

## George Maxwell's collecting locality – Eyre's Relief

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### SHORT COMMUNICATION

Several of the plant specimens gathered by 19<sup>th</sup> century naturalist George Maxwell bear the collecting locality 'Eyre's Relief' or 'Eyre's Water Relief'. This has usually been interpreted in the literature (e.g. Gardner 1960) and herbarium specimen databases (AVH 2023) as meaning the place where, in April 1841, Edward John Eyre found water in the sandhills east of the Baxter Cliffs; i.e. Eyre or Eyre's Sandpatch, where the stone Eyre Telegraph Station was built in 1897 and where the Eyre Bird Observatory is now located (32°14' 47" S, 126° 18' 5" E). However, this interpretation is problematic since many of the plant taxa in question have never subsequently been found at Eyre. The general location of Eyre's Relief is important to know as it is the type locality of at least 11 species (Table 1) and potentially marks the eastern distributional limit of other species (Nelson 1974). Evidence provided here suggests that it lies near the western end of the Baxter Cliffs, another area where Eyre is known to have sourced fresh water.

The Baxter Cliffs stretch for 160 km along the southern coastline of Western Australia from Point Culver in the west to Twilight Cove in the east (Figure 1), presenting a sheer drop of 80 m to the surf below. West of Point Culver, the cliffs retreat inland (as Wylie Scarp) leaving a stretch of sand hills, sand flares, salt pans and low vegetation between Wylie Scarp and the ocean. At the eastern end, the cliffs turn inland forming an escarpment that separates the Hampton Tableland from the Roe Plain.

Eyre travelled westward along the southern coastline in company with his overseer, John Baxter, Wylie, an Aborigine from King George Sound, and Joey and Yarry, two Aboriginal youths from New South Wales (Eyre 1845). After finding water in the sandhills at Eyre and filling their containers, they travelled along the top of the Baxter Cliffs. About 70 km west of Eyre, John Baxter was shot dead by one of the New South Wales Aborigines, both of whom then absconded with some of the stores and equipment, including two of the firearms. Desperate to find more water and to put some distance between themselves and the two boys, Eyre and Wylie continued along the cliff-top. Finally, at the western end of the cliffs, Eyre wrote 'a native road led us down a very steep part of the cliffs, and we descended to the beach. The wretched horses could scarcely move ... By perseverance we still got them slowly along, for two miles from the base of the cliffs, and then turning in among the sand-drifts, to our greatest joy and relief, found a place where the natives had dug for water; thus at twelve o'clock on the seventh day since leaving the last depot, we were again encamped at water, after having crossed 150 miles of a rocky, barren, and scrubby table land.' (Eyre 1845, Vol II: 17).

In April 1863 George Maxwell accompanied an expedition led by Charles Edward Dempster to explore eastward from Albany along the southern coastline. His plant collections from Eyre's Relief

**Table 1.** Details of locations, habitat and dates given on specimens collected by George Maxwell from ‘Eyre’s Relief’. ^ = not otherwise recorded from Eyre (AVH 2023); \* = type material.

<b>Taxon</b>	<b>Specimen</b>	<b>Location, habitat and date</b>
<i>Acacia pulchella</i> R.Br.^	MEL 0049525A	Eyre’s Relief, sand flare. Top of bank.
<i>Adenanthos cuneatus</i> Labill.	MEL 2169421A	Below the bank on loose dry lime stone soil.
	MEL 2169422A	Eyre’s Relief. Near the bank on loose lime stone soil. Sand drifts.
<i>Andersonia macranthera</i> F.Muell.^	*MEL 0233230A	Near Eyre’s Relief sand flares. Great Bight. Winter 1863.
<i>Clematis pubescens</i> Hügel ex Endl.^	MEL 2209637A	Extremity of the Great Bight. Eyre’s Relief Sand Flares. Eucalyptus thickets. Sandy soil.
	MEL 2209646A	Eyre’s Relief Sand Flares. Among Eucalyptus thickets. Sandy soil.
<i>Dodonaea stenozyga</i> F.Muell.	MEL 2250951A	Behind Eyre’s Relief. Growing in sand hummocks, sandy places. 1863.
<i>Eremophila decipiens</i> Ostenf. subsp. <i>decipiens</i>	MEL 0079216A	Eyre’s Relief. Sand hummocks.
	MEL 0079217A	Eyre’s Relief. Lime stone formation, base of the bank. Sand flares.
<i>Eucalyptus micranthera</i> F.Muell. ex. Benth.^	*NSW 345964	‘... on a white sandpatch, two miles westward from Eyre’s Relief. This latter place is today known as Eyre...’ (Gardner 1960)
	*MEL 0075550A	Israelite Bay to Eyre’s Relief. Sand flares. Sandy hummocks.
<i>Eucalyptus scyphocalyx</i> (F.Muell. ex. Benth.) Maiden & Blakely^	*MEL 1008918A	Eyre’s Relief Camp. White sand flare.
	*NSW 17795	Eyre’s Relief Camp.
<i>Goodenia concinna</i> Benth.	*MEL 0023674A	Base of the bank behind Eyre’s Relief sand hummocks.
<i>Glycocystis beckeri</i> (F.Muell.) Chinnock^	*MEL 0095562A	Loose lime stone under the bank opposite Eyre’s Relief sand flares.
<i>Grevillea sparsiflora</i> F.Muell.	*MEL 0074750A	Lime stone ridges near Eyre’s Relief sand flares.
	*MEL 0074750B	Lime stone ridges near Eyre’s Relief sand flares.
<i>Grevillea tripartita</i> subsp. <i>macrostylis</i> (F.Muell.) Makinson^	MEL 0065700A	Eyre’s Relief. Sandy places. Sand plains.
<i>Halgania andromedifolia</i> Behr & F.Muell.	MEL 0656853A	Eyre’s Relief sand flares. In front of the bank. Dry decomposed lime stone soils.
<i>Hybanthus floribundus</i> subsp. <i>curvifolius</i> E.M.Benn.^	MEL 0026942A	Between the bank and Eyre’s Relief sand hummocks. 1863.
	MEL 0026976A	Between the bank and Eyre’s Relief sand flare.
<i>Leucopogon obovatus</i> subsp. <i>revolutus</i> (R.Br.) Hislop^	MEL 0078333A	Eyre’s Water Relief. White sand hummocks. Sandy places.
<i>Olearia exiguifolia</i> (F.Muell.) F.Muell. ex. Benth.	*MEL 1543516A	On the top of the bank behind Eyre’s Relief sand hummocks.

Taxon	Specimen	Location, habitat and date
<i>Phebalium lepidotum</i> (Turcz.) Paul G.Wilson <sup>^</sup>	*MEL 0004798A	Sandy ridges between the bank and Eyre's Relief sand hummocks.
<i>Philothea fitzgeraldii</i> (C.R.P.Andrews) Paul G.Wilson <sup>^</sup>	MEL 0004035A	Between Eyre's Relief sand hummocks and the bank.
<i>Senecio pinnatifolius</i> A.Rich. var. <i>pinnatifolius</i>	MEL 2168113A	Eyre's Relief camp. Growing among sand drift hummocks.
<i>Styphelia concinna</i> (Benth.) F.Muell. <sup>^</sup>	*MEL 1513018A	On the table land interior of Eyre's relief sand flares. Lime stone formation.
<i>Styphelia exserta</i> (F.Muell.) Sleumer	MEL 1510114A	W extremity of the Great Bight. N from Eyre's Water Relief. On the top of the bank. Sand drift. Hummocks.
<i>Styphelia hainesii</i> F.Muell.	*MEL 0009035A	Near Eyre's Water Relief sand drift. Hummocks. Precipitous lime stone cliffs. June 1863.
<i>Synaphea divaricata</i> (Benth.) A.S.George <sup>^</sup>	*MEL 0687661A	Eyre's Relief. On the top of the bank. Sand flares. Lime stone tableland.

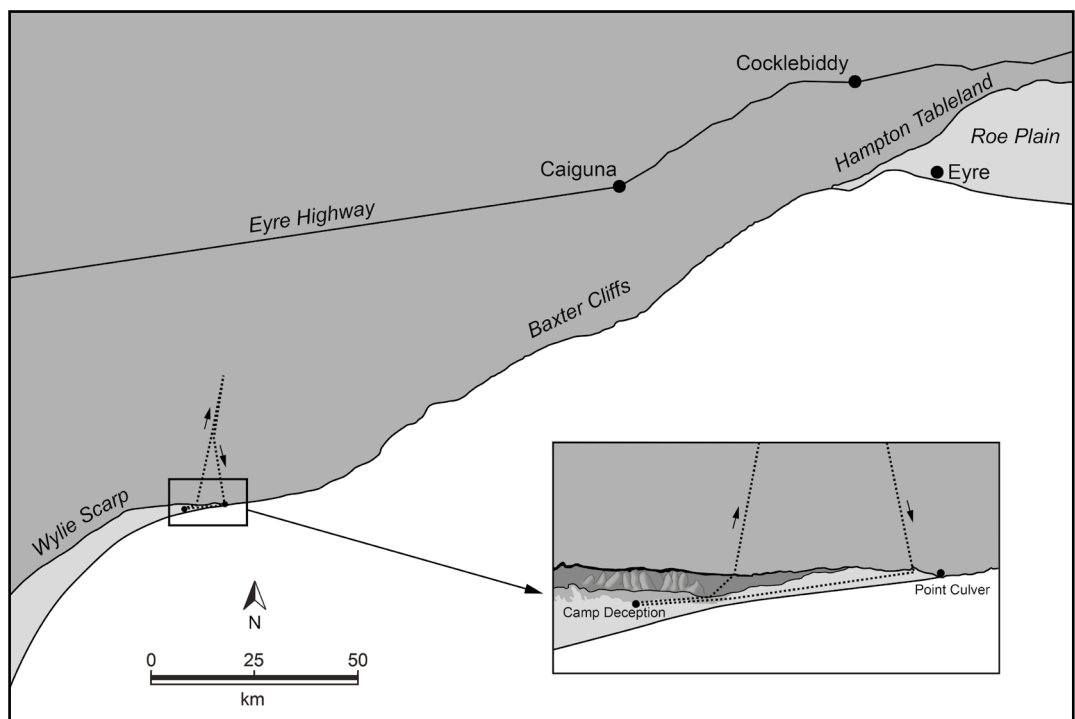


Figure 1. The location of Point Culver and Eyre relative to the Baxter Cliffs, on the south-eastern coast of Western Australia. Insert: Route taken by the Dempster party on 19–20 June 1863 and supposed location of their Camp Deception.

appear to have been made during this trip in June, although only a subset are labelled with the year and only one, *Styphelia hainesii* F.Muell., bears the month (Table 1). In early June the party travelled from Israelite Bay north-eastward as far as the western end of the Baxter Cliffs. Some of the party climbed the Wylie Scarp and travelled a further 18 miles (29 km) north before returning to the main camp. The whole party then retraced their steps to Bellinger Sandplain (on the mainland opposite Bellinger Island), where Maxwell and another man (one of the crew of the *Amelia*) left the main party and returned to Albany travelling overland by themselves.

When at their closest approach to Point Culver on 18 June 1863, the main party had halted at ‘Camp Deception’, ‘in a valley where there is a little grass’ (Dempster 1863, 2018). They had obtained water by digging ‘on edge of Sand Patch’. From this description and from their subsequent movements, it is clear that Camp Deception was situated somewhere between the ‘immense sand patch’ of Carey (c. 1877) (i.e. Bilbunyah Dunes) and Point Culver. Confirmation of this can be found by plotting the route of their excursion north on 19–20 June 1863, when, on their return journey, the party descended the cliffs ‘behind Point Culver’ (Dempster 1863, 2018; Figure 1). This would place Camp Deception at roughly 32° 56’ S, 124° 26’ E or thereabouts, where there are sand hummocks, sand flares and a bank (cliff) of limestone formation, as described by Maxwell on his specimen labels. This area to the west of Point Culver was called Billabilla in the 1870s (Carey c. 1877).

To my knowledge, Maxwell never travelled further east along the coastline than he did during this 1863 expedition. Subsequent travellers, for example John Forrest in 1870 (Forrest 1998), John Paul Brooks in 1874 (Brooks 1874) and Henry Stuart Carey in 1876 (Carey 1877, c. 1877), also found water by digging in the sand hills just west of Point Culver.

Of 23 plant taxa recorded by Maxwell at or near ‘Eyre’s Relief’, or ‘Eyre’s Water Relief’, 13 have not otherwise been recorded at Eyre (Table 1). Moreover, the terms Eyre’s Relief and Eyre’s Water Relief seem to echo Eyre’s sentiments of ‘greatest joy and relief’, while the terms ‘sand flares’, ‘sand hummocks’ and ‘the bank’ are a better description of the country just west of Point Culver than of the country surrounding Eyre, which is sand plain with large dunes on the seaward side and an escarpment about 9 km inland. On this basis I conclude that ‘Eyre’s Relief’ must lie close to the western end of the Baxter Cliffs in the general vicinity of 32° 56’ S, 124° 26’ E and not 200 km to the east at Eyre.

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