

Moolooloo
September 19th 1860

I arrived here on the 17th inst from a terrible journey in a very exhausted state. I am sorry to say that I have been unable to make the North West coast, the difficulties have been more than I was able to overcome. After arriving at the Centre I was visited by that dreadful disease scurvy which compleatly [sic] prostrated me & rendered me quite helpless, still I persevered and endeavoured to reach the mouth of the Victoria River on the North West coast, but was beat back twice from want of water, the country into which I got on the first course was an immense plain of red light soil covered with nothing but Spinifex and large gum trees, not a blade of grass on it, the horses were three days without a drop of water, and had I not been fortunate enough to drop in with a native well I would have lost nearly all. I again tried a little more to the eastwards to round this plain but the result was the same. I was now forced to return to the Centre and there I have had the honour of being the first to plant the British flag, I have placed it on a high hill and named it Central Mt Sturt, from which I saw ranges of hills to the North East, this gave me a better view of the country for water, and thought that I might get an opening in it that would lead me to the north west of the Gum and Spinifex plain. I therefore proceeded in that direction to latitude 19°22'00" Longitude 134°18' 00" from this I again made//

made another attempt to make the Victoria but here also I was obliged to retreat from want of water the horses were 111 hours without it. I regret to say that I had the misfortune to lose three horses on this trip who perished from want of water travelling over heavy sandy soil through scrub and under a burning hot sun. I now gave up hopes of making the Victoria and tried for the Gulf of Carpentaria in the hope of cutting a creek that was carring [sic] off the surplus waters of the lake on this course I reached Latitude 18°47'00" Longitude 124° 50' 00" and got upon large plains of aluvial [sic] soil covered with grass and surrounded by low stony hills with a few mulga and mally bushes growing on them but on the plains there were only low two or three low bushes in the distance they have the appearance of large dry lagoons could not find a drop of water on, or about them. The horses being very weak and without water for two days and a night I was affraid [sic] to risk them being without it for a longer time in case I should lose this lot and was therefore compelled to fall back on the last water. The next course that I tried was West North West towards some very distant hills, one days journey brought me to a creek which had large and long waterholes situated at latitude 18°54' 00" Longitude 134°23'00" running to the east of north. This I determined to follow thinking it might be the fall of the country to the Gulf. Next morning I traversed it down but found it running more to the east than I expected at six miles the water ceased the creek becoming narrower and deeper and the bed sandy. I continued for fifteen miles but found that there was no chance of water further down it was running direct for the easternmost grassy plain into which it empties itself, seeing that I determined to return and continue my course of the previous day to the distant hills which I supposed to about 30 miles distant but when within 7 miles of where I had camped I was suddenly attacked by a number of natives fully armed and prepared for war who endeavoured to prevent my crossing the creek, three times they came rushing to the attack but were repulsed they also endeavoured to surround and cut us off from the pack horses but that I prevented. They are the finest natives I have yet seen, tall powerful muscular men, bold daring and courageous, not at all frightened for either us or the horses but came rushing boldly to the charge. It was nearly dark when they came upon us in the middle of a small scrub//

on the banks of the creek just as we were about to cross it. We saw them in the morning as we came down. They would not come near us then but walked off as quick as possible now there was no sign of them neither smoke nor any thing else to show that they were still there, from that I thought that they must have gone off as the other natives had done whom we had passed before but I was mistaken for no sooner had we entered the small scrub than they were upon us upwards of 30 attacking in front

and how many more there were endeavouring to surround and cut us off from our pack horses I cannot tell every bush seemed to produce a man as soon as I was able to stop the mad career of those in front I pushed the horses across the creek to a more open piece of ground which was a more favoured position for me we now had them all in our rear they set fire to the grass around [sic] this shouting and yelling was most fearful and it was with difficulty we restrained the horses from bolting away, it now became so dark that I was unable to see what their movements were and thought it was prudent to continue on our course now that they kept out of range of our guns, proceeded up the creek to our last night's encampment they still following us but at a distance, seeing the number of our enemies being so great and the thick scrub coming nearly down to the banks of the creek I did not think it wise to remain there for the night where I could be so easily cut off. I therefore fell back upon a large open grassy plain that I had crossed the day before. This we reached about 11 o.c.PM and turned out the horses to feed, they seemed to have lost our tracks at our last camp for I could hear nothing of them during the night. Immediately after sunrise we could see signal smoke springing up all round us. They were again upon our tracks. During the night I took into consideration the position in which I was then placed, my horses tired and some of them nearly done up, the men complaining (6 weeks before this) of being so weak from want of sufficient food that they are unable to perform their duty, their movements were more like men of upwards of 100 years old than young fellows of 25 years—myself being so unwell that I was unable to sit in the saddle a whole day without suffering the most excruciating pain, our provisions scarcely sufficient to carry us back and now being in the midst of hostile natives who have shown themselves to be wily bold and daring, so much so that I could see at once that my small party would be unable to cope with them although we gained the advantage at first in a short time they would be able to wear us out, if I proceeded I would leave enemies behind and in all probability meet with them in front thus would I have to fight my way to the coast and back//

Again, to do that with only two men and myself, having six pack horses to look after would be utterly impossible. I could only act on the defensive, we were sure to be cut off in some way or other, could I have made friends with them I would have gained the coast but that I could not do they would take no notice of all the signs of friendship I made, after their first charge. I endeavoured to do so it was of no avail we received a shower of boomerangs and spears, for our forbearance one of which attacked my horse they were now within 40 yds and it was high time to stop their further advance which was accordingly done. If I proceeded and was cut off by them all the information that I have obtained would in all probability be lost. I therefore made up my mind with great reluctance to return.

In returning I was surprised at the great rapidity with which the waters were drying up. I was depending upon the Winter rain to bring me back none fell with the exception of one shower we have not have as much as would wet a shoe (?) through since the 24th March till we again reached the settled districts. I intended making another trial to reach the Victoria from a creek four days journey to the south west in which I had found large holes of water but when I returned to it I found it very much reduced. I saw the case was hopeless. If I delayed my return I would be cut off until rain fell. We were unable to hold out till that time which will not be until about September. I was fortunate in arriving at this stream for in coming back I found many of the waters dry which I thought would have lasted much longer, a weeks delay would have prevented my return, in many places we could scarcely obtain enough for the horses.

I met with no desert but with three or four mulga scrubs the broadest a little more than 60 miles the ranges not higher than Flinders Range and many not near as high. The salt bush and table hills cease in Latitude 25°00'00", Spinifex, grass, sandstones, granite, quartz, slate and ironstone commence and continue as far as I went, many large creeks but no running rivers, the country generally good for pasture purposes, I also lost one horse before I crossed the northern boundary he got bogged and we were unable to get him out. My furthest point is about 120 miles south of Gregory's track crossing from the Victoria River to Moreton Bay, I wish the Telegraph could be laid down, there is no obstacle but what can be overcome as far as I have gone//

I would have been in town as soon as this but I hear that Mr Finke is expected up by this mail and have remained to see him if he does not come I will be down by the next steamer. Remember me kindly to Mrs Chambers and family to your brother and his family. You must excuse this short description of my journey. I feel so unwell that I am unable to write a longer one.

I am

My Dear Sir

Yours sincerely

John McDouall Stuart

James Chambers Esq.

Adelaide