

TRAVELS FROM GULF TO GULF

Story of Mineral Wealth and Stirring Flood Experiences

Rev. Ira Menear, of the Federal Methodist Inland Mission, has just completed a trip across Australia from the Gulf of Carpentaria to St. Vincent's Gulf. The route taken from Burketown was via Lawn Hills, down the Northern Territory fence to Camooweal, Mount Isa, Cloncurry, Boulia, Eromanga, and Nocundra, through the Warree gate into New South Wales, due south to Broken Hill and thence to Adelaide. The journey was made in the first closed-in car that the station people along the bush tracks that he followed had ever seen on the road.



Rev. Ira Menear, B.A.

pre-Cambrian. The discovery has upset previous surveys and they are being gone over afresh.

Mount Elliott Copper

At present Cloncurry stands on the tip toe of expectation. The Mount Elliott Company has erected a new electrical leaching plant by means of which it is claimed that the copper can be extracted from the ore at a cost so low that all the old mines of the district can be reopened and worked at a profit. It seems, however, that all the capital of the company was absorbed in erecting the plant and it is waiting on finances for working capital.

All along the route as far as Cloncurry, drought conditions do not exist for the pastoral industry. A cyclonic disturbance in the early part of the year precipitated heavy rains along the gulf to a little south of Cloncurry.

In a few weeks after heavy rains the grass is higher than a wheatfield, but the sun quickly browns it into the appearance of vast stubble paddocks. So dry is the atmosphere that dew never falls, and the grass remains nourishing for stock for 12 months or more.

The journey onward from Cloncurry left little opportunity for gathering extraneous information for attention was focussed on the track and how to get along. Rains set in a month earlier than their habit. A terrific thunderstorm broke over Cloncurry on Sunday night and in spite of warnings the motor car turned her radiator to the track on Monday morning.

About 20 miles from the town we came upon a car load of men who had been out for the week-end shooting ducks. They could hardly be seen for mud, and had been all the previous afternoon and night travelling 30 miles along boggy roads and flooded creeks. In sheer alarm they pulled up and urged us to go back, but it was poor policy to trust the judgment of men who had been bullocking all night on empty stomachs, so we went on. The state of the track can be imagined when it is stated that the trip could be done from Cloncurry on a dry track in five days, whereas in the wet it took 17.

Flooded Creeks

Though the roads were boggy, the car ploughed out her track slowly and confidently. The chief obstacle was the flooded creeks. First they would have to be crossed on foot to test their depth and make sure that no holes had been washed out. Then the car had to be got ready. Off came the fan belt and the exhaust pipe. The generator and distributor were made watertight, and finally a tarpaulin was lashed across the front of the radiator.

Sometimes the creeks were too deep for even these precautions to prevent the water getting to the electrical parts. The only thing to be done then was to find a good smooth entrance and exit, take the car well back, race her up to it all out, shut off the engine, and trust to momentum to carry through.

Once the car stopped with only her front wheels up on the bank. There was nothing for it but the Spanish windlass. The pull is sure, but terribly slow. The car only moved about an inch at a time, and after a couple of hours there was very little skin left on anyone's hands. It is not working under the best conditions either when it is thundering and lightning for all it is worth and the water is rising up the creek. It was 11 o'clock one night before the car was dragged to safety. However, there is this advantage, that when it is all over it transforms the hard ground into a downy bed.

Occasionally the creeks were so bad, it was futile to attempt to cross them. The only thing to do was to abandon the track and go bush to the line of ridges, and follow along the side of them for 50 or 70 miles, and pick up the track again

where the river was less deep and wide. The overland traveller at this time of the year has not only to overcome the obvious difficulties of the track, but there are hidden ones as well. There may be few signs of rain in the vicinity, but it has rained heavily far away up on the hills. A Crown ranger, travelling seven miles ahead of me, carelessly descended into a creek. There was nothing to suggest that its bed would be other than as dry as it had been for the last 10 months. Before he could pull up he was into 18 inches of water, which splashed into his ignition and stalled the engine.

He had just alighted from the car to dry his electrical parts when, looking up the river, he saw it coming down a banker. There was nothing to do but abandon the car and scramble up the bank to safety. His car was washed downstream until it jammed against the bank at a turn. The owner, who had followed it down, promptly tethered it to a tree and walked off for help.

A week's work will probably put his car on the road again.

Treacherous Water

Water plays a treacherous part even where there are no creeks. A heavy down-pour may send the water hurtling down a depression between two ridges. A deep washaway is scoured out, and then it becomes full of sloppy silt. The rain may have fallen only on a nearby ridge. In a few hours heavy duststorms may blow and cover up the silt with a layer of sand. The unwary motorist goes gaily down one side, expecting to sail merrily up the other, when his car suddenly drops into slush and comes up against the hard ground on the other rise with a jar that rattles every bolt in the car, not to mention every bone in his body.

One morning the driver pulled up at a picturesque little wayside inn on the banks of Bancannia Lake. Over breakfast the innkeeper told how 10 tons of groceries came to be in the bottom of the lake. Many years ago the lake was dry, and a teamster was camped in its bed. The bullocks were grazing, and he was dozing when it began to rain. It rained 10 inches overnight, and the water began to pour into the basin. Of course, the teamster had to fly to safety, and he left behind the wagon with five tons of flour and five tons of mixed groceries. Next year when the lake was once more dry he came back to find his property, but he did not find it. Silt had covered it over and obliterated all traces of its whereabouts.

Reminiscences are always fed by association of ideas. The story of the lake had been brought to the publican's mind by the events of the previous day. A carter had borrowed a galvanised iron tank, and tying it on to the tray of his Ford truck had gone down to the Government earthen tank for water. While filling up on the table it began to rain and the gutters began emptying themselves into the dam. The water-getter thought it wise to get out. He started up the Ford and turned it towards the slippery bank, but the car was loth to leave and began to slip and slip until at last it slithered into the tank and now lies below 18 ft. of water.

The driver is not worried about the Ford. He says he can easily fix her up when he gets her out. What is worrying him is the galvanised iron tank, for that was borrowed.

The River's Pleasure

A journey from gulf to gulf can only be faced with confidence after the wet season has begun, with a car on which reliance can be placed. One evening we drew up at a station intending to spend the night, when the manager, who had just come in from the run, exclaimed that the Bourke and Wills Creeks were coming down a banker. It meant a 40-mile race to cross them both before the floodwaters reached the crossings. To wait then would have meant a delay of six weeks, or perhaps till the wet season was over. Forty miles of bush track and three gates to open lay before the car, which did it in an hour.

It was an exciting race and we stopped for a breather on the far bank of the Wills to chat with a kangaroo shooter. He told us that some years before in the Cobb & Co. coach days the horses were trying to race the flood. They crossed one river still dry, and when they travelled the two miles to the next they found the floodwaters had come down. They wheeled round and whipped the horses back, only to find the first river a raging torrent. They were caught between the two and could do nothing but find the highest point of land and camp at the rivers' pleasure. They were there some weeks. The mailman had to swim the river for rations.

THE RHODES SCHOLARSHIPS. A statement concerning the Rhodes scholarships for the academic year 1926-27 has been issued by the Rhodes Trust. In this it is stated (remarks The Melbourne Age) that during the year 62 Rhodes scholars took up their scholarships for the first time. The number of scholars regularly in residence for either the whole or some part of the academic year 1926-27 was 187-93 from the British Empire and 94 from the United States of America. There were also in residence for one or more terms 15 ex-scholars. In the course of the year 64 scholars either completed the term of the scholarship or went finally out of residence without completing it. The academic year 1927-28 started with 181 Rhodes scholars in residence. At least four more will be coming into residence in January. In addition there will be 13 ex-scholars in residence. Of the present scholars 53 studied law, 32 natural science and medicine, and 22 English literature. Only one Victorian scholar (R. R. Sholl) represented Oxford against Cambridge in sport, and that was in lacrosse.

ADV. 5-1-28 LEAVING EXAMINATION RESULTS. The results of the leaving examination, conducted by the Adelaide University, from November 22 to December 5, are published on page 13 of this issue. There were 1,162 candidates, though a large number of these did not sit for sufficient subjects to enable them to receive the Public Examinations Board's certificate. This is the largest number which has sat for a leaving examination in this State. The results have been made available two days earlier this year than last year, and it is probable that the intermediate results will be published about January 25. The high standard of teaching in country high schools is shown by the success of a Moonta High School student, who won the Tennyson medal for first place in English.

ADV. 5-1-28 SCHOOL OF TROPICAL MEDICINE. ESTABLISHMENT IN SYDNEY. Canberra, January 4. A contract is being signed for the erection of a new school of tropical medicine in the grounds of the Sydney University for training for work in the external territories particularly. Arrangements for the ceremony of laying the foundation stone by the Prime Minister (Mr. Bruce) will be made immediately, and it is hoped to complete the building by the end of the year. The Federal Government will bear the cost of the building, and will provide the staff.

In dry weather, writes Mr. Menear in his diary of the trip, the inland roads are among the best in Australia for motoring. The black soil plains beat down hard and smooth as a billiard table, but woebetide the motorist who has to travel them in the wet. Rain transforms the plains into a bottomless abyss of the consistency of treacle.

The journey as far as Cloncurry was made over dry roads and called for no resourcefulness.

Burketown boasts a landmark of historical importance. About two miles down the Albert River stands a tree marked by Landsborough on his exploring expedition. The marking occupies an oval space about 18 in. long. No date is carved, just the bare instructions, "DIG 2 FT. N." It takes the bark of the tree about 20 years to overgrow the marking, but when the bark is peeled off the carving can be seen in the wood as clearly as the day it was done.

Lawn Hills Station gives the impression of a fortress perched on the top of a great rocky mountain. From the verandah of the homestead can be seen the surrounding countryside for a distance of 20 miles. The station is a very old one and was built where it is in the days when the blacks were a menace to the whites. No hostile person could steal upon the home without being seen.

Near the homestead is a grave with a tombstone to the memory of a police constable who was shot by a half-caste named Flick. Flick's mother was an aboriginal and had been seized by a white who would not let her go back to her camp. Flick went to fetch her, and words led to blows, in which Flick felled the white man. Believing he had committed murder, Flick seized his gun and fled into the bush. He was finally riddled with bullets by a police party, but not before Flick had mortally wounded the policeman whose tombstone stands on Lawn Hills.

Silver-Lead Mines

For a radius of 20 miles it is possible to journey near this station and come upon deserted silver-lead mines. The richest is the Silver King. The lode there is rich and extensive and has captivated the attention of overseas financiers again and again. Always the stumbling-block to working the mines has been the huge expense of transportation to the markets.

All along the track to Camooweal natural food is to be had in abundance. On the banks of the Gregory a galah was shot for bait, and many beautiful bream were landed. When the palate wearied of fish then wild duck and wild turkey were easily bagged and as easily fried and eaten.

About four miles north of Camooweal and two miles from the border of the Northern Territory stands another tree marked by Landsborough.

The little settlement of Mount Isa, about 150 miles south-east of Camooweal, is attracting much attention from mining magnates. Some experts consider the extent and richness of the silver-lead lode outrivals that of Broken Hill. The Queensland Government is pushing on with the railway to it, and it should be completed next year.

Meantime the Russo-Asiatic Company is spending £500,000 on mapping out the field by means of drills. Opinion has it that when the railway has been completed and the machinery hauled there and erected the town will grow into a city as large as Charters Towers in the gold rush days.

During the last two years discoveries have been made which are of great interest to the geologist. A prospector fossicking among the hills came upon an outcrop of limestone, containing perfect specimens of trilobite fossils. They range in size from one to 15 inches. Previously all that area had been considered to be