

New eyes on old forests: A reconsideration of early accounts of the North Coast of New South Wales

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Introduction

While there are numerous early accounts of the forests of the North Coast of New South Wales, this is not to say that they are assembled or are readily accessible. Indeed, any current attempt to use such primary sources—in order to address local or regional history—will soon be revealed as constrained by three challenges: the time-consuming search to identify material likely to be relevant; then the problems of determining significance and analysis; and following the insights in the few secondary sources, with their own range of sources and their own purposes. Regional historical scholarship is much like early exploration; through this thicket there are few pathways to follow.

What prompted this current interest in early accounts of the North Coast of NSW were those students, primary, high school and tertiary, who, at various times, all asked the seemingly off-point question about the explorers of the North Coast. Why were they studying only what scholars might have termed a ‘canon’—other places, people and significance—when the students wanted primarily to understand the land around them? This came at a time when the richly-forested North Coast of NSW provided many contested sites of land-use, and associated

debates which presented historical opinions as facts—debates which could fracture families. Fortunately there was some encouragement for educators in history to take a closer view of the local; and the work of Lionel Gilbert (1974) was always a reminder that the effort was both worthwhile and to some degree achievable.

North Coast NSW Background

The North Coast of NSW will be known to most Australians for its long highway with widely distributed potential holiday destinations, its beaches, resorts or caravan parks. With its numerous recent deviations and freeways, the highway is nowadays less characterised by its passage through tall well-established forests. Until recent years, a North Coast journey would be ‘bookended’ by the winding forested ways of Buladelah and Burringbar—both now bypassed. This seeming rush to modernity belies the region’s long history as a backwater.

Maritime exploration for the in-filling of gaps in Cook’s charts (Flinders, Oxley then Rous), had led to settlement at a succession of ‘distant’ outposts—Norfolk Island, Newcastle, Port Macquarie, and Moreton Bay as places of ‘secondary punishment’ for convicts. Such sites were selected for their isolation and their long distance from the open-prison of Old Sydney Town. Clearly the North Coast geography was useful in what only slowly became a series of river-mouth settlements, each isolated by many miles of forests, and the only ‘escape’ being seemingly endless beach tramping—either north to China (as convict dreams would have it), or more often south to the next community, and so on towards Sydney.

The official land journeys of the coastal strip came even later, when most explorer attention had turned to the vast inland distances of the continent. Given this delay in exploration, the first written descriptions of the North Coast had a somewhat old-fashioned feel to them, even at the time of their composition, seemingly constrained in their vision at the same time as competing accounts had a grand continental sweep (e.g. works by Sir Thomas Mitchell and Ludwig Leichhardt). The pre-eminent text of the early North Coast of NSW is Clement Hodgkinson’s *Australia: From Port Macquarie to Moreton Bay* (1845). It may be argued that these first-but-late detailed accounts have been able to preserve perceptions of the forests which are more appropriate for those moderns who wish to look closely at the local.

Early Writing

Early descriptions of forests have long been used as sources for factual evidence of past forests. Indeed, predominantly Victorian-era accounts, composed as records of exploration, with observations either major and large scale, or minor and almost local, have been selectively applied in helping to understand other regions or localities.¹ Regardless of the scale of the original compositions, the intention had been to observe and record the unfamiliar, whereby new eyes could provide factual information deemed of significance. At times, such accounts can be frustrating to a modern reader in that they have insufficient information, location and specificity. They were not as concerned with precision as we might like. While this is in part due to our increased specialisation, subject-definition and the like, the early authors were simply not as interested in what is sometimes called 'exact studies'. Following on from the tradition of 'Renaissance man' (or woman), and into the Victorian notion of the 'learned clerisy', their interests were broadly across the sciences, but also economic as well as literary. This last is part of a long tradition of accounts of exploration, and where those produced in the Victorian era may be grouped under the term of *belles-lettres*, that 'beautiful writing' which was the aim of prose writers who saw dignity and import in their work, in both its content as well as its language. Examination of this aspect reveals more broadly the impact of early forests upon those new eyes which had been more familiar with urban or long-cultivated rural settings.

This style of writing is today unfashionable. Indeed, in the late-Victorian era the very profusion of a less ambitious *belles-lettres* prose may have led to its decline, and the post-Victorian era saw almost a schism between factual and literary texts. However, new critical approaches of recent decades have brought renewed attention to such hitherto neglected texts, e.g. work by Simon Ryan (1996), while not specifically attending to Hodgkinson or other early writers with a focus on the North Coast. Of course, school education has long relied upon students' production of short quality prose (without using the term *belle-lettres*). This critical interest has occurred at the same time as schools have seen a major increase in environmental education, and where a close investigation of the local present is now being encouraged.

Navigators

The intention now is to trace some of the key features of the early descriptions of forests through to the end of the nineteenth century. Not least because many of these descriptions are brief and note-like, it will be seen that there is often an overlap with landscape descriptions.

The first recorded description is by Joseph Banks in 1770.

May 12. Land much as yesterday, fertile but varying its appearance a good deal, generally however well clothd with good trees.

Lt. James Cook's first description is given in general comments on the land late on the 14th May 1770, as *Endeavour* sped northward with a breeze which was suddenly strong:

As we have advanced to the northward [since Botany Bay] the land hath increased in height in so much that in this latitude it may be call'd a hilly country but between this and Botany Bay it is diversified with an agreeable variety of hills ridges Vallies and large planes all clothed with wood which to all appearance is the same as I have before mentioned. As we could discover no Visible alteration in the soil near the shore the land is in general low and sandy except the points which are rocky...

This Enlightenment text constructs the perceived land within a picturesque mode (perhaps one suggested by Banks). In forming a sylvan whole, there is a repeated pleasure from the change of landscape, the 'agreeable variety', from wooded hills and associated valleys, interspersed with plains, all neatly separated from the sea by a line of unvarying low sandy foreshore. This is a distant view, safe within the certainties of the ship's organisation, progress, and shared communication ('clothed').

The next account comes almost thirty years later. Matthew Flinders in the sloop *Norfolk* gives a generalised description of the land (near present Coffs Harbour) on 11th July 1799:

[the land] is low near the sea and skirted by a sandy beach; but rises almost immediately to a moderate height; it is well clothed with timber and diversified by irregular and somewhat steep hills and vallies (Mackaness 1956: 9).

This is an unacknowledged paraphrase of Cook's generalised description (above), only Flinders's eye moves in the reverse direction—from the near to the distant. The effect is to reinforce the impression of general

agreement between the two mariners' accounts and to consolidate these foundational judgements.

John Oxley's voyage of 1820 includes landings on the north coast of NSW at several points. At Trial Bay he records a negative view of the land and its timber, and one which was to continue for estuarine landscapes until recent times:

the Hilly forest Country is not so remote, approaching from 1 to 3 or 5 Miles. The Soil, where we had opportunities of examining, was sandy and unfertile, the Timber small, even in situations where better might have been expected to grow...There is nothing in the local Situation of this Inlet or the quality of the surrounding Country that can at present render it an object of any Interest.

This can be read as an evaluation of the commercial potential of the land and timber, and so as a corrective to the mercantile hopes which may have been raised by the accounts of the two earlier voyages. Further north, on the same voyage, while travelling upriver on the Tweed, John Uniacke gives an enthusiastic but generalised natural description:

The country on either side was very hilly, and richly wooded, and the view altogether beautiful beyond description;

and

The scenery here exceeded any thing I had previously seen in Australia—extending for miles along a deep rich valley, clothed with magnificent trees, the beautiful uniformity of which was only interrupted by the turns and windings of the river, which here and there appeared like small lakes, while in the background, Mount Warning (the highest land in New South Wales) reared its barren and singularly shaped peak, forming a striking contrast with the richness of the intermediate country (Mackaness 1956: II, 22).

Drawing as it does on elements of the picturesque, here there is an expression of artistic satisfaction in uniformity and surprise, closeness and expanse, contrast, and in the overall grandeur to the scene. There is much delight in the prose, but also content which would stimulate entrepreneurs, howsoever generally expressed.

However, it is Rous (1828) on the same river, eight years later, who would go into fuller detail. Once the channel deepens, attention in his record moves to the main interest of the report—the vegetation borders to the journey. Its density is noted and the variety listed. Detailed as to its species, and attractive to merchants as a listing of timber products,

the list also evokes the lush greenness of the riverbanks, with ‘thick foliage’ and ‘native vines’, all noted as ‘impenetrable’, which all suggests a rich bounty. There is a positioning of the landscape as a challenge to businessmen. All that then remains is to turn the eye towards the widest possible frame that can be viewed—in effect mapping an inland semi-circle of ‘thickly wooded hills’ and ‘lofty mountains’. Entering the Richmond River to the south, Rous’s text again records a listing of tree types—tea tree, mangrove, swamp oak, followed by Moreton pines, cedar, yellow wood, palms and gum trees—but here growing on gentle banks and flats of rich soil. In contrast to even the distant observations of Cook and Banks, and despite the inland penetration, this text constructs a static land, without note of fauna or any movement other than that of the mapping observer. This forested land is positioned as waiting for the entrepreneur.

Overland Travellers

Despite John Oxley’s dismissive view of the land given above, he was not immune to romantic description, as can be seen in his earlier account of his eastward journey from the Tablelands towards the coast. David Malouf used John Oxley’s land journey (1818) to locate the first written expression of the sublime in Australia:

‘Quitting this place,’ he writes, ‘we proceeded up the glen, into which many small streams fell from the most awful heights, forming so many beautiful cascades. After travelling five or six miles we arrived at that part of the river at which, just after passing through a beautiful and level though elevated country, it is first received into the glen. We had seen fine and magnificent falls, each one of which excelled our admiration in no small degree, but the present one so surpassed anything we had previously conceived possible, that we were lost in admiration at the sight of this wonderful natural sublimity.’ And there it is at last, the Australian sublime. No sense here of that limiting of local possibility in which the earliest of our poets, Baron Field, finds that the only rhyme our language offers for Australia is ‘failure’.

Here, what is most notable is the elision of the forests—of the girth, solidity, height, and darkness which can so awe modern viewers. For Oxley, the traveller, the forest was that which surrounds, almost encloses, confounds attempts at mapping, of locating best-course, bearings, dangers ahead. For this traveller’s record, not even the

informing presence of the colonial botanist could link the flora to the sublime. It takes the stability of a settler/surveyor of the region to move to a closer engagement with the forests.

The first extensive records of journeys along the North Coast came much later, and were those of the settler and contracted surveyor to the Government, Clement Hodgkinson (1819–93). His work is the longest and most substantial text in its close engagement with many aspects of the North Coast, of those reports or records to be considered. The author declares that it was written in England in response to the enthusiasm of those who had heard his stories of the North Coast. Published in 1845, and never re-published, it remains one of the most valuable sources for local history in that its span covers much of the whole region in its largely pre-Contact condition.

What distinguishes this text from the style of maritime prose or of that of settlers is its similarity to the wide-ranging exploratory mode of Oxley, expanding upon that surveyor's keen observation and scientific recording, as well as adding a determination to capture what is sublime and romantic about this land. Remembering that Hodgkinson's text moves in the reverse direction to Oxley's work, here Hodgkinson's labouring up-river is culminated by the reward of similar vision and language:

The sublimity of these falls cannot be surpassed by the finest waterfalls of the Alps, especially when the MacLeay is swollen by rain;—the untrodden forest crowning the towering precipices, the dazzling spray, and boiling foam, and the mighty roar of the torrent, reverberating with a deafening sound through the narrow glen, cannot fail to strike the spectator with admiration (Hodgkinson 1845: 20).

Unlike Oxley's account, here the tall 'untrodden forest' is a key element of the impact. The Switzerland-like sublime and the romantic are to occur at various points in Hodgkinson's text. Of the Nambucca valley to the north, the elements may be seen in the broad sweeping view, in which forests are integral, presented as both 'universal' and varied:

We had a beautiful view from the summit we were now upon. To the westward, amidst a confused mass of mountains rising beyond mountains, covered with universal forest, the eye could trace the deep, narrow valleys full of brush, of the streams forming the Nambucca, curling into the deep mountain recesses. Looking towards the north-

west, the direction in which I wished to proceed, tier beyond tier of mountains rose in serrated ridges of steep, high conical summits; the view in that direction being bounded by the dim, blue outline of a level crested range of surpassing altitude. Looking east, the eye embraced the dense forest and swamps on the Nambucca river, the silvery glare of its tranquil reaches, and the blue surface of the boundless Pacific Ocean, which was about twenty-five miles distant. To the south-east, the isolated position of Mount Yarra-Hapinni made it stand forth in bold relief (Hodgkinson 1845: 31).

Enveloped by the darkness or shade of heavy vegetation, or even battling through dense brush, when an eminence is gained, the view is sudden and liberating in all directions. Unlike the static forward vision most characteristic of inland exploration, here the eye is liberated, and in attempting to maintain the threefold descriptive pattern of the highly picturesque, the profusion of detail overwhelms any simple concept of a prospect. Here the potential for the sublime is in any direction, and now it overwhelms any attempt at simple controlled presentation of the awesome in nature.

A little further to the north, their journey up the Bellinger valley prompts description which is close as well as delightful. After riverbank 'creepers' prevented the death of his horse by falling down that riverbank,

we next traversed a thicket swarming with fire-flies, and with luxuriant fern reaching to my shoulders as I sat on horseback; and after passing another gravelly brook, we found ourselves on a beautiful grassy forest bank, overlooking the river Bellengen (39).

The next morning they follow the river through ten miles of a 'dense cedar brush', by necessity using the alluvial flats, crossing/re-crossing twelve times, and encountering 'brush, cedar plains, and forest flats'.

The brush contained the finest cedar and rosewood I had ever seen; the trunks of these trees were often six feet in diameter, and ninety feet high, before they threw out a single branch. The Casuarina also grew to such an uncommon height, and its foliage assumed such an unusual form, that I thought at one time it was a species of Pine...the grassy forest flats were principally wooded by that species of Eucalyptus called Forest Mahogany (40).

His conclusion to this journey notes the 'romantic beauty' of the scenery, but declares that the valley's constrained 'dimensions render it perfectly unavailable for grazing purposes' (41). This practical ending

reflects his own interests as a Macleay grazier, if not the interests of potential timber-getters.

On a later journey, Hodgkinson includes human farming in a word-portrait of the landscape.

The track here led me through the chain of rich cultivated farms bordering on this stream. The scenery was surpassingly beautiful as the shades of evening crept over the landscape. The alluvial plains in the narrow valley were of a rich golden hue from the ripe maize, which formed a strong contrast to the dark green foliage of the lofty brush, and the glistening white trunks of the gigantic Flooded gum trees. Immediately beyond the brush, lightly wooded forest hills, verdant and grassy, rose in graceful waving contour; whilst looking up the valley, lofty mountains, covered with brush, and tinted with deep purple, from the reflected light of the glowing evening sky, closed the scene to the north-west (Hodgkinson 1845: 83).

While the evidence of agriculture is foregrounded, the clear movement of the eye in this description soon takes the reader away from the immediate human evidence and towards the natural and the distant. Here again is delight in the specific detail of trees, the 'glistening white trunks', which is combined with the inter-connectedness of forest and landform, capturing a sense of the enormity of the forest background, and which dwarfs the human impact.

In approach, Hodgkinson's text looks to the grandeur of nature rather than to the grandeur of the journey. These are the forests in which he and his local community are looking to make their lives, and sections of his text could be inspiring models for current writers.

A more static view of settlers and forests comes from the convict-author, James Tucker, located for some time at the secondary-punishment facility at Port Macquarie. He described the purposefulness of the settlers in terms which may have been more commonly felt at the time, and were certainly part of a pattern for many who followed. He lauded

the wonted energy of the Anglo-Saxon race, who speedily rescue the most untamed soils from the barbarism of nature and bid the busy sounds of industry and art awaken the silent echoes of every primeval forest in which they are placed (Tucker, c.1850: 68).

As a convict he had limited choice or control over his participation in this landscape, and like the disempowered in many societies, he

found strength in his race, as well as in denigration of the natural environment.

A more empowered view of the settler experience of forests comes from another settler-writer on the Macleay River, and a near-contemporary of Hodgkinson, the retired officer Lieut. John Henderson (1851). The latter's two-volume account of his time in New South Wales looks more for opportunity than for romantic grandeur. He expresses disappointment that he does not see the parkland of which he had heard much mention. Instead his land adjoins a river whose

banks are clothed with brushes, which shroud the river, as it were, with a dark pall; and this sort of land, though it is the richest, costs a great deal before it can be got under cultivation (Henderson 1851: I, 114).

Here the forest darkness is funereal and oppressive, threatening failure in the great personal effort which would be needed to introduce agriculture. Despite this meditative gloom, however, forest danger can be more immediate, as in the extensive fire which burns one of Henderson's rudimentary dwellings. Acceptance of such immediate loss means that the event can also give cause for expressions of awed spectacle.

At night, the appearance of the forest was very grand, the dead timber everywhere being in a blaze. One tree, in particular, stood gleaming through the dark night, like a tall pillar of fire, not blazing, but at a red

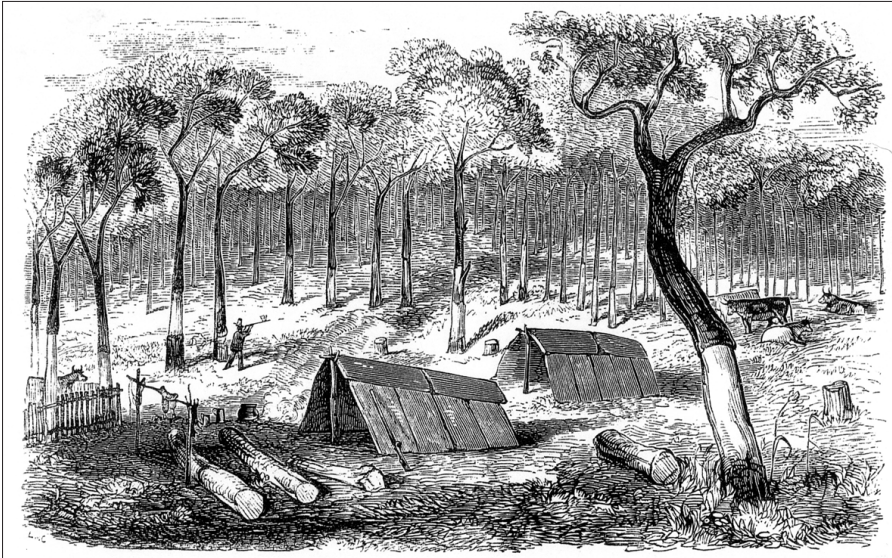


Figure 1: Turning the forest into parkland, with both axe and pen.
Lieut. John Henderson, Macleay River, 1851.

heat, till all at once, while we were looking at it, it dissolved in myriads of sparks (Henderson 1851: II, 15).

While it should not be assumed that settlement is a marker of sensitivity to forests and land, here is grandeur surprising a settler who had predominantly practical intentions.

Later Travellers

Obviously aware that they are not the first in these forests, later travellers still record experiences which they see as novel—the first for them or for their readers. This is early writing in the tourist mode. Godfrey Charles Mundy (1852) left an account of his visit to Lake Innes House² near Port Macquarie, and of the journey inland from the settlement to their destination at Lake Innes he says:

Two carriages...conveyed us through seven or eight miles of forest land, some part of which is remarkable for large and handsome timber and carpeted with luxuriant ferns to Lake Innes Cottage (Mundy 1852: II, 15).

The description is an overlay of a model of elegant English country house and lands, upon what is seen as an exotic, perhaps primeval, landscape. When he moves to a coastal scene, the coolness and darkness can not only be acknowledged—they can be welcomed, in part because the enthusiasm of the participants is extended to details of the landscape.

We were galloping along the finest sea-beach I ever saw (perfectly level and hard sand) for twelve miles, between two headlands. Close down to the sea-shore grows the most luxuriant forest and brush, the trees thickly enlaced by parasites and creepers, among which a handsome kind of passiflora throws its broad shining leaves, flowers and tendrils, so as to form a canopy of verdure across the cattle-paths, into which we struck to avoid the heat and glare of the sun (Mundy 1852: II, 17)

The interest in flora shown here is in its aesthetic potential as well as its useful coolness. There is a richness of unfamiliar detail and a 'holidaying delight' in this natural description, that, in this inter-relationship, has parallels in many subsequent texts responding to the natural beauty of the North Coast.

Still, descriptions of the land gradually change with their progression to the limits of current occupation, of a promising but untamed land—such as that described around an isolated dwelling, which had

a comparative handful of cleared land, terminating in the eternal gumtree wilderness. The soil hereabouts seemed exceedingly rich, and the herbage and foliage wonderfully luxuriant (Mundy 1852: 22).

The location is clearly one of isolation, confronting the vast sameness of the bush, yet in all there is a certain positive suggestion of a sustainable place for people in this land. Elsewhere, in order to make the vastness of the forest more comprehensible or manageable, the land could be compressed in time, and be made to seem merely the result of rapid recent change. Thus, for the traveller, in the forest,

with the exception of a few patriarchal trees that have survived storm and fire and axe, he finds no object around him half so venerable as himself. Where the owls, and bats, and satyrs dwell in Australia, I cannot imagine! (Mundy 1852: II, 24).

In the half-humorous exclamation at the end there is a search for mystery in the forests. Soon enough, the answer comes. With its increasing forest cover, the land presents more of a challenge to the spirit:

In no part of the world did I ever see such absolute midday darkness as occurred in many spots of this forest. Not a ray pierced, nor apparently had ever pierced, the dense shade. The eye ranged through the melancholy colonnades of tall black stems and along the roof of gloomy foliage, until it was lost in the night of the woods—literally the *nemorumque noctem* of the poet. We were, perhaps, the more struck with this peculiarity because the reverse is the usual character of the Australian bush (Mundy 1852: II, 27–28).

If not for satyrs, here indeed is space for Australian myths. This text is a reminder of Hodgkinson's descriptions of thick 'brush', and also reminiscent of his aim of countering the standard image of Australia as an arid country. Gone is the comfort of a landscape seemingly younger or less permanent than oneself, a notion now replaced by a land that seems so primeval as to be older than light itself. By way of contrast it may be noted that this forest surrounds the road to the east of Mount Seaview, which is the same route which John Oxley had taken over thirty years earlier.

An outsider's eye can record impressions and details that are overlooked by those from mainstream written culture. Theodore Müller wrote in 1877, in German, of a much earlier trip north to the Manning River. There are expressions of delight in the detailed recording of birds, trees and bees. The manner in which stock animals amazedly

observe the rare wanderer in the forest seems to justify the presence of both. The forest itself is treated at length, with several romantic descriptions highly evocative of the writer's Germanic background but now transferred to the all-encompassing North Coast forests. This is his first encounter where

immense forests were stretching out on both sides of the road. From time to time individual farms appeared with their low buildings covered in bark and separated by miles, then the forests were closing in behind us. High beech trees, wild apple-trees, oaks and fir-trees stretched their old weather-beaten heads high up into the air. With the low-grown shrubbery and still-growing trees, there are immensely thick and high gum or ash-trees which would stretch out their huge branches over the younger wood in a protective way. Often there are long stretches of the same kind of wood, and individual species which are very useful for humans and which can be found only in certain areas as will be seen further on. So we continued to wander on in silence and, despite some appeal and vitality in the forest, its dark appearance created a similarly dark mood on this first day (Müller 1877: 20–21).

The detail in this description is similar to that found in Hodgkinson's text, yet it differs in its emphasis, its cumulative pleasure (which belies its 'dark' ending), and its close link to human moods.

The itinerant Müller soon gained employment as a shepherd, and his written record then positions a forested land of peace, solitude and unrushed work against a negative generalised description of European urban life.

Here one does not hear anything of the restless hustle and bustle of the people in the cities and villages. The loud lamenting of the poor, of the unhappy and of those discontented with their destiny, does not penetrate the calm of the primeval forests hardly entered by Europeans. No ghost, still so common in the old world, disturbs here the sleep of the tired wanderer (Müller 1877: 19).

Camping alone in the forest, while daunting for many, is here presented as an experience of untroubled freedom, without even the ghosts of the old world—but still delineated without a thought to the spirit of the new land.

Also the loneliness of the forest has its beauties and its heart-winning sides and many hours which previously I have wasted in the company of others have never left such beautiful impressions within me as the time of my being in the Australian bush (Müller 1877: 30).

There is a sense of joy in the writer's increasing observant awareness of the bush, combined with his release from that older too-familiar landscape which was predominantly human—finding his freedom in a sense of opportunity for personal endeavour in the new land.

Another outsider's eye was that of the artist. In 1895, the painter Tom Roberts entered the far north coast of NSW, from Tenterfield to Drake, partly as traveller and partly as settler (joining in a gold-mining lease). In a private letter of brief almost poetic text, Roberts's focus is clearly on the ordinary folk who occupy a small (even vulnerable and 'mysterious') living space in the awesome vastness of their natural surroundings:

the 'township at evening—dim—
young moon—all mysterious—smoke from cottages
& people sitting outside'

A nearby site singled out for his amazed detail is a lush valley:

& the gorge—all palms soft moisture & ferns
festoons of creepers from strange & rich foliated trees (Roberts 1895).

Presented as the climax of the difficult journey, the description's compressed detail shows the impact of this paradise-like site. Both this and the arrival in Drake seem to be positioned as preparatory planning for possible paintings.

Against these brief impressions by the then renowned painter from Sydney, one might position a local child's eye of the same decade. Ion L. Idriess, reflecting upon his time as a child in and around Lismore, later described an 1890s journey with his father from Lismore to Tweed Heads through the Big Scrub.

The sulky creeping along wagon tracks walled in by the great trees, often with the regal staghorns and elkhorns growing high up on the towering trunks among bowers of bird's-nest ferns...Just occasionally we would glimpse a pretty orchid high on a beech-tree among climbing clematis; the few orchids seemed to favour the beech-tree. Giant vines and creepers often twined and twisted into massive living ropes reaching far up into branches that blotted out the sun. Here there was no sign of sky except at midday, showing far up there amongst the topmost branches directly above the track as a creek of delicate blue high overhead. While here below, just a few feet in amongst those mighty trunks that always whispered of life to me, was cool gloom and a brooding silence that seemed the breath of countless living trees domed by their impenetrable foliage (Idriess 1985: 18–19).

Unlike all other accounts, this text is not bound by the surrounding darkness, the concerns of the journey's progress, or to repeat or confirm the perceptions of others. This is a perpendicular view, as if the passenger child has ample time to stare upwards, and in so doing to observe and to sense. The midday appearance high-up of a narrow ribbon of sky, which indicates the windings of the forest track below, is a powerfully vivid image, and is unforgettable. The whole response covers the strength and sheer bulk of the forest, as well as its prettiness and delicacy, culminating in a sense of the 'breath' of the many trees that 'whispered of life to me'. Here is a hint of the power of forests to the Aborigines. These impressions had remained with the man for over half a century before being recorded, and stand as encouragement to any who would wish to understand North Coast forests, or those who wish to attempt their own individual account.

Conclusion

Many of the comments above would be applicable to the written accounts of other forested regions, e.g. the Otways, the Gippsland hills, the New Zealand bush, and where later exploration and settlement led to the creation of detailed *belles-lettres* texts. Today we encounter fewer forests, and do so through the lenses of many pre-conceptions. Those who work in educational fields know that new (young) eyes are being brought to those forests, and that multi-sensory exploration, followed by literary responses, together are powerful methods of engagement. To some degree this process is a modern analogue for the experiences and writing of those early explorers, settlers and travellers. Through some encounter with local or regional early texts—and through being explicitly positioned as the inheritors of this tradition—it is suggested that both young and older today can come to a more profound appreciation of their forests, their bounty and fragility, their darkness as well as their light.

Notes

- 1 See: George Farwell, 1973. *Squatter's castle: The story of a pastoral dynasty: Life and times of Edward David Stewart Ogilvie 1814–96* (Melbourne: Lansdowne), 149, 175; *Australians 1838*, ed. by Alan Atkinson and Marian Aveling (Broadway, NSW: Fairfax, Syme and Weldon, 1987), 29, 40, 100. Rod Ritchie, 1989. *Seeing the rainforests: In 19th-century Australia* (Sydney: Rainforest Publishing); Alan Moorehead, 1966. *The fatal impact* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), 151.

- 2 This is the same extensive country house which was the setting for *Annabella Boswell's journal: An account of early Port Macquarie* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1965).

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