

# **‘We never rolled ourselves up in our blankets more satisfied with a repast.’ Food in the expedition of Ludwig Leichhardt from Moreton Bay to Port Essington 1844-1845 September 2024**

I first came across Ludwig Leichhardt in High School where he was just one of the white explorers I studied in my Australian history class. I came across him again recently while researching for an article on surveys of edible native plants 1834 – 1934.<sup>1</sup> My search turned up his Lecture II on the edible native plants he found during his 1844/45 expedition from Moreton Bay in Queensland to Port Essington in the Northern Territory.<sup>2</sup> It set me wondering about food matters on expeditions like this – how they were provisioned, what if anything they ate of native flora and fauna, what difficulties there were in getting food and water. Leichhardt’s *Journal of an Overland Expedition from Moreton Bay to Port Essington. A Distance of Upwards of 3000 miles during the Years 1844 – 1845* has descriptions of these food matters and that material is the content of this article.<sup>3</sup> Lecture II describes more edible native plants experimented with during the expedition not recorded in the *Journal* and I have wherever possible identified them in the footnotes.

I look at the expedition party’s food matters month by month. This creates a narrative which I think more effectively situates the food matters as they affect and are affected by the daily life of the expedition than would happen grouping foods in siloed categories. There are four threads to the narrative not all of which always appear in any month: edible native plants, native animals, non-native animals (bullocks and horses) and Aboriginal foodways. Leichhardt’s party often encountered Aboriginal individuals and groups in ways directly affecting the party’s food or came across sites where they could observe Aboriginal foodways. I include these where they occur in the narrative. Leichhardt uses derogatory terms for Aboriginal people which are retained when citing his words.

## **Ludwig Leichhardt**

Leichhardt (b.1813) arrived in Sydney from England on 14 August 1842. His knowledge and skill as a natural scientist was based on several years of study at some of Europe’s most prestigious scientific institutions and study of natural history collections in London and Paris. He did extensive fieldwork, including geological studies, in Europe.<sup>4 5</sup>

Why come to Australia to pursue his interests? ‘Leichhardt had studied Australian materials in Paris, and probably in London, but he was certainly no expert on Australian forms. But then he spent the next couple of years familiarising himself with these as well as learning the bushcraft skills that he needed. It is clear that Leichhardt by this time had committed himself completely to Australia. He obviously believed - as no-one else had until then - that the primary place for studying Australian nature was Australia and not the great museums of Europe.’<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Van Reyk, Paul, *Not Just Cases of Extreme Hunger: Surveys of Edible Native Plants 1834 – 1934*, 2024, compost.sydney.

<sup>2</sup> Dr Leichhardt’s Lectures, Lecture II, Domestic Intelligence, *The Sydney Morning Herald* August 26 1846 p.2

<sup>3</sup> *Journal of an Overland Expedition from Moreton Bay to Port Essington. A Distance of Upwards of 3000 miles during the Years 1844 – 1845* Published online by Cambridge University Press 5 October 2012.

<sup>4</sup> *Leichhardt: the motivations of an explorer*. Paper presented by Professor Rod Home at the Leichhardt Symposium, National Museum of Australia, 15 June 2007

<sup>5</sup> ‘Report of the Expedition of L. Leichhardt, Esq, from Moreton Bay to Port Essington’, *The Sydney Morning Herald* 16 March 1846 p.2 is a testament to his expertise in these areas of scientific endeavour and his ability to communicate these in lucid language. This Report is on the geology and geography of the countryside travelled. It has nothing further to add on the edible plants or native animals.

<sup>6</sup> Home ... National Museum 2007

It chanced that the New South Wales Legislative Council in 1844 proposed an exploratory expedition from Sydney to Port Essington in the far north of the country. Governor Gipps refused to risk government funds to support it. Calls went out for public subscription and sufficient funds were raised to support the project. Leichhardt - who had built up a reputation on the basis of explorations he had done studying flora, fauna and geology in the colony - was hired to head the expedition.

It is sufficient for us to be able to assure our readers, that the adventures of this enterprising man are singularly characteristic, and that they prove him to be a person well calculated to battle with the difficulties which would, doubtlessly, await anyone who should attempt the overland route.<sup>7</sup>

## October 1844

It was at the end of September 1844, when we completed the necessary preparations for our journey, and left the station of Messrs. Campbell and Stephens, moving slowly towards the farthest point on which the white man has established himself. We passed the stations of Messrs. Hughs and Isaacs and of Mr. Coxen, and arrived on the 30th September, at Jimba where we were to bid farewell to civilization.<sup>8</sup>

They begin their trek on 1 October 1844 from Jimba station. There are ten men in the expedition party<sup>9</sup>; 16 head of bullocks 'at the same time means to move our provisions, and form a good stock of provisions themselves'<sup>10</sup>; 17 horses; and four kangaroo dogs<sup>11, 12</sup>.

Leichhardt unfortunately doesn't list the provisions with which they begin their journey. It emerges later that they have 960 lbs of flour which they pack in bags of 120 lbs each that are carried by four of the bullocks. They make damper<sup>13</sup> with it and use it as a thickener in soups and stews. Just eleven days into the trek they strike difficult scrub and when trying to get through it flour bags are torn and they lose 143 lbs of it. This will have consequences later.

They also have chocolate and gelatine the latter of which they will use in soups and stews and both of which 'are very acceptable' when 'little animal food can be obtained'.<sup>14</sup> They have tea. When crossing a creek one of the horses carrying tea falls in the water 'drench(ing) its valuable load.'<sup>15</sup> Happily not all the tea is drenched. Leichhardt writes later: 'We enjoy no meal so much as our tea and

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<sup>7</sup> 'Exploration of New Holland', *South Australian Register* 3 August 1844 p.4

<sup>8</sup> *Journal* ... p.2

<sup>9</sup> 'My party consisted originally of six persons—Mr. Roper, Mr. James Calvert, John Murphy, Phillips, and the black fellow Harry Brown, of Newcastle. In Moreton Bay, a negro, Caleb, and a black of Bathurst, Charley, joined me. At the Downs, Mr. Hodgson and Mr. Gilbert, increased the number of my party to ten persons. 'Report ... 1846 p.2

<sup>10</sup> Leichhardt ... *Report* p.2

<sup>11</sup> 'European dog breeds were trained and cross-bred as 'kangaroo dogs', proficient at catching emus, kangaroos and wallabies.' Newling, Jacqui *Eat Your History. Stories and Recipes from Australian Kitchens*, Sydney Living Museums and NewSouth Publishing 2015 p.55

<sup>12</sup> Leichhardt ... *Report* p.2

<sup>13</sup> Damper is a dough of flour and water and sometimes baking powder cooked on the coals of a fire. Later Leichhardt mentions mixing fat into the dough.

<sup>14</sup> *Journal* ... p.16

<sup>15</sup> *Journal* ... p.22

damper at luncheon, when we encamp between twelve and two o'clock. It is remarkable how readily the tea dispels every feeling of fatigue, without the slightest subsequent injury to health.'<sup>16</sup>

They have some success shooting birds and kangaroo. 'Pigeons, mutton-birds (*Struthidia*), are frequent, and provided us with several messes'.<sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup> A pigeon, a duck and a kangaroo 'gave us a good desirable supper of animal food'.<sup>19</sup> A search for possums is fruitless. 'Iguanas are considered great delicacies'.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the expedition Leichhardt notes that fresh-water mussels are plentiful beside lakes, waterholes and river banks. It isn't clear whether they eats them or not. Later he observes: The camps of the natives were ... distinguished by heaps of shells of Cytherea, oysters, fresh-water mussels, and fish bones'.<sup>21</sup>

Two plants are recorded as being eaten. The young wood of bottletrees (*Sterculia*) contained 'a great quantity of starch between its woody fibres and was frequently chewed by our party'.<sup>22</sup> The *Fusanus* has fruit which 'furnished a very agreeable repast'.<sup>23</sup> I have been unable to identify what this is. The only *Fusanus* I found is a West Australian native sandalwood.

'Mr. Calvert brought an (fortunately) edible mushroom out of Flourspill Scrub.'<sup>24</sup>

They find an Aboriginal camp 'where large unio shells were abundant; the bones of the codfish, and the shield of the fresh-water turtle, shewed that they did not want food'.<sup>25</sup> They identify trees 'recently stripped of their bark, the swellings of the apple-tree cut off to make vessels for carrying water, honey cut out, and fresh steps cut in the trees to climb for opossums'.<sup>26</sup>

## November 1844

There is no mention of meat in any form in the initial provisioning. Leichhardt expected that they would kill sufficient game. By early November, some success of hunting notwithstanding, It was 'painfully evident to (me) I had been too sanguine in my calculations, as to our finding a sufficiency of game to furnish my party with animal food, and that the want of it was impairing our strength'.<sup>27</sup>

Two of the men return to Moreton Bay to ease some of the pressure. Leichhardt slaughters one of the bullocks 'the meat of which we cut into thin slices, and dried in the sun. This, our first experiment—on the favourable result of which the success of our expedition entirely depended—kept us, during the process, in a state of great excitement. It succeeded, however, to our great joy,

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<sup>16</sup> *Journal ...* p.65

<sup>17</sup> *Journal ...* p.

<sup>18</sup> A mess is a military term for where meals are had. Leichhardt generalises the term to mean meals themselves.

<sup>19</sup> *Journal ...* p.16

<sup>20</sup> *Journal ...* p.20

<sup>21</sup> *Journal ...* p.399

<sup>22</sup> *Journal ...* p.24. Lecture 2 mentions two kinds of *Sterculia* – heterophylla (the Kooremin) and a rose coloured one. '... made when slightly roasted, a fine coffee, and the remaining grounds were good to eat.'

<sup>23</sup> Where I have had to identify a plant mentioned by Leichhardt I have checked in Tim Low's 1988 *Wild Food Plants of Australia*, Angus and Robertson, and in Damien Coulthard's and Rebecca Sullivan's *first nations food companion* Murdoch Books 2022

<sup>24</sup> *Journal ...* p.18

<sup>25</sup> *Journal ...* p.8

<sup>26</sup> *Journal ...* p.9

<sup>27</sup> *Journal ...* p.24

and inspired us with confidence for the future. The little steer gave us 65lbs. of dried meat, and about 15lbs. of fat'.<sup>28</sup>

On the downside they have been using more flour than expected. 'The daily ration of the party was now fixed at six pounds of flour per day with three pounds of dried beef, which we found perfectly sufficient to keep up our strength.'<sup>29</sup>

They meet a small group of Aboriginal men who 'pointed out honey in one of the neighbouring trees, (and) assisted in cutting it out and eating it'.<sup>30</sup>

On two occasions they catch 'small fish of the genus *Gristes*'.<sup>31</sup> The only *Gristes* I found was a Murray Cod, but this is hardly likely to only be seven inches in length. They also catch crayfish and eels in waterholes and lagoons. They often find the empty carapaces of turtle, but Leichhardt doesn't record eating one.

Leichhardt notes that young fat hen ( Leichhardt *Atriplex* now *Chenopodium album*) and sow-thistle (*Sonchus*) are excellent vegetables. Also, 'The tops of the *Corypha* palm eat well, either baked in hot ashes or raw, and, although very indigestible, did not prove injurious to health when eaten in small quantities.'<sup>32</sup>

Leichhardt finds a temporarily unpeopled Aboriginal camp. He appropriates what he wants – 'four fine kangaroo nets, made of the bark of *Sterculia*; also several bundles of sticks, which are used to stretch them' – and leaves in exchange 'a fine brass-hilted sword, the hilt of which was well polished, four fishing-hooks, and a silk handkerchief; with which, I felt convinced, they would be as well pleased, as I was with the cordage of their nets.'<sup>33</sup> This is something he does at any temporarily empty or deserted campsite.

Their luck in finding animal food improves. They catch and dine on iguanas, possums, kangaroo, and all manner of birds. 'The dried kangaroo meat, one of our luxuries, differed very little in flavour from the dried beef, and both, after long stewing, afforded us an excellent broth'.<sup>34</sup> They shoot 10 bronze-winged pigeons 'so that we had a fine pigeon supper and breakfast, each having his bird—a rare occurrence in our expedition.'<sup>35</sup>

A bag of flour is torn and spills on the ground. The flour is scooped up 'well mixed with dried leaves and dust, and of this we made a porridge,—a mess which, with the addition of some gelatine, every one of us enjoyed highly'.<sup>36</sup>

## December 1884

They often dine on a salad of native portulaca.<sup>37</sup> In a gully Leichhardt comes across 'a shrub with dark-green leaves; its red berries, containing one or two seeds, were about the size of a cherry, and

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<sup>28</sup> *Journal* ... p.27

<sup>29</sup> *Journal* ... p.27

<sup>30</sup> *Journal* ... p.28

<sup>31</sup> *Journal* ... pp. 29, 35

<sup>32</sup> *Journal* ... p.40

<sup>33</sup> *Journal* ... p.45

<sup>34</sup> *Journal* ... p.46

<sup>35</sup> *Journal* ... p.50

<sup>36</sup> *Journal* ... p.47

<sup>37</sup> Lecture II notes that they boil the 'young shoots of native spinach (*mesembryanthemum*), the goose-foot (*chenopodium*), portulaca and the sow-thistle (*Sonehus*) as vegetables'.

very good eating when ripe'.<sup>38</sup> This happens frequently on the trek: Leichhardt is avid to try unknown fruit on every possible occasion – the consequences sometimes being vomiting and diarrhea but luckily not fatal. They come across. 'The seeds, (of what Leichhardt determines is a species of Cassia) when young, had an agreeable taste, and the tissue, when dry, was pleasantly acidulous, and was eaten by some of my companions without any ill effect, whilst others, with myself, were severely purged.'<sup>39</sup>

When he guesses at/knows a plants botanical name he gives it. When he doesn't he collects enough material to put in his specimen book and writes a rich description to take back to Sydney for formal identifying .

Yesterday in coming through the scrub, we had collected a large quantity of ripe native lemons, of which, it being Sunday, we intended to make a tart; but, as my companions were absent, the treat was deferred until their return, which was on Monday morning, when we made them into a dish very like gooseberry-fool; they had a very pleasant acid taste, and were very refreshing. They are of a light yellow colour, nearly round, and about half an inch in diameter; the volatile the volatile oil of the rind was not at all disagreeable.<sup>40 41</sup>

Leichhardt has planned to slaughter another bullock at Christmas but can't wait.

We enjoyed ourselves very much on this occasion, and feasted luxuriously on fried liver at breakfast, on stuffed heart for luncheon, and on a fine steak and the kidneys for supper. Those who may have lived for so long a time as we had upon a reduced fare, will readily understand with what epicurean delight these meals were discussed.<sup>42</sup>

For Christmas dinner they eat suet pudding and stewed cockatoos.

### January 1845

They start the year inauspiciously. Their supplies are getting low, and they have to reduce the daily ration of flour to 3lbs. Leichhardt decides to slaughter another bullock. 'and during the 17th and 18th occupied ourselves in cutting up the meat, drying it in the sun, frying the fat, preparing the hide, and greasing our harness'.<sup>43</sup>

On a cheerier note, they find a bean the seeds of which when roasted and ground 'afforded us a very agreeable substitute for coffee'.<sup>44</sup> They find a root in a deserted Aboriginal camp and eat it. 'A sleeping lizard with a blunt tail and knobby scales, fell into our hands, and was of course roasted and

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<sup>38</sup> *Journal ...* p.71

<sup>39</sup> *Journal ...* p.92

<sup>40</sup> *Journal ...* p.77

<sup>41</sup> 'Leichhardt collected plants assiduously wherever he went. In the settled areas many of the plants had been named, and in Sydney he had access to Brown's *Prodromus Florae Novae Hollandiae*, and some volumes of De Candolle's *Prodromus Systematis Naturalis Regni Vegetabilis* to assist him in naming. He had also studied Australian plants in Paris and London, so was able to name many of the plants he collected.' *Leichhardt as scientist and diarist*, Paper presented by Dr Tom Darragh, Museum Victoria, Leichhardt Symposium, National Museum of Australia, 15 June 2007

<sup>42</sup> *Journal ...* p.83

<sup>43</sup> *Journal ...* p.92

<sup>44</sup> *Journal ...* p.111

greedily eaten.<sup>45</sup> Charley finds nests of the native bee, 'full of the sweetest and most aromatic honey we had ever tasted'.<sup>46</sup> They collect wild marjoram and add it to their tea and their soup.

## February 1845

My companions shot twenty-one pigeons (*Geophaps scripta* the squatter pigeon), and five cockatoos were shot: a welcome addition to our scanty meals. For a considerable time previous, I had reduced our allowance of flour to three pounds; but now, considering that we were still so far to the eastward, it was, by general consent of my companions, again reduced to a pound and a-half per diem for the six, of which a damper mixed up with fat was made every day, as soon as we reached our encampment.<sup>47</sup>

They shoot and roast many crows and find them 'exceedingly tender'<sup>48</sup>. They shoot more to save using up their dried meat. These together with some cockatoos, and a small scrub wallabi, (sic) 'gave us several good messes'.<sup>49</sup>

Another bullock is slaughtered this one with lots of meat fat and suet. Having previously thought that fat meat wouldn't dry they find it will. In that condition they add it to their soups, 'and no one hesitated to drink the liquid fat, after having finished his meat'.<sup>50 51</sup>

## March 1845

Leichhardt examines the bellies of birds to find what they feed on and whether it is edible for humans also.

Mr. Roper and John Murphy succeeded in shooting eight cockatoos, which gave us an excellent soup. I found in their stomachs a fruit resembling grains of rice, which was slightly sweet, and would doubtless afford an excellent dish, if obtained in sufficient quantity and boiled.<sup>52</sup>

Leichhardt describes how he finds water.

'In looking for water, my search was first made in the neighbourhood of hills, ridges, and ranges, which from their extent and elevation were most likely to lead me to it, either in beds of creeks, or rivers, or in water-holes, parallel to them. In an open country, there are many indications which a practised eye will readily seize: a cluster of trees of a greener foliage, hollows with luxuriant grass, eagles circling in the air, crows, cockatoos, pigeons (especially before sunset), and the call of *Grallina Australis* and flocks of little finches, would always attract our attention.'<sup>53</sup>

They come across a series of large waterholes across one of which was a weir made of sticks for catching fish. Bones of large fish, turtle shells, and heaps of muscles, were strewed round the fire places.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Journal ...* p.117

<sup>46</sup> *Journal ...* p.120

<sup>47</sup> *Journal ...* pp.136 - 137

<sup>48</sup> *Journal ...* p.148

<sup>49</sup> *Journal ...* p.151

<sup>50</sup> *Journal ...* pp.157,168

<sup>51</sup> Lecture II notes this month that they 'washed out the blossoms of the drooping tea-tree (*Melaleuca Leucadendron*) to get at the honey, which they contained in great quantity'.

<sup>52</sup> *Journal ...* p.174

<sup>53</sup> *Journal ...* pp.182 -183

<sup>54</sup> *Journal ...* p.188

Easter is celebrated with 'a luncheon of *fat damper* and *sweetened tea*'.<sup>55</sup>

### April 1845

A large fig tree provides figs 'the size of a small apple, of an agreeable flavour when ripe, but were full of small flies and ants.'<sup>56</sup>

Phillips finds 'a flesh-coloured drupaceous oblong fruit, about half an inch long, with a very glutinous pericarp, containing a slightly compressed rough stone: in taste it resembled the fruit of *Loranthus* ... We all ate a great quantity of them, without the slightest injury'.<sup>57</sup>

They have been travelling along the Burdekin River and have found little game. 'But yesterday, when riding to the Clarke, two flocks of kangaroos passed me : a proof that the country is not so destitute of game as I had thought.'<sup>58</sup>

### May 1845

Leichhardt describes their morning routine.

I usually rise when I hear the merry laugh of the laughing-jackass (*Dacelo gigantea*), which, from its regularity, has not been unaptly named the settlers' clock; a loud cooe then roused my companions,— Brown to make tea, Mr. Calvert to season the stew with salt and marjoram, and myself and the others to wash, and to prepare our breakfast, which, for the party, consists of two pounds and a-half of meat, stewed over night; and to each a quart pot of tea. Mr. Calvert then gives to each his portion ... Brown's duty is to fetch water for tea ; and Mr. Calvert weighs out a pound and a-half of flour for a fat cake, which is enjoyed more than any other meal; the large teapot being empty, Mr. Calvert weighs out two and a-half pounds of dry meat to be stewed for our late dinner.<sup>59</sup>

He comes across Aboriginal women in a lagoon gathering *Nymphaea* flowers. 'I threw a tin canister over to them, and they returned me a shower of roasted *Nymphaea* fruit. It seems that the seed-vessels of *Nymphaea* and its rhizoma form the principal food of the natives; the seeds contain much starch and oil, and are extremely nourishing. I then gave them some pieces of dried meat, intimating by signs that it must be grilled; soon afterwards they retired.'<sup>60</sup> Later he learns that they roast and pound the seeds 'into a substance much resembling mased potato'.<sup>61</sup>

One of their horses is badly injured and Leichhardt proposes they should kill and eat it. There are no objections. 'We cut the meat in slices, and dried it; and though there was some prejudice against it, it would have been very difficult to have detected any difference between it and beef; particularly if the animals had been in the same condition'.<sup>62</sup>

On the Queen's birthday they 'celebrated it with what—as our only remaining luxury—we were accustomed to call a fat cake, made of four pounds of flour and some suet, which we had saved for

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<sup>55</sup> *Journal* ... p.190

<sup>56</sup> *Journal* ... p.201

<sup>57</sup> *Journal* ... p.223

<sup>58</sup> *Journal* ... p.227

<sup>59</sup> *Journal* ... p.234 - 236

<sup>60</sup> *Journal* ... pp. 246 - 247

<sup>61</sup> *Journal* ... p. 257

<sup>62</sup> *Journal* ... p. 247

the express purpose, and with a pot of sugared tea. We had for several months been without sugar, with the exception of about ten pounds, which was reserved for cases of illness and for festivals'.<sup>63</sup>

In an Aboriginal camp he finds 'Three koolimans (vessels of stringy bark) ... full of honey water, from one of which I took a hearty draught, and left a brass button for payment. Dillies, fish spears, a roasted bandicoot, a species of potato, wax, a bundle of tea-tree bark with dry shavings; several flints fastened with human hair to the ends of sticks, and which are used as knives to cut their skin and food; a spindle to make strings of opossum wool; and several other small utensils ...'<sup>64</sup>

He finds *Exocarpus latifolius* of which 'the ripe kernel as well as its yellow succulent leaf-stalk have a very agreeable taste; a leguminous shrub, about five or six feet high, with purple blossoms gathered into terminal oblong heads; this would be an ornament to our gardens.'<sup>65 66</sup>

They kill another bullock but 'were very disagreeably disappointed in not finding sufficient fat to fry the liver, which was our favourite dish; even the fat of the marrow had disappeared and had left a watery tissue, which, when grilled for some time, turned into a yellow substance, having the taste of the fried yolk of an egg'.<sup>67</sup>

### June 1845

He drops in to an Aboriginal camp as they are eating a meal. They run off leaving the food. This is characteristic of Leichhardt's contacts with Aboriginal groups on this expedition. They leave as Leichhardt's group approaches. 'Blackfellows were very near to us last night; they very probably withdrew upon seeing us make our appearance.'<sup>68</sup> If they do not and appear to Leichhardt's mind threatening he fires a rifle in the air, and they understandably run off. In a handful of encounters, they remain and there is an exchange of gifts and some attempt at communication to help guide the expedition party with varying success. 'We asked them for water (yarrai) which, according to what we could understand from their signs, was plentiful lower down the creek.'<sup>69</sup>

At the camp he finds:

koolimans, (vessels to keep water) full of bee bread, of which I partook, leaving for payment some spare nose rings of our bullocks. In their dillies I found the fleshy roots of a bean, which grows in a sandy soil, and has solitary yellow blossoms; the tuber of a vine, which has palmate leaves; a bitter potato, probably belonging to a water-plant ... Their koolimans were very large, almost like small boats, and were made of the inner layer of the bark of the stringy-bark tree. There was no animal food in the camp.<sup>70</sup>

He tries roasting and boiling the tuber, but it remains bitter. 'At last, I pounded and washed them, and procured their starch, which was entirely tasteless, but thickened rapidly in hot water, like arrowroot; and was very agreeable to eat, wanting only the addition of sugar to make it delicious; at least so we fancied.'<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *Journal* ... p. 267

<sup>64</sup> *Journal* ... pp. 269 -270

<sup>65</sup> *Journal* ... p. 267

<sup>66</sup> Lecture II notes also 'a native mulberry with small white fruit ...'

<sup>67</sup> *Journal* ... p. 273

<sup>68</sup> *Journal* ... p. 11

<sup>69</sup> *Journal* ... p. 102

<sup>70</sup> *Journal* ... p. 279

<sup>71</sup> *Journal* ... pp. 284 - 285



To celebrate the anniversary of Waterloo they have only the saturated sugar bags which they boil with tea. They have run out of flour. Leichhardt finds some seeds of the *Grewia* which when boiled up was 'at all events the best (beverage) we had tasted on our expedition.'<sup>72</sup>

### July 1845

Leichhardt tries pandanus which he finds too astringent. They have little success angling. They kill an emu and cut up the hindquarters for drying but have to guard it from square-tailed kites. They shoot a black Ibis which weighed three and a half pounds was very fat and was excellent eating.

The fruit of a native melon Leichhardt finds 'tastes very tolerably after the bitter skin has been removed ; but when too ripe, the fruit is either insipid or nauseous.'<sup>73</sup> They collect seeds of the *Nelumbium* which make an excellent substitute for coffee when roasted and pounded.<sup>74</sup>

They have run out of salt but find a good store of it in a creek. 'I found the broad bed of a creek one mass of the purest and whitest salt. Lumps of it had crystallized round stems of grasses which the wind had blown into the water ... Its appearance was quite new and wonderful to me, who had been so busily employed in scraping the incrustations full of mud from the dry beds of the creeks.'<sup>75</sup>

### August 1845

Leichhardt suggests what he thinks is the purpose of the fires they have constantly seen lit by Aboriginal people.

The natives seemed to have burned the grass systematically along every watercourse, and round every water-hole, in order to have them surrounded with young grass as soon as the rain sets in. These burnings were not connected with camping places, where the fire is liable to spread from the fireplaces, and would clear the neighbouring ground. Long strips of lately burnt grass were frequently observed extending for many miles along the creeks. The banks of small isolated water-holes in the forest, were equally attended to, although water had not been in either for a considerable time. It is no doubt connected with a systematic management of their runs, to attract game to particular spots, in the same way that stockholders burn parts of theirs in proper seasons.<sup>76</sup>

They have killed two emus and prepared them for drying. Leichhardt leaves enough flesh on the bones to grill them 'and we enjoyed a most beautiful moonlight night over a well grilled emu bone with so much satisfaction, that a frequenter of the Restaurants of the Palais Royal would have been doubtful whether to pity or envy us.'<sup>77</sup>

They collect *Terminalia* gum and experiment with ways to make it palatable. 'It dissolved with difficulty in water; added to gelatine soup, it was a great improvement; a little ginger, which John had still kept, and a little salt, would improve it very much. But it acted as a good lenient purgative on all of us.'<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *Journal* ... p. 295

<sup>73</sup> *Journal* ... p. 328

<sup>74</sup> In July they first come across *Salicornia* which is noted as eaten in Lecture II and 'tasted well when boiled with our stewed meat, particularly when were without salt.'

<sup>75</sup> *Journal* ... p. 346

<sup>76</sup> *Journal* ... p. 354

<sup>77</sup> *Journal* ... p. 368

<sup>78</sup> *Journal* ... p. 374

## September 1845

There tea is getting low, so they re-use the tea leaves.

‘Tea is unquestionably one of the most important provisions of such an expedition’ Leichhardt writes, ‘sugar is of very little consequence, and I believe that one does even better without it. We have not felt the slightest inconvenience from the want of flour ; and we were a long time without salt. The want of the latter, however, made us costive, and, when we began to use it again, almost every one of us had a slight attack of diarrhoea.’<sup>79</sup>

They find a ‘fishing station of the natives, where they seemed to have a permanent camp ; the huts being erected in a substantial manner with poles, and thatched with grass and the leaves of Pandanus; there were extensive fire places containing heaps of pebbles ; and an abundance of fish bones. The weir was, as usual, formed with dry sticks, across a shallow part of the river.’<sup>80</sup>

At a deserted camp he sees:

‘ ... half a cone of the pandanus covered up in hot ashes, large vessels (koolimans) filled with water in which roasted seed-vessels were soaking; seed vessels which had been soaked, were roasting on the coals, and large quantities of them broken on stones, and deprived of their seeds. This seems to shew that, in preparing the fruit, when ripe, for use, it is first baked in hot ashes, then soaked in water to obtain the sweet substance contained between its fibres, after which it is put on the coals and roasted to render it brittle when it is broken to obtain the kernels. I also observed that seeds of Cycas were cut into very thin slices, about the size of a shilling, and these were spread out carefully on the ground to dry, after which, (as I saw in another camp a few days later) it seemed that the dry slices are put for several days in water, and, after a good soaking, are closely tied up in tea-tree bark to undergo a peculiar process of fermentation.’<sup>81</sup>

They kill an emu whose meat gets tainted. ‘As the nutritious quality of our meat decreased, I had increased the daily allowance from five pounds to seven; allowing two pounds and a half for breakfast, the same quantity for luncheon, and two pounds for dinner.’<sup>82</sup>

They have their last pot of tea ‘were now fairly put on dry beef and water.’ They turn to the seeds of the Mackenzie which ‘allowed us again a pot of coffee at luncheon for the next three weeks. This coffee had at first a relaxing effect, but we soon became accustomed to it and enjoyed it even to the grounds themselves’.<sup>83</sup>

## October 1845

They find the youngest part of the Typha (bullrush) ‘very tolerable eating’.<sup>84</sup>

They have successfully shot many geese and four for dinner, ‘and they formed by far the most delicious dish our expedition had offered: the others were stewed for the next breakfast; and they were equally good; though a whole night's stewing might have robbed them of a little of their rich flavour’.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Journal* ... p. 392

<sup>80</sup> *Journal* ... p. 396

<sup>81</sup> *Journal* ... p. 407

<sup>82</sup> *Journal* ... p. 408

<sup>83</sup> *Journal* ... pp. 148 - 149

<sup>84</sup> *Journal* ... p. 429

<sup>85</sup> *Journal* ... p. 431

Leichhardt has promised his companions that the next kangaroo caught will be roasted whole. Charley and Brown kill one. 'We had consequently a roasted Red Forester for supper, and we never rolled ourselves up in our blankets more satisfied with a repast.'<sup>86</sup>

Three of their horses drown crossing a creek.

This disastrous event staggered me, and for a moment I turned almost giddy; but there was no help. Unable to increase the load of my bullocks, I was obliged to leave that part of my botanical collection which had been carried by one of the horses. The fruit of many a day's work was consigned to the fire; and tears were in my eyes when I saw one of the most interesting results of my expedition vanish into smoke.<sup>87</sup>

He gathers a large 'vinebean, with green blossoms, which had thick pods containing from one to five seeds. Its hard covering, by roasting, became very brittle; and I pounded the cotyledons, and boiled them for several hours. This softened them, and made a sort of porridge, which, at all events, was very satisfying. Judging by the appearance of large stones which were frequently found, in the camps of the natives, still covered with the mealy particles of some seed which had been pounded upon them, it would seem that the natives used the same bean.'<sup>88</sup>

He experiments with adding to a wallaby stew 'some green hide to make it more substantial. 'It required, however, a little longer stewing than a fresh hide, and was rather tasteless.'<sup>89</sup>

Phillips collects some acacia seeds that have been roasted in a bushfire, pounds them and boils them and gives Leichhardt 'the fluid to taste, which I found so peculiarly bitter that I cautioned him against drinking it; his natural desire, however, for warm beverage, which had been increased by a whole day's travelling, induced him to swallow about a pint of it, which made him very sick, and produced violent vomiting and purging during the whole afternoon and night'.<sup>90</sup>

### November 1845

In a further blow to his collection of botanical specimens the bullock carrying them jumps into a creek. 'I was almost crying with vexation at seeing all my plants thoroughly soaked.'<sup>91</sup>

He finds an 'arborescent Capparis, the ripe fruit of which tasted very like strawberries; but those which were not ripe were very pungent'.<sup>92</sup> They eat 'a great quantity of gibong (the ripe fruit of *Persoonia falcata*), and some small yellow figs of the glossy leaved fig-tree'.<sup>93</sup> My companions had, for several days past, gathered the unripe fruits of *Coniogeton arborescens*, Br.; which, when boiled, imparted an agreeable acidity to the water, and when thus prepared tasted tolerable well. When ripe, they became sweet and pulpy, like gooseberries, although their rind was not very thick. This resemblance induced us to call the tree "The little Gooseberry tree."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> *Journal ...* p. 435

<sup>87</sup> *Journal ...* p. 445

<sup>88</sup> *Journal ...* p. 451

<sup>89</sup> *Journal ...* p. 453

<sup>90</sup> *Journal ...* p. 459

<sup>91</sup> *Journal ...* p. 469

<sup>92</sup> *Journal ...* p. 472

<sup>93</sup> *Journal ...* p. 478

<sup>94</sup> *Journal ...* pp. 479 – 480

They kill another bullock and prepare the meat for drying but rain and 'sultry weather ... weather rendered the meat very bad ... its soft state enabled the maggots to nestle in it ; and the rain to which it had been exposed, rendered it very insipid'.<sup>95</sup>

### **December 1845**

They meet a group of Aboriginals who are 'remarkably kind and attentive, and offered us the rind of the rose-coloured Eugenia apple, the cabbage of the Seaforthia palm, a fruit which I did not know, and the nut-like swelling of the rhizome of either a grass or a sedge. The last had a sweet taste, was very mealy and nourishing, and the best article of the food of the natives we had yet tasted. They called it " Allamurr" (the natives of Port Essington, " Murnatt"), and were extremely fond of it. The plant grew in depressions of the plains, where the boys and young men were occupied the whole day in digging for it. The women went in search of other food; either to the sea-coast to collect shell-fish,—and many were the broad paths which led across the plains from the forest land to the salt-water—or to the brushes to gather the fruits of the season, and the cabbage of the palms. The men armed with a wommala, and with a bundle of goose spears, made of a strong reed or bamboo (?), gave up their time to hunting'.<sup>96</sup>

A group of Aboriginal women brings them " Imberbi," the root of Convolvulus, which grow abundantly in the plain; they gave us a very seasonable supply of it, but would not taste our dried beef, which they turned, broke, smelled, and then with a feeling of pity and disgust returned to us'.<sup>97</sup>

They come across water buffalo and shoot 'a young bull, about three years old, and in most excellent condition. This was a great, a most fortunate event for us ; for our meat bags were almost empty, and, as we did not wish to kill Redmond, our good companion, we had the prospect of some days of starvation before us ... The sultry weather, however, caused a great part of the meat to become tainted and maggoty'.<sup>98</sup>

'A species of Anacardium, which the natives called " Lugula "', Leichhardt notes, ' bore a red succulent fruit, formed by the enlargement of the stalk, with a greyish one-seeded nut outside, like Exocarpus. The fruit was extremely refreshing; the envelope, however, contained such an acrid juice that it ate into and discoloured my skin, and raised blisters wherever it touched it: these blisters were not only followed by a simple excoriation, but by a deep and painful ulceration'.<sup>99</sup>

'The Seaforthia palm became very abundant, and at last the forest was formed entirely of it, with trees of every size. Our guide shewed us how we could easily obtain the young shoots, by splitting the leaves and leafstalks ; and we enjoyed a fine meal of the cabbage.'<sup>100</sup>

*This is the last entry on expedition food matters in the Journal.*

### **End of the Expedition**

On 17 December 1845 they arrive at Victoria/Port Essington where they remain for a month. They embark on the schooner 'Heroine' and arrive in Sydney on the 29th of March.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> *Journal* ... pp. 485 – 487

<sup>96</sup> *Journal* ... pp. 504 - 505

<sup>97</sup> *Journal* ... pp. 522 – 523

<sup>98</sup> *Journal* ... pp. 524 - 525

<sup>99</sup> *Journal* ... p. 533

<sup>100</sup> *Journal* ... p. 534

<sup>101</sup> *Journal* ... p. 536

At Sydney, a reception awaited us, the warmth and kindness of which, it is out of my power to describe. All classes pressed forward to testify their joy at our reappearance, which, we found, had been long despaired of, and to offer their aid in supplying our wants. A public subscription was set on foot, which, in a very few weeks, by the liberal contributions which flowed in from all parts of the Colony, amounted to upwards of Fifteen Hundred pounds ; and in the Legislative Council, a motion was brought forward, which, by the unanimous vote of that House, and the ready concurrence of His Excellency, Sir George Gipps, the Governor, devoted a Thousand Pounds out of the Public Revenue to our use.<sup>102</sup>

He remains there until he begins a new trek in December 1846 to travel from the Darling Downs in Queensland to the West coast of Australia. But after a series of problems has to turn back after covering 500 miles.

He sets out on a second trek in March 1848. No trace of the expedition has been found since 3 April 1848.

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<sup>102</sup> *Journal ...* pp. 536-537