FRANK HALL

WILD COLONIAL BOY

by Len Talbot

In 1860 a reward of the fabulous sum of £100 was offered for the apprehension of Frank Hall, wanted for cattle stealing in the Vasse and Blackwood districts. This was at a time when a married couple could be hired to work on a farm for their keep and £50 a year, or a labourer for £1 a week. A reward of £100 would have been a fortune to most people in the 1860s (it is perhaps equivalent to about $40 000 in 1993). How did all this come about?

Frank Hall was the son of respected early Western Australian colonists. His parents were Henry and Sara Hall, pioneer settlers who arrived in Fremantle in 1830 and took up a land grant in what is today the Mandurah district; the present day Halls Head was named after the family. Frank was the youngest of eight children, and was one of the first Europeans born in Western Australia. Like so many boys who grew up in the bush in the earliest days of the colony, young Frank spent much of his boyhood among Aboriginal children and their families. He developed a close affinity with their race; he spoke the language fluently, understood their customs and no doubt learned bushlore from them, for he rapidly became an expert bushman himself.

In his early twenties, Frank moved south to the karri country. He took up the first cattle run, about where the town of Manjimup now stands. The lease was officially taken out in 1859, but it is evident that Hall had been operating in the forests of the South West and along the southern coast for several years before that. Subsequent events proved that he knew the country like the back of his hand, and was very familiar with the Aborigines of the Donnelly and Warren Rivers.

Hall named his cattle station Manginup - also spelled Manjinnup in some early documents. The word is Aboriginal, meaning 'the place of the manjin', referring to a plant that grew prolifically in local swamps. He used the station to run cattle, which he obtained from other settlers, before droving them to the Vasse district for reselling, usually in Busselton.

Hall seems to have spent a good deal of time at Busselton, then the nearest town to Manginup, leaving a stockman named Mottram in charge of the station during his absences. When in Busselton he made his base at Earnshaw's Commercial Hotel. He met pioneer businessman Mr Henry Yelverton, whose business included a sawmill. Yelverton's workmen worked hard and very long hours, and were big eaters. He provided them with three hearty meals of meat every day, and he needed a regular supply of cattle to be able to do so.

This was where Frank Hall came in. He bought cattle on Yelverton's behalf and held them at Manginup until they

were required for slaughtering; on delivery Hall was paid according to the weight of the animals delivered.

The arrangement between Yelverton and Hall worked satisfactorily for two and a half years, and may have gone on for many more, but it was discovered that the enterprising Hall, instead of buying the cattle that he had been selling to Yelverton, had been stealing them.

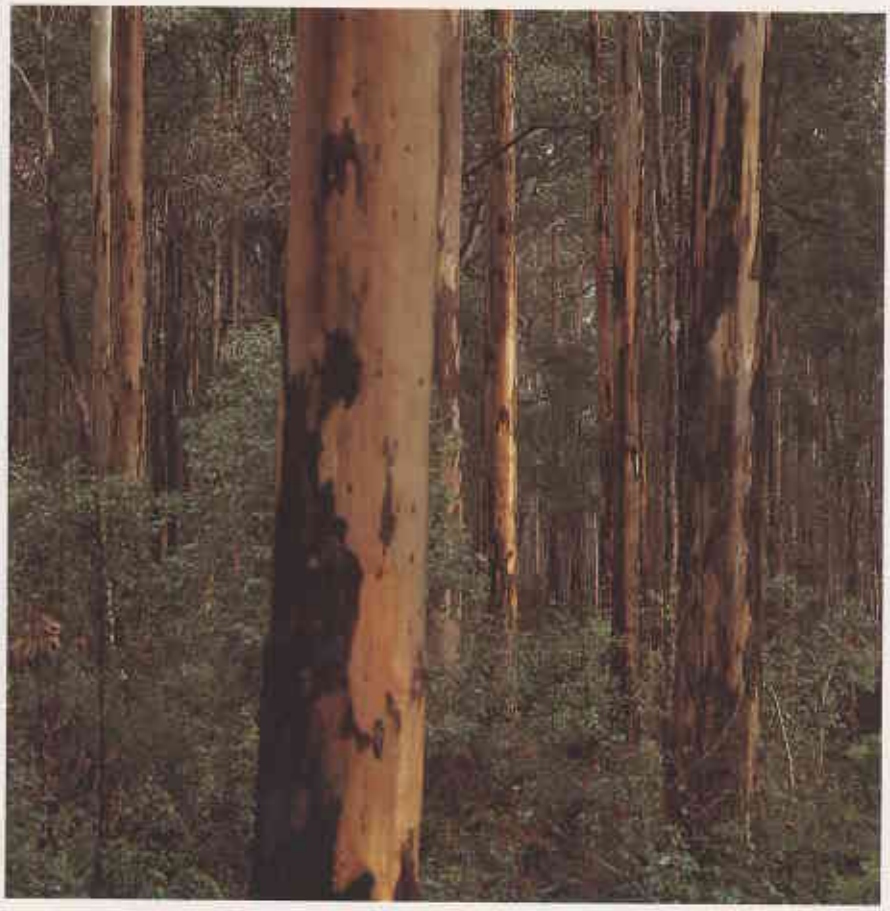
TROUBLE FOR HALL

In early September 1860, Constable Finlay of the Vasse made a routine visit to settlers along the Blackwood River. He learned that the Jones brothers of Southampton, the Hesters from Bridgetown and the Rose brothers at Wilgarup had all lost cattle, which they suspected had been stolen.

On his return to Busselton the constable visited the local tanners, where he found several hides that matched the descriptions of some of the missing cattle. Further investigation led to two of the missing cows being found on Yelverton's property. They proved to be part of a consignment recently delivered by Frank Hall, but not yet slaughtered because they were in calf.

Hall was located at the Commercial Hotel in Busselton, where he was immediately arrested and charged with cattle stealing. His publican friend Earnshaw put up the £50 bail for him, but the next day he was committed for trial and held in gaol. Cattle stealing was a crime against property and few crimes were more serious in those days.

The police then organised a muster on Hall's station at Manginup. They found more than 80 head of stolen cattle, whose owners' names read like a who's who of the pioneer families settled in the lower South West. The animals had been rebranded with Frank Hall's FH brand; in some cases the original brands had been altered or botched. The earmarks on the cattle had also been altered. It was an open and shut case.



Title page
Illustration - Gooitzen van der Meer

Opposite page: Hall moved to the karri country in his early twenties.
Photo - Robert Garvey

Right: The Hall family's house at the mouth of the Murray River, Mandurah
Photo - Courtesy of the Battye Library

Below: Hall was very familiar with the area around Warren River. This knowledge served him well in later years.
Photo - Dennis Sarson/Lochman Transparencies

HALL ESCAPES

Hall was held in the Busselton gaol pending his trial, but a week after his arrest he escaped.

He had been taken outside for exercise but when the policeman guarding him was momentarily off guard, he bolted across the street to where a horse was tethered to some palings. Before the policeman could catch him, he unhitched the horse, leapt into the saddle and yelling a cheeky goodbye to the policeman, galloped off as hard as he could go.

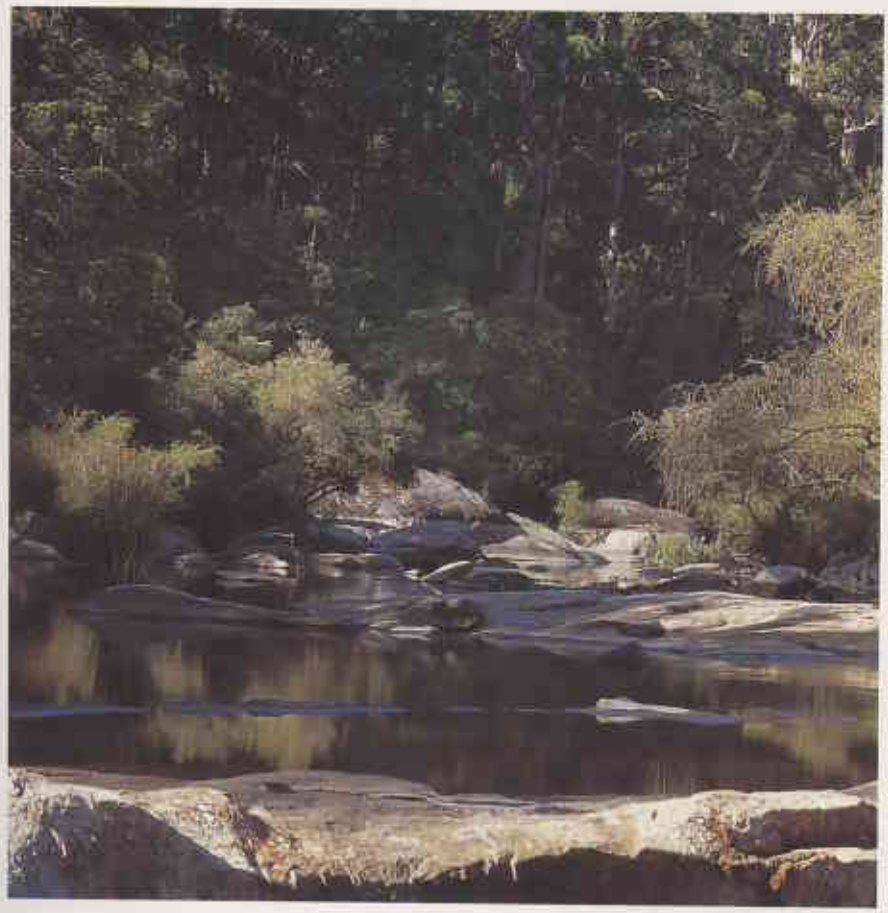
Three mounted constables were immediately in pursuit. One of these was despatched to King George's Sound (Albany) to head off a possible escape from the colony by way of the steamers calling in there. The others tried to track Hall and make an early capture. But Frank was a far better bushman than any of his pursuers and he simply vanished into the forests of the South West that he knew so well.

The escape of a cattle thief caused a sensation, as well as embarrassment for the authorities. Soon all available policemen in the colony, aided by native constables and trackers, were out searching for him. They failed to find so much as a trace.

The intensity of the search was increased and a huge reward was posted. Hall had affronted the aristocracy of the colony by duffing their cattle, and they wanted him in gaol. Furthermore, there were many people eager to collect the £100 reward, not least the poorly paid policemen. So there was great excitement and wild speculation. The bush buzzed with rumours as harassed police parties rode back and forth over the countryside following up false leads. Hall's name was on all lips.

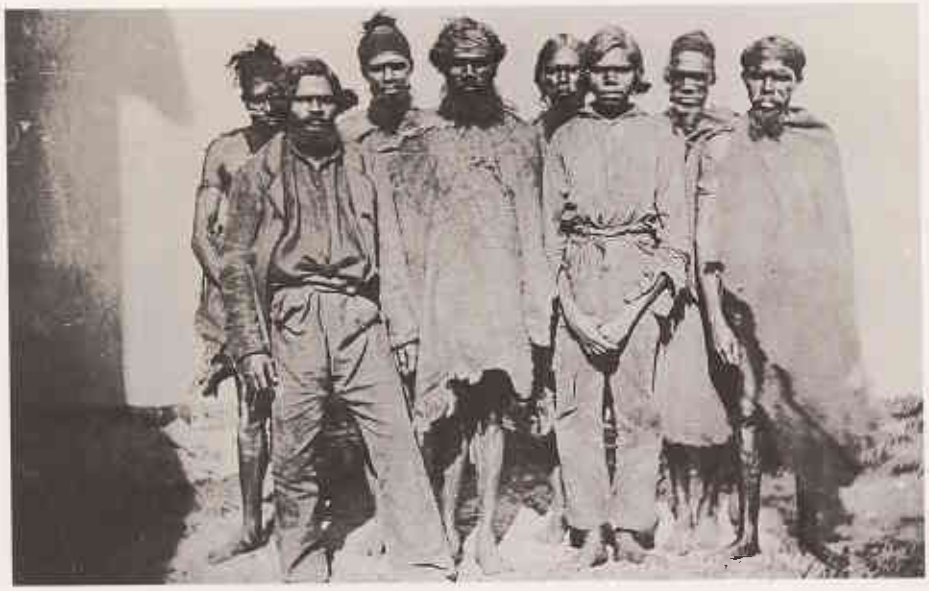
There were some clues. A horse stolen from the Bunburys' property was found on Spencer's run near Albany, showing signs of having been hard ridden, and shortly afterwards it was discovered that one of Spencer's best horses was missing. There was little doubt in anyone's mind that Frank Hall was in the neighbourhood and an even closer watch was kept on shipping in the harbour.

One night, the whaler *Offley* from Hobart town weighed anchor soon after dark and cleared out from Busselton. It sailed across Geographe Bay and anchored off Castle Rock for a day and a night. Rumour had it that Frank Hall was aboard. A week later the *Offley* returned to Busselton with a large whale, but no sign of the escapee was found on board.



ENTER THE ARISTOCRACY

The Superintendent of Police for the colony in 1860 was Sir Alexander Cockburn-Campbell, Bart., a pompous and arrogant man. He was particularly unpopular with the editor of *The Inquirer*



Top: Hall learned the language and bush skills of the local Aborigines.
Photo - D. Croft/The Battye Library

Above: Hall spent much of his time on the run in the coastal country now part of D'Entrecasteaux National Park.
Photo - Marie Lochman

newspaper, and it was with apparent relish that they reported the following incident concerning Sir Alexander and Frank Hall.

On his way to Busselton, Sir Alexander called at the house of Dr Brydges on the Capel River and there met Mr Robert Hester, who was lying on the sofa. Unknown to Sir Alexander, Robert Hester's wife, Letitia, was Frank Hall's sister. Dr Brydges introduced the two men and then with his wife left the room to arrange refreshments for the visitors. During their absence Superintendent Campbell became suspicious that the man on the sofa was in fact Frank Hall, so he went outside and asked his orderly who the man was. The orderly confirmed his suspicions, and then in the words of the newspaper report:

> 'Sir Alexander then told his man to get a chain from his horse's neck and put it around the neck of Mr Hester. This was done despite protestations from Hester that he was not Frank Hall. The policeman held one end of the chain while the other was placed around Hester's neck. Hester was kept in this degrading position for several minutes, and he was only released from confinement upon Dr Brydges making oath that his name was Hester and not Hall. During the time Mr Hester was in custody, the Superintendent of Police went into the bedroom of his host and turned down the bedclothes, for what purpose it is difficult to conjecture, seeing that he had a chain around the neck of the presumed Frank Hall . . .'

Meanwhile the courts declared Frank Hall an insolvent and his property was sequestered for the benefit of his creditors - mainly Henry Yelverton. Notices were placed in the newspapers calling on him to appear in court on a certain date, or show cause why this should not be done; but of course he did not appear and the search for him went on.

The police continued to scour the forest country from the Blackwood south to the Warren. Their horses became jaded and knocked up from the constant working through the thick bush, and all the while the newspapers derided them for their failure to recapture Hall. One report stated:

> 'Hall has never been heard of since his escape. Notwithstanding the reward which has been offered for his apprehension, the array of police, the number of natives, the little army of spies, all anxious to have a share of the reward, not the slightest trace of him has been found, no clue to his whereabouts, and the police are as much abroad with respect to his movements and place of concealment as they were the first day he started . . . For aught they know to the contrary he may be out of the colony . . .'

HALL SURRENDERS!

A few days before Christmas in 1860, Hall suddenly appeared at Quindalup and gave himself up to Henry Yelverton, who then accompanied him to Busselton to surrender to the police. When they got to Busselton, however, there were no police in town - all were away in the bush searching for Hall! So it was decided that he should surrender to the Resident Magistrate, but even then it was only after considerable searching that the Magistrate was located.

The Magistrate instructed his clerk to accompany Hall to the lock-up and to confine him there; but at the lock-up the clerk could not find the key. So it was that the most wanted man in the colony found himself unable to get back into prison until his would-be captors returned from another fruitless search, and let him in.

Hall, his stockman Mottram and another man named Guerin who had helped him drive one lot of cattle to Manginup, were all taken to Perth under close guard and placed on trial. During the trial, Hall tried to exonerate his companions, claiming that they were

unaware that he had not purchased the cattle, and that his stockman, in branding them, was only carrying out his duty as his employee. Nevertheless, all three were convicted of cattle stealing. Mottram was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment and Hall and Guerin each to 15 years' imprisonment in Fremantle Gaol.

A BRIEF REPRIEVE

In 1863, the Comptroller of Convicts in Western Australia, Mr H.M. Lefroy, set out to explore the country eastwards from York, including the area that 30 years later was to become the Eastern Goldfields. He obtained the Governor's permission to take Colonial Convict Frank Hall with him on the expedition. Lefroy wrote of Hall:

> 'His well known bush experience and familiarity with the natives, and his general cleverness and smartness has induced me to solicit His Excellency's permission to take him with me in the capacity of convict servant, which request His Excellency was pleased to accede to.'

Lefroy was greatly impressed with his convict servant during the expedition and he recorded several stories Hall told him of the Aborigines along the south coast between Albany and Augusta. It was apparent to Lefroy that Frank Hall had lived for some time with this tribe - including the period he had been on the run - mainly in the coastal country which is now the D'Entrecasteaux National Park. Hall told Lefroy that life had been very lean for the Aborigines along the coast at the time. Kangaroos were so scarce they would hunt one animal for three days, camping on the tracks overnight and continuing the hunt in the morning. Occasionally they trapped fish at the river mouths and in the shallow inlets along the coast, but their main diet was grubs and tubers. One of the tubers that formed an important part of their diet was the *mean*, the scarlet tulip-like roots of which were ground into a paste and then roasted. This stained the insides of their mouths purple, and this in turn was a distinguishing mark of those coastal tribes. (Later, the early European settlers used the same roots to make red ink; the plant is called *Haemodorum spicatum*, and still occurs abundantly in the South West.)

In his official report on his 1863 expedition, Lefroy commended Hall for the way in which he had performed his duties, and he appealed to the Crown for a remission of Hall's long sentence. However, the crime against the landed gentry was considered too serious. Lefroy's appeal was dismissed and Hall was returned to gaol to do his full 15 years.

The authorities did eventually relent. He was pardoned in 1871, and moved to the Champion Bay (Geraldton) district, where he worked for a while as a teamster; from there he moved to the Gascoyne and to Shark Bay, where he became a pastoralist and a pearler. He died in Northampton in 1886. He had married in 1882; his widow eventually remarried and lived for another 64 years, dying in Fremantle in 1950.

Mottram and Guerin were also pardoned in 1871; Guerin sailed for India, but Mottram moved back to the forest districts of the South West. The Mottram name is well known and highly respected in the karri country today.

SPURNED

One further anecdote concerning Frank Hall has survived.

During his time at Manginup, Hall's constant companion was an Aborigine named Yowan. Yowan had helped Hall muster and drive cattle to Quindalup, and there is little doubt that his duties included running off stolen stock from other settlers' runs. After Hall's arrest, Yowan was taken to live at the house of the detective sergeant in charge of the case, and he subsequently became one of the Crown's key witnesses at the trial. Although his evidence was largely discredited because of his association with the detective sergeant, he was never charged with any crimes associated with Hall's cattle duffing.

After his release, Hall returned briefly to the south and, according to local legend, saw Yowan saddling a horse at Dickson's place on the Barlee Brook. Pleased to see his old companion again after so many years, Frank greeted him but was surprised to hear a curt reply. Hall asked 'Don't you know me, Yowan?' But without bothering to look up from what he was doing, Yowan answered, 'Yair, I know you awright. You're Frank Hall, the cattle thief.'

Today Frank Hall is regarded by popular history as a bushranger, but in fact he did not hold up banks or mail coaches. Even Yowan's description is a bit hard. Maybe he could best be remembered as a pioneer of the South West forest country, a bushman and adventurer and a wild colonial boy from the early days of Western Australian settlement.

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HENRY YELVERTON

Henry Yelverton was a pioneer businessman and sawmiller in Western Australia. He had arrived in the colony in 1841 on an American whaler and was initially in charge of the cooperage at the Fremantle Commissariat. Before long he entered the profitable sandalwood trade, as a buyer and exporter at Fremantle. He soon graduated to employing pitsawyers producing sawn jarrah from areas south of Rockingham and from the hills east of Guildford, and he supplied the piles and jarrah timber for the first bridge across the Swan River at Fremantle. He then took up leases in the Sussex (Busselton) District and established the first steam-driven sawmill in WA, at Quindalup. Later he built the State's first railway, a wooden-railed tramway which ran from his sawmill to the coast, and along which horses drew trainloads of timber to a specially constructed jetty in the Geographe Bay. This was the first deep-water jetty in WA from which timber could be loaded directly into ships.

Yelverton sent sawn jarrah railway sleepers to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and to the burgeoning Indian Railways, exported jarrah paving blocks to London, traded timber for wheat with businessmen in South Australia and won timber supply contracts with the colonial government in WA. The mill employed 270 men, mostly 'Ticketers' (i.e. ex-convicts with a Ticket of Leave from the Governor, which enabled them to work more or less as free men). They cut mainly jarrah but also karri, which occurred then in pockets as far north as Quindalup. Yelverton's men also cut tuart in sawpits at Wonnerup.

Yelverton's establishment was very substantial for the day. As well as the mill, there were houses and barracks, a blacksmith's shop, a carpenter's shop, long rows of stables, a foundry, a store and a dispensary. He also built a school and supplied a teacher.

Hand in hand with nature. This brushtail possum is just one of the animals studied during fauna surveys of the Batalling Forest. *See page 16.*

Lush vegetation and a welcoming smile greet you as you arrive at Mt Hart Homestead, the 'Oasis in the Leopolds'. *See page 48.*

LANDSCOPE

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'Fire, Wind and Water', on page 42, tells of recent research into the rehabilitation of exploration tracks in the Rudall River area of the Little Sandy Desert.

Deep beneath the Southern Ocean lies the wreck of the Sanko Harvest. *This rotting hull is now an artificial reef attracting marine life and divers alike.* *See page 23.*

Plantations of brown mallet in the early 1900's began a chain of events that resulted in the 'Woodland Wonderland' of Dryandra. *See page 28.*

FEATURES

REGULARS

COVER

Woylies prefer clumped, relatively open vegetation with sandy soils that are easy to dig. They are found, among other places, at Batalling Forest and the Dryandra Woodland. See stories on pages 16 and 28.

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