

Favenc, Ernest 'Diary of expedition in Northern Territory from Powell's Creek to Daly Waters May 28-Jy 15, 1883'

Introduction

The following transcription is of a diary kept by the explorer Ernest Favenc during his explorations to the east of the Overland Telegraph Line over some seven weeks in the middle of 1883. It is based on the original diary held in the Mitchell Library (B 879, CY 2581, frames 119-156).

The diary records a kind of expedition-within-an-expedition. The larger expedition commenced from Gregory Downs Station in northern Queensland on 14 April 1883. Led by Favenc, its other members were Lindsay Crawford and the recently married couple Emily Caroline Creaghe and Harry Creaghe. Initially Favenc's wife Bessie was also to join the expedition, but pregnancy had forced her to return to Sydney before the expedition proper began. Emily Caroline Creaghe kept a diary of the full expedition, recording its delayed beginnings after a sea voyage to Normanton, and then the arduous trekking through often difficult and unfamiliar country, until the party reached the Overland Telegraph Line near Powell's Creek on 14 May 1883. Creaghe's original diary – the first by a woman explorer in Australia – is also held in the Mitchell Library (MLMSS 2982, CY 936, frames 1 – 243). In addition it is available in a published form edited by Peter Monteath (Corkwood Press, 2004).

Both Creaghe's and Favenc's diaries indicate that there were some tensions within the exploration party by the time of its arrival at the Powell's Creek telegraph station. In setting off from Powell's Creek back toward the east to explore the region of the Macarthur River, Favenc dispensed with the services of the Creaghes. For this shorter expedition he was still accompanied, as his diary reveals, by Lindsay Crawford but now also by a man called Rogers, whom Favenc had met at the telegraph station. After exploring the Macarthur region the trio returned to the Overland Telegraph Line, reaching Daly Waters telegraph station in a state of near exhaustion on 15 July. When they met up with the Creaghes at Springvale Station on 26 July, Emily Caroline Creaghe described them as 'looking very thin and black'.

Favenc wrote an official report of his explorations for the South Australian government, which at this time was curious about the development potential of its Northern Territory. Published in the South Australian Parliamentary Papers of 1883-84, his report was overwhelmingly sanguine about the region's prospects, especially for the pastoral industries. Favenc also wrote a series of articles on his exploration for *The Sydney Mail*. The diary transcribed below, in contrast, was not designed for public or official consumption. It is valuable for the insights it gives into the rigours of outback exploration in territory which provided a range of challenges.

James Anderson and Peter Monteath

Transcription of Ernest Favenc's Diary (B 879, CY 2581, frames 119 – 156)

Index Card

Favenc Ernest
 Diary of expedition in Northern Territory from Powell's Creek to Daly Waters
 May 28-Jy 15, 1883: [original ms.]
 12 mo. Pp. 53. B 879

Northern Territory–Exploration
 Macarthur River
 Crawford, L.

Spine

DOW Favenc 16.3.32

Frontispiece i [*Text written sideways to page*]

Duffer Favenc March 1st 80.
 DDD [*Double Darn & Damnation*]

Frontispiece ii

Diary of Expedition
 in Northern Territory
 from Powell's Creek to Daly Waters,
 May 28-Jy 15, 1883.
 By
 E. Favenc

Page 1 [*Transcriber's note: pages not numbered in original*]

June 10/83
 Sunday

↑
 Relief Camp IV Gum Tree

[*Throughout the text, tree markings superscribed with an arrow ↑ are generally enclosed within a chevron.*]

Page 2 blank.

Page 3

F + LC.
 D^f EF

<u>March</u> [illegible] Cash		6	
x Advance Cook	1		
x Boatmen	1		
Washing		6	8

Page 4 blank.

Page 5

Monday May 28th 1883

Left WK (Powell Creek) Bowley the station master and Abbott assistant at Tenants [*sic*] Creek rode with us about 4 miles. Crawford and a man named Rogers are with me. R seems inclined to develop [*sic*] a conversational talent but is a handy man and will be useful. More so than our late companions who were only ornamental. Camp at Ferguson Springs to-night, 14 miles from Powell Creek. GBP. [*God Bless Podge*]

Page 6

Tuesday 29 May

Left Ferguson Spring. Travelled along road to-day; stopped for dinner at South Newcastle. Water-hole nearly dry; country presents every appearance of a drought In the afternoon sent Rogers along the road with pack horses. Crawford and I went in to look at the big hole. Found it a large sheet of water but country not very good round about. Good camp to-night for horses. GBP

Met G and A Phillips returning to Powell

Page 7

Wednesday 30 May

Pole Camp

Sent Jack along with horses to follow road to North Newcastle. Crossed Asburton [*sic*] Range to Eastward came on a plain but saw no sign of water. Returned to camp about 5pm. Found Jack had arrived safely - saw traces of our late party affecting sight of the track of a feminine foot around edge of lagoon and an empty cocoa tin. No game. Filled water bags for tomorrow. GBP

Page 8

Thursday 31st May

N Newcastle

Left N Newcastle this morning and reached Briggs lagoons about 5 pm. These are the

↑
lagoons seen by Briggs and Hedley [*sic*] when out with me in 79. Marked tree 1 on S. bank of lagoon. Nothing particular to chronicle today, everything going on well troubles all ahead as yet. GBP

Page 9

Friday 1 June

↑
Brigg's Lagoons I

Left Brigg's Lagoons this morning, followed up creek which is only a blue bush flat between two belts of timber, and at 2 pm came to another shallow lagoon with green grass around the edge of the water. Turned the horses off for a couple of hours, started at 4 and camped in bed

↑
of creek, no water. Marked tree at lagoon II

GBP.

Page 10

Saturday 2 June

Left camp. Dry Creek (Ross) and after some trouble in consequence of the creek running out in flooded country, traced it to where it formed again, and finally came to a dry lagoon, went on, saw old cattle tracks, creek again all over the country camped on open Coolibah forest edge of plain: good feed but horses too thirsty to appreciate it. Went ahead but got into scrub so determined to return to Green Grass Lagoon as [illegible] very much done.

GBP.

Page 11

Sunday June 3.

Left Camp on plain and made back for Green Grass Lagoon. Two of the horses had made back nearly 8 miles in short hobbles. Picked them up on the way. Very hard day did not reach lagoon until dark, horses staggering. When they got in, never saw them look so bad. After we had unpacked two blacks called out across the lagoon. They came up and told us they had only got in just before us. Nearly done for water. Everybody tired.

GBP.

Page 12

Monday June 4

↑

Spelled. II

Gave horses a spell today. One of the blacks can talk a little English (very little). They had both been in at Daly Waters. They say there is water to the East, but know of none South. One fellow, it seems, knocked upon coming in to this lagoon and the other took him back some water. Intend taking them on to show us the water.

GBP

Page 13

Tuesday June 5

Left Green-Grass Lagoon and camped on old camp edge of plain. Found pack that we had left all safe. Our two niggers trotted along all day hunting as they went. They killed a big snake 14 feet long and brought it on and have it cooking now. One is a very talkative fellow and is a black facsimile of Rogers whose tongue never rests. They are going to show us the water tomorrow but it is impossible to make them understand distance.

GBP

Page 14

Wednesday June 6

Left camp on plain and reached Yarroo creek about 5pm. Our niggers brought us about 22 miles rather a round about track to this creek which they call 'Yarroo'. There is not much water here, but they say there is more up the creek. Have given them a shirt each, some flour and a tomahawk and they are as happy as possible.

GBP

of the cliffs the view was splendid only if Podge {was here, she would insist upon leaning over, I know. Too late to get back to camp so another cold night without blankets but, Crawford and I are used to it now - G B my P} {} = over, p 20

Page 20

Tuesday 12 June

Left Perplexity Creek and camped on head of strange creek. {—} 11th
12th
Returned camp, got fresh horses and started S. Ranges and scrub till sundown then good country. GBP.

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Wednesday 13 June

Left camp on downs head of strange creek and returned to camp V. This morning we went up the range back of our camp and had a fine view. Then ran creek down looking for water as we saw pigeons and cockatoos but got none until nearly 3 o'clock, then only a little. Very dry season none of the creeks appear to have run for eighteen months. Got back to camp 11 at night. Very tired. GB my P.

Page 22

Thursday 14 June

Left camp V and went N to valley. Returned camp. This morning went N and at 9 miles came to edge of valley, seemingly of great extent. Saw a remarkable looking mountain in the distance which christened M^t Bedford. Have seen nothing yet fit for Podge. Got back camp at sun-down and had the first nights comfortable sleep for some time. GBP.

Page 23

Friday June 15

Left camp V Relief Creek taking all the horses and shifted onto the water we saw on the 13th in the (Yah Yah) Creek, we camped on the night of the 12th. Shall call it "Yah Yah" Creek after somebody's remark at beginning of this diary Jack's conversation having been bottled up for four days is quite oppressive today and has knocked Crawford up. Got a skull today for Podge. An old fellow buried on a platform will sketch it. Brought two wings from Relief creek for her. GBP

Page 24

Saturday 16

↑
"Kangaroo" Creek. VII
Went out in the morning and sketched the old skull's burial place, then ran creek short distance found it ran into a gorge with permanent water in it. Went S over good country, found several

creeks, one creek swarming with kangaroo tracks, regular roads, perhaps like Gulliver we have got into a land peopled with animals.

Trees marked today Bloodwood F Gorge. Gum SA on dinner creek Gum VII Kangaroo Ck.
GB my P

Page 25

Sunday 17

“Big Tree” Creek Gum F. Very unsatisfactory day. Struck fine creek. Splendid timber on it 10 miles E of camp, no water. Ran it up SSE about six miles, little water in sand in one place. Turned back and watered horses by digging hole. Lost all the billies had to run tracks back to where we struck creek first, no sign of them sent Jack back to camp to look for them. Whole day lost. DDD! Of course! Of course! Of course! No billies found. Camp at Creek VII (Kangaroo)
GB my old P

Page 26

Monday 18th

Kangaroo Creek. Left camp with Crawford and went to point of Southern Range. Had a good view and took bearings of hills. Returned by creek we followed yesterday or river rather. Found the billies so called the river the “Prodigal” because the lost was found.

Marked trees today Gum on highest point of “Prodigal” W bank F Gum on E bank at junction of creek ↑ in bark. Temper slightly improved.
GBP.

Page 27

Tuesday 19th

Eight Creek VIII Bloodwood W Bank
Left camp on Kangaroo Creek expecting to get a days easy travelling. Crushed again! River we followed ran into gorges very picturesque and splendidly watered, running springs but abominably rough and stony. DDD very much annoyed by several things. Camped on this dry creek at 4.30. From ridge on other side can see nothing but stony ridges on all sides, for miles. Never mind.
GB my P.

Page 28

Wednesday 20th

IX Gum E bank Macarthur Early start this morning. Got water soon after leaving camp. Very pretty hole. North all morning over stony ridges. Went up hill at 12 and took bearings. Ranges all around. In afternoon struck large creek in good country followed it up some distance then down. No water at camp.
GB my P

Page 29Thursday 21st

↑

X Flooded Boa[bab] on bank of small ana branch. Ran creek up this morning. Believe it to be main river, but it is not running here, very dry. At 11 a m started down and followed river to foot of bluff range we saw yesterday. Very grand scenery V good country all day. Had the worst possible piece of bad luck yesterday lost my "housewife" that Podge made me. Thought I might find it this morning but did not. No more luck now. GB my P.

Page 30Friday 22nd

↑

Gum XI on N bank opposite Mountain CAPE. CRAWFORD on Gum same place. No luck. Followed river down some five miles from last camp then N. Struck dry creek in 3 miles from river. NNW to far range all spinifex. In creek under range turned ENE for five struck big creek in desert country been dry for years. One hole of great depth 30 ft quite dry. After dark Jack's horse knocked up, left loose[?] Struck ana branch at 9.30, followed up but no water went[?] in to river which reached at 12.40. Water, but hard job to get to it.

GBP

Page 31Saturday 23rd

Slept late. Went back to look for Jack's horse and bring him in. Could not find him. Hunted till sun down. Did not get back to camp till Midnight. No luck since losing Podge's present.

GBP

Very tired.Page 32Sunday 24th

Started down river at 11AM, at about 1 came to a running spring which followed back to Gorge found a waterfall. Very pretty place or rather grand. Called it the "The Bessie Fall," marked it on a gum tree where we had dinner. Followed river down and camped on it. Good

↑

open country well grassed. Box XII

GB my P

Page 33

↑

Majuba Hill Box XIII

Monday 25th

Started intending to follow river, but coming to large creek coming from S. Camped on small lagoon. Crawford and I ran creek up during day, found it came out of broken ranges. Shot a catfish in a water hole. In evening marked tree on creek "The Kilgour". Coming back to camp came across some gins digging roots brought two to camp and gave them a feed as they seemed half starved one very ancient old lady very talkative. GB my P

Page 34

Tuesday 26th

Bloodwood by small lagoon in Gorge XIV. Left camp early. Struck junction of Kilgour and
 ↑
 F

Macarthur 1 1/2 miles from camp. Good country — all day River large with deep water holes In evening came to rocky gorge in which we are camped.

GB my P
 (Tired)

Page 35

Wednesday 27th

Macarthur somewhere above road crossing. Intend marking tree at crossing in morning, also write this diary as my eyes are very weak tonight. GB my P

Found a good watering place for the horses last night. Country very poor and [illegible] cattle have crossed lately, but we are too late I am afraid. Should like some beef.

GB my P. again.

Page 36

Thursday 28

Struck crossing in about 2 miles. Marked tree on E bank gum XV marked tree on west bank
 ↑

M^c Arthur box. Cattle have crossed some week or two back. Followed river down about 7 miles poor country. After camp went down to river to fish and shot an alligator. Thought I had him, but in his dying struggles he rolled off the rock into the deep water and sank.

GB my P.

↑
 Box XVI
 F

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Friday 29th

Started at 7.15 and ran the river down about 10 miles found it a fine broad river with splendid reaches, should like to have a boat on it. Our progress was stopped by a salt water creek on arm of the river. Fresh water lagoon close to the salt-water creek. High banks and very little mangrove in river. Eyes still very weak can hardly see anything when the sun gets strong. GB my P.

Returned to creek at old crossing and camped.

GBP.

Page 38June 30th

Left river at about 10 and went SW. At 2 came to range. Turned NW but could get no water and had to strike back to river which reached about 7. After some difficulty found a place to take the horses down and water them.

GBP.

Don't like this river. Never have any luck on it. Yesterday quite thrown away.

DDD

Page 39July 1st

Started about 12.30. After looking to horse's shoes came to where we turned back, crossed the gap and came on to open flats which took us on to big creek coming from S probably the creek shown by Gregory. Packed my horse "Trooper" today, he is in disgrace: would not go at all last night after dark and we had several rows. Better grass here than on the river. Jack's insanity very strong today. GB my P

Page 40July 2nd

Watered horses in big creek 1/2 mile from camp. Marked gum tree XVI. Ran creek up through valley, great many lagoons. At 2 crossed stony ridge and saw ranges for 20 miles to W. Wretched country all the afternoon, a perfect desert no water. Hope to get some soon, tomorrow morning. Poor "Trooper", quite blind in one eye. Country fearfully dry and parched. GB my P

↑

F

Page 41July 3rd

Left camp 7.45 travelled west three miles over stony desert ridges. Turned south down a steep ridge struck creek. No water to be found although pigeons [?] and other birds were about. Went on South and at 12.30 struck Gregory's? Creek. Found water up the creek and watered horses. Gave them a good spell and came on five miles. GB my P

Page 42July 4th

Bloodwood XIX S bank.

↑

F

Started S to creek; [pinites?] marked tree XVIII in fork of creeks. Spring in main creek ran

↑

F

SW until 3. 40. then got into stony limestone ridges and turned S got several large creeks but got no water. Awful drought everywhere am tired of looking for water. Had five shots at a turkey today and missed him. DDD.

GB my P.

Commissioner went well today, he is picking up a little. Got some samples of grass for Broad, and a galah's wing for Podge. Eyes very weak, DDD
GB my P

Page 48

* ↑ Small bloodwood sapling
XX
III
July 10th

“Trooper” was dying this morning. Had him shot to put him out of pain. He was poisoned on the lower Macarthur and has been lingering ever since. RIP. Struck the Parsons again soon again soon after leaving camp and found a little water in some rocks.* In the middle of the day came through a dense scrub. Passed a dry lagoon where large number of blacks had been having a great

Page 49

Bloodwood ↑
XXIV
F

Corroboree. For a wonder we are camped at water tonight. Shot 4 bronze-wing pigeons so shall have a decent breakfast tomorrow. GB my P

July 11th

very little to put down today. Fairly started on our long dry stage to the line. Very cold last night, horse very well at present but I don't know how they will look tomorrow night. Perhaps we may be lucky and get a little water.

GB my P

Page 50

July 12th

After leaving camp — scrub for a short distance then open spinifex. At 9 am turned S. and SW. and struck dry billabong. Followed flat down WSW and at 1 pm came to water. Blacks camped at it, one of them showed us another lagoon 4 miles further on. More blacks there, our old friend Jacky amongst them. Hope to reach Daly Water in two days. Horses almost done.

GB my P

Page 51

Coolibar ↑ S end.
F

1st lagoon (Whichwongi), 2nd lagoon (Amungee-mungee)

July 13th Coolibar ↑
XXV

Passed through good country on starting. Open plain well grassed, scrub on either side. Pressed two niggers into our service to show us this water they speak of between us and the Daly. They are going in the usual round about fashion. No water tonight but hope to get some by mid-day tomorrow

GB my P

Page 52July 14th

Reached (Tongmurrie) the water spoken of by the blacks at 1 pm scrubby country all the way.
Had no luck shooting this evening, the shells we have are worn-out and missed fire. A little bread left for breakfast tomorrow and then Daly Waters, I hope for dinner.

GB My dear old P

↑
XXVI
EF Bloodwood E
LC

Page 53July 15th

Reached DW 1 pm for letters and telegram from Podge.

GB my PPage 54 blank.Page 55

2 1/2 W
1 1/2 SSW
6 WSW
4 WSW

Page 56

SSW 2 miles
WSW 1 mile
W 14
WSW 1 mile
12.12
133

Page 57 [Text written sideways to page]

From point of range (Extreme) to point of old observations NW 4 miles.

From Entrance Point of range to pinnacle range N to most westerly one to most northern hill E

20 S5 miles

To point of range NE 1 1/2 miles.

1/2 to dip of light

Pages 58 to 61: Hand drawn charts and calculations.