

A River Lost.

The Bidwill Route --- An Opinion.

What requires to be opined --- you may well ask? But to those who have followed or studied John Carne Bidwill's career, there appear a number of events during his appointment as Wide Bay Crown Lands Commissioner that appear out of character for a man of his education and experience.

His abilities as botanist, horticulturist and hybridist, in such early colonial days of Australia and New Zealand, are well accepted and praised by his peers, both then and now. However his term as the first Wide Bay Crown Lands Commissioner produced certain developments, in matters other than the professions mentioned above, that would tend to combine to diminishingly affect his standing as one of our important contributors to early Australian white settlement.

Significantly included, an event, posted in stigmatic cloud for Bidwill and in continued historical and community query, as to how a Crown Lands Commissioner could get himself so hopelessly lost in the Mary Valley scrubs for eight days before being rescued by local Aborigines, reportedly, nearer dead than alive.

But such diminishment may not appear as quantified as is sometimes popularly portrayed. Perhaps there are valid or even assumed reasoning for us to ponder or conclude otherwise. The following account is promoted to provide fuel for thought on these matters, to question at least some factors that have otherwise been, perhaps unfortunately, deemed detrimental to Bidwill's abilities.

Adventurer, botanist, man of general science, merchant (trader and agent) and administrator, all accomplished within his life, so early terminated at 38 years of age. To all but the latter I must leave his peers to reflect. His botanical and horticultural skills are well known and praised and his hybridisation of specific plants has, of recent times, been reanalysed for scope in the endeavours of modern hybridisation research. Although it is pertinent to my story to include briefly his background in these matters, it is to a specific role, designated to him as Wide Bay Crown Lands Commissioner, that my story relates.

But let us briefly go back to the beginning of Bidwill's introduction to Australia.

Born in Exeter, England in 1815, Bidwill took himself off to the wilds of Canada at the ripe old age of 17. Canada, being still a relative frontier country to Europeans at that time, no doubt provided an element of adventurism to young John Carne. Returning two years later he found his vocation in botany. It was a profession that was to see him venture into strange new lands with flora alien to the norms of England and Europe.

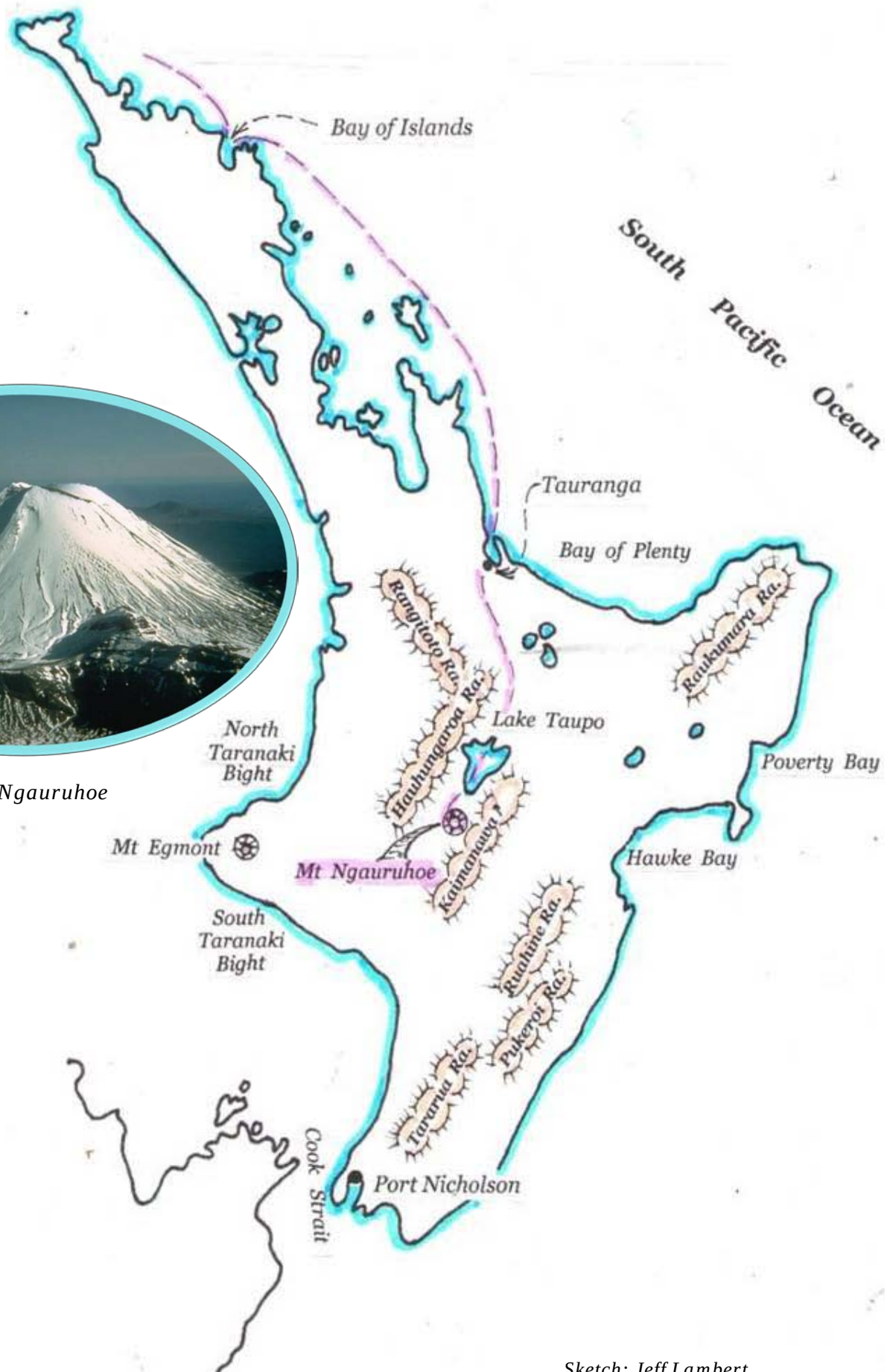
At the age of 23, after studying botany in England, he left its familiar shores for the new colony of New South Wales; to its colonial centre of government, Sydney Town. Bidwill joined a merchant company located in Sydney.

But soon there was another call to adventure and he sailed for New Zealand. Landing at the Bay of Islands, he then sailed by smaller boat to Tauranga in the Bay of Plenty, where he established his base for his ventures into the centre of North Island. It is said that he was only the second white man to venture into its interior. Going against the directive of the Maori chief, he climbed Mt Ngauruhoe which constituted violation of Maori sacred territory. In those days, if one had the option of obeying the Chief's command or not, one very wisely would have chosen the former. Bidwill chose the latter and was hard pressed not to pay for it with his life.

However it was the start of Bidwill's investigation into New Zealand's flora and being of general scientific mind, geology as well. His return to Sydney saw him working in with William Macarthur at Camden, introducing new species into the Australian landscape and dispatching Australian species to Kew gardens in England and to other destinations around the world. William was the youngest son of Elizabeth and John Macarthur --- yes, the John Macarthur of rum corps infamy.

New Zealand - North Island

Mt. Ngauruhoe --- Taupo Volcanic Zone



Mt Ngauruhoe

Bidwill, as Assistant Colonial Botanist was appointed the first Director of the Sydney Botanical Gardens, however his appointment thus by the NSW Colonial Government was overturned, by what was seen in the Colony, (more particularly by Bidwill), as the political appointment of Thomas Moore back in England. Of course the English appointment prevailed much to the disappointment of Bidwill and the colonial government.

Macarthur had backed Bidwill's promotion to the directorship and he was a very influential man in NSW, being engrossed in the occupations of farmer, grazier, horse breeder, horticulturist, immigration promoter, landowner, magistrate, member of the upper house, plant breeder, publican, sheep breeder, university administrator, wine industry leader and wine maker. ---- busy, busy boy!

Bidwill fronted the Governor in reparative terms, requesting his appointment as Crown Lands Commissioner to Wide Bay in the far northern extents of then occupied NSW to which, to cut a long story short, he eventually succeeded. Prior to that appointment however the firm sent him to Port Nicholson (now site of the capital Wellington) to establish another arm of the firm in New Zealand. From here Bidwill continued his forays into the interior of North Island and also South Island, investigating and collecting many botanical species some of which commemorate his name. But let us return to his new appointment at Wide Bay.

In November 1848, Bidwill stepped ashore at the primitive port of Wide Bay at what is now the city of Maryborough. His introduction to the wharf side crowd did little to enhance his acceptance into what was then a rough and tumble settlement and where its first policeman was not engaged until 1850. Dressed in white with tropical hat and sunshade, Bidwill addressed the crowd to inform them of his duties as Crown Lands Commissioner and his added duties, which over time were Chief Magistrate, Harbour Master, Clerk of Petty Sessions and Government Registrar, which latter duty required him to perform marriages and conduct funerals.

Some portfolio you may say, however combined remuneration saw Bidwill attain some 500 pounds sterling per annum at Wide Bay, whilst his replacement London appointee for the position of Director of the Sydney Botanical Gardens received 300 pounds the first year to cover his own costs of getting to Sydney and acquiring accommodation there and thence after, 200 pounds per annum. So that Bidwill did very well out of what became to him, a bitter disappointment at losing his position at Sydney.

Also at Tinana where he settled (at the junction of the Mary River and Tinana Creek) he was able to establish two gardens. One smaller for the house vegetable supplies and a larger one where he planted all manner of fruit trees and rarer species both from Australia and overseas. A labour of love created within his selected 800 acres --- a mix of botanical novelty and speciality.

It is said that he first introduced from Tahiti (where he stayed for one year) papayas and mango and was possibly the first to grow sugar cane in Australia. But his expertise in hybridization saw him develop many species, including stephanotis and hibiscus varieties from Tahiti and other places around the world.

However during his term as Crown Land Commissioner, his reputation was somewhat dimmed by events and altercations with the settlers. From Bidwill's perspective the demon drink was the underlying problem. He accused John Mactaggart of Kilkivan Station of supplying *grog* to certain settlers and apparently let it be known so. Mactaggart took exception and challenged Bidwill to a duel which Bidwill (quite lawfully and probably wisely) refused, whereupon Mactaggart took to Bidwill with his whip in front of the townsfolk. Bidwill had him charged and Mactaggart was fined --- some say that the fiery Scot served a short sentence, cooling his heels at Her Majesty's pleasure.

Another incident involved George Furber. Furber had travelled from Ipswich to occupy the old lease (Girkun) taken up by John Eales. He was thus situated on the south side of the Mary River close to and upstream from the suburb known today as Tinana. He set up wharves there and advertised their availability for shipping of wool and other cargo to the south and supplies returning.

Whilst fencing with an offsider, they were attacked by Aborigines with the fencing axes. His offsider was killed and suffering dreadful head wounds himself, Furber rode 150 miles (240 kilometres) all the way to Ipswich to have his wounds treated. Recovering he returned to Maryborough where some time later he shot dead an Aboriginal in front of Bidwill and other townsfolk. Furber claimed that the Aboriginal was one of those that attacked him, but some townsfolk were sceptical about the claim and

others thought that Bidwill should have taken action to apprehend Furber for taking matters into his own hands. Bidwill, as Chief Magistrate, chose not to take any action. Furber was Maryborough's first settler and trader, albeit established firstly on the south side of the river.

In the late 1840's Maryborough was still a primitive settlement but because of its port facility it became the gateway to the Wide Bay and Burnett regions. By 1890 it had become second only to Sydney as Australia's leading immigration port, processing some 21,000 immigrants to settle the Wide Bay and Burnett districts and beyond and catering for miners to the Gympie Gold Field. However Road transport and communication came by circuitous route via Ipswich and the Brisbane Valley or alternatively via the dangerous and sometimes unreliable route over the Conondale Range and thence by the flood prone Mary River. Some early commuters even travelled via the downs and then travelled down the range and on to Ipswich.

To engage the Brisbane Valley route one had to travel south westerly from Maryborough to Gigoomgan Station (a former outstation of Eale's Tiaro Station) thence south westerly along Teebar Creek and over the Coast Range, leaving the Mary waters and on to the South Burnett waters via Dodamarine Creek to the Lawless Brothers station at Boobyjan. From there the road traversed south following via (very approximately) the present roads servicing Goomeri, Murgon, Wondai, Kingaroy to Nanango.

From Nanango they travelled south east into the Brisbane Valley. If the River was quiet they travelled via the river but if it roared the route via Colinton, Cressbrook (now Toogoolawah) and on to meet the Downs/Ipswich road at Laidley Plains and then easterly to Ipswich. At Ipswich before a pontoon bridge was built, travellers commuted across the Bremer River into Ipswich by dinghy. Ipswich, originally known as Limestone, was then the main commercial centre for the Moreton District before the convict administration ceased operation at Brisbane Town.

Consequently few travellers progressed past Ipswich, however those doing so had to live with much the same situation as crossing the Bremer. Of course the Brisbane River at Brisbane was much wider than the Bremer and if your luck was out and the boatman on the other side, then one had to whistle one's teeth out, or do whatever else was appropriate to attract his attention. That is if he was not up at the tavern enjoying a lunchtime, early and or late, refreshment. If you desired to take your horse to the other side it had to be tethered behind the row boat and if the horse didn't like swimming he (and often his owner) suffered the wrath of the oarsman.

So you can see it was a very circuitous and time consuming journey with added time endured in the crossings. Brisbane to Maryborough as the crow flies is about 240 kilometres whereas the road journey via *The Loop* was twice that distance. So it was not surprising when the New South Wales Government, after the finish of the penal settlement (1838), decided that a more direct route was needed to Maryborough and with the rise of Brisbane as the commercial centre the road was to connect Maryborough to Brisbane, not via Ipswich, but via the shortest route possible.

So one might ask why a road had not already been constructed up the coastal plain to Maryborough? Why travel was by the loop as described? To understand the restrictions to such we must go back to the penal station days. Governor Gipps had issued a commandment that no development was to be undertaken within a 50 mile (80 kilometre) radius from the penal station. A similar radius of 12 mile free zone around Ipswich (within the Brisbane 50 mile radius) remained for some time. This was to deter would be escapees who, having *jumped the fence*, were faced with a wall of virgin scrub, rivers and creeks unbridged and extending from their source in the D'Aguilar and Blackall Ranges to the Coral Sea and with vegetation ranging from heavily forested ridges to thick rainforest and swamps of thick tea-tree. It was to be a no go zone.

One exception was the German mission station at the present suburb of Nundah/Nudgee area. However it was known that tracks were surreptitiously used by the Archer's and Mackenzie's via the Mission and across the prohibited area. On reaching the Glass House Mountains, they then rode west to their properties on the Stanley River. Perhaps the authorities back in Sydney Town were too far away to hear of such a breach, or perhaps they may have turned a blind eye to such a saving in time to their then most northern Moreton Bay settlers.

But the penal station finished taking inmates in 1838, although it ran its time of prevailing sentences into 1842. So what then of the freed zone of 50 mile radius? Well Andrew Petrie who was a respected

early explorer and Superintendent of Works at the Penal Station, had noted the plight of the Aborigines being forced from their lands by white settlement. He conversed with Governor Gipps on this matter and Gipps created an Aboriginal reserve over the coastal plain which stretched from just north of Brisbane into the Mooloolah area and nearly to the white settlement on the Maroochy. Time-wise it followed on from the revocation of the 50 mile restriction.

This reserve lasted until the Colony of Queensland was declared in 1859. One of the first legislative provisions by the Queensland Colonial Government was to pass an 1860's act titled "*The Unoccupied Crown Lands Occupation Act*". **The title speaks for itself.** Under Governor Bourke's proclamation of 1835, declaring occupation of Australia under Terra Nullius and that nobody owned the land before the arrival of the British, the legislators could ignore any argument that the aborigines owned any land at all and that therefore they were not legal occupants.

Therefore the previous Aboriginal Reserve became null and void of occupancy thus becoming *Unoccupied Crown land* and the Act provided for the Crown to then sell or lease the land as it saw fit to accommodate occupancy. It was to take 157 years for Terra Nullius to be overturned in the Australian High Court. (1992).

Having described the circuitousness of *The Loop* and the problems constricting developments around the penal station and thus the coastal plain, let us return to Maryborough and Bidwill's progress.

One might applaud the New South Wales Government for thinking so favourably of their far distant northern cousins by rewarding them with such amenity. But alas -- perish the thought! The road justification was really brought about at request of the police escort service. Prisoners from Maryborough and beyond, destined for Brisbane, had to have such police escort numbers as to allow for guards not only travelling but during overnight camps. Five days to complete the journey, if no flood holdups, stretched the police budget to such an extent that the direct road investigation was approved.

Of course it would be nice to think that the settlers' convenience was the prime justification, however the irony of the fact that the road reached approval purely to accommodate the police escort of those that had been disruptive to their town peace and quiet, presented no conscientious dampener to the Maryborough settlers' eager acceptance of the project.

So the directive from the New South Wales authority reached Maryborough in 1850 where it fell to Commissioner Bidwill to carry out the road line investigation. Maybe it could have been carried out by others if available and willing. However whether by default, self or official nomination, it became Bidwill's project.

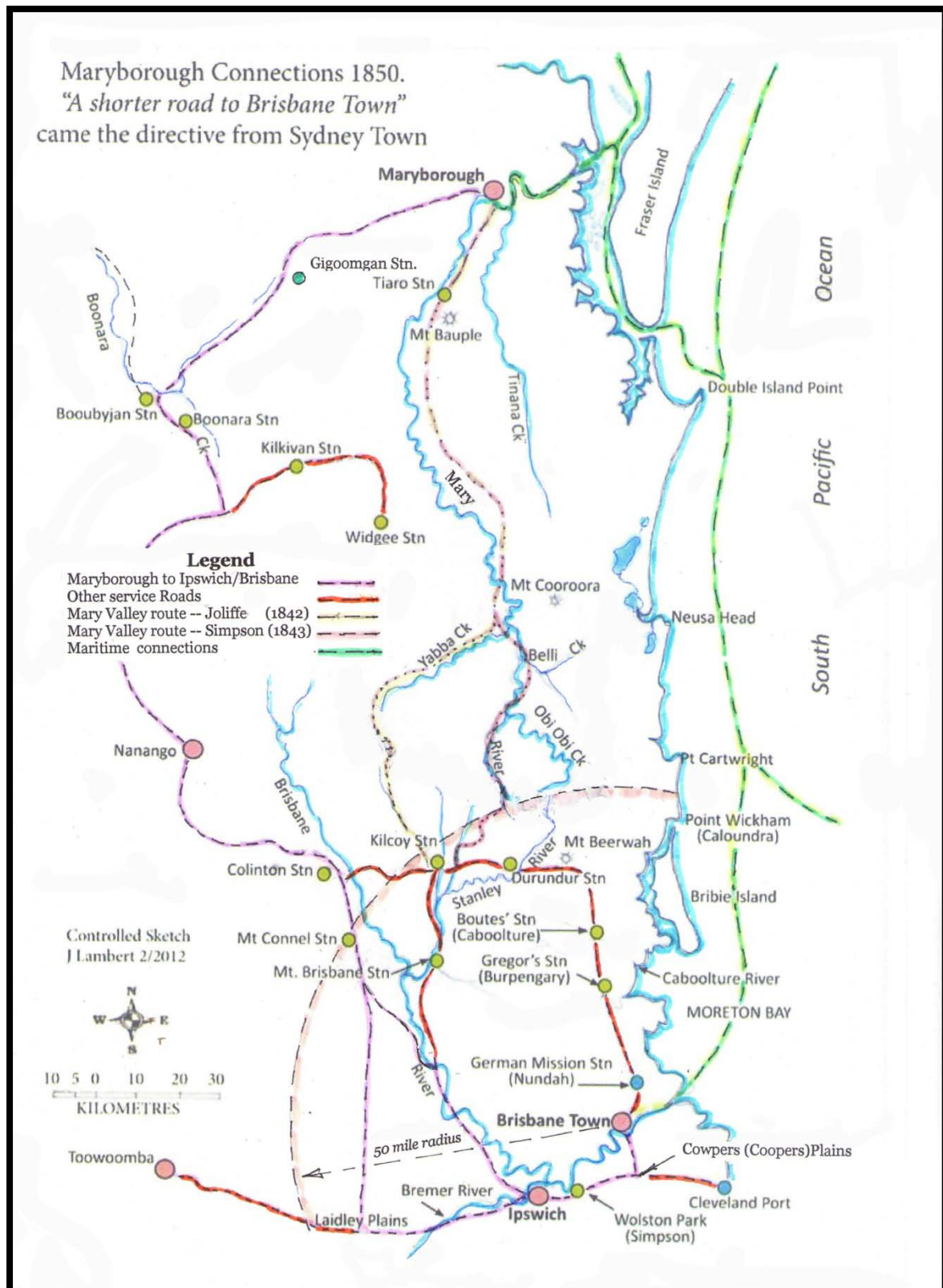
It took Bidwill several months to prepare as he could not find available, wagon and bullocks. Once under way however they made fair progress along the ridge that forms the divide between the Mary waters and the Tinana waters. Bidwill had travelled this route as far as Duramboi lagoons to investigate the large and beautiful blue water lilies (*Nymphaea gigantea*) --- approximately 300 millimetres diameter growing abundantly in the lagoons. After this however Bidwill, by his own reckoning, found himself further west than the general route via Curra Creek. This, instead of leading him via the ancient aboriginal track and earlier European track which led over the divide between Curra and Twelve Mile Creeks (the latter now known as Deep Creek) led him instead through the centre of the present town of Gympie.

Deep Creek, in its lower flows, has the peculiarity of steeply sloping banks down to a waterway which is enclosed much as a wide drain with almost vertical sides to the bottom. It does not lend itself to suitable crossing points in the vicinity of its Gympie flow. Bidwill reported that he had to build a bridge to facilitate the crossing of the bullocks and wagon. Some writers have suggested that he built his bridge over the Mary River itself, however Bidwill goes on to state that he later crossed the river where Eales' had crossed in 1842, some 20 kilometres south of Gympie at Traveston Crossing. Apart from that Bidwill had neither the manpower or expertise to bridge the Mary.

Bidwill's ward, William Dart, who was on the expedition, later commented on the passage through present day Gympie and the fact that Bidwill found gold whilst the bridge was being built. According to Dart he kept the specimens in a bottle to later show visitors his find. Traversing through Gympie, the hilly gradients would suggest that he arrived at the One Mile area of the Creek. This area bore rich

alluvial gold and a reserve for fossicking is still maintained on part of Deep Creek. Bidwill's find was 16 years before James Nash made his famous discovery.

From there it is likely that he reverted to the east to return to the old Aboriginal Track. In order to avoid the steep and deep part of the Six Mile Creek (where the present bridge on the highway is located) the track led to higher ground which becomes part of the Dulang Range. It is crossed in the vicinity of the present Woondum Rail Station after first crossing the Six Mile Creek.



Over the range, the track proceeded down Cobb's Gully to near where the present highway runs and then follows on to Traveston Crossing by diverting to the north and west of Mount Kelly. (Arrawatta Lookout).

Traveston Crossing (where recent infrastructure developments have relegated the Traveston Crossing bridge to *old* category) is a rock bar across the river. Upstream of the bridge is pondage prone, with the bar itself immediately down flow from the bridge, quite shallow in normal run. According to a very early reporter, some enterprising individual set up a store there, to cater for the diggers from the south, heading for the Gympie diggings. Apart from Imbil Station where supplies were available after a time, the crossing store would have established a very rare, but welcome, Conondale Track amenity.

Before proceeding to Wide Bay, Bidwill had been a guest of David Archer at Durundur Station. He had walked from Durundur to Mt Beerwah and scaled it to the summit. (even found a rare orchid on the mountain). He had noted the relatively flat terrain to the north east (coastal plain) and the fact that the road from Durundur to Brisbane passed close by. He had also been informed (by what he described was a **reliable source**) that the land lying between the head of the Mary River and Mt Beerwah was tolerably accessible. Upon receiving his instruction to blaze the road he had then deduced that the road passing by Mt Beerwah was to be his target. This was logical, as the track south to Brisbane was relatively plain and through country gently undulating. But Bidwill was to find that the **reliable source** had things so very wrong.

When atop the Dulang Range, Bidwill took note of a sight which quickened his pulse and raised his expectations and excitement. It was the sight of the volcanic plugs of the Six Mile Creek domain. This, he contemplated must surely be his destination for that, the largest, has to be Mt Beerwah! He concluded that he had arrived at the Glasshouses. But he aimed to confirm by getting closer!

Bidwill reached Traveston Crossing on nightfall and as he could not readily find the crossing, set up camp for the night. During the night they were attacked by Aborigines who drove off some of the bullocks. Bidwill himself had to scout the countryside looking for them. Eventually an Aborigine coo-ee'd and pointed to the direction of the bullocks, which he finally located although one was wounded by spear. The name of the native was Minni Minni, being as close as the white interpretation could decipher and Bidwill engaged him to stay with them as guide. Next day they found the crossing and wagon tracks. Bidwill in his report to the Sydney authorities mentions Eales' tracks. Eales himself was never on the trek through the Mary Valley. His expedition leader was Joliffe with Duramboi as pathfinder. But Eales was the sponsor and therefore Bidwill has referred to the tracks as that of Eales. It is however more probably the tracks of Crown Lands Commissioner Stephen Simpson who came by the year after Eales.(1843). Although they both, led by Duramboi, crossed at Traveston.

From his position at Traveston he had better sight of the plugs and was more convinced than ever that he had reached the Glass House Mountains and that the most prominent was Mt Beerwah. He enquired of Mini Mini through a Maryborough native he had engaged for the trek. Mini Mini shook his head when asked where the white man station (Durundur) was from the mountain. Mini Mini replied that there were no white man stations anywhere near and that the name of the mountain was Korura. (now Cooroora). He did not know of any Beerwah in the area. Or as Leichhardt had dubbed it *Beowah* (from the Aboriginal)

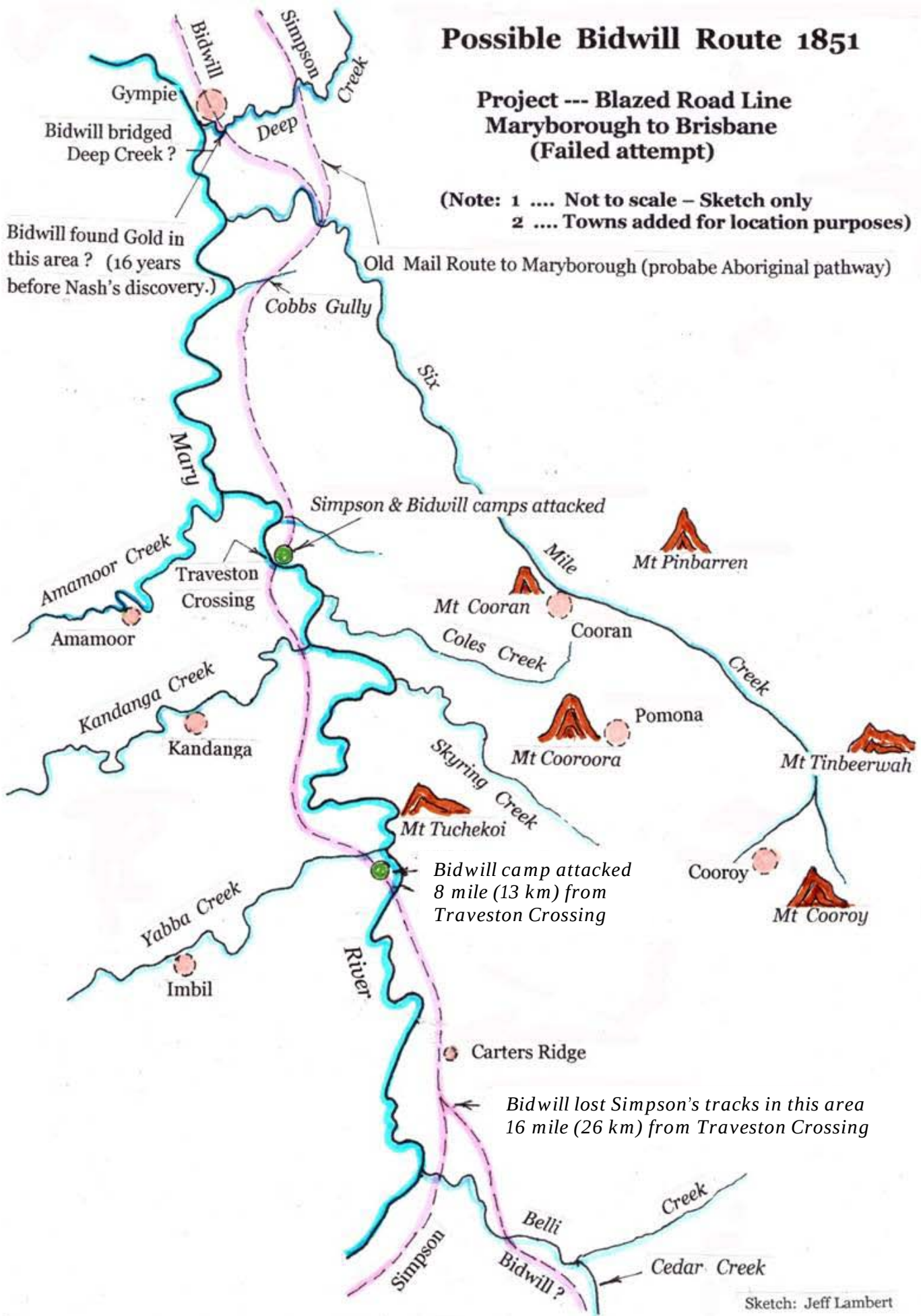
But Bidwill was so utterly tied to the belief that the mountain was Beerwah and that Durundur could not be far away that he disbelieved the native. So he then got his Maryborough native to ask if Mini Mini had ever been to the other side of the mountain he called Korura, to which he shook his head. Bidwill then ignored any further advice from Mini Mini. Perhaps Bidwill was unaware of the reliability and speed of the Aboriginal *telegraph*, as even if Minni Minni had not been to the other side of the mountain, their communication on the location of any new white settlements was surprisingly rapid and reliable.

So let us look at the situation because this event had Bidwill so certain that he had reached the Glass Houses that in my opinion it was to seriously jeopardise the remainder of the trek. Bidwill by his own reckoning had only travelled 65 mile (104 kilometres) from Maryborough to Traveston Crossing and that, by the meander of the trail. (less as the crow flies) Bidwill had possession of a map in which he quoted to his superiors in Sydney, to show Maryborough to Durundur as 90 mile as the crow flies.

Possible Bidwill Route 1851

Project --- Blazed Road Line Maryborough to Brisbane (Failed attempt)

(Note: 1 Not to scale – Sketch only
2 Towns added for location purposes)



Sketch: Jeff Lambert

Beerwah would be a similar distance. Yet Bidwill obviously ignored the detail of the map, although he must have been aware of the discrepancy. He also ignored the word of the native Mini Mini.

Such a map would have some detail of southern developments, such as to the extent of Kilcoy and Durundur stations, connected by coastal (maritime) survey or estimate, connecting to surveys of the lower Mary River as far upstream as the town of Maryborough. These northern surveys were carried out by surveyor Burnett. However between the two thus connected surveys, lay a hiatus of unmapped *no man's land*, by which Bidwill was confronted.

Bidwill's account to his superiors does not give a day to day account by date. So that without the actual dates of proceedings each day there is no true chronological record. My own opinion is that because Bidwill was so convinced that the mountain was Beerwah, that he spent considerable time, more than he had planned, looking for Durundur Station, or the tracks leading to same in the wide vicinity. This may account for unplanned usage of **nominated trek rations**.

Bidwill travelled 8 miles from Traveston Crossing the first day following the wagon tracks of Simpson. This would have bought him to just past the junction of the Yabba Creek with the Mary. Here he set up camp. He then climbed a high hill from which he observed Mt Cooroora (still to him Mt Beerwah) as being about 4 miles distant and bearing east by north. The high hill he climbed was therefore probably Mt Tuckekoi. From the camp he followed Simpson's tracks where he lost them in the hard stony ground as they deviated from the river.

Bidwill, accompanied by a man named Slade then left the encamped party with the intention of reaching Durundur Station. Bidwill in his report to his Sydney superiors, stated that this was in endeavour to obtain the services of one of the Durundur blacks to guide them over the best trail. However Firmin McKinnon in his address to the Historical Society of Queensland, in 1933, stated that Bidwill made the journey to replenish their depleted **rations**. No doubt McKinnon's information would have been derived from history passed down by Durundur residents.

Bidwill neglected to take his compass. This has been adversely commented upon by historians endeavouring to reason how and where he became lost. But it is possible that Bidwill did not see the need for a compass. All Bidwill had to do was to follow the Mary River where the tracks of Simpson would still be visible in the soft going of the river flats and departing to cross the Conondale Range to Sandy Creek and onto the track connecting Kilcoy Station with Durundur Station.

With such an uncomplicated task then, where and how did Bidwill go wrong? How did he lose a river? My opinion leads us back to the Simpson expedition with Duramboi as pathfinder. Although Duramboi, leading his party (most probably following along the Aboriginal pathway) crossed the Mary River seven times between and including, the Conondale Range crossing and Traveston Crossing and held fast to the river and its flood plain flats, he made one major deviation from the Mary.

After crossing the river at what we know today as Kenilworth he traversed the Hinka- Booma flats. Lush grass as high as the horses ears greeted them as they proceeded to where Gheerulla Creek nears its confluence with the Mary River where they camped for the night. North from this point the river cuts into a range of hilly terrain displaying steeply eroded banks. Perhaps that was the reason for Duramboi's departure from the river although I cannot be certain, as other factors may have been at play, such as avoiding native territory that Duramboi considered unfriendly.

As they travelled through rough terrain throughout that day, it was commented (Simpson's Diary --- March 22nd 1843) "*Started at half past 7 am and passed nearly the whole day in traversing very mountainous and broken country*". Toward the end of that country in the vicinity of Newspaper Hill (just south) flows Belli Creek which then flows through sharply undulating country to make confluence with the Mary. But upstream from there it flows through relative flat country where the valley is plainly obvious and wide.

Travelling North it appears as a large re-entrant joining the mountainous country, but travelling south it invites one into the more gentle valley it commands, via the country at and south of that embracing today's Newspaper Hill Road. In my opinion that is where Bidwill became skewed. **In other words he took the wrong valley.** Travelling south by east would lead him into the Cedar Creek Valley where the valley narrows just as the Mary does in its upper flow. Perhaps in miniature comparison,

but as would be in his mind to leave the Mary River to the right to cross the Conondale over to Sandy Creek, so his departure from Cedar Creek Valley to the right would lead him up into the dissected tableland (part of the North Arm volcanics) immediately north of the present town of Mapleton.

Bidwill's account is vague but his story does give us some clues. For once again Bidwill's hopes were raised that he was near his objective. Whilst on the tableland mentioned above he had travelled south easterly along an Aboriginal pathway but decided to return to the wagon. Retracing his steps, he lost them in the thick scrub and then decided to head south west. He arrived at a high point where the drainage ran south and this led him, jubilantly and thankfully, to believe that he had arrived at the scarp of the Conondale looking south over the Stanley Valley.

"Tomorrow we breakfast at Kilcoy Station" and probably no one could have been more relieved than the recipient of that Bidwill remark --- a very exhausted Slade.

But breakfast had to wait. How long they did not know. For on descending the scarp into the valley they came upon what Bidwill referred to as a river. Not flowing south west as the Stanley, but north west, which an exhausted and bitterly disappointed Bidwill deduced must be an unknown tributary of the Mary. Too exhausted to follow and confirm. Too exhausted to risk further exploration, Bidwill set his course due south. The Obi Obi, from its confluence with the Mary is of much the same length as the now recognised Mary source. Indeed early settlers argued which of the two was the major source of the Mary River.

The image below, taken by the author, is taken from a high point where the source of the northerly flow of Gheerulla Creek, is separated from the southerly flow of Gap Creek into Pencil Creek which in the valley to the south, junctions with Obi Obi Creek. The outline of the tree lined Obi Obi Creek may be seen in the valley and at upper centre may be seen a corridor leading up to Curramore on the Maleny Plateau. That corridor bears due south from Pencil Creek confluence with the Obi Obi. - **Perhaps that is how Bidwill saw it as well?**



Photo: Jeff Lambert

Somewhere, possibly up on the plateau, natives caught up with them and fed them some bush honey and grubs. Here Bidwill offers another clue as he states that they had reached the top of the real Conondale (or as he states, Brisbane Range). The natives told him not to go to the west as that leads to Kilcoy, but to take a pass to the south which would lead them to Durundur. This would confirm that the obviously shortest route suggested by the natives, as with the Obi Obi Creek encounter, saw Bidwill travelling well to the east of the Mary. That in turn would favour the Belli Creek opinion.

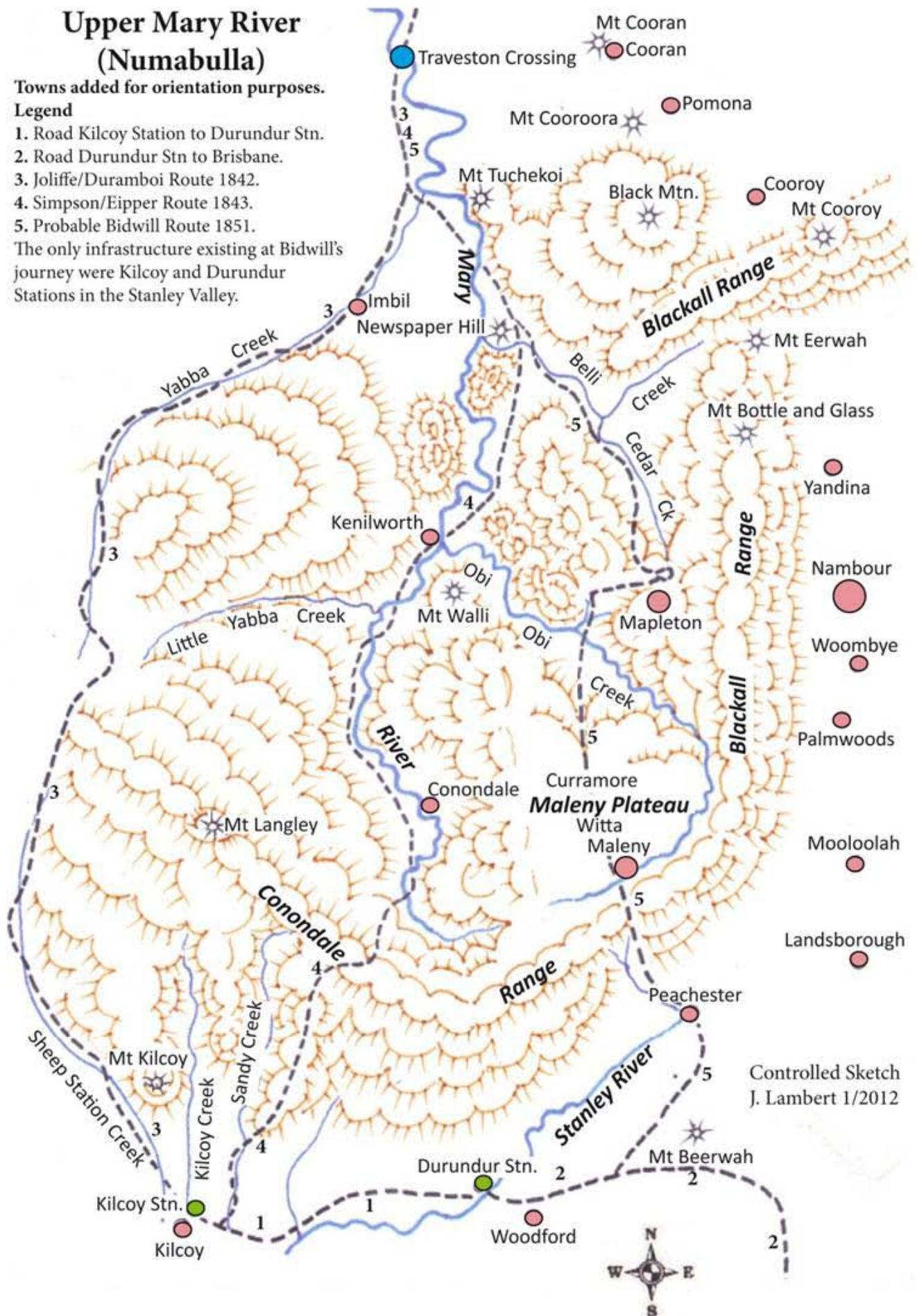
According to Bidwill's report to his superiors in Sydney, he made Durundur *under his own steam*. However McKinnon's version was that, after 7 days since they left the camp, with but a days rations, they were now too weak to walk what would have been still a considerable distance to Durundur.

Upper Mary River (Numabulla)

Towns added for orientation purposes.

Legend

1. Road Kilcoy Station to Durundur Stn.
 2. Road Durundur Stn to Brisbane.
 3. Joliffe/Duramboi Route 1842.
 4. Simpson/Eipper Route 1843.
 5. Probable Bidwill Route 1851.
- The only infrastructure existing at Bidwill's journey were Kilcoy and Durundur Stations in the Stanley Valley.



Controlled Sketch
J. Lambert 1/2012

In fact McKinnon claims that they were carried by the blacks to Durundur. In such a debilitated condition and with still such a considerable and unfamiliar distance to reach Durundur, one would have to agree that McKinnon's version was more acceptable.

A further clue as to their position came with Bidwill's remark that on proceeding to Durundur they came within two miles of *The Real Mt Beerwah*. (to the east of the Mary headwaters and well to the east of the Sandy Creek crossing --- his original target). This last event backs up the theory that he proceeded well to the east of the Mary River ever since he crossed at the base camp, 8 miles south of Traveston Crossing. It would also suggest that they were carried, as Mt Beerwah would have been visible from the scarp of the Maleny Plateau well before his sighting same along the track to Durundur.

Bidwill in his account to his superiors stated that he rested one day at Durundur and then rode back to Maryborough via *The Loop*. However Firman McKinnon in the above mentioned address, refers to Bidwill's illness being of such nature as to see him attempting to recuperate at Durundur for some time before his ongoing problems saw him travel to Brisbane to see a doctor. Subsequently it would appear that the Brisbane doctor referred him on to a Sydney doctor. He was a very sick man!

Eventually Bidwill returned to Maryborough to resume his duties. But he never fully recovered and in fact his condition deteriorated to the extent that he was just a shell of his former self and died an agonising death in 1853 at the early age of 38. His grave is located on his beloved garden at Tinana surrounded by four Bunya pines.



So to return to our opening observation of what is there of Bidwill's character to opine?

It would appear that from the earlier instance of disregarding the Maori Chief's edict; the unguarded remarks regarding serious allegations against John Mactaggart; the acceptance of Mt Cooroora as Mt Beerwah against rational deducible reasoning and Aboriginal advice, that one could opine that Bidwill was at least of impulsive nature. How many other rash instances that may have occurred during his trek through the Mary Valley, we can only contemplate and one wonders what opinion Slade may have entertained of his leader.

But Bidwill was a very sick man. Certainly the privations of his journey, either caused or exacerbated his condition. It is said that he died of kidney failure or conditions caused by such failure. If indeed Bidwill was subject to the onset of kidney disease prior to his journey, his medical condition may have had some effect on his rationality. For instance, a condition of renal failure is sometimes apparent as Azotemia. Some forms of Azotemia display the symptom of **confusion** amongst an array of other possible symptoms. The confusion is more often noticed by the patient's family and peers whilst remaining oblivious to the patient. The onset of kidney disease also, may go unnoticed until advanced.

In this I do not seek to make excuses for Bidwill's failure, but to promote possibilities that may otherwise have affected him to his detriment. In relation to the suggested pathway he took, if my hypothesis is deemed acceptable, then yes he made a mistake in taking the wrong valley. And yes there are differences in flow rates etc that Bidwill should have been cognisant of. But we must remember that Bidwill made similar erroneous assumptions of the location of the glasshouses when commonsense rationale would have seen him conclude otherwise. So I put it to the reader to ponder.

Firmin McKinnon in his address to the Historical Society of Queensland mentioned of Bidwill's mysterious disappearance for 8 days in the Mary Valley scrubs.

"The two men were lost in the scrub, without food, except what edible roots they could find. They wandered about for eight days and finally when they were at death's door, they were guided --- carried in fact --- by some friendly blacks to the Durundur station".

Once again, if my opinion of the route taken by Bidwill may be looked upon as reasonable, then one has to take issue with McKinnon in relation to his statement that they --- *wandered about*. Under the circumstances of their plight (so well put by McKinnon) when one looks at the ruggedness of the country my estimate of their journey in location, distance and duration embraced, then they certainly did not **wander about**. In this, on Bidwill's record, clearing a way through virgin scrub was one of the time consuming and energy sapping constrictions to their travel progress.

Accepting his mistakes and my reservations above, there is no doubt that Bidwill's journey was, if perhaps not of epic nature, then certainly one of endurance and courage. Of the matter of leaving (whether intentionally or not) his compass with the rest of the party, Bidwill demonstrated obvious skill in determining his bearings without it, at least in the directions of the cardinal points. The member for Wide Bay, W H Walsh, described Bidwill as a good bushman. As to whether his medical condition affected his rationale or not, we will never know. But perhaps, given that his attempted journey was undertaken as of benefit to the colony and undoubtedly led to his death two years later, some may find themselves, as the governor of New South Wales commented below, more appreciative of his efforts than has been the case with some in the past.

"I am instructed to inform you that his Excellency thinks that Mr Commissioner Bidwill is entitled to great praise for his zeal and perseverance under such difficulties and privations he had to endure and his Excellency can only regret that circumstances that Mr Bidwill could neither foresee or avoid, have prevented, on this occasion, his efforts to marking out the road from being successful."

Jeff Lambert

Post script.

There are approximately 50 plants (including specie varieties), commemorating the name of Bidwill. Suburbs in Sydney and Maryborough also commemorate Bidwill's name. One tree, known to most Australians, is the Aboriginal named Bunya Bunya Pine, which bears the scientific name, *Araucaria bidwillii*. There is a story attached to that naming which in fairness to another renowned early Australian, warrants explanation.

The pine was first (European) discovered by Andrew Petrie, whom we mentioned earlier in our story above. Petrie took the plant to Bidwill, who correctly identified the pine as *Araucaria* specie. Bidwill shipped a live specimen to Sir William Hooker, then the director of Kew Gardens in England, who in confirming Bidwill's identification, named the plant after Bidwill. But in Brisbane Town it was known for some time as *Pinus petrieana*. The naming was seen by the Petrie family and followers as a breach of faith and the animosity over the event lasted for generations and is probably, still to this day, a bone of contention.

Whilst Bidwill pushed his way through the Mary Valley scrubs, his base camp back at Yabba Creek vicinity was attacked. One man was speared through the thigh and all abandoned the bullocks, wagon and supplies, along with Bidwill's personal equipment and instruments, including his compass. They left it all to the victorious Aboriginals and retreated to Maryborough, both parties at that stage, not knowing the fate of the other. One, benefactor of the friendly, the other, victim of the unfriendly.