

# ANGUS McMILLAN

## DISCOVERER OF GIPPSLAND.

(By P. J. C. Wallace)

The idea to hold a pilgrimage to the grave of Angus M'Millan is a worthy one, and should be an annual affair on the anniversary of his death, which is the 18th. of May. His sons should be invited. This is not the only thing which should be done. Somewhere on the Prince's Highway, in a commanding position, a monument or arch should be erected to our famous pioneer explorer. It should be visible from the railway also. In years to come the Prince's Highway will be the main motor road between Melbourne and Sydney, and when the railway is carried through to meet the New South Wales line, the Gippsland route will challenge the Albury line for supremacy.

There are many wealthy families in Gippsland today, who could, between them, easily spare the necessary money for the erection of a suitable memorial. Do they ever think of what they owe to Angus M'Millan? Some of them would not have been in existence but for the fact that their parents or grandparents met and married, owing to the discovery of Gippsland.

In looking up records at the Melbourne Public Library, I saw the following extract in a paper which was read before the Victorian Historical Society just ten years ago:—

"What has been done to keep green the memory of him who in 1839-41 blazed the track into the rich valleys of Gippsland—Angus M'Millan? Beyond a portrait in the Mechanics' Institute, Sale, and a tombstone over the family in the cemetery of that town, nothing! Surely it is time that Gippsland folk awoke to the privilege they possess to recognise worthily the work of their energetic pioneer."

In view of the ceremony which is taking place this week at the graveside, the following sketch of the discovery of Gippsland may be of interest. If there are mistakes to be corrected or further facts which can be supplied by old residents I would be very pleased to see them in print. It is to be deplored that so many of our pioneers have passed away without their early experiences being chronicled. Cannot something be done before they are all gone?

No part of Australia has a greater variety of scenery than Gippsland. Mountain, plain, river, lake and sea make an ever-changing panorama as the delighted traveller journeys through this magnificent district which has rightly been designated "The Garden of Victoria."

The settled portions, with splendid roads, flourishing farms and busy townships, show the advancement made in eighty-two years. Views may be obtained from mountain summits which embrace the whole landscape from the Alps to the sea. The beauty of the Buchan caves is unsurpassed. The lakes teem with wild fowl of all kinds. Lake Tyers, the gem of them all, has its unique and picturesque aboriginal station. The Ninety-mile beach is a source of never-ending joy. Further east the Croajingolong scenery is ever grander.

In 1839, before the gold era, what is now Gippsland was an unknown wilderness. The State of Victoria was a portion of New South Wales and was known as the Port Phillip Settlement. Melbourne was then a small village. Settlement had extended from Melbourne towards Dandenong and Western Port but since the day in 1799 when the gallant young Surgeon Bass, after whom the strait is named, had beached his boat near Cape Everard no white man had been known to have penetrated its interior.

Hall savage seal hunters who frequented the islands of Bass Strait occasionally made raids on the coast and carried off native women, but the country itself repelled exploration. The eastern progress of settlement had

country itself repelled exploration. The eastern progress of settlement had been arrested by dense timber, low scrubby ranges and morasses surrounded by thick ti-tree. On the north and north-east the barrier of the Australian Alps extended as far as the head of the Murray. On the New South Wales side of the present boundary, settlement by squatters and others had extended from Sydney to Twofold Bay and the Maneroo district, or as it was then called "Maneroo." Reports had been received from the blacks of fine open grassy country over the Alps to the South West. Vain efforts were made to reach it and a man named George M'Kellar had penetrated the barrier as far as the Omeo High Plains, (then called Omio) and formed a cattle station, but the winter climate was very severe and he got no further.

Angus M'Millan was the man who succeeded after several attempts during which he suffered innumerable hardships and risks from hostile natives. He was then about 30 years of age. He was born in the Isle of Skye and had been in the colonies about nine years. He was employed as overseer at Carrawang station in the Maneroo district.

On the 29th. May, 1839, he started with "Jimmy Gibber," the native chief of the Maneroo tribe, to endeavor to reach the country spoken of by the blacks. They travelled S.W. for five days and from the top of a high mountain, which he named Mt. M'Leod, beheld the promised land of plains, lakes and sea. The country was very rough and the black, becoming alarmed, on account of the wild natives of the Warigal tribe, refused to go further. M'Millan wished to go on and, in turn, coaxed and threatened his black companion, but it was of no use so they camped. That night the explorer woke up suddenly to find the black standing over him with a raised waddy. He grabbed his pistol and the native, cowed to submission, accounted for his action by saying that he had been dreaming that another blackfellow was carrying off his gin. It was a narrow escape for the explorer, and he thought it advisable to turn back. Thus ended his first attempt. After this trip he proceeded to form a station nearer his objective. He was employed by Lachlan M'Alister. A bullock dray and provisions for another attempt were despatched from Sydney to Maneroo and eventually, from the latter place after innumerable difficulties, they got the dray over the mountains, sometimes in four feet of snow, crossed the Snowy River, and once it took them three days to climb a pinch of nine miles. Without shelter they suffered very much. They reached a point about fifty miles south of Omeo, called by the blacks Numbla-Mungee, and formed the new station for a starting place for the next attempt to reach those alluring plains and the sea.

On the 26th. December, 1839, a party from the newly settled station, consisting of himself, M. M'Alister, Cameron and Bath, a stockman, started out with several weeks' rations. The objective was Corner Inlet where he hoped to find a suitable port for shipping the cattle from the new country to Tasmania and Sydney. On the first night they camped on the bank of a river (the Tambo.) Many signs of natives were seen, but they were not molested. One day M'Millan was riding ahead and came suddenly upon a number of blacks. The natives gazed with affright and astonishment at horse and rider, the first they had ever seen. M'Millan dismounted and made friendly signs to them, but they fled in terror, and all day the wailing of the gins and picaninnies could be heard in the bush. Years afterwards some of the same blacks told M'Millan that they first thought he and the horse were one animal, but when he dismounted they were more terrified, as they took him for the horse's picaninnie, as he was carried on its back! They pushed on and by cutting a track through the scrub to the river bank were enabled to cross over logs, carrying their rations and saddles and leading the horses by ropes, making them swim or scramble through. The ranges on both sides of the stream were very steep. They had bad luck with the pack horse which slipped on a mountain side and rolled down until stopped by a tree. It was so badly hurt that they returned to Numbla-Mungee station. The second attempt had failed.

Before starting again M'Millan sent a man to Omeo station to get a semi-tame black for a guide and for parleying with the wild natives. The man returned with two blacks, Cabon Johnny, chief of the Omeo tribe, and a blackboy whom M'Millan named Friday.

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The 11th. January, 1840, saw them started for the third attempt to reach the kernel of the nut which was proving such a hard one to crack. After travelling for some days over their old route in very rough country, having splendid views of lakes and plains from various mountain tops, they struck the Tambo river again and followed it down to the lowlands, and then on to its mouth where it enters the lake. The lake was alive with ducks, swans, pelicans and other aquatic birds. M'Millan named the lake "Victoria" after the reigning Queen. (This part of the lake is now called Lake King.) The country was good, the grass being as high as the saddle girths. Kangaroos and emus were numerous. The party travelled west along the lake, and on 17th. January came to another river and named it Nicholson, after a Sydney doctor. The river was too deep to cross so they followed it up to the ranges, and the horses scrambled through a rocky ford. The weather was fearfully hot and the meat went bad, but one of the party shot some ducks and the situation was saved. These were the first ducks ever shot in the Lakes district. Who can estimate the number slaughtered since then in that sportsman's paradise? On the 18th. another river barred their way. M'Millan named it after Surveyor General Mitchell, of New South Wales. It was not crossable, so they had to follow it up, having some trouble in the morass. Afterwards from the top of a hill they had a grand view of the surrounding country. Mountains tier upon tier rose behind them. Lakes, rivers, plains and timbered country stretched away to the south and south-west. M'Millan thought of Scotland, the land of his birth, and of the thousands living in poverty in the old country. Here was a new land to support them all! On the spur of the moment he named it "Caledonia Australis."

On the 19th. January, 1840, the Mitchell was crossed, and travelling S.W. the party camped at a place which they named Providence Ponds.

On 21st a large lake was sighted. They at first thought it was a continuation of the one they had named Lake Victoria, but found that the water was fresh instead of salt. It they named Lake Wellington.

Lots of blacks were seen on the shore of the Lake, but they fled on sighting the party. White men they had never seen before, and the noise of the horses terrified them.

On 22nd they came to another river (the Avon) followed it up and crossed it about two miles from the hills. The country now consisted of fine open plains with occasional belts of timber. They camped on the plains and had a fine view of the mountains to the north. M'Millan named Mt. Wellington. They continued S.W. and struck another river, which they named the M'Allister. Native signs were numerous. On 23rd. they tried to cross but could not do so. They followed it down, but its junction with what is now called the Thompson was not observed. They reached the morass below where Sale now is, where the Glengarry and Thompson rivers junction and form the La Trobe. Hundreds of natives were seen along the banks of the river where the swing bridge now spans the stream, but they would not parley with M'Millan's blacks, and ran away. One old black who was lame and could not run was captured. They made signs that they wanted to get to the sea, and endeavored to get information from him through the black guides, but without success. He was given an old pair of trousers and a knife. His only ornaments were three of four human hands remarkably preserved by being dried in the sun, suspended from his neck.

To cross the river they tried to strip a bark canoe off a tree, blackboy fashion, but failed as the bark split. Provisions were low, so a consultation was held. M'Millan desired to go and find an outlet to the sea, but the others outvoted him so he decided to return to his base and bring down stock to the good country he had passed near the Avon River. It took the party seven days to return. They camped in the open as they had no tent. Thus ended the explorer's third trip.

On 31st January 1840 he proceeded to Maneroo and reported to his employer, Mr M'Allister, and gave him full particulars about the new country. He also wrote a report to a friend in Sydney, but the letter went astray. His employer was not prepared to send stock to the new country unless a shipping port was available, and he consequently lost the information about the

employer was not prepared to send stock to the new country unless a shipping port was available, and he apparently kept the information about the new country to himself, and it is just here that another claimant steps in as the "Discoverer of Gippsland."

Count Strezelecki, a Polish scientist, who had been doing work for the N.S. Wales Government, and who had explored and named Mt. Kosciuszko, heard a party to explore it. He had all the necessary surveying instruments and in some way, of the new country. At the Government expense he fitted out pack horses to carry the outfit. His party arrived at Numbia - Mungoo station during M'Millan's absence at Maneroo, and having replenished his provisions and obtained a camp kettle from M'Millan's stores, he left the station on 27th March 1840 (two months after M'Millan's return from the Latrobe) for the new country. Matthew M'Allister, who had been with M'Millan, went with the Count for one day exploring the country and the rivers to be crossed, and showed the tracks made by M'Millan's party which Tarra, the Sydney-side black the Count had with him, said he could easily follow.

The Count's party reached the Latrobe, managed to cross, but a few days afterwards struck trouble with the scrub, and being short of rations they were compelled to abandon the horses and all their baggage, including their instruments, and then attempted a direct line to Western Port on foot. They hoped to reach the latter place in a few days. For twenty two days they struggled over ranges, through dense scrub, hacking their way with tomahawks. Sometimes they were up to their waists in swamp for hours. For over two weeks they lived on the flesh of native bears, sometimes having to eat it raw, strongly flavoured as it was with eucalyptus. Broken down and enfeebled with starvation the ragged party reached the outskirts of civilisation at Western Port on 12th May. they freely admitted that they owed their lives to Tarra, the native, whose resources in woodcraft ensured them such food as they were able to obtain.

Therefore, although Angus M'Millan was first into Gippsland, the Count was first into print! When he had sufficiently recovered from his enforced diet of raw native bear, the Count sent his report to Sir George Gipps, Governor of New South Wales, and also stated that he had named the new country "Gipps'Land" in honour of His Excellency.

His Excellency enlarged on the report in forwarding his despatch to London, and the Count was awarded the gold medal of the Royal Geographical Society.

The name "Gippsland" was accepted for the new territory and M'Millan's "Caledonia Australis" died at its birth.

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M'Millan in the meantime had started with a dray and seven men to clear a road across the mountains to the new country. This was his fourth venture. He had been working for three weeks when he received orders from his employer not to form any more stations until he had discovered a port at Corner Inlet, so the party returned.

On 14th. July, 1840, for the fifth time, he started with a party consisting of Lt. Ross, M'Allister, Bath, McLaren and a black. In twelve days they reached the Glengarry or Latrobe river, further up than where he made his former trip. The river was high with the winter rains. They could not cross, so once again they returned to the Tambo station at Numbia-Mungee.

M'Millan was now determined, in spite of his employer's orders, to take possession of the country he had already cleared a track to, and on which he had spent so much money and labor. In October, 1840, he started with the first draft of cattle and founded a station on the Avon river, the now famous Bushy Park. From there he made his sixth attempt to reach the sea at Corner Inlet, but although he got within six miles of it, the scrub stopped him, and they lost one tomahawk and broke another. He named the mountain "Tom's Cap" after Tom M'Allister's head-dress, which it resembled in shape. He returned to the Avon river station and then left for Maneroo to secure the protection of his rights from the Commissioner of Crown Lands in Sydney, but that individual would not

Sydney, but that individual would not give it, and told the explorer that as he had gone so far afield he must protect himself!

On his way back, at the Tambo station, he found that his men, whom he had left at Bushy Park, had been driven from there by wild blacks and his cattle speared or dispersed. The men escaped with their lives but had been pursued for twenty-five miles, and had reached Tambo station.

M'Millan collected a party which included himself, Dr. Arbuckle, John M'Donald, Bath, M'Laren and three others and started out to teach the blacks a lesson. The inclusion of our pioneer doctor in the party shows us that M'Millan meant business! There was a desperate fight, but history is silent as to the casualties among the natives. The whites came through all right.

When things had become quiet, and the surviving cattle had been recovered, he started for the seventh time to attempt to reach the sea. The old story of Bruce and the spider applied in this effort, for this time he won! He had with him T. M'Allister, four stockmen and a black.

They left on 8th. February, 1841 for the final attempt to get through as his employer had given him distinct orders to abandon the new country unless he could find an outlet by sea. They crossed the Glengarry and camped on a creek (Merriman's.) It took a day to cut a narrow track to the summit of Tom's Cap, but their toil was rewarded by a splendid view of the long-looked for promontory and the inlets. They camped at what is now Bruthen Creek on the 12th. Feb-

ruary, and next day reached the sea and found a river (the Tarra.) On the 14th. they discovered a place for shipping cattle, with seven feet of water at low tide (Port Albert.) The goal was won!

As they had blazed a trail all the way, they were back at Bushy Park on 29th. February. M'Millan was now determined to get his dray through to the seaport.

About six weeks before M'Millan discovered the port, a small steamer named the Clonmell left Sydney for Melbourne with passengers and cargo. The captain attempted a short cut and the steamer was wrecked near

and the steamer was wrecked near the entrance to the Port channel. A boat was sent towards Melbourne and was picked up by the Government cutter. Vessels were sent to rescue the remaining crew and passengers. This was successfully done, but the Clonmell could not be refloated. The cargo was afterwards sold. A few years ago the remains of this wreck could be seen amongst the breakers in the channel. Possibly it is still there.

The people connected with this wreck reported good country in the vicinity and a company of squatters and merchants was formed to test it. It was named the Port Albert Company and the pioneers of the movement left Melbourne on the "Singapore" with horses, cattle and other stock and goods. They arrived shortly after M'Millan had reached the sea. They had with them the native Tarra, who had saved Strzelecki's party from starvation. The black soon found M'Millan's track and his blazed trees to the river. The pioneers gave the native's name to the river.

After building some huts and a storehouse, they left a few men in charge and decided to explore to Melbourne overland. They followed M'Millan's blazed trail to the river Glengarry and then struck west, and by keeping further north than the Count's party, avoided the swamps, but had to cut through dense scrub for thirty miles. They reached Western Port on 11th. April, 1841, after nineteen days of rough travelling.

In the meantime M'Millan was battling to get through with his dray, which he did after many difficulties. He was three weeks clearing the way and had great trouble at the river. Judge his astonishment at finding a small active settlement where there was a wilderness a few weeks before. His bullock driver, James Lawrence, was hailed by the settlers as the lion of the party. He had driven that team of bullocks and dray from Sydney over the Australian Alps, through many rivers and trackless bush and landed it and its contents at the port! Slightly different travelling to the motor traffic at the present time on the Prince's Highway.

Angus M'Millan had many more trips of exploration which helped to open up Gippsland. He died on the 18th. May, 1865 at the comparative

open up Gippsland. He died on the 18th. May, 1865 at the comparative early age of 55 years. No doubt the hardships of his young manhood hastened the end.

Near the main entrance of the Sale General Cemetery, in the Presbyterian ground, stands the modest obelisk over the family grave where he is buried. This is the inscription—

ERECTED

To the Memory of

ANGUS M'MILLAN

Discoverer of Gippsland

Died 18th. May, 1865.

Aged 55 Years

Is this to be his sole memorial? Will those readers, who have had the patience to peruse this article to the end, kindly turn to the beginning and re-read the extract from the paper of the Victorian Historical Society and ask themselves the question, "What have we done to worthily record our indebtedness to Angus M'Millan, Gippsland's Pioneer Explorer?"

Melbourne, 4/12/1923.