

# From Grenfell to Kimberley

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## Preface

The writing of these notes was prompted whilst researching details of the Filby family in Grenfell. An early arrival in the Grenfell area in 1868 was William Boswell Filby. In 1886 he was one of a party of Grenfell residents who joined the gold rush to the East Kimberley region of Western Australia. The account below draws on family records, numerous contemporaneous newspaper references to the expedition and to the Kimberly region, many in the *Grenfell Times and Lachlan District Advertiser*. All errors and omissions are the author's.

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## Introduction

In 1881 gold was discovered by prospectors Philip Saunders and Adam Johns in the Kimberley region of present day Western Australia, at the time properly known as Swan River Colony. Prior to this time there was significant interest in developing a pastoral industry in north western Australia, including the Kimberly region, but gold sparked a much broader interest in the area. Since the early 1850s gold fever had infected many of the Australian population, and stimulated waves of hopeful immigrants from many countries seeing a means to wealth. Government authorities followed up the reports of Saunders and Johns and a prospecting expedition was organised. Those involved confirmed the existence of significant gold deposits in 1885 but on Christmas Day that year a prospector, Charlie Hall, found a 28 oz gold nugget. This was one of the finds that led to the official proclamation of the Kimberley Goldfield in May 1886 and the influx of perhaps 10-15,000 seekers of fortune to the area from the Australian colonies, New Zealand, China and elsewhere.

Some travelled as individuals and some as organised groups. Much of the easily found alluvial and surface gold from fields in the south and east of the continent had been recovered and hopeful miners and others responded quickly to reports of new discoveries. Newspapers of the day carried many stories of new gold finds. Soon thereafter they carried stories of the rushes of people to these locations and before long, further accounts of disappointment and dismay on the part of the formerly hopeful diggers.

In the Grenfell area, by the mid-1880s easily procured surface gold had become elusive and local miners were excited by newspaper reports from the Kimberly region. In about the third week of May 1886 two parties of Grenfell men, one of seven and the second of somewhere between 10 and 16, left Sydney to travel to the East Kimberly area, to the vicinity of Charlie Hall's discovery, seeking gold, though in his report WB Filby said they had gone "to see the rush". Their planning almost certainly started before the official proclamation of the goldfields that same month, but their conviction to travel would have been strengthened by the proclamation.

In response to this new outbreak of gold fever, some coastal ship owners were arranging their affairs and advertising specifically to provide passage for men and horses from Sydney

and elsewhere to Port Darwin and the Kimberly region, and the Grenfell party took advantage of one of these ships.

In the 1931 obituary of one of the participants in the first group (Walton Frederick McCarthy) the two groups are referred to as first and second contingents, implying that the two parties actually represented one expedition. In a newspaper report from the second party reference is made to meeting up separately with two members of the first party. There was “a good shake of hands all round, and a good talk about the rush” and a “wretched account” given of what to expect ahead, a meal or two shared but apparently very little time spent together. This implied the two groups, though well known to each other, were in fact separate parties. WB Filby reported that before they reached their destination they met one of the earlier party returning to Cambridge Gulf. When the destination was reached on the goldfields, the two parties appear to have camped within the same vicinity. This was near the Elvire River (referred to as Elvira below) and close to the developing town of Halls Creek.

Most of the details available of these journeys are about the larger, second party. The party probably left Grenfell in late April or early May 1886 with a number of horses and pack horses, five or more donkeys, two drays, capital of 100 pounds each and the intention of purchasing necessary equipment for the journey in Sydney. There seems to be no description of their actually leaving Grenfell or the means by which they travelled to Sydney. In some reports the party was described as all being experienced miners, and it is reasonable to assume they were seeking gold as one report indicated they intended to remain digging if there was any prospect whatever. They took with them six months’ provisions and intended staying for some time if they encountered payable gold. They were certainly better equipped and made of sterner stuff than many of those who joined the Kimberly. Despite being experienced miners and bushmen, they too experienced their share of difficulties. Newspaper reports describe prospective miners who were stranded in Port Darwin with nothing to enable them to leave for the goldfield, to distress amongst penniless people on the diggings, and to others who had left for the fields but had returned without having reached their destination. Many “diggers” died in their pursuit of gold and even the Grenfell party buried one who had died alone on the track.

The party sailed north from Sydney, via Port Darwin, and arrived at the present location of Wyndham in Cambridge Gulf on 27 June 1886, about 3 months it was formally proclaimed a town. The published account commences on Sunday 4 July 1886. In addition to the many newspaper references to the harsh environment and poor prospects of finding payable gold in the East Kimberly there were several other accounts of travel on the route followed by the Grenfell groups. All gave a similar account of conditions on the track.

## Participants

The participants in the journey knew each other well. Most had lived in the relatively small town of Grenfell for a long time. Some were neighbours, others were Freemasons together, some were involved in one or other of the Grenfell churches and most had mining interests at one time or other.

### **The first group**

**Walton McCarthy**, Adelaide born and 29 years old when the party set out, was the youngest of the group. He was well involved in community affairs in Grenfell including local concerts and was a successful and highly regarded businessman. **Alexander Meldrum** was born in Ireland and was a 55 years old miner who continued so in the Grenfell area until at least his late 60s. His 31-year-old son **Robert**, Grenfell born, accompanied his father. **Daniel Perry** was born in Young and was 50 years old at the time of departure. **James McFarland**, was also born in Ireland and was 50 years old when the party left Grenfell. **Charles Lee** was 56 years old at the time of the expedition. He was one of Grenfell's blacksmiths and also a miner in the district. The average age of the participants was about 47.

### **The second group**

Not all 16 members of the second group are easily identified. Adelaide born **John George Dane**, was 45 when the party departed. A neighbour of Dane's was **William Boswell Filby** who was born in Sydney and arrived in Grenfell in 1868 seeking gold. He was a contractor in Grenfell area and 44 years old at the time of the trip to the Kimberley region. **J McLaughlan**, was a merchant and wine seller in Grenfell. English born **Joe Napier** senior, 57 years old at the time of the journey, was a farmer and involved in the Anglican church. His 16-year-old son **Joe** junior was also part of the group. **James Kerr** was a contractor in the district and 41 years old. **Edward Mitton** (also spelt Mitten) was born in England and was 30 years old. **Thomas Kirkpatrick** was an experienced and accomplished prospector and miner and was 30 years old. **William Paice** was born in Beechworth and his family had been involved in goldmining there. He was 29 when the party left Grenfell. **Andrew Dunn, Tom and Jack Dodd, John Hamilton, T Duncan and MS Williams** and one other were also members of the group. It would seem the average age of this second group was less than 40.

## The Letter of WB Filby to the *Grenfell Record and Lachlan District Advertiser*

Published by the *Grenfell Record and Lachlan District Advertiser*, Saturday 16 October 1886. (Spelling, punctuation and expression of the source is maintained.) Unfortunately, there seems to be no extant record of the first 75 lines or so of this article so some critical information about preparation and the early days of the expedition is unavailable. The title, *From Grenfell to Kimberley* and name of the author of the letter are not directly available due to the incomplete primary source but both are referred to in an item in the *Cootamundra Herald* Wednesday 20 October 1886 in a column that also “deprecates the adverse criticisms passed on the Kimberley goldfields until the place has been fairly tried during this wet season.” The author of this caution was a member of the party of Philip Saunders. The reference to the rainy season in this and other items is a reflection that one of the significant limits to prospecting in the region was the dearth of water on the goldfield that could be used for washing “dirt”. It appears the party sailed to the as yet unnamed but busy location that became Wyndham, in Cambridge Gulf, the destination of many ships approaching the goldfields. In a telegram to *The Sydney Morning Herald*, the Dodds say they reached Cambridge Gulf on 26 June with the intention of an extended stay in the region and the account by WB Filby commences in early July. With tides of 6 metres and extensive mudflats the landing of passengers, animals, equipment and stores was a most awkward and time consuming affair. Port facilities were yet to be developed and ashore, landed equipment, animals and provisions were widely and haphazardly spread without buildings for their storage. At the time of proclamation as a town in September, six pubs were referred to, one of two storeys. Numerous temporary tents were strewn around the area. Contemporary accounts describe the scene as being chaotic.

The party followed a route which is now approximated by the road to the site of old Halls Creek, a distance of perhaps 460 miles (740 km) return. The track south from the present site of Wyndham was a very difficult one due to the roughness of terrain, newness of the route and its remoteness. Many diggers died either on their way to the fields or during their return. Limited supplies were available in the town but otherwise hopeful prospectors needed to be self-sufficient. One or two attempts were made to set up stores along the route, but due to the brevity of the rush these were quickly abandoned. This probably enabled anyone with their own spare provisions to sell them on the track, though there were complaints about the high prices for provisions and low prices for horses. The *Grenfell Record and Lachlan District Advertiser*, Tuesday 19 October 1886 reported that some of the party had returned to Grenfell in the previous week suggesting that this account was completed and sent to the paper from Grenfell.

### **From Grenfell to Kimberley WB Filby**

. . . . (missing text) . . . .

Drays went back for . . . . (missing text) . . . . the men got back early, and camped for the rest of the day; sent one man ahead, to see what the country was like, and he found it very rough, and reported that only half a load could be taken for the next ten miles. Here

were a great many bottle trees; plenty of grass and water; formation; sandstone; weather, warm.

Monday, 5th. Made an early start, over some rough, stony country, but having only half a load, had no difficulty. Crossed the first range since leaving the port, got into a very good camp about dinner time, and named it Grenfell Camp. After dinner (damper and dried apples) Mitten and Paice started to go back for the remainder of the stores, the rest of the party fishing and shooting; distance about ten miles.

Tuesday, 6th. The drays came into camp about 10 a.m., and it was decided to stop for the remainder of the day. It was found out that drays with heavy loads were a mistake. Williams and Kirkpatrick went along the road for about four miles to see what it was like, and found it a little better; while out, they shot a fine turkey, and some more game, so that the cooks were busy; weather still warm.

Wednesday, 7th. Made an early start over some sandy country, with stony patches; had an advanced guard clearing stones off the road; did not expect to get much better roads till a different formation was reached. No game to day; had to fall back on damper and apples. Killed a large brown snake, measuring some twelve feet; the country seemed to be full of them; distance, nine miles.

Thursday, 8th. Made an early start, as it was too warm to travel in the middle of the day, and carry a swag. The writer, in company with George Dane, Kirkpatrick, and some others, went along the road to look for water for the next day's stage, but failed to find any, but the other party found some just at dark; they also found a poor fellow dead in the bush, and as it was too late to do anything that night, they left him; distance, ten miles.

Friday, 9th. Started before daylight to clear the road, and when the spring was reached, Betts and party were found waiting for us to go and bury the man found the day before. The writer's opinion was that he had been dead some six or seven days, and that he had died from natural causes, as there were no signs of any foul play; there were no papers nor anything to identify him by, no money, and nothing but his swag and some rations he was carrying. A hole was dug, and he was buried in the presence of seven witnesses. The party proceeded on their journey; roads still very heavy; expected to get a change the following day, and did not care how soon it

came, as carrying a swag is no joke, though there were plenty doing it. Camped at a small waterhole; the worst stage for grass and water since starting; distance, eleven miles.

Saturday, 10th: Made an early start, and came on to the Denam River, a splendid sheet of water. Thought we had got out of the sandstone at last, and expect to have better roads. Came to the river again in about twelve miles, and camped, it being the best day's work since starting, in all about fifteen miles.

Sunday, 11th. Decided to cross the river, and camp, as grass was scarce last night. All hands busy washing. Paice, Kirkpatrick, and self, took a stroll into the hills in the afternoon to look for kangaroos, but did not get any, though they would have been very acceptable, but we saw some of the roughest scenery ever witnessed, and found looking for kangaroos anything but a good line when limited in shoe leather; distance, one and a half miles.

Monday, 12th. Started at 7 a.m. from the river, crossing it several times; some of the crossings very heavy; had to double bank to get through; were this river running, it would be impossible to get along; grass good, plenty water, weather warm; distance, twelve miles.

Tuesday, 13th. Made an early start, the first four miles very fair; then came to a complete block; had to unload both drays, and had to put five horses on, and all hands with ropes, to get the empty drays up, just a true picture of what we saw in the *Sydney Mail*. They call it Hell's Gates. Got over all right, and started for the next difficulty. Came to good water, and camped; distance, ten miles.

Wednesday, 14th. Ten miles before dinner, over a very fair track, through granite, with hungry quartz; came on to two tracks after dinner; the drays took one, and some of the party the other; the drays made a spring in about two miles, and camped. Danes, Williams, Kirkpatrick, and I, came on to the Bow River, and camped; distance for drays, twelve miles.

Thursday, 15th. Drays came up to the Bow about 10.30, and camped for the rest of the day. Some packers came into camp to day from the field, being the first we had met on the track. They did not give a very good account, but they were going for 'tucker' in order to give the field another trial; some of them were very bad with scurvy. They told us we had still 170 miles to do, and that we had

come something like 130 miles. By O'Donnell's chart, the whole Distance is made 220 miles - something wrong; distance, ten miles.

Friday, 16th. Parted with poor old Hamilton this morning, who goes back to the Gulf, as the men coming back say you cannot get 'tucker' for money, and that we had still some very rough country to go over; what we had come over nearly knocked Hamilton up. We came to the river again in five miles, and camped for dinner (tea and damper), and started again for a camp nine miles off. Met a lot of packers and some swagmen without a pound of flour. Do not know how they will get down; some of these men ran the field down. Came into camp and found Mr Carr Boyd; the less said about him the better. Had to double bank both drays several times to day; weather warm; distance fourteen miles.

Saturday, 17th. Started about 8 passed through very poor country, nearly all granite hills. Met a lot of men, who gave a wretched account of the field, and made some of our boys look very down in the mouth. Kirkpatrick shot a fine wallaroo, so we shall have a good dinner tomorrow; weather still very warm distance, eight miles.

Sunday, 18th. Spell day. Had a fine dinner - wallaroo and apples; these animals are better here than they are in New South Wales - at least we thought so. It was the first time we had had anything in the shape of meat since leaving the ship.

Monday, 19th. An early start; the first three miles very rough rugged hills on both sides do not think a cat could get over them. Paice had a capsized today no harm done got into camp all night; distance, six miles.

Tuesday, 20th. Started early; roads very rough; passed thirty or forty men to day, some going for tucker, some for good; camped on a big hill; very mean camp for grass and water; distance six miles.

Wednesday, 21st. Shortly after starting, we came to a very steep pinch; had to double bank, and all hands with ropes; got over without unloading. Very hilly country to day; grass very mean, nothing but spinifex. Passed a lot of men to day; in fact, there are as many coming away as going; distance, five miles.

Thursday, 22nd. Still in rough country; crossing rivers, nothing but dry sand beds; about three miles from last night's camp we came to



another very rough pinch; got over all right, and camped for dinner - our usual fare, damper and tea. Got under weigh for another camp; found the roads a little better; came up to a lot of drays in camp, giving their horses a spell, and decided to do the same, as some of our horses were looking very dicky, and the chances were that they would die. Many animals died at the different camps on this river, some say from eating a pea, but I think from overwork, as some of the teams in this camp started ten days before us. This was a very good camp, plenty of water and grass, though the latter is getting very dry; distance to-day, nine miles.

Saturday, 24th. Spelling the horses to day. Some of our shipmates came into camp with their horses knocked up, and, like our own, badly in want of a spell.

Sunday, 25th. Still in camp. One of our shipmates' horses died to day; they made a *post mortem* examination, and the verdict was that he died from the effects of a capsize, and not from eating the pea, and I believe that, and overwork, was the cause of most of the deaths.

Monday, 26th. Started at 8 a.m., and passed a patch of boggy ground just after starting; camped at 11 for dinner - tea and damper. Afterwards made Fletcher's Creek; formation to day, granite and limestone; very good grass. As we came into camp, Williams shot a fine turkey. Distance, nine miles.

Tuesday, 27th. Left the creek early, and passed through good country for water; plenty of grass, but no substance in it; formation, same as yesterday; the hills are all a mass of boulders, with neither grass nor timber; camped for dinner about nine miles from Fletcher's Creek; started for a better camp, as one or two of our horses are nearly done up, and we shall have to give them a spell, or leave them; distance, twelve miles.

Wednesday, 28th. Spelling the horses again. Found out to day that we had a lot of shoemakers in the party. Most of us are busy half soleing and heeling our boots with some of our trace harness, as the Sydney boots will not stand this country. This is the first time that the Grenfell party have been camped by themselves since leaving, home. A lot of men passed again today, and they say the rush is a duffer, but some of us are determined to see for ourselves, if we have to carry our swags, but I hope we shall be able to save our

horses, as we may want them for other purposes than carrying our tucker.

Thursday, 29th. Started early, with Kirk's more in the shafts, and packed old Punch. Came to the Ord River; dry at crossing, and a very stiff pull through sand for about half a mile; had to double bank to get through; nearly a case with the horses, so expect we shall have to camp again. Passed large numbers of dead horses to day - hard work, I suppose. Tried a few prospects; no luck; traces of tin. Old George a little off his tucker to day; nothing serious. Four bags of flour gone up to date - speaks for itself. Distance, eight miles.

Friday, 30th July. Started at 8 a.m. Horses looking very dicky; only intend to go five or six miles. Half an hour after leaving camp we met Walton McCarthy, and had a good shake of hands all round, and a good talk about the rush. He said it might turn out something yet, that is, when the rain set in, but did not think it would be anything before. We parted from him, and again proceeded on our journey, coming to some of the roughest country we had had yet. It took the drays six and a half hours to do six miles. This has been a very warm day, and cloudy (the only clouds we have seen since we landed in Western Australia), and we made every preparation for rain, but it came to nothing but heat. Things are beginning to look very blue, but it is no use crying over spilt milk, as we came here to see the rush, and that we are determined to do - at least some of us; distance, six miles.

Saturday, 31st. Had some trouble to get a start this morning on account of the horses; they are nearly done up, but we are trying to get them along to the nearest point to the field; from all accounts it is a rank duffer as yet, and if it should be true (we hope not) the only chance left is to get our stores in and sell them. We met Dan Perry to day, on the down trip; he gives a wretched account, but we are still going on. Very cloudy, looks like a thunderstorm, that is, if there is any such thing this time of year in this country. Road very fair to day; formation granite on edge, just as thin, and like slate. Tried a couple of dishes, any amount of black sand, but, not the ghost of a colour of gold. Started on the fifth bag of flour to day; all the boys in good health, but not in spirits; distance, five miles.

Sunday, 1st August. Camped to day to give the horses a spell, in very good grass, the best they have had for some time. We also managed to get some game, so will have a passable mess today -

curry and dried apples. Had a slight thunderstorm last night, with a few drops of rain; this morning it is still raining a little, just enough to make us cover up the drays. We have an eccentric being in camp to day; he calls himself Kermar Lenman, from the United States - not a bad sort on the whole. We are thinking of making a depot at this camp, so that if we have to turn right back, it will do for us the down trip. It came on to rain pretty smartly at about 1 p.m., and continued for a couple of hours. Believe it is something unusual to see any rain this time of the year, the old hands so. Total rainfall about sixty points by our gauge (frying pan), the only use we have had for it on the track.

Monday, 2nd August. Horses hotter this morning. Five of us stopped behind to bring up the tents, which got very wet yesterday, and plant our stores and tools that we shall not require, by all accounts, and if we should want the tools, it will not be far to come back only fifty five miles. It has been a very nice day for travelling. Got up to the rest of the party in camp about 11 o'clock, and found O'Donnell camped there; had a yarn with him, and proved that he knew nothing about mining; nor does he profess to do so, but said that where there are such pieces as he handed us to inspect, there ought to be some more (quantity produced between nine and ten ounces). I gave him all particulars about the man we buried on the road. The country we passed through to day is very poor looking for gold; formation, granite and hungry quartz. Andrew Dunn suffering a little from sore eyes; applied some of Dr. Rygate's lotion. All the rest of the boys in the best of health. Grass very mean at this camp; water very good; distance nine miles.

Tuesday, 3rd August. Glad to get out of this camp on account of so many dead horses. Was talking to O'Donnell last night about the distance; by his directions, and what we found by travelling over the road, we found that in starting from the port we, like the rest, were too heavily loaded that the journey could be best done with pack horses. Came on to the Panton River in about six miles from last camp; these are called rivers, but at present they are only dry, sandy beds, with water in holes here and there. Had another slight shower, which compelled us to camp at 11 o'clock; very little rain after all. Dunn's eyes a little better to day; a few more applications will put him right, I think. Formation, granite, with patches of basalt. Self and Kirkpatrick went one way prospecting, and George another; all I got was black sand, George a few colours; it is quite possible that the head of this river would be worth prospecting, but

a man would have to know the country well, as it seems to be very rough for travelling; grass very fair; distance, nine miles.

Wednesday, 4th August. Started at 7 o'clock with drays. McLaughlan and Williams stopped with tents, as they were very wet; came on all right for about eight miles, and then the horses were completely knocked up; had a great job to get them into camp; the only way that we can account for this state of affairs is, that the grass they are eating cannot have any more substance in it than Ingrey's sawdust, if as good, as the road we have travelled to day has been the best we have had for the distance, not a pinch in the whole stage; what we are to do with them is a mystery to me; got into camp; had our usual dinner - damper and tea; myself and Kirkpatrick went out after dinner prospecting, travelled about 3 miles over some very rough country, and got nothing in the shape of gold; tracked a lot of blacks, young and old, but saw none; weather still warm, nights cool; distance, eleven miles.

Thursday, 5th August. Did not start till about 9 o'clock, as horses were very weak, and only a seven mile stage to do; met any amount of shipmates to day coming back, and from them we have the old story, that it is a rank duffer. I expect some of us will make a start with bluey tomorrow, as the horses are done this time, and we would have to give them a four or five days' spell, so the best thing to be done now is for a few to go in and see what we think of the place; fell some palm trees to have a feed of cabbage and damper — some of Schweitzer's beef would go high with it; all the boys still in good health, looking back, however, to the journey, and no boots to do it with, not a very nice prospect; road very fair, formation granite, patches of slate and basalt, very mean on the whole; weather still very warm; distance, seven miles.

Friday, 6th August. Had a meeting to day in reference as to what was the best thing to do, some of us consider that if we put the horses in the drays again that they would not be of any use to us again for anything, so it was decided to share out the tucker and pack them and ourselves for remainder of the journey, nineteen miles, and sell or do whatever was best, one of each party to stop at this camp till the others came back, McLaughlan for our party, Paice for his, and J. Dodd for his; we left some more provisions at this camp for the return trip.

Saturday, 7th August. Started this morning with pack horses with about two hundred pounds each; all the donkeys, about 40 pounds on their backs, got along very well, but found it very warm work; nothing else for it, we had to grin and carry it; the horses camped at the first water, fourteen miles; Williams and I decided to go the rest of the journey, five miles, which was a very rough track, and something to be remembered; got two old ship mates and camped with them; they are just on their way down, fairly disgusted with the place, as they are men like ourselves used to making fair wages when they work; they have been here two weeks, and worked out one gully and part of another for five ounces; it beats all the places I have ever seen as yet; you can work half a mile of a gully for a load of stuff, and after you have carried it on your back one or two miles to water, you might get a pennyweight or two for your trouble; not a very bright prospect for Kimberley so far.

Sunday, 8th August. Pack horses came in today all right, and we started to sell our stores: flour, 1s per lb; tea, 4s; potatoes, 2s; sugar, 1s.6d; rice, 1s 6d; Charley Lee came over to our camp and had dinner with us; from what we could hear from him and others, there is nothing much to stop here, for we have no doubt that from what we can hear there is gold in the country, but the high price of rations and the chances of bad health that are likely to come after the rainy season it would be folly for us to stop here, for the best of it is only a fossicking place, and has been greatly overrated; had a true report been given of the place there never would have been a rush, at least that is our opinion; we are camped on the Elvira River; there was a rush to a little ravine running into it last week by some hundred or hundred and fifty men, and the whole of it was worked out in a few days for five ounces; this I believe to be a fact, as nearly all the men that worked in the gully were ship mates of ours.

Monday, 9th August. Busy today selling stores; the rest of the boys are gully raking to try to get a few pennyweights as a sample of Kimberley gold; one good feature in the men that are on this field is that they do not care much for spirits as we have a few bottles and cannot get rid of it. Tom Kirk, says it is very hard work; there is no mistake about it, you have to carry the dirt three quarters of a mile, and five of them worked a hundred yards of a gully for sixteen pennyweights; so much for our first day on Kimberley.

Tuesday, 10th August. Off to work at sunrise; worked harder than yesterday for less gold; everybody about looking very blue over

total for the day, fourteen pennyweights; this is for five donkeys packing one hundred and fifty pounds on their back, and making ten trips a day; very warm work.

Wednesday, 11th Aug. Started again at sunrise for another day; some went to a rush about two miles away, and others to find another gully. Mitten and Williams came back from the two mile no good; the others came in shortly after, with the same prospect - no good, and the party went on packing the dirt for the remainder of the day for a total of eight weights; this had finished the gully of about 220 yards. We came to the conclusion that it was no use our stopping any longer, for what we heard from others and what we know ourselves, it is a very bad speck, as a man might make his tucker if he has a mind to work, but he must work.

Thursday, 12th August. Went down the river about three miles to a lay on, and was late; tried above and below, but could get nothing; came back to the camp, and prepared to start for the Gulf; saw any amount of quartz reefs in and about the field, but no gold in any of them, and if there was they would have had to be very rich, as there is no timber in the country, not even for firewood; I don't believe that the whole of the country we travelled through would run three trees to the acre; a poorer timber country I never was in. So much for my experience on the road to and at the Kimberley goldfields. Left the field on the 20th August, and arrived at the twenty mile on the 27th; camped there till Tuesday with the horses, and we could not do anything with them, so we agreed to sell them for what they would bring; sold the four of the horses that we took from Grenfell, with three pack saddles, and went into the Gulf the following day, 2nd September; booked in the Edith Mary, sail vessel, for Port Darwin, and started from Cambridge Gulf on Saturday, 3rd September, and bid farewell to Kimberley.

We arrived in Port Darwin on the 7th September, camped there till Saturday, 17th September, went on board the steamship Guthrie, and started for Sydney on the 18th; arrived at Thursday Island on 21st, left the same day, and arrived at Cooktown on Saturday, 24th, Townsville 26th, and Brisbane 1st October. Thomas Kirkpatrick and John and Thomas Dodd got off here to stay a while at least. The rest of the party proceeded on the journey, and arrived in Sydney Harbour on 4th October, sadder but wiser men, but all well, and not rid of all our colonial gold.

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## Further Comment

The mention of Ingrey's sawdust was a humorous reference to Mr CJ Ingrey, a leading and highly regarded Grenfell citizen who was a flour and timber miller at the time. He arrived in Grenfell in 1867. Dr Rygate's lotion refers to Dr RE Rygate, an esteemed and long term medical practitioner in Grenfell. The *Edith Mary* on which WB Filby reports the party returned from Wyndham to Port Darwin was probably the *Edith May* a Sydney-owned 212 ton, 3-masted schooner that sailed the Australian Coast and as far afield as Mauritius, and possibly further. It made many voyages between Port Darwin and Wyndham. There were 90 passengers between Wyndham and Port Darwin on this occasion. The steamship which carried the party back from Port Darwin to Sydney, the *Guthrie*, serviced various Australian ports carrying passengers, general cargo and mining equipment but also voyaged as far as Chinese ports. They had waited in Port Darwin for the ship to arrive from Hong Kong. The Denam River referred to in the letter is known as the Denham River.

With the missing text, dates after leaving Sydney are uncertain. At that time, the voyage to Port Darwin took about 15 days and then to Wyndham about 3-4 days. The party's cargo would have been unloaded in Port Darwin, then after a wait of a few days for the ship to Wyndham, their horses, equipment and provisions loaded onto the second ship. This would have accounted for about 5 days with a further 3 days for the passage. Dodd reported that the group arrived in Wyndham on 26 June. Unloading in Wyndham may have taken a day or more due to the poor port facilities there at the time and the party probably needed at least 2 or 3 days in Wyndham to prepare for the overland journey. This suggests they may have started on the track on about 2 or 3 July which would appear to match reasonably well with the first date WB Filby gives in his account, 5 July.

WB Filby refers to several people met during their journey. Early in the report he referred to using "O'Donnell's charts". In the few years prior to the discovery of gold in the Kimberly region there was considerable interest in establishing a pastoral industry in the region. In the hope of establishing a sheep station in the area, in 1883 William O'Donnell led a party from Katherine to explore the East Kimberley area around Cambridge Gulf and report back to the Cambridge Downs Pastoral Association. He was also commissioned in 1885 by the Western Australian Government to find a better route to the goldfields that were proclaimed the following year. O'Donnell is recognised as having made a significant contribution to the region. Having been prepared by someone who had this experience in the region, his charts would have been of great use in travelling to the goldfields. Some of his maps had been printed in newspapers in early 1886 and may well have been an encouragement to the Grenfell group.

On 2 August, the party came on the camp of O'Donnell, "had a yarn with him, and proved that he knew nothing about mining; nor does he profess to do so". He did, however, show the party a good quantity of gold he had found in his travels. There was clearly discussion with O'Donnell about the route the party had chosen.

One of O'Donnell's party was William Henry James Carr-Boyd and it was he whom the Grenfell men encountered on 16 July, earlier in their journey. The way his name is

introduced implies the party knew of him prior to their expedition. Certainly by that time his reputation would have been established. That WB Filby wrote “the less said about him the better” is curious given Carr-Boyd’s extensive and acknowledged skills as a bushman and explorer. Another newspaper correspondent who encountered Carr-Boyd within days of this encounter described him as “an awful blowhard”! Carr-Boyd’s biography is an interesting account of a character and of early life in remote areas of Australia.

The party returned to Grenfell, though not as a group. Jack Hamilton had turned back early. The return for the main party from Part Darwin was aboard the steamship Guthrie. Thomas Kirkpatrick and John and Thomas Dodd disembarked in Brisbane to spend a short time there whilst William Filby, William Paice, Duncan, James Kerr, Mitton, Joe Napier and Joe Napier junior continued to Sydney and home to Grenfell.

Several newspapers throughout the colonies reported on a letter written on 16 August 1886 by “an old Grenfell miner” in which the author, probably a member of the group of interest here, claimed that the Kimberley diggings were the “biggest swindle that had been known for many years past”. He reported that here was no gold there except colour and that hundreds who went to the region with expectations of getting gold would be left there to starve. Thomas and JH Dodd also sent a telegram to the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 10 September stating that the diggings were a complete failure, an opinion conveyed in many letters and reports from about May 1866 until at least early 1897. Accounts by some banks and other businesses were not as pessimistic as were the reports of individual miners and there were reports of some good quantities of gold and other ores being won and sold.

The *Cootamundra Herald* printed an article in late October 1886 with a view differing from that of many. It reported statements of a Mr Baines who had been part of “the Saunders party” in 1886. He was unhappy about the “adverse criticisms passed on the Kimberley goldfields until the place has been fairly tried this wet season”. He reported that the Saunders party was still in the field, in excellent health, and that they had never lost a horse.

At times the Grenfell party found the going very demanding and early into their travels, on 16 July, Jack Hamilton succumbed to the rigors of the track and turned back to the gulf, knowing there was some more very rough country to traverse. The difficulties impacted all members of the party and though they experienced no significant health issues, the rigors of the journey precipitated a meeting on 6 August to discuss their situation. Subsequently the group split into three groups and on 8 August, it became clear that they did not see themselves being in the region for long and they discussed leaving provisions in place for their return journey.

The journey by these Grenfell residents was one of many similar journeys to the Kimberly region from other places throughout Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere. That they expected to stay only about 6 months indicates they were hoping for quick and rich pickings from the East Kimberly goldfields. They were unsuccessful in their quest, but undoubtedly learnt from their experiences and had their eyes opened to the rigors of living and working in the Australian tropics. On their return they would have been warmly greeted by their families and friends in Grenfell and no doubt shared many more stories than those reflected in the account by WB Filby. Their journey is not any more significant than that of others in search of riches during Australia’s early years. It is, none-the-less, worthy of recognition.



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