**Essays on Mount Crosby - Field Naturalists at Mount Crosby**

Being about as far up the Brisbane River as one can navigate in a boat before having to portage across the shingle beds at Colledges Crossing, Mount Crosby has been a popular destination for boating trips for longer than you might expect. Although by the 1890s the land was settled and largely changed from its natural condition, it was still a very pleasant experience for day trippers who could easily imagine they were passing in the wake and oar-strokes of the early explorers.

We know of several of these early boating day trips because of newspaper articles in which the activities of notable trippers are described in detail, and we can be sure that less well publicised outings were relatively frequent. In one report a journalist describes his experience on the river; in another we hear about the capsize of a tour boat; for one, the only evidence is a beautifully arranged photograph at Mount Crosby wharf, and then there is the trip by the Field Naturalists of the Royal Society.

In June of 1892, twenty members of the Field Naturalists section of the Royal Society went aboard Mr Sutton's steam launch at Graceville and set off for Kholo Bridge (today's Colledges Crossing). It was their trip, so here is their description of the outbound leg:

*The morning was beautifully fine and clear, and the boat made rapid progress up the stream, giving an ever-changing series of views of high banks covered with scrub or forest, of low alluvial flats in various stages of cultivation, of jutting promontories or long placid reaches, of cattle feeding lazily in the meadows or drinking from the stream, of startled wild fowl and of cottages where children waved their welcome or stopped their play to watch.*

Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? When they got to the Mount Crosby wharf, near today's riverside golf hole, they made an excursion into an interesting piece of steep forest country that, providentially, still exists today. At the foot of Barnes Hill they noted several unusual species of plants - the rarer ones including the Grease Nut (*Hernandia bivalvis*), a rare soft-wooded tree with a spectacular red fleshy flower and whose timber is said to have been preferred by draymakers for brake pads; the Muskwood (*Mailea vitiensis*) so called from the scent of its timber, which is close grained and yellow in colour; and *Parsonia lanceolata*, a climber with small whitish flowers, gathered for the first time by the field naturalists.

Following their plant collecting ramblings, the naturalists climbed Barnes Hill before returning to their steam launch, satisfied with their efforts and ready for a joyful journey home.

It's a difficult business to get on a steamer today, but the land the naturalists rambled on is, by sheer luck and virtue of its steepness, still there to help us all imagine what our district looked like when Oxley and Cunningham first saw it.

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