

LT. GEORGE GREY'S 1838 EXPEDITION REVISITED

On 20 September 1995, members of the Society enjoyed a presentation entitled "My Journal of an Expedition of Discovery in Northern and Western Australia during the year 1838 by Lord Grey, Late Captain of the 83rd regiment, Governor of South Australia, New Zealand and the Cape Province of South Africa, describing many newly discovered, important and fertile Districts, with assistance from P.J. Knight, Esq. Gent. and H.E. McGlashan, surgeon to the expedition of rediscovery".

Hamish McGlashan, resplendent in formal attire, read from George Grey's Journal, recently republished by Hesperian Press, telling how Lt Lushington was Grey's second in charge and how Lord Glenelg, Secretary of State for the Colonies, had instigated their trip with support from the Royal Geographic Society. Glenelg's letter of instruction of 16 June 1837, stated that Grey and Lushington were to embark in HMS *Beagle* going to either Swan River or Cape of Good Hope where they would engage another vessel to take them to Prince Regent River. Once there, they were to explore the openings behind Dampier Land before riding parallel to the coast and investigating any rivers they crossed *en route* to the Swan River Colony. In the process, they were to explore all lands and familiarise the natives with British Traditions.

The tale of Grey's travels and traumas then unfolded, with Peter Knight stepping forward to take us on an illustrated walk. After sailing from Plymouth in the *Beagle*, Grey had engaged the schooner *Lynher* at Cape Town, where he collected seeds, including cotton, for planting. Unfortunately, the party reached the northern Australian coast at the start of an exceptionally wet "Wet", and Grey and several others almost expired trying to walk from High Bluff Point to Hanover Bay in the heat. Grey was only 25 years old; Lushington was even younger.

During the time Grey's party spent in what would become the Kimberley, they established a base camp, hoisted the British flag to take possession in the name of the monarch, and fetched ponies from Timor. These poor beasts were so small the party had to remodel their saddles to fit them. Exploratory jaunts brought the British explorers into conflict with local Aboriginal people and Grey was speared in the hip. This injury gave him trouble for the remainder of the expedition and contributed to the party not being able to cover more than about 100 km of the journey toward Perth. Grey still managed to demonstrate his potential as a leader, however.

Hamish then resumed the story in the words from Grey's journal, telling how they examined the islands at the entrance to Prince Regent River in St George Water on 13 January 1838 and found lofty paper barks, cascades, isolated pinnacles of limestone rocks, anthills and the "gouty stemmed" trees they called Capparis, meaning our boabs. They reached a noble river, 3 to 4 miles across and complete with verdant islands, which Grey named after Lord Glenelg. The flies were terrible and crawled into their eyes, nostrils and mouths. Exhausted, they halted on the bank of a stream dotted with water lilies, catching fish and a long necked turtle. The 'natives' were described as 'manly and noble' and the audience, totally captivated by the word pictures created by Grey, was taken completely by surprise when the accompanying

slide presentation suddenly switched to the nine noble men from the re-discovery expedition standing in the pool with their manly parts strategically covered by large lily leaves.

Hamish and Peter became interested in Grey's expedition during a 1983 trip to Walcott Inlet. They knew that this first inland penetration of Northern Australia had led to the disastrous Camden Harbour Settlement in 1864 and that Howard Coate had rediscovered the Grey cave paintings in 1958 when he was working for Professor Elkin. Howard is an amazing man who studied three Kimberley Aboriginal tribes and their languages as well as translating the Bible into the Worora language. Dr Ian Crawford (WA Museum) had also led an expedition to try to find the paintings illustrated so well in Grey's journal. With no exact locations given, they were hard to find, but Peter Knight's wife, Glen, was the first to spot them. The party also took the first photographs of *Grevillea adenotricha* which had been found in 1988 by Kevin Coate, a cousin of Howard's, but never before photographed. Another triumph involved relocating the "head" that Grey had described as a carving. Never short of adventure, they also faced raging bushfire and menacing crocodiles during their 13 day walk!

There were many slides of the cave paintings they struggled so hard to find; including good Wandjinas, with one in a long red robe. After 150 years the paintings are in reasonably good condition. There were also excellent slides of all aspects of the modern expedition which was quite as gruelling as Grey's effort. Hamish and Peter intend going back to re-discover Grey's "Bradshaw" figures, next year if possible. We hope they are as successful.

Daphne Choules Edinger