

AUSTRALIAN MINING HISTORY ASSOCIATION BOOK REVIEW

Prospecting the Pieman: George Campbell Meredith's logbook November 1876 to March 1877

Alice Meredith Hodgson, 2009. A.M. Hodgson, Sandy Bay, Tasmania, 109 pp. illustrations index, endnotes, bibliography, maps, 21 cm, \$19.90. Available from Alice Hodgson, PO Box 447, Sandy Bay TAS 7006.

While being refreshing to read, and very realistic of the real life of miners, *Prospecting the Pieman* is in itself a wonderful primary source book. It is well set out, and relevant illustrations are interspersed throughout the book.

The manuscript of the two prospectors brothers, George Campbell Meredith and Owen Meredith is a remarkably frank record of their prospecting along the Pieman River on the west coast of Tasmania during the summer of 1876-1877. The logbook held in the Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office is a very slim blue-covered, lined notebook, 11.5cms X 18cms. The transcription is faithful – maintaining original punctuation and spelling, grammar and structure. The book is in two sections side by side – on the left hand page are explanatory and historical notes from newspapers and other historical sources and on the right the transcription of the diary, thus following the principles of publishing manuscripts in having the original text on the right and a well-researched and explanatory commentary on the left.

The result of the Merediths' prospecting trip was the registration by the brothers of the first tin mining claim on the Heemskirk Field. The log book contains all the detail of the harsh weather conditions, torrential rain and flooding rivers, secrecy, communication with competitors, the sounds of the bush, camp and travelling conditions, and details on the vegetation including Bauera and Razor Grass, and the fierce Horizontal (*Anodopetalum biglandulosum*). The branches of the latter each thrust new branches upwards, which formed an interlacing network that had to be cut through. Four parties (the Merediths and three others led by Thomas Moore, Charles Donnelly and Frank Long) were competing in the Summer of 1876 for the first major discovery in the west. They fired the scrub to clear a path and to keep track of each other. Although the parties met and yarned, their conversation was strained. On 27 February the Merediths found their tent cut down and a note left by Donnelly on a nearby tree, providing inaccurate details of the location of his own camp. The parties had all been following tracks of government surveyor Charles Sprent, which proved fortuitous, for on the 8th, 9th and 10th March 1877 the Merediths found good tin on the flats and rises of Heemskirk.

George and Owen Meredith walked from Macquarie Harbour to Emu Bay arriving on 24 March 1877 'ragged and almost barefoot', the first white men to have done the overland trip. The brothers registered their claims followed on 13 October 1877 by registration of their company, the Emu Bay and Pieman River Prospecting Company. On 6 March 1878, George Meredith was granted the first Miner's Right on the west coast by Mining Registrar, Charles Sprent, and in that same month he went back to the Pieman where he built the first sluice box on the west coast.

The author outlines the Meredith family's early land development endeavours in Tasmania following their arrival in 1821, and the subsequent careers of the brothers. In so doing she creates a sensitive and colourful overview of early mining development on the west coast of Tasmania.

Ruth S Kerr
President, AMHA