

## FORT GREY STOCKADE

On 17 July 1845 Sturt's central expedition was facing an uncertain future. Having regathered the men at Depot Glen for the funeral of Poole, Sturt ordered Piesse to take a few men and return to Adelaide. He would continue northwards even though the effects of scurvy were apparent amongst the remaining party. Sturt's primary concern was to locate freshwater to ensure the ability of the expedition to continue its journey inland.

Eleven days out of Depot Glen Sturt found good water at Lake Pinnaroo where he established his second base camp on Monday 28 July 1845. Situated in the extreme north west corner of New South Wales at latitude  $29^{\circ} 6'30''$  and in longitude  $141^{\circ} 5'8''$ . Sturt initially called the depot "The Park" but on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1845 in remembrance of their departure from Adelaide a year earlier, he declared it Fort Grey in honour of his Excellency the then Governor of South Australia

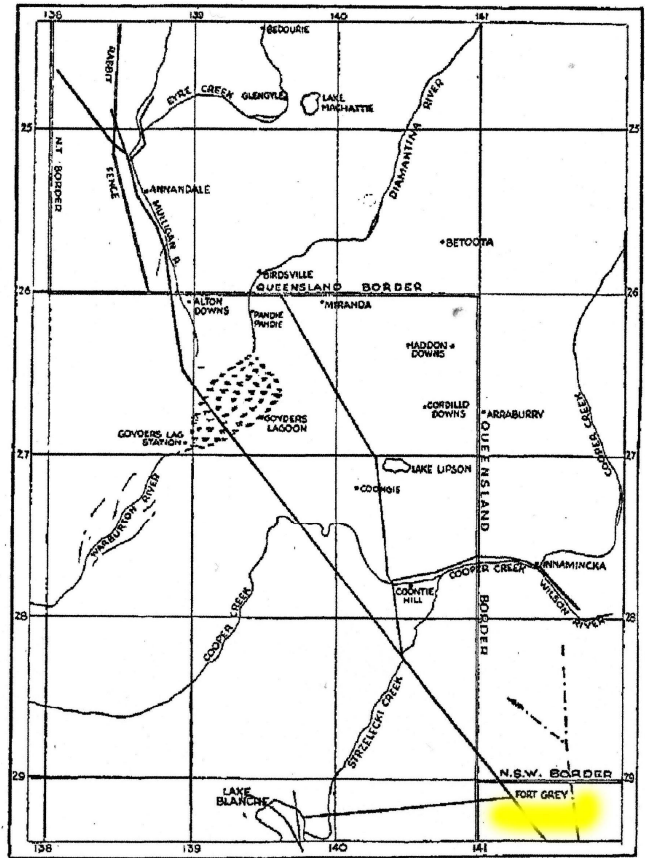
Described by Daniel Brock in his diary as 'pleasant' with 'numerous box trees' he detailed the site as "4 or 5 miles long and more than a mile in width, having a creek passing some distance into the flat, and here terminating, the waters when the creek is full passing over, forming a kind of lagoon... This creek flows in from the eastward, rising in a range running north. Although the soil is sand and most probably would grow not one vegetable, it is as much an oasis as can be found in any desert in Africa"

Sturt stayed only briefly at the camp site before heading out southwest with Browne, Flood, Joseph and Lewis. In his absence, Sturt was commanded to erect a small stockade and stockyard which should have "close palisades four feet six inches above the ground".

Sturt wrote in his journal that he

"directed that the bell tent shall be enclosed by a Stockade for the security of the Party – in the event of any unforeseen occurrence, for although the Natives are at present but few in number and are timid, they evidently assemble during the seed season in large Mobs, and I have thought it better to anticipate any hostility whether provoked or not. I have directed Mr Stuart not to encourage the Natives to the camp by giving them anything, and never to allow any of the women to frequent it. I have directed that the Firearms and Ammunition be kept and arranged in the Stockade from which the men will have a full command of the drays, and I have ordered that on the first sign of alarm the sheep are to be driven into the Stockade"

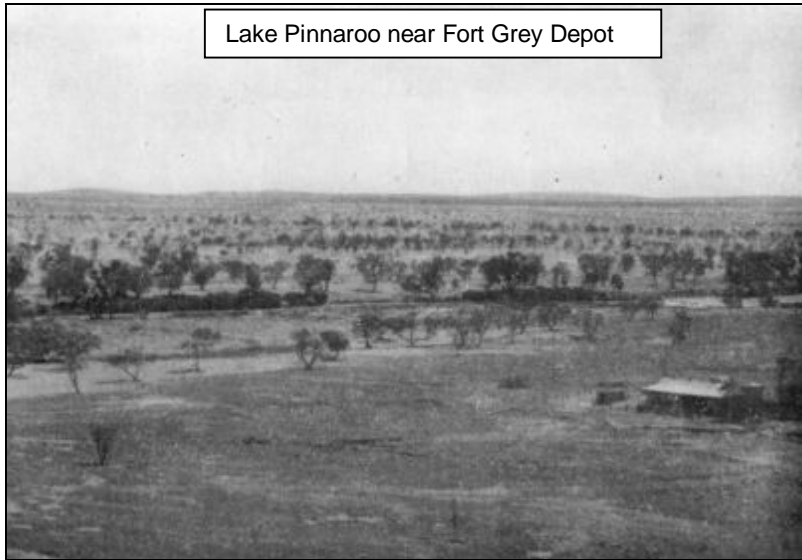
Sturt was pleased to note on his return on 8<sup>th</sup> August that the stockade had been completed and that the flag was flying at the entrance. Importantly Davenport had dug and planned out a fine garden which he had planted with seeds. Sturt described the scene



"Immediately in front of the tents there was a broad sheet of water shaded by gum-trees, and the low land between this and the sand hills was also chequered with them. The position was in every way eligible. The open grassy field or plain stood full in view, and the men could see the cattle browsing on it."



Sturt's Tree, Lake Pinnaroo



Lake Pinnaroo near Fort Grey Depot

Sturt made three forays from Fort Grey and on the last return on 13 November with Lewis, Flood and Joseph, it was discovered that Harris Browne had pulled the remaining party back to Depot Glen due to lack of good water at the Fort. Sturt was forced to accept that without fresh water and vegetables the expedition could not continue. Fort Grey was abandoned and plans made to return to Adelaide.

An archaeological survey will be initiated at Fort Grey to explore the stockade site, The National Parks and Wildlife Service contracted an archaeologist in 2007 to carry out fieldwork to locate the previously unknown location of the Stockade. Unknown as an accurate measurement of longitude had yet to be determined. Using a 2006 geophysical survey the archaeologist discovered mid-1800s ceramic fragments and detected a distinct square outline of the dimensions of the stockade. While the Sturt National Park have developed the Lake Pinnaroo Interpretation trail to give visitors a chance to walk in the footsteps of Sturt, this archaeological survey should provide some useful information to better understand Sturt's central expedition.

\*\*\*\*\*