

Resident Magistrate Humphries - "Land Buying Collingwood Bay".

Diary 8/9/31 - 18/9/31

This includes a great description; the land apparently was for Bunting. Other items:-

"A crowd of Jews and Arabs would be less difficult to meet on land matters than these people of KOREAF." (p.2)

"Apparently scrub is land and grass is nothing of the sort." (p.3)

Diary 26th September 1931 - 8th October 1931

"The soil on this table between the gorges is rich and deep beyond promise."

1/10/31, on the country between KOREAF and Mt. Victory. Earlier he had described it as a sloping plane or an inclined table, with gorges; this sounds a bit like the slopes of Lamington, too.

p.3, Thursday, 1/10/31.

"The scene here at this camp [in the wide stony bed of the UROWO] is rather striking. The broad river bed (100 yards wide) lies at the very foot of Victory. There is little or no intervening land; in fact the volcano rises so abruptly from this stony expanse that the "pencil" on its summit is invisible. Blood red in parts are the sands and stones on its sides and at its base; and this also is the colour of the ground in my tent volcanic soil? Yes, of the richest kind I should say all treated by nature's chemicals before being poured forth from the furnace. It has been deposited lavishly for miles along the way we have come during the last few days. I have never seen richer soil in my life and I have grown corn on the rich northern lands of N.S.W. If other portions of the area were similarly favoured Mr. McGown's Coy would be fortunate indeed.

I noticed that though the evening was still and clear with early stars hovering gem like against the sides of Victory there was something about the aspect of the place that was gaunt and funereal. We looked upon the gigantic scars—some blood-red and some pure white—in the riven sides of the mountain and simply wondered. But some of my more ignorant companions turned away manifestly alarmed at finding themselves overlooked by such a monster. As night fell great flocks of hornbills passed to their sleeping places in Kerororo's caves and crevices, and even after dark the raucous cries of late comers continued to break the silence: The night was uncomfortably cold."

Yes, and no wonder Pacific Islands Monthly paid tribute to his "remarkable literary talent" in their tribute to him (February 1951, p.13).

It is ironic that he was to fall victim to another Papuan volcano - Mount Lamington - on 21.1.51.

pp.6-7, Wednesday, 7/10/31.

"But I shall never again think of these WANIGELA natives as ignorant. If a white man is honest the chances are he will lose against them everywhere. They are all of them christians, but in name only. Their teaching has made them trustless and untrustworthy and they are destitute of all understanding of the conduct of christian man to man. It might only be a passing phase in the welter of the hasty civilisation that is being forced upon them, but there it is, a menace to all decent white men. It is the fruits of our toil among them, for I believe they were better before, they were Christianized. And it seems to me that it is the decent white man who needs protection where these natives are concerned."

Humphries was upset; this was written after buying Koreaf land, and they had refused to honour the original price agreement reached before he did the actual survey of the purchase area.

He was not anti-native, either, though I do not intend to document this.

Nor was he, like many Administration people, anti-Mission (Anglican in this case); in fact he was "a close friend of the mission".

The price paid for the Koreaf land was very low - 3d per acre - but his predecessor as R.M. at Cape Nelson (MacDannell) had bought nearby land for about half that figure.

A listing of purchase costs plus expenses dated 15/11/31 shows £431/9/9 for 19,000 acres (I assume this is the Koreaf land, or includes the Koreaf land).

"Habits of sloth and indolence appear to be growing among the people together with a more lax morality."

(Monckton, then Resident Magistrate at Cape Nelson, on the Wanigela and Koia Koia; ENG AR 1902-03:34)

I never had anything to do, first-hand, with the Wanigela people, for which I remain most grateful. I doubt that the decline reported by Monckton has continued much past the 1930s situation, as described by Humphries (7/10/31 item), but I gather that there hasn't been much improvement either.

*JRA*

30.12.75