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## Pioneering Days: Thrilling Incidents in the Early Sixties

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# Pioneering Days: Thrilling Incidents

Across the Wilds of . . .  
Queensland with Sheep to  
the Northern Territory

## In the Early Sixties



— BY —

GEO. SUTHERLAND

BRISBANE:  
W. H. WENDT & Co. Ltd., Printers  
1913

# Pioneering Days :: Thrilling Incidents

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By GEO. SUTHERLAND

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NO. 1

Few of the early pioneers of Western and North-Western Queensland are now in the land of the living, and to collate any reminiscences of the distant past, of men and matters—the dangers and hardships they underwent through droughts and floods, savage blacks, hunger and thirst, &c., &c.—may be of interest to many readers of the present day and to a certain extent illustrate the hard conditions of life in those wild regions at that period.

The aim of our party was to buy sheep and start out with them in quest of new country. At that time there was a big rush for runs if the quality of the country was at all favourable. When two or more discovered the same piece of country a race took place between them to Brisbane, as the first applicant's tender secured the country. It was no joke to ride hundreds of miles and then a slow boat trip, perhaps, to Brisbane, but the hot fever of securing runs was rampant and travelling magnificent distances no object so long as the land was safely secured.

Alas! Sad to relate that a few years after the rush out a crash came, a depression previously unequalled in Queensland, when stock and wool dropped to zero, causing ruination to thousands of graziers, in all parts of the colony, and especially to those far inland. Bad enough to have to endure the hard and dangerous life even if a fortune was in sight; but to struggle on from year to year and then have to bow to the inevitable—after all their pluck, energy and endurance—was intensely cruel and galling.

By the people of the present generation there is not much thought given towards the old explorers and pioneers. To them it is oblivious old times, and may say, "What fools they were to risk life and limb to penetrate the wild wilderness; was it not with the view of advancing their own interests." Yes, to a certain extent, just as the gold digger tramps out beyond civilisation in the hope of discovering a new Eldorado, or like the mariner voyaging away into unknown seas hoping in his adventures to drop across a new and profitable land. The world to-day would be much poorer only for those brave adventurers by land and sea

## II.

In the latter end of '63 our boss bought some 8000 sheep in the vicinity of Rockhampton: horses, drays, stores, &c.—a general outfit—and a start made Northwards, across Connor's Range, by Colloray and Nebo and thence on to Suttor Creek Station. This run was owned then by Kirk and Sutherland and carried a few thousand sheep, having been stocked some two years previously. Here a halt was made to lamb and shear and cart the wool down to Port Mackay, some 130 miles distant. Nothing eventful happened between Rockhampton and Suttor Creek, the country intervening being pretty well occupied right through. The writer afterwards came over from Melbourne to join the party, and landed in Rockhampton in the beginning of the big '64 flood. Rockhampton was then but a small hamlet, and owing to the heavy rain the streets and roads were in a fearful condition. Bullock teams from Peak Downs and Springsure way were bogged in rows in the streets, and the whip-cracking and loud language of the "bullockies" made the township a little inferno. Then the drinking and rowdiness made night hideous. The few police had not much chance in coping with so many, all vying with each other to turn the town red.

In the middle of the '64 flood the writer left Rockhampton for Port Mackay (or the Pioneer River, as the place was then generally called) in a small, cranky steamer named the *Diamantina* (Captain Champion). She took some four days to reach Mackay. The old tub was slow, and the rough weather and head winds made her slower. However, "all's well that ends well," and we were very glad that we "ended" at all—on land.

Mackay then, of course, was a very small place. There was a very thick jungle in places, and the river bank a mass of mangroves. Here I met the teams from Suttor Creek—the stations' teams and our party's teams down with wool and loaded with supplies for the up journey, also a team belonging to Anderson and Trimble, who were also spelling on Suttor Creek to shear and lamb (afterwards they took up Crowfels on the Lower Flinders, and many years afterwards Trimble owned Magour, lower down the Gulf). This loading was to be our last supply till settled down—where or when we did not know. As it happened eventually, many hundreds of miles from Suttor Creek, and many a long month on the road to our final stopping place. All the people on Suttor Creek were out of rations, so the teams would be anxiously looked for, but owing to the fearfully heavy rain it was no joke to travel, especially with heavy roads and a bush track in the state of nature. However, the five teams pulled out of town, and the journey commenced. The ground everywhere was a perfect bog, and the rain kept pelting down with increased volume, creeks and gullies running bankers, but still we kept moving slowly, sometimes only a couple of miles a day. Then we reached Sandy Creek, which was bank high. Here we were compelled to stay for two days, when the creek lowered. Determined to proceed, we bridged the creek, carried rations, cases, cans, &c., across, yoked up the bullocks, and fastened them to the point of the poles of the empty drays, with a dozen chains, so that the

leaders landed on ~~the opposite bank and got~~ a footing before the dray got into the stream. Thus we got everything across safely, re-loaded and off again, generally bogging and double-banking a dozen times a day. At last we reached Denison Creek, a large watercourse with flooded flats on both banks. This creek was in high flood, and rising fast when we reached it. We camped a short distance from the bank of the flat. That night was as dark as Egypt, and to our surprise and discomfort soon after dark, we found the water rushing in between the drays. Still rising rapidly, we had to fasten the drays to trees with bullock chains, were shifting perishable goods up on the guard irons, for in a short time we were up to our waists in water, and dreaded that our cattle would be washed away. However, it is a long night that has no ending; the morning broke, and the rain, at the same time, ceased. We had a wretched night, and, of course, soaking wet, but by this time we were getting amphibious, as wading in water and wet through night and day was our lot all the way from Mackay. We had enough of this flood, and devoutly wished for no more floods like the '64 one. At any rate, not on the road with teams and breaking our hearts to get home to supply the unfortunate starving people there with food.

### III.

Lambing finished, sheep shorn, and supplies to hand, the next move was a "move on." The sheep were in good order, bullocks and horses mud fat; we were quite prepared to make long stages and make for the Flinders, as no good country for sheep, well-watered, was likely to be found anywhere nearer. Sutherland (of Kirk and Sutherland, Suttor Creek), just came in from the Flinders and told us track out was drying up fast in places, and a long stage or two without water between the Cape and the Flinders. This hurried matters more, and, worse still, the Earls of Yacamunda (lower down the Suttor) were almost ready to start some 700 cattle out the same track; so if they got ahead of us, probably the small waterholes en route would be destroyed by their stock. Mr. Earl, senr., came to our camp and mentioned they were starting the cattle in a few days, and would pass the sheep quickly. However, the jumbucke beat them easily. The Messrs. Earl took up and stocked Ifley on the Lower Saxby.

All ready, a start was made. There were two strong teams, a two-horse dray the cook had charge of, which always followed the sheep, and, all told, twelve men. From our camp on Suttor Creek we crossed over by the head of the Suttor River, a place afterwards taken up and stocked by the Messrs. Murray Bros., near Rockhampton. They called it Point Lookout. We camped on the bank of the river, a narrow, sandy watercourse, at a large waterhole, and very deep. Passing by there many years after, I was surprised to see the hole had disappeared, and from bank to bank levelled with sand. The next place we struck was Conway, very recently stocked. The tableland between the Suttor and Conway was very bad country to ride over, being full of big holes. Sometimes several sheep would be fast in these holes, and had to be

lifted out. Conway was on ~~Rosch Creek~~, but I forget who owned it then. The teams camped here a night, the sheep being a day ahead, the two drivers and myself with them. After dark, one of the drivers, a big, fat fellow, not long out from London, went across to the hole for water. Hearing a fearful yell from him, we rushed to our firearms, and ran in his direction, thinking the blacks were murdering him. To our surprise, we found him heels up in one of the big water-worn holes. He stumbled in a small hole, and then head first in the big one. The two of us got him out, and, finding he wasn't hurt, couldn't help laughing at such a predicament. Passing on towards Mount McConnell, we crossed country where a lot of gold, silver and asbestos was afterwards found, but all very barren country for stock. On a little creek near Mount McConnell, I saw the first wild black. He was busy, several feet up a big box tree, hanging on by his big toes and point of fingers, chopping a hole in the tree with his stone tomahawk. His back towards me, he did not notice me, so I stood some distance away watching him. Presently he finished the hole, put his hand into it, after dropping the tomahawk, and pulled out an opossum, knocked him against the tree, threw him down, and then came down himself. As he landed on terra firma, I gave a big yell, and pretended I was to rush him on horseback. He turned round and then rushed off like lightning, leaving 'possum and weapons behind. How he could cut a neat oval hole inches deep in a hard tree standing up in his own notches with a stone tomahawk was beyond belief till one saw the operation.

#### IV.

On reaching Mount McConnell we heard the blacks were in large mobs ahead and very aggressive, killing stock and attacking the men on Natal Downs. Mr. Kellett, manager and part-owner of Natal, was at the Mount trying to get help from there to disperse the black assailants, and told us to be very watchful travelling up the Cape, especially at night, when the niggers were more likely to make a raid. Leaving Mount McConnel we got on to Cape River at its junction with the Belyando, and followed it up to the junction of Amelia Creek. The Cape at that time held splendid waterholes right along, but, like Suttor, many years after I could hardly find a hole: all sand, but plenty of water a short distance underneath. Natal Downs being off the river, we did not see it. Neither did we see any blacks, but plenty of tracks. Coming to Amelia Creek we followed it up for some distance, and then on to Billy Webb's Lake—only a fair sized waterhole. Within a mile or so beyond the lake was a belt of poison bush. The stock had to be carefully and hurriedly driven through this belt. Camping at the lake, next morning we rushed the sheep through in a canter, flock after flock, and did not lose a sheep. The track was white, however, with the skeletons of a former lot, where some thousands succumbed to eating the bush. These sheep belonged to Alexander, a Burnett squatter, and were in charge of Reginald Halloran, who took the remnant of the mob down below Donor's Hills, and settled on country there. Leaving Webb's Lake, our trouble commenced for want of water till we got to

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