

THE ARCHIPELAGO OF THE RECHERCHE

A General Account of the Australian Geographical Society's Expedition, November, 1950. (Additional photographs presented in Camera Supplement.)

By JOHN BÉCHERVAISE

AHUNDRED islands in a lonely sea, little known yet rich in history, seldom visited yet full of unusual tales, beautiful and uninhabited . . . this was the lure which the Archipelago of the Recherche, out west of the Bight, offered little more than a year ago when the Australian Geographical Society commenced preparations for its recently completed survey.

The scattered light of many authorities was focused as far as possible into a single beam. Bright though distant were the memories of an old seaman¹ who gladly made his knowledge available through numerous letters and a copy of a personal account of the days he spent in and around the Archipelago more than sixty years ago. They made full-blooded reading: stories of reefs and wrecks in days of sail and uncertainty; of the strange 'spiked' and 'exploding' nut-trees of the islands; of venomous snakes that haunted them; of a sequestered lake of rose-coloured brine; of granite-girt coasts and foaming dangers—the chronicle redolent always of the tang of the sea.

The scientists were consulted,² and here it was found that on several occasions since the turn of the century individuals or parties had examined certain of the islands for their varied ornithology, their prospects as potential suppliers of phosphate, or for other purposes. From all enquiries it was evident that many remained completely undescribed and that, for some, no records of landings, even, appeared to exist.

The romance of the Archipelago has its springs in history.

"In the year 1627, the South Coast of the Great South Land was accidentally discovered by the ship *Gulde Zeepaard*, outward bound from the fatherland, for the space of a thousand miles . . ." Thus De Hondt's narrative reads. Three hundred and more years ago, by accident, in the uncertainties of winds and navigation, these old Dutchmen—Pieter Nuyts, Francois Thyssen and the rest—outward bound for the tropical spice isles found

themselves in uncharted waters by an endless desert coastline and recorded their journey. Thevenot's chart, which included something of the Isles of the Recherche (later so named), became the archetype for the future map-makers and Matthew Flinders states one hundred and seventy-five years later that the Dutch chart of 1627 was the sole authority for much of his journeying and that, "making allowances for the state of navigation at that time, it was as correct in form as could reasonably have been expected." The islands of St. Peter and St. Francis in the eastern Bight and a rocky cape to-day commemorate the lonely voyager of the *Gulde Zeepaard* ("Golden Sea-horse") but perhaps Nuyts's best remembrance is in the lovely chrome-golden Christmas Tree of the West which bears his name.³

The French Rear-Admiral Bruni D'Entrecasteaux, sent with *La Recherche* and *L'Espérance* in search of poor La Pérouse, next sights the south coast of New Holland on December 5th, 1792. So was named the *Archipel de la Recherche*, a little unfairly perhaps (and so thinks Matthew Flinders) in view of the use made of the Dutch navigator's charts. Still, D'Entrecasteaux was the next to glimpse the perilous isles. It seems that he ran along the coast eastward and actually landed on what is now known as Observatory Island. This afforded "timely shelter to the French ships on December 9th from a gale which had arisen at S.W."⁴ Of the utmost interest, however, is the fact that it was on this occasion that the first scientific Western Australian botanical collections were made.⁵ Labillardiere's report, in spite of the unrest in France at the time, excited attention and an English translation was available within a year or two. D'Entrecasteaux thereafter prudently skirted the archipelago, keeping well away from the concealed and apparent dangers of the inner islands, though naming several of them—*Ile du Milieu*, *Ile du Mondrain*, *Ile de Remarque*, and others—from a distance.

It was left for Matthew Flinders to accept the challenge of the surge-swept mountains jutting from the ocean and fairly to find their measure. At the dawn of the nineteenth century virtually the only information available was that of



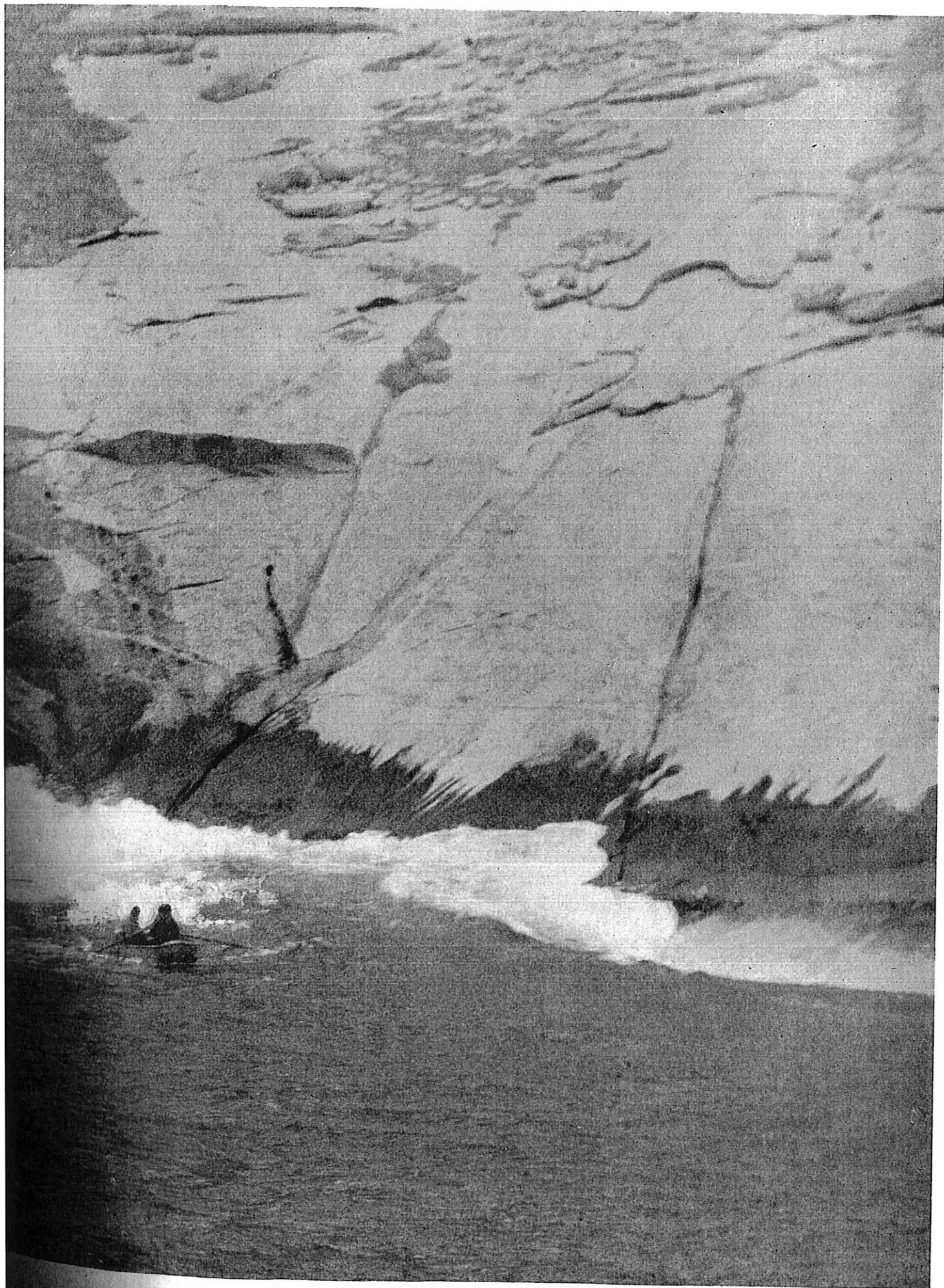
1. Mr. T. C. Andrews, of Milson's Point, Sydney, a member of the Society, who suggested the value of such an expedition.

2. Messrs. A. F. Basset Hull (*The Emu*, XXI, 1922); Whittell (*The Emu*, XXXVIII, 1938); G. P. Whitley (*The Emu*, XLIV, 1944); S. Fowler (*The Emu*, XLIV, 1945); Dr. D. L. Serventy (Report of Visit, 1944) and the Geological Reports of Messrs. J. C. Duffer (1943) and H. P. Woodward (1908).

3. *Nuytsia floribunda* (Labill.) R. Br.
4-6. Journal, Matthew Flinders—*A Voyage to Terra Australis* (1814).

5. It has been suggested by some authorities that Observatory Island has been confused with another.

★ The surge, even to leeward, made an approach to Termination Island very difficult. The actual landing place is denoted by the figures on the rocks.



Nuyts and D'Entrecasteaux. "Many circumstances indeed," Flinders writes, "united to render the south coast of Terra Australis one of the most interesting parts of the globe" Like the modern explorer who needs must search for plankton or seek the strength of cosmic radiation, he then outlines sufficient reasons, enough to convince both statesmen and empire-builders.

" . . . it was not without some reason attributed to England as a reproach," he writes "that an imaginary line of more than two hundred and fifty leagues extent, in the vicinity of one of her colonies, should have been so long suffered to remain traced upon the charts under the title of unknown coast." But the light is in his eyes. On Friday, January 8th, 1802, just before sunset, D'Entrecasteaux's *Archipel de la Recherche* looms to the eastward. "The French admiral," he records, "had mostly skirted round the archipelago, a sufficient reason for me to attempt passing through the middle . . . if the weather did not make the experiment too dangerous."

His account is accessible, and I must forbear, on account of space, the temptation here to quote further from the fascinating log of his labyrinthine sailing. Hazardous the journey, as any voyaging purely under sail must ever be in those waters, but he continued, meeting

dangers with skill. On one or two islands, including Middle (*Ile du Milieu*), he landed. On an island close by he spent about a week capturing the bewildered Cape Barren Geese. Good eating they must have been to sailors long at sea. In spite of narrow escapes it is without trepidation that Flinders returns to the lovely islands after circumnavigating the continent. The charts of Thevenot and Beautemps Beaupré (cartographer on *La Recherche*) were fragmentary; those Flinders left are basically little changed to this day.

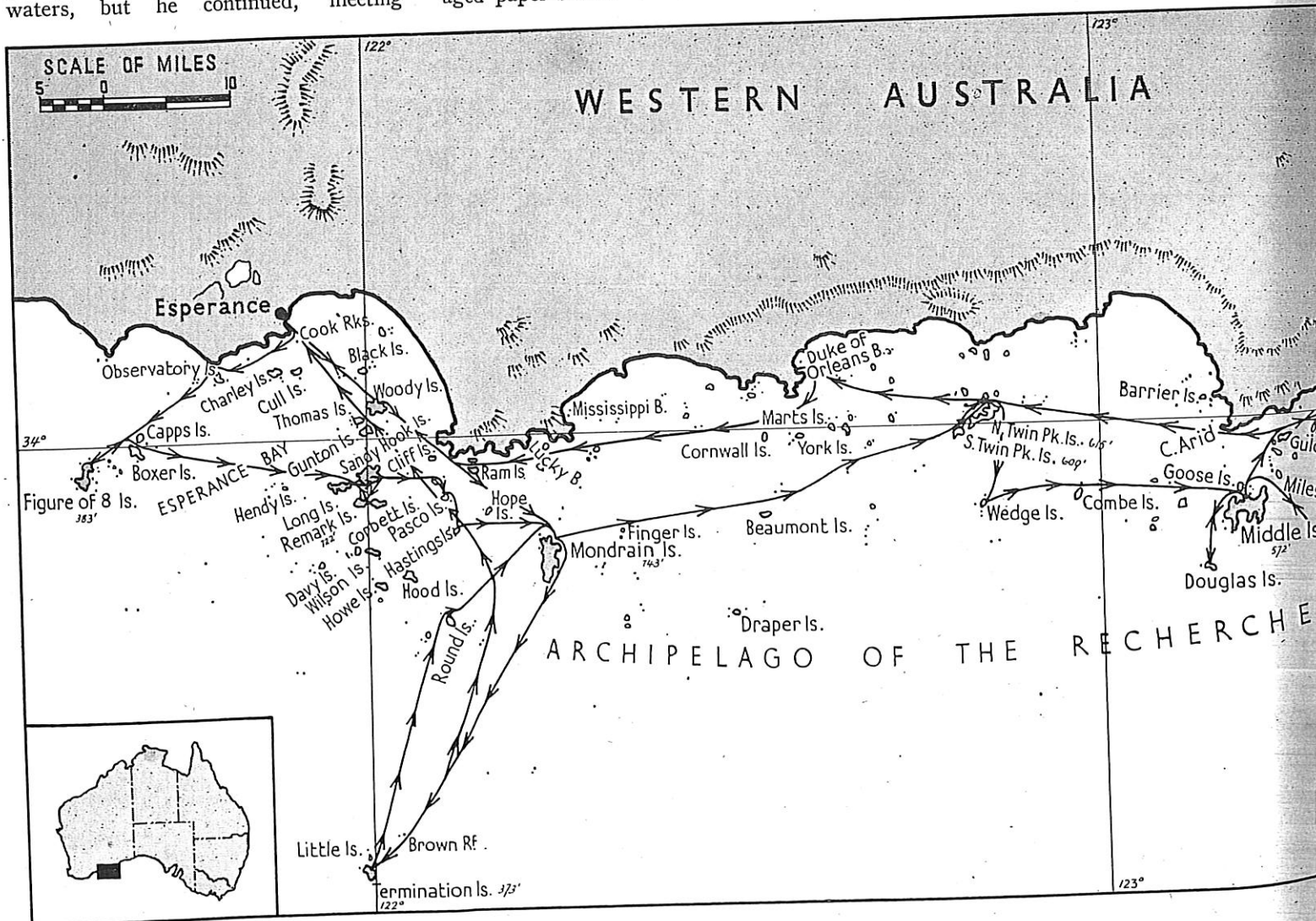
TRADER followed the explorers, and the islands next witnessed many strange sails and sailors seeking the soft pelts of seals which had bred there undisturbed for countless thousands of years. It would be impossible to chart their century-old courses. They decimated the seal colonies, ruthlessly clubbing the defenceless creatures to supply the ready markets of Western Europe and America. The larger islands—Middle and Mondrain—with their more extensive anchorages, were naturally the sealers' headquarters, and to this day may be there located many fragmentary relics—old spars and chains, a few nameless mounds; even a hut completely dwarfed and hidden between some aged paper-barks.

Comparatively few records remain of this wilful and gallant era. Not all its history would make pleasant reading. A journal of 1848⁷ states, "We have been informed that Middle Island, one of the Group called Recherche Archipelago in the Great Southern Bight, has been for some time the resort of a set of lawless desperados, composed of runaway convicts, sealers, etc."

So it was time for us to go. Again, here, I must make a long story short. Several months of pleasurable preparation included the chartering of a suitable craft, its equipping with supplies and tackle, with radio and, not least, with a company of enthusiastic specialists, men who combined the urge to adventure with a capacity for appreciating whatever we might discover.

After many inquiries, a swift flight across to Kalgoorlie and a rail-journey (taking twice as long as the flight) down to Esperance, our biggest problem was solved by making the acquaintance of Don Mackenzie and his schooner-rigged thirty-five-foot open 'workboat,' *Water Lily*. What is subsequently told of our eight-hundred-mile voyage will vouch for both. The *Water Lily*, equipped with a Perkins six-cylinder Marine Diesel (30-65 h.p.)

7. *Inquirer* (Perth), January 5th, 1848.

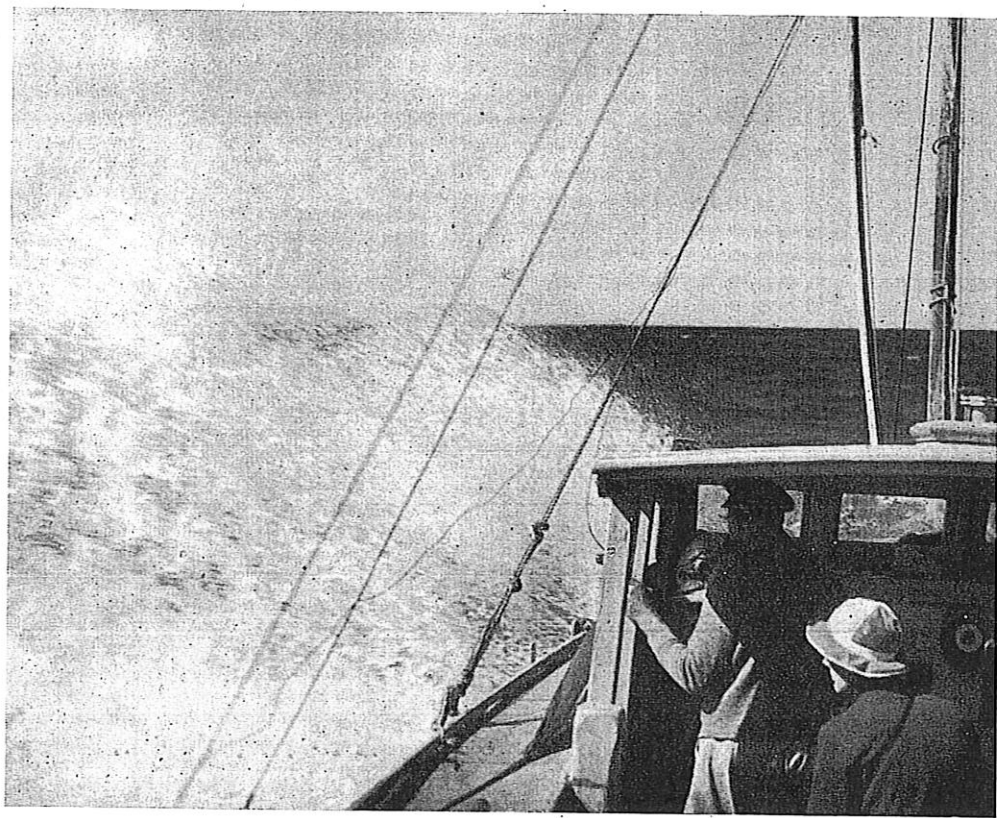


engine and auxiliary sail, promised to combine ease of handling in small shelters with ample power and sufficient stowage for men and gear. Her rig was specially set for the job. There is a faintly Odyssean flavour about the procuring of her main-mast—up in the bush beyond Esperance, from a tough and flawless desert eucalypt!

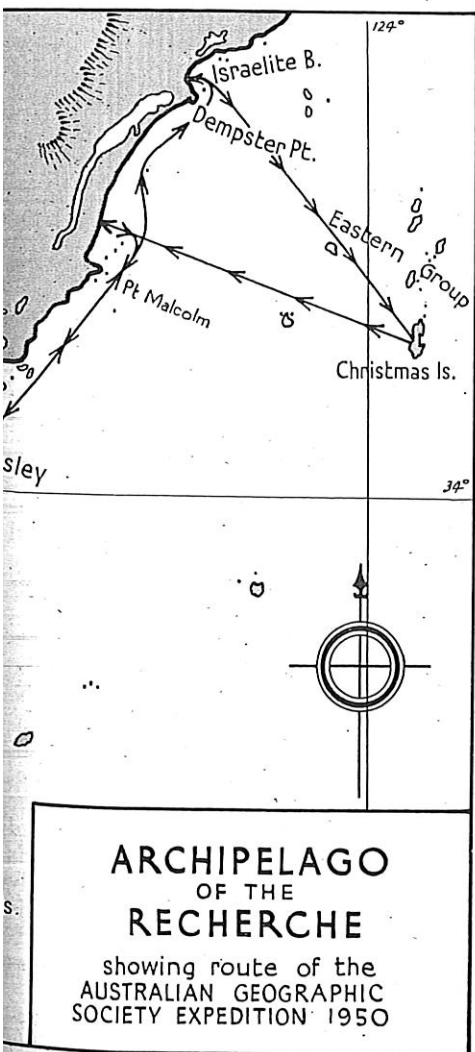
The party consisted of James Willis, Vincent Serventy, Raymond Bean, Donald Mackenzie, Alfred Sanders, Michael Farrent, Ian Wilson and myself.⁸ In the multitude of scientific and practical tasks each man had several spheres; there could be no passengers.

From all the southern capitals, in the month of November, we converged by 'plane on the attractive little port of Esperance which forever holds before it one of the most beautiful coastal seascapes in Australia. How pleasant a landfall the first sight of her tall Norfolk Island pines can be was in the fulness of time appreciated. The local merchants⁹ had crated supplies exactly according to instructions, so that every case and keg had its place, time and meaning. There was little to do upon arrival other than to instal the radio (whose mast, upsetting the fairness of the *Water Lily's* rig, was ever a mote in the eye of Mackenzie) and toss in our personal gear and collecting equipment.

While the stars still shone on the silent



★ The *Water Lily* sprayed by heavy seas.



waterfront we rowed out to our craft, which for some weeks, according to all reports, "had been almost leaping out of the water." She surged forward into the sunrise as we shipped the light dinghy across her stern and slipped her moorings. Out of harbour we skirted granite Dempster Head and made south-west for Observatory Island, D'Entrecasteaux's "timely shelter." The town still slept behind; for us the day was already advanced, and ahead lay adventure. For weeks we would see no sail nor habitation in nearly a thousand miles of voyaging. All but the few nearer islands were as virgin (save for fires lit by passing mariners) as when Nuyts sighted them three hundred years ago.

THE first islands of Esperance Bay, Rabbit, Charley and Cull, long bare from the grazing of mainland sheep, soon passed astern and within an hour we slid past Observatory Island to port. The sea was calm and lazily washed the long granite slopes below the dense colourful vegetation but we made no landing as our plan was to reach the West Group as soon as possible and thence work back eastward through the entire Archipelago. Our exact itinerary must depend largely upon the weather, for many of the islands were known to be steep-to, and that would mean difficult landings even in moderate seas. A lee-shore, bane of the sailor, might easily encompass the only practicable

anchorage and the Archipelago is no place for being harbourless at night.

The first day of perfect sunshine with just a long smooth southerly swell lifting blue peaked and whale-back islands above a clean horizon, gave us a grand beginning. We moved up to the starting line, so to speak—the most westerly isle of the whole Archipelago—and put down the pronged rock anchor off Figure of Eight in about two and a half fathoms of limpid water. In the weeks which followed we never saw another such day. Often we hounded our way into spiteful easterlies with "a bone in our mouth"; many times the wind, from a prevailing south to south-westerly quarter sent the white-caps chasing us as we swept forward on a fine swell, gaining on it in exuberant glissades. There were other gloriously sunny days when with the wind abaft the beam we lay back like care-free pirates beneath arching red sails; but the days were seldom calm, and there were times when the sea lost all its colour and became sullen and fretful.

Our plan was fulfilled. Steadily in the three weeks which followed we steered a course through the islands, generally easterly, linking base-camps on Boxer, Sandy Hook, Mondrain ("the island of sandhills"), North Twin Peaks and Middle, with many sorties on the lesser rocks and long lonely probes southward to the exposed and isolated attractions of Termination and Salisbury. From Figure of Eight Island (Long. 121° 36' E.) to Christmas Island of the Eastern Group (Long. 124° 6' E.) which, incidentally, we found most approachable

8. Respectively: Botanist (National Herbarium, Melbourne); Zoologist (Perth); Official *Walkabout* Photographer and Radio Operator; Boatman and Assistant Boatman; Observers (2) from St. Peter's College, Adelaide and Expedition Leader.

9. Messrs. L. and R. C. Daw, Esperance.



★ Heavy stores being landed on a rock-ledge, Mondrain Island.

from a mainland camp at Israelite Bay, is one hundred and forty miles direct as no bird flies; the extent of latitude traversed ranged from Israelite Bay in the north ($33^{\circ} 37' S.$) to Termination Island ($34^{\circ} 28' S.$)—a lesser distance by about half. The Archipelago of the Recherche occupies approximately five thousand square miles of sea and our total cruise sighted every island and permitted landings on twenty representative members.

The camps established on the islands already mentioned involved strenuous labours. The requisite stores, tents and other equipment were landed not without difficulty, often through surf on to awkward slabs of granite. We gathered round memorable camp-fires; we lay in tents straining against streaming rain (we were glad of the fresh rain-filled pools, as otherwise we carried all fresh water); once or twice inhospitable sites denied us sufficient fuel but mostly we were comfortable and always we were busy.

The two youthful members of the

party, Michael Farrent and Ian Wilson of St. Peter's College, Adelaide, besides taking a lively interest in all aspects of the expedition, in the capacity of joint quartermasters gave sterling service. The camp chores were evenly divided between all members of the party. Few would not have envied our commissariat, especially when it was augmented by an abundance of fish—sweep, maori and blue groper—which abound in those waters.

All the islands without exception are basically of granitic rock, part of the same archaean material that covers such an immense area of Western Australia. The granite reaches a considerable height on several islands, culminating in the peak of Mondrain (743'). Only a little lower and much more abrupt is Remark (722') and the Twin Peaks both exceed six hundred feet. Like the islands of Bass Strait they are ancient mountain tops isolated by the sea but they are of infinitely greater geological age. The original granite has been metamorphosed to a tortuous gneissic texture banded by veins and dykes often

of great beauty. In many places the dark bands of sparkling black biotite or pegmatite, its large crystals of quartz and feldspar gleaming white or faintly pink, run for hundreds of yards. On Middle Island, particularly, the north coast is unbelievably beautiful by virtue of the striated flow-patterns in the rock. Sometimes they are as fine and complicated as the streams on marbled paper; close by there may be reefs of pure crystalline quartz or mica schists with a myriad coruscations in the sunlight. It is little wonder that the angular gravels of the island contain gem-like stones. Often there is an effect of immense foliated strata, huge prisms of rock being detached as though from a layer perhaps twenty feet thick and left isolated on the steeply shelving sea-line. For this reason the rock then rises almost vertically but, in the majority of cases, the islands emerge from the water in broad surf-polished ramps covered in goose barnacles and treacherous black slime.

There was generally a respectful reconnaissance before landing anywhere. This

was made from our tough twelve-foot metal dinghy, specially constructed from rivetted sheets of galvanized iron to the theory that it was better to be dented than holed (it also possessed the advantage of lightness and ease of repair—with a soldering iron, rivets and scraps of sheet-metal). From the *Water Lily* we would select what seemed possible and launch the dinghy. With Sanders left in charge of the vessel, Mackenzie invariably rowed on these occasions with up to three for company.

It is extraordinary what a difference to one's appreciation of wave, foam and rocks a reduced elevation makes. Over a healthy swell we would approach within a few feet of the broken water and scan all the elements of the encounter as a wrestler watches for his hold. For several waves in succession, possibly, the sea would break on a receding wash and leave a turbulent gulf several feet deep between the rock and our dinghy poised just beyond the reach of its anger; then it would try a new tack and slop a dozen feet up the granite, throwing back the creaming spray in heavy showers; at last it would tire and there would come an interval when it sulked in dead water.

A swift glance seaward to judge the next attack, then we would run in, usually stern first, and one of us would jump, having had ample time to assess the static rock. Only the algae would be unpredictable and occasionally we would measure our length, clawing at cracks and scrabbling out of the reach of the surge. One at a time it was, and Don Mackenzie handling his oars with a dexterity that always defeated the sea and, one imagined, even excited the admiration of the bored, magnificent seals. The return movements were generally easier as you could take a less restrained leap to meet a rising dinghy, and if you missed, it mattered less.

We were accustomed to our craft and company and had experienced wide extremes of weather within a week of quitting the mainland. After the perfect opening had come tempest. On Boxer we were storm-bound after Don had run for a mainland shelter to avoid a foaming lee-shore and a bottom that gripped neither kedge, rock nor heavy Admiralty-pattern anchors. Hemp and chain, after all, must frequently moor the fortunes of any such venture.

For two days on that bleak island mighty seas thundered against the southern rocks, shooting spray a hundred feet in the air and vibrating the very senses. After manhandling stores and dinghy over hundreds of yards of rock to less broken water, we had left Boxer astern in the high swell that followed the storm. The spray which rose from Douglas Patch and at times broke right over Henty Isle (52') in solid white streams was magnificent to watch. We flew before it all with engine and sails. Then followed halcyon days on Sandy Hook, the pinnacle of Remark and Long Islands. At Long Island, Ray had caught a breaker but managed

to save his cameras and our landing on Pasco, in a fiord-like inlet, had been sufficiently nimble.

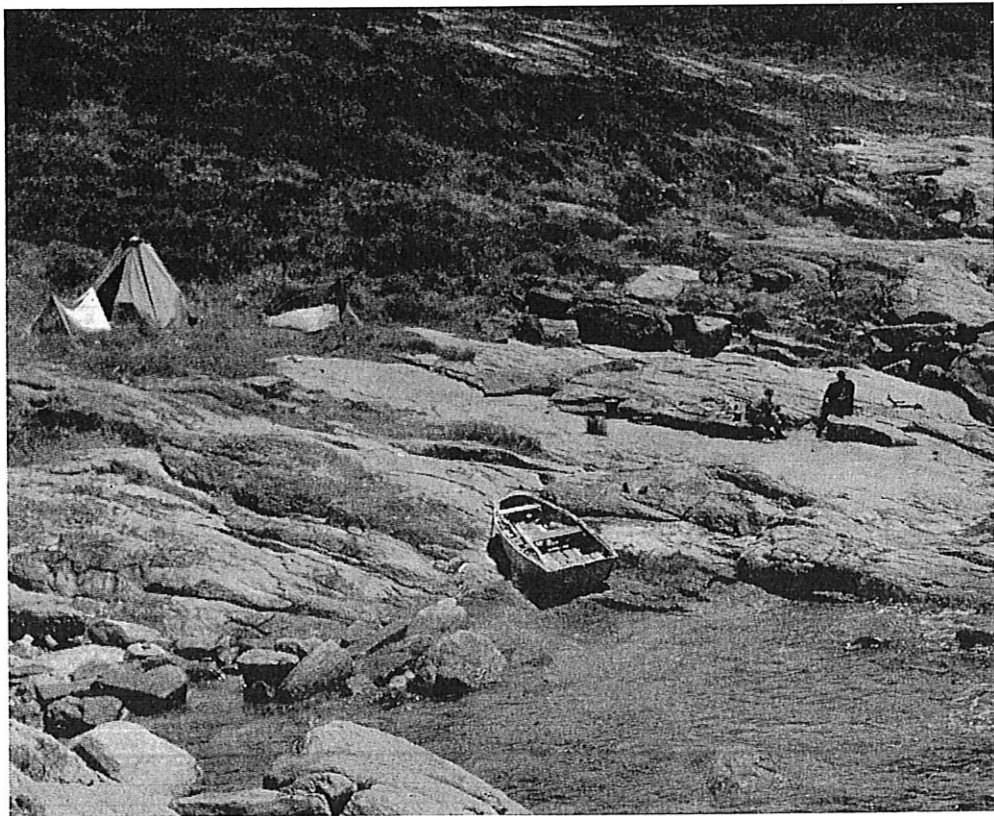
Both Pasco and Remark are mountains of granite deeply incised by streams which, dissolving the feldspar, have left radial lanes in great tumbling steps from summit to sea. Wind also has played its part and in places the solid-seeming rock is honeycombed by deep "gnamma" holes.

MONDRAIN gave us perfect camping in a beautiful hollow beneath the paper-barks where by day there was shade and at night a lanterned cosiness beneath the fretted stars. The glass had been jumping about a good deal and an attempt on Termination Island was postponed on account of a rollicking nor'easterly. Then in mid-November came a good day with the perpetual S.W. swell weakened by the contrary winds and off we set on a S.S.W. course. We sped along comfortably in a choppy sea, shipping spray merrily and dressed for it. Intent on the southern

make a successful landing on and examination of Termination Island, the first main chapter of the expedition would be complete.

Then, very simply and suddenly, the engine roared and raced. Don quickly cut down the throttle. It took about thirty seconds to realize what had happened. The propeller had dropped off and was now settling peacefully and forever thirty or forty fathoms below.

Our sails were no longer decoration. There was a slight south-east breeze and the jib, foresail and mainsail bellied lazily as we immediately put the *Water Lily* about for Mondrain. Our picnic was over for the time. We were fifty miles' cruise from Esperance and if the falling glass spoke true we would be lucky not to spend some time at sea as, in storm or contrary winds, a return through the reefs would be inadvisable. Fortune smiled; the wind increased in strength and favour of course, and, leaving Mondrain to starboard, we made a welcome starlit landfall of the lights of Esperance thirteen hours after



★ The wind-swept camp on Boxer Island.

horizon we saw the low hump-back (actually 370' high) grow from less than a shadow on the sea. There were few real problems of navigation as our charts¹⁰ were good and our leeway slight in the comparatively small distances between islands. Our course could always be made good by reference to a couple of known peaks and our position accurately determined by islands in transit and rough running fixes.

Somehow it seemed that if we could

10. Admiralty Charts Nos. 2189 and 2984 (also Australian Pilot, Vol. 1).

the mishap. The storm warnings from Perth meant little to us then.

For two days we rested little. Mackenzie fortunately possessed a spare propeller; the manner in which Morton Kent of Esperance laboured through the hours, day and night, will not be forgotten. Most of us assisted with file and hacksaw. The old shaft, with its hidden weakness removed, was reversed. Kent sacrificed the vertical support of a large drilling machine—it was the only piece of suitable steel in the town—for its extension. He impro-

vised, milled and welded as only a man with a "parish" of three thousand square miles will. Fitting the new gear was most-ly achieved under water as the *Water Lily* refused to mount the somewhat primitive slip. Mackenzie broke his diving records in the task. Two hours after the shaft had been welded and trued, in the dusk, we again left Esperance Bay.

Termination Island was all we expected. A vicious swell broke the length of the rocks even to the leeward. It surged into every hollow and added greatly to the difficulties of reaching precipitous rock. Several times the dinghy was swirled away from the only seemingly possible approach, a small incut corner leading to climbable cracks. The rest of the shoreline was steep and treacherous, clothed unusually high with black slime and other algae. Mackenzie showed consummate judgement and three of our party, one after another, made the landing and got away successfully.¹¹ The simple ecology of Termination, spray-drenched at times over its highest rocks, will in due course make a fascinating story.

ON many islands hard limestone overlies the granite. I am told that this is of comparatively recent origin, a mere half million years, which, compared with the age of the granite rocks, is as yesterday. It is said to be residual from the dunes of a period of great aridity. Its calcareous content is quite evidently uneven for in places one finds concretionary rock as hard and smooth as flint giving way to soft erosible sandstone. Boxer, Goose and a great deal of Middle and Salisbury Islands in particular held immense cappings of this travertine and occasionally it entered the sea as some of the most evil reefs avoided by us. It not only supports a different flora from that of the pure granite but has added interest by being honeycombed with caves. On Boxer Island, high above the sea, these caves are dark and deep. They are screened by curtains of a sort of sea-spinach so that one scarcely suspects their existence or extent. They are mostly haunted by shearwaters (mutton-birds) and other birds whose foot-prints form a never-disturbed pattern in their soft, sandy floors. In one long-forgotten hermitage on Boxer we discovered an old bush-built stretcher, a bundle of seal-skins parchment-like with age and a crate of rock-salt. With the wells of Middle Island, the nameless graves and ancient timbers that are liable to be found almost anywhere, they constitute mute evidence of the unchronicled sealers.

Sometimes, after stumbling and crawling over brittle spikes of limestone in utter darkness, one entered a chamber lit by an aperture in the hillside above. Only a martin or two wheeling in from the skylight to bill-packed nests of mud had disturbed the stillness for centuries.

11. We should be interested to hear any reports of previous landings on Termination Island—Ed.

Most frequently a reception committee of curious seals barked and trumpeted their complaints on our arrival at a new island. In heroic pose the young bulls reared themselves, the sunshine rippling in their splendid muscles, and regarded us with irritation and contempt. Why should their ancient peace be disturbed? If any inherited memory of man their arch enemy persisted it was weak and distant. If their numerous wives betrayed too much interest in our intrusion, they were soundly cuffed. Occasionally we encountered some old patriarch who disliked us to the extent of bellowing his defiance and floundering at remarkable speed to the attack. He would probably have always stopped short, but once or twice, not being interested in defence, we moved away with as much dignity as necessary speed permitted. Certainly we had no difficulty in meeting the most charming family groups sunbathing in glorious abandon; the contented cows suckled their young; the bucks lay stretching themselves with an occasional scratch of their sun-baked flippers. Hair seals, easily identified by the distinctive shorted "toes" of the hind flipper, were much the more abundant; only occasionally, as within the reefs of Salisbury, was there any concentration of the darker, sleeker and more playful "fur" species.

The birds of the Archipelago were a constant delight. What ocean rocks, however precipitous or majestic, would be complete without them? At one extreme the gallant stints, diminutive grey wanderers of the world who nest in Siberia, dart down to the water's edge in defiance of the inconsistent waves. Their little bodies sway in the gale but their feet remain motionless. At the other extreme are those strange old birds, the Cape Barren Geese, with prehistoric-looking curved yellow bills, strutting stiffly like elderly ladies in grey silk. They are not easily frightened into flight; they prefer to move hastily but never without decorum over the ridge and out of sight. If, however, they take the air, they fly surely, supporting their heavy bodies on slow deliberate wings.

The clean-cut Caspian Tern, angular, designed with a marvellous economy, was generally somewhere about, crying in alarm over its fledglings or eggs; the powerful Pacific Gulls, swift of wing and cruel of red-stained bill, were ubiquitous; the smaller gulls, too, and numerous petrels and shearwaters. Serventy was always with his birds. On a dangerous slope of Douglas Island he found the Storm Petrel nesting; on Termination he discovered the Great-Winged Petrel chicks with their infant down still providing charming neck-ruffs.

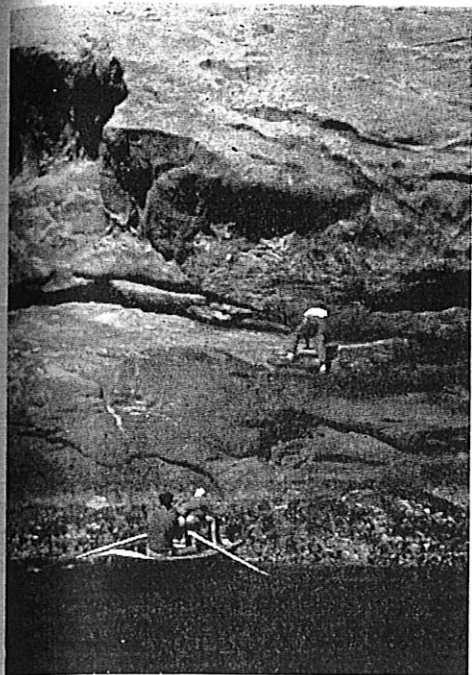
One bird we all discovered. In the heaving sea we saw him drifting at ease but at night he surrounded us in his thousands. Wherever we camped almost, the shearwaters (*Puffinus carneipes*) already possessed squatters' rights. Their

burrows undermined our tents; from the sky, in early starlight, they dropped in for the night. They squealed and moaned and squabbled, a strange querulous assembly. Poor Bean in particular never became accustomed to the subterranean quarrelling of these handsome black birds. He bitterly denounced them; then, as a final insult, just at the first grey dawning, they stumbled excitedly out of their holes, over and into his sleeping-bag and through his precious photographic equipment in their eagerness to reach the cliffs. Clumsy they may be on land, but in the air, contouring the ragged waves, they possess a supreme competency. Of other birds, Singing Honeyeaters, Rock Parrots, Cormorants, Oyster-catchers—surely the most comical of birds, like wooden toys with whistles—penguins, birds-of-prey and the rest, I must leave description to our ornithologist.

There is one grave danger lurking on almost every island except, curiously enough, the largest and most fertile, Middle. This is the deadly death-adder, often in concentrations such as possibly exist nowhere else in Australia. Blending with the fawn and speckled granite, they are difficult to see until disturbed, when, with electric speed, they recoil and strike from a characteristic "S" position. We did not slay them often; they were too numerous and there was no point in their destruction unless they were too close to our tents. But it was necessary always to be wary of these repulsive slug-like snakes with the flat diamond-shaped heads, sleepless eyes and thorny tails. Ray Bean, our most indefatigable curio-hunter, having had a narrow escape from stepping on father while he photographed mother, secured a splendid skin, and Jim Willis, with his characteristic scientific outlook, cooked the flesh. It was pronounced excellent by us all.

Other snakes were also numerous; in fact the reptiles rivalled the birds in numbers. Lizards of many species, swifter than sight or relying on a ferocious show for their defence, ranged from obscene little barking geckoes to the leathery old goanna. Here, perhaps, I should mention briefly the extraordinary "squarms" (as we named them!) of pythons or carpet-snakes. Big handsome fellows, six or seven feet long, they lay in gregarious multi-coloured coils, sunning themselves in the noon-flower.

NO description of the islands, however general, could ignore the engaging wallabies of which there are two species, the Tammar and the Mondrain, segregated fairly strictly, it appeared, in specific island haunts. The Mondrain or Recherche Rock-Wallabies (*Petrogale hacketti*), probably confined to the Archipelago, are quite common, living in "cold lairs" amongst the eroded coastal granite. With their black bushy tails flying behind, they appear in mobs leaping from rock to rock with amazing agility. From every safe



* A typical "vertical" landing, Douglas Island. The swell raised the dinghy to within reach of the cleft where the figure stands.

stance, comically and indecisively, they turn back their dark, pensive little faces with white side patches, the perfect blending of curiosity and timidity.

The Tammar (*Thylogale eugenii*), more at home in the dense, dodder-tangled bush, is seen less frequently although quite conspicuous in its rusty pelt. On Middle Island, in past time, it was hunted vigorously but it still exists there and on Twin Peaks also. A most inquisitive Tammar encircled us for nearly a quarter of an hour as we sat intrigued behind the bars of dense bush near the summit of this island. It was this little marsupial which Pelsart had described after his shipwreck in the Houtman's Abrolhos in 1629, thus giving it the distinction of being the first described member of the kangaroo family.¹²

NO man of the whole company drove himself harder than Jim Willis, our botanist. We usually embarked early, rising between three and four, when we were transshipping camp, but for Willis every day was alike. As one lay snug there were often a dozen reasons why those pre-dawn starts were utter madness. Every wind was a gale, every storm was a tempest and the sea howled discouragement. But Jim was off with his bulky portfolio of drying papers at first light, and at night when the camp-fire was dying, he would be busy in his tent by candle-light, recording the many plant species he had observed or collected.

Since the time of Robert Brown, the "botanical gentleman" of Flinders's *Investigator*, so little had been done in this branch of science that only a few dozen records existed for the entire Archi-

pelago. Willis multiplied this number by three or four.

The richness of the islands' flora, though perhaps not comparable with that of the colourful sand-plain of the mainland, astonished us all. From the sea the vegetation often appeared stunted and unimpressive. On many of the larger islands, however, such as Sandy Hook, Mondrain and Middle, there were fine forests of melaleuca (*M. globifera* and *M. pubescens*), several species of eucalypt, including the "spikey-nutted" Yate (*E. cornuta*) and the smoothly lacquered *E. platypus*, soft, feathery casuarinas and tall hakeas. Sometimes the velvet from the sea became, on closer inspection, tall trees up to forty feet in height. It was always a delight to go "botanizing" though it meant many a long waterless "scrub-bashing." I recall the day we struggled up the high western granite of Middle Island.

We left camp early and followed the beach in blazing sunlight, with a swim inside the reef, near the bizarre red wreck of the *Penguin* (1906), to cool our progress. We had a waterless luncheon, Jim and I, in a she-oak grove, a fantastically lovely, dry, deserted paradise. We fought our way upwards through the scrub while behind opened the perfect panorama of successive coves and the pink lake just inshore. All the way here, as on



* Fish augmented the commissariat: Land—a Blue Groper.

other islands, we found flowers—crimson *Calothamnus*, perfumed spikes of cream *Stackhousea*, the exquisite scented stars of a ray-flower, tiny graceful trigger plants of several species, fragile mauve hibiscus, strange wind-resistant cushion-plants; then, at last, we reached the high granite and found the big pool, reported to exist more than fifty years ago, to be completely dry. We somewhat wearily turned southwest to return by another route. Then Jim discovered a tiny pool complete with the scientific interest of a water-fern and a

minute black snail. The day became young again and we did not return to camp until the stars shone.

The pink lake of Middle Island is brighter in hue than any such lakes I have ever seen. The shoreline is heavily encrusted with salt; the colour of the water is thought to be caused by a manganese salt upon which further will, in due course, be written.¹³

AT random arise countless memories which cannot here be more than briefly mentioned . . . the masses of delicate pelargonium, white and purple streaked, against the steep skyline of Remark where the sea-eagles circled . . . an evening ramble on a scrap of sand-plain high on Sandy Hook Island, when we found a boronia by the light of a fine sickle moon . . . hours of sunshine when we drove through churning seas towards blue horizon goals . . . a dinghy upended in the breakers at Salisbury . . . anchorages in azure coves as fair as any in fable or imagination . . . black waves with white sneering tips. There was Wedge Island, sun-searched relentlessly over every inch, devoid of shadow . . . and the hidden pool below the great canopy of Cave Island (which we named) with rainbow seaweeds and sponges, pink coralline and vivid blue algae and yellow and emerald-green weed . . . flat Combe Island's intriguing granite residuals, millennia-sculptured to a beauty of form that moderns seek and seldom achieve. One could not forget the pockets of fairy-like shells on Middle Island, nor the calm, high pool where we swam, the high stalactited cliffs and the combers with streaming manes.

Colour plays as great a part as form in one's appreciation. Often a long smooth slope was riotous with a hundred shades of red, yellow, brown and green from noonflower, salt-bush, samphire, lichens, mosses and algae in amazing prodigality. There was an hour when we stopped our engines for a radio schedule with Esperance, when the surface of the sea was ethereal, completely unbroken and very deep. The sunshine penetrated the water surrounding one's shadow with restless, unfathomable, deep and paler blue flames.

Bedded in the deepest limestone are tree-forms and shells of the same land-snails (*Bothriembrion* sp.) that inhabit the islands to-day five hundred thousand years later than their fossil ancestors. One can climb a few hundred feet up the brittle cliffs and so encompass the mighty measure of time. May the beautiful islands of the Recherche remain the sanctuary of their wilderness for ever.

13. Papers describing the more scientific aspects of the expedition will later be published by the Australian Geographical Society.

(The Photographic Supplement and the Map should be kept for reference as further articles on The Archipelago of the Recherche will appear later.)

12. E. Troughton: *Furred Animals of Australia*.