

MEMOIRS OF EUSTON CORYNDON KING

“Camels to the relief of Milparinka in 1882”

Euston King was the sixteen year old messenger in the story.

During the early days of the Mt Browne Gold Fields provisions were sent mainly from Wilcannia. The store keepers were mainly branches of Wilcannian Firms, Crainsie, Bowden and Woodfall, W.C. Palmer and Co. C.F. H. Henzenroeder operated in Milparinka and Gus Hickey, Bacon and Co and W.C. Palmer. Later W.S Downie held sway. At the Granite etc were mainly branches of Wilcannia firms who operated also in The Granite, afterwards called Tibooburra by the then Minister (Warden) for Mines Mr. W.H.J.Slee who was in charge of the diggings as Warden prior to 1882.

At all times, it was quite an undertaking to keep the supplies up to the 12,000 (sic) people on the field and horse teams used to be employed, taking various times to do the trip, according to the state of the roads and the condition of the teams and sometimes, the character of the loading, for when beer was included it often used to be delayed until there was no more fresh water to bull it, and the clay pan water so much in demand was too thick and creamy to mix well with it.

The main delay, however, was caused through the long stages between the watering places and the shortage of fodder for the teams, along the 200 mile route.

There came at last, a time when the supplies were reported to be so low in the various stores that flour, tea, sugar and vinegar had to be rationed to make them last as long as possible for the roads were becoming more and more in a serious state and with no rain falling, a very serious drought was on, and as the usual watering places were fast becoming dry and farther apart, even the coaches had difficulty in getting through and at last had to be given up.

This was the introduction that Mr. Charles McArthur King, the newly appointed Police Magistrate and Warden had when he arrived at Milparinka in the mid summer of 1882, some time in January. He was immediately faced with a very serious responsibility and problem. He at once acquainted the Sydney Government as to the state of affairs, but as the mails were threatened to stop running and Government Departments then, as now took a lot of correspondence to come to a decision and rise to an occasion, no reply had been received.

After a few mails had been, shall I say wasted, and nothing definite done, the mails ceased to be carried. Mr King was not aware that his suggestion to get the South Australian Government to come to the rescue by sending camels loaded with the bare necessities of life from Port Augusta, had reached Sydney. Camels were the only means of transport over the long dry stages that cut the goldfields off in every direction and as even these had to be educated to go without water for a few days, it all took time and one can imagine the feelings

of the inhabitants when it was announced that the last bag of flour had been opened and no word of relief was to hand.

It was then that Mr. King started a messenger to go into South Australia to the nearest accessible Telegraph Line with urgent request for relief. The messenger was well horsed by Mr. Harry Crozier who had come in from his station, Fort Grey on the N.S.W -S.A. boundary sixty miles away with promises of relays of horses at Fort Grey and other outback stations. It involved a rather strenuous and risky journey, but so many people were depending on it. It was willingly undertaken by a young lad of sixteen, a light weight, and he was accorded a very hearty send off at about 5 o'clock in the evening to ride 60 miles in the cool of the night by himself.

Imagine his feelings and the feelings also experienced, when on giving his horse a drink at Sturt's Depot Glen Waterhole of early historic fame, his horse gave a snort and a bound and went almost mad, for the smell of camels coming round the bend of a hill reminded him of the terror caused on his own home run by the sight of one of Burke and Wills' derelict camels that used to wander about on Fort Grey Station, causing no end of fun amongst the horses.

As soon as the horse could be pacified, the rider also got a start, for there in full view were 30 heavily laden pack camels slowly and sedately swinging in towards the water, having come a long distance without a drink. A few words from the Afghan in charge, little

'Targ' Mahomed, was enough and the message was taken back to Milparinka that the camels would be there in the early morning.

No whip not spur was required to urge "Fireman" back to Milparinka, for whether by the importance of the news he carried, or the panic caused by the camels' unsavoury odour, he did not even stop for the only gate for miles around to be opened for him.

There was some excitement and demonstration in Milparinka that night; it would almost compare with the Mafeking night in Broken Hill, years afterwards in which the messenger took a very active part.

Hence, the famine scare was ended and never since has there been any shortage in that part, but until the drought broke, Mr. King commandeered sufficient numbers of camels with a reliable Afghan driver or rider to convey the mails to and from Wilcannia, about 200 miles, under the charge of Jack Tarragon, the little coach driver who was marooned at Milparinka on the last coach to stagger through.

He also organized the sick, suffering from fever, dysentery and scurvy to be taken to the Wilcannia Hospital by ten or twelve camels yoked up in a German Wagon, harnessed like horses with the collar put on upside down. It was a novel sight, but quite common sense. Another similar team accompanied this, and had for passengers, a consignment of prisoners to serve their sentences in Wilcannia Gaol for various offences, principally horse stealing. It took this caravan over a week to get there.

At that time, a wag sent a picture to the Sydney Mail, supposedly depicting this event and it has been twice since reproduced and I suppose people really thought it a true picture and representation, but to those who know, it was intended as a joke. It represented two fine high stepping camels going at top gear harnessed with a big Cobb and Co Thorough-brace Coach, with police in charge of the prisoners and an Afghan riding pillion.

It was not long after this that Mr. Hogarth, manager of Momba Station used to drive a pair of camels in his buggy into Wilcannia. Since that time camels have just about cut the horse and bullock teams out in the West Darling country and now the Motor Truck was about to cut them all out.

The writer has since been all through that country in motor cars. It is always interesting to recognize old landmarks and compare the differences of transport with that of the old coaching days and the days of four in hand teams and bullock drays. One has at least one great consolation when departing from those rough times to the up to date motor express, and that is that fact that one gets over the bad heavy roads without in any way causing any cruelty or discomfort to man's old friend the companion the good horse.

How proud we used to be of our horses and their performances. Can anyone ever have the same feeling for his machine.....I doubt