**Essays on Mount Crosby - The Mermaid**

There is a mountain of fair proportion (396 metres) situated equidistant between Lake Manchester and Gold Creek Reservoir (Upper Brookfield); and indeed that good hill, called Mermaid Mountain, separates the creeks that run east or west into each reservoir.

I have enjoyed imagining its name arose from some resemblance to a reclining mermaid, but I have given up that hope in favour of an idea with more merit (and which, even if somehow wrong, affords an opportunity to tell a good story). I am disposed to think our mountain is named after His Majesty's Cutter "*Mermaid*", the little ship that carried Lieutenant John Oxley to Moreton Bay in 1823, and two years later, under the command of Major Edmund Lockyer, became the first sea-going vessel to enter the Brisbane River. Both men were prominent in exploring our river system and its relationship to the nearby D'Aguilar Range.

As for the little *Mermaid,* she was built in Howrah, India, in 1816 and was a very small ship of wood carvel construction. Originally cutter rigged, but later converted to a two-masted schooner, she measured just 17m by 5.6m. *Mermaid* became famous when used by Lieutenant Philip Parker King to survey parts of the Australian coastline missed by Mathew Flinders. Parker King made four voyages between December 1817 and April 1822 on his task of ‘Exploring and Surveying the Coast of Australia'.

In 1829, *Mermaid* was involved in an amazing maritime story. On route to Port Raffles (NT), *Mermaid* struck bad weather at night and was wrecked on a rock in Torres Strait. All of the crew survived three days on their miniature island until, at last, the *Swiftsure* in charge of Captain Johnson hove to and picked them from the rock. In a few days, the *Swiftsure* itself encountered a gale and was wrecked ashore. Again the crews were stranded, and days of anxiety followed until the welcome outline of another Government cutter showed on the horizon. It was the *Governor Ready*, which took the shipwrecked people aboard. But the crew of the *Mermaid* must have had an unlucky member because within a few days the *Governor Ready* struck a submerged rock and sunk. Now the crews took to the long-boats and for four days those of the *Mermaid*, *Swiftsure*, and *Governor Ready* drifted on the great ocean.

Fortunately, the Tasmanian ship *Comet* hove into sight and picked up the crews who, by now rather tired of wrecks, were congratulating themselves on surviving three times when the *Comet* too was wrecked. Everybody went to the boats. At last the *Jupiter* came into sight and took all aboard, and (probably bearing in mind the fate of the other ships) steered as fast as possible for Port Raffles. The welcome misty headlands of Port Raffles were showing dimly in the distance when, with hardly any warning, a violent storm sprang up and after many hours battling, the *Jupiter* ran ashore at the entrance to the harbor and was wrecked.

Mercifully, the crews had been involved in five wrecks without a single loss of life. All of which makes Mermaid Mountain a little more interesting, doesn't it?

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