

DISCOVERY DAY.

MAJOR MITCHELL'S JOURNEY THROUGH "AUSTRALIA FELIX."

Yesterday Discovery Day celebrations were held at Wangaratta, when a marble tablet, suitably inscribed and erected on a fine specimen of native red gum tree growing at the north-east side of the Ovens bridge, was unveiled by the Director of Education, Mr. F. Tate, M.A., I.S.O., to commemorate Major Mitchell's crossing of the Ovens river at this spot on October 15, 1836. On the suggestion of Dr. J. A. Leach, B.A., District School Inspector, the Borough Council and State School Committee made application to the Education Department to have Wangaratta selected as the official centre for the 1915 celebration of Discovery Day in Victoria. The Department readily granted the request, and the arrangements were made by the following committee, representing the schools, and A.N.A.—Crs. C. A. Teague (Mayor), and J. H. Sandford and W. H. Edwards, Bishop Armstrong, Messrs L. N. Gunther, T. F. Notcutt, L. Burgess, T. Bridgen, J. F. Schilling (master) and school staff, Messrs W. Higgins and D. N. Christensen (A.N.A.) and Mesdames W. Boyes, G. Bullivant, and G. Allan, Mr. Edwards (correspondent to the School Committee) acting as secretary. The tablet cost about £5, and the money was collected by Mr. Edwards, and Mesdames Boyes and Bullivant. There was an attendance of about 1000 children, including scholars from ten district State schools, the local High, State, Catholic and Church of England Schools. The visitors included Mr. Frank Tate, M.A., I.S.O., Director of Education, Mr. C. R. Long, Inspector of Schools, and the leading authority in Victoria on the travels of early explorers, Dr. J. A. Leach, B.A. (District Inspector), Mr. Armitage (Inspector Beechworth District), Hon. J. Bowser, M.L.A., and many leading citizens were also present, the gathering totalling about 1400 people.

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the Mayor, Cr. C. A. Teague, said they had assembled to commemorate the passing through Wangaratta and crossing of the Ovens river by Major Mitchell on 15th October, 1836. The Education Department had kindly selected Wangaratta as the official centre for Discovery Day celebrations. He had much pleasure in welcoming the official visitors to the town. The Mayor, then introduced Mr. C. R. Long.

Mr. Long said it was with pleasure that he stood there that day to take a share in the fine ceremony of the unveiling of a tablet to commemorate the work of the great pioneer of our continent—Major Mitchell. He passed through this district 79 years ago. After dealing with his early life at home, Mr. Long said he would relate a little of the hard work Major Mitchell did in exploring these parts of Australia. Proceeding he said—

Major Mitchell, the Surveyor-General of New South Wales, had been sent, in March, 1836, to determine whether the river that Captain Sturt had seen, in 1830, flowing into the Murray, was the same stream which that explorer had, in 1829, discovered near its junction with the Macquarie, and named the Darling, and which had been traced from Fort Bourke to Menindie by Mitchell himself in 1835. Having assured himself that it was the same, he was returning along the Murray, with the object of exploring it to the point where Hume and Hovell had crossed it in 1824, and had passed the mouth of the Murrumbidgee, when, noticing a tributary (the Loddon) coming, through good country, from the south, he did not, after crossing it, continue very far along the Murray, but struck off in that direction. It was the month of June after a good season, and the wide plains, lightly timbered, and covered with kangaroo grass, extended on every side. Mitchell ascended Mount Hope, which he so named because of the hope raised within him, that he had come upon better country than he had been travelling over; and he was not disappointed. He could scarcely find words to describe the fertile aspect of the country, or express the delight he felt on account of being its discoverer. "The scene," he says, "was different from anything I had ever witnessed, either in New South Wales, or elsewhere—

anything I had ever witnessed, either in New South Wales, or elsewhere—a land so inviting, and still without inhabitants. As I stood, the first intruder on the solitude of these verdant plains, as yet untouched by flocks or herds, I felt conscious of being the harbinger of many changes there; for our steps would soon be followed by the men and animals for which it seemed to be prepared. Of this Eden, it seemed I was the only Adam." Soon after again crossing the Loddon the route being south-westerly from Mt. Hope, the Avoca and Avon were discovered; and, then rugged mountains loomed in the distance, recalling to Mitchell the Grampians in Scotland, after which he named them. Ascending one of the highest (Mount William, named after King William IV.), he saw a wide extent of mountainous country, and decided to direct his course more to the westward. A fair-sized stream, the Wimmera, was crossed, and Mitchell made the ascent of a hill in the neighbourhood, to which he gave the name of Mount Arapiles. From the summit, he saw numerous small salt or brackish lakes, a peculiar feature of this district. Leaving Mount Arapiles, and making a southerly course, the country was found to be good, herbage very luxuriant, and game plentiful. The difficulties he encountered on the journey were the opposite of those usually met with by Australian explorers. Instead of sandy deserts and dried-up streams, Mitchell speaks, in his journal, of such obstacles as dense forests, flooded creeks with soft banas, and boggy ground, impassable by the drays; for the journey was made during the winter months. The last day of July brought the welcome discovery of a fine river, to which the discoverer gave the name Glenelg, after the Secretary of State for the Colonies. The country was magnificent; lovely scenes daily met the eye. When the river became large enough, Mitchell launched upon it a boat that he had brought with him, and rowed down to its mouth; but he was disappointed to find a sand-bar almost blocking the outlet to Discovery Bay. On arriving near Portland Bay, the explorers were astonished to see houses, and a vessel at anchor. The houses proved to be a settlement formed by Messrs Henty, two years before, and the vessel, a

whaler, engaged in the fishery of the coast. Before Mitchell learnt this, however, he had to make an explanation, for the appearance of his men had much alarmed the settlers, who took them for bushrangers. The explorers, when it was known who they were, received a hearty welcome, and were supplied with some flour, of which they were in need, and with as many vegetables as they could carry. Mitchell's return journey was in a north-easterly direction. He skirted the southern end of the Serra Range, crossed the Pyrenees near the site of the township of Lexton, passed close to what is now the township of Castlemaine, directed his course thence, across the Goulburn, to the junction of the Ovens and the King, where we are standing now, and recrossed the Murray about thirty miles west of Albury. He reached a cattle station on the Murrumbidgee, three days after his food supply had been quite used up. On his return

to Sydney (from which he had been absent seven months), Mitchell called the splendid country he had passed through Australia Felix ("Australia the Happy"). This name however, gave place to that of the Port Phillip District, and, in 1861, to that of Victoria. "The Major's Line," as his north-easterly route through Victoria is called, will always remain a record on the map of a fortunate exploration—one that had great results in the opening up and settlement of this country. As a reward for his valuable services, Major Mitchell was granted a thousand pounds by the Government at Sydney, and received the honor of knighthood.

In conclusion he said the Department was indebted to the people of Wangaratta for erecting this tablet, which he hoped they would preserve. (Applause.)

Cr. W. H. Edwards, who also possesses a fund of information in regard to the early history of the town and district, gave an interesting description of the country from Glenrowan to Springhurst, and through which Major Mitchell passed. Referring to the account written by the explorer on his return

ten by the explorer on his return to Sydney, Mr. Edwards remarked that it was the means of deciding such men as Messrs Faithful, Docker, Bowman, Chisholm and Reid to come and settle in this part, Mrs J. D. Reid, who resides in Wangaratta being the first white woman to cross the Murray. He also referred to the opening of the first store by Mr. Rathley, the building of the punt by Mr. Clark, and the erection of the first bridge across the Ovens river at Wangaratta.

Bishop Armstrong said that Captain Cook discovered Australia nearly 150 years ago, and Discovery Day had been established to honour him and all the other early explorers of Australia. It was only right that the people of this favoured land should perpetuate their memory and remember what they have done for them. They should appreciate their hard pioneering work, and he asked the children and the people to take care of the tablet that had been erected to the memory of Major Mitchell.

The Mayor called on Mr. Tate to unveil the tablet. Mr. Tate said

that the Education Department was doing its best to impress on the minds of the children the great debt of gratitude they owed to the men who blazed the track, and made it possible for the pioneers of this country to come here and settle. By doing honor to Major Mitchell they were doing honour to themselves. They should also express gratitude to men like Messrs Faithful Docker, Chisholm and Reid, and others who came and opened up this part of the country, thereby enabling those who followed to enjoy ease and comfort. It was good to do honor to such men and women in order that they should not be forgotten. He hoped that the teachers and children would gather round the tablet once a year and repeat the stirring story of Major Mitchell's deeds in 1836. Mr. Tate then removed the Union Jack, which covered the tablet, and declared it unveiled. (Applause.)

The tablet bore the inscription—
"This tablet commemorates the crossing of the Ovens River near this spot by Major Mitchell, October 15, 1836; also the river was named by Messrs Hume and Hovell on

er 10, 1836; also the river was named by Messrs Hume and Hovell on November 24, 1824." The engraving was done by Mr. A. Parnell, mason, Wangaratta. The tablet is placed in a wooden frame and secured to the gum tree at the foot of the Ovens bridge.

At the request of Mr. Tate cheers were given for King and Empire and confusion to their enemies.

After the unveiling ceremony, the children from the various town and district schools within a radius of ten miles that were present were served with light refreshments, which had been provided by parents and friends, and were served by a bevy of willing helpers.

Mr. Tate and Mr. Long left by the afternoon train for Melbourne.

On Thursday night, Dr. and Mrs. Boyes entertained Mr. Tate, Mr. Long, Dr. Leach, Cr. Teague and Cr. Edwards at supper at "Avalon."

Yesterday the Mayor, Cr. C. A. Teague, entertained Messrs Tate, and Long, Dr. Leach, Mr. Bowser, M.L.A., Mr. A. Clements (President of the High School Council), Messrs F. Refshauge, J. F. Schilling and W. H. Edwards, at lunch at Prisk's Commercial Hotel.
