**Essays on Mount Crosby - Allan Cunningham and Red Cliff Reach**

On the Brisbane River about midway between the Mount Crosby weir and the Kholo Bridge is a place of cliffs and high ridges that goes under the name of "the Blackwall"; something the toponymists would have no trouble explaining, for the Blackwall is everything its name suggests.

The lovely view from the top of the Blackwall and the timelessness of the locality (preserved in its undeveloped shape by land resumed for water supply) are certainly enough to write about, but as with many local things, there is more to know of the Blackwall.

The journals of Allan Cunningham, botanist and explorer, show that the Blackwall marks the most westerly point reached by his 1824 expedition with Surveyor General John Oxley, and it was after a walk into the nearby forests that Cunningham first described the great tree that bears his name, our king of trees, the Hoop Pine (Araucaria cunninghamii). Some specimens, he wrote, were majestic giants five feet in diameter and well over 100 ft tall.

At this point our explorers did something to surprise the logical toponymist; they named the place Red Cliff Reach, though there is nothing red about it, and marked a sketch showing the same in Cunningham's journal. I excuse it like this: Both Oxley and Cunningham had recently been at the singular and most easterly settlement at Red Cliff (today Redcliffe, but then spelled as shown); so perhaps they enjoyed the thought of bookending the known world between "Red Cliffs" in honour of the first Queensland settlement. Be sceptical of my theory, if you know what is good for you.

In 1828, following an investigation of his doorway to the Darling Downs (Cunningham's Gap), Cunningham rested at Limestone Station (now Ipswich) and made several short journeys into the neighbouring lands. Among these short trips was a melancholy walk north to the Red Cliff Reach (Blackwall). It rekindled the memory of his friend, John Oxley, and his great trees, about which he wrote:

"In traversing a pitch of forest ground formerly walked over by Mr. Oxley, accompanied by Lieutenant Butler and myself, to the Pine Range, I could feign to have recalled to life that lamented gentleman who so long and so creditably to himself filled this post, and many a pleasing incident now recurred to me. I passed over the ground and ascended the darkly brushed acclivity of the Pine Range by the same opening in the thicket which we had 4 years since penetrated to the higher points where grew those stately timber trees, the monarchs of these forests - the new Araucaria."

Col Hester