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HAMILTON HUME

Emigration to New South Wales in the early days of the colony required courage and determination. They were qualities which the Hume family, descended from Scottish borderers, seemed to have in abundance.

Andrew Hamilton Hume, the first of the family to come to Australia, arrived in 1790 to take up the position of Superintendent of convicts. He survived a shipwreck at the Cape of Good Hope.



Hamilton Hume

Soon after his arrival in Sydney, Andrew Hume was appointed to Norfolk Island. Shortly afterwards, in May 1793, he was Superintendent of convicts at Toongabbie where he received a land grant of 30 acres. He was a hard worker and he possessed a fine tenor voice. He was also able to produce good quality flax.

He married Elizabeth Moore Kennedy who had arrived in 1795 and who had, for a time, served as Matron of the Orphanage Institution.

Andrew and Elizabeth, both free settlers, established themselves in the Parramatta district where their first son, Hamilton, was born on 18 June 1797. He was destined to become one of the country's greatest explorers.

In the early days of the colony, the means of education were extremely limited and young Hamilton received his only education from his mother. He wrote: "I owe everything to her".

He also suffered the disadvantage of being Australian born and found himself included with the "Currency lads and lasses" who were mostly the illegitimate offspring of convict parents.

As a result, Hamilton developed considerable initiative and a very independent attitude.

He also had to cope with his father's reputation as an irascible man with an explosive, reckless temper who constantly quarrelled with authority and who, as a result, was unemployed for long periods.

With such a background, it is not difficult to imagine young Hamilton growing up with a chip on his shoulder.

After being flooded twice and burnt out once, the family left Toongabbie in 1812 and moved to a 100 acre property at Appin granted to Andrew Hume by the Governor, Bro. Lachlan Macquarie.

This enabled his father to keep out of trouble and young Hamilton to develop his skills in bushcraft.

He loved to explore the bush around Appin and in 1814 when he was just seventeen years old, he and his younger brother John Kennedy Hume, at the time twelve years old, together with an Aboriginal boy, discovered excellent grazing land in the area now known as Berrima.

They blazed the route on trees and on their return, reported their discovery to the Surveyor-General, Bro. John Oxley, who later established a sheep station in the area. In 1815, Hume guided Oxley's superintendent to the Bargo area.

Some years later John was shot dead by bushrangers near the township of Gunning.

In 1816, Hume led Dr Charles Throsby to country around Berrima and Bong Bong which Throsby later occupied.

Governor Macquarie requested Hume to accompany the Surveyor James Meehan and Dr Throsby to further explore the area. Meehan and Throsby had a disagreement which resulted in Throsby leaving the party after which Hume and Meehan went on to discover Lake Bathurst and the Goulburn Plains.

As a reward for his services, Governor Macquarie granted Hume 300 acres of land near Appin where he lived for a number of years.

In 1819, Hume joined Oxley and Meehan on a journey from Liverpool to Jervis Bay and, the following year, he went with Dr Throsby on a journey through the country he had explored in 1817.

Accompanied by his brother-in-law George Barber, his brother John and W. H. Broughton, Hume and his party discovered the Yass Plains during a trip in 1821.

The following year, he accompanied Lieutenant Robert Johnston R.N. and Alexander Berry in the cutter *Schnapper* down the coast south from Sydney in search of river systems. From the upper reaches of the Clyde River, they penetrated inland nearly as far as the present location of Braidwood.

Later that year, he went with Berry by sea from Sydney to the Shoalhaven River in the *Blanche* to help Berry select a 10,000 acre property.

Hamilton Hume was about to begin his greatest adventure.

The Governor, Bro. Sir Thomas Brisbane, approved an expedition from Sydney to the southern coast of the continent. Unfortunately the Governor did not provide financial backing.

The leaders of the expedition were Hamilton Hume and a retired ship's captain, William Hilton Hovell, who was eleven years older than Hume and of very different temperament. Hume was the determined, bush-wise young man, Hovell the courteous seaman who had survived shipwreck and several near misses.

Hovell could navigate, Hume could not. Hovell, an Englishman, was married to a daughter of Surgeon Arndell of the first fleet and they had arrived in Sydney in 1813 to settle on a 700 acre property at Narellan.

Both men's resources were slender and, as a result, the expedition was poorly equipped. The lack of finance was emphasised when Hume was forced to sell his plough to meet initial expenses.

On 2 October 1824, Hume and Hovell mounted on horseback, accompanied by six assigned men seeking tickets of leave and who were on foot, using two bullock trays carrying their limited supplies, set out from Appin.

They also had a sextant, three compasses and a wheeled distance measuring perambulator which, since it was designed for reasonably flat ground, surprisingly lasted 10 weeks before it was finally smashed.

Their first difficulty was the crossing of the Nepean River and it took the party eleven days to travel the 200 kms to Hume's property at Lake George which he had acquired three years earlier.

Beyond the Yass Plains was unexplored territory and so the real journey began on 16 October 1824.

They intended to follow as closely as possible a line which they had marked on a chart between Lake George and Western Port.

They reached the Murrumbidgee River on 19 October which they found in flood and flowing fast. Hume stripped a cart of its wheels, axles and shafts and, by covering the frame with a tarpaulin, made a serviceable boat. He then swam the icy snow-fed river to carry a rope to the opposite bank. Seven hours later, men, animals and supplies had been ferried across the swollen river.

Their route became barred by high mountain ranges and the party split to find a suitable route. Hovell, who headed north-west, found only steep waterfalls whilst Hume, who had travelled south-west, found a narrow river gorge and, on 25 October, they arrived at the banks of a stream near the present site of Wee Jasper.

Here, the carts and all non-essential supplies were hidden and the remaining equipment was loaded onto the bullocks.

The journey led them deeper into the mountains and they frequently had to retrace their steps. The bullocks had to be unloaded to cross mountain creeks and they could traverse little more than 20 kms a day.

On 31 October they reached the end of the mountain range and a steep and difficult descent was found with the bullocks sometimes sliding down on their knees.

On 8 November, after discovering the Tumut River, Hume and Hovell climbed a high peak near to the present town of Tumbarumba to look for an easier route. The diary reads:

"All the mountains that we have seen or gone over are mere hillocks when compared with those we have seen today".

They named the area the Australian Alps. It is from this time that there seems to have developed a growing rivalry and dislike between the two leaders.

Hovell was used to absolute command, Hume to rely on his own ability. Hume believed that compass and sextant would no longer guide them through the difficult terrain. Hovell was not prepared to rely solely on Hume's bushcraft.

The two parted company with Hovell following a southerly route directly towards the Alps. Hume decided on a westerly route to skirt around the obviously formidable barrier.

Hovell soon rejoined Hume when he realised the futility of trying to cross the alps.

They continued in a south-westerly direction for several days and the diary records that food was running low and small flies were a constant pest.

Hume followed kangaroo tracks to find a route through the mountains and, on 11 November the party reached the summit of a hill, now Mount Macedon, where they saw open plains and the smoke from Aboriginal's fires which meant fodder for the animals and food for the men.

On 16 November they came to a large river which they named the Hume. It is now called the Murray.

A clear division now existed between the leaders. Both men claimed in their writings that they conceived the idea of crossing the river by making a boat of saplings covered with a tarpaulin.

The Hume and Hovell walking track from Gunning to Albury now closely follows their route up to this point.

Some 7 kms from the Hume they came to the Mitta Mitta River where again the leaders quarrelled and separated for the second time.

Hovell again rejoined Hume and, on 24 November, they reached the Ovens River and, after an easy crossing, they saw and named Mount Buffalo and the Oxley Plains.

Another river was reached on 3 December which they named the Hovell. It is now called the Goulburn.

After traversing difficult bush country where water was scarce, they finally reached the coast on 16 December 1824.

Both men believed they had arrived at Western Port but they were, in fact, at Corio Bay where the City of Geelong is now situated.

Later, Hovell went to Western Port by sea and discovered his mistake.

The return journey took just thirty one days and, on 22 January, Hume presented his report to Governor Brisbane.

Hume was promised 1200 acres on the Crookhaven River, but sold the property to cover the expenses of the expedition.

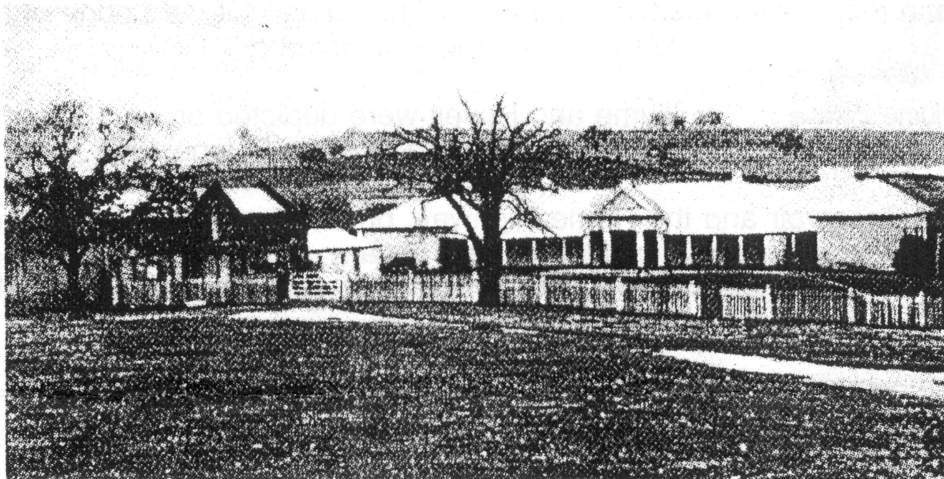
On 8 November 1825, Hamilton Hume married Elizabeth Dight at St Philip's Church, Sydney. They had no children.

Hume continued his exploration work and, in 1827, he discovered a line of road to Bathurst which was superior to the route through Mount York.

In 1828, he undertook a journey of exploration as second-in-command to Captain Charles Sturt who spoke highly of his leadership and bushcraft. During this trip they explored the Darling River and Hume was granted 1920 acres at Yass.

The following year Sturt found and named the Murray River in honour of Sir George Murray, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies in the English Parliament. It was in 1838 that it was finally discovered that the Hume and the Murray were one and the same river. Sturt apologised to Hume for his error.

In 1839, Hume purchased a property named "Cooma" at Yass where he and his wife decided to live.



Cooma Cottage, Yass, where Hamilton Hume lived as a grazier after his exploring days.

In 1853, another quarrel erupted between Hume and Hovell following a claim by Hovell that he had discovered the Geelong area of Victoria. In 1855, Hume, who, at this stage of his life was in poor health and drinking regularly, published "A Plain Statement of Fact" but the argument remained unresolved.

It is interesting to note that Hovell's comprehensive journal does not make any mention of any difference of opinion between the two men.

In 1860, Hamilton Hume was elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.

Hovell's second wife left a 6000 pounds bequest to the University of Sydney to endow a lecturer in Geology and Physical Geography as a memorial to Captain William Hovell.

Hume donated land for the Yass Hospital and the Yass Presbyterian Church and Minister's residence.

He had one last quarrel, this time with his favourite nephew, Francis Hume, before his death at "Cooma" on 19 April 1873 at the age of 75 years. He was a wealthy man with 18000 acres of the finest sheep country in Australia.



Hamilton Hume's grave
in Yass cemetery.

Bro. Hamilton Hume was initiated into Freemasonry on 12 September 1825 in The Leinster Marine Lodge of Australia No.266, Irish Constitution, meeting in Sydney. He was made a Fellowcraft on the same evening, a common occurrence in those days, and raised a master mason on 12 December 1825.

He was the second candidate in the lodge which is now No.2, United Grand Lodge of New South Wales, meeting at Castle Hill.

The Hume Lodge of Australia No.909, English Constitution was consecrated at Albury in 1862.

Lodge Hume No.212, United Grand Lodge of New South Wales, now meets at Holbrook.

Hume and Hovell were depicted on an 18 cent stamp issued by Australia Post on 9 June 1976.

The Hume Reservoir and the Hume Highway, proclaimed in 1928, are named in his honour but you will scan your atlas in vain for any mention of William Hovell other than Hovell's Creek near Geelong which was once called Kennedy's Creek.

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