed through to society fostering social and economic advancement for all. Smith believed that evidence from the past suggested an identifiable sequence of development through four stages from primitive society through to advanced civilisation. Other intellectuals formed a theory of progress that identified it as having a cyclic form. Using historical evidence, progress could be explained as a continuing process of development, stagnation and decline, which made way for a higher stage in the cycle of progress.[2] The ideology of progress inspired an optimistic outlook. It was based on the view that "civilisation has moved, is moving, and will move in a desirable direction" towards the attainment of perfection.[3] Britain provided an example of the success of progress. Through industrialisation, mercantilism and colonial acquisitions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a belief in continued progress was sustained into the nineteenth century.

J.B. Bury urges that progress was understood in secular terms, divorced from religious belief in providential design. He asserts:

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[2] Peter J. Bowler, *The Invention of Progress: The Victorians and the Past*, Oxford, 1989, pp.7-14.
[3] J.B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*, New York, 1960, p.2.
James H.S. Bossard, "The Concept of Progress", *Social Forces*, Vol.10, No.1, October 1931, p. 5. http://www.jstor.org/

> The process must be the necessary outcome of the psychical and social nature of man: it must not be at the mercy of any external will; otherwise there would be no guarantee of its continuance and its issue, and the idea of Progress would lapse into the idea of Providence.[4]

Whilst Bury accepted that both beliefs could be held by the individual, he believed that their underlying assumptions were incompatible.[5] In more recent years commentators on progress such as Nathan Rotenstreich, David Spadafora and Robert Nisbet have challenged this understanding.[6] In their interpretations, the idea of progress and Christian conceptions of Providence were interrelated.[7] From the accounts of exploration of Australia in the early nineteenth century covered in this thesis, there is evidence that Providence and progress were intertwined. Underlying the ideology of progress in the literature was a strong belief in Providence. Providence was the hand that guided explorers to suitable land where Christian settlement and strong commercial centres would develop. However it was human industry that impelled imperial progress not Providence. Providence guided and protected the explorer, as its agent, during the course of his journey of discovery. The belief in Divine Providence and the optimism contained in the philosophy of progress inspired explorers' discussions about the future of the Australian landscape and its inhabitants.

The explorer as the harbinger of progress

Although the idea of progress was secularised and rationalised to some extent by the early nineteenth century, explorers often advanced a form that was not only British and imperial but also Christian. Explorers believed their imperial mission was directed by Providence. While the land was claimed in a symbolic way by raising the British flag and proclaiming possession of the land on behalf of the crown, the explorer was guided to idealised land by Providence. For example, Eyre was ceremonially presented with a Union Jack by Captain Charles Sturt, who stated:

> This noble colour, the ensign of our country, has cheered the brave on many an occasion. It has floated over every shore of the known world, and upon every island of the deep. But you have to perform a very different, and a more difficult duty. You have to carry it to the centre of a mighty continent, there to

[4] Bury, *The Idea of Progress*, p.5.
[5] *Ibid*., pp.21-22.
[6] David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth Century Britain*, New Haven, 1990. Nathan Rotenstreich, "The Idea of Historical Progress and its Assumption", *History and Theory*, Vol.10. No.2, 1971, pp.197-221. Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress*, New York, 1980.
[7] Rotenstreich, Spadafora and Nisbet use understandings of the idea of progress throughout history to identify instances of its ongoing ties to and dependence upon religious philosophy.

> leave it as a sign to the savage that the footstep of civilized man has penetrated so far. Go forth, then on your journey, with a full confidence in the goodness of Providence; and may heaven direct your steps to throw open the fertility of the interior, not only for the benefit of the Province, but of our native country; and may the moment when you unfurl this colour for the purpose for which it was given to you, be as gratifying to you as the present.[8]

The explorer, with God on his side, was the agent of progress. Mitchell depicted himself as a Moses-like figure leading his party through a harsh environment, believing "that He, who led Israel like a flock, would guide and direct our little party, through the Australian wilderness before us."[9] At one point on his expedition in 1846, he considered himself primitive man, an Adam-like figure, pondering: "The 'gorgeous curtains of the East' over grandly formed clouds harmonised well with my sentiments on awaking, again to trace, as if I had been the earliest man, the various features of these fine regions of earth."[10] Mitchell considered himself closest to God in such untouched regions; philosophically he reflected:

> Young, I think, has said, that a situation might be imagined between earth and heaven, where a man should hear nothing but the thoughts of the Almighty; but such a sublime position seems almost attained by him who is the first permitted to traverse extensive portions of earth, as yet unoccupied by man; to witness in solitude and silence regions well adapted to his use, brings a man into more immediate converse with the Author both of his being, and of all other combinations of matter than any other imaginable position he can attain. With nothing but nature around him; his few wants supplied almost miraculously; living on from day to day, just as he falls in with water; his existence is felt to be in the hands of Providence alone; and this feeling pervades even the minds of the least susceptible, in journeys like these.[11]

The explorer not only was guided by Providence but also protected by it during his expedition. Stokes attributed the preservation of the explorers from injury from the explosion of a fowling piece to God's protection while doing His work. He contended that:

> Without intending to be presumptuous, we may be permitted to believe that we were spared partly on account of the service in which we were engaged – so beneficial to humanity so calculated to promote the spread of civilization, which must ever be the harbinger of Christianity.[12]

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[8] Eyre, *Journals of Expeditions*, Vol.1, pp.19-20.
[9] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.1, p.165.
[10] Mitchell, *Journal of an expedition*, pp.310-311.
[11] *Ibid*., pp.315-316.
[12] J. Lort Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia, with an Account of the Coasts and Rivers explored and surveyed during the Voyage of HMS Beagle, in the Years 1837-38-39-40-41-42-43 by Command of the*

Implicit in their belief in the doctrine of Divine Providence was their self-perceptions as harbingers of imperial progress. Mitchell took this responsibility to the extreme when he considered that through his exploration the land came into history. He declared:

> We advanced with feelings of intense interest into the country before us, and impressed with the responsibility of commencing the first chapter of its history. All was still new and nameless, but by this beginning, we were to open a way for the many other beginnings of civilized man, and thus extend his dominion over some of the last holds of barbarism.[13]

Prior to his discovery the land waited in limbo. Through his explorations, survey and naming, the land came into existence as part of the British Empire and settlement and the first stage of progress was instigated.

Mitchell explored and surveyed an extensive part of the interior of eastern Australia and while he was recognised as a competent, reliable surveyor, his published accounts exuded a superiority that emphasised his pre-eminent role in opening up the land for settlement. Mitchell the explorer was engaged in a heroic endeavour that would induce settlement and thus strengthen British imperial progress. For example, after leaving the river Murray, Mitchell ascended Pyramid Hill and considered this responsibility:

> A land so inviting, and still without inhabitants! As I stood, the first European intruder on the sublime solitude of these verdant plains, as yet untouched by flocks or herds; I felt conscious of being the harbinger of mighty changes; and that our steps would soon be followed by men and the animals for which it seemed to have been prepared.[14]

Mitchell deemed the land to be in a state of nature but provided for British use. Through his survey of the land pastoralism would begin and the land progress.

In a similar manner, George Grey anticipated the progress of land that would be discovered through his explorations of north western Australia:

> Great then was my joy, when all my preparations were completed, and I felt the vessel gliding swiftly from Table Bay into that vast ocean, at the other extremity of which lay the land I so longed to see, and to which I was now bound, with the ardent hope of opening the way for the conversion of a barren wilderness into a fertile garden.[15]

Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty. Also a Narrative of Capt Owen Standley's visits to the Islands in the Arafura Sea, Vol.2, London, 1846, p.282.

[13] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.1, p.36.

[14] *Ibid.*, Vol.2, p.159.

[15] Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions* Vol.1, p.35.

Grey was very much aware of his role in the land's advancement towards civil society when he explored the coast of western Australia around the Gascoyne River. He recorded:

> I however felt conscious that within a few years of the moment at which I stood there, a British population, rich in civilization, and the means of transforming an unoccupied country to one teeming with inhabitants and produce, would have followed my steps, and be eagerly and anxiously examining my charts; and this reflection imparted a high degree of interest and importance to our present position and operations.[16]

Explorers self-consciously portrayed their achievements as contributing to the grand civilising enterprise of the British Empire. The explorer, often an agent of the colonial and/or British government, played a vital role in advancing a belief in British imperial progress. Bolstered by confidence in continuing progress the explorer idealised landscape and espoused its potentiality and readiness to advance from a natural state to a civilised and higher stage. In this way the ideology of progress became a way of establishing the imperial claim over the land.

An idealised and ancient land

The land the explorers idealised in their descriptions was found in the unexplored parts of Australia. This was land in its original state as God/Nature/Providence had provided it.[17] In 1846, Mitchell conceived the possibilities of the land in Central Queensland to provide the foundations for advancement to civil society. In an idyllic setting, he envisaged its future:

> The charm of a beginning seemed to pervade all nature, and the songs of many birds sounded like the orchestral music before the commencement of any theatrical performance. Such a morning, in such a place, was quite incompatible with the brow of care. Here was an almost boundless extent of the richest surface in a latitude corresponding to that of China, yet still uncultivated and unoccupied by man. A great reserve, provided by nature for the extension of his race, where economy, art, and industry might suffice to people it with a peaceful, happy and contented population.[18]

Like the epigraph at the beginning of the chapter, Mitchell alluded to the untouched, pristine state of the discovered land. It was an earthly paradise, free from the misery that pervaded British industrial society in the mid-nineteenth century - a land that

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[16] *Ibid.*, p.359.
[17] God, Nature and Providence seem to be used interchangeably.
[18] Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition*, pp.292-293.

evoked the promise of societal rebirth. He considered it an enchanting place that awaited tranformation through British settlement and human industry.

Mitchell believed that British imperial progress was positive and constructive not aggressive and destructive. He regarded the future establishment of rural settlement on land he discovered and named Australia Felix as:

> a lasting monument of the beneficial influence of British power and colonization, thus to engraft a new and flourishing state, on a region now so desolate and unproductive; but this seems only possible under very extensive arrangements, and by such means as England alone can supply:-
>
> *Here the great mistress of the seas is known*
> *By empires founded, - not by states o'erthrown*[19]

While idealised land could be perceived as fertile and peaceful it could also be considered "desolate". But the word "desolate" pointed to how the land was devoid of signs of economic use, in the British sense, and was not necessarily used to denote the fertility of the soil. It was "desolate" and "unproductive" because it was not settled, not because it lacked potential. The use of such words did not erode the image of an idealised landscape but exposed the utilitarian understanding of land based in the idea of progress that was held by explorers.

With this view of land, explorers imagined the extent to which idealised land could be developed to become an important part of a progressive British Empire. As he commanded a view over the Plains of Promise in northern Australia, John Lort Stokes contemplated the progress of civilisation:

> In that direction, however, no curling smoke denoted the presence of the savage; all was lonely and still; and yet even in these deserted plains, equally wanting in the redundance of animal as in the luxuriance of vegetable life I could discover the rudiments of future prosperity, and ample justification of the name which I had bestowed upon them. I gazed around, despite my personal disappointment, with feelings of hopeful gratitude to Him who had spread out so fair a dwelling place for his creatures; and could not refrain from breathing a prayer that ere long the now level horizon would be broken by a succession of tapering spires rising from the many Christian hamlets that must ultimately stud this country, and pointing through the calm depths of the intensely blue and gloriously bright skies of Tropical Australia, to a still calmer and brighter and more glorious region beyond, to which all our sublimest aspirations tend, and where all our holiest desires must be satisfied.[20]

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[19] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol 2, p.334.
[20] Stokes, *Discoveries*, Vol.2, pp.319-320.

This was an ideal setting for British settlement. It was open and park-like and unsettled. Stokes considered God created the region for the development of civil society. The commercial port of Investigator Road would ship produce from the fertile interior of northern Australia overseas and would result in the "habitations of civilized man, and the heaven-ward pointing spires of the Christian Church."[21] He was impelled in his exploration by the thought that Christian settlement would one day be developed on the site. This thought, "added to the zest with which [the party] prosecuted [their] subsequent researches."[22] The notion that God had provided such areas for British progress was common in published accounts of exploration. Mitchell expressed a similar sentiment at the beginning of his published account of his three expeditions when he wrote, "the author was led cheerfully on, by an eager curiosity to examine a country which is yet in the same state as when it was formed by its Maker."[23]

Explorers invariably preferred open, park-like landscapes that they deemed were prepared by Nature or God for the purpose of British colonisation.[24] Mitchell imagined Australia Felix in this manner in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter. It was "open and available in its present state, for all the purposes of civilized man."[25] At an earlier point in his narrative he noted that:

> Flocks might be turned out upon its hills, or the plough at once set to work in the plains. No primeval forests required to be first rooted out, although there was enough of wood for all purposes of utility, and as much also for embellishment as even a painter could wish.[26]

While Mitchell's depictions of idealised landscapes had aesthetic value, he connected aesthetic appreciation to the land's economic potential. In a stable, fertile environment such as Australia Felix, where individual freedom was not restrained and human industry prospered, the further progress of society was inevitable. Mitchell considered that the region awaited only the "enterprising spirit and improving hand" of "intelligent man" "to turn to account the native bounty of the soil."[27]

Rural development

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[21] *Ibid.*, p.272
[22] *Ibid.*, pp.272-273.
[23] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.1, preface.
[24] See Chapter 5 for further discussion of aesthetic preferences for park-like landscapes.
[25] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.2, p.333.
[26] *Ibid.*, p.271.
[27] *Ibid.*, Vol.1, p.5.

Explorers considered civil society in Australia would be founded on the active participation of British settlers in rural development. Leichhardt described the Isaacs River region in terms of its potential for pastoralism. Eagerly he wrote:

> The fine open country between the two ranges through which it breaks, we shall not probably find a country better adapted for pastoral pursuits. There was a great want of surface water at the season we passed through it; and which we afterwards found was remarkably dry one all over the colony ; the wells of the natives, however, and the luxuriant growth of reeds in many parts of the river, shewed that even shallow wells would give a large supply to the squatter in cases of necessity; and those chains of large water-holes which we frequently met along and within the scrubs, when once filled, will retain their water for a long time.[28]

However he recognised that settlers would have to deal with some opposing environmental influences in the surrounding area, including the scrub which formed "a refuge of hostile natives and a hiding place for the cattle".[29]

For Mitchell the Claude region offered the potential for rural development. He refers regularly in his journal to the types of grasses, the supply of water and the fertility of the soil. All were essential to the success of rural endeavours. He wrote of the region near the Claude:

> Then across one of the richest plains I had ever seen and on which the *Anthistiria australis*, and *Panicum loevinode*, the two best Australian grasses grew abundantly. The soil was black; the surface quite level.[30]

As the expedition party proceeded on their exploration they ascended a hill "which commanded a view over an extent of similar country, large enough for a county".[31] The description of well-grassed, open land recalled the improved state of the gentleman's park:

> Beyond the valley we arrived at open downs of the richest soil, and of an extent not to be embraced by the eye at any one point of view. The finest sorts of grass were fast springing up, and curious herbs were beginning to shoot from the rich alluvium in the vallies.[32]

Soil type was an important indicator of the potential of the land to sustain pastoralism and agriculture. The combination of fertile soil and an adequate water supply prompted

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[28] Leichhardt, *Journal of an Overland Expedition*, p.229.
[29] *Ibid.*, p.172.
[30] Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition*, p.232.
[31] *Ibid.*, p.292.
[32] *Ibid.*, p.291.

Bland, the editor of Hume and Hovell's account, to relate that the open plains the explorers had discovered were suitable for pastoral purposes.

> The soil excellent, a rich red loam, thinly wooded, and although parched, the grass luxuriant, plentiful, and of the best quality, and with water sufficient either for sheep or horned cattle.[33]

The relationship between soil type and pastoral potential was often noted by Hume and Hovell during their explorations. At another point, Bland recounted:

> The general appearance of the country, together with that of the soil, is rich and beautiful. The grass having apparently been burnt early in the season, and being now in full seed, is fresh and luxuriant, frequently as high as their heads, and seldom lower than their waists. [34]

Occasionally explorers considered that due to soil type the land was more suitable for agriculture than pastoralism. Sturt noted:

> The soil upon it was good, excepting in isolated spots, where it was sandy. Vegetation was scanty upon it, but, on the whole, I should conclude that it was fitter for agriculture than for grazing. For I think it very probable, that those lands which lie hardening and bare in a state of nature, would produce abundantly if broken up by the plough. I called this Hamilton's plains, in remembrance of the surgeon of my regiment.[35]

Mitchell considered the regions he explored near the Gwydir would "become an important addition to the pastoral capabilities of New South Wales".[36] However the establishment of civil society also relied upon other resources. Grey observed that the tablelands near the Glenelg river "afford[ed] good timber, particularly pine" while Bland recounted that though the river valley of the Ovens River was "scantily wooded" the "timber trees [were] of the most valuable description."[37]

Often an extensive view of the landscape offered all possibilities, pastoral, agricultural and commercial. Mitchell noted of the Murray River valley:

> One or two spots seemed very favourable for farms or cattle stations. The soil in these grassy flats was of the richest description: indeed the whole of the country covered by reeds, seemed capable of being converted into good wheat land, and of being easily irrigated, at any time by the river.[38]

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[33] Bland (ed.), *Journey of Discovery*, p.37.
[34] *Ibid.*, p.42.
[35] Sturt, *Two Expeditions*, Vol.2, p.48.
[36] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.1, p.141.
[37] Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions*, Vol.1, p.272. Bland (ed.), *Journey of Discovery*, p.47.
[38] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.2, p.138.

In addition the river would provide communication so that "produce might be conveyed by it at such seasons to the sea shore."[39] The climate was healthy as there "was no miasmatic savannah" and the land ready for pastoral development as there was no "dense forest to be cleared".[40] Mitchell considered this extensive tract of land provided the necessary elements for cattle properties

> affording excellent winter grass, back among the scrubs to which cattle usually resort at certain seasons ; while at others they could fatten on the rich grass of the plains, or during the summer heat enjoy the reeds amid abundance of water. We found on these plains an addition to the common grasses. The fine open country afforded extensive views, and to the eastward and south-east, we saw hills with grassy sides, and crowned with callitris. Through the intervening valley flowed the Murray, the course of which was seldom visible, as no trees grew along its border.[41]

Important to the economic progress of the Australian colonies was not only finding a means of transporting produce from the interior to the coast but also the establishment of secure harbours for those sailing along the coastline and overseas. Grey predicted the potential of the natural landscape near the Glenelg River in north-western Australia to progress to the commercial stage of economic development. Such a vista restored the explorer on his journey.

> The horses and sheep revelled in the luxuriant pasture. The hill we had encamped on formed a sort of plateau; behind us stood dark mountains, and in our front lay fertile plains, from which green hills rose one behind the other, until they were lost in the distance, without any perceptible change in the character of the country. To the eastward the prospect was similar, as well as to the westward, except that in this direction the hills were more lofty, and behind these the tropical sun was hurrying down with a rapidity of movement never witnessed by those who live in the gloomy climes of the north. The men all looked healthy and full of hope; the cool sea-breeze refreshed my feverish frame: I painted in fancy the rapid progress that this country would ere long make in commerce and civilization, and my weakness and fatigues were all forgotten.[42].

This fertile region also boasted a navigable river and "three of the finest harbours in the world, in each of which the tide rose and fell thirty-seven and a half feet, I could not but feel we were in a land singularly favoured by nature."[43] Grey considered that the establishment of a colony focusing on cotton growing in north western Australia would

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[39] *Ibid.*
[40] *Ibid.*
[41] *Ibid.*
[42] Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions*, Vol.1, p.163.
[43] *Ibid.*, p.179.

have considerable economic advantage for Britain due to its vicinity to potential Asian markets.[44]

Encouragement of emigration from Britain was an underlying theme in the explorers' published accounts. As previously mentioned explorers often chronicled Australia's fortunate condition at the beginning of their journey using its rapid progress as an example of the success of the Empire's civilising mission. This impressive record of progress together with the cataloguing of resources and the recording of the settlement potential of land travelled through during their exploration provided material that could further emigration to Australia. Emigration had a twofold benefit as it not only forecast individual freedom and advancement but would also relieve the burden of overpopulation in Britain. As Sturt observed:

> The evils resulting from a surplus population in an old community, were never more seriously felt than in Great Britain at the present moment. Assuming that the amount of surplus population is 2,000,000, the excess of labour and competition thus occasioned, by diminishing profits and wages, creates, it has been said, an indirect tax to the enormous extent of 20,000,000l. per annum. It has appeared to many experienced persons, that it is in emigration, we should best find the means of relief from this heavy pressure; particularly if the individuals encouraged to go out to the colonies were young persons of both sexes, from the industrious classes of the community. Even if no more than three couples were induced to emigrate from each parish in England in ten years, the relief to the springs of industry would be very great.[45]

Bland extolled the virtues of land discovered by Hume and Hovell for rural settlement in the area "extending from Port Phillip, and Western Port, to the settled districts of Bathurst". The well-watered, accessible land he recounted was suitable for agricultural and pastoral purposes and was "fully adequate to receive, at the lowest estimate, the entire supposed present surplus population of the Mother Country".[46]

Surroundings that promised the freedom of the individual encouraged industry and initiative that not only contributed to the advancement of colonial society but also bolstered imperial progress. By the 1820s free immigrants were settling in Australia in increasing numbers and with various assisted immigration schemes further free settlement occurred in the 1830s and 1840s. The impact of the gold rushes saw even greater numbers arrive in Australia in the 1850s. Mitchell was impressed by the

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[44] *Ibid.*, p.274.
[45] Sturt, *Two Expeditions*, Vol.1, p.lxv-lsvi
[46] Bland (ed.), *Journey of Discovery*, p.87.

industry of some emigrants. In the published account of his *Three Expeditions* he related his encounter with an elderly Scottish settler. He praised individual qualities of diligence and energy which had led to his success and which encouraged the emigration of family members. Mitchell described his farm:

> Sleek cattle filled his stock-yard, his fields waved with ripe grain, and I had the satisfaction of learning from him, that he had written for his family, and that he soon expected their arrival in the colony.[47]

The publication of such anecdotes served the imperial mission by emphasising the success of settlers prepared to undertake hard work and reinforced the benefits of continued British emigration.

According to the dominant contemporary view, the middle classes were important to the continuing progress of civilisation as they advanced an optimistic view that connected faith in progress with faith in economic growth. They were motivated by individual self-interest and profit and their involvement in increasing industrialisation of the eighteenth century had elevated them to prominence in the early nineteenth century.[48] However many members of the middle classes were reluctant to emigrate to Australia because of their concerns about the extent of civil society. Grey attempted to allay such concerns in his published account by relating his personal experience. He considered "that civil and military establishments in New South Wales, form the elements of as good society as it is the lot of the majority to command in Great Britain."[49] Grey noted the beneficial results of individual industry in two middle-class gentlemen settlers he described. He believed they "were far happier than many an idle young man I have seen lounging about in England, a burden to himself and his friends; for it must be borne in mind that they were realizing a future independence for themselves."[50] It was imagined that through individual effort, improvements occurred in wealth, the division of labour and interdependence, knowledge and morals. In this economic rationale of progress it was optimistically considered that the benefits from the individual's desire for economic advancement flowed on to the poorer sections of society, so that all

[47] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.1, p.27.
[48] Sidney Pollard, *The Idea of Progress: History and Society*, Harmondsworth, 1971, p.104.
[49] Sturt, *Two Expeditions*, Vol.1, p.lix.
[50] Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions*, Vol.1, p.318.

society progressed.[51] However the explorer's view of the ability of the Aborigines to progress was more complex.

Aborigines and the idea of progress

Theories of socio-economic and biological development reinforced notions of imperial power and authority. They helped to explain why some people had progressed further than others and influenced British assumptions and policies towards Indigenous people. While the subtleties of the British mission to bring liberty and civilisation to "savage" nations are evident in the explorers' descriptions of the character, customs and manners of Aborigines they encountered, their understandings about the ability of Aborigines to progress were often diverse.

Generally explorers considered Aborigines to be living in a state of savagery where they supported themselves by hunting animals and gathering wild fruits and seeds. They observed that Aborigines did not live in settled communities or engage in domesticating animals or growing food. As a result of their perceived primitivity, many explorers had a philosophical interest in the Aboriginal way of life. At one point during his 1830s expeditions, Mitchell extolled the nobility of Aboriginal life in southern New South Wales.[52] Likewise, on his 1846 expedition, he celebrated the superior physical appearance of his Aboriginal guide. He believed that living in a state of nature had endowed Aborigines with excellent health and physical condition, far superior to civilised people. His Aboriginal guide was

> a very perfect specimen of the genus homo, and such as never is to be seen, except in the precincts of savage life, undegraded by any scale of graduated classes, and the countless bars these present to the free enjoyment of existence. His motions in walking were more graceful than can be imagined by any who have only seen those of the draped and shod animal. The deeply set yet flexible spine; the taper form of the limbs; the fullness yet perfect elasticity of the glutei muscles. The hollowness of the back, and symmetrical balance of the upper part of the torso, ornamented as it was, like a piece of fine carving, with raised scarifications most tastefully placed; such were some of the characteristics of this perfect "piece of work". Compared with it, the civilised animal, when considered merely in the light of a specimen in natural history, how inferior! … Such health and exemption from disease; such intensity of existence, in short,

[51] Pollard, *The Idea of Progress*, pp.66-67, 72-76. Ronald L Meek, *Society Science and the Ignoble Savage*, Cambridge, 1976, pp.116-118, 150-155.
[52] Mitchell, *Three Expedition*, Vol.1, p.170.

> must be far beyond the enjoyments of civilised men, with all that art can do for them [53]

In this almost homoerotic description Mitchell idealised his Aboriginal guide's physical condition as superior to that of Europeans. His romantic appreciation of this Aborigine could be perceived as a criticism of British industrial society with its increasing social problems and economic inequalities. He continued, comparing the life of Aborigines living in the stage of savagery to that of life in the Garden of Eden before the fall. Mitchell considered Aborigines preferred

> the land unbroken and free from the earliest curse pronounced against the first banished and first created man. The only kindness we could do for them, would be to let them and their wide range of territory alone; to act otherwise and profess good-will is but hypocrisy. We cannot occupy land without producing change, fully as great to the aborigines, as that which took place on man's fall and expulsion from Eden. They have hitherto lived utterly ignorant of the necessity for wearing fig leaves, or the utility of ploughs; and in this blissful state of ignorance they would, no doubt, prefer to remain. We bring upon them the punishments due to original sin, even before they know the shame of nakedness. Such were the reflections suggested to my mind by the young savage as he tripped on lightly before me by the side of his two half-civilised brethren of our party, who, muffled up in clothes, presented a contrast by no means in favour of our pretensions to improve and benefit their race.[54]

Throughout Mitchell's published account he engaged in philosophical discussion about Aborigines. Ironically, while Mitchell occasionally considered himself as the Adam-like figure surveying the potential of a pristine landscape, he also described his Aboriginal guide as Adam-like, uncorrupted by progressive commercial society. His comparison of the guide with those of his "two half-civilised brethren" revealed his reservations about the British civilising mission and the effect of British progress on Aborigines.

Mitchell's published accounts demonstrate the diversity of views that could be held by one explorer. At times he idolised the noble savage, but he also displayed some hesitation about their mode of life. Aborigines were living in a stage of savagery, an integral part of the idealised and primeval landscape,

> living in common with other animals simply on the bounty of nature; artless, and apparently as much afraid of us, and as shy as other animals of the forest. It

[53] Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition*, pp.64-65.
[54] *Ibid.*

> seemed strange, that in a climate the most resembling that of Milton's paradise, the circumstances of man's existence should be the most degrading.[55]

His discussion demonstrated the authority of his European understanding about the stages of progress. Later in his account he suggested Aborigines lived in a symbiotic relationship with their environment. Their practice of burning grass was vital to maintaining the balance of the ecosystem. As Mitchell observed: "Fire, grass, kangaroos, and human inhabitants, seem all dependent on each other for existence in Australia; for any one these being wanting, the others could no longer continue."[56] He believed that European settlement and pastoralism were disrupting the relationship that Aborigines had with the land, resulting in their demise.

The failure of Aborigines to utilise the land in a European way was a sign of their savage state. Their savagery allowed explorers to describe idealised land as "unoccupied", "unproductive", and "uncultivated"; words which can be directly connected to notions of economic progress.[57] The land was "unoccupied" because it did not indicate civil society and "unproductive" and "uncultivated" because it was not utilised for the benefit of a settled population. It was the absence of human interaction with the land in agricultural and pastoral pursuits reminiscent of Britain that evoked such language. In Mitchell's entry for 1 September 1846 he wrote that the Mantuan Downs near the Claude River was of

> boundless extent of the richest surface in a latitude corresponding to that of China, yet still uncultivated and unoccupied by man. A great reserve, provided by nature for the extension of his race, where economy, art, and industry might suffice to people it with a peaceful, happy, and contented population.[58]

The historian D.W.A. Baker has argued that Mitchell's statement could be interpreted as indicative of Mitchell's support for the doctrine of *terra nullius*.[59] In recent years the concept has been used by historians and lawyers to explain British possession of Aboriginal land with the result that it has developed a number of distinct meanings. Literally it means a land without people, but it has also been used to indicate a land without a sovereign or a land without visible signs of land ownership. Baker appears to

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[55] *Ibid.*, pp.98-99.
[56] *Ibid.*, p.412.
[57] Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions* , Vol.1, p.359. Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.2, p.334.
[58] Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition*, p.292.
[59] Dr. M. Connor, "Error Nullius Revisited", The Samuel Griffith Society, Vol.16, Chapter four, pp.1-11. www.samualgriffith.org.au/papers/html Bain Attwood, "*The Law of the Land* or the Law of the Land?: History Law and Narrative in a Settler Society", *History Compass*,Vol.2, 2004, pp.1-30.

understand *terra nullius* to be the first, that is, the landscape was unpeopled. Certainly Mitchell did use the words "uninhabited" and "unoccupied" but their meaning differed from Baker's as Mitchell associated these words with the lack of evidence of economic use of land. Explorers like Mitchell demonstrated an understanding of land use that involved cultivation of the soil. The land was "unoccupied" and "uninhabited" because it was not utilised in a recognised European manner not because it was unpopulated.

Baker claims that Mitchell's position was ambiguous as a few days later he revealed his "Mabo decision" when he recognised Aboriginal use of the land in their practice of firing the grass to encourage new growth that would attract animals.[60] Mitchell observed Aborigines had modified the landscape through firing to create "open forest, which had become green as an emerald with the young crop of grass. These plains were thickly imprinted with the feet of kangaroos, and the work is undertaken by the native to attract these animals to such places."[61] This later description of Aboriginal land management practices and control of the land was not a sign of his ambiguous position but recognition of their cultural traditions and demonstrated the diversity of understandings about Aborigines held by explorers. Extensive evidence in the published accounts definitely suggests explorers did not perceive Australia as a land without people. Even D.W.A. Baker agrees that Mitchell recognised Aborigines and their use of the land. Baker's difficulty lies in coming to terms with Mitchell's diversity of views and the tensions they create within his narrative. Furthermore, Baker fails to recognise the role of the doctrine of progress in the explorer's description of Australia and its Indigenous inhabitants.

Grey believed that Aborigines had an understanding of land ownership. To demonstrate this he included a letter from John Dunmore Lang to Dr Hodgkin, an advocate for Indigenous people, extracted from Reports of the Aboriginal Protection Society. In the letter Lang revealed some of the finer points of his understanding of Aboriginal land management and cultural practices that led him to believe the

> Aborigines of Australia have an idea of property in the soil in their native and original state and that that idea is, in reality not very different from that of the European proprietors of sheep and cattle, by whom they have, in so many

[60] D.W.A. Baker, *The Civilised Surveyor: Thomas Mitchell and the Australian Aborigines*, Carlton South, 1997, p.178. Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition*, p.306.
[61] Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition*, p.306.

> instances been dispossessed, without the slightest consideration of their rights or feelings. [62]

Lang believed that Aboriginal ownership was reinforced by the fact that they had named landforms in their tribal area. He reinforced his point by ending his letter with a latin phrase *Nullum sine nomine saxum,* which not only emphasised the significance of the naming process in European and Aboriginal understandings of ownership but also implied the close connection of Aborigines to their land.[63]

Lang's letter demonstrated an ethnographic and humanitarian view of Aboriginal culture; Aborigines were living in a savage state, but his research suggested similarities between Aboriginal and European use of land. Aborigines did not "cultivate the soil", Lang reported, but subsisted by hunting and gathering and lived a nomadic life within set boundaries. He noted that while they did not erect fences they believed that the native animals within their tribal area belonged to them in a similar manner to European settlers who owned sheep and cattle on their property. Aborigines fired the landscape to encourage the growth of new grass and aid hunting. Lang observed:

> the country is occupied chiefly for pastoral purposes, the difference between the Aboriginal and the European ideas of property in the soil is more imaginary than real, the native grass affording subsistence to the kangaroos of the natives, as well as to the wild cattle of the Europeans, and the only difference indeed being, that the former are not branded with a particular mark like the latter, and are somewhat wilder and more difficult to catch.[64]

Implicit in Grey's account of Aborigines was a belief in the British civilising mission to raise Indigenous people from their savage state. He paternalistically approached this duty. While he considered Aborigines were less advanced than Europeans, common humanity suggested that Aborigines could advance given the right motivation. Such understanding provided the foundation for Grey's later "report on the best means of promoting the civilization of Aboriginal Inhabitants of Australia" which the Colonial Office circulated to the governors of the other colonies. In it, he advocated policies to assimilate Aborigines into European civilisation albeit at the suppression of their own

[62] John Dunmore Lang to Dr Hodgkin in Grey, *Journal of Two Expeditions*, Vol.2, p.236.
[63] Latin for "No stone lacks a name" John Dunmore Lang to Dr Hodgkin in Grey, *Journal of Two Expedtions*, Vol.2, p.236.
[64] John Dunmore Lang to Dr Hodgkin in Grey, *Journal of Two Expeditions*, Vol.2, pp.233-234.

cultural traditions, laws and beliefs.[65] He refuted philosophical understanding that celebrated the life of the noble savage as free and not constrained by culture. Grey considered that such understandings were erroneous and believed that Indigenous people could not progress while they retained their traditional cultural practices:

> But to believe that man in a savage state is endowed with freedom either of thought or action is erroneous in the highest degree. He is in reality subjected to complex laws, which not only deprive him of all free agency of thought, but, at the same time by allowing no scope whatever for the development of intellect, benevolence, or any other great moral qualification, they necessarily bind him down in a hopeless state of barbarism, from which it is impossible for man to emerge, so long as he is enthralled by these customs; which, on the other hand, are so ingeniously devised, as to have a direct tendency to annihilate any effort that is made to overthrow them.[66]

Eyre's account of the Aborigines of Australia reflected a similar belief that custom was inhibiting Aboriginal progress:

> Custom has, however, from time immemorial, usurped the place of laws, and with them perhaps, is even more binding than they would be. Through custom's irresistible sway has been forged the chain that binds in iron fetters a people, who might otherwise be said to be without government or restraint. By it, the young and the weak are held in willing subjection to the old and the strong. Superstitious to a degree they are taught from earliest infancy to dread they know not what evil or punishment, if they infringe upon obligations they have been told to consider as sacred. All the better feelings and impulses implanted in the human heart by nature, are trampled upon by customs, which, as long as they remain unchanged, must forever prevent them from rising in the scale of civilisation and improvement[67]

The views of Eyre and Grey can be traced to British humanitarian concerns that emerged from the 1837 "Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)". This committee was concerned about the suffering of Indigenous people that was occurring as a result of British colonialism. Further the Committee considered ways to improve the welfare and protection of Indigenous people within its growing Empire.[68] These two explorers advocated assimilation in their approach to the progress of Australian Aborigines. They believed that Aboriginal progress was tied to equality

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[65] Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867*, Chicago, 2002, p.37. "Sir George Grey", *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A010439b.htm

[66] Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions*, Vol.2, pp.217-218.

[67] Eyre, *Journals of Expeditions*, Vol.2, p.384.

[68] Julie Evans, *Edward Eyre: race and colonial governance*, Dunedin, 2005, pp.99-100. "Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements) with Minutes of Evidence Appendix and Index", *British Parliamentary Papers*, Volume 2, Anthropology/Aborigines, 1837.

before the law which could not occur while Indigenous people were constrained by observance of customary laws and traditions.[69]

A diversity of views on Aboriginal ability to progress existed in the early nineteenth century. Generally they were considered low on the scale of humanity with innate uncivilised tendencies governed by custom that hindered their advancement. Occasionally explorers rejected generalisations that appeared in the press and were made by uninformed commentators and which cast Aborigines in disparaging light. The explorers' observations were made over the course of extended journeys, which allowed for longer ethnographic observation and thus greater understanding. For example, Eyre also noted the misrepresentation and maligning of Aborigines as "the lowest and most degraded of the human species, … generally considered as ranking but little above the members of the brute creation."[70] Although he did not agree with such deprecating generalisations, he still considered Aborigines "savages" with "many vices" but no worse "than in many other aboriginal races."[71] Eyre repudiated commentators who asserted that Aborigines were "irreclaimable" and "unteachable"; instead, he proposed that they could be civilised if comprehensive and culturally sensitive policies were put in place.[72]

Like Eyre, Grey noted the misrepresentation of Aborigines in the public mind. In a chapter in his account which dealt with the impact of Europeans on Aborignies, he claimed the public were "prejudiced" in their views of Aborigines and generally considered them a "very inferior race, in fact as one occupying a scale in the creation which nearly places them on a level with the brutes." These assumptions about Aborigines, he believed, would be hard to eradicate, but if not stamped out, would lead to an uncertain future where Aborigines either died out or became a minority living in a degraded state.[73] Aborigines, Grey noted, were as "apt and intelligent as any other race of men…they are subject to the same affections, appetites and passions as other men."[74] He believed that their savage customary laws were a hindrance to their advancement

[69] *Ibid.*, pp.99-100.
[70] Eyre, *Journals of Expeditions*, Vol.2, p.153.
[71] *Ibid.*
[72] *Ibid.*, pp.154-155.
[73] Grey, *Journal of Two Expeditions*, Vol.2, p.367.
[74] *Ibid.*, p.374.

towards civilisation. Paternalistically Grey advocated teaching Aborigines British laws to supersede their own laws

> so that any native who is suffering under their own customs may have the power of an appeal to those of Great Britain; or to put this in its true light, that all authorized persons should, in all instances, be required to protect a native from the violence of his fellows, even though they be in the execution of their own laws.[75]

Although he considered their law barbaric, he perceived, by analogy with other Indigenous subjects of the empire, that Aborigines too had the ability to advance to a civilised state by being made amenable to British law.[76] His imperial rhetoric, while demonstrating Britain's humanity and benevolence towards Aborigines, reinforced the British belief in its own assumed superior justice system.

British officials liked to portray their colonisation as philanthropic, as conveying enlightenment and civilisation to Indigenous people. There are numerous examples of explorers observing the ability of Aborigines to adapt to European civilisation. Sturt considered that a willingness to barter was a sign that Aborigines could progress beyond their barbarous state: He observed:

> We occasionally exchanged pieces of ironhoop for two other kinds of fish, the one a bream, the other a barbel, with the natives, and the eagerness with which they met our advances to barter, is a strong proof of their natural disposition towards this first step in civilization.[77]

While some early nineteenth century explorers accepted the capacity and aptitude of Aborigines to be civilised, many discerned impediments to their advancement. Such barriers were not only a result of their adherence to customary ways but also related to the clash of two disparate cultures. For example, Mitchell observed that Aborigines would not survive contact with European civilisation as settlement was disrupting their mode of existence. He noted that Aborigines were disappearing from the settled areas as they

> could no longer enjoy their solitary freedom; for the dominion of the white man surrounded them. His sheep and cattle filled the green pastures where the kangaroo (the principal food of the natives) was accustomed to range, until the stranger came from distant lands and claimed the soil. Thus these first

[75] *Ibid.*, p.375.
[76] *Ibid.*, p.377.
[77] Sturt, *Two Expeditions*, Vol.2, p.113

> inhabitants, hemmed in by the power of the white population, and deprived of the liberty which they formerly enjoyed of wandering at will through their native wilds, were compelled to seek a precarious shelter amidst the close thickets and rocky fastnesses which afforded them a temporary home, but scarcely a subsistence, for their chief support, the kangaroo, was either destroyed or banished.[78]

Yet Mitchell observed a willingness amongst some Aborigines to accept civilisation, particularly his guides. While he considered equality of treatment was the key to civilising Aborigines, it had not been successful because Aborigines had a strong attachment to the bush that lured them back when their attempt to fit into the British way of life was challenged. Mitchell suggested a social experiment that would remove an Aboriginal couple from Australia, thus obviating the compelling attraction of their traditional land and allowing the civilising process to take place unencumbered. The success of this couple might inspire other Aborigines to "attain a state of equality with the white men".[79] Despite his belief in equality of treatment in dealings with Indigenous people, Mitchell's account exudes the paternalism of the white colonising race. He concluded his discussion by stating that Britain, as "the nation so active in the suppression of slavery" should "consider betimes, in taking up new countries, how the aboriginal races can be preserved; and how the evil effects of spirituous liquors, of gunpowder, and of diseases more inimical to them than even slavery, may be counteracted."[80]

Eyre, like Mitchell and other explorers, considered that Aborigines were a dying race. While this was regarded as the inevitable result of contact with a progressive civilisation, he called for efforts to allay the speed of the their demise. However his comments also reveal much about the British civilising mission:

> For the account given of the Aborigines the author deems it unnecessary to offer any apology; a long experience among them, and an intimate knowledge of their character, habits, and position with regard to Europeans, have induced in him a deep interest on behalf of a people, who are fast fading away before the progress of a civilization, which ought only to have added to their improvement and prosperity. Gladly would the author wish to see attention awakened on their behalf, and an effort at least made to stay the torrent which is overwhelming them.[81]

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[78] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.1, p.10.
[79] Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition*, pp.414-417.
[80] *Ibid.*, p.417.
[81] Eyre, *Journals of Expeditions*, Vol.1, p.x

Following British policy of the humane treatment of Indigenous people, Aborigines were exposed to and interacted with a modern and progressive civilisation which would encourage their progress towards a higher stage. However, Grey expressed concern that this had not happened as the Aboriginal race had rejected British progress and was fading away. His imperial rhetoric revealed the humanity and concern of a British official following British policy towards Indigenous people but it also evoked a sense of British authority in the colonising process.

Conclusion

Throughout their published accounts explorers engaged in imperial rhetoric that claimed Australia as part of the British Empire. Ideas of social and economic progress provided a theoretical background for establishing their claim. It underlay their vision of Australia's potential for economic and societal progress through individual freedom and labour. It also explained a diversity of views about the ability of Aborigines to progress. Some explorers considered that Aborigines could progress and merely needed to overcome their customary ways by assimilation to British cultural and legal traditions. Others perceived similarities and differences between British and Aboriginal understanding of land ownership. While some explorers recognised the ownership by Aborigines of traditional areas, the narratives did not extend to discussion of their sovereignty of Australia as a whole. At times explorers described the land as "unoccupied" or "uninhabited" but such words did not relate to the absence of Aborigines but to their failure to utilise the land in a European manner. Explorers regarded Aborigines as an integral part of an idealised landscape.

Although progress provided a way of explaining the landscape, a belief in Providence guided the journeys of explorers and legitimated their claims. Australia was generally considered a land created by Providence for British settlement. The land merely awaited improvement by British settlers who would further claim the land through agriculture and pastoralism. The explorers' descriptions of the landscape and the stories of settlers' success suggested to readers that Australia was an ideal location for British migrants. But the theory of progress was only one philosophical idea that provided a way of appropriating the landscape and its people. Inextricably intertwined with their use of the idea of progress that predicted economic and social advancement in Australia

was the establishment of an aesthetic appreciation of the land that proffered familiarity and emotional attachment.

Chapter Five
"scenes of surpassing beauty": aesthetic appreciation of the landscape

> This ravine, in the luxuriance of its vegetation, and the great size of the trees, as well as in its rapid stream, at times leaping in cascades, or foaming in rapids, resembled those we had before seen in the sandstone ranges, but it differed from them in the greater height of the surrounding hills and cliffs, which being overshadowed with hanging trees and climbing plants, presented as rich a painting as the eye could behold; and as these grew golden with the rays of the setting sun, or were thrown into deep and massive shadows, I could not but regret that no Claude of the tropics had arisen, to transfer to canvas scenes which words cannot express.[1]
>
> George Grey, *Journal of Two Expeditions,* 1838.

This epigraph from the explorer George Grey's explorations in north-western Australia underlined the preference for the conventions of the picturesque and romanticism in describing scenery in exploration literature. The picturesque elements of the scene prompt the explorer to liken it to one worthy of painting by an artist like Claude Lorraine. Besides revealing the aesthetic preferences of the explorers such descriptions were a form of imperial rhetoric as the aesthetic ideals drawn upon provided a way for explorers to understand and claim the landscape. The conventions of the picturesque placed order on the land that made it familiar and controllable. Moreover, the understanding that emerged about Australia through the use of these principles encouraged wider appreciation. The use of picturesque theory subdued tensions that existed between concern to present an idealised landscape and the desire to capture the uniqueness of the Australian landscape. It concentrated on the visual representation of the land in a known style, an image that was extended through supporting illustrations. An emotional connection to an idealised land was stimulated through romanticism. Inspired by nature, the explorer responded spontaneously in subjective and lyrical descriptions. Ultimately the images of the land they created in their accounts appropriated the land for the Empire by placing it within the bounds of contemporary European aesthetic understanding and appreciation.

This chapter explores how the picturesque aesthetic and romanticism operated within early nineteenth century accounts of exploration to strengthen imperial rhetoric. It looks in particular at how these ideas were used to describe Australia and its Indigenous people and how the subsequent descriptions were a way of making it familiar, stimulating emotional attachment and substantiating British claims.

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[1] Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions*, Vol.1, p.216

By the nineteenth century aesthetic theories provided conventions for viewing the landscape that were an influence on literature, art, landscape gardening, architecture and travel.[2] The concept of the picturesque had been developed in the late eighteenth century by aesthetic theorist and artist, William Gilpin who extended the notions of the sublime and the beautiful to give the whole scene an association with artistic composition.[3] The picturesque as an aesthetic ideology was a way of seeing which not only operated upon the senses and sensibilities of the viewer but also upon the reader. Explorers envisioned idealised landscapes using Gilpin's idea of picturesque beauty which emphasised the essential elements of roughness, contrast and variety. If they were lacking, scenes could be improved by altering the features or adding gradations of colour and/or shadows or even omitting elements when their inclusion would reduce the impact of the scene's picturesque qualities. While the picturesque aesthetic provided conventions to improve scenes, often in Australia explorers perceived that Nature had provided idealised landscape that did not require the usual improvement associated with picturesque composition.

The picturesque provided the transition from the order of classicism to the wildness of romanticism.[4] The aesthetic theorist, Christopher Hussey stated that the "picturesque was necessary to enable the imagination to form the habit of feeling through the eyes."[5] In many accounts of exploration the picturesque is combined with romanticism which emphasised "the individual, the subjective, the irrational, the imaginative, the personal, the spontaneous, the emotional, the visionary, and the transcendental."[6] In particular, romanticism was characterised by a reliance on the imagination, subjectivity of approach and freedom of thought and expression. The celebration of human emotion and the idealisation of nature were at its centre. The explorer responded spontaneously and emotionally to the landscape; often associating the moods of nature with the moods of members of the expedition. The explorer's response emphasised feeling and imagination over reason, logic and science. This developed alongside a rational view of

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[2] Hussey, *The Picturesque*, pp.4,8,27,28. Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque, Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800*, Aldershot, England, 1989, p.26.
[3] Gilpin, *Three Essays*, p.19.
[4] Hussey, *The Picturesque*, p.4
[5] *Ibid*.
[6] "Romanticism," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 2006. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. http://www.search.eb.com/eb/article-9083836.

landscape as the setting for scientific, religious and historic representation, although it did not usually exclude such themes from the overall account. Whilst the picturesque and romanticism are often intertwined, in this chapter they are dealt with separately to stress the particularities of the two approaches.

The picturesque

Most of the explorers covered here had an aesthetic appreciation which demonstrated an understanding of the picturesque as Gilpin used the term, that is, to "denote such objects, as are proper subjects for painting".[7] For a scene to contain picturesque beauty it had to consist of the elements of roughness, variety and contrast. The picturesque explorer sought his objective in idealised Nature; a natural, undeveloped landscape, but one which he might proceed to improve through subtle embellishments according to the conventions of the picturesque. Gilpin stated that the aim of picturesque description was to

> Bring the images of nature as forcibly and as closely to the eye as it can, by high colouring. High colouring is not a string of rapturous epithets, but an attempt to analyse the views of nature: to mark their tints and varied lights and to express this detail in terms as appropriate and vivid as possible.[8]

Mitchell proficiently employed the picturesque aesthetic in his descriptions and sketches of the landscape. He was competent in the use of its conventions and in particular "high colouring", which he used in interpreting natural scenery for the reader. His descriptions often combined concern for picturesque composition with romanticism to arouse the emotions and the imagination of the reader who delighted in the prospects of the lush setting described. Viewing a backwater of the Murray, Mitchell recorded:

> On crossing a point of [a sandhill], we came upon a most romantic looking scene, where a flood branch had left a serpentine piece of water enclosing two wooded islands of rather picturesque character; the whole being overhung by the steep and bushy slope of the hill. The scenery of some lakes thus formed, was very fine especially when their rich verdure and lofty trees were contrasted with the scrub which covered the sand-hills nearest the river, where a variety of shrubs, such as we had not seen, formed a curious foreground.[9]

Mitchell's description and the supporting illustration prompted the reader to visualise a scene of sylvan beauty.(Illustration 12) Nature had provided an idyllic setting that was

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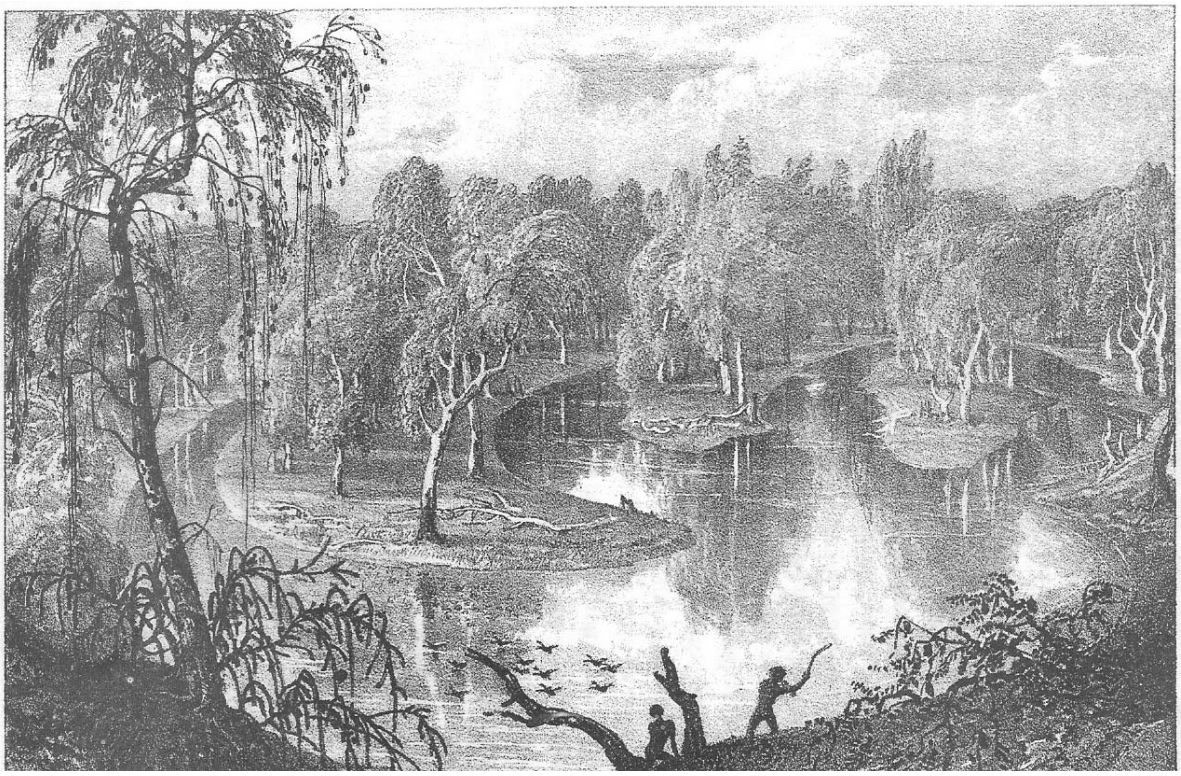
[7] Gilpin, *Three Essays*, p.36.
[8] cited in Hussey, *The Picturesque*, p.34.
[9] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.2, p.132

Illustration 12



Backwater of the Murray

Source: T.L. Mitchell, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia,* Vol.II, London, 1839, facing page 133.

fertile and had a reliable source of water. At other times Mitchell composed the elements of the scenery in terms of the conventions of landscape painting. The foreground was framed, the middle distance described and the limits of the view defined. While the main party remained encamped at the Claude River, Mitchell, after struggling through brigalow for some miles, sketched the visual reward of a

> scene of surpassing beauty, that gradually opened to us. That long-lost tree, the graceful Acacia pendula, received us in the foreground, and open plains, blended with waving lines of wood extended far into bluey distance, beyond which an azure coronet of mountains of romantic forms, terminated the charming landscape.[10]

In his account, Mitchell demonstrated the "love of novelty" that was at the foundation of the picturesque explorers' quest.[11] The landscape that delighted Mitchell was described for the reader as a landscape painting was painted by the artist. The foreground functioned to prevent the viewer's attention from straying away from the focal point of the scene and led the viewer's focus into the important middle-distance.[12] In Mitchell's description of the landscape the foreground was framed with the darker foliage of the acacias, the wavy lines of trees constituted the lighter and open middle-distance and distant mountains formed the boundary of the scene. This descriptive technique while conforming to picturesque conventions subtly conveyed imperial rhetoric. It forced the reader's visualisation of the scene to the important open plains and aroused associated ideas about the possibilities of the landscape.

As if to demonstrate their familiarity with landscape art, explorers made frequent reference to artists. In the epigraph at the beginning of the chapter, Grey likens the scene before him to one worthy of a painting by Claude Lorrain. The glen, which Mitchell viewed after proceeding through Stephenson's Pass, reminded him of the beauty and grandeur of the nature works of English artist, John Martin. Mitchell explained:

> This gap I called Stephenson's Pass; it led into a spacious glen surrounded on all sides but the N.W. by mountains such as I have described, recalling to my memory the most imaginative efforts of Mr. Martin's saepia drawing, and showing how far the painter's fancy may anticipate nature.[13]

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[10] Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition*, p.229.
[11] Gilpin, *Three Essays*, pp.47-48.
[12] Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, p.29. Andrews states that this device was part of the conventions of picturesque composition.
[13] Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition*, p.237.

The recollection of this drawing highlighted that aspect of picturesque composition that was to mould representations of nature into an ideal form. It is interesting that Mitchell, by rendering the scene as one comparable to such idealised nature, suggested that the scene at Stephenson's Pass did not need the usual improvement associated with picturesque composition.

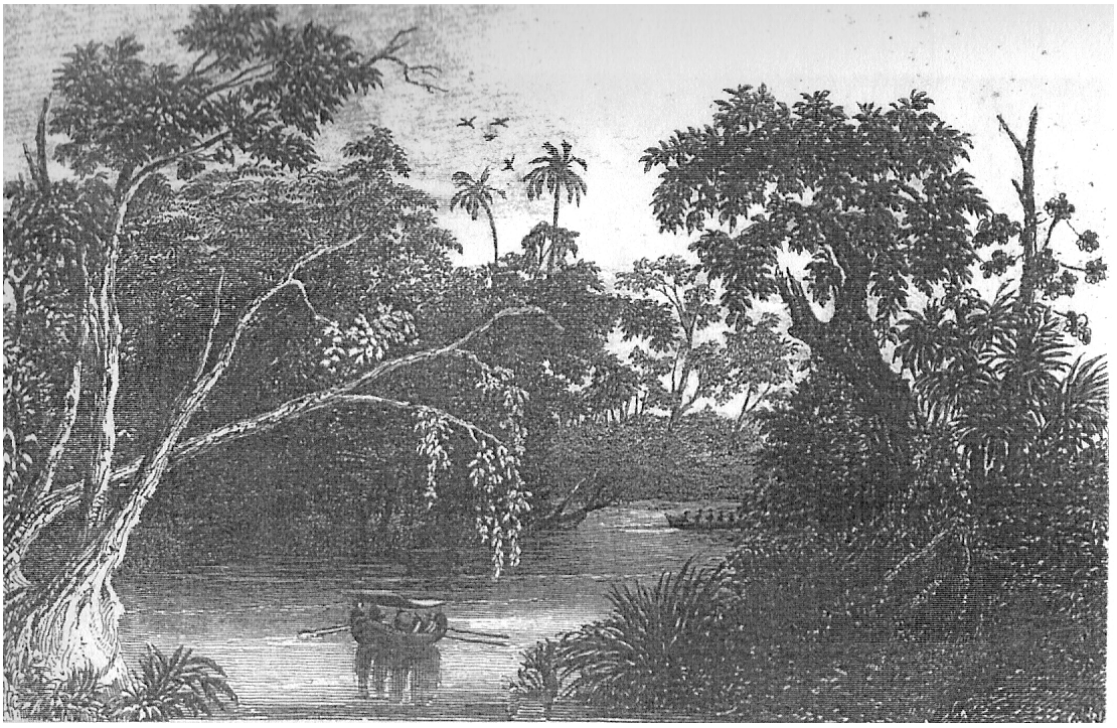
The textual representation of the landscape by the explorer and the subsequent appreciation of the landscape scenery by the reader were tied to an aesthetic appreciation of landscape art. Mitchell clearly shows awareness of the interconnection between the two in his use of the conventions of landscape painting in written descriptions and in the reference to renowned painters such as Claude Lorraine, Salvator Rosa and John Martin. Not only were their names used in the naming of landscape features but their works became a reference point for the aesthetic appreciation of the scenery he observed.

A concern for picturesque composition was not unique to Mitchell. It is evident in many of the published accounts of exploration. Passages extolling the picturesque nature of scenery were often accompanied by an illustration also following picturesque composition. For example, Stokes included illustrations in his account, sometimes adding further detail and at other times briefly allowing the illustrations to define the beauty of the scene. In one instance, after a lengthy textual description of the beauty by night and day of one channel of the Albert River, Stokes continued by enriching the description of the beauty of its south branch with reference to the illustration in the front of volume one.[14] This illustration was composed with trees defining the limits of the scene and the focus drawn to the boat in the middle distance (Illustration 13). Concern for depicting the variety of vegetation types provided contrast to the scene. The landscape depicted was rich, abundant, exotic and ideal.[15]

In Mitchell's *Three Expeditions,* the illustration and accompanying description of the *Fall of Cobaw* follows the familiar pattern of picturesque description but in this case, Mitchell enhanced the scene by drawing attention to its contrast and variety as essential elements. Mitchell wrote of the scene at the *Fall of Cobaw*,

[14] Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia, with an Account of the Coasts and Rivers explored and surveyed during the Voyage of the HMS Beagle*, Vol.2, London, 1846, p.315.
[15] *Ibid.*, Vol.1, illustration facing page 1.

Illustration 13



South Branch of the Albert River

Source: J. Lort Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia,* Vol.I, 1846, illustration facing p.1.

> I rode up the bank towards a noise of falling water, and thus came to a very fine cascade of upwards of sixty feet. The river indeed fell more than double that height, but in the lower part, the water escaped unseen flowing amongst large blocks of granite. I had visited several waterfalls in Scotland, but this was certainly the most picturesque I had witnessed; although the effect was not so much in the body of water falling, or the loud noise, as in the bold character of the rocks over and amongst which it fell. Their colour and shape were harmonized into a more complete scene than nature usually presents, resembling the "finished subject" of an artist, foreground and all. The prevailing hues were light red and purple-grey, the rocks being finely interlaced with a small-leaved creeper of brightest green. A dark coloured moss, which presents a warm green in the sun, covered the lower masses, and relieved and supported the brighter hues, while a brilliant iris shone steadily in the spray, and blended into perfect harmony the lighter hues of the higher rocks, and the whiteness of the torrent rushing over them. The banks of this stream were of so bold a character, that in all probability other picturesque scenery, perhaps finer than this, may yet be found upon it.[16]

Once again Mitchell presented an idealised scene from Nature that did not appear to require the usual assistance of the artist to meet the conventions of picturesque composition. The contrasting colours and irregularity of the rocks particularly engaged Mitchell.

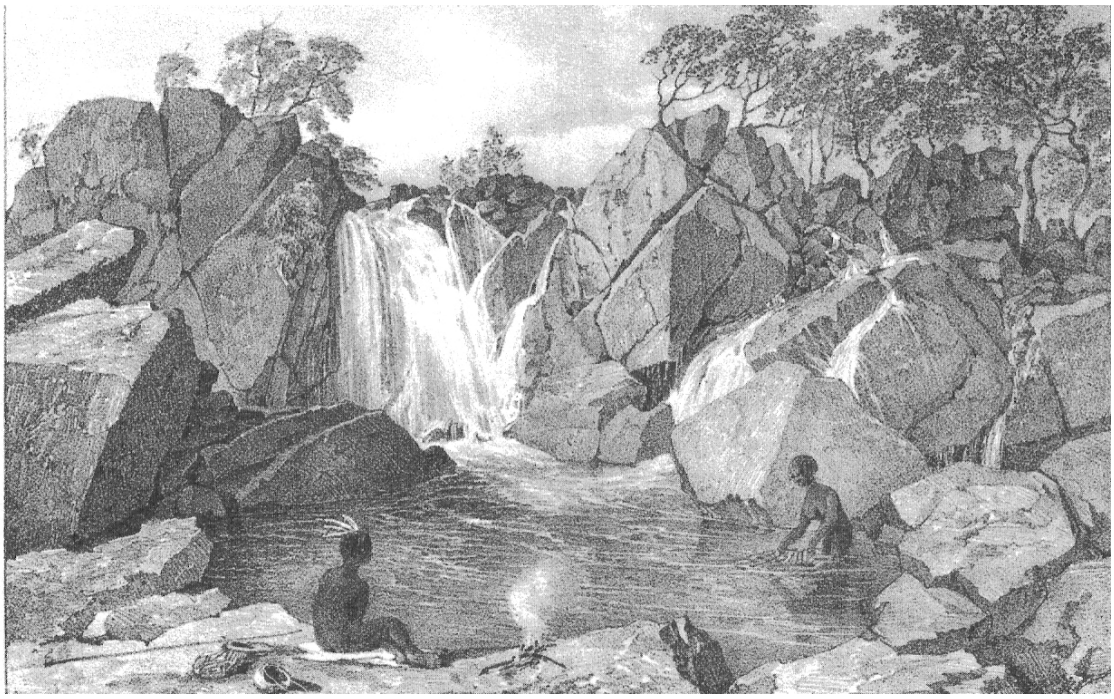
However there was some tension between Mitchell's assertion that the scene was "more complete than nature usually presents" and his accompanying illustration. In his sketch Mitchell added the figures of two Aborigines in the foreground who are not mentioned in the text but who introduced a scientific dimension as well as arousing associated ideas of the untouched, wild and romantic nature of the setting.[17] (Illustration 14) By placing Aborigines within the bounds of the picturesque composition, Mitchell depicted them as "noble savages", inferior but dignified and undisturbed. While the inclusion of figures was accepted in picturesque composition to improve the qualities of the scene, implicit in his addition of Aborigines was imperial rhetoric of race that suggested British authority to manipulate Aborigines.

The scenery of the Glenelg River led Mitchell to lyrically describe and sketch it according to the picturesque. Inspired by the setting he noted:

> The scenery on the banks was pleasing and various: at some points picturesque limestone cliffs overhung the river, and cascades flowed out of caverns hung with stalactites: at others, the shores were festooned with green dripping shrubs

[16] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.2, p.286.
[17] Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye*, pp.66-67.

Illustration 14



Fall of Cobaw

Source: T.L. Mitchell, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia,* Vol.II, London, 1839, facing p.286.

> and creepers, or terminated in a smooth grassy bank sloping to the water's edge. But none of the banks consisted of water-worn earth; they were in general low and grassy, bounding the alluvial flats, that lay between the higher points of land.[18]

Roughness and disorder are highlighted in Mitchell's portrayal of the scene using words like "festooned" and "dripping" for the plants, the cliffs that "overhung" the river and "cascades" that "flowed out of caverns hung with stalactites". Adding variety through the smoothness of the "grassy bank" and "alluvial flats" enhanced its aesthetic qualities. Mitchell's contrived description was supported by an accompanying illustration, not unlike Stokes' South Branch of the Albert River, which suggested the role of the picturesque explorer as the harbinger of civilisation to a pristine, untouched land. (Illustration 15) The civilisation that Mitchell brought to the supposedly unexplored regions of the southern interior was British and imperial, signified by the Union Jack unfurled on the boat. Moreover, implicit in his description of the land along the banks of the river were opportunities for further British settlement.

Picturesque and park-like – the nexus of aesthetic and economic value of land

The picturesque aesthetic often combined with an appreciation of the economic value of land in accounts of exploration covered here and operated to reinforce the imperial rhetoric implicit in the texts. As a picturesque explorer, Oxley was delighted by the discovery of a scene of picturesque composition, which did not require correction.[19] He wrote enthusiastically:

> A mile and a half brought us into the valley which we had seen on our first descending into the glen: imagination cannot fancy anything more beautifully picturesque than the scene which burst upon us. The breadth of the valley to the base of the opposite gently rising hills was, between three and four miles, studded with fine trees, upon a soil which for richness can nowhere be excelled; its extent north and south we could not see: to the west it was bounded by the lofty rocky ranges by which we had entered it; this was covered to the summit with cypresses and acacia in full bloom: a few trees of the sterculia heterophylla, with their bright green foliage, gave additional beauty to the scene. In the centre of this charming valley ran a strong and beautiful stream, its bright transparent waters dashing over a gravely bottom, intermingled with large stones, forming at short intervals considerable pools, in which the rays of the sun were reflected with a brilliancy equal to that of the most polished mirror.[20]

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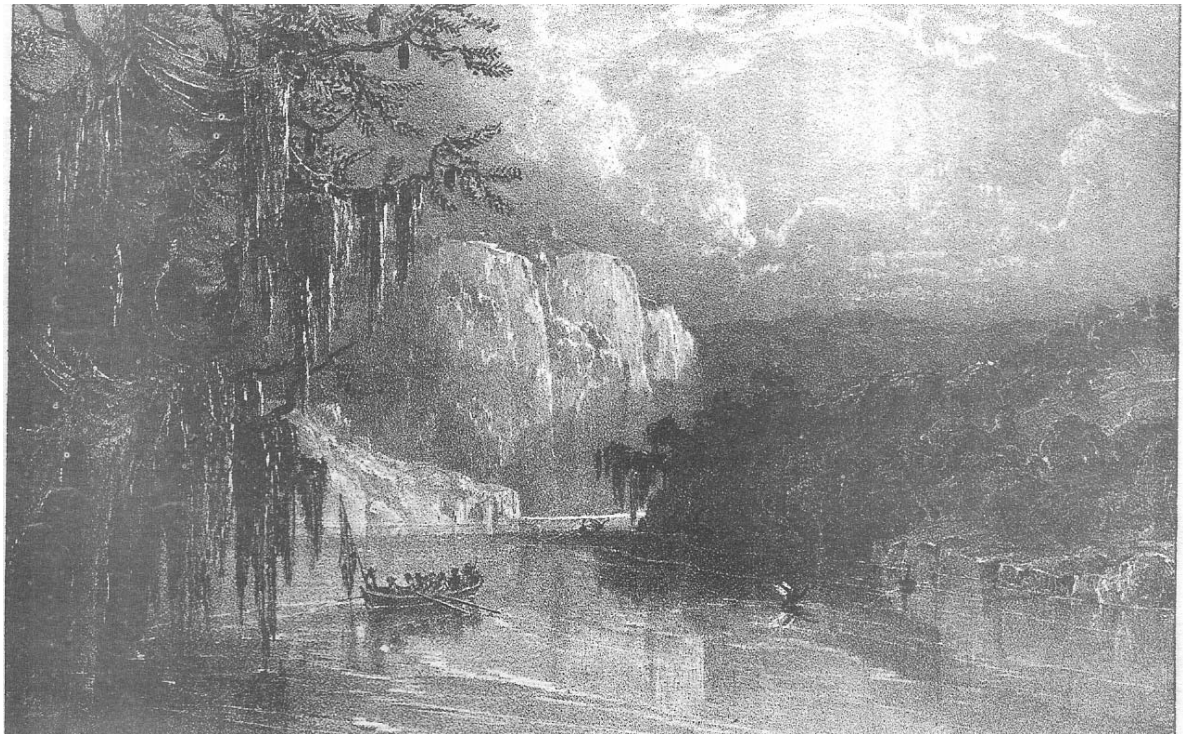
[18] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.2, p.223.
[19] Gilpin, *Three Essays*, pp.49-50.
[20] Oxley, *Journal of Two Expeditions*, p.32

Illustration 15



The River Glenelg

Source: T.L. Mitchell, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia*, Vol.II, 1839, facing p.225.

While he was concerned to describe the scene according to picturesque composition as he defined its limits and drew the reader's attention to the foreground where there was a fertile valley with abundant water, his depiction also indicated an understanding of the elements of picturesque beauty: roughness, smoothness and variety. The descriptive words chosen by Oxley supported his aesthetic appreciation of the scene and highlighted the fecundity and availability of the land for settlement.

Explorers often described the landscape by comparison to English country estates which reflected Gilpin's preference for scenery with contrasts and irregularities. The beauty of nature was contained in the contrasting colours brought about by the effect of changes in light on elements of the scene and in the variety of landforms it contained. Mitchell demonstrated an appreciation of such picturesque scenes which contained open and undulating land with irregular groupings of trees.[21] Describing land near the Gwydir River, he wrote:

> Penetrating next through a narrow strip of casuarinae scrub, we found the remains of native huts; and beyond this scrub, we crossed a beautiful plain; covered with shining verdure, and ornamented with trees which, although "dropt in nature's careless haste", gave the country the appearance of an extensive park.[22]

In such passages Mitchell revealed his aesthetic sensibility, although in this instance he not only conveyed an understanding of the picturesque but also its application in landscape gardening.

This trend in landscape gardening was directly linked to the picturesque aesthetic and Gilpin's belief that "nature is most defective in composition; and must be a little assisted. Her ideas are too vast for picturesque use, without the restraint of rules."[23] Landscape gardeners such as William Kent, "Capability" Brown and Humphrey Repton extended the picturesque into landscape gardening to create freer, less formal gardens with an emphasis on irregularity and artful disorder. Through the use of ha-has instead of fencing, man-made lakes and the strategic plantings of trees, a naturalistic style of landscape was created that became the accepted standard of landscape gardening. David Watkins suggests that the development of an irregular form in landscape

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[21] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*,Vol.1, p.192. Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition*, p.251..
[22] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.1, p.90.
[23] Gilpin, *Three Essays*, p.67.

gardening coincided with a reaction to the enclosure movement when the landscape was formalised through the fencing of open fields for productive use.[24] These English country estates characterised an elite section of British society which was considered to command an aesthetic sensibility.[25] The gentleman's park that evolved from the popularity of less formal gardens epitomised the convergence of the economic value of land with its aesthetic appreciation. While still productive these parks were aesthetically pleasing. They demonstrated picturesque preferences for irregularities, contrasts and variety which became part of the formulae for creating informal landscaped gardens in the picturesque style.[26]

Explorers demonstrated an appreciation of Australian scenery that was considered park-like and picturesque. Generally the explorer's preference was for open, undulating land with detached groups of trees and contrasting vegetation. Such land was compared to the contrived country estates in England. But as already mentioned such estates also had an economic value related to their productive use. The explorer's aesthetic preference for park-like landscapes and undulating and productive landscape scenery reflected the British idealised rural image that became popular through the development of country estates. Consequently the imperial rhetoric of explorers praised those aspects of the natural landscape that were not only picturesque but also productive, linking aesthetic preferences to the economic value of land. Oxley journeyed "through a beautiful picturesque country of low hills and fine valleys" near his camp at Limestone Creek. Describing the park-like quality of the landscape the detached groupings of trees and the open grassed areas, he stated "I never saw a country better adapted for grazing of all kinds of stock than that we passed over this day."[27] Sturt offered confirmation of his earlier prediction of the potential of park-like scenery on the shores of Lake Victoria. He contended:

> the SW shore of the lake is low and grassy, and beautiful umbrageous trees adorn it, in number not more than two or three to the acre.… On the 15th I again moved so as to keep pace with him, and was highly delighted at the really park-

[24] David Watkin, *The English Vision, The Picturesque in Architecture, Landscape and Garden Design*, London, 1982, p.1.
[25] Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology, The English Rustic Tradition 1740-1860*, London, 1986, pp.9-14.
[26] Gilpin, *Three Essays*, p.28.
[27] Oxley, *Journal of Two Expeditions*, p.1

> like appearance of the scenery. This pretty locality is now occupied as a cattle run, and must be a place of amusement as well as profit.[28]

He considered the landscape not only profitable but also visually pleasing, reminiscent of a contrived pleasure-ground of sparse groups of shady trees in an undulating grassed plain. Such estates were used for hunting and sport-shooting as well as agriculture.

In making a comparison with country estates in England, the explorer implied that the land was provided for British use. As mentioned in Chapter Four, in many instances Nature/God/Providence had provided land that did not need to be improved and simply awaited settlement. For example Sturt observed:

> It would have been impossible for the most tasteful individual to have laid out pleasure ground to more advantage, than Nature had done in planting and disposing of various groups of trees along the spine, and upon the sides of the elevations that confined the river, and bounded the low ground that intervened between it and their base.[29]

Oxley likened the soft, undulating tranquil landscape he discovered to the country estates of the British elite. He noted on August 15:

> From several of the hills over which our route led us, we had the most extensive and beautiful prospects; from thirty to forty miles round, from the north to south, the country was broken in irregular low hills thinly studded with small timber, and covered with grass: the whole landscape within the compass of our view was clear and open, resembling diversified pleasure grounds irregularly laid out and planted.[30]

He not only linked the park-like scenery to its productive potential through analogy to the gentleman's country estate but also through his observations of its support of Aboriginal populations. He considered that the prevalence of Aboriginal fires in the area denoted "we were in country which afforded [Aborigines] ample means of subsistence; far different from the low deserts and morasses to the south-west".[31]

In *The Cartographic Eye*, Simon Ryan suggests that class connection to land and its appropriation are perpetuated through explorers likening landscape scenery in Australia to the gentleman's park, a symbol of the British establishment and aesthetic taste.[32] His analysis of the explorers' descriptions of park-like landscape is provocative, contending

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[28] Sturt, *Narrative of an Expedition*, Vol.1, pp.94-95.
[29] Sturt, *Two Expeditions*, Vol 2, p.152.
[30] Oxley, *Journal of Two Expeditions*, p. 30.
[31] *Ibid*.
[32] Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye*, pp.72-73.

that the explorer's understanding of the picturesque aesthetic meant that park-like landscapes were connected to wealth and privilege. Thus Ryan suggests that explorers considered such landscapes in Australia were provided for the development of civilised society, as Indigenous people living in savagery would have been unable to create such a landscape.[33] This assumption played a "large role in the journals' construction of the 'park-like' lands which they described as the products of accident, or as areas divinely intended for colonial settlement."[34] He asserts that descriptions of "park-like" landscapes reinforced imperial authority to appropriate the land and revealed a "fundamentally intentionalist stance, which project[ed] English class privilege onto the Australian landscape".[35] His analysis demonstrates the strong connection between the picturesque aesthetic and the economic value of the land explorers described. However in his concern for deconstructing the texts to support his thesis, Ryan is preoccupied with intent on the part of the explorer and tends to undervalue the aesthetic sensibility of the explorer as a man of taste whose descriptions were the automatic response to scenery and, although imperialist in tenor, were much less intentionalist.

While the illustrations that accompanied the explorers' texts combined the picturesque with the productive, the figures adorning the illustrations evoked the bucolic charm of the landscape. These figures were an important feature of conforming the illustrations to picturesque composition. Gilpin suggested that while industrious figures were more pleasing in a sketch of a scene where the moral message was significant, idle figures were suited to the picturesque as they added dignity to the scene without intruding on its naturalism.[36] He stated that sketchy figures might be used sparingly in drawing picturesque landscape:

> to mark a road – to break a piece of foreground –to point out the horizon in a sea-view – or to carry off the distance of retiring water by the contrast of a dark sail, not quite so distant, placed before it.[37]

Indeed in Gilpin's picturesque aesthetic, figures were meant "merely as the ornament of scenes". He continued:

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[33] Ryan overlooks the fact that some explorers recognised that Aborigines in their fire-stick farming were responsible for the park-like quality of the landscape. See Chapter 4.
[34] Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye*, p.73.
[35] *Ibid*., pp.73-74.
[36] Gilpin cited in C. Hussey, *The Picturesque*, p.118.
[37] Gilpin, *Three Essays*, p.77.

> In the human figure we contemplate neither exactness of form; nor expression, any farther than it is shewn in action: we merely consider general shapes, dresses, groups, and occupations; which we often find casually in greater variety, and beauty, than any selection can procure.[38]

In Stokes's account, figures not only break up the foreground but also animate the landscape and accentuate the vastness of the *Plains of Promise* depicted. The inactive shepherd-like figures in the centre of the illustration surveyed the extent of the plains as if heralding the approach of civilisation. (Illustrations 16 and 17)[39] In Sturt's *The View from Stanley Range* the figure in the middle distance appeared to be surveying the landscape through a telescope. This figure and the smaller one walking up the slope heightened the extensive nature of the surrounding landscape and conveyed the infinite potential of the undulating and open plains.[40](Illustration 18)

Gilpin approached the use of animals in picturesque composition in a similar manner. Again they are not meant to be detailed or to be the focus of attention but were introduced to add to the deficiencies of an apparent idealised landscape.[41] The inclusion of herd animals in the illustrations in explorers' published accounts reinforced the imperial rhetoric of pastoral settlement.[42] (Illustrations 19 & 20) Mitchell's illustration of the River Darling in his *Three Expeditions* is worthy of more discussion.(Illustration 21) The scene he composed demonstrated and reinforced the imperial mission. In the foreground expedition members tend grazing flocks of sheep and cattle while in the background on the far side of the river Aborigines appear engaged in a corroboree. Implicit in the illustration was the prediction of advancing civilisation in the form of pastoralism subduing a romantic landscape that was wild and uncivilised.

Romanticism

While conventions of the picturesque provided a formula for envisioning a landscape, the romanticism of the texts evoked an emotive response. Romanticism, blended with

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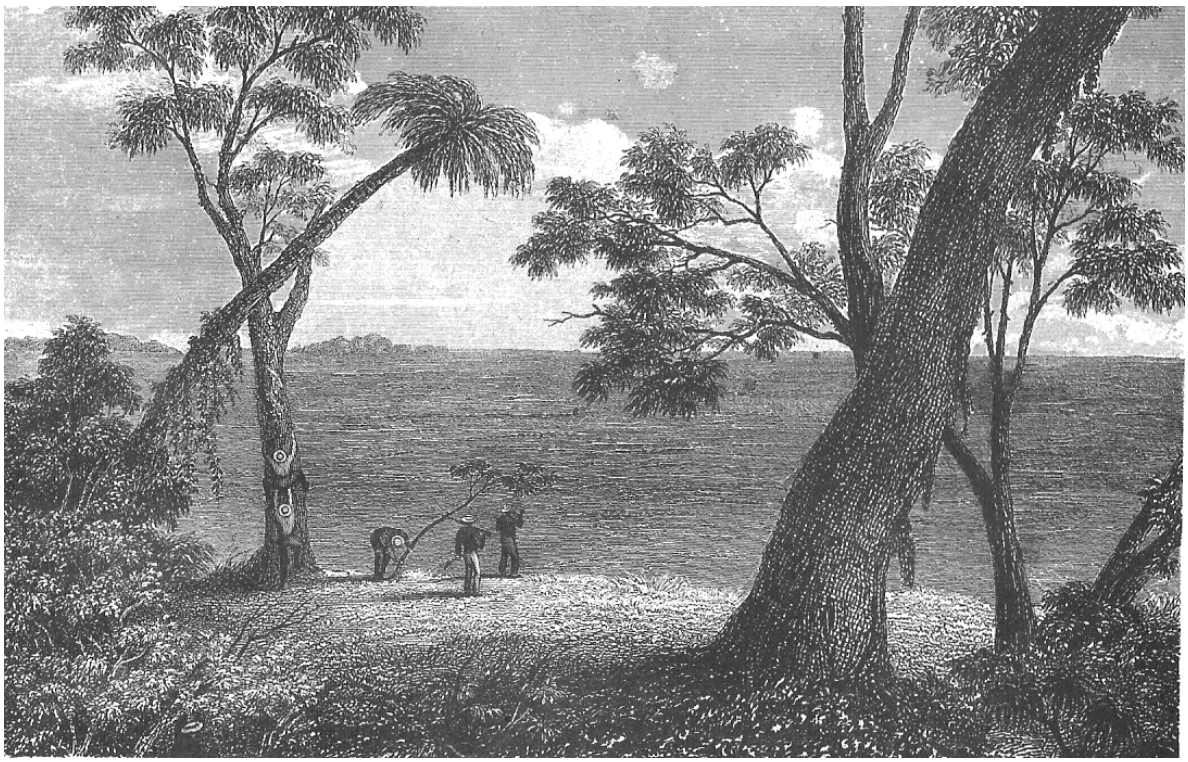
[38] *Ibid*., pp.44-45.
[39] Progress and the environment has been covered in detail in Chapter 4. Hussey, *The Picturesque,* pp.117-119. Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, p.25.
[40] Sturt, *Narrative of an Expedition*, Vol.2, facing title page
[41] Gilpin, *Three Essays*, p.45.
[42] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.1, The River Darling, facing p.297. *Ibid*., Vol.2, The Yarrayne, facing p.160. Grey, *Journal of Two Expeditions*, Vol.2, Crossing cattle over the Murray River, near Lake Alexandria, facing p.186.

Illustration 16



First View of the Plains of Promise Albert River

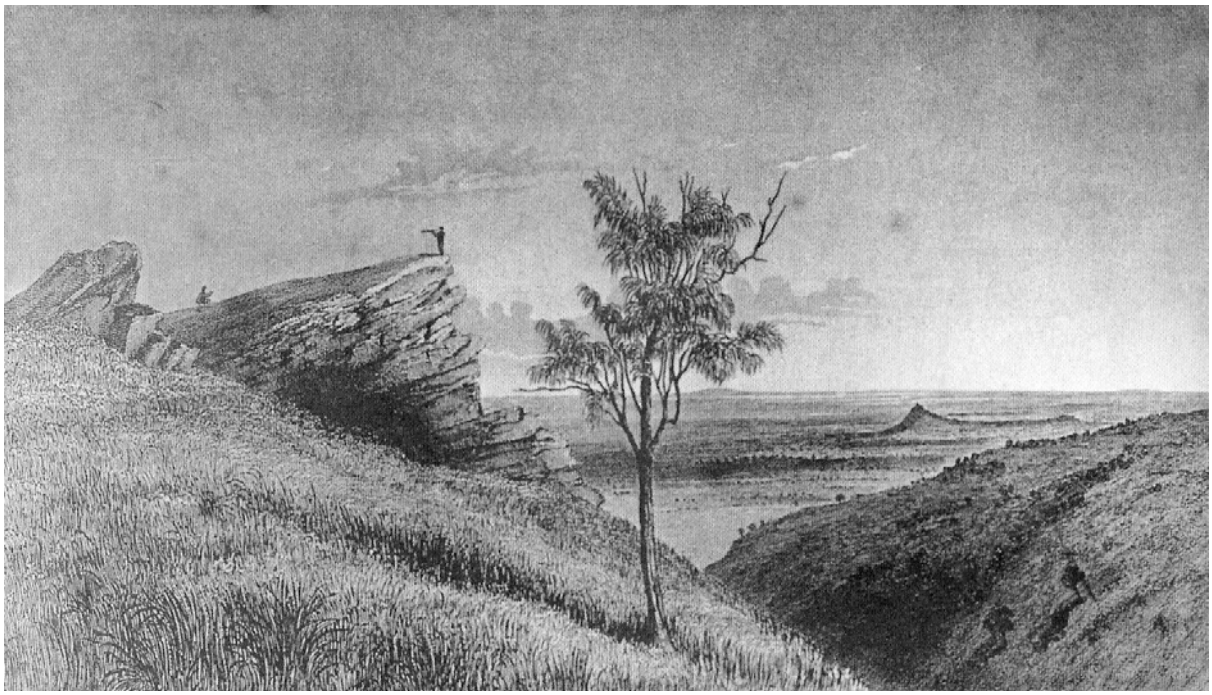
Source: J. Lort Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia*, Vol.II, London, 1846, facing p.316.

Illustration 17

Last View of the Plains of Promise Albert River

Source: J. Lort Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia*, Vol.II, London, 1846, facing p.317

llustration 18



View from Stanley Range

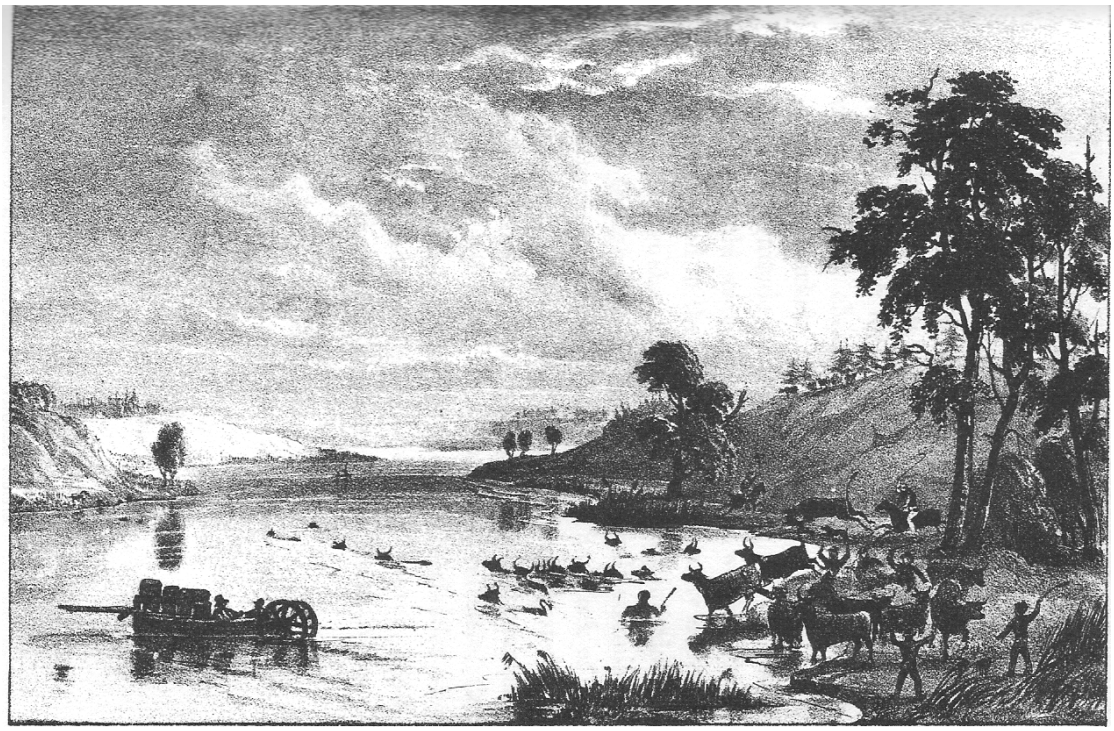
Source: Sturt, *Narrative of Expeditions into Central Australia,* Vol.II, London, 1849, facing title page.

Illustration 19

The Yarrayne

Source: T.L. Mitchell, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia*, Vol.II, London, 1839, facing p.160.

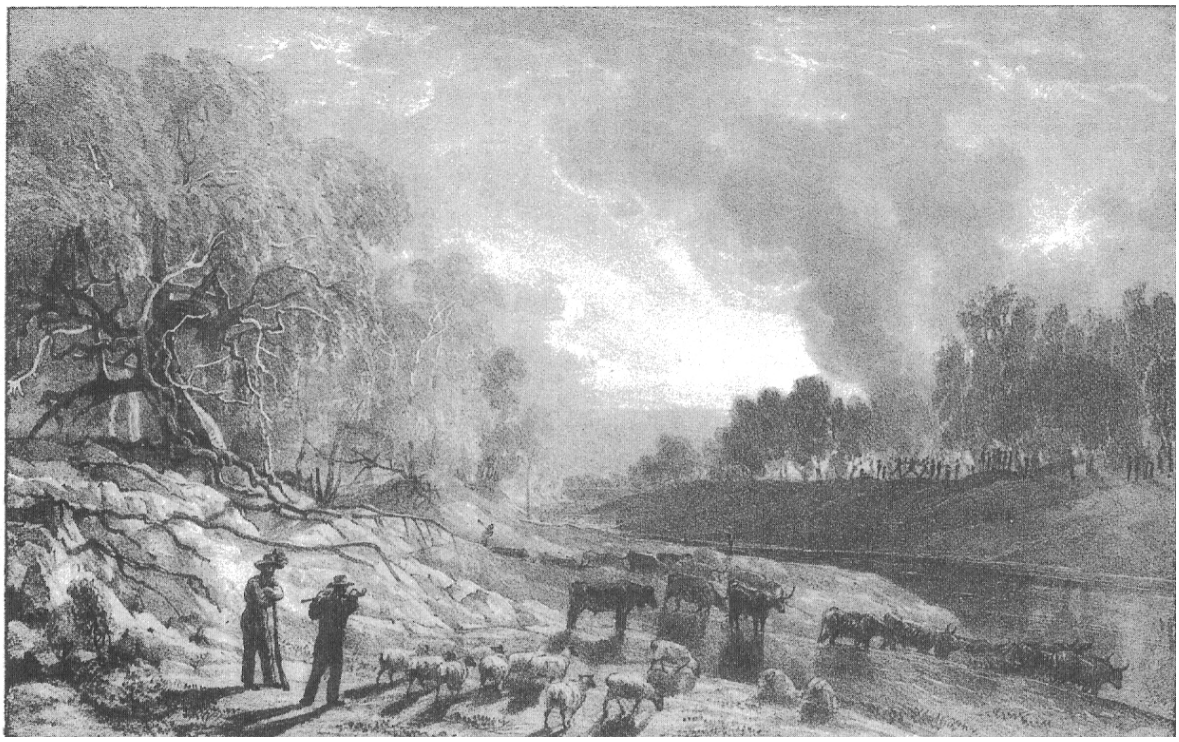
Illustration 20



Crossing Cattle over the Murray Near Lake Alexandrina

Source: George Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery*, Vol.II, London, 1841, facing p.186.

Illustration 21



The River Darling

Source: T.L. Mitchell,*Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia,* Vol.I, London, 1839, facing p.297.

concern for the picturesque, was evident in Grey's description of the country around Gantheaume Bay. He wrote:

> On reaching the valley I have before-mentioned we found a small stream, and following this to the northward for about a mile, came out upon one of the most romantic and picturesque-looking estuaries I had yet seen: its shores abounded with springs, and were bordered by native paths, whilst the drooping foliage of several large sorts of Casuarina, the number of wild swans on its placid bosom, and the natives fishing in the distance, unconscious of our presence, imparted to the whole scene a quiet and a charm which was deeply felt by those who had now for so many days been either tossed about by the winds and waves, or had long been wandering over barren and inhospitable shores. We did not, indeed, find much good land about this estuary, but there were rich flats upon each side of it, whilst the nature of the rocks, and the lofty and peculiar character of the distant hills, gave promise of the most fertile region I had yet seen in extra-tropical Australia.[43]

Grey composed the scene according to picturesque composition, in the process emphasising the calming effect of the scene on the party after an arduous journey at sea and through difficult country, at the same time anticipating the future journey with optimism.

David Arnold suggests a connection between romanticism, the appreciation of nature in one's country, and the development of national identity. He links the growth of romanticism in England to a "growing sense of pride in this 'green and pleasant land'".[44] Romanticism had developed as a reaction to the Industrial Revolution and the political upheaval in Europe in the late eighteenth century. This effect was particularly noticeable in the celebration of nature and delight in rural life. Associated with the idealisation of nature was often a pensive melancholy that evoked awareness that the landscape was being transformed. Writers such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge cultivated a fervent appreciation of English scenery and rural life that demonstrated an emotional and philosophical attachment to England.[45]

However romanticism was not confined to the British setting; travel writers took it into the imperial context where it became incorporated into commentary on imperial destiny. Explorers observed romantic tradition to idealise the Australian landscape, emphasising its ancient and untouched qualities and implying Australia was a land provided for

[43] Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions*, Vol.2, pp.3-4.
[44] Arnold, *The Problem of Nature*, p.137.
[45] *Ibid.*

British settlement. Their published accounts established an emotional connection to a strange land that enveloped it in a known aesthetic framework that made it familiar and appreciated. Thus the landscape was brought into the imperial imaginings of the explorers' readership.

In their journeys explorers travel backward temporally and figuratively from civilisation to savagery. Their expeditions begin at a site of civil society such as a vice-regal function, an established and prosperous farm or commercial centre. From this point the journey assumed epic proportions as the explorer travelled away from civilisation into the interior of Australia in the search for untouched land suitable for the development of civil society.[46] Eyre, Mitchell and Sturt reveal this motif in their published accounts. The motif of the backwards journey contributed to the romanticism in their accounts as it accentuated the veracity of the explorer's discovery of a seemingly untouched land in Australia. The image of a pristine landscape reinforced the imperial rhetoric that Australia was a primordial land awaiting development. In establishing the notion of a pristine Australia explorers emphasised the wild disorder of the environment. For example Grey described a ravine near their landing at Hanover Bay:

> The romantic scenery of this narrow glen could not be surpassed. Its width, at bottom, was not more than forty or fifty feet, on each side rose cliffs of sandstone, between three and four hundred feet high, and nearly perpendicular; lofty paper-bark trees grew here and there, and down the middle ran a beautiful stream of clear, cool water, which now gushed along, a murmuring mountain torrent, and anon formed a series of small cascades. As we ascended high the width contracted; the paper-bark trees disappeared; and the bottom of the valley became thickly wooded with wild nutmeg and other fragrant trees. Cockatoos soared, with hoarse screams, above us, many-coloured parakeets darted away, filling the woods with their playful cries, and the large white pigeons, which feed on the wild nutmegs, cooed loudly to their mates, and battered the boughs with their wings as they flew away.[47]

The setting was exotic. Grey used images of abundance, disorder and sublimity to create a primordial setting. Towering cliffs, grand trees and foaming water created the wild, primitive nature of the ravine. Luxuriant vegetation and the cries of birds contributed to the wildness of the scene. Through such a description the reader could wonder at the primordial condition of Australia. Mitchell also romantically described some settings. From Mount Greenock he considered the eastward vista:

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[46] See Chapter 2 for more detail on the backward journey. Also Dixon, *The Course of Empire*.
[47] Grey, *Journal of Two Expeditions*, Vol.1, pp.93-94.

> The surface presented the forms of pristine beauty, clothed in the hues of spring; and the shining verdure of these smooth and symmetrical hills, was relieved by the darker hues of the wood with which they were interlaced; which exhibited every variety of tint, from a dark brown in the foreground, to a light blue in extreme distance. ... In travelling through this Eden, no road was necessary, nor any ingenuity in conducting wheel carriages, wherever we chose.[48]

Mitchell combined romanticism with picturesque composition, defining the boundaries of the view and its contrasting tones as well as conjuring up notions of the pristine nature of the landscape. His explicit use of an analogy to the biblical Garden of Eden inspired appreciation and delight in a bountiful region. This together with its fertility and the ease of access through the area anticipated British settlement. Similarly in Sturt's published account of his expedition into Southern Australia favourable climate and the untouched and fertile nature of romantic scenery implied its suitability for British settlement.[49]

Mitchell in particular resorted to romantic writing often incorporating the picturesque. Inspired by the landforms of Central Queensland to recall the paintings of Salvator Rosa, Mitchell wrote:

> Travelling along the bank of this stream, we found it flowing, and full of sparkling water to the margin. The reeds had disappeared, and we could only account for the supply of such a current, in such a country, at such a season, by the support of many springs. We made sure of water now for the rest of our journey; and that we might say of the "Labitur et latetur in imne volubilis aevum". The hills overhanging it surpassed any I had ever seen in picturesque outline. Some remembered gothic cathedrals in ruins; others forts; other masses were perforated, and being mixed and contrasted with the flowing outlines of evergreen woods, and having a fine stream in the foreground, gave a charming appearance to the whole country. It was a discovery worthy of the toils of pilgrimage. Those beautiful recesses of unpeopled earth, could no longer remain unknown. The better to mark them out on my map, I gave to the valley the name of Salvator Rosa. The rocks stood out sharply, and sublimely, from the thick woods, just as John Martin's fertile imagination would dash them out in his beautiful sepia landscapes. I never saw anything in nature come so near these creations of genius and imagination.[50]

Here was a fertile landscape that Mitchell considered pristine and ready for settlement. In this passage he romantically captured the wildness of the setting and its picturesque character.

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[48] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.2, p.276.
[49] Sturt, *Two Expeditions*, Vol.2, pp.21-22.
[50] Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition*, pp.224-225.

In particular the imagery of ruins was important in evoking emotion. Such an analogy appealed to the memory of the reader who recalled to mind the grandeur of the past and who associated the untouched landscape described with its future potential. Some ruin imagery was associated with a political message that suggested power; that the landscape could be liberated from its savage state and contribute to the development of civil society. For instance, Mitchell described a rocky pinnacle by analogy to a defensive tower. He observed:

> at the gorge of this valley, there stood a sort of watch-tower, as if to guard the entrance, so like a work of art, that even here, where men and kangaroos are equally wild and artless, I was obliged to look very attentively, to be quite convinced that the tower was the work of nature only. A turret with a pointed roof, of a colour corresponding, first appeared through the trees, as if it had been built on the summit of a round hill. On a nearer approach the fine tints of the yellowish grey rocks, and the small pines climbing the sides of the hill abruptly rising out of a forest of common trees, presented still a very remarkable object. I named this valley 'Glen Turret,' and this feature "Tower Almond", after the ancient castle, the scene of many early associations, and now quite as uninhabited as this.[51]

The sublimity of rocky landscapes conjured up an image of the majesty of the scene that aroused associated thoughts of ruined fortifications and implied command over the landscape in the future.[52](Illustration 22) Stokes also used the analogy of ruins to describe the rocky appearance of Cape Upstart:

> In the afternoon we left the anchorage we had been the first to occupy, and standing out of the bay, were much struck by the rugged outline Cape Upstart presents. The huge bounders scattered over the crest of the hills, give it the appearance of a vast mass of ruins, the clear atmosphere bringing it out in bold relief against the sky.[53]

Such scenes aroused feelings of awe and wonder which recalled an ancient past and prompted associated thoughts of power and grandeur.[54] This was a landscape with infinite potential for the empire.

Views of mountain scenery aroused some of the romantic sentiment espoused in the published accounts and enabled the explorer to predict the bountiful appearance of the landscape for British settlement. Julia Horne has traced the history of the aesthetic

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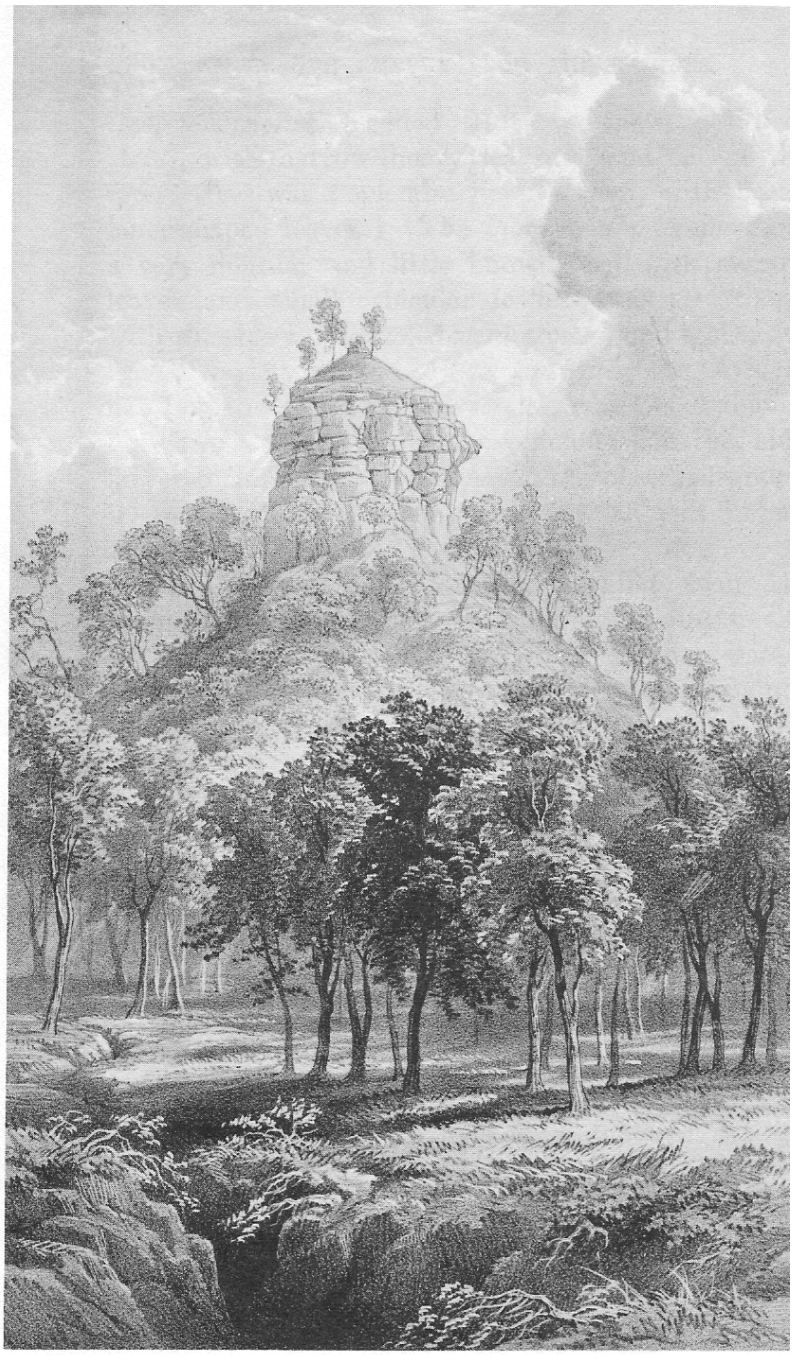
[51] *Ibid*., p.237 with illustration facing page.
[52] Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, p.45.
[53] Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia*, p.337.
[54] Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, pp.45-50.

Illustration 22



Tower Almond

Source: T.L. Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition*, London, 1848, facing page 237.

appreciation of mountain scenery from its beginnings in the eighteenth century through to John Ruskin in the nineteenth century. She maintains that "mountains were thought to extend the sensibilities and develop character…to enlarge and ennoble the human spirit".[55] The sublimity of mountain landscapes featured prominently in exploration literature as illustrations as well as textual descriptions.

In their descriptions of mountains explorers often referred to the emotional response they aroused. They were sublime as "rocky precipices" or "sharp inaccessible pinnacles" with beauty in their subtle colours, a "deep blue colour", and "blue distant ranges"[56] Their sublime qualities provided the weary explorer with fortitude after extended periods travelling through monotonous terrain. A new hope and determination was reflected in the attitude of the members of Leichhardt's expedition by the sudden appearance of mountains in an otherwise monotonous landscape:

> We had travelled so much in a monotonous forest land, with only now and then a glimpse of distant ranges through the occasional clearings in the dismal scrub, that any change was cheering. Here an entirely open country – covered with grass, and apparently unbounded to the westward; now ascending, first, in fine ranges, and forming a succession of almost isolated, gigantic, conical, and domed-topped mountains, which seemed to rest with a flat unbroken base on the plain below – was spread before our delighted eyes. The sudden alteration of the scene, therefore, inspired us with feelings that I cannot attempt to describe…[57]

However, sublime scenery not only inspired explorers to continue their journeys but also drove them into depression. Eyre considered "some imposing scenery, consisting of cliffs from six to eight hundred feet in height, rising perpendicularly from their bases, below which were recesses, into which the sun never shone," held a "gloomy grandeur" that stimulated melancholy which coincided with their feelings of desolation in a barren landscape.[58]

Nonetheless descriptions of mountain scenery produced some of the most visionary passages in explorers' accounts. From mountain summits, explorers could allow their imaginations to contemplate the future of the landscape. Stokes visualised the future

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[55] Julia Horne, "Travelling Through the Romantic Landscapes of the Blue Mountains", *Australian Cultural History*, No.10, 1991, pp.86.
[56] Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition*, p.220. Jukes, *Narrative of the Surveying*, pp.90-91. Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition*, p.207. Leichhardt, *Journal of an Overland Expedition*, p.241.
[57] Leichhardt, *Journal of an Overland Expedition*, p.123.
[58] Eyre, *Journals of Expeditions*, Vol.1, p.123.

potential of the "plains of promise" that burst upon him when he gained an elevated position.[59] Here he saw a pristine landscape, a fact highlighted by the stillness and tranquillity of the setting – a "new and untrodden country".[60] From this he anticipated British settlement of the landscape.[61] Stokes perceived himself the first human to view such a landscape, giving him the visionary capability to predict its future.[62]

Of course, mountains also served a practical purpose by providing a site for surveying and plotting a course. Leichhardt highlighted their importance as a means of plotting a course through the landscape to be traversed while Mitchell systematically used mountains to survey and to check the accuracy of his map.[63] From Mt Owen, Mitchell gained an "extensive view" to the eastward and south-east which allowed him to "intersect many of the summits observed therefrom; thus adding extensively to the general map, and checking my longitude, by back angles into the interior."[64]

Romanticism and Aborigines

In the romantic perception of the Australian landscape, Australia was untouched and ancient. Aborigines were incorporated into the romantic appreciation of landscape as an integral part of the natural environment of prehistoric Australia. Rod Macneil suggests that by placing Aborigines within a wild and uncultivated setting outside of settlement "the landscape becomes 'decultured' – a purely natural environment of flora and fauna, erased of an indigenous population and thus readily available for colonisation."[65] Aboriginality was synonymous with the natural environment and the romantic depictions of their manners and customs only served to heighten and reinforce opinions about Australia's antiquity. Explorers demonstrated an aesthetic appreciation of Aborigines as noble savages living in a state of savagery: they were passive and child-like, wise and dignified or wild and excited. Their romantic descriptions were sentimental and intensified feeling about the landscape although scientific and rational observations were also present in their accounts. Aborigines were idealised as noble savages with parallels in their behaviour to an ancient past. They were living in

[59] Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia*, Vol.2, p.316.
[60] *Ibid*.
[61] *Ibid*., p.319.
[62] See previous chapter for more detailed discussion of Stokes' vision of the landscape.
[63] Leichhardt, *Journal of an Overland Expedition*, p.186. Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition*, p.202.
[64] Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition*, p.202.
[65] Rod Macneil, "Time after time: temporal frontiers and boundaries in colonial images of the Australian landscape", in Lynette Russell (ed.), *Colonial Frontiers – Indigenous-European encounters in settler societies*, Manchester, 2001, p.49.

harmony with their environment, free and unconstrained by civil society. Aborigines were invariably exotic, mysterious or untouched; depictions which supported the idea of the landscape as primordial. The rhetorical image of Aborigines as part of the natural environment, ancient and uncultivated, justified and foreshadowed British settlement.

The eulogising of Aborigines as noble savages living in a state of nature contributed to the image of Australia as a wilderness. The quality of life of Aborigines was sometimes considered superior to that of individuals living in civilised society. Aborigines were unaffected and lived a simpler and therefore happier existence. Their life was idyllic, their wants and needs few and adequately provided by their environment. During the course of his expedition to explore the river Darling, Mitchell described Aborigines in their natural setting:

> The evening was beautiful; the new grass springing in places where it had been burnt, presented a shining verdure in the rays of the descending sun; the songs of the birds accorded here with other joyous sounds, the very air seemed alive with the music of animated nature, so different was the scene in this well-watered valley, from that of the parched and silent region from which we had just descended. The natives, whom we met here, were fine looking men, enjoying contentment and happiness, within the precincts of their native woods. Their enjoyment seemed derived so directly from nature, that it almost excited a feeling of regret, that civilised men, enervated by luxury and all its concomitant diseases, should ever disturb the haunts of these rude but happy beings.[66]

Mitchell not only celebrated an idealised nature but also extended the image to include Aborigines. While appreciating them as noble savages untouched by civilisation, he predicted the certainty of British settlement. He continued the description of the encounter, romantically composing the scene in the moonlight with the haunting sound of the flute in the background. As if pre-empting the future he ended his description of the scene with: "The cattle were refreshing in green pastures."[67] Furthermore Mitchell's illustrations of Aborigines often completed their romantic image as noble savages. His illustration of Talambe, a young Aborigine of the Bogan River depicted a scarified young man, his head adorned with leaves and his body draped with cloth over one shoulder reclining in an idealised setting.(Illustration 23)

To accentuate the idea that Aborigines were an integral part of the natural landscape, they were described as materialising out of the surrounding bush. Leichhardt likened

[66] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.1, pp.170-171.
[67] *Ibid*., p.171.

Illustration 23

Talambe

Source: T.L. Mitchell, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia*, Vol.I, London, 1839, facing p.318.

one Aborigine he met to a Greek god who "stepped out of the forest with the ease and grace of an Apollo".[68] Likewise Mitchell, while noting in a footnote the similarity of the ceremony to the ancient Greek gesture of supplication, described the emergence of the Aboriginal chief and young Aboriginal boy from the forest. Although impatient to gain information on the whereabouts of Cunningham from Bogan River Aborigines, Mitchell imaginatively related their appearance:

> I expected to see their chief; at all events, from these silent woods something was to emerge, in which my guides were evidently much interested, as they kept me waiting nearly an hour for
>
> "Th' unseen genius of the wood."
>
> At length a man of mild but pensive countenance, athletic form, and apparently about fifty years of age, came forth, leading a very fine boy, so dressed with green boughs, that only his head and legs remained uncovered; a few emu-feathers being mixed with the wild locks of his hair. I received him in this appropriate costume as a personification of the green bough, or emblem of peace.[69]

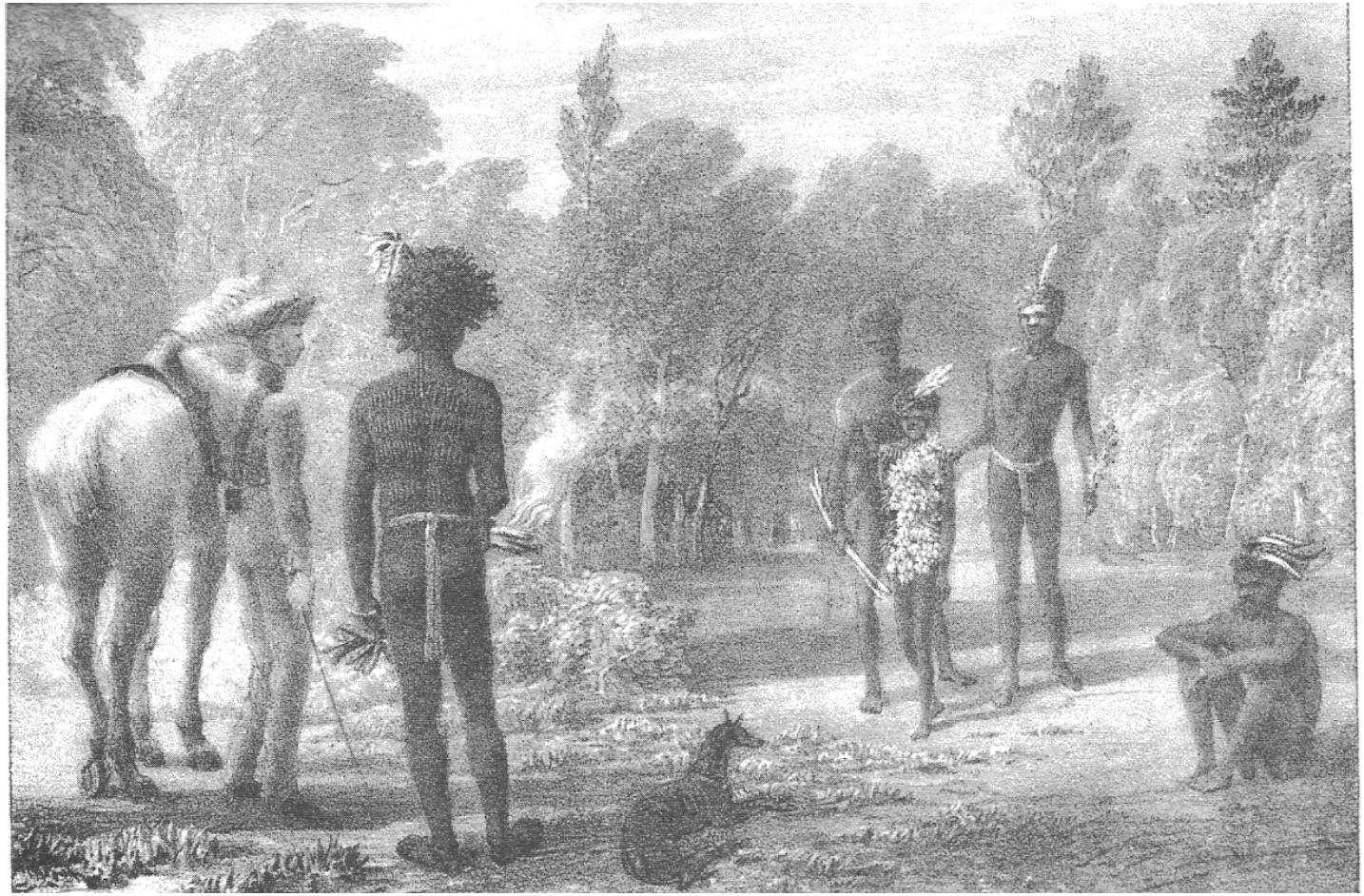
(Illustration 24) The use of the ancient Greek analogy, along with the apparent sagacity and calmness of the older Aborigine, elevated the noble savage image and extended the romanticism of the scene. The parallel produced considerations about the progress of all civilisations. Through this understanding comparisons could be drawn with British civilisation, which emphasised its progressive nature and reinforced the further success of imperial progress.

The actions of Aborigines in their natural surroundings recalled to Mitchell a romantic Scotland of pagan rituals and ancient druids. Quoting from Sir Walter Scott's *The Lady of the Lake* Mitchell paralleled the wildness of the Australian setting to that of the Scottish highlands. With a taste for the mysterious and irrational, he described the Aborigine's behaviour:

> It was obvious the ceremony belonged to some strange superstition. He occasionally turned his back towards each of us, like "the grisly priest with murmuring payer;" he touched his eye-brows, nose, and breast, as if crossing himself, then pointed his arm to the sky; afterwards laid his hand on his breast, chaunting with an air of remarkable solemnity, and abstracted looks, while at times his branch
>
> "he held on high,
> With wasted hand and haggard eye,
> And strange and mingled feelings worke,

[68] Leichhardt, *Journal of an Overland Expedition*, p.502.
[69] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.1, pp.193-194.

Illustration 24



First meeting with the chief of the Bogan tribe

Source: T.L. Mitchell, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia*, Vol.I, London, 1839, facing p.194.

While his anathema he spoke."[70]

Demonstrating his appreciation of his own national origins and native folklore Mitchell used the parallel of the priest in Scott's poem to sentimentalise the Aborigine he met and incorporate him into the wild and ancient landscape.

Stokes also evoked an emotive response to an Aboriginal grave-site in the Gulf country that aroused thoughts of classical times and ancient cultures.[71] He described the scenery surrounding the site in picturesque fashion evoking associations with Greek myths:

> The eastern bank had become steep, overhanging, and clothed with a mass of luxuriant creepers ; whilst on the opposite side was a low woody patch, partly immersed by the lake-like glassy water of the river, into whch (sic) one slender tree dipped its feathery crest, appearing like another Narcissus, to admire its own beauty in the stream. In front, the eye could penetrate far down the reach hemmed in as it was by trees that clustered thick on the water's brink. To the right was what might be called an open glade in the midst of it rose a tree the branches of which were laden with a most singular looking bundle or roll of pieces of wood.[72]

Continuing in a romantic style he evoked the atmosphere of loneliness the scene aroused:

> There was an air of loneliness in the spot, perfectly in keeping with the feelings this strange discovery naturally called forth; and from the few recent signs of the natives, it would appear that here, as in other parts of the continent, spots where the dead lie are kept sacred. Some dark brown and black hawks perched on the trees near, looking like so many mutes stationed to shew respect to the departed; but their intentions were of a different character, as they were waiting, I imagine, for some friendly gust of wind to shake off the covering of the deceased.[73]

He then returned to a more empirical mode to comment on the distribution of this practice throughout colonial Australia. Finally he indulged in ethnological speculation by noting its similarity to the burial customs of noble savages such as the ancient Scythians.[74] Completing the romanticism of the scene, Stokes' published account of the voyage included a picturesque illustration. (Illustration 25).

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[70] *Ibid*., Vol.1, pp.249-250.
[71] Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*, pp.7-72; Hussey, *The Picturesque*, p.69.
[72] Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia*, Vol.2, p.295.
[73] *Ibid*., p.295.
[74] *Ibid*., p.297.

Similarly Mitchell sketched and described an Aboriginal burial ground. His romantic

Illustration 25

Burial Reach Flinders River

Source: J. Lort Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia*, Vol.II, London, 1846, facing p. 295.

description and accompanying illustration highlighted the eerie atmosphere and exoticism of the scene:

> The burying-ground was a fairy-like spot, in the midst of a scrub of drooping acacias. It was extensive, and laid out in walks, which were narrow and smooth, as if intended only for "sprites;" and they meandered in gracefully curved lines, among the heaps of reddish earth, which contrasted finely with the acacias and dark casuarinae around. Others gilt with moss shot far into the recesses of the bush, where slight traces of still more ancient graves, proved the antiquity of these simple but touching records of humanity. With all our art, we could do no more for the dead, than these poor savages had done.[75]

The illustration supported his description and confirmed the primeval nature of the Australian landscape complete with noble savages in the foreground.(Illustration 26)

Conclusion

Throughout the published accounts of exploration tensions exist between the explorer's aesthetic sense and the reality of his journey. Mitchell best enunciated this conflict in the following description of a scene near Rodrigo Ponds:

> While I stood near this spot, awaiting the arrival of the party, which was still at some distance, I overheard a female singing. The notes were pleasing, and very different from the monotonous strains of the natives in general. Just then, I had been admiring the calm repose of the surrounding landscape, gilded by the beams of a splendid setting sun, and anticipating a quiet night for the party. The soft sounds, so expressive of tranquillity and peace, were in perfect unison with the scene around. Nothing could have been more romantic, nevertheless I could most willingly have dispensed with the accompaniment at that time, so associated were all our ideas of the natives, with murder and pillage.[76]

Mitchell conveyed the picturesque and romantic qualities of the park-like setting but he could not forget past encounters with more hostile Aborigines and the need for vigilance against sudden attack from them. While at times the explorer merged the picturesque with a more pragmatic and scientific understanding of the landscape, at other times he idealised Australian landscape, as one that did not need the usual improvement associated with picturesque composition. At still others his use of romanticism established emotional connection to an ancient and untouched land. Through a well-developed aesthetic sensibility, the explorer described Australia and incorporated it into the imperial vision.

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[75] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.1, p.321.
[76] *Ibid*., p.117.

Illustration 26

Burying Ground of Milmeridien

Source: T.L. Mitchell, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia*, Vol.I, London, 1839, facing p.321.

Chapter Six
The ardour of geographical research: Imperial science and the landscape

> From Mount Macedon I reconnoitred Port Phillip at the distance of sixty miles. In this region the party crossed ranges of granite, others of trap rock, the woods forming open forests which only partially covered the country. This, even in its present state, seems nearly all available for the purposes of agriculture and grazing; and being almost without any aboriginal inhabitants, it is consequently in the best state for the reception of British emigrants. [1]
>
> T.L. Mitchell, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 1837.

The epigraph above demonstrates how science worked to support the imperial mission. Mitchell described the geological nature of the area and from this suggested the suitability of the land for European settlement and pastoral and agricultural use. Such optimism based upon science encouraged the development of Australia. Through scientific investigation and collection in Australia by explorers like Mitchell, imperial science claimed Australia as an integral part of the Empire. The discovery of the east coast of Australia in the eighteenth century expanded scientific knowledge of the known world and placed the Australian environment under the gaze of imperial science. By the early nineteenth century explorers and naturalists were regularly sending information and specimens back to Britain for further analysis. Findings were published in books and as articles in journals. Through imperial science the Australian environment was claimed for the empire. Its geography, geology, botany and Indigenous people were systematically described, classified and placed within scientific nomenclature. Australia became part of the imperial scientific framework. While explorers' discoveries were valuable to the expansion of scientific knowledge, the information gained in the areas of geography, geology, botany and ethnography also had implications for the prestige and economic future of the Empire. Imperial science acted as an agent for the dispersion of imperial rhetoric that encouraged and justified immigration, strategic settlement and resource development.

This chapter explores the role of imperial science in directing the course of the explorer's journey and in the systematic approach taken by them. In particular the chapter examines the influence of scientific societies in this process and how they broadcast the imperial view through their publications and lectures.

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[1] T.L. Mitchell, "Account of the Recent Exploring Expedition to the Interior of Australia", *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, Vol.7, 1837, p.277. http://www.jstor.org/

Explorers set out with a particular purpose in mind - to answer questions about the unknown and to expand knowledge of the geography and natural history of the land. The information obtained was used to further the course of empire. In the early nineteenth century much of inland Australia was still unknown in terms of its geography, botany and geology. As Allan Cunningham pondered in 1832 in the second volume of the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*:

> Amidst the ardour with which geographical research has been patronized and prosecuted in almost every other portion of the globe, it is a subject of surprise and regret that so little anxiety should have been shown by geographers, and even by men of science in general, to increase our knowledge of the interior of the Australian continent.[2]

He linked the acquisition of geographic knowledge to the imperial enterprise. Further exploration in Australia held the potential to reveal land suitable for new colonial settlements. He noted in particular that Australia's

> eastern and western shores, … are daily exciting more and more interest in this country; and, should the tide of emigration continue to flow, as it has done for some years past, new land must be thrown open to meet the wants of the settlers.[3]

Cunningham's paper revealed the centrality of exploration and the expansion of geographical knowledge to the course of settlement in Australia. He narrated the discoveries of earlier explorers, such as himself and John Oxley whose command of the systematic study of the land had opened up access to the interior and ongoing settlement. He described the Darling Downs as "an extensive tract of clear pastoral country", the lower sections of which presented

> flats, which furnish an almost inexhaustible range of cattle pasture at all seasons of the year – the grasses and herbage generally exhibiting, in the depth of winter, an extraordinary luxuriance of growth. From these central grounds, rise downs of a rich, black, and dry soil, and very ample surface; and as they furnish an abundance of grass, and are conveniently watered, yet perfectly beyond the reach of those floods, which take place on the flats in a season of rains, they constitute a valuable and sound sheep pasture.[4]

In the conclusion to his paper, Cunningham urged further expeditions to reveal

> the real features and character of Central Australia, - its animal and vegetable productions, - the extent to which a region so remote from the coasts is peopled,

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[2] Allan Cunningham, "Brief View of the Progress of Interior Discovery in New South Wales", *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, Vol.2, 1832, p.99. http://www.jstor.org/

[3] *Ibid*

[4] *Ibid.*, p.112.

> and that which would not be the least interesting in the inquiries of such exploring parties – its system of rivers.[5]

On this last question he proposed an expedition to the north-western coast of Australia to ascertain

> whether or not Australia, with a surface equal nearly to that of Europe, discharges on its coast, a river of sufficient magnitude to lead, by a long, uninterrupted course of navigation to its central regions; by which alone a knowledge of the capabilities of such distant parts of the interior may be acquired, and the produce of the soil be one day conveyed to its coast.[6]

In this passage Cunningham revealed the role of hypotheses in the process of geographical exploration. Explorers systematically described the environment in an accepted form, making comparisons with known geographic features in other parts of the world and then proceeding to make further assumptions about the still unknown parts. The American historical geographer J.L. Allen employs the concept of "geographic lore" to explain how assumptions and knowledge interacted in the process of exploration. Geographic lore ranged from the empirical, based on known geographic facts, to conjecture, to the imagined, a belief that the desired object of exploration actually did exist. Using the known as a model, rational extrapolations about the unknown were made. However while exploration expanded empirical geographic knowledge, myths contained in non-empirical geographic lore often remained. These myths were transferred to less known regions. In this way geographic lore was dynamic, constantly changing as the unknown became empirically known.[7]

Geographic lore impelled the search for the Great South Land in the eighteenth century.[8] As discoveries were made in the Pacific and Indian Oceans the area in which the Great Southern Continent could potentially be found diminished.[9] After the discovery and settlement of Australia geographic lore continued to motivate exploration. Empirical and non-empirical geographic lore supported the idea that a large navigable river existed in the interior which would allow easy communications

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[5] *Ibid.*, p.131.
[6] *Ibid.*, p.132.
[7] Allen, "Lands of Myth", pp.41-61.
[8] W. Eisler, *The Furthest Shore: Images of Terra Australis from the Middle Ages to Captain Cook*, Cambridge, 1995. W. Eisler & B Smith (eds), *Terra Australis: The Furthest Shore*, Sydney, c.1988. G. Williams, "New Holland – The English Approach" in John Hardy and Alan Frost (eds), *Studies from Terra Australis to Australia*, Canberra, 1989, pp.85-92. Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise*, 1984.
[9] Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise*, pp.1-6.

between the southern colonies and northern Australia and Asia.[10] The chief motive of King's hydrographic survey of the coastline in 1818-1822 was "to discover whether there be any river on that part of the coast likely to lead to an interior navigation into this great continent."[11] Much of the exploration of the interior of Australia in the early nineteenth century was motivated by the search for either an inland sea or a large navigable inland river. It was a commonly held belief that because the other continents of the world like Africa and America had such rivers, inland Australia would contain the same.[12] Indeed Mitchell set out in 1831-32 in search of such a river flowing to the north-west. His journey was based upon known geographic facts and a report from a runaway convict. Mitchell believed that a watershed existed in the north-west which separated the Kindur of Barber the convict and the Darling river which had been discovered by Sturt.[13] While Allan Cunningham challenged Mitchell's theory of a watershed that would be the origin of a great river leading to the north-west, the dynamism of geography as a science was apparent in his suggestion that further exploration of the northern interior should be undertaken to confirm his refutation.[14]

Associated with the discovery of a great river was the location of a fertile region suitable for settlement.[15] Stokes conducted a hydrographic survey of the coastline of northern Australia urged on by these beliefs. His survey included a search for any large rivers in the Gulf of Carpentaria region. Stokes imagined that a fertile region with large navigable rivers flowing into the Gulf was waiting to be discovered on the western side of the coastal ranges of north-east Australia.[16] Although widespread settlement did not eventuate in the Gulf country, systematic descriptions of land like that of Stokes which included soil types, vegetation and other resources possibly contributed to Australia's selection as a new home for British emigrants.

Implicit in Leichhardt's account to the Royal Geographical Society was the suitability of land on the Mitchell River for further settlement. He described:

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[10] Allen, "Lands of Myth", p.46. Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, New York, 1987, pp.56-57.
[11] King, *Narrative of a Survey*, p.xxvii.
[12] Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition*, p.3
[13] T.L. Mitchell, "Recent Information from Australia", *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, Vol.2, 1832, pp.318, 332. http://www.jstor.org/
[14] *Ibid*., pp.318, 333.
[15] Allen, "Lands of Myth", p.46. Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, pp.56-57.
[16] See previous chapter on progress for a description of the Plains of Promise as suitable for Christian settlement. Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia*, Vol.1, p.340.

> Plains, open forest land, lagoons full of fish, and covered with the broad leaves and showy blossoms of the nymphaea, gave a great variety to this fine country, well adapted for the breeding of cattle and particularly horses, though deficient in good timber.[17]

The expansion of geographic knowledge also had a strategic importance. Exploration of the coastline both by land and sea provided information about sites that might become harbours and port settlements that would facilitate easier communication between Australia, Asia and the rest of the Empire.[18] As well as external communication exploration increased communication between points of settlement within Australia and provided maps for settlers and others to follow. Leichhardt considered one of the most important results of his exploration was a route for later travellers to follow

> between the east coast of Australia and the east coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria, along a river with running water, through a fine country; that of the Nonda Country, and of the big plains at the east side and at the head of the Gulf; that of a communication between Limmen-bight and the South Alligator River, along running streams and creeks. The future will show how far the country along the big rivers between the head of the Gulf and the Limmen-bight is available.[19]

While information on the geography of new lands was published as explorers' journals, it was also of interest to scientific organisations like the Royal Geographical Society. Findings were read at meetings of members in London and later the papers were published in their journal where they met the demand, not only of members but a wider audience. The Royal Geographical Society was an influential body whose main object was the "promotion and diffusion of that most important and entertaining branch of knowledge GEOGRAPHY." Its support of the imperial agenda was obvious in its statement of objectives that geography was "of the first importance to mankind in general, and paramount to the welfare of a maritime nation like Great Britain, with its numerous and extensive foreign possessions."[20] Thus a cooperative and supportive relationship existed between the Society and the British government. The government passed on relevant information to the Society and the Society advised government in matters related to geographic exploration. It also sponsored and contributed to

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[17] Ludwig Leichardt[sic], "Account of Dr. Ludwig Leichardt's Expedition from Moreton Bay to Port Essington, Australia", *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol.16, 1846, p.223. http://www.jstor.org/

[18] This is covered in detail in the chapter on progress.

[19] Leichardt, "Account of Dr. Ludwig Leichardt's Expedition", p.238.

[20] "Prospectus of the Royal Geographical Society:" *Royal Geographical Society*, Vol.1, 1831, p.vii. http://www.jstor.org/

expeditions. For example George Grey's exploration of the north west of Australia was funded by the Royal Geographical Society:

> To gain information as to the real state of North-Western Australia, its resources, and the course and direction of its rivers and mountain ranges; to familiarize the natives with the British name and character; to search for and record all information regarding the natural productions of the country, and all details that might bear upon its capabilities for colonization or the reverse; and to collect specimens of its natural history.[21]

In addition to funding expeditions the Society also provided support in the form of equipment. Two new sextants were provided by the Society for Sturt's expedition into Central Australia. Even when the Society was not directly involved in the expedition, many explorers ultimately presented or had papers read at meetings of the Society and were rewarded for their efforts. Indeed Edward Eyre, Charles Sturt, Ludwig Leichhardt and Paul Strzelecki were awarded the Society's gold medal for their contribution to geography.[22] Such awards legitimated the explorers' discoveries and popularised their accounts. The Society was complicit in the imperial mission as they circulated imperial rhetoric based in science to a wider audience through libraries as well as newspapers and other journal publications.[23]

The economic imperative of geographical exploration was explicit in the Royal Geographical Society's instructions to geographers. Geography was not just concerned with describing the origins of landforms but was also important to imperial economic progress, a point taken up by the William R. Hamilton, President of the Royal Geographical Society in 1838. The geographer

> must likewise lay before us the different productions of the earth, diversified as they are by soil, climate, and exposure; he must describe to us all the varieties of animal life which that soil supports, from those which are invisible to the eye, to the lords of the forests, and to man himself. Here indeed, other sciences and other inquirers will come to his assistance; but he must be the pioneer, who is to unlock the treasures which we want to possess; he is to point out the way which others are to go; he is to declare to us, "Here you may search, with the hope that your labours will not be unrewarded; here will only waste your time, for you will find nothing to repay your toils."[24]

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[21] Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions*, Vol. 1, p.4.

[22] "Presentation of Gold Medals", *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vols.13, 1843, pp.xi-xiv, Vol.16, 1846, pp.xxxv-xxxviii, Vol.17, 1847, pp.xxiii-xxvii. http://www.jstor.org/

[23] Ian Cameron, *To the Farthest Ends of the Earth, The History of the Royal Geographical Society 1830-1980*, London, 1980, pp.21-22.

[24] William R. Hamilton, "Address to the Royal Geographical Society of London", *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol. 8 1838, p.xxxix. http://www.jstor.org/

Within the study of geography was concern for information pertaining to geology, botany and ethnography. Hamilton defined geography in his 1838 address to the Society,

> Geography, as its name imports, is, in its simple sense, a delineation of the Earth – and would seem at the first blush to be a plain, easy, and, I might almost add, homely acquirement; but the result of experience, and a little reflection, prove to us that it is of a very opposite character: it involves, in the general acceptation of the term, the application of History, Astronomy, Geometry in its most extended sense, Natural Philosophy, Statistics, and to a certain degree, Geology.[25]

At the turn of the nineteenth century geology was a relatively new science. By the early nineteenth century William Smith had completed the first geological map of the whole of Britain and catalogued fossils characteristic of each geological strata. The study of fossils became a way of determining the relative age of rocks.[26] By the early 1830s Charles Lyell had published his *Principles of Geology* the definitive work in geology for much of the nineteenth century.[27] In that groundbreaking work Lyell had overthrown earlier understanding about the formation of earth by maintaining that the formation of the landscape was the result of volcanic and water action.[28] However nineteenth century geology had a very practical application as it was used to determine the location of mineral resources necessary for British industry and steam shipping and in determining and improving the fertility of soil for agricultural and pastoral development.[29]

Mitchell's keen interest in geology pervaded his accounts. In his *Journal of an Expedition into the Interior of Tropical Australia*, the geological features of the downs adjacent to the Claude River raised questions for Mitchell, which he elaborated in his account. He described the landscape with reference to geology but questioned the origin of black soil in a region thought originally to be a sea-floor. He considered

> The fossil wood of such plains has no appearance of having been exposed to fire. The Acacia pendula grows on the skirts of them, and indicates a salsolaceous soil. These circumstances are obvious to everybody, but no

[25] *Ibid.*, p.xxxviii.
[26] William Smith in T.I. Williams (ed.), *A Biographical Dictionary of Scientists*, London, 1969, p.480.
[27] The twelfth edition of this work was published in 1875 following Lyell's death. Williams, *A Biographical Dictionary of Scientists*, p.343.
[28] Mott T. Greene, *Geology in the Nineteenth Century, Changing Views of a Changing World*, Ithaca, 1982, p.71.
[29] Robert A Stafford, "Annexing the landscapes of the past: British imperial geology in the nineteenth century", in John M. MacKenzie, *Imperialism and the Natural World*, Manchester, 1990, p.68.

> geologist has yet explained to us the causes of such changes as may have produced that rich black mould, on which trees now silicified, formerly grew; or these wide plains and downs of rich earth, above red sandstone formation. One has called the interior of Australia a "dry sea-bottom;" but this phrase admits of no easy application to such cases as these. Fragments of a ferruginous conglomerate of water-worn pebbles, apparently identical with those in the basin of the Darling, in some places accompany these angular fragments of fossil wood.[30]

Concerns about soil type demonstrated the practical application of geology in determining the potential of an area for agricultural and pastoral purposes. Such descriptions were comparative, that is, the explorer utilised his acquired understanding of European geology to describe and make assumptions about the geological structure of Australia. Through this process, Australia was incorporated into imperial science and the geological description of productive soils became a means of making a quasi-territorial claim.[31] Science provided a means whereby the land's potential was undeniable and British settlement inferred.

Australia came to be considered in imperial science as having extinct and living fossils which provided a link not only between past and present life forms but also connection between British and colonial landscapes.[32] Mitchell's survey of the Wellington Caves acquired great importance after his fossils were sent to Hunterian Museum, Royal College of Surgeons, where they were analysed by Professor Richard Owen. Owen had systematically described and placed the fossil remains within their biological genera.[33] Those of the genus *Diprotodon* became significant to Darwin in his development of the law of the succession of types that anticipated evolutionary theory.[34](Illustration 27) Mitchell's survey of the Wellington Caves was sent to the Geological Society in London where it was read and published in 1831.[35]

Societies like the Geological Society and other individual British specialists analysed specimens sent to them and compiled inventories of the resources of new lands like Australia. Their professional opinions were published as appendices in accounts of exploration or in specialist journals. For example Mitchell thanked his "scientific

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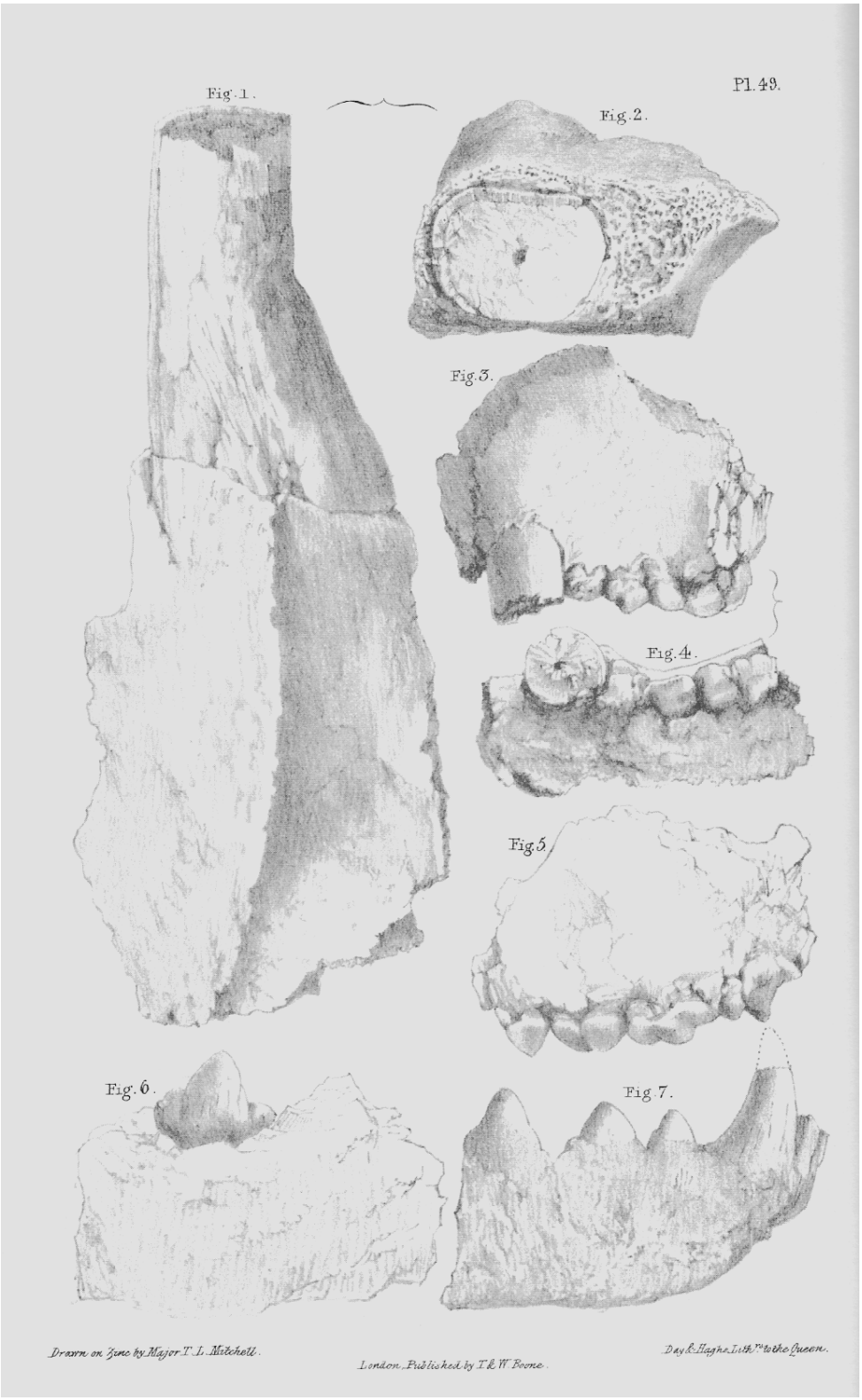
[30] Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition*, p.293.
[31] Stafford, "Annexing the Landscapes of the Past", pp.71, 76.
[32] *Ibid*., p.81.
[33] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.2, pp.359, 369.
[34] Stafford, "Annexing the Landscapes of the Past", pp.81.
[35] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.2, p.359.

Illustration 27



Diprotodon

Source: T.L. Mitchell, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia,* Vol.II, London, 1839, facing p.369

friends in England" for their interest in his exploration.[36] This type of analysis of geological specimens, including the classification of soil types and vegetation, provided indications of possible locations for further settlement. From Mitchell's expedition and the work of surveyors in his department, he was able to compile maps of the geological structure of Australia.[37] Using these maps he contended that he was "able to determine the relative value of the land in the districts recently explored – and to compare it with that of the country previously known."[38] Analysis of the geology of Australia, he believed, would indicate the quality of soil and thus "where to look for arable land amidst barrenness".[39] For instance he noted that areas of "Trap rocks form good soil on decomposition, as is shewn in the rich district of the Illawarra, Cowpastures, Valley of the Hunter, Liverpool Plains, Wellington Valley, and Burree."[40] However Mitchell was not only interested in agricultural and pastoral land. He noted that the appearance and geology of Mr Blaxland's property not only suggested its productive potential but that the land also contained mineral resources worthy of mention. It had

> that peculiar, undulating character which appears in the southern districts, where it closely resembles furrows, and is termed "ploughed ground." This appearance usually indicates a good soil, which is either of a red or very dark colour, and in which small portions of trap-rock, but more frequently concretions of indurated marl, are found. Coal appears in the bed and banks of the Wollombi, near Mr Blaxland's station, and at no great distance from his farm is a salt spring, also in the bed of this brook……This deposit contains numerous fossil shells, consisting chiefly of four distinct species of a new genus, nearest to *hippopodium*; also a new species of *trochus*; *atrypa glabra*, and *spirifer*, a shell occurring also in older limestones of England.[41]

Mitchell's geological maps of Australia delineated the boundaries of various soil types and suggested areas of potential settlement. These and other maps drawn by surveyors in service of empire added to geographic knowledge which was collated at the centre of the empire, information which was destined to be used to further imperial agendas. Like other official documents such maps gained referential power that implicitly legitimated British territorial claim.(Illustration 28)

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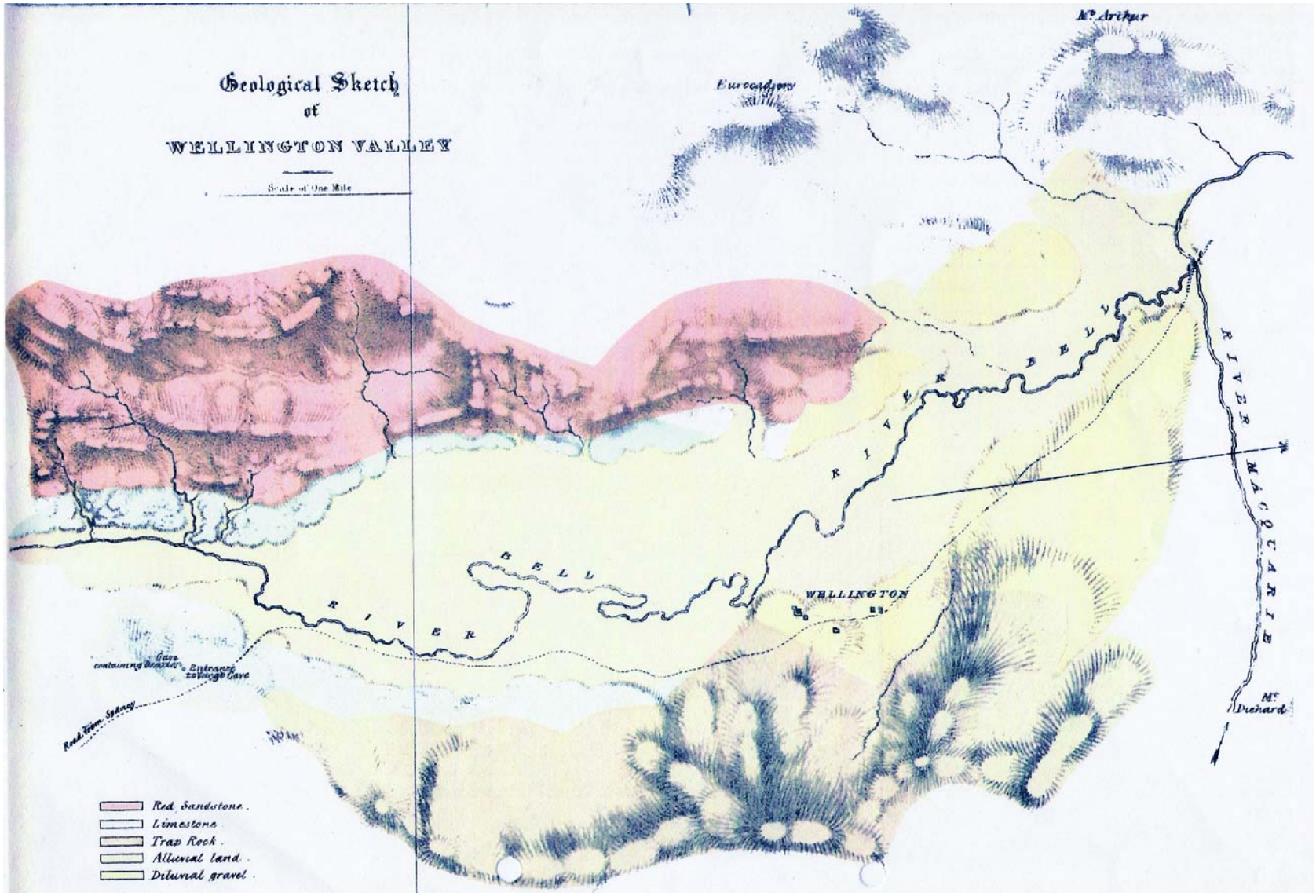
[36] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.2, p.353.
[37] *Ibid*., p.354.
[38] *Ibid*., p.353.
[39] *Ibid*., p.354.
[40] *Ibid*., p.356.
[41] *Ibid*., p.14.

Illustration 28



Geological Sketch of Wellington Valley

Source: T.L. Mitchell, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia*, Vol.II, London, 1839, facing p.359.

Like Mitchell, the explorer and geologist Paul Strzelecki was concerned with describing the resources of the landscape he explored. In 1845 he published his *Physical Description of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land* which was a comparative account of the history of survey, climate, botany, zoology, ethnography and colonial agriculture of Australia. It included a systematic geological examination of parts of New South Wales and Tasmania. In the preface to his account Strzelecki included a letter from members of the Tasmanian community who acknowledged his contribution to scientific and economic progress. They wrote:

> We are conscious that much is owing to your scientific knowledge, and to your indefatigable exertions; much that will, from henceforth, advance the progress of science, and the development of the natural resources of Tasmania;[42]

Besides his thorough discussion of the aforementioned, Strzelecki included a detailed final section in which he described the state of agriculture in the colonies at the time of his expedition as well as a prediction of its future.[43] Strzelecki considered that geology provided a way a determining the future use of areas as soil type was an indication of fertility. He wrote:

> From what has been said, it follows that the soils of the two colonies consist of two distinct classes, within which all the minor varieties may be included: the *first*, impoverished by denudation, and which yields only pasture for grazing; the *last*, enriched by the drift, presenting every inducement for agriculture.[44]

Again geological comparisons were made to known places. In this case Strzlecki compared the uncultivated soils in Canada, United States and South America to those in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land and found the Australian types inferior in fertility.[45] However he recognised that native vegetation was well-adapted to the soil and grew well and thus did not discount the future of the environment.[46] He believed in the future progress of the colony as the character of settlers indicated they were not used to the "easy, quiet, and smooth way of passing through life" but were accustomed to:

> Difficulty of position, labour, anxiety, hard struggles, and all the wear and tear of life, … the elements in which that race thrives, and in which the Anglo-Australians will not fail to thrive likewise, and to work out their own prosperity in the truly national way.[47]

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[42] P.E. Strzelecki, *Physical Description of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land*, London, 1845, p.v.
[43] *Ibid*., p.vii.
[44] *Ibid*., p.363.
[45] *Ibid*., pp.360-361.
[46] *Ibid*., p.361.
[47] *Ibid*., p.369.

He contended that improvements to the fertility of the soil and thus an increase in its productivity would be possible through scientific farming.[48] He noted that in terms of improvements in agriculture:

> The era is grand, and unparalleled in British history! The highest nobility lead the way to a new national glory – the glory of the perfection of agriculture! The Dukes of Richmond, Rutland, Portland, Buccleugh, and Sutherland, Lords Spencer, Ducie, and Aberdeen, Sir Robert Peel, &c. &c., are at the head of at the movement, and identifying themselves with that noble profession, *"upon which the welfare and development of the whole human species, the richness of states, and all commerce, depends."*[49]

Geological knowledge was also important in terms of resource development. As a result imperial scientific bodies fostered continued exploration of Australia by colonial scientists and explorers. This was not confined to Australia but was part of a widespread imperial movement to develop an inventory of resources. The geology of Australia was of particular interest as geologists in London were interested in correlating geological knowledge with information on other parts of the world where mineral resources had been discovered. From these correlations imperial scientists developed assumptions about the location and potential of Australia's mining resources. Moreover geological assay suggested the worth of these mineral resources to Britain's ongoing industrial development. By the late 1840s the discovery of mineral resources in Australia suitable for mining operations enhanced the economic growth both in the colonies and the British Empire. Roderick Murchison, President of the Royal Geographical Society and the Geological Society understood the importance of geological specimens to imperial science. A firm supporter of the British Empire he encouraged ongoing geological surveys in Australia and employed the results obtained for the promotion of immigration and resource development.[50] As Robert Stafford suggests, Murchison

> believed that the role of the scientist as a pioneer of economic development was being enacted with miraculous success in the southern colonies, and he promoted further research to press the advantages won and stimulate a similar approach in other British colonies and spheres of interest.[51]

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[48] *Ibid*., p.458.
[49] *Ibid*., 460-461.
[50] Robert A Stafford, *Scientist of Empire, Sir Roderick Murchison, Scientific Exploration and Victorian Imperialism*, Cambridge, 1989, pp.33-39.
[51] *Ibid*., p.33.

While geological and geographical information uncovered about Australia was of importance to the imperial economy, botanical exploration of Australia did not reveal any plants suitable for imperial economic development on a broad scale. Settlers had to transplant exotic species in their new home that were suitable for economic use. However Australian flora created great excitement in London scientific circles and was eagerly received within the corpus of not only European botanical science but a developing global web of scientific knowledge. Imperial science with its organisations and professional expertise legitimated their incorporation into this web through the methodical description and naming of collected specimens according to European systematic formula.

In the early eighteenth century, the Swedish naturalist, Carl von Linné (Linnaeus in Latin) developed a system of identifying plants and animals. Through his *Systema Naturae* explorers, naturalists and even non-professionals were able to classify, record and name the unknown flora and fauna they encountered.[52] His sexual system of classification was a European construct that simplified the classification process to a limited number of characteristics. By the early nineteenth century the Linnaean system provided a global classificatory system accepted by explorers and scientists engaged in the service of Empire throughout the world. Through this system they were able to understand and claim the strange flora and fauna they encountered.

The connection of the system with imperial exploration in Australia began with Banks and Solander who had been a student of Linnaeus. However the link became more evident and compelling when James Edward Smith purchased Linnaeus' collection and books on his death. These works eventually formed the core of the library of the Linnean Society of London.[53] Alexander McLeay held the secretaryship of the Linnean Society of London from 1796-1816 and later established the Linnean Society of New South Wales when he was colonial secretary under Governor Darling. McLeay fostered science in the colony and also sent many specimens back to London. At his estate at Elizabeth Bay he grew exotic plants from around the world, which he distributed in an

[52] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, pp.24-25, 27.
[53] Carl Linnaeus, in Williams (ed.), *A Biographical Dictionary of Scientists*, pp.331-332.

imperial manner to settlers for propagation.[54] Thus the land was claimed through the propagation of foreign species.

Carron, the botanist attached to Kennedy's expedition, had gained botanical knowledge through his experience as a gardener at Cambridge University and working in Alexander MacLeay's garden at Elizabeth Bay.[55] In his account of the journey Carron focused on placing the vegetation within a European framework using a known botanical taxonomy. His scientific appreciation of the botanical diversity of the north Queensland rainforest was apparent in his empirical description. At the camp of June 30 he described the surroundings with reference to its botany:

> In the scrub near our camp I found a species of *musa*, with leaves as large, and the plants as high, as the common banana *(M. paradisiaca)*, with blossoms and fruit, but the fruit was not eatable. I also found a beautiful tree belonging to the natural order *myrtacae*, producing on the trunk and large branches only abundance of white, sweet scented flowers, larger than those of the common rose apple *(jambosa vulgaris)*, with long stamens, a very short style, slightly two cleft stigma, five very small semi-orbicular petals, alternate with the thick fleshy segments of the calyx, broad lanceolate leaves, the fruit four to six inches in circumference, consisting of a white fleshy, slightly acid substance, with one large round seed, the foot-stalk about one inch long. This is a most beautiful and curious tree (fruit perhaps not always one-seeded). Some specimens I saw measured five feet in circumference, and were sixty feet high, the straight trunks rising twenty or thirty feet from the ground to the branches, being covered with blossoms, with which not a leaf mingled. There were ripe and unripe fruit mingled with the blossoms, the scent of the latter being delightful, spreading perfume over a great distance around; I had frequently noticed the fragrance of these blossoms while passing through the scrub, but could never make out from whence it arose. It resembles the scent of a ripe pineapple, but is much more powerful.[56]

This passage from Carron demonstrated the botanist's concern for following Linnaeus' systematic process for classifying plants through identification of specific characteristics; the plant's stamen, stigma, calyx, its leaves, flowers, fruit and seed. While Mitchell included a list of new plants in the front of his published account, they had been systematically named by Dr John Lindley, Professor of Botany at London University, Fellow of the Royal Society and member of the Horticultural Society. A similar list in the account of his later expedition included known species as well as

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[54] Lucile H. Brockway, *Science and Colonial Expansion, The Role of the British Royal Botanic Gardens,* New York, 1979, pp.66-67.
[55] L.A. Gilbert, "William Carron, Botanist and Explorer, 1821-1876", *Royal Australian Historical Society Journal*, Vol.47, Part 5, October 1961, p.292.
[56] Carron, *Narrative of an Expedition*, pp.24-25.

many newly discovered species.[57] Paul Carter points to the pleasure of the botanist in bringing plants into "the logic of universal reason" through collecting the unusual and unique and bringing them into general understanding through the systematic naming of new forms.[58] Implicit in such descriptions was imperial rhetoric – that by classifying botanical specimens within the global taxonomic system, explorers and scientists made a territorial claim upon new environments.

Organisations like the Horticultural Society, the Linnean Society of London, the Royal Gardens at Kew and the Royal Society had government support and royal patronage and were sent a regular supply of botanical specimens discovered in Australia. These organisations had a pivotal role in botanical science in the collection, classification and dissemination of knowledge. Following Cook's voyage natural history specialists became an accepted part of exploration parties, collecting new species of flora, fauna and geological specimens. The importance attached by the Admiralty to the need for natural history specialists to accompany the voyages of survey can be found in the supplementary instructions to King to

> receive on board Mr A Cunningham, a botanist, now in New South Wales, who has received the orders of Sir Joseph Banks to attend you; and you will engage any other person, if there be such in the colony, who possesses a competent knowledge of Mineralogy or Natural History… You will exercise your own discretion as to landing on the several parts of the coast which you may explore; but on all occasions of landing, you will give every facility to the botanist, and the other scientific persons on board to pursue their inquiries; and you will afford them such assistance in the pursuit as they may require.[59]

While at Endeavour River, Cunningham collected a variety of seeds and other curious plants which eventually formed part of his extensive botanical collection. Banks was later to acknowledge Cunningham's contribution to the collection at Kew, advising him in 1820:

> I have received safe and in good condition the numerous things you have sent me, and the Royal Gardens have materially benefited by what we have had from you.[60]

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[57] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.1, pp.iv, x-xi. Ann Moyal, *A Bright and Savage Land*, Ringwood, 1993, p.92. Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition*, pp.432-437.
[58] Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, p.20.
[59] King, *Narrative of a Survey*, Vol.1, London, 1827, pp.xxx-xxxi.
[60] Banks to Cunningham, 14 April 1820, cited in Moyal (ed.), *Scientists in Nineteenth Century Australia*, p.29

The Royal Gardens at Kew became a centre for plant collection, hybridisation and redistribution to parts of the empire. Cunningham, a botanist trained at Kew, not only collected specimens for Sir Joseph Banks but also was responsible for the planting of seeds of familiar European species at the various landfalls. Directions to King had stated that he was to provide himself with

> the seeds of such vegetables as it may be considered most useful to propagate on the coasts you may visit, and you will take measures for sowing or planting them in the fittest situations, with a view not only to their preservation, but to their being within the observation and reach of succeeding navigators.[61]

As well as providing sustenance for future mariners voyaging along the coast, the planting of European species at isolated spots along the coast was undertaken for scientific reasons. These experiments could indicate the fertility of the soil and the suitability of the area for European species. King indicated an element of reciprocity in the process. At Cape Tribulation, he stated that "Mr Cunningham, in return for the plants he collected, sowed peach and apricot stones in many parts near the banks".[62] The successful planting of European species in a foreign setting also meant that European features became part of the landscape giving it greater familiarity in European eyes. It would domesticate the land to European needs and preferences.

The garden Grey planted in north western Australia also indicated how imperial science perpetuated the desire to not only colonise the land with settlers but also with exotic animals and plants. Grey observed that the garden he had planted on arrival in north-western Australia with species from Timor, Brazil and the Cape of Good Hope was thriving on his departure four months later,[63]

> The only marks of our residence in this valley were a few shattered bark huts, young cocoa-nut plants, a bread-fruit, and some other useful trees and plants, I felt very loath the leave the spot. I considered what a blessing to the country these plants must eventually prove, if they should continue to thrive as they had yet done, and as I called to mind how much forethought and care their transport to their present position had occasioned, I would very gladly have passed a year or two of my life in watching over them, and seeing them attain to a useful maturity. One large pumpkin plant, in particular, claimed my notice. The tropical warmth and rains, and the virgin soil in which it grew, had imparted to it a rich luxuriance: it did not creep along the ground, but its long shoots were

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[61] King, *Narrative of a Survey*, p.xxviii
[62] *Ibid*., p.222.
[63] Lieutenant Grey & Lieutenant Lushington, "A Brief Outline of the Recent Expedition to the North-West Coast of Australia", *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol.8, 1838, p.459. http://www.jstor.org/

> spreading upwards amongst the trees. The young cocoa-nuts grew humbly amidst the wild plants and reeds, - their worth unknown.[64]

These plantings, common among explorers served the needs of later travellers and were not just confined to coastal locations. They demonstrated the imperial mission to colonise and thereby improve the colonial landscape.[65] But they could have another benefit. In a paper read to the Royal Geographical Society, Grey hoped that the colonising of the area with exotic plants and animals would be "a blessing to the natives and to the country."[66] Grey's passage indicated explorers were conscious of the role expected of them by imperial scientists.

Most expeditions included members with experience in natural history. On Leichhardt's journey there was not only himself but also John Gilbert who was appointed by John Gould to collect zoological specimens. The problems encountered in collecting specimens as well as preparing and preserving them during the course of an extended journey in difficult conditions were recorded by Gilbert and Leichhardt. In one of the last entries in his diary before he was killed by Aborigines, Gilbert related that while sitting skinning birds to add to his collection, with a specimen case opened between his legs to "air the specimens enclosed," a *Milvus isurus* "darted down, and to [his] surprise and vexation fairly carried off" his last specimen of a new Honey-sucker.[67] Later on, after Gilbert's death, when three of their horses were drowned, Leichhardt was forced to discard his and Gilbert's collection that had been collected during the course of expedition, to lighten the load on the remaining horses. With some regret Leichhardt related the loss of the collections:

> Unable to increase the load of my bullocks, I was obliged to leave that part of my botanical collection which had been carried by one of the horses. The fruit of many a day's work was consigned to the fire; and tears were in my eyes when I saw one of the most interesting results of my expedition vanish into smoke. Mr. Gilbert's small collection of plants, which I had carefully retained hitherto, shared the same fate. But they were of less value, as they were mostly in a bad state of preservation from being too much crowded. My collection had the great advantage of being almost complete in blossoms, fruit, and seed, which I was

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[64] Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery*, Vol.1, p.236-237.
[65] Alan Frost, "The antipodean exchange: European horticulture and imperial designs", in David Philip Miller & Peter Hanns Reill, *Visions of Empire, Voyages, botany, and representations of nature*, Cambridge, 1996, pp.58-79.
[66] Grey and Lushington, "A Brief Outline", p.459.
[67] Friday 27, Journal of John Gilbert, cited in Moyal, *A Bright and Savage Land*, p.45.

> enabled to ensure in consequence of the long duration of our expedition, and the comparative uniformity of the Australian Flora.[68]

Unscheduled delays during the expedition allowed Allan Cunningham to add to his collection of specimens. At one stage the party was held up by bad weather at Fitzroy Island and in another they were delayed at Endeavour River repairing one of the boats.[69] King wrote that at Fitzroy Island the botanical specimens collected by Cunningham included

> A nutmeg tree *(myristica cimicifera,)* two species of olive *(olea paniculate and notoloea punctata)*, and three palms, viz. the *corypha australis* or large fan palm, the *seaforthia elegans*, and another, remarkable for its prickly leaves. We also found and procured seeds of *sophora tomentose*, and a plant of the natural order *scitamineoe*, *hellenia coerulea*, Brown: two parasitical plants of *orchideoe* were found growing upon the bark of trees in the shady place near our watering-place; one was *dendrobium caniculatum*, Brown; the other was also subsequently found at Cape Grafton, and is not yet described; it has oblong, three-nerved, thick and leathery leaves; we saw no quadrupeds, and but very few birds.[70]

Some of the scientists who became influential in imperial science served apprenticeships as collectors. In 1802, Robert Brown, one of Joseph Banks' collectors, served Matthew Flinders as naturalist during the voyage of the *HMS Investigator*. Seeds collected on the voyage were sent back to Kew Gardens and delighted Banks.[71] In 1830, Brown, by then Fellow of the Royal Society and a founding member of the Royal Geographical Society, presented a paper to the Society which was later published in its journal. In that paper he discussed the botany of the Swan River area, developed from specimens collected by Charles Fraser and sent to him by Alexander McLeay, naturalist and Colonial Secretary. While the botanical evidence suggested the soil of the area was poor quality, Brown did not discount the potential of the region as Fraser had reported an abundance of *Anthistiria australis* (kangaroo grass) in the area and Captain Stirling's despatch had mentioned how stock had "even fattened on the natural herbage of the country" in a dry season.[72] Brown's paper demonstrated the authoritative role of the imperial scientist in furthering botanical understanding of Australia, not just to peer groups but to a wider audience. The understanding gained

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[68] Leichhardt, *Journal of an Overland Expedition*, p.445.
[69] King, *Narrative of a Survey*, pp.206-207, 211-215, 224.
[70] *Ibid*., pp.206-207.
[71] Moyal, *A Bright and Savage Land*, p.21.
[72] R. Brown, "General View of the Botany of the Vicinity of Swan River", *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, Vol.1, 1831, pp.17-18. http://www.jstor.org/

was intrinsically and implicitly connected to establishing the economic value of the land and in encouraging further settlement.

Occasionally explorers had to consume unknown plants and fruits to supplement their diet. Grey and his party supplemented their breakfast with a grape-like fruit that he considered a species of cissus. He noted:

> We met altogether with three varieties of this plant, all of which were creepers, but differing from each other in their habits, and in the size of their fruit. Two of them generally ran along the ground, or amongst low shrubs, and the third climbed high trees; this latter kind bore the finest fruit, and it was a plant of this description which I to-day found. Its fruit, in size, appearance, and flavour resembled a small black grape, but the stones were different, being larger, and shaped like a coffee berry. All three produced their fruit in bunches, like the vine, and the day being very sultry, I do not know that we could have fallen upon any thing more acceptable than this fruit was to us.[73]

An understanding of what plants and fruits were safe to eat came from a number of sources. These included observations on the diet of Aborigines encountered and the knowledge of Aboriginal guides who accompanied them and the explorer's own knowledge of botanical science. Sometimes their sampling of new foods had adverse effects as Leichhardt discovered at the Mackenzie River:

> The long-podded cassia was plentiful, and its young seeds tasted well, but considerably affected the bowels.[74]

When they encountered the pods later in their journey, they modified their treatment of the seed. Leichhardt related:

> The bean of the Mackenzie was very abundant in the sandy bed of the river; we roasted and ate some of its fruit; it was, however, too heavy, and produced indigestion: Mr Phillips pounded them, and they made an excellent substitute for coffee, which I preferred to our tea, which, at that time, was not very remarkable for its strength.[75]

This and other native foodstuffs assisted Leichhardt and his party in avoid scurvy, a disease that had such devastating affects on other expeditions.[76] Leichhardt's fortunate situation was the result of his knowledge of botanical science which allowed him to distinguish those plants, fruits and seeds likely to be edible and then to sample small

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[73] Grey, *Journal of Two Expeditions*, Vol.1, p.211.
[74] Leichhardt, *Journal of an Overland Expedition*, p.105.
[75] *Ibid*., pp.282-283.
[76] Sturt, *Narrative of an Expedition*, Vol.1, p.314. Eyre, *Journal of Expeditions of Discovery*, Vol.2, pp.34, 39. Grey, *Journal of Two Expeditions of Discovery*, Vol.1, p.212.

portions to determine their effects.[77] Often it was the resemblance to known European species that prompted explorers to sample plants. Mitchell described his process of determining whether a plant was edible:

> The perfume of this herb, its freshness and flavour, induced me to try it as a vegetable, and we found it to be delicious, tender as spinach, and to preserve a very green colour when boiled. This was certainly the most interesting plant hitherto discovered by us; for independently of its culinary utility, it is quite a new form of Australian vegetation, resembling, in a striking manner, that of the south of Europe.[78]

Such information had enormous potential for new settlers in isolated areas and subtly made botanical connections between Australia and Europe.

As well as understanding the flora, fauna and geology of unknown lands, the Royal Geographical Society of London considered an understanding of the culture and society of Indigenous people fundamental to geographic knowledge. In the President's address to the Society in 1838, William R. Hamilton stressed the point that

> Before we can satisfactorily delineate and describe any one country, much more the whole globe which we inhabit, we must make ourselves well acquainted with the early inhabitants of its several divisions – the various migrations which have transferred the different hordes and tribes from one place to another, each successively driving out its predecessor – the various colonial establishments which have been planted, for the purposes of commerce or conquest, or for avoiding the evils of a super-abundant population – the origin, progress, dispersion, and amalgamation of languages; – and, what is the most essential for the present time, we must know the various forms of government now existing – the different religious sects – the political and moral state of the inhabitants – their commercial and agricultural resources – their manufactures, arts, and usages: and all this from the lowest state of the savage, to the highest refinement of civilized life.[79]

The specificity of Hamilton's instructions indicated a scientist's interest in understanding the culture and origin of Indigenous groups. He considered exploration had a four-fold benefit:

> in promoting the wealth and commerce of the world – in extending the sphere of human happiness – in opening the benefits of civilization to myriads of human beings – in bringing us into communication with the new world, and generally in hastening our approach to a full knowledge of the configuration of the globe.[80]

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[77] Glen McLaren, *Beyond Leichhardt, Bushcraft and the Exploration of Australia*, South Fremantle, 1996, p.164, p.295 endnote 145.
[78] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.1, p.254.
[79] Hamilton, "Address to the Royal Geographical Society of London", pp.xxxviii-xxxix.
[80] *Ibid*., p.xli.

Explorers like Charles Sturt were often charged with this task in their instructions. In his list of instructions prior to undertaking his expedition into the interior of southern Australia, Sturt was directed to

> note the description of the several people whom you may meet, the extent of the population, their means of subsistence, their genius and disposition, the nature of their amusements, their diseases and remedies, their objects of worship, religious ceremonies, and a vocabulary of their language.[81]

Thorough knowledge of Aboriginal society, culture and language was essential to the success of the imperial mission to colonise and develop Australia. It guided Britain's paternalistic policies towards Aborigines who were perceived as inferior and also rendered their dispossession acceptable in the minds of readers. With these philanthropic and economic prospects in mind, the Royal Geographical Society funded and eagerly awaited the publication of the account of Grey's expedition into north-western Australia as it would "contain much to interest them, not only in geography and in the light thrown upon the origin of the races who now inhabit this vast island, but in the natural history, geology and other branches of science."[82] The published account did not disappoint in regard to expanding knowledge about the local Aborigines as it provided comprehensive ethnographic observations in ten chapters. These chapters were devoted to their language, culture, society and the influence of Europeans. The narrative implied the need to protect and defend Aborigines through a policy of civilisation and assimilation which would raise them from their perceived degraded status. While Grey was concerned about the perception of Aborigines as "on a level with brutes", believing instead in monogenism, that is, all human beings were descended from a single pair of ancestors and thus were racial equals, his policies reflected a paternalism which demanded a view of Aborigines as inferior and childlike and in need of protection.[83]

Eyre also devoted a number of chapters of his account to describing the physical appearance, language, customs of Aborigines and their interaction with European settlers. It is apparent that Eyre had some understanding of mid-nineteenth century racial theory when he described the physical appearance of Aborigines:

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[81] Sturt, *Two Expeditions* Vol. 1, pp.187-188.
[82] Grey and Lushington, "A Brief Outline", p.454.
[83] Grey, *Journal of Two Expeditions*, Vol.2, p.367.

> The male is well built and muscular, averaging from five to six feet in height, with proportionate upper and lower extremities. The anterior lobes of the brain are fairly developed, so as to give a facial angle, far from being one of the most acute to be found amongst the black races. The eyes are sunk, the nose flattened, and the mouth wide. The lips are rather thick, and the teeth generally very perfect and beautiful, though the dental arrangement is sometimes singular, as no difference exists in many between the incisor and canine teeth. The neck is short, and sometimes thick, and the heel resembles that of Europeans. The ankles and wrists are frequently small, as are also the hands and feet. The latter are well formed and expanded, but the calves of the legs are generally deficient.[84]

Eyre's description emphasised the facial characteristics of the Aborigines he encountered and reflected the importance of comparative anatomy to early nineteenth ethnology. In the late eighteenth century, Peter Camper measured facial angle to indicate the position of various races within a hierarchy that placed Europeans at the top and other races below with apes and chimpanzees at the bottom. His measurement of the angle "between a horizontal line through the nose and ear, and the line of the face" suggested that "the more protruding jaw, the greater the angle and the closer to the angle of the ape".[85] The work of scientist George Cuvier in the early 1800s revisited the work of Peter Camper and suggested that the cranial measurement was connected to 'animality' and 'intelligence'.[86]

Eyre's description suggested an understanding of physiognomy and facial angle measurements and while his comments are not derogatory, they emphasised the differences between Aborigines and Europeans that suggested Aborigines were lower in the hierarchy of races. Moreover his description of Aboriginal women implied that they were inferior to Aboriginal men which positioned them even lower in the order. He wrote:

> In the female the average height is about five feet, or perhaps a little under. The anterior part of the brain is more limited than in the male; the apex of the head is carried further back; the facial angle is more acute; and the extremities are more attenuated. The latter circumstance may probably be accounted for from the fact, that the females have to endure, from a very early age, a great degree of hardship, privation, and ill-treatment.[87]

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[84] Eyre, *Journal of Expeditions*, Vol.2, pp.206-207.
[85] Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800-1960*, Oxford, 1982, pp.8-9.
[86] *Ibid*., pp.12-15
[87] Eyre, *Journal of Expeditions*, Vol.2, pp.207.

Eyre did not confine his comments to physiology but also included discussion of their culture which included the insertion of illustrations of items worn by Aborigines and the weapons used by them. (Illustrations 29 and 30). Such illustrations emphasised the primitive nature of Aboriginal society in readers' minds.

Strzlecki's account suggested that he also had an understanding of racial theory. His account provided a detailed account of the physical appearance of Aborigines with particular emphasis placed on the face which he defined as the "characteristic feature of the race".(Illustration 31) The face presented

> a facial angle of 75º and 85º. It is marked by a low forehead, eyes large, far apart, and half covered by the upper lid, with a conjunctiva of the purest white, spotted with yellow; the iris invariably a dark brown, the pupil large and of a jet black; a nose broad and flat, the frontal sinuses being remarkably prominent, the nostrils extending and wide-spread; cheeks generally hollow, with prominent malar bones; a wide mouth, with large white teeth, and thick lips; the lower jaw unusually short, and widely expanded anteriorily.[88]

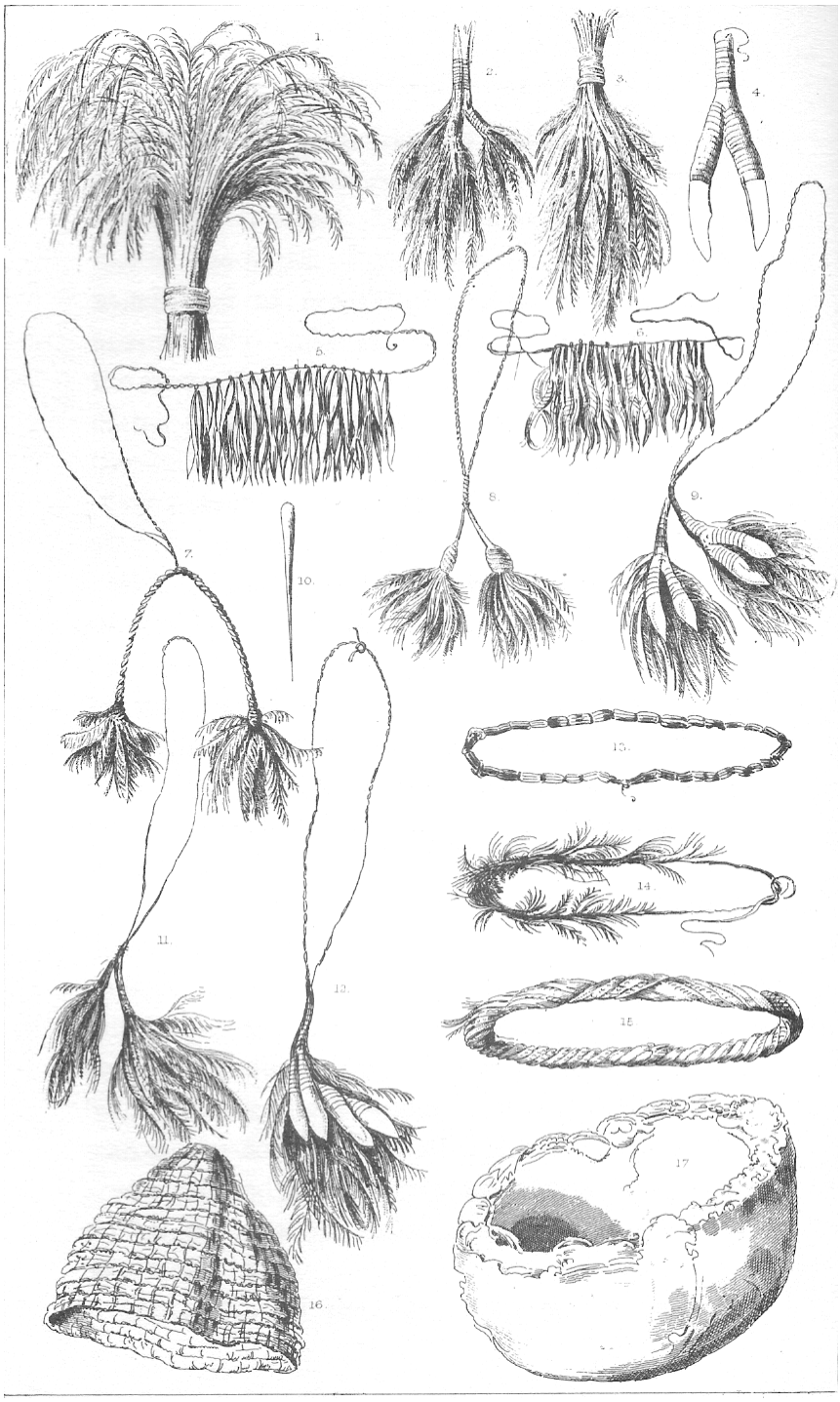
His description suggested Cuvier's scale of human races whereby intelligence was measured at "30º for apes, 70º for Negroes, 80º for Europeans and 90º for ancient Greek sculptures of men and 100º for sculptures of the divinities".[89] Strzlecki's measurement of facial angle demonstrated disagreement with Cuvier's scale as he placed Aborigines somewhere within the range of Negroes and Europeans. Nevertheless his description still emphasised differences between Aboriginal and European facial structures and evoked an image of physiological variation as comparison was drawn to a known and assumed superior white model.

Some scientists and explorers used craniometry, physiognomy and phrenology to link skull features with innate temperament and faculties.[90] Sturt was aware of these scientific studies when he described Pulcanti, an Aborigine taken prisoner at Lake Victoria and taken to Adelaide. He considered the

> bold savage would have submitted to torture without a groan; he was the most repulsive native in aspect that [he] ever saw, and had a most ferocious countenance. The thick lip and white teeth, the lowering brow, and deep set but

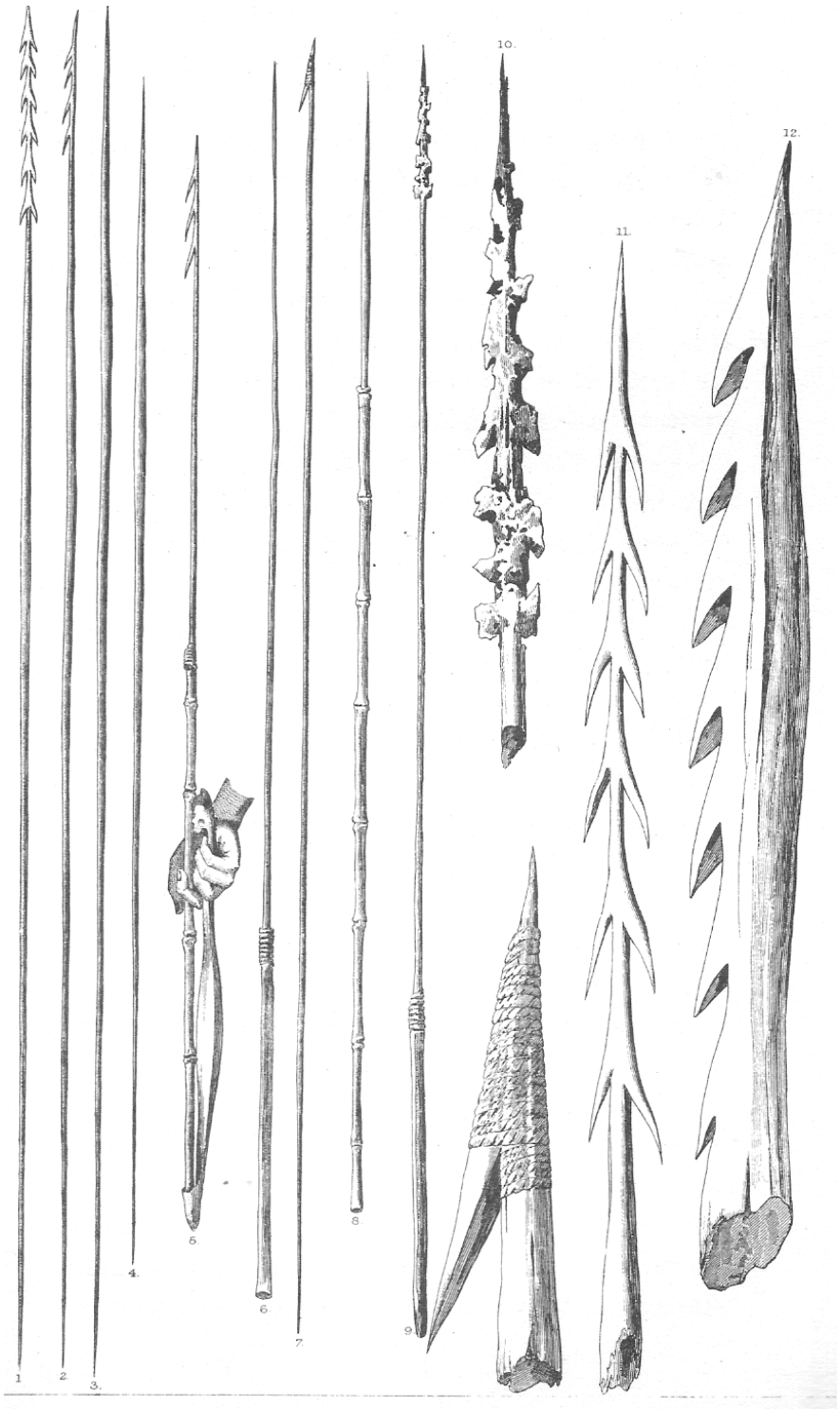
[88] Strzelecki, *Physical Description of New South Wales*, pp.334-335.
[89] Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, p.14.
[90] Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire, Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, London, 1995, pp.122-123. Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, pp.20-21

Illustration 29



Implements
Source: Edward Eyre, *Journal of Expeditions of Discovery*, Vol.II, London, 1845, facing p.209.

Illustration 30



Weapons
Source: Edward Eyre, *Journal of Expeditions*, Vol.II, London, 1845, facing p.306

Illustration 31

Jemmy
Native of the Hampshire Hills, Van Diemen's Land
Source: P.E. De Strzelecki, *Physical Description of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land*, London, 1845, facing p.333.

> sharp eye, with the rapidly retiring forehead all betrayed the savage with the least intellect, but his demeanour was now quiet and inoffensive.[91]

While Sturt's description indicated knowledge of physiognomy and craniometry and their connection to animality and intellect, the innate savagery suggested by the Aborigine's cranial features was not supported by the self-control he displayed in Sturt's presence. This behaviour prompted Sturt to express scepticism about the exactness of these sciences in general. Later in the second volume of his account he elucidated his reservations. After relating an incident that demonstrated Aboriginal moral conscience, he noted:

> It will be borne in mind, that I have not here spoken of their personal appearance. That that generally is against them, cannot be doubted. If there is any truth in phrenology, they must have their share of the brutal passions. The whole appearance of the cranium indeed, would lead to the conclusion that they possess few of the intellectual faculties; but, in a savage state, these are seldom called forth. They are nevertheless, capable of strong attachment, are indulgent parents, and certainly evince a kindly feeling towards their relations[92]

Sturt's questioning of nineteenth century scientific ideas revealed the tensions that often existed between the explorers' understanding of racial theories that guided British policies towards Indigenous people and the reality of the explorers' encounters.

Nineteenth century racial theory also considered human origins. In the early nineteenth century a monogenetic perspective prevailed. Monogenists believed that all human beings were one species, descendants of Adam and Eve. Hence it was considered that the geographical origin of humankind lay somewhere in Asia.[93] By mid-century polygenist arguments were more prominent. Polygenists considered physiological and anatomical variations along with comparative psychology, craniology and linguistics and advocated that differences between racial groups indicated separate species of human beings.[94] Tension in explorers' understanding of these two positions was often apparent in their texts. Stzelecki's account of Aborigines revealed his reservations about the monogenist view of one pure source of human beings. He observed: "In his physical appearance, [the Aborigine] does not exhibit any features by which his race

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[91] Sturt, *Narrative of an Expedition*, Vol.1, p.90
[92] *Ibid*., Vol.2, p.277-278.
[93] Young, *Colonial Desire*.
[94] Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, pp.1-3. George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, New York, 1987, p.26.

could be classed or identified with any of the generally known families of mankind."[95] Thus Stzelecki could not trace the ancestors of Aborigines or establish links to other "primitive races of mankind".[96] However rather than take a polygenist approach he reasserted a monogenist view that "on such subjects as the origin of a human race, we must be satisfied with the simple declaration of Scripture" that is, a single human origin of humanity in Adam and Eve as written in the Bible.[97]

Philology and linguistics also provided a basis for understanding the geographic origin of different races and classifying them. Consequently Aboriginal languages were of interest to explorers as it was assumed that they provided a way of determining the origins of Aborigines. Eyre, Grey and Mitchell provided details about the Aboriginal languages spoken in different parts of Australia. In an appendix to Mitchell's *Three Expeditions* he inserted a table of English words and their Aboriginal language equivalent collected in various parts of the New South Wales and compiled from a range of sources.(Illustration 32) Mitchell found a "striking similarity in eight words, and it appears singular, that all these words should apply to different parts of the human body".[98] He confined this uniformity in vocabulary to the south-eastern and south-western portions of Australia, seeing no consistency with the languages of the northern coast where he inferred that changes in dialect occurred more frequently. He considered that the words that occurred consistently on the southern coast provided philologists with specimens of the vocabulary that could be tested in places north of Australia. Such comparative analysis could contribute to determining the origin of Aborigines. Mitchell noted a slight similarity between a few Aboriginal words and the words used by Indigenous people on some of the islands in the Pacific.[99]

Similarly Grey included a comparative vocabulary of Aboriginal dialects for Swan River, King George's Sound, South Australia and Sydney but suggested that the dialects all had a common origin.[100] Grey assumed that Aborigines came from the north and migrated to the distant parts of Australia. He provided a vocabulary table that highlighted the similarities in commonly used words throughout the country. His theory

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[95] Strzelecki, *Physical Description of New South Wales*, p.336.
[96] *Ibid*., p.333.
[97] *Ibid*.
[98] Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, Vol.2, p.340.
[99] *Ibid*., pp.340-341.
[100] Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions*, Vol. 2, p.208.

Illustration 32

APPENDIX.

VOCABULARY OF WORDS HAVING THE SAME MEANING

IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF AUSTRALIA.

	King George's Sound.*	Raffles' Bay.†	Karaula in lat. 29°.	Wellington Valley.‡	Lachlan, Regent's Lake.	Moreton Bay.§	Wollondilly River.
Head	*Caät*	Warhee	*Kanga*	Bullong	Ballang	Maggol	Bubyong
Hair of the head	Kion	Away, ea	. .	. .	Ooran	Kâbboey	Darreng
Eyes	*Mial*	Dala	*Mil*	. .	*Mil*	*Mill*	*Mil*
Nose	Chiangohet	Y, ē, ne	*Murro*	. .	*Murro*	*Murro*	Nógorro
The cheeks	Gnieluck	Adiera or adgara	. .	. .	Tàkal	Tággal	
The beard	Gnanuck	La mur mur	Yerry (beard or chin)	. .	Yàrreng	Yarreu	Yarreng
The lips	Tawa	La mar jala	. .	. .	Moondo	Tàmbora	
The teeth	Gnoluck	*Ei yeu*	*Elera*	. .	*Yeèrang*	*Deer*	*Yerra*
The tongue	*Talien*	*Arrad*	*Talley*	. .	*Tallèng*	Choorogòng	*Darline*
The mouth	Talgomet	Là wae	Nyèy	. .	Nyàn	Wongah	Mundo
Ears	Twany	O, tomare	Binna	. .	Ota	Bidna or pidna	Kurré
Neck	*Woort*	Ebanaiche	*Oorr*	. .	*Worro*	. .	Kanga
Breast	Twambar	Anabad	. .	. .	Bergin	. .	
Mamillæ	Piap	O, ye or age	Nammo	. .	Nammo	Hammo	Ny-apung
Abdomen	Copul	Ei, wood	Cunna	Barabing	Porpin	Diggery	Bendy
Umbilicus	Peell	Wan, hor, eæ	. .	. .	Beràyn	Môberee	
Nates	Pāre	Abaicha	. .	. .	. .	Nárral	
Penis	Maik	Ma, mure	. .	. .	Dònn	Doogi or Toogi	
Thighs	Tawell	Etanela	. .	. .	Tarra	Tarra	Darra
Leg	Woolet	Murando	. .	Böoyon	Bòyo	Pyyoo	
Calf of the leg	. .	. .	Ooroga	. .	. .	Puyso	
Foot	*Tian*	E lood	*Tinna*	*Dinnung*	*Tinnang*	*Chidna*	*Dyenna*
Toe	Perigur	Eiman	. .	. .			
Shoulders	Moonk	Nandìe, ya	Wallar	. .	Cannà	Kicka	Parowra
Elbow	*Gnoyong*	Mirenan	. .	. .	*Nyòona*	O'pee	*Nyuna*

* From Mr. Scott Nind. † Dr. Wilson. ‡ Mr. Larmer. § Major Clunie, late Commandant.

Source: T.L. Mitchell, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia,* Vol.II, London, 1839, Appendix.

that Aborigines were of Asiatic origin was supported by cave drawings of clothed figures that reminded Grey of the descriptions from the Prophet Ezekiel.[101] Eyre also noted connections between the different dialects and provided a comparative table of English words with the corresponding word in the regional Aboriginal languages.[102] He believed:

> Australia was first peopled on its north-western coast between the parallels of 12º and 16º S. latitude. From whence we might surmise that three grand divisions had branched out from the parent tribe, and that from the offsets of these the whole continent had been overspread.[103]

However in Strzelecki's account of the languages of Australian Aborigines he questioned such generally held monogenist beliefs. He considered that not enough was understood about the structure of the language to indicate a common root.[104] He criticised explorers and travellers who jumped to such conclusions when a thorough understanding of the languages of the Aborigines had not been undertaken. He observed that "The limited state of our knowledge respecting the language of Australasia presents also a barrier to inquiry into the force, activity, tendency, and advancement of the mental faculties of its natives."[105] Moreover Strzelecki was convinced that the contemporary approach of philosophers and naturalists to classifying Indigenous races was not appropriate. In a footnote to his text, he firmly stated:

> Hitherto physical geography, in describing "man", has classified him according to the characteristics which his external organisation presents. Philosophers, in the contemplation of his destiny, rejecting that classification, have viewed him merely as a member of the whole human race; but the day is perhaps, not far distant, when both philosophers and naturalists will admit that it is the instinctive and mental faculties peculiar to each race, and in perfect accordance with the local circumstances in which that race is placed, which constitute the true principles of that classification. The study of this instinct, which may be looked upon as a guide to the politics and morality of every race, has been lost sight of; and this is the fruitful source of all the errors and failures of political and religious regenerators, who labour, in opposition to the history of past and modern ages, to reduce all the races of mankind to one uniform standard of customs and institutions.[106]

He advocated that the thorough understanding of each race should include a study of their "instinctive and mental faculties". Strzelecki's account of Aboriginal physiology

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[101] *Ibid*., Vol.1. facing p.214 and p.215.
[102] Eyre, *Journals of Expeditions*, Vol.2, pp.395-397, 400-402.
[103] *Ibid*., p.405
[104] Strzelecki, *Physical Description of New South Wales*, pp.336-337.
[105] *Ibid*., p.338.
[106] *Ibid*.

and languages seems to suggest that he was moving towards a polygenist view that not only considered their physical and linguistic differences from Europeans but also investigated their intellectual and cultural differences.[107] Regardless of their particular approach to describing and commenting on Aboriginal culture and society, explorers emphasised how Aborigines were different to Europeans. Such descriptions, while often based upon differing understandings of the origin of human beings, invariably placed Aborigines in an inferior position. This type of imperial rhetoric fostered a paternalistic approach to their governance and allowed their dispossession.

Conclusion

Imperial science in the guise of organisations such as the Royal Geographical Society, the Royal Geological Society, the Royal Society and the Royal Gardens at Kew as well as through government authorities fostered scientific exploration that had pragmatic and paternalistic objectives. British industrialisation motivated the collation of information and the collection and systematic description of specimens from new lands. Theories of race based on comparative anatomy, psychology, craniology and linguistics placed Aborigines in an inferior position through comparison to a superior white model and reinforced notions of European superiority and paternalism. The information collected contributed to the development by the imperial centre of an inventory of resources and understanding that could be utilised in the imperial endeavour. In the process of scientific exploration explorers incorporated Australia not only into imperial science but also into a global scientific understanding which reinforced its economic potential for further settlement and resource development. Scientific organisations at the centre of empire were instrumental in legitimating and dispersing this information which reinforced territorial claims over Australia.

[107] Young, *Colonial Desire*, p.66.