

## Chapter 1

# "A Beautiful Sward of Grass"

The problem of where the northern rivers flowed was one question exercising Allan Cunningham's mind when he came north in winter 1827. The rivers he found were all much lower than usual, because of drought, which did not help him to decide which were the major ones. He seems to have believed that all the rivers he met on the north-west slopes would eventually join the Peel. Cunningham the explorer was a botanist by profession and this scientific interest also prompted the journey. Most importantly, he wanted to discover what country lay north of Oxley's 1818 line, which stretched from the Liverpool Plains to Port Macquarie. A convict settlement had been established at Moreton Bay (Brisbane River) and Cunningham, who had visited it, hoped to find an overland route thence.<sup>8</sup> In the process of fulfilling these aims he found thousands upon thousands of hectares of grazing land to gladden the hearts of the land-hungry, drought-stricken men of the Hunter, who followed his track and squatted on the lands he discovered for the Crown. He also crossed the three major rivers in the Inverell district, naming one after Peter Macintyre of Scone.<sup>9</sup> This gentleman, evidently attracted by the "beautiful sward of grass" Cunningham described on its banks, despatched the second exploring expedition to the Inverell district eight years later. On this trip the upper reaches of the Macintyre River were at length discovered.

Allan Cunningham's exploration began from his depot at Segenhoe. Scone, on 30 April, 1827, with rations for 14 weeks and well-constructed measuring instruments. His friend Peter Macintyre, manager of Segenhoe, guided him up a steep pass over the Liverpool Range, out of the Hunter Valley. Once onto the Liverpool Plains, the party was proceeding north when, from a hill near Currabubula, the sight of the rugged Moonbi mountains ahead caused Cunningham to deviate westward before continuing on the northerly course. He therefore bypassed the New England Tablelands, almost the entire area from Bendemeer to Tenterfield being discovered by the first settlers. He also missed the western plains, although on a previous expedition he had come close to Boggabri, leaving this area to be explored by Mitchell in 1831. Instead, he travelled along the north-west slopes. Forging the Namoi near Carroll, he entered a country of high ridges, stony gullies and scarce feed, which was a spur of the Nandewar Ranges. Cunningham's journal describes his day-to-day progress through the upper north-west slopes.<sup>10</sup>

20 May, 1827: During this day Cunningham crossed the east-west traverse of the Nandewar Range, near the present Bingara-Barraba road, and entered the Gwydir Valley. The group travelled north down Halls Creek and camped that night about 11 km south of Bingara, where the grass was "fresh and luxuriant" and where a "small limpid stream, running through the centre of the vale, murmurs over the stony bed of its channel". He named the vale Stoddarts Valley.

It was here that he found "faeces, two or three days old, of horned cattle, and the trodden grass showed where 8 to 10 animals had rested" — 250 km north of the nearest stock stations! Cunningham concluded that "Europeans had been wandering through that part of the Interior".

21 May: The company of explorers continued northward, following Halls Creek to its junction with a river, about which Cunningham wrote "seemingly the Peel", but when he crossed it downstream on his return journey, the same river was named the Gwydir. It took time and effort to make a crossing over a "gravelly bed 250 yards in breadth", and the party camped the night on the northern bank. Twenty years later the town of Bingara began at this crossing.

22-23 May: Leaving the river, in a NNW direction, the explorers skirted the rough country and cypress-covered hills to the east. After 22 km the country opened out and Cunningham could see that the Nandewar mountains to the westward terminated and that there was heavily timbered land beyond. About a kilometre to his west was a "rocky ridge of hills" (Mt Rodd) and "to the north east the country rises to a considerable elevation, and a very lofty ridge, crowned with cypress lying nearly east and west, from the back of which rose a very sharp cone". He called the cone Braco Peak, now Balfours Peak, and the high ridge Mastertons Range, now known as Mastermans Range. "About noon on the 23rd we reached the wide but shallow reedy channel of a river forming simply at this season, a long chain of ponds" (Warialda Creek), which he followed upstream for 6 km and made camp, somewhere between the modern Gwydir Highway bridge and the sawmill at Warialda. The marks of native hatchets "were observable on the trees, but the few savages that prowl through these lonely regions in quest of food appear evidently to avoid us".

24 May: Crossing Warialda Creek they took a north by east bearing over a stony cypress ridge and

## *World of its Own*

after about 6 km "we observed a change had taken place in the rock formation, which was abundantly shown by the dark colour and superior quality of the soil". This was Cunningham's introduction to the black soil of the north-west slopes. They had some difficulty in finding water that night but "to our great joy, a large clay hole was found, containing an ample sufficiency of the precious element to meet all our demands". The location was probably Crawfords Arm Creek about 2 km east of Croppa homestead.

25 May: Cunningham's party continued in the same direction and crossed a plain "bounded by low thinly wooded forest hills and altogether a pretty, picturesque country", and then another plain. He noted that "it was distressing however, to observe so much fine black soil — sound, dry and crumbling beneath the foot — clothed moreover with an exuberant growth of grasses and herbage, languishing for rain". As evening came, they remarked on "a pleasing succession of open forest hills and waterless downs" and were relieved to find water in rock cavities. That night's camp was about 2 km east of Yallaroi Sugarloaf, and from a hill nearby Cunningham observed that "the hills to the westward terminated and that level open country broke upon our view". He was looking out over the flood plains of Ottleys and Seereys creeks.

26 May: Proceeding NNE "through an extent of forest ground", the group "at length intersected the sandy channel of a river which in other seasons than the present is highly important to the adjacent good grazing land and which in periods of good rains forms an impetuous stream 10 feet deep and fifty yards wide". This was later named Ottleys Creek. The explorer commented on "how wonderfully the native grasses had resisted the dry weather on the upper banks of the dried watercourse. They appeared fresh and nutritive, affording abundance of provision to the many kangaroos that were bounding around us". The travellers crossed the creek and continued NNE "over a plain 2 miles in width of a black colour, but very dry, the surface being in many places cracked into deep chasms by the actions of the solar rays" (Turkey Plain, 2 km west of Rocky Dam). Cunningham was again worried about finding water before nightfall. Observing hilly country to the eastward he altered his direction to ENE in the hope that "we should succeed in discovering a sufficiency of that element so rare in these solitudes for ourselves and horses". After about 3 km they reached "the margin of a rocky creek" and soon an "abundance of good water was found on its rocky bed, and, as its bank furnished grass of tolerable quality, we halted". The camp was made on Simpsons Creek, about 11 km south of Yetman (on Lat. 29°00'02" south, Long. 15°40'15" east). Cun-

ningham named this Mogo Creek, because the natives had been sharpening their mogos (stone hatchets) on white rocks along its banks.

27 May: "Being Sunday, I rested my people and horses". It was time for the leader to take stock of his situation. They had consumed more than half of the original store of rations and on inspecting the horses Cunningham found that "notwithstanding the extreme care of my people, the backs of several had become much galled by the saddles and all were debilitated by the labours of the journey and more especially by the parched up state of the pasture and the general poverty of the country through which we had travelled". He therefore determined to travel more to the eastward "to secure a more certain and nutritive provision than the harsh vegetation" on which the horses had been subsisting. He also hoped to identify fixed points, such as Mount Warning, on a sketch map he had previously made from Moreton Bay, in order to connect the map with his present position.

28 May: After travelling about 5 km the party came to "the left bank of a stream, presenting a handsome reach half a mile in length, thirty yards wide and evidently very deep. Its bed, which was of gravel containing many water worn pebbles of quartz and jasper, was skirted by lofty swamp oaks bearing on their branches flood marks at least 20 feet above its naked channel". This first sighting of the Macintyre River by white men occurred 8 km upstream from Yetman. Cunningham named this river Dumaresq, after the Dumaresq brothers, whose sister was married to Governor Darling. Searching for a crossing place, they moved upstream another 2 km and found a spot where "the waters above and those of the reach below us were almost entirely separated by the dry weather". The trip continued along the NNE line from the eastern bank of the river, over some stony ridges and then through a "desert wood" of small ironbark and cypress. In dense scrub and "small blighted timber" progress was difficult, and the surface beneath was "generally coated with white or reddish sand to the depth of several inches". With the sun declining, and no water in sight, they began to move north-east. Their hopes were raised by finding a sandy channel, then a damp hole and at long last a stagnant pool. This camp site was on Cox's Creek Branch, within the present Bebo State Forest.

29 May: A NNE course was continued through more open country for over 3 km, when a small river running westerly was intersected. This is now known as Campbells Creek, in this dry season a chain of waterholes. Crossing the creek, the party entered a thick cypress brush, but after about 3 km it began to rain, so they returned to Campbells Creek and made camp at Lat. 28°45'45" south.

30 May: Cunningham endeavoured to force his way through the thick low cypress to the ENE, but did not succeed, so a NE course was set and "at last a patch of open forest enabled us to proceed, when we came upon the elbow of a rivulet". He had arrived at the present Dumaesq River, which he named Macintyres Brook after the man who had guided him over the Liverpool Range. The flats beside this river were covered with a "beautiful sward of grass capable of forming rich pasturage and permanently watered ... a richer and more luxuriant growth of grass than had yet been met with in any stage of the journey from Hunter's River".<sup>11</sup> "This beautiful stream we found too deep to pass; but, tracing it up over a verdant carpet ... about three fourth of a mile, we discovered a pebbly shallow, and gaining the opposite bank [now Queensland] we resumed our course to the NE". Cunningham's crossing place was close to the modern weir named after him at Beebo.

A few days later Cunningham came upon a view which eclipsed all others, the famous Downs which he named after Governor Darling. It is for this discovery that his name is chiefly remembered. The group explored in that area for a few weeks, before turning toward the former path. On this return journey, they came much closer to Inverell. Approaching down Tenterfield Creek, they crossed the Mole River and followed the Dumaesq River downstream for 27 km. Cunningham called this river the Dumaesq, because he wrongly identified it as the river he had crossed on 28 May. He did not, apparently, connect it with the river he had crossed on 30 May, which was the same. On the night of 2 July, 1827, the band of explorers camped on the bank of the Dumaesq near Riverton. "We halted on the river at a part where the breadth across to the opposite bank ... was not less than 100 yards. The flats on the opposite side were on fire and, as we remarked patches in flames near us, it was evident there were natives in the neighbourhood. The river appears to continue its course to the southward and westward towards an obviously lower country through which our route tomorrow will lie. Our dogs caught an emu on the flats and our anglers had scarcely cast their hooks into the river than their success commenced. Several fish of the cod of all the western rivers were caught in the course of the evening, of which one weighed 15 lbs".

3 July, 1827: "A very cloudy morning with every sign of rain at sunrise". The trip continued down the river, and by noon the SW wind had dispelled the clouds. After about 11 km the valley took a decided bend to the WNW and NW. "We therefore quitted this fine stream." The party moved away from the river in a SW direction, crossed the Beardy River (without comment), some open country on latitude



Allan Cunningham

— Used by permission of Mitchell Library.

29°12'03" and then over "some stony forest ridges and narrow valleys, for about 3 miles, when, observing from SE to SSE before us a lofty, broken country, I deemed it prudent to halt ... our tents were therefore pitched in a barren valley giving us plenty of water, but our horses had scarcely any grass". Before sunset Cunningham climbed a hill and decided to change direction to the northward and westward in order to avoid some high hills. This campsite was on Little Limestone Creek, and the hill the explorer climbed was Hetheringtons Sugarloaf.

4 July: On breaking camp the party followed the new course until it was possible to turn to the south-west. They continued in this direction for two days. They had now crossed the Severn River watershed and were proceeding through country drained by Myall Creek. He was not very impressed with the Ashford district: "The timbers were of iron bark, box and white gum ... the soil poor and unproductive of grass and, as no rain had fallen for many months, it was with difficulty we discovered sufficient water for ourselves and horses." They probably camped that night on Myall Creek.

5 July: Still travelling in a south-westerly direction Cunningham recorded "we crossed on the afternoon of the 5th, a stream flowing southward to westward, to which I gave the name of Anderson's Brook ... Beyond the stream the grasses appear altogether of a brighter hue". He crossed this river, which became known as the Severn, at a point about 1 km upstream

## *World of its Own*

of its junction with Frazers Creek. The party continued on the same line, passing just to the east of Ashford, crossed Frazers Creek "and at the close of day we rested on a well-watered patch of good grass". This was located about 2 km west of Arthurs Seat homestead.

6 July: "Upon passing onward to westward through open forest about 3 miles we reached the right bank of a river about 30 yards wide and trending to the NNW. This river, which originates in the mountainous country at NNE [really SE] bore signs of being a channel by which vast bodies of water are carried to the NW interior ... at this season it is little other than a chain of large, canal-like ponds separated by shallows of gravel of which its outer banks are formed ... this stream was named Burrell River, doubtless augmented by Anderson's Brook in a few miles further to westward, falls into Peel's River". Not recognising this river, which he had crossed on 28 May, Cunningham gave it a new name, which was never used. His second crossing of our Macintyre River was about 4 km downstream of the present McCosker Bridge on the Ashford-Graman road. Veering to the SW, the explorers travelled for nearly 15 km "through gentle, open forest with good sweet grass". This was the southern end of Hickeys Plains between Wallangra and Graman. From a high spot close to his track the explorer obtained an extensive view of the line of country (the Great Divide) lying west of Shoal Bay (the name given by Flinders to the bay at the mouth of the Clarence River). Cunningham knew just where he was in relation to the coast, about 240 km east. The party had now entered the upper reaches of Ottleys Creek's catchment and probably spent that night about 5 km west of Graman.

7 July: Cunningham continued on his SW course, covering 26 km for the day. Warialda Creek was crossed in its upper reaches and they continued until difficult country was encountered, the escarpment above the present Rough Rocky Creek. Seeking easier terrain they digressed to the NW, camping near a broad, reedy creek (Warialda Creek).

8 July: Continuing along Warialda Creek, the explorers observed steps made by natives seeking larvae or pupae, on the trunks of trees. On both his outward and his return journey, Cunningham remarked on the number of natives in the Warialda area. The party pitched camp on the same creek, upstream of Cranky Rock, about 8 km from the present town of Warialda.

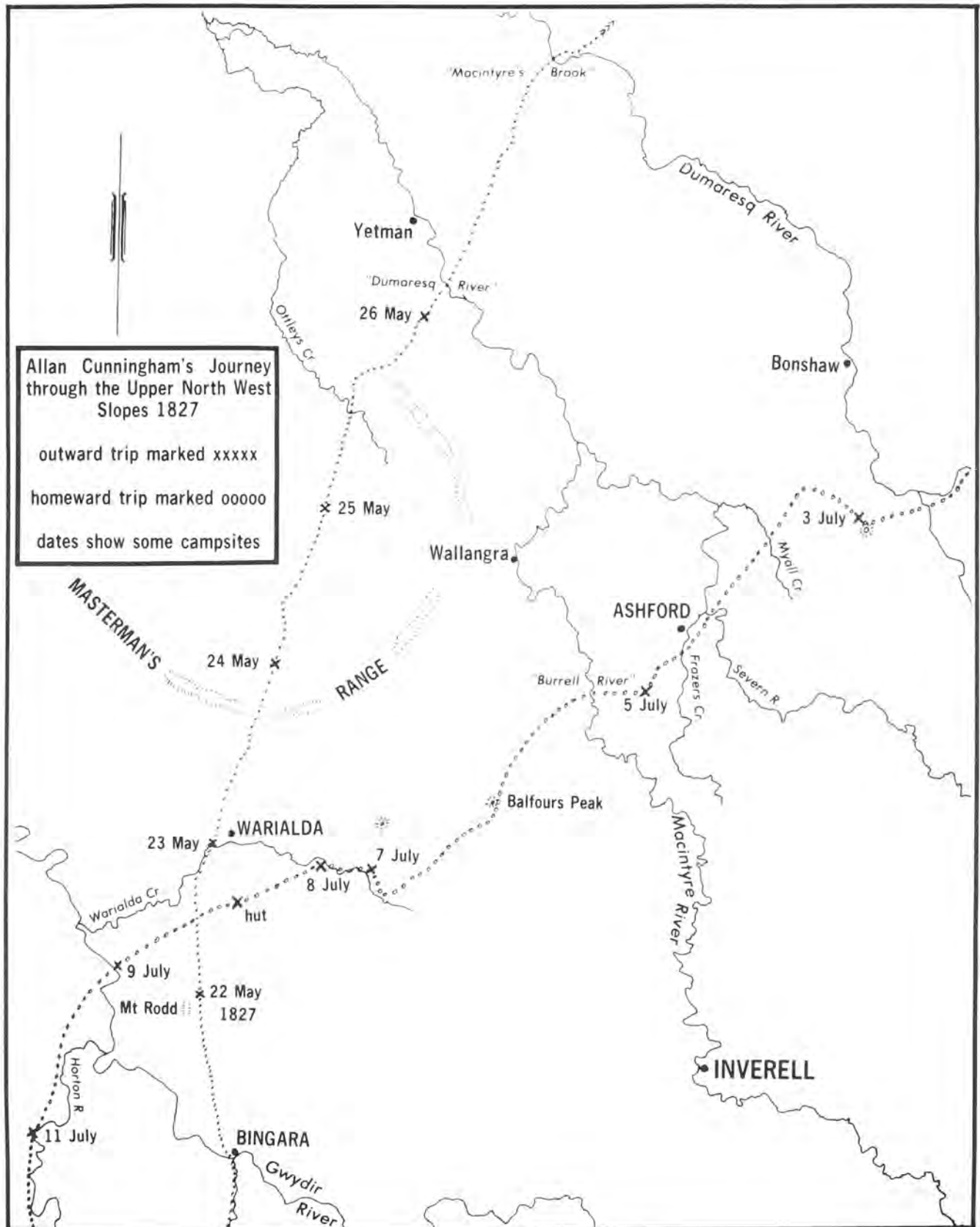
9 July: "In order to avoid a rocky part of the valley, I pursued a course to the SW over stony boundary hills and passed through a barren scrubby wood

productive of many curious plants. In this sterile forest, which afforded me many specimens, we were not a little surprised to meet with a shed of most temporary erection, 24 feet long by 6 feet broad, and formed by eight strong posts of young trees having their bases well-secured in the earth, supporting a horizontal wattled roof, slightly thatched with gum tree boughs, about ten feet from the ground. Upon examination, it was evident that it had been set up by white men who knew well the use and application of the axe, and from the appearance of the ends of the timbers we judged it to have stood so for four months. There were several small bark huts of natives in the neighbourhood ... I arrived at the conclusion that the persons who had erected this screen from the sun (for it formed no protection from rain or bad weather, being narrow and open on all sides) had been cedar cutters, who, having escaped from Port Macquarie, distant ESE 165 miles, had joined a tribe of natives and were wandering at large through this distant interior".

Although Cunningham did not evidently connect this bough shed with the signs of cattle he had seen in "Stoddart's Valley" 40 km to the south on his outward journey, some have speculated that it could have been built by cattle duffers, who were known to have used the Nandewar Ranges as a hideout soon afterward. Dean Boyce advances the theory that the shed could have been erected "by a convict named Clarke, who absconded from Singleton early in 1826 and crossed into the Kamilaroi country on the western side of the Great Dividing Range in the vain hope of walking to Ireland. Clarke was captured and adopted by tribesmen and spent the next five years living with the Kamilaroi. Evidence suggests that Clarke travelled extensively over the North West".<sup>12</sup> The hut was probably located in the south-east corner of the Stonehenge State Forest, near the Gwydir Highway, 4 km SE of Warialda. Whoever was responsible for its erection was almost certainly the first white man (or men) to venture into these districts.

The exploring party continued through the forest to the valley formed by Kellys Gully. They followed the flatter and more open country to westward, passing about 3 km to the south of the present village of Warialda Rail, and then resumed their original SW course. They crossed their outward track at about 4 km SW of Warialda Rail (the position was estimated as Lat. 29°35' south). For the next 16 km the country was open, thinly timbered and almost destitute of water. A halt was made that night on a small creek near the northern end of the Nandewar Range, which Cunningham remembered.

10-11 July: Cunningham writes "we had no



sooner quitted the ground on which we had encamped, than at a distance not exceeding 200 yards we came upon the right bank of a stream forming a very handsome reach of deep water, seventy yards wide, with steep, soft banks, and bending around the northern extreme of the lofty range to the NW. This river we traced on its right bank upwards to a safe ford, by which we crossed to its opposite side over a bed of gravel measuring 146 yards in breadth. Above the bed of the river, which the prolonged season of drought had reduced to a very low level, we remarked the traces of floods 55 feet in the branches of the swamp oaks skirting its channel. When, therefore, in seasons of great rains, this river is swollen ... the rush of the impetuous torrent bearing logs of timber down its channel to a depressed interior must be awfully grand". It would have taken the expedition an hour or more to cross the river, which Cunningham named the Gwydir, in honour of Lord Gwydir. The ford was about 5 km upstream from Ginerol homestead. Travelling parallel to the line of the range on the west, the explorers maintained a southerly direction. On the afternoon of 11 July they came to another river which "trended to northward and having so much the character, magnitude and appearance of the Peel", which Cunningham thought it joined. He followed the river upstream for about 1 km and named it Horton's River. They spent the night a kilometre or so upstream of the present Box Hill homestead.

12 July: Cunningham continued up the Horton Valley into more difficult country and during the afternoon, in the hope of finding an easier path, turned SW into another valley "at a remarkable break in the ranges, through whose centre a tributary of Horton's River meandered". The tributary is Rocky Creek and they camped that night on its banks "amid very steep, stony hills". Cunningham seems to have been trying to veer to the west, perhaps hoping to see features that he had located on his previous expedition to Boggabri. However, he moved southward up Back Creek and encountered very rough, mountainous country in the shadow of Mount Kaputar and was relieved, on 17 July to reach the level country of the Namoi Valley. From here he set a direct course southward, returning to Segenhoe on 28 July, 1827.

Although Allan Cunningham spent a total of a week in these two traverses of the northern portion of the Inverell Shire, he was not greatly impressed with its potential, not surprisingly, since he did not visit the "extensive treeless tracts" of rich alluvial soil, lining both sides of the Macintyre River for the next 90 km of its upstream course, nor the black soil Dangars Plains (the Delungra area) covered with "thick grasses".<sup>13</sup> These were the descriptions of another famous explorer who visited the district in May 1843,

Ludwig Leichhardt, on a trip north to the Darling Downs,<sup>14</sup> but by the time of his visit, the exploring had been done. As Leichhardt wrote, "the country is fully occupied with stations and stockyards all the way to the Severn"<sup>15</sup> (the Dumaresq).

The chief importance of Cunningham's exploratory journey was that one of the best grazing and farming districts in Australia was found, in close proximity to the sea port of Moreton Bay. He also reported that there was good pastoral land north of the 29th parallel, attracting attention to the north-west slopes. By 1827 the first stockmen were grazing their flocks and herds on the Liverpool Plains. As soon as the best land there was occupied, the squatters began to follow the track that Cunningham had marked to the rivers which "trended northward". In the vanguard of this wave of unofficial explorers was Alexander Campbell, faithful employee of Peter Macintyre, who has rightly been regarded, always, as the explorer of the upper Macintyre and the founder of Inverell.

## From Invermein\* to Inverell

Alexander Campbell was typical of many of the free men who emigrated to Australia in the 1820s and 1830s. Born in Scotland, son of an army major, he had received only a rudimentary education, but had a lifetime experience on the land.<sup>16</sup> Probably the family farm was too small, or its prospects poor, as in his early thirties, still single, he took the opportunity of having his fare paid to Australia by T.P. Macqueen. Macqueen, a British MP, had decided to invest large sums of capital in NSW and thus received grants totalling 20,000 acres, to be selected wherever his agent, Peter Macintyre, wished. Macintyre, born in Perthshire, Scotland, in 1783, had proved himself to be an excellent manager, winning many prizes for farming when employed by Lord Gwydir. He was put in charge of Macqueen's Australian venture, which landed in Sydney in April 1825, aboard the *Hugh Crawford*. Mr Macintyre's personal entourage numbered 27 people, as well as Saxon and Merino sheep and a valuable Shorthorn bull. It is clear that, from the beginning, Macintyre had determined to make his own fortune at the same time as furthering the interests of his employer.

To this end, he requested a personal grant of 2000 acres and proceeded to the Hunter (suggested by Macqueen) to choose the estates. Settlement was only just beginning in the Upper Hunter, opening up large areas of rich river frontage. Segenhoe was the name given

\* Early name for Scone, Hunter Valley



Alexander Campbell

to Macqueen's grant, the sheltered river flats upstream on the Hunter from Aberdeen. In the years between 1825 and 1830 Macintyre changed this untouched bushland into a productive farm, the largest estate in NSW, where up to 100 convicts were at work. The whole scheme was, however, a spectacular failure. Perhaps this was due to its very magnitude. Certainly the severe drought which afflicted the Hunter in the late twenties did not help, and neither did the high capital cost of improvements, nor Macqueen's well-known wasteful and extravagant ways and financial mismanagement. Probably foreseeing the inevitable insolvency (which was postponed till 1838 only by Macqueen's unscrupulousness), Macintyre left in 1830 to manage his own estates. Campbell came too, becoming Macintyre's principal superintendent.<sup>17</sup>

The task of Macintyre and his overseers, such as Campbell, on Segenhoe, must have been very difficult. They had to discipline, train and organise into an agricultural work force a motley collection of the outcasts of British goals, mostly from the city, many having lived a life of crime. Even the workers brought out as free emigrants had to become accustomed to Australian conditions, where the seasons were so different, and there were constant problems of droughts, floods, remoteness from Sydney and attacks from aborigines and escaped convicts. However, it was this sort of experience which



Catherine Campbell

later enabled Alexander Campbell to succeed as a squatter where so many failed. Some of the difficulties he faced as Macintyre's superintendent, when the owner was often away, are revealed in these extracts from Alexander Campbell's only surviving letter, dated 8.8.1832:

"I am waiting today for Court tomorrow with one of my men a shepherd who has got a great number of the sheep destroyed by the native dogs — 16 ewes and 20 lambs and him and I had a scuffle ... The wheat here is not worth while sending to Sydney for it is very bad and I have to wash it all for the Government men .... the weevil has done a great deal of damage to it ... The number of men that is on the farm now is sixteen but I must send down Davison it is not above a week since I got him ... will bring in Clare because he has been seen for three or four days tayloring on the bed in the room and many thing else ... The tobacco did not turn out so well as I expected for I have it all down this time 890lbs. I have got no leather for shoes ... I will soon run out of soap now as the men gets 4lb now." [The Government men referred to are the convicts.]<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, Macintyre had been building up his own holdings. While choosing Segenhoe, he had fan-

cied the land between Dartbrook and the Hunter, said to be some of the most fertile land in the valley. The astute surveyor Henry Dangar, ordered to assist Macintyre, had previously, while exploring the Upper Hunter, earmarked this piece for himself. When he tried to allot Macintyre land elsewhere, there was a dispute which resulted in Dangar's dismissal (for using his government position for personal gain). This did not, however, curtail the young Cornishman's ambitions. Dangar became surveyor for the Australian Agricultural Company and was later able to add to the Hunter Valley estates previously acquired (notably Neotsfield near Singleton) vast squatting runs in the north, including two in the Inverell district.

Peter Macintyre did not reside on the Upper Hunter, as he had a home in Sydney, kept by his unmarried sister Mary, as well as a substantial brick house at Pitnacree, Maitland. It had 22 rooms,<sup>19</sup> indicating his status as one of the landed gentlemen of the colony. His pastoral ventures must have prospered, as he said once that he had never bought any stock, and by 1832 had 1059 cattle and about 5000 sheep.<sup>20</sup> He was also able to apply for assigned convicts in increasing numbers, so that by 1829 he had 44 convicts as well as eight free servants. In 1840 there were 46 convicts and 29 free men, many of whom he had brought out from Scotland as bounty immigrants.<sup>21</sup> Although himself an employee, Campbell too was the master of several assigned servants.<sup>22</sup> By 1845 he had 11,100 sheep,<sup>23</sup> so like many others was probably paid in livestock. His wage from Macintyre was presumably similar to that of his successor, 300 pounds a year, at a time when stockmen were paid 20 pounds a year and shepherds less. It was common practice for employees to run their stock on their employer's land, and there is no evidence that Campbell had a personal estate on the Hunter. His convicts would have been employed as shepherds for his own sheep.

By the early 30s Peter Macintyre needed more land, sufficient to permit natural increase of his stock. By then the system of land grants (except those already promised) had ended, but Macintyre persisted in his efforts to acquire another grant. Indeed, he informed the Colonial Secretary that his reason for emigrating had been the hope of obtaining land grants. By 1832 he had received the maximum allowable, 2560 acres, to which had been added 4000 acres of purchased land and the 2000 acres belonging to his deceased brother John. In 1837 he claimed that 8-9 miles of his grant had been fenced, 250-300 acres had been cultivated and he was grazing 13,000 sheep, 2000 cattle and 100 horses and owned 80 working oxen and 10 drays.<sup>24</sup> Further land could be bought, but the best land had been alienated already, and the official price of one pound an acre in 1840 was prohibitive.

Another alternative was to send the stockmen and shepherds with the cattle and sheep over the Liverpool Range at the head of the Hunter Valley and on to the slopes and plains which had been explored, but not settled. Officially they were supposed to be the "unsettled district". In 1829 Governor Gipps, seeking to contain the still largely convict and ex-convict population in an area where proper law enforcement and police protection could prevail, described an artificial boundary called the Limits of Location (about 200 miles in a radius of Sydney) inside which settlement was supposed to remain, and within which land could be bought and sold in the usual way. However, even at the time of its creation, spurred on by drought in the Hunter, men were grazing flocks and herds on the Liverpool Plains. Soon, increasing numbers of enterprising and adventurous men were moving out in every direction in search of a few square miles of this never-grazed virgin soil. They were called "squatters", once a derogatory term, but in Australia it came to mean a respectable grazier with a large area of land. While officialdom pretended that the problem did not exist, vast areas were unofficially occupied and in later years the first comers claimed, that this gave them legal right to 'their country'.

Eventually, in 1836 the government (still that of London, administered through the Governor of NSW) asserted its ownership of the lands on which the colonists were squatting, and from 1 January, 1837, anyone occupying crown lands beyond the limits was obliged to take out a licence, costing ten pounds annually, one for each district in which he had stock depastured. He was not required to describe, in order to lay claim to a particular run, as many flocks were able to graze in a nomadic fashion over a large area, following the best grass and water. However, as more squatters came, men began to mark out a particular area, usually described in terms of the watercourse flowing through it, bounded by the divide between it and the next stream. Trees were blazed where natural landmarks were inadequate or indistinct, but of course, disputes were common. These necessitated the appointment of the first representatives of government beyond the boundaries, the Commissioners for Crown Lands. From 1837 to 1839 the whole northern inland was one huge district, administered ineffectively by a commissioner who never visited the Inverell district. The result was that only a few squatters bothered to take out licences<sup>25</sup> and, when they did, the designation on the licence was only "Northern", "New England" or "Liverpool Plains", which makes it impossible for the historian to be certain about which run was being licensed. Furthermore, if a man held several runs he still needed only one licence, so there was no need to be specific on the application form, even if he could have been specific. It is evident that many men did not really know where their runs

were, as the country was still being explored and many had never been 'up the country', having sent their employees out to participate in what was virtually a 'land grab'.

Even though the squatter had now to pay for a licence, he was no more the owner of the land than the gold miner was, soon to invade the countryside. Any improvements he made were his own risk and would be lost if the government chose to sell the land. Furthermore, he still had no police protection and was obliged to go to Muswellbrook if police assistance was required. The result was that frequently the settlers or their workmen took the law into their own hands, as occurred at the Myall Creek Massacre (see chapter 5). This affair, which caused a furore in Sydney, compelled the government to create, in 1839, a Border Police force, which was to operate as a mounted force, beyond the borders of the settled district. To finance this, run-holders were charged a levy on each head of stock and commissioners were appointed to collect this. In 1839 Commissioner McDonald set up residence at a spot he called Armidale, from whence he travelled to inspect the licences of squatters in the New England district. This included the eastern half of the Inverell district (see table in appendix for which stations were in which district). He also settled disputes and collected returns of people and stock. Many of these documents still exist and are major sources for the squatting period.<sup>26</sup> Commissioner Edward Mayne and his assistant Roderick Mitchell administered from Tamworth the Liverpool Plains district, which included the western portion of the Inverell district, until 1847, when the new district of Gwydir was created and Commissioner Richard Bligh made his headquarters at Wyallda.

All these government regulations resulted in a small mountain of documents, many of which can be read in the State Archive Office and the NSW Government Gazette. In order to piece together the jigsaw of Inverell's squatting settlement I have used the licence applications, maps, records and correspondence of the Commissioners of Crown Lands, as well as some traditional information and the few accounts which exist. Some of the pioneers, usually the more literate ones, were aware of their history-making roles and left diaries, journals and even books relating their adventures, or, in later years, seeing the tremendous changes that had taken place in the countryside, wrote their reminiscences, but the majority of those who came to the Inverell district left nothing. Either they were too busy, died too early to realise the importance of their discoveries or were not of the 'educated' classes and did not note things on paper, but passed down oral traditions. Quite a few of them never married, because of the scarcity of suitable girls in the

remote Australian bush, and did not, therefore, have descendants to whom to relate the events of their youth. The oral traditions that did survive to recent times have so often been proven wrong that they cannot be regarded as trustworthy. Many squatters stayed in the Inverell district for only a short time. Some sold out because of financial difficulties, while others had to move on because of boundary disputes. The result is that no written accounts exist of the early years of almost all of the squatting runs in the Inverell district. This detailed explanation has been necessary to explain why, in spite of consulting all available sources, I have sometimes had to be vague about dates, locations and first settlers, particularly before 1839.

The first men on to the Liverpool Plains from 1826 were small farmers, originally from the Hawkesbury. They were followed by landholders from the Hunter like Macqueen and Macintyre, both of whom had squatting runs near Breeza by 1830.<sup>27</sup> In 1832 a huge grant was given to the Australian Agricultural Company on the Liverpool Plains, which dispossessed many of the smaller men. They were reluctant to move, until compelled to do so in 1835, when they moved further beyond the limits north and west. In the absence of 'official' explorers, experienced bushmen had a head start in the rush for land in New England. A route over the Moonbis was discovered by Cory, and his associate, R.A. Wiseman, was grazing his cattle on the McDonald River in 1834 (near Bendemeer).<sup>28</sup> The banks of this river, named after Wiseman's overseer, provided a route to the north which Wiseman's men evidently followed, as he soon had stations at Kingstown, Stony Batter and Keera<sup>29</sup> — the first on the upper reaches of the Gwydir. He sold them in a very short time to later-comers, making the marking out of runs a lucrative business.

Very little is known of this explorer's travels, although his family was very well-known in NSW. Born on the convict ship which was transporting his father Solomon to Australia in 1806, Richard Alexander Wiseman spent all his life in the colony,<sup>30</sup> firstly on his father's farm at Wisemans Ferry (on the Hawkesbury). Later he received a grant of his own at Wollombi, on the route between the Hawkesbury and the Hunter, from which he made extensive visits to the north, selecting runs and leaving stockmen (of whom he had 22 in 1841)<sup>31</sup> in charge. Holding on to these runs, however, proved more difficult than acquiring them.

## The trip of Alexander Campbell

The next visitor to the upper Gwydir was Alexander Campbell. The only account of his journey is contained in the writings of William Gardner,<sup>32</sup> a tutor on various New England stations in the 1840s and 1850s. Although there are respects in which Gardner's work is remarkably accurate, providing many valuable clues, one must check his names and dates, as much as derived from hearsay. His work on the squatters was also incomplete, particularly in regard to the slopes and plains. Gardner relates two trips of Alexander Campbell — one in 1835 to the Guyra district and the other in "1838 or 1839" to settle the Inverell district.\* Historians have found these accounts difficult to understand, as it is almost inconceivable that in 1835 Campbell, on behalf of Macintyre, headed away from the direction of the river Cunningham had named after Macintyre, on whose banks he had found good pasturage. Gardner says that Campbell went on to discover Byron Plains "in the year I think 1838 or early 1839", implying doubt about this date. As well, at the end of 1837 Myall Creek Station had been marked out, its boundaries coming to within 9 km of Inverell, so the area was hardly unexplored. Although I have based the following account on Gardner, I have modified it in the light of these and other considerations and some other fragmentary accounts.<sup>33</sup>

When Alexander Campbell led a party north from Blairmore, Scone, in 1835, he too, came over the Moonbi range. He presumably chose this route as Cunningham had emphasised the hilly, heavily wooded, poorly watered nature of the way he had come. Campbell had probably called at Macintyre's station, Long Point, near Breeza, where he was joined by the holders of nearly Piallaway run, James and Alexander McDougall<sup>34</sup> (who had homes near Muswellbrook and came originally from Baulkham Hills near Sydney). They travelled up the Moonbis just ahead of the drays of the Dumaesq brothers (perhaps for mutual protection and company), but at the McDonald River the other party followed Cory's track to the north-east, establishing runs near Armidale. Gardner says that Campbell's party went due north by the compass from the McDonald River. Advised probably by Wiseman's men, he followed the river, which flows north until Retreat, when it turns west. From this point there is a low divide into the Gwydir catchment, where Roumalla Creek leads the traveller to join the Gwydir near Torryburn. This route bears almost directly north from Bendemeer. It was the first road to the Inverell district and its most important for 50 years, being the shortest, presenting

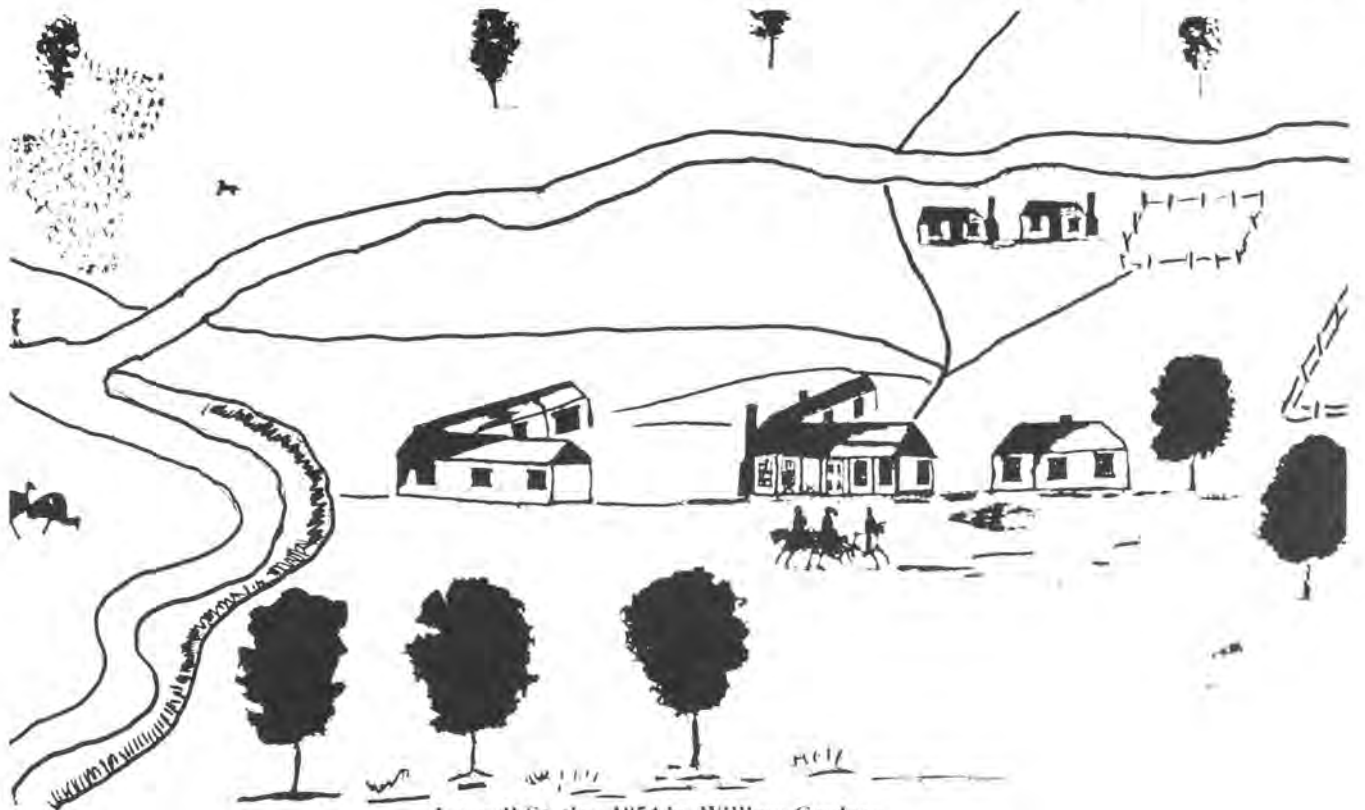
no major river or mountain crossing and providing abundant water and feed for stock.

The first place where the party (reputedly consisting of five men, three of whom were convicts)<sup>35</sup> camped for any length of time was four miles upstream from Bundarra, near a station afterwards called Winscombe which Campbell later sold. A sojourn was made at Bakers Creek, which was named after John Faulkner (sometimes rendered Falconer) a baker by trade, who had arrived on a convict ship in 1826. He was assigned to Peter Macintyre as a stockman. Transported to NSW for life because of his crime of pickpocketing, Faulkner received a Conditional Pardon in 1843.<sup>36</sup> Soon Alexander (called "Sandy" by his contemporaries) Campbell arrived at Keera, where he found an apparently abandoned set of stockyards (really Richard Wiseman's), near the creek still called Macintyre's. He used these to form the basis for a station, where he remained for some months until, as many of the cattle had become lost in the hills, he decided to move on. When some aborigines told him that there was another great river to the north, he probably suspected that this could be Cunningham's Macintyre and decided to explore there. Returning to the Bundarra area, he found that Joseph King had arrived and he acted as a guide over the range of mountains which divide the two river systems. The present Inverell-Bundarra road still follows the track made by King over Kings Gap. Making their way through a belt of rough granite country, the explorers at length camped on a high point north-west of the present Inverell.

From this camp, small groups went exploring. One of these, led by Peter Byron, returned with news of finding fertile black soil plains on the banks of a sizeable river. Campbell thereupon decided to name the area Byron Plains. Byron had arrived on the convict ship Speke in 1826. Aged 25, he had no education and was transported for life for burglary, his second offence. The convict indent describes him as 5ft 8½ inches, with a ruddy complexion and brown hair and eyes. He was tattooed with Adam and Eve, a tree and angels on his right arm, and a crucifix on his left. Because his occupation was given as "farmer's man", he was assigned to George Blaxland as a shepherd.<sup>37</sup> By the time of this trip to Inverell he presumably had been granted a ticket of leave<sup>38</sup> and was being employed by Peter Macintyre. Although William Gardner stated that Byron Plains were named after the poet Lord Byron, the unwavering local tradition has been that they were named after convict Peter Byron, who spent the rest of his life, from 1841, living in the district.

Convinced that he had found excellent

\* His account has been transcribed in Appendix 1



Inverell Station 1854 by William Gardner  
— Used by permission of Mitchell Library

agricultural land, equal to that of Blairmore, Campbell immediately claimed the area for his employer. Although the river was not the one named Macintyre's Brook by Cunningham, it was always called Macintyre's River by Campbell and his men and all who followed them. The precise boundaries of Byron Plains station were probably not marked out yet, as there were no other settlers anywhere near, but the Macintyre family always asserted that it extended about 20 miles along both sides of the river. There has never been any dispute that Campbell's party was the first to arrive at Inverell. The most likely date of their arrival is 1836, but this can as yet be verified only by circumstantial evidence. Peter's brother, Donald, stated in 1846 that his family had been in possession for "nine or 10 consecutive years".<sup>39</sup> The licence which Peter Macintyre received in January, 1837, described the run as situated in north-western New England.<sup>40</sup>

Two of the group were left with the stock at Byron Plains. When Peter Macintyre applied for the depasturing licence on 9 December, 1836, he said that John Ross, free man, and John Faulkner, ticket of leave, were in charge of the stock.<sup>41</sup> It was usual, in fact, to leave men, even assigned convicts, to manage as best they could on remote stations. This was the only way pioneers could lay claim to their runs while

they returned to civilisation. Those who did not, risked others occupying their runs. Wiseman later accused Campbell of taking over his stockyards while he was away 'down the country', and afterwards selling the run to Allan Macpherson, who named it Keera.<sup>42</sup> Wiseman, however, retained a sizeable area of the Gwydir. By 1838 he had sold the Big River run (now Cootingora). Despite the success of his land deals, Richard Wiseman was declared insolvent in December, 1843. Many years later his nephew, with the same name, purchased Clerkness, Bundarra, renewing the association.

Leaving Byron Plains, Campbell and his party turned east. They were probably running low on supplies and knew that the Dumaresqs had established a station north of Armidale. They claimed Falconer and Guyra stations and explored the country to the east, possibly in an attempt to find a way to the coast, before returning down the Moonbi Range. Although Macintyre was quick to register Byron Plains station, it was used only for cattle for the first two years, with a staff of about two. One of these stockmen, who was brought out from Scotland with his brother in 1837 by Peter Macintyre, told his son about the loneliness of life in the bush, especially to a new arrival, and how they once had to ride all the way to Clerks' at Bundarra to procure a couple of "stunted clays" (pipes) to

## *World of its Own*

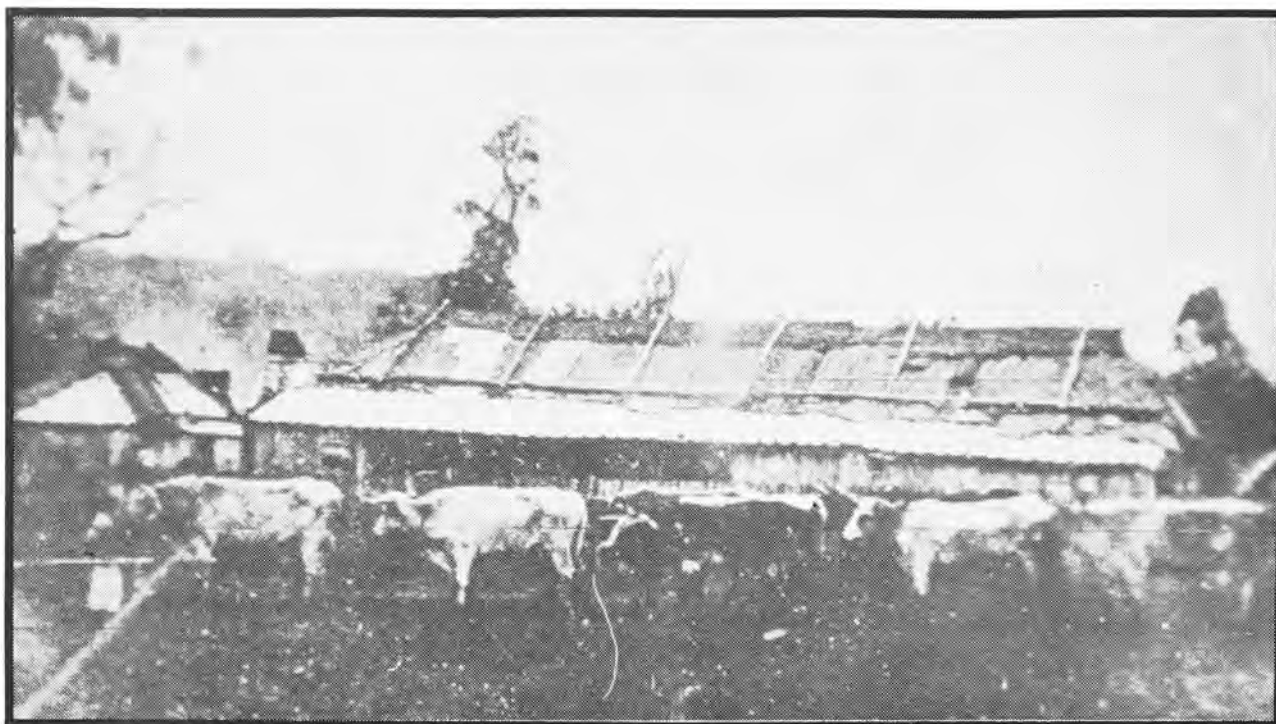
pacify the hostile aborigines, with whom there was much strife in the first four years.<sup>43</sup>

During 1837 Peter Macintyre concentrated on increasing his work force, by bringing out free workers from Scotland (the government assisted with the fare) and by applying for convicts, of whom he was assigned 21 in 1837.<sup>44</sup> Only then was he able to set up Byron Plains as a sheep station during 1838. Guyra was used for the cattle. Both Macintyre and Alexander Campbell visited the Macintyre River during those years. Campbell continued to live on Macintyre's grant at Blairmore, Scone, which was the base for the "up country" stations. As principal superintendent his job was to supervise all the widely dispersed properties and organise more than 70 (in 1840) of Macintyre's employees, as well as his own. In December, 1838, he married Catherine McIntyre (unrelated to Peter), who had arrived from Scotland the previous year to work at Blairmore. Their first two children, Margaret and Elizabeth, were born at Scone in 1840

and 1842. Meanwhile, Peter Macintyre died in 1841 and his sister, Mary, who inherited the estates, moved to Blairmore. Campbell remained as her superintendent until her marriage in April 1844\*, when he brought his family to live in the district he had named Inverell.

Instead of being discovered by intrepid explorers conscious of their significant role in history, the Inverell district was opened up by its first settlers. Although Cunningham, the gentleman botanist, was able to draw attention to "this beautiful sward of grass", he was speaking of the Dumaresq, crossing the Macintyre twice with no comment about its grazing potential. Byron the convict, Wiseman the convict's son and Campbell the free emigrant are representatives of the largely forgotten majority of Australians who were the country's real pioneers.

\* See Appendix for further information on the Macintyre families.



**Bullock team in front of Inverell Station 1854.**