

Extract from the Diary of Lady Jane Franklin

Lady Jane Franklin, the second wife of Sir John Franklin, Governor of Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) and famous Arctic explorer, crossed Bass Strait to Port Phillip and began an arduous journey overland from Melbourne to Sydney in 1839. She stayed two nights at 'The Crossing Place' which later became Albury. With her own tent and camping gear, she was accompanied by a small party of companions, including Sophy Cracroft, Mr Elliot, Captain Moriarty and Dr Hobson.

The entourage travelled by horse, cart and on foot, Lady Franklin preferring to ride on the front seat of the cart which carried their supplies. She also rode side-saddle. Whilst in the bush the cart also doubled as a bed for the ladies if they did not wish to camp in tents or on the ground under the stars. The 400 miles between Melbourne and Yass took the party 25 days.

The following is taken from "This Errant Lady: Jane Franklin's Overland to Port Phillip and Sydney 1839." We pick-up the diary on Friday 19 April 1839, as they approach the Murray and continue until three days later when the party is just north of present day Holbrook:

Came to Murray bank on right, being on its left bank – saw field of maize edging banks other side below it. Mr Brown's hut – here river makes great bend – descend bank and over bit of pebbly beach. The ford was up to horses' bellies – beach very steep on bank opposite. We encamped within fenced paddock of mounted police between river on one side and the embanking hills other. Their station is on side of hill – begun in October when they arrived – finished in 17 days – 4 men and a sergeant – The four rooms are neat – Joe and Mary are blacks, buy wood and water – jabber English.



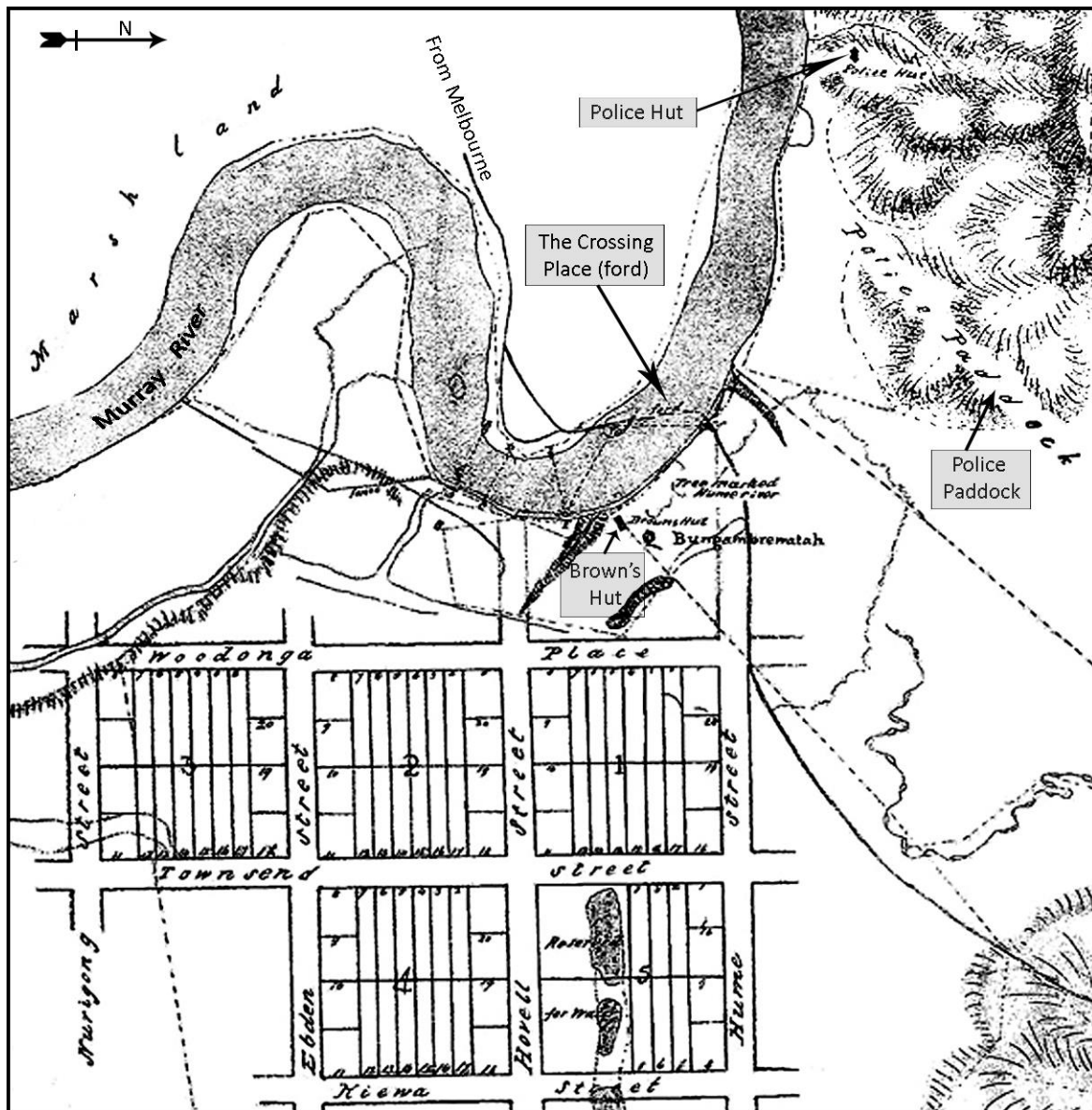
Lady Franklin writes to her husband Sir John:

My dearest love ...

Saturday 20 April

The river here makes a deep bow the bight of which is towards the East and a little below it is the crossing-place or ford. The banks were not lofty but were rather steep. They descended however in the present state of the river not into the water but upon a flat beach of shingles which was a great advantage to us in crossing. The water in the deepest part did not come above the horses' girths, and the current was not sufficiently strong to render it a matter of any difficulty to stem it. The water here may be about 80 yards across, and the stream tho' thus easy to passage, was much more rapid than any other we had hitherto seen. In times of flood it is dangerous on account of this rapidity – as well as on account of the steepness of the banks. We were told that parson Docker's drays had been overturned in it, and one of the bullocks drowned on the occasion. Accidents to human life have also occurred at this passage since it has become the highway between the old colony and the El Dorado of Port Phillip. On the right bank of the Murray are two inhabited dwellings and a smaller unfinished one; the latter belongs to a Mr Lewis, whose cattle station we had passed two miles on the other side of the river.

Of the former, one is the spacious hut of Mr Brown, erected for a store, and standing on the forest plain near the water, and the other is the station of the Mounted Police perched upon the steep declivity (which, a few hundred yards below Mr Brown's, rises from the edge of the river) of the lofty and undulating bank. On a flat enclosed paddock between these two dwellings, and meant as a reserve pasture for the horses of the Mounted Police, we pitched our encampment, rejoicing to have passed that formidable river which had hitherto been represented to us as the greatest obstacle we had to fear, and at the same time to have accomplished the half of our journey to Yass, or exactly 200 miles in a fortnight.



Thomas Townsend's 1838 plan for the village of Albury with highlighted sites mentioned by Lady Franklin.

The police station here was formed in October of last year [1838], and the house completed in 17 days. The walls are of split boards of stringy bark, and the roof is covered with sheets of bark. It contains four rooms for a sergeant and four men, and is probably sufficiently weather-tight for so fine a climate, though the light and air enter through the gaping boards and the windows are unglazed. A small shed at a little distance is the poultry house, giving shelter to about a dozen fowls, one of which the sergeant said he would immediately knock

down for us if we pleased to have it for dinner. On the plain below is a stable shed for horses and cattle.

Mr Brown's store has been erected about a twelve month. It consists of five rooms and closets built in the same way as the barrack, but is not yet furnished with its supplies. We should not have found it easy to make our purchases here either for ourselves or our horses had we required to do so.

Mr Brown has some cattle here and 4 acres of ground on the bank of the river planted with maize the finest looking I think I ever saw in any country. Many of the stems were over 12 feet high, '3 times as tall' as Sophy observed, as Mr Elliot, who was measuring himself by them, and who seemed by no means to understand why he had fallen so immeasurably low in her estimation. Sophy had never seen a field of maize before, and was struck as well she might be with the noble dimensions and brilliant colouring of the cob, the beautiful provision of enveloping leaves, which preserve it from injury until it is ripe for the harvest nor least with the bending plume of dessicated and straw coloured flowers, which crown the summit of each tall and graceful stem, and which if they could be transported safely to the straw bonnet shops of Regent and Oxford Street would, fragile as they are, make the fortunes of owners.

A native black, named Jem, dressed in a jacket and trousers, with his gun by his side and a pipe in his mouth, was squatting on the ground by the side of the maize field and on the river's bank to frighten away the crows. He had a heap of burning ashes before him and had placed a plank between him and the ground, all of which signs of civilisation were curiously contrasted by the loss of two front teeth in his upper jaw (one of the distinguishing marks of his tribe) and by a pendant ornament to his shock-head consisting of two kangaroo teeth fastened by strings to the native hairs.

I heard a good account of the useful and amiable properties of this man as well as of another named Joe, who is particularly attached to the police station, where he and his wife and young daughter perform the drudgery of bringing wood and water to the house, all being paid to their entire satisfaction for their services by such refuse victuals as may be given them. They eagerly seized upon the potato parings and raw outside cabbage stalks of our culinary fare and were ready to make themselves useful in any way they could for the sake of anything left upon the plates, and which would otherwise have been thrown to the dogs.

We were told that Joe used his gin (wife) very kindly. They were all, including another woman, who was probably Jem's wife, and an old man and boy whom I did not see, uglier than the people we saw in Melbourne but the women's figures were better. One was dressed in a cotton shift, the other in an opossum skin, and the child held a small blanket about her with which she at times concealed her figure completely from observation, as if intent on doing so, while at another, after seating herself with great care upon the ground she would let her dingy mantle drop, and display her juvenile proportions with childish insouciance. This young girl, who appeared to be about 12 years of age, was not yet arrived at the age when the scarifications with which these poor savages, female as well as male, disfigure their skins, are performed. The gashes are made with broken glass, they are not allowed to close, but I believe are kept open by some stringent bark granulations formed at each edge – these come together, and the skin forms over them and makes ridges. The hair of some of these blacks was extremely curly, and that of others nearly straight. The women wore it short, as

well as the men, but extremely thick. One of the women's heads was a perfect mop, impeding her sight.

As we have spent a whole day on the banks of the Murray in order to rest the horses, we had time to amuse ourselves a little with these people. One of them has been out to search for opossums and flying squirrels in the trunks of the trees. Their acute sense can detect by the scratches which these animals will make on the bark in climbing, as well as by holes in the trunks, such trees as they have rested in, and however loft or branchless the trunk, they will by the help of their tomahawk (taw-win) soon notch and toe their way to the spot. If the trunk is at all bent, they always, as may be supposed, choose the sloping or convex side. Joe was not successful in his first search, and indeed did not appear to me to be very ardent in the pursuit: either he was too lazy or thought he had little to gain by it, or he had no great hopes of finding what he sought for, and rather humoured his employers than followed his own behests. To an unpractised eye the most obvious sign that a tree was or had been occupied by the flying squirrel was the young twigs which strewed the ground beneath, bitten sharp off by the teeth of that most beautiful little animal.

Jem was invited on the evening of our arrival to dance at the fire but he seemed to have little inclination for it, whenever he began to attempt it the dogs barked at him, and he seemed as much afraid of the dogs as our horses at the Ovens were of his own black fellows in scent and complexion.

The blacks in general in this neighbourhood are said to be quite quiet, but at Mr Brown's sheep station 18 miles off, they had been spearing someone's cattle and between this and the Murrumbidgee, had attacked several men in a similar manner ...

*Your affectionate wife,
Jane Franklin*

Returning to Lady Franklin's Diary

Noisy morning with screeching of cockatoos and women frightened at dogs which bark at them – grey cloudy morning and a little rain fell early. River had increased, not by rain here, but by increase of a stream joining 1½ miles above, coming from 18 miles up in Snowy Mountains, where there has been a considerable fall of snow. It is a very dangerous river when high – current strong – a man at Mr Brown's had known many accidents in it. Parson Docker's drays had been overturned in river – only one bullock lost – they turned over & over, could not resist strength of current.

Mr Brown from Stone Quarry, 50 miles from Sydney, has been here about a year – his house has been built about the same length of time – gapping boards, bark roof – has 5 rooms in it – he is going to keep a store – has some cattle here, keeps his sheep 18 miles off where stream comes from – has 4 acres of land & more to wheat – 4 quarts of seed are sufficient for the acre – in favourable season he produces 200 bushels per acre – ground requires no preparation but ploughing and harrowing – seed is sown in November; requires rain when cobbing or fruiting at end of December or beginning of January. Had only one rain this year – soon after put in, 5 months before harvest which is about this season – requires rich soil and is often in preparation for wheat in soils of over richness – sometimes a soil will require 5 or 6 crops of maize before fit for wheat. It was the tallest maize I ever saw, much of it 12 feet high – but cobs not well filled. Sophy had never seen it before – she admired its rich glowing ear, the careful manner in which this is sheathed and enveloped in dry leaves, the

bunch of hairy filament-like tassels or tufts at top emerging – the bunches of dried flowers so fit for plume of straw bonnet at apex of plant.

Dined in Police hut owing to rain – after dinner went up hill – saw little more of river, but more of hill ranges. Mr Elliot had cotton rope for tinder – struck light with flint and steel – got dry grass and tried to flame – Sophy could not. Drank tea in open air – but driven into tent by rain – interrupted writing to Sir John by moth diving in & putting out lantern – much rain during night but temperature milder – parted from our two mounted police here and had two new ones – rained all night but not so cold – cloudy and slightly showery in early morning but sun came out and dispersed them – became a pleasant day with equable and by no means hot temperature. Mr Brown gives gents a nankeen crane half stuffed before they left.

Sunday 21 April

Off at 9 – leaving Murray behind. Encamped in gully by waterholes under small hills to left, 22 miles North East – this day brown sugar was found to fail – sent back to Clark's [at Mullengandra] to know if he had any – had heard 2 shillings charged in these parts for 4d of sugar – Clark however said his price was usually 1/6 but to me would charge less – bought 10 lbs brown sugar – if I had been a poor person, he would have charged a great deal more, he said. Cold night – Moorpark's melancholy note.

An entry in Hobson's Diary, 21 April:
[At the Mullingandra] a person by the name of Clark keeps what he designates a store!!! which is nothing more than a piece of canvas stretched over a ridge pole. The most cruel of all was – the perfect emptiness of this store! All we could get was a little dark sugar – which this scamp charges poor people 1/6 per lb but Lady F only 1/- !!!

Monday 22 April

17 miles – so called, but as we thought 20 – to Tagoon Moonil Bingar – also called 10 Mile Creek, being 10 from the next where is permanent water. A spur winged plover shot on road here and soldier bird shot here – the latter has no feathers on its head – but black silk night cap and bump on upper part of beak – or nose – white silky heathers on breast – rest grey.

Snachall tipsy. The night before the Sargeant, unsolicited, had brought him two glasses of rum from Clark's. In the morning instead of getting breakfast he was under the cart and his wife did all. In setting off he generally drives and of course, tho' much recovered he was made to walk – he lagged and we all got on slowly perhaps in consequence. I went halfway on Kitty.

The ground was pretty about Mullingandery [Mullengandra] and continued so in the valley – road undulating and hilly, but nothing steep except water hole banks – saw water in many holes, but none permanent till we reached the station. A good hut here – walls and roof of stringy bark – owned by man and wife of name of Mitten, natives of Campbelltown in NSW. At their door we saw Mr Oaks – he arrived yesterday and soon after we saw him he walked on to a station 6 or 8 miles on. We passed by Mitten's as they had no feed there, and went on up creek – this was one of the least favourable places we had been at. We established ourselves about half a mile up the creek. After dinner we walked back to the house. Mitten was away – I spoke to her. She told us the natives name of the creek. They have been here a year – have a few cattle, about 50 head and intend keeping a house of accommodation. They have 6 rooms, such as they are – no glass in windows, but the little curtains look neat – no butter now, but she gave us milk and offered us as a present a couple of fowls which we declined. They have a half underground room for future dairy – now keep meat there – a

fenced stockyard and a paddock or enclosed field of 9 or 10 acres where they hope to raise 2 crops of wheat. There are 2 young children – and other people of household – they have no sheep. She gave us milk and we took some away next day.

Dingo tails nailed against tree – horses got good feed some little distance from encampment. Father Therry had a station here – now removed. We had met the postman going to Melbourne in the early part of our stage – a horseman with a bag – he looked and lingered, but we did not learn till later that he was the postman.