

# **Navigating the Topographical Drawing**

**The South African Journal of J. S. Dobie**

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## **ABSTRACT:**

This dissertation aims to explore aspects of topographical drawing in nineteenth century Natal. It has as its centrepiece the drawings of John Dobie (1819-1903). It is argued that topographical drawing is enmeshed in the landscape and its attendant cultural discourse. On this basis an analogy is drawn between topographical drawing and navigation.

Chapter One discusses the drawings of Captain Robert Garden (1821-1859) as an exemplar of the topographical genre in colonial Natal.

Chapter two introduces Dobie's South African Journal. In examining the linked processes of wagon journey, narrative and drawing, this chapter focuses on issues pertaining to Dobie's navigation of unsurveyed territory. Several supporting instances of his practice are included.

Chapter Three puts forward arguments for the links between drawing and navigation based on the interdependence of text and drawings in Dobie's Journal.

Premised on a distinction between the 'optical' and 'experienced' world, Chapter Four sets forward further arguments for the shared meanings of drawing and navigation. These arguments focus on the process of drawing itself.

## **DECLARATION:**

Except where the contrary is acknowledged, this dissertation is the original work of the candidate and is submitted for the degree of Master of Art in Fine Art, University of Natal, and has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

Scott Bredin.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my parents and to Celeste.

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## **PREFACE:**

The following conventions have been applied in this dissertation:

References in the text follow the Harvard System.

Double indentations and single spacing indicate quotations.

‘ ’ used for quotations within body of text.

“ ” used for titles of poems and journal articles.

[ ] indicate the author’s insertions in quotations.

Titles of publications and works of art are underlined.

Illustrations are referred to by their figure number in brackets.

In the works illustrated the height measurement precedes the breadth.

Due to the fact that so few of Dobie’s drawings have been published, as many as possible of the drawings cited in the text are reproduced at the end of this dissertation. These reproductions take the form of photostatic reproductions of photographs of the drawings supplied by Mr Robin Guy. Some loss of quality is, therefore, inevitable. As Dobie did not supply most of his drawings with formal titles, corresponding excerpts of text and date are quoted in their place - though not underlined. It must also be noted that the South African Library catalogue numbers are not necessarily consistent and that many of the smaller drawings are not catalogued at all.

Note: The inclusion of offensive terms such as Kafir within quotations, as well as the use of gender specific language, are due to the historical context and convention of the period under discussion and do not reflect the personal ideology of this author.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

It was as if he had walked under the millimetre of haze just above the inked fibres of a map, that zone between land and chart between distances and legend between nature and storyteller (Ondaatje 1992 : 246)

This dissertation aims to explore certain aspects of nineteenth century colonial visual culture, in particular, the topographical drawing in Natal. It has as its centrepiece the topographical drawings of John Shedden Dobie (1819 - 1903), although other practitioners in Natal are also discussed. Topographical representation is enmeshed in the landscape and its attendant cultural discourse. Analogous to the linkages between that discourse and its landscape is the practice of navigation. For this reason the interface of drawing and navigation is the subject of this dissertation.

The research is delimited on several bases. Firstly, it deals with the colonial history of Natal prior to the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. Though it is acknowledged that the dramatic influx of draughtsmen that accompanied the British forces into Natal and the Zulu Kingdom provide an engaging record of colonial spatiality, the nature of the events which occasioned these images require that they constitute a separate subject. Similarly, the Anglo-Boer Wars might also prove to be fertile ground for studies of this sort. Secondly, it deals with landscape drawings. This is partially due to the nature of colonial visual output - in turn a function of the state of development in Natal - and partially due to the nature of drawing itself as conducive to observational studies of the landscape. Thirdly, Dobie's drawings have been chosen to explore the relationship between drawing and navigation. Again there are several reasons for this choice: his drawings are exceptionally good examples of a form of amateur draughtsmanship and his output was prolific; the close correlation between his journal narrative and the drawings reveals the processes at work that relate text, drawing and landscape.

In this dissertation topography is taken to refer to the faithful, intentionally accurate depiction of an identifiable locality. The history of topography can be traced along two broad lines: that of the map, and that of descriptive art. The lineage of topographical representation extends right back to the Palaeolithic era: 'In some Palaeolithic rock-carvings, such as those

at Mt Bego in the Italian Alps, lines and dots have been identified as paths, huts and enclosures as seen from above' (Brown, R. W. in Turner, vol. 31, 1996 : 152)

J. M. Coetzee, writing on William Burchell's Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa(1822), discusses the reasons why English landscape art of the early nineteenth century should have found the African landscape 'intractable' and resistant to imported schemata. In particular, he analyses the picturesque mode and enumerates the 'deficiencies' of the African landscape: the entire palette must shift from the deep verdure of Europe to a range of fawns; the light is bright and the transitions from light to shade abrupt; African foliage lacks lustre because it transpires little; and finally, surface water and the 'diffusive medium of atmospheric moisture' are rare. (Coetzee 1989 : 42-43) The results of this apparent incompatibility of the African landscape with European aesthetic sensibilities constitute a revealing record of colonial experience. What emerges is often indicative of a lack of 'authentic' engagement with the landscape. Whether or not such an unmediated experience is ever possible remains a matter for philosophical debate.

Ernst Gombrich supplies the instructive example of Chiang Yee, a Chinese painter who produced a series of painted scenes of England and Ireland. [Fig. 1] Working in the idiom of traditional Chinese brush painting the artist created a series of disarmingly 'Chinese' landscapes. This is but one example in an extended cross-pollination of Eastern and Western landscape traditions. (Mitchell 1994 : 9 and Varnedoe 1990 : 76) Gombrich provides a commentary:

The artist will be attracted by motifs which can be rendered in his idiom. As he scans the landscape, the sights which can be matched successfully with the schemata he has learned to handle will leap forward as centres of attention. The style, like the medium, creates a mental set which makes the artist look for certain aspects in the scene around him which he can render. Painting is an activity, and the artist will therefore tend to see what he paints rather than to paint what he sees." (Gombrich 1977 : 73)

Might a San observer have experienced a similar reaction to one of Thomas Baines' paintings as a native of the English Lake District might experience towards Chiang Yee's work? How is one to judge whether Chiang Yee's brush paintings are 'authentic' records of the landscape and his experience of it?

Nineteenth-century categorization of the beautiful, the sublime and the picturesque are, in principle, based on a set of conventions which regulate meaning. The conventions of the picturesque proved so pervasive that the landscape itself began to be categorised and altered to conform to these tenets.

Topographical drawing in particular, and observational drawing in general, demands an awareness of the limits of pictorial conventions. To what extent do the conventions of topography determine representation - and to what extent does the environment challenge that vision? It is clear that the conventions of the picturesque, for instance, cannot plausibly extend to depictions of the earth from outer space. Where drawings take on the function of accurate reportage, their success in that function is inversely proportional to the maintenance of inappropriate conventions. Gombrich cites the example of a depiction 'drawn accurately from nature', of a beached whale with an ear (perhaps bovine?) in place of the lateral fin to illustrate the persistence of schemata. (Gombrich 1977 : 69)

It is this apparent contradiction between schema and accuracy which makes the study of topographical drawings of importance in reviewing colonial visual culture. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century European topographical drawing often had patron inspired aims: they demanded a sober perspectival space, uniform treatment of detail, accuracy of proportion, a culturally significant subject matter - monuments and country estates being the stock in trade - and the whole to be composed more or less along the lines of the picturesque. This is precisely the area in which the problems set forth by Coetzee above constitute an artistic impasse for colonial artists.

Writing on nineteenth century American landscape depictions, Barbara Novak describes how simple topographical recordings - modestly amplified by conventions of the picturesque - gave way to the more baroque tendencies of painters such as Church and Moran. The 'civilizing' influence of artistic conventions served to withdraw newness from the terrain at the very moment it was seeking to exalt it. (Novak 1995 : 148-149)

Where we recognise conventions or schemata at work they may have a great deal to contribute towards a better understanding of the culture which produced them, though the image itself



may have little to contribute in terms of independent meaning or empirical information. Current literature in the field of post-colonial studies emphasises this kind of deconstruction of meaning. Typically, this discourse examines the accuracy and iconography of colonial images and the means by which such images contributed towards a specific cultural construction of the other/colonial (subjugated) landscape/indigenous peoples. The attempt is made to examine the social, political and economic facts 'embedded' in the idealized settings of landscape images. (Mitchell 1994 : 6-7)

Histories of landscape [...] continually present it as breaking with convention, with language and textuality, for a natural view of nature, just as they present landscape as transcending property and labor. (Mitchell 1994 : 17)

Mitchell (citing Pratt 1986 : 138-162) goes on to argue that such historical narratives are ideally suited to the discourse of imperialism:

...which conceives itself precisely (and simultaneously) as an expansion of landscape understood as an inevitable, progressive development in history, an expansion of "culture" and "civilization" into a "natural" space in a progress that is itself narrated as "natural". Empires move outward in space as a way of moving forward in time; the "prospect" that opens up is not just a spacial scene but a projected future of "development" and exploitation. (Mitchell 1994 : 17)

The potential meaning of the colonial images under discussion in this dissertation extends beyond the past few centuries of predominantly European colonization of the globe. The use of blood and DNA testing of the world's populations in order to map ancient human migrations is subverting the notion of the 'original inhabitant'. Crudely simplified, world history since the Neolithic revolution appears to be an endlessly repeated cycle of the mobile 'barbarians' descending upon the more sedentary peoples to plunder their wealth and appropriate their lands: the wolf circling the fold. It would be a gross misunderstanding to suggest that this is, in any way, a justification for the practices of invasion, subjugation and colonization. What is important is that the experience of colonization is a very ancient and widespread one. It is also an issue which is more often decided by political expediency than any notion of moral rights.

The myth of the empty landscape ripe for colonization must have been difficult to sustain in the

case of mid-nineteenth century Natal. Land was being claimed and defended by British, Boers and Zulus. Large scale land speculation by white settlers in the 1840s gave rise to the situation described by Moodie: 'Two-thirds of the land in Natal was claimed in 1843. Towards the end of 1847 six-sevenths of this land was lying waste, two-thirds again of this waste land was owned by absentee speculators, and four-fifths of all the claimants to land had left the colony' (cited in Brookes and Webb 1965 : 61-62). The selective blindness displayed by the colonists towards the indigenous population was reinforced by the literature promoting immigration and by maps which fail to acknowledge their existence on the land. The current critical debate concerning the nature, causes and effects of the Mfecane is one area in which the 'empty landscape' is being scrutinized.

In the context of nineteenth century colonization of Natal there appears precious little to recommend the images produced by the white immigrants other than as tools used in the process of colonization. By subjecting the landscape to European schemata, the artist inevitably figures the pristine environment as fair game - literally and figuratively. Liese van der Watt quotes the example of Thomas Baines:

When asked by a German hunter why he so earnestly wants to see an elephant, Baines answers 'Shoot him if I can, and, if not, sketch him' (Van der Watt 1993 : 28)

The images of the landscape serve much the same purpose as a map in that, to paraphrase Baudrillard, they precede the territory. (King 1996 : 1) Indeed it is possible to view the entire English tradition of landscape painting in an analogous manner - a tradition in which the nineteenth century with its rampant imperialism is sometimes represented as the apogee. Histories re-figured in terms of notions of ecology address the problematic relationship of Western culture and nature embodied in that tradition:

But though environmental history offers some of the most original and challenging history now being written, it inevitably tells the same dismal tale: of land taken, exploited, exhausted: of traditional cultures said to have lived in a relation of sacred reverence with the soil displaced by the reckless individualist, the capitalist aggressor. And while the mood of these histories is understandably penitential, they differ as to when the Western fall from grace took place. For some historians it was the Renaissance and the scientific revolutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that doomed the earth to be treated by the West as a machine that would never break, however hard it

was used and abused. [...]

Intensive agriculture, then, is said to have made possible all manner of modern evils. [...]

And perhaps not even the West. Perhaps, say the most severe critics, the entire history of settled (rather than nomadic) society, from the irrigation-mad Chinese to the irrigation-mad Sumerians, is contaminated by the brutal manipulation of nature. Only the Paleolithic cave-dwellers, who left us their cave paintings as evidence of their integration with, rather than dominion over, nature, are exempted from this original sin of civilization. Once the archaic cosmology in which the whole earth was held to be sacred, and man but a single link in the long chain of creation was broken, it was all over, give or take a few millennia. [...]

In offering this alternative way of looking, I am aware that more is at stake than an academic quibble. For if the entire history of landscape in the West is indeed just a mindless race towards a machine-driven universe, uncomplicated by myth, metaphor, and allegory, where measurement, not memory, is the absolute arbiter of value, where our ingenuity is our tragedy, then we are indeed trapped in the engine of our self-destruction.

At the heart of this book is the stubborn belief that this is not, in fact, the whole story. [...] The point of *Landscape and Memory* is not to contest the reality of this crisis. It is, rather, by revealing the richness, antiquity, and complexity of our landscape tradition, to show just how much we stand to lose. Instead of assuming the mutually exclusive character of Western culture and nature, I want to suggest the strength of the links that have bound them together. (Schama 1995 : 13-14)

If the long quotation be excused, this is also one of the informing methodologies of this dissertation. An understanding of cultural history which interprets Dobie's drawings *solely* as instruments of power risks the expenditure of a rich vein of extra-ideological meaning. This is not to deny the implication of these images in the rhetoric of imperialism. At least in the case of Dobie we find an individual who, on the whole, accepts this rhetoric with all of its derogatory, racist baggage.

Instead of accepting the line of criticism that views colonial landscape images as vehicles which can convey only ideology, this dissertation aims to show the possible depths of meaning and experience that such a reductive account threatens to ignore. To paraphrase Schama: the point is not to contest the realities that colonialism has borne down to us in the late twentieth century. It is, rather, by revealing the rich complexity of human experience of the landscape, to show how much we stand to lose by assuming reductive accounts.

In the case of Dobie we have the myth of the explorer-navigator (played out at a relatively late

date it is acknowledged) in ‘unpeopled territory’ at the service of self and Empire. But we also have the basic narrative of the individual navigating a temporal and spatial *terra incognita*. It is a story with military resonances - from the slaughter of Varus’ legions in the Teutoburger Wald (Schama 1995 : 88-89) right down to the British military disaster at Majuba, we know how crucial knowledge of the landscape is in warfare.

Rich as the history of navigation and survey may be, it constitutes a mythos which is informed by inescapable biology. At the level of the individual, every human baby slowly orientates itself in a strange new world. The process by which children learn to cognize large-scale spaces is discussed at length by Downs and Stea in Maps in Minds. (1977 : 187-208) For the purposes of this paper it is enough to assert that the cognitive articulation of a spatially extended reality is crucial for the survival of human beings, as well as a vast number of other organisms that move.

Central to the argument of this dissertation is the dependence of Dobie’s drawings, at the level of what they express and how they express it, upon relatively constant biological imperatives. (Fuller 1980 : 230 - 264) More specifically, the need to orientate oneself in the environment. At the figurative level, if we lose our horizons of significance, become disorientated, we are threatened with a loss of meaning because our choices become meaningless. Thus disorientation is analogous to the philosophical perils of indeterminacy. This, after all, is one of the reasons why the word ‘lost’ is largely synonymous with disaster.

In order that Dobie’s small pencil images be placed in their correct context, Chapter One is dedicated to the drawings and watercolours of Captain Robert Garden (1821-1859). It seems wholly inadequate to suggest that Garden is a “typical” example of the colonial topographer: many of his works are extraordinarily beautiful. Perhaps it is more apt to consider him an exemplar rather than an example. However, a good deal of his artistic practice conforms to the requirements of topography.

Chapter Two introduces Dobie’s South African Journal. In examining the linked processes of wagon journey, narrative and drawing, this chapter focuses on issues pertaining to Dobie’s navigation of unsurveyed territory. Several supporting instances of his practice are included.

Two types of arguments are put forward for the link between drawing and navigation. The first concerns the narrative of the journey. These arguments deal with the *modus operandi* of the artist/navigator, and they rely upon the evidence of text, drawing and the connections between them. These arguments are set forth in chapters Two and Three. The second type of argument is premised on a distinction between the optical and the experienced world. These arguments, concentrated in Chapter Four, follow a more philosophical vein and meditate on the processes of drawing itself.

It is beyond the scope of this introduction to discuss fully the methodological implications of a study of this sort. Suffice it to say that this research is best characterised as archival and qualitative. It is archival in the sense that it involves research in which the sources are in drawings and documentation; qualitative in that it is concerned with the content, context and components of those primary sources. However, there are several methodological issues which pertain to this specific subject which need to be addressed at this point.

The most immediate of these problems is the lack of a body of literature dealing with Dobie's drawings. Dobie's journal has been partially published and the manuscript remains an excellent historical source. Apart from their significance as historical evidence, the drawings have received scant attention. Certainly part of the reason for this lack of attention is that they have not, to this author's knowledge, been widely published or reproduced. (See Chapter One in this regard.) This is in turn due to the fact that Dobie produced no body of paintings by which he may have gained wider attention. The drawings' small size and present state - pasted into the manuscript - mean that it is highly unlikely that the originals will ever be publicly shown. The nett result is that whilst a sizable quantity of writing has been dedicated to individuals such as Bowler, Baines and Angas, Dobie's drawings are not likely to receive much attention.

Methodologically, this poses a problem when it comes to assessing Dobie in terms of much current critical thinking. This has prompted the present author to surmise that critics would probably hold essentially similar positions on Dobie as they would on other nineteenth century topographical artists that they have written about. This is especially appropriate when

considering texts which use artists as examples of tendencies within the genre, rather than their exclusive subject matter.

A related problem concerns the terminology appropriate for the appraisal of the drawings. Although Dobie displayed a degree of knowledge about the English landscape tradition, his drawings are highly unlikely to have influenced any 'significant' artists. In which case it appears mildly absurd to draw parallels between the drawings of this colonial sheep farmer and any other subsequent artists. The languages of art historical discourse are nominally constructed in relation to their subject. How then are those languages to deal with artifacts that appear outside of their intended scope? In the case of Dobie, this is clearly not a radical problem because his life and work is related to that of his contemporaries. Indeed, this dissertation has it as an implicit aim to enlarge the language with which we attempt to discuss colonial visual culture in Natal. However, the temptation to view aspects of his work in the light of related tendencies outside of his cultural milieu must be treated with caution. Martin Kemp emphasises a similar methodological problem in the context of postmodern critiques of art:

We have failed, to put it at its crudest, to recognise that what a postmodern historian can potentially get out of an image may not only bear little resemblance to what went into the painting's genesis but may also stand outside the interpretive scope of viewers in the period itself. [...] we need to recognize the status of our reading-into as essentially exploitative in relation to the functional contexts within which the works were originally articulated. (Kemp 1997 : 16 - 17)

The drawings of Dobie can be categorised as nineteenth century topographical drawings. However, it is one of the intentions of this paper to suggest the ways in which this categorisation may be superficially true, but remains inadequate to account for their complexity. This categorization has the practical result that these drawings are most often housed in collections of Africana and therefore examined in that context, rather than that of art history. In this manner 'accurate' topography is opposed to the 'effects' of art. This schism follows that discussed by Simon Gikandi as existing between European aesthetic discourse and colonial events:

Since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, debates about the aesthetic, especially in

the British tradition, have been represented as metropolitan intellectual affairs concerned with the nature and judgement of beauty and explanation of artistic phenomena - and unconcerned with the turbulence associated with the colonial empire. (Gikandi 1997 : 12)

The double appellation - “topographical Africana” - removes images from the domain of a felt experience of the world, and inserts them into that of historical or geographical evidence. Mindful of Kemp’s warning about the limits of ‘reading-into’, the following chapters will seek to uncover some of the rich complexities harboured in the topographical drawing.

## **CHAPTER ONE:**

In spite of their high aesthetic quality, the watercolours of Captain Robert Garden (1821-1859) are virtually unknown outside of the realm of Africana. There is little published on either the man or his work. His biographical details are recorded in Gordon-Brown's Pictorial Africana. (1975: 163) Garden came to South Africa with the 45<sup>th</sup> Regiment and was stationed in Natal from 1848 to 1853. The following remarks are based on the holdings of the Campbell Collections in Durban. The collection of Garden's work comprise roughly fifty drawings and watercolours - as well as a typescript of the so called Garden Papers.

The foreword to the Ramblings along the Sea Coast between Port Natal and the Umzimvooboo in the Garden Papers is particularly useful as a summation of his aims:

My object in compiling the following pages is the desire to disseminate every Atom of useful knowledge concerning a country but little known. These pages not being intended for publication I have noted down my sentiments and ideas as they occurred. I have been particular in describing the several scenes I witnessed as unvarnished as I possibly could. It has been my object to paint nought but the truth. I am actuated by no other motives than the desire to promote useful knowledge so as to lead men of scientific knowledge to visit the parts I have travelled through in order that through them resources of this land may be fully developed. The sketches I have taken on the spot and are as true as my knowledge of drawing will allow me to effect. (Garden nd : foreword)

The entire passage, typifying the spirit of Enlightenment, is devoted to the notion of truth. He goes on to concede that his lack of scientific knowledge and understanding of 'the language' may compromise his epistemological ideals. However, this is the voice of instrumental reason in full cry. Whilst those that have preceded him may have strayed from the truth, it is Garden's intention to ignore the sirens of 'highly coloured descriptions' and 'anything approaching romance'. Garden was by no means alone in taking this stance. The puzzled traveller who arrives where others have preceded him with grandiloquent prosing only to find his information disproved at every turn is the worn myth of nineteenth century travel and colonisation. For instance, Garden's contemporary in South Africa, the Frenchman Adulphe Delegorgue, is vociferous in his criticism of the information supplied by Francois Le Vaillant (1753-1824). (Delegorgue 1990 : xxiv) For extensive coverage of this aspect of colonial experience, I refer the interested reader to Carter's The Road to Botany Bay and



Pratt's Imperial Eyes.

Garden's Victorian 'accomplishments' were given a wide rein in Natal. His Papers are filled with an enormous range of observations and information recorded from the testimony of his contemporaries. The subjects stretch from 'Crown Lands' to 'Caffir Modes of crossing Rivers'. Nothing was not worth recording. Such non-selective and all-embracing observation reflects the prevalence of empiricist and phenomenological methods in scientific discourse in the nineteenth century. Its implicit claim is one of objectivity: interpretations of reality moved away from generalized theories towards more subject centred approaches. The emphasis was on rendering nature as it appears, rather than making elaborate claims about its underlying essence.

Judging from his journal entries, Garden was in the habit of drawing in his spare time. Several drawings include the outspanned wagons in the foreground. It is clear that he was not in the position of the 'picturesque tourist', and his drawings were an adjunct to his military activities as a captain. However, his writing is replete with metaphors alluding to painting - as is the case in the above quotation. The suggestion is that Garden was 'framing' his observations with a pictorial mode: '...writing this which I do on the spot in order that I may describe the scenery with truth...' (Garden nd : 48) In Biggar's Berg looking E.N.E. Natal 1852 [Fig. 2] Garden includes a seated draughtsman in the foreground. Whether supposed to be a self-portrait or one of his companions, the figure naturalizes the artist in the landscape. By invoking *plein-air* reportage, Garden can claim authoritativeness for his writing and drawing.

Garden's oeuvre is dominated by landscape, but there are a number of narrative works - predominantly in pencil - which deal with memorable incidents. Their titles convey some of their drama: The Black Rhinoceros being disappointed in getting at G-H...and at horses...1852; I lose my way and have to sleep in the open air.... Garden's skill at pencil drawing is clear in A Godsend, Grantham shoots an Eland close to the Camp. [Fig. 3] The drawing is full of animated activity and incident, dramatised by the full tonal range. The light-toned eland in full flight is set off against the dark background as shape, and is reminiscent of San images of the same subject.

Given Garden's insistence upon 'truth', it seems fair to consider his landscape drawings within the tradition of topography. In Britain this tradition developed out of the mapping of estates following their enclosure in the eighteenth century. English landowners commissioned Dutch and Flemish landscapists to produce accurate renditions of their country houses and the extent of their land. (Klonk 1996 : 71) As an officer in the British army, it is highly likely that Garden would have received a degree of tuition in accurate topographical drawing for military purposes. He is thus an important precursor to the officers (Crealock, Cramer *et al.*) who drew during the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879.

Battlefield of Boers & Zulus in 1838, looking due East, Hill over the Blood River 1852 [Fig. 4] is typical of Garden's watercolours. In a certain sense, this work also typifies the topographical watercolour. The subject conforms to the expectation of being a famous spot or view, and stylistically it relies on a uniform treatment of detail. (Bermingham 1986 : 10, 98) However, the light is soft - the drawing evidently being executed in the evening after the wagons had outspanned. Topography in Garden's work attempts to stabilize the depicted scene by minimizing the visual effects of changing weather and light conditions. The effect is one of vast space. There are no trees and the place is populated, aptly, by crows and vultures. In spite of the clumsily drawn vultures, the drawing maintains a poignancy befitting a battle scene. The largeness and emptiness of the landscape paradoxically serve to emphasise it as a site of history and mythos.

True to his military training, Garden surveys the site from a hill, no doubt attempting to picture the action. The elevated vantage point has the strategically useful effect of clarifying the complex spatial relationships which lie below - much in the manner of a map. This, after all, is the reason why television crews film football matches from above.

It is also a position which encourages panoramic representations of the landscape. The higher the vantage point, the more visually dominant the horizon line becomes. In various forms, the panorama was a representational staple of Western culture: from views over cities to the vast moving panoramas of the early nineteenth century. The panorama is a hybrid of topographical drawing and the map. Dispensing with the symbols of a map and annotated

with directions and names, the panorama provides information in a visual medium.

However, its special priority is the clarification of spatial relationships. This interaction of representation and spatial relations is the subject of the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER TWO:**

I mark'd, where, on a little promontory, it stood, isolated;  
Mark'd how, to explore the vacant, vast surrounding,  
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself;  
Ever unreeling them - ever tirelessly speeding them.  
(Walt Whitman, "Leaves of Grass", cited in Novak 1995 : 154)

This chapter has as its primary subject the South African Journal of John Shedden Dobie (1819-1903). It is the aim of this chapter to discuss Dobie's drawings as they relate to navigation and cartography.

The original manuscript consists of roughly 550 pages of handwritten text interspersed by a considerable number of pencil drawings. An edited version of this manuscript was published by the Van Riebeeck Society in Cape Town in 1945. In the preface the editor, A. F. Hattersley (1945: xii), commented on the drawings as being of 'considerable charm', but 'too delicate for reproduction'. A set of bland copies was substituted as equal to the printing technology of the time. A selection of twenty-one of the original drawings was published as a calendar in 1996. (Guy 1996)

The Journal was transcribed by Dobie from his five original notebooks which served as highly portable combinations of sketchbook and diary. In order that the drawings could be displayed in conjunction with the rewritten diary entries, these notebooks had to be destroyed.

Each had in turn been for a considerable time my daily companion - sharer in my joys and sorrows - and the sacrifice was made not without feelings of remorse. Their compact form gave them a great advantage over the more cumbrous Sketch block previously in use which had proved very unproductive, being never there when wanted. Along with my Rifle, powder flask, bullet patch box and compass, small bags for collecting seeds, pencils, stump and india rubber, the Note Book had its corner in my Hunting Wallet, and was always ready at a moment's notice. (Dobie 1880 : Dedication)

The bulk of the drawings which are the subject of this inquiry relate to Dobie's three treks, from 1862 to 1864, between Natal and Queenstown in the Eastern Province. However, the few drawings which he produced within the bounds of surveyed and colonised Natal make for instructive comparisons with the 'trek' drawings.

Dobie was born in Beith, Scotland. His love of horses and open-air life prompted him to abandon his studies in law in favour of a course in veterinary science. The details of his worldwide travels are contained in Hattersley's introduction to the Journal. In summary: after a failed sheep farming venture in Australia he returned to Scotland; from there, on to the gold diggings in California and Australia. These years of travel were characterised by Dobie's proclivity for adventure and the energetic pursuit of opportunities which presented themselves to him. His aptitude for animal husbandry led him to another attempt at pastoralism in the antipodes, but this time on a cattle station in Victoria, Australia. However, the discovery of gold in the area and increasing demand for agricultural land forced the leasehold pastoralists off the land which they could neither afford to lease nor buy. Rather than head for Queensland, New South Wales or New Zealand, as many of his fellows did, Dobie chose Natal. He disembarked from the *Sea Nymph* at Port Natal in August 1862.

Dobie's intention upon reaching Natal was to establish himself as a sheep farmer. Within a few days he had made his way to Pietermaritzburg and reestablished contact with Henry Bucknall, one of his fellow passengers on the *Sea Nymph*, and Henry's brother Fred.

They think of renting a 6,000 acre farm about twenty miles further up country ...; sheep are said to do well there. They have arranged to start with their own wagon and Kafirs, etc., through Kafirland to the Eastern Province of the Cape, where better sheep can be had for half the price at which they can be bought here. Go through Nomansland, see that unoccupied country, which may do for squatting - buy sheep in the 'Old Colony' and, if the season gets too far advanced, return on the other side of the Drakensberg ..., thereby avoiding the many rivers which have to be crossed on this side and become frequently impassable after the summer rains set in. Proposed that I make one of the party, each to have his own horse and rifle, shoot, sketch, see the country, study the manners and customs of ye peoples and speculate in sheep, if I have a mind to do so. Agreed. (Dobie 1880 : Hattersley, 14)

This was to be the first of three annual treks with similar aims. Dobie spent the intervening time attempting to establish his sheep farming enterprise in the Fort Nottingham district of Natal.

Dobie's South African Journal was, in effect, one episode in an extended personal travelogue. Hattersley mentions two precedents: 'His manuscript journals entitled *Hawaii* and *Athwart the Pacific*, profusely illustrated with pencil sketches commemorate these two voyages.' (Hattersley 1945 : xv) The Journal belongs to the genre of travel writing which had enjoyed increasing popularity in Europe from the sixteenth century onwards. (Pratt 1992)

Essentially an extension of the Copernican Revolution, the 'voyages of discovery' provided the impetus for European expansion. During the Renaissance travel was systematized by governments and merchant interests. (Hale 1966 : 11) The combination of economic and political factors accompanying the rise of European capitalism proved a strong incentive for these voyages - and with them the need for navigational skills. These skills had originally been taught to the Spanish and Portugese by Arab navigators. (Hale 1966 : 11)

For three centuries European knowledge-making apparatuses had been construing the planet in above all navigational terms. These terms gave rise to two totalizing or planetary projects. One was circumnavigation, a double deed that consists of sailing around the world then writing an account of it (the term "circumnavigation" refers to either the voyage or the book) ... The second planetary project, equally dependent on ink and paper, was the mapping of the world's coastlines... (Pratt 1992 : 29)

The travelogue is thus integral to the process of exploration - a literary navigation through uncharted territory.

The diversity of experience afforded by exploration and imperial expansion were part of the ambient romanticism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Through the narratives and the accompanying illustrations, Victorian readers were able to participate vicariously (sic) in the new worlds being opened up... (Rees 1976 : 260, cited in Pickles 1978 : 151)

With the ascendancy of European imperialism in the eighteenth century, the ever increasing numbers of Europeans exploring and colonising the globe, and a growing market for print publications, travel writing became extremely popular. The genre embraced a wide range of publications: the official reports of expeditions, advertisements, log books, sensationalist tales, novels, poetry, diaries, scientific writings - virtually the entire gamut of the printed word. However, it was the travel journal itself which emerged as the clearest embodiment of

the travellers' cultural meaning. Parallel to this veritable geyser of words there emerged a tradition of illustration - often as an integral part of these publications. Again the range of possibilities was immense. At the upper end of the market were the folio editions of prints - hand printed and coloured pictorial essays on the wonders of the colonies (George French Angas, Samuel Daniell and Cornwallis Harris becoming the most popular practitioners in Southern Africa.) The development of lithography in the early nineteenth century also made possible the mass production of illustrated books.

After the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) had opened up the Continent to the Grand Tour, English taste in landscape had been governed by the examples of Claude Lorraine and Salvator Rosa. The enthusiasm for the kind of landscape depicted in their paintings had also contributed to the practice among Englishmen of travelling for the purpose of viewing natural scenery. (Coetzee 1989 : 39)

Given these conditions, it is hardly surprising that the travelogue - sometimes illustrated - became so popular with the colonisers of Natal in the nineteenth century. Drawing was considered as an "accomplishment" suitable for cultivated colonials. In nineteenth century Natal this invariably involved the "taking" of sketches of picturesque features of the landscape. The choice of these features was often restricted to a few stock scenes: Durban from the Berea, the Umgeni (or Howick) Falls, and the Kranzkip possibly being the three most popular. The watercolours of General George Hamilton Gordon (housed in the State Archives Depot, Pietermaritzburg) are a particularly good example in that they record visits to picturesque sites in Natal with numerous drawings of the same landscape features. The Kranzkip features prominently in this regard.

Dobie's own decision to reorganise his Journal so that the drawings could be displayed in conjunction with the diary entries suggests the close links between text and image in his journal. For this reason the following descriptions and analysis of the drawings are reliant upon the text that accompanies them.

The drawings are in pencil and range in size from about 170mm by 100mm, to 70mm by 30mm. However, their smallness does not preclude the wealth of detail which they are able

to communicate. They range from pure line drawings to tonally articulated compositions. Occasionally two drawings are joined so as to produce a panoramic composition.

The majority of the drawings are of the landscape - sometimes with the inclusion of indigenous animal species and people. However, these figures are generally added to the landscape rather than constituting the main subject matter in themselves. Within the European tradition of landscape, these figures or animals are best described as staffage - their scale and significance are subordinate to the landscape *per se*. In the case of Dobie these narrative details are derived from observation and then inserted into the composition: 'Saw a mob of Hartebeest after crossing river so that the embellishment of man & beasts is not so wide of the truth.' (Dobie 1880 : 339) [Fig. 5] Depictions of the outspanned camp are usually restricted to grazing horses and oxen - sometimes the wagon is included. Other drawings feature mounted hunters giving chase to game - or herds of wildebeest stampeding. [Fig. 6] Their small scale precludes anatomical correctness, but the animals are usually identifiable in spite of this - an indication of not inconsiderable draughting powers. There are a number of drawings which feature the inspanned wagon in the middle distance. [Fig. 7] Drawings in which the landscape does not appear are rare - the most notable examples being a group portrait of the black labourers that accompanied the wagon in 1863 (Dobie 1880 : 306), a small study of a hartebeest skull (Dobie 1880 : 340) and the portrait of 'Lachan.' (Dobie 1880 : 283)

The drawings are generally of a high standard. The line work is supple and varied without the sacrifice of accuracy. The marks react to changing subjects as well as articulating spatial relationships through atmospheric perspective. Dobie also demonstrates considerable skill in depicting the play of light across the landscape. [Fig. 11]

It is clear from the many comments that Dobie makes about his own drawings that he followed a fairly set *modus operandi*. The first step was evidently the selection of the subject matter. This point will be elaborated later. The outline of the principal hills is drawn in, followed by the details of vegetation, staffage and distribution of light. This pattern of drawing roughly corresponds to the distinction in eighteenth and nineteenth century British art between 'topography' and 'art'. Crudely put: 'topography' was associated with the accurate delineation of the landscape, whilst 'art' was professed to be concerned with 'effect'.



Ultimately it is an extension of the old squabble between the *Rubenists* and the *Poussinists*. This distinction is still adhered to in different forms and resurfaces as the debate over whether images such as Dobie's ought to be classified as 'Africana' or 'art'. At this point, suffice it to say that central to this debate are questions of accuracy and truth.

Several more points need to be noted with regard to Dobie's drawings. Almost without exception the horizon line is included in the composition. Typically, it allows for between a quarter and a half of the composition to be taken up by the sky. Although Dobie mentions his admiration for the 'skies and water' of Turner (Dobie 1880 : Hattersley, 145), the atmospherics in his drawings remain, apart from a few notable exceptions, firmly above the horizon line. His efforts are often frustrated by the inclement weather - his most persistent complaint that the clouds have descended upon the mountains and obscured their outline.

Dobie makes numerous references to the picturesque:

The only picturesque feature being the Mountain range & that does not include the prettiest part of it. Evening or morning sunlight on the Mountain gives it its chief charm. Without this it is a great wall-sided affair. The Heads of Umtata tableland are more picturesquely broken by valleys & has the adornment of Bush which this wants. The river only shows some serpentine twists like a ribbon thrown carelessly down! (Dobie 1880 : 268) [Fig. 11]

Pretty country again becoming however more hilly & abrupt and consequently more picturesque... (Dobie 1880 : 39)

For Dobie the picturesque mode requires that the landscapes be 'broken', 'abrupt', and adorned with bush. He also recognises the picturesque convention of the serpentine line that leads the eye into the landscape. J. M. Coetzee discusses the problem of the picturesque in colonial landscapes as the resistance of the intractable South African landscape to the ordered, composed and reconstituted picturesque landscape. (Coetzee 1989 : 36-62) However there is very little evidence in Dobie's drawings of the use of Claudian *coulisses*.

Rather than struggling with the conventional picturesque, it is as if these drawings are divided into three distinct zones: sky, hills, and expansive foreground. The sky does service as the 'chief organ of sentiment' whilst the hills or distant mountains are carefully delineated and then

subjected to the effects of light. Although often populated with figures or animals, the foreground remains a compositional problem for Dobie.

That deficient foreground too often spoils a view - fine receding valleys awaiting - too much cross purposes. Frequently in a sketch what would be taken for a valley is on the contrary a view along a higher level and across a succession of valleys. (Dobie 1880 : 291)

The 'effect' which most captivates Dobie is the light as it falls upon the landscape:

The City [Dobie's name for the Swiman in the Drakensberg (Guy 1997 : 6)] only shows in part after the sun has attained a certain height - it was very fine in the early morning & remarkably like ruins. [Fig. 8] The light on the two principal features (the Castle & Cathedral) was wanting in effect & continually shifting. With the afternoon's sun they [would] both be beautifully brought out in lines & buttresses. It would however be a much more tedious affair to do them justice - or even to make a passable resemblance. (Dobie 1880 : 286)

Dobie's frustration with the clouds which inevitably descended upon the Drakensberg and obscured their outline is indicative of topographical concerns in other colonies. The New Zealand Colonisation Company was formed in 1838 and was responsible for the settlement of over 8000 colonists in that territory. 'As part of the Company's staffing, artist-surveyors were included among the emigrants.' (Docking 1971 :30) These artists (Heaphy, Smith, Brees, Ashworth, Merrett and Buchanan) are noted for the visual clarity of their work.

...the style of painting used by the surveyor-artists in New Zealand was due not so much to their response to the transparent light of New Zealand, but arose out of a need to produce clear factual records of the areas being explored and surveyed for settlement purposes.

As the navigator-seamen of the eighteenth century were trained to sketch explicit coastal profiles which ignored weather conditions in order that these drawings could be more effectively used in association with marine charts; so the surveyor-artists of the nineteenth century produced numerous sharply-defined watercolours and wash-drawings which were of practical value, because of their clarity, when studied alongside maps of land-surveys of the same regions. (Docking 1971 : 36)

The week prior to the departure of the first trek to Queenstown (1862) had seen Dobie busy with preparations for the trip into Nomansland. On the 16<sup>th</sup> September he comments: 'Had

some paste made, and stretched map on calico.’ A small map dated 1865 is preserved in the collection of the State Archives Depot, Pietermaritzburg (M1/63). [Fig. 9] Its date and the fact that it is mounted on cloth suggest that the map that Dobie had in his possession was probably not unlike this example. The information it offers is schematic: the rivers are named and the Drakensberg and Ingeli Mountains are noted. Hancock’s Drift features on what looks to be a wagon route that terminates at Pietermaritzburg. The general relief of the country is schematised in relation to the rivers and their tributaries. Given the rugged nature of the country and the difficulty in fording the larger rivers with a wagon, this map provides scant information to the potential traveller. The reference to maps throws open a whole field of inquiry.

Crucial to the development of British colonies was the accurate surveying of the land. Consequently, the post of Surveyor-General was the first official professional appointment in the colonial administration of 1845. (Merrett 1979 : 30) The post was first filled by William Stanger. In general terms, his duty was to carry out the ‘...measurement and appropriation of lands...’ (Montague in letter to Stanger, 1845, cited in Merrett 1979 : 30) For such a brief to be completed required three kinds of survey: geodetic, topographical and cadastral. In basic terms: a geodetic survey entails the establishment of a network of beacons whose positions are accurately known; the topographical survey aims to record the elevation, relief and spatial extension of the entire landscape; and a cadastral survey entails the surveying, mapping and registration of property boundaries.

There were a number of reasons why this brief proved to be problematic for Stanger and his successors. These are enumerated in Merrett’s paper on Stanger (Natalia 1979 : pp30-35) They include: the physical difficulties imposed by the rough landscape; financial stringency; a lack of proper instruments; problems of official policy and staff; and disputes arising from previous, inaccurate, maps. The time pressures imposed by the rapid colonisation of the region resulted in the Surveyor-General’s department’s concentration on the cadastral survey (which included the survey of the towns), at the expense of a proper topographical survey.

Beyond the southern border of the colony lay the territories variously known as Nomansland,

Pondoland and Kaffraria - although this nomenclature was by no means stable nor necessarily consistent. Bounded on the south by the eastern reaches of the Cape Colony, this region was unsurveyed.

The early maps have a number of features in common. Most noticeable is the almost complete lack of detail for the Drakensberg and Natal south of the Umkomaas River. (Merrett 1979 : vii)

The reasons for the cartographic neglect of southern Natal in particular can be attributed - over and above the survey problems outlined above - to political and economic factors. The region referred to as Nomansland was intended as a political buffer zone between Kaffraria and Natal. Although there existed extensive forests in the region (those of Ingeli being the best example) the land's economic potential was uncertain and the surveyors' resources were stretched by the demand for their services elsewhere. This dearth of accurate cartographic detail contributed in turn to the slow pace of economic development in the region. Contemporary maps attempted to fix the positions of the major rivers and mountains, but at best this information was vague.

By the time that Dr. P. C. Sutherland (whom, incidentally, Dobie met on his return trek of 1864) had succeeded Stanger as Surveyor General in 1855 the same problems were still evident. However, recorded topographical knowledge was expanding slowly. J. Alfred Watt's map of 1855 includes cadastral surveys as far south as the Umkomazi River. Watt's map was to set the standard until Captain Grantham's map - surveyed in 1861, but only published in 1863. It shows as unsurveyed much of the upper reaches between the Umkomazi and Umzimkulu rivers - territory that Dobie traversed.

The implications of this state of cartographic affairs for colonists like Dobie were serious. However, it was not as if the territory south of the Umkomazi river was unexplored. Captain Allan F. Gardiner had crossed the 'Umcamas', not far from its' intersection with the 30<sup>th</sup> parallel, on September 28<sup>th</sup> 1835. He proceeded roughly north-east into the present day district of Underberg, on to the source of the 'Umzimvoobu' and back to the coast in a south-easterly direction. Gardiner was attempting to find a pass through the Drakensberg range, and thereby open a route to the Cape Colony which would avoid the Frontier war being

waged at the time. According to Pickles, Gardiner: 'Projected most clearly the romantic view and his interpretation of the mountain landscape was conventionally picturesque; he also described many of his experiences associated with the 'colonial-romantic' landscape, particularly those of solitude and wilderness.' (Pickles 1978 : 198) His Narrative of a Journey to the Zoolu Country in South Africa was published the following year and included two maps detailing his travels in the region. Gardiner expressed his own difficulties:

...deceived as we had been by every previous account of this country (having encountered nothing but steep mountains where open plains were reported, and actually laid down on maps)... (Gardiner 1836 : 347)

Gardiner reports on the shortcomings of his navigational tools: a pocket compass and two sextants, and admits that '...my computed reckoning, under such circumstances, is not likely to be very correct.' (Gardiner 1836 : 355) He mentions being 'conducted by an elephant path' (Gardiner 1836 : 359) in order to pass through the thick coastal bush, but also of being confused by Hippopotami paths. (Gardiner 1836 : pp.15-16) In spite of his own dislocation, the description he offers of guides is scathing:

It has been a lesson to me ever since never to take the advice of a native - their descriptions of localities are always vague - they cannot calculate distances, and they are so little acquainted with the average speed of horses, which they invariably exaggerate, that nine times out of ten they will most innocently and undesignedly mislead the traveller who reposes the least confidence in their information. (Gardiner 1836 : pp.18-19)

The colonial discourse is a one-sided affair. The objectives and means of the European constitute the terms of reference by which guides are 'measured'.

Gardiner's map follows the pre-Stanger displacement of the Drakensberg too far to the east, rendering Victoria - as Natal was then called - smaller than it really was. (Merrett 1979 : vii) Topographical relief is restricted to a schematic depiction of the Quathlamba (or Drakensberg) Mountains. The major rivers are indicated - with dotted lines showing their presumed course where they remained unsurveyed. The map relies on annotations rather than symbols to describe the landscape: 'Fine Pasture Country Open without Trees'; 'Rugged Precipices'; 'Country abounding with Gneu'.

Gardiners' route is marked by a series of triangular beacons; each dated and joined to the next with straight lines. The route is drawn in relation to land marks - some of which are named: 'Wyngart's Ford'; 'Agate Vale'; 'Giant's Cup'; 'Giant's Castle'. The Narrative is illustrated with lithographs, drawn from Gardiner's field sketches, of a number of these named features. As a British officer it is likely that he was compelled to learn field sketching in order to gain 'an eye for the country' (Bradlow and Bradlow 1984) The titles of the drawings are noteworthy: [Fig. 10]

Giant's Castle W.  $\frac{1}{2}$ N. by compa[s]s, from a hill near the Bivouac, Oct. 10<sup>th</sup>  
Outline of Mountains about Cavern Glen Oct. 22<sup>nd</sup> (Gardiner 1836 : opp. 338)

Mountains about Cavern Glen. Oct. 23<sup>rd</sup>  
Giant's Castle N.E. the Giant's Cup, at the same time bearing E.-b.N.  $\frac{1}{2}$ N. by  
compa[s]s  
Appearance of part of the Quathlamba Range, as seen from the heights just  
beyond Wyngart's Ford (Gardiner 1836 : opp. 448)

The drawings and titles of 'Giant's Castle' issue a navigational directive: on *this* date from *this* position Giant's Castle looks like *this*. The map provides information which fixes the position of Gardiner's bivouac on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October. Text, image and map conspire to define a precise spatial relationship. Cavern Glen Mountain is also fixed in a similar matrix: the bird symbols and key identify the formation. The relationship between this landmark and the other mountains which dominate the composition serve to fix a unique point that centres on the one-eyed Cartesian observer.

In the drawings the emphasis is on the outline of the features described. The panoramic view of the 'Quathlamba Range' is presented as a silhouette and all other detail is omitted. Again, compass bearings of the features serve to locate the observer. Such a procedure had its colonial counterparts. Lieutenant Beckworth of the Gunnison Pacific Railroad Survey of 1853 reported of his topographer:

...with snow-capped peaks rising just on the verge of the horizon, and frequently remaining in sight for days, serving as points of reference, and all of which were carefully traced and noted for the delineation of the country. (Beckworth cited

in Novak 1995 : 142)

Although Gardiner's Narrative was a well known publication in Natal, that Dobie may have seen it must remain pure conjecture. However, Dobie was similarly captivated by 'Giant's Castle', which he called 'The Castle'.

In passing, it is perhaps worth mentioning the paintings of August Hammar (1856-1931). Appointed to the post of Government Surveyor to the Colony of Natal in 1890, Hammar's landscape paintings were deeply influenced by the empirical concerns of his profession. (Leigh and Hillebrand 1985 : 3-5) Incidental to Dobie's Scottish origins is a notable eighteenth century precedent for the alliance of landscape drawing and the topographical survey: Paul Sandby (1731-1809)

Following the final defeat of the Stuart pretender at the battle of Culloden in 1746, the Scottish Highlands were not only scourged of Jacobites; they were also colonised by political arithmeticians from Westminster and Edinburgh. So that in post-Culloden Scotland the conquest of the mountains was not so much a figure of speech as a military fact. The brothers Sandby exemplified this peculiar alliance between drawing and subjugation. Thomas, the elder brother, was attached to the camp of the "Butcher" of the Jacobites, the duke of Cumberland, throughout his bloody campaign in the Highlands, and through the duke's influence won an appointment in the Ordinance Office in London, drafting maps and surveys of the conquered territory. He in turn found a place for his younger brother, Paul, who, following a spell in the London office was sent to Scotland in 1747...

...Sandby penetrated the remoter fastnesses of Argyll, Moray, and Inverness, sketching for his own pleasure while wielding the theodolite for the king. (Schama 1995 : 466. Sandby is also discussed in Klonk 1996 : 71)

Here is a conception of maps, subscribed to by J. B. Harley and others, as 'pre-eminently a language of power, not of protest' (Harley in Cosgrove and Daniels 1988 : 301) As a colonial import to Southern Africa, the map is a privileged mode of communication reserved for use by colonists. Maps anticipate occupation by the coloniser, in part by fostering the notion of socially empty space. Such 'knowledge was thus a form of power, a way of presenting one's own values in the guise of scientific disinterestedness'. (Foucault cited by Harley in Cosgrove and Daniels 1988 : 279)

In the case of Natal the lack of accurate maps proved to be a crucial factor in virtually all of the nineteenth century military episodes. (Merrett 1979 : vii) The development of trade routes - especially for the 'over-Berg' trade - required the building of roads - themselves dependent on topographical surveys. Settlement by white colonists was dependent upon cadastral surveys.

However, the superior strategic knowledge of the landscape displayed by non-cartographic societies such as the Khoisan, Hlubi and Zulu indicate that the drawn map was not a necessary pre-requisite for 'useful' topographical knowledge. Local navigation for the Zulu depended upon named beacons and territories. Animal paths were used extensively: 'Topographers have noticed the surprising skill with which some animals, notably elephants, follow gradients so well chosen that they could scarcely be improved upon by surveyors.' (Rosenthal 1970 : 86) In discussing Zulu military tactics and the system of recruiting based upon age, Knight notes that 'because the warriors came from all parts of the kingdom, it is highly likely that whenever it was operating on its own soil, there were always men present who knew a particular locale intimately.' (Knight 1995 : 179) Long distance travel remained dependent upon political structures. The first requirement was to report to the chief or king ruling that territory. If the audience was a success, the traveller would be supplied with the requisite guides who would escort one to the boundaries of the next territory. (Interview with Balcombe, 1997) I refer the interested reader to Waterman's Animal Navigation for a brief overview of human non-cartographic navigation.

Shifts and Expedients of Camp Life, Travel and Exploration by W. B. Lord and Thomas Baines was published serially from 1868 to 1871, and in book form in 1876. A survival manual for travellers, explorers and settlers, it provides a comprehensive account of virtually every aspect of nineteenth century colonial travel. Its sagacious chapters include: 'Waggons and Other Wheeled Vehicles'; 'Extempore Bridges and Makeshifts for Crossing Rivers and Ravines'; and 'Bush Veterinary Surgery and Medicine'. Chapters XIX and XX are 'On Sketching and Painting Under the Ordinary Difficulties of Travel' and 'The Estimation of



Distances and Hints on Field Observing', respectively.

Chapter XX is a treatise on navigation for explorers. Baines was considered to be an important contributor to nineteenth century cartography in Southern Africa. (Bradlow 1984 : 79) This chapter in his book provides directions for the use of sextants, plane tables, clinometers, trocheameters - and all manner of other 'shifts' and 'expedients', including a section 'On Obtaining Geographical Information from Natives or Frontier Colonists'. The emphasis is on 'extemporised' instruments for navigation through unsurveyed territory. The previous chapter (XIX) on sketching and painting is also concerned with surveillance of the landscape:

It conduces very greatly to correctness if the bearings of distant hills are taken by compass and noted in pencil on the upper margin of the sketch, while nearer features are similarly noted at the bottom - if the estimated distance in miles is added, this enhances greatly the value of the sketch, as it becomes then a geographical record, in addition to its merit as a work of art. (Lord & Baines 1876 : 629)

The authors also encourage the artist to include notes as to the nature of the soil, foliage, water, clouds and the direction of rivers. This was by no means a new practice. Constable's sketches are famous for their empirical notes of this kind. However, within the context of unsurveyed colonial territory they indicate a mode of perception common to topography and navigation.

With regard to painting, the authors note that in painting distant hills 'the tone of colour proper to their respective distances must be preserved'. (Lord & Baines 1876 : 632) In 1862 we find Dobie exercising this same perceptual mode:

Saw the Conical Hill & Bluff of Umtata table-land today - at first could not believe it to be the same - but we must make it much longer by the road than the crow flies - *40 miles appeared to be its distance from its colour...* (Dobie 1880 : 101; italics mine)

The only navigational tool, apart from a map, that Dobie mentions whilst travelling is a compass. Its' short-comings are exposed on December the 2<sup>nd</sup> during the first trek when the party 'resolved to mount a high range [...] in order to spy out the land':

There some one had been before us and set up an Ebenezer! [cairn or heap of stones to mark a spot (Hattersley 1945 : footnote 37)]

After an extended description of the panorama noting the bearings of the main topographical features, he is checked:

There is great local attraction in these stones here when set upon the top of the pile the compass needle was drawn down to the card, and pointed anyway - obliged to take it in my hand & stand back. Our course appears to be N.E. by E. [...] Found on further observation that our compasses varied very much on different sides of the hill, so as to make any particular bearing, rather, if not quite uncertain. (Dobie 1880 : 110)

The same journal entry provides a clue as to how it was possible to navigate a route with tools as fickle as compasses and as vague as maps. Whilst surveying the panorama Dobie notes a range which he calls 'the Saw-teeth' as 'represented in the sketch of the 30<sup>th</sup>...' Three days later, on the 5<sup>th</sup>: 'The N.E. point for which we have been steering since being on Mt. Ebenezer is now a good deal closer.' (Dobie 1880 : 114)

A similar series of observations intersperses the text in November of 1863:

[Figs. 11 to 24 correspond to the text quoted below.]

Mon. 16.

Bearings from our camp abt. centre of Round Head - Left hand point of Zion, S.W. by S. Cannon S.W. by W. - centre table of Ingano, S. by E. - Point of Gap S.S.E. - D. Bihi S.E. by S. - Centre of table S.E. by E. - Highest sharp point of Berg N.W.  $\frac{1}{2}$  N. *of which took this note.*

Tue. 17.

...our course E.N.E. - The Berg shows right round on left hand with no high ground intervening - S.W.C. bearing N. shows fine rugged points of his own for some distance on either side - Two conical hills one [...] cut away, spurs of Bihi - point of Cannon range S.W. $\frac{1}{2}$ W. Table part of Berg before noted W.N.W.  $\frac{1}{2}$ N.

Round-Head bearing S.W. by W.

Wed. 18.

Took this note of the Berg & Pass, which shows in two places like double lines, over the N.W. by W $\frac{1}{2}$ W point in sketch.

...our course towards tail of Berg. [Fig. 11]

Thu. 19.

...did this note of the pretty part of Berg which I did not include in yesterday's sketch [...] the mountain lying at abt. N.E. [...] Wheeled about and took the other note of the line of road we have to travel today. S.E. by E over flats towards a low gap with a double crowned hill in centre distance. At first took this to be S.W.C. but it turns out to be Nehemiah's hill...

Found waggon camped near that first point in note which was a good distance off tho' it didn't look it. Some Griquas there who certified that Kok's Pass did come down near source of Little Kiniha & that the Avenues seen were the roads made by Griquas. They say we will make it to Umzinvubo tonight, across which there is only one Drift.

...those two conical hills seen & steered for on Tuesday morning.

Fri. 20.

...rode up to flat hill[,] seen in yesterday morning's note[,] which is close to our last camp and took a sketch of Valley of Umzinvubo [Fig. 12] [...] Could not see round a corner so shifted my position to take this note [...] of a hill bearing E. by S. as it is a good "Land Mark"

Sat. 21.

...On with the sheep over the points of low hills and from a sandstone ledge (*which bore E.½N. From the flat topped cone in the left hand corner of yesterday's sketch*) had a wide extended view of the country ahead.

Dismounted and made this sketch, and noted the bearings of its conspicuous points. [Fig. 13]

...No sign of river yet & can only hazard a guess at it's course.) On in an easterly direction up valley (or down[;] without running water, hard to tell!) Towards that conical hill in left-hand corner of yesterday's sketch. [Fig. 12] [...] Camped near some water holes before reaching the hill - Our course in afternoon to be E.N.E. towards. A hill ½ a point more to North which Fred takes to be Ebenezer of last year & and of which this is a note.

Sun. 22.

...On, up a long sloping range to left of hill last sketched abt. E.N.E. from night's camp & E. by N. from starting point yesterday.

...a good view all round - and what must be the valley of Umzinvubo close to, coming out from Sawteeth range between long sandstone spurs. One branch turning the other way towards Natal part of Berg. Apparently runs down under the distant range in sketch of valley (20<sup>th</sup>) [Fig. 12] - Bearings S.W.C., N.W. by W. Sandstone ridges where sketch of yesterday morning taken W.½S. First of Sawteeth, N.½W. Umzinculo peak of Berg N.E.3/4N. "Land-mark", S.E. by E. (barely E) This note [Fig. 14] shows the distant peak of Berg & the

peculiar sharp pointed peak ending a spur, in the centre. The range to right being one noted yesterday... [Fig. 15]

Mon. 23.

...Took this note of the lay of flat country looking back towds. Kiniha. [Fig. 16]

...Point of table range in left of sketch of 21<sup>st</sup> now bears E.½S. [Fig. 13] In that sketch, Mt. Ebenezer is scarcely discernable it lies so much under the loom of that table range - we have been looking out for it for the last two or three days and wondered where it could have got to - (made it a little plainer). It now bears E. by S. - "Land-mark" bears S.S.E. & turns out to be the pointed hill at head of Wildebeest Flat. Our flat travelling ground ahead lies E. by N. (see note) [Fig. 17]

...On again heading for that low gap and got as far as the grand Double Trap-dyke Avenue *noted last year*. Rode to a favourable position & did these two rapid sketches of it. [Figs. 18 and 19]

...The Saw Teeth here shows again & our old friends the Castle and Cathedral are in sight.

Tue. 24.

...Bearings - Ebenezer, S.E. Point of Eland range, E.S.E. Middle peak of Sandstone Spur, N.½W. - Our route, E. by N. [Figs. 20 and 21]

Wed. 25.

...Rode with Fred to the right & found he was right about our night camp and Eland chase of last year. The camp was under Ebenezer...  
Bearings from camp...

Thu. 26.

[Fig. 22]

Sat. 28.

[Fig. 23]

...Resumed my pencil and took this sketch of our future course... [Fig. 24]

Several points about this remarkable sequence of recorded bearings and drawings need to be made. The reader having borne with the excessive length of the above quotation, perhaps it is worth noting the extent to which the spatial references overlap. Landmarks slowly come into use and then disappear; hills are noted from afar, reached, climbed, bearings taken; another drawing completed, another hill chosen. There is an obvious emphasis on the route of the wagon and the conspicuous landmarks for which they were steering. The named rivers provide an idea of their progress through the landscape as it would have appeared to them on

whatever map they had in their possession. The meeting with the Griquas illustrates the extent to which they were able to glean information from other people in the area. The naming of the landscape by Dobie will be discussed in Chapter Three.

Perhaps most important is the constant cross-referencing between drawings, navigational observations and memories of the previous year's trek. The necessity for this cross-referencing is recorded on the 19<sup>th</sup> when Dobie is deceived as to the distance of a hill. Human stereoscopic vision is limited in its ability accurately to determine long distances through triangulation - hence Dobie's use of atmospheric perspective to gauge distance in an earlier episode.

The navigational requirements for the steering of a wagon are by no means technically complicated from the point of view of a land surveyor or ship's captain. The navigator is required, at the gentle pace of a wagon, to determine the shortest and most practicable route to a fixed destination. The chief difficulty is the negotiation of obstacles such as marshes, rivers and steep slopes.

Dobie's journal bears witness to a constant succession of these obstacles. His references backward and forward in time and space suggest how he was able to build up a network of landmarks and reference points. Most telling are the remarks which directly link his observations with previous drawings - themselves fixed by a set of recorded bearings. The process results not in the one-dimensional line of a wagon route, but a complex knowledge of the landscape which 'revealed a palimpsest of the explorers' experience, a criss-cross of routes gradually thickening and congealing' (Carter 1987 : 23) In a sense, this process goes beyond the linearity of a single map because of the layering of route and memory, although it does bear resemblance to the larger cartographic project in nineteenth century Natal whereby 'apparently new maps rely upon the content and form of their predecessors'. (Merrett 1979 : xi)

The process elucidated above is analogous to the concept of the songlines:

The Australian aborigines use linear piloting to travel over their ancestral paths in the interior of the continent. Despite being nomadic hunter-gatherers, these people range widely by following ancient dream tracks or songlines that are

central to their cultural heritage and even, they believe, to their individual identity and honor. The Native navigator depends on piloting through a sequence of hills, ravines, hummocks, rocks, and other landmarks. The perceived importance and sacredness of these places comes from their being considered as the spirit dwellings of mythical god-animals such as the rainbow snake, the crocodile, the sea eagle, and the spiny anteater. [...] As has been suggested for some animal navigation, path following by the aborigines unfolds like a series of snapshots or video scenes known to the traveller. These have been learned and later recalled en route with the aid of heroically long traditional songs whose couplets trace the sequence of directions and landmarks for a given songline. (Waterman 1989 : 70-71)

In discussing Australian Aboriginal songlines in relation to the practices of colonial exploration, Geoff King remarks that:

A narrative is thus created that renders the environment meaningful, negotiable and habitable. These meanings might be less exploitative than those imposed later by colonial explorers, but the difference is relative. In neither case is the meaning either inherent or objectively given. The landscape is thus a palimpsest of different meanings. (King 1996 : 73)

It is this essential aspect of landscape - its creation by and support of cultural cartographies - to which the following chapters are addressed.

### **CHAPTER THREE:**

Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind.  
Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock.  
(Schama 1995 : 6-7)

The preceding chapter sought to establish an explicit link between Dobie's drawing and navigation. This section will parallel those concerns by examining how the experience of landscape is culturally mediated. The aim of this chapter is to show why the drawings were not merely intelligence gaining exercises for colonisation - that their meaning is richer and full of human experience of the world.

A wagon journey encourages a broad perception of the landscape. Not only is the relief of the landscape important, but the geology, season, flora and inhabitants are all crucial factors to be taken account of to ensure the safe passage of the wagon through difficult terrain and rivers. The livestock are of special importance to the colonial traveller: not only do they require grazing but must also be protected from fire, poisonous plants, predatory animals and thieves.

This kind of knowledge is an extension of what Pratt refers to as Europe's third totalizing or planetary project, namely the systematization of nature. (The others being circumnavigation and the mapping of the world's coastlines.) Based on Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae* (1735), this project had its origins in the eighteenth century. Its fulfilment required the categorizing and mapping of all the plant species of the world. What distinguishes this project from the preceding ones is its attempt to provide a map, organised in terms of plant species, of the interior of the world's continents. Dobie's journal provides plenty of evidence that he was also engaged in this project, albeit as an amateur, through the collection of indigenous plant seeds. Whilst it is questionable whether Dobie's botanical efforts meaningfully contributed towards this project, it does suggest the production of order out of the colonial chaos.

As a mid-nineteenth century naturalist in Southern Africa, Adulphe Delegorgue provides a fascinating account of his own biological mapping of unsurveyed territory:

Further to my mentioning the long-tailed shrike, (*Melanoleucus*) I find it useful to associate the places which I visited with certain species which are still to be found there today; they are reliable indicators that will serve those who come after me - more constant and easier to remember than the names of mountains and rivers which disappear with the local population in the wake of some disastrous war. The traveller who explores new lands should, or so it seems to me, always proceed in this way; the route which he followed will be more recognisable to those who come after, and the distance which he travelled will not be contested. Personally I never neglected this attention. As proof of the latitudes which I reached, I collected specimens indigenous to the area. I preserved them when I judged it to be necessary. I describe them and, with proof of this kind, I do not fear the expressions of doubt which have been richly deserved by more than one traveller: 'But did the gentleman really make the journey he has described?' - a remark which is quite in order these days when one knows of famous travellers who have written about things they have seen only in their dreams. (Delegorgue 1997 : 25)

Delegorgue's *Voyage dans L'Afrique Australe* (originally published in 1847) also provides a "Hunting Map showing the places inhabited by the various species of animals." (Delegorgue 1997 : 331) Clearly, this mapping process presupposes future colonial conquest. Territorial expansion is justified by Delegorgue's claims to truth and scientific veracity.

'The power to narrate, or to keep other forms of mapping at bay, is a key element in the ability to claim a territory,' (King 1996 : 139) which largely explains why Dobie is incapable of entertaining any alternative understanding or cultural 'mapping' of plants:

Found that grinning fool Skunguin [a sheep herder employed by Bucknall] putting some more old bones & trash into a small bag & putting them inside the waggon. Could not resist the first opportunity of emptying it of its contents - old bones, shells, sticks & roots. He pretends to be studying the art of becoming Doctor! Which interpreted means Imposter! [...] as soon as he came into dinner he had a look for his bag & on discovering the loss came up to me in a very excited state & yabbering what I could not understand. I was told afterwards that he used language which deserved the whip across his back. Had he been my Kafir he [would] have got that for his impudence in putting such stinking trumpery into the waggon. Picked up a peculiar *Ixia* in the bog. (Dobie 1880 : 112 - 113)

The irony of the juxtaposition of Skunguin's botanical inquiries with Dobie's own seems lost on the author. His own interests in plants is justified, implicitly throughout the text, as scientific and ordered, and therefore superior to indigenous practice. Perceived threats to that world



view produce a racist and violent response. Similar sentiments find expression in his dismissal of San paintings:

These paintings are what Fred is in the habit of sploring about as showing wonderful talent, he having seen them on the Berg! Such things as children 3 or 4 years old might daub! (Dobie cited in Guy 1996 : unpaginated)

Scientific ‘mapping’ of the landscape is also evident in Dobie’s geological observations and drawings of geological phenomena. Charlotte Klonk argues that “...it was [...] the fieldwork approach to geology after the turn of the [eighteenth] century which most fundamentally affected the representation (and, ultimately, the perception) of nature.” (Klonk 1996 : 78) As a result, early eighteenth century geological practice shifted away from *a priori* theorising towards the accumulation of raw data. Again we find Dobie, the gentleman-amateur, attempting to read the environment in terms of observable phenomena.

Two of Dobie’s most striking drawings concentrate on the ‘grand Double Trap-dyke Avenue’ (Dobie 1880 : 277), another feature remembered from a previous trek. [Figs. 18 and 19] Not only do the drawings display compositional sophistication, but also manage to convey descriptive geological information. This interest is confirmed by numerous descriptive entries - most aptly on the above mentioned occasion when the compass was found to be irregular:

This range & several others hereabout consist of sandstone tiers below, topped by a greenish coloured trap or granite in boulders which when broken, show a brown irony appearance in the centre. (Dobie 1880 : 110)

The passage is indicative of Dobie’s empirical concerns. As scientific reportage its’ emphasis is on ‘appearance’ rather than the positing of a firm causal chain. This methodology is typical of the epistemological strategies of phenomenism. ‘According to phenomenism, artists or scientists must confine themselves strictly to what is given to the perceiving subject, without making any prior suppositions concerning the underlying mechanisms by which what is observed is connected’ (Klonk 1996 : 5)

Another side to Dobie’s geological diversions is aesthetic and moral:

...some big rocks which Henry & Frank amused themselves by smashing off their particular & prominent points - things that have stood the storms of centuries - ages - since old ocean carved them. How I do detest this spirit of evil which leads our countrymen to chip statues & corners of Monuments & public buildings which all should honor & preserve. Is it a levelling spirit or what? (Dobie 1880 : 348-349)

Dobie's comments serve to ease the opposition of nature and culture. Later in that week Dobie comments on and draws a sandstone "Vase or Baptismal Font!" (Dobie 1880 : 355) On several occasions his anthropomorphising of rocks is almost euphoric and his infatuation with the 'Castle' is often repeated.

The rocks very fantastic overhanging our camp. One very like a lawyer with gown & wig - Before him a gigantic Judge! A hungry Pleader & a well fed Judge! Another part looks like Egyptian or Oriental ruins. (Dobie 1880 : 124)

In discussing the Mt. Rushmore Memorial, certainly one of the twentieth centuries' brashest exercises in literal anthropomorphisation of the landscape, Simon Schama comments:

Mountain carving, of course, went one better than mountain climbing, for it proclaimed, in the most emphatic rhetoric imaginable, the supremacy of humanity, its uncontested possession of nature. (Schama 1995 : 397)

It seems ironic to allude to Gutzon Borglum, the sculptor in charge of the Mt. Rushmore Memorial, in the light of Dobie's preservationist sentiments expressed above. Never-the-less, Dobie is loosely situated in the tradition of Dinocrates: architect to Alexander the Great. Dinocrates proposed to carve Mount Athos into the figure of a man. (Schama 1995 : 399) This is not to suggest that behind Dobie's casual imaginings of cathedrals, judges, castles and baptismal fonts are thinly veiled megalomaniac designs. Rather, his anthropomorphising is a 'civilizing' device; a means of transforming 'space' into the human domain of 'place' - a site of history. On occasion geological history is a platform from which to launch what must have been, given the treacherous entrance to Port Natal across the bar, every colonists future fantasy: 'a very peculiar ledge & basin having very much the appearance of a Dockyard excavation & Breakwater'. (Dobie 1880 : 356)

Post-colonial discourse asserts that there is 'never an excuse for [the] dehumanising western

habit of representing other parts of the world as having no history' (Pratt 1992 : 219) It comes as a mild surprise then to find the 'merely' topographical drawings of Dobie alluding to the vast epochs of geological time. His preservationist stance arises precisely because of his awareness of the history of the 'wave washed sandstone' (Dobie 1880 : 273) Not having a formal scientific training, it is unclear as to how deeply aware Dobie was of the geological debates between the 'vulcanist' and 'neptunist' theories of the earth's formation which raged in the early nineteenth century. At the very least he is aware of the chronological implications of rock strata. Indeed, this is what gives the lie to his phenomenological stance. The drawings of the 'Double Trap-dyke' are not value-free. Dobie's emphasis is clearly on the 'avenue'. The geological procession is depicted as if on a route-march across the landscape. The process is also vertical: the geological history of erosion that has revealed the rock formation. In composing the scene, however rapidly, Dobie is doing more than transcribing the topography.

The landscape is named as Dobie's journey progresses. It has already been demonstrated how Dobie navigated through unsurveyed territory with these specific land marks. The names are a combination of those of his own invention and 'native names' which 'should always be respected and preserved.' (Dobie 1945 : 157) Whether these 'native names' were unavailable to him when he 'christened' hills is unclear. However, the combination constitutes a revealing spatial history. 'Dumice's Hill', 'Incisa', 'Nehemiah's Hill', 'Spieonkop' : the names reveal an existing set of spatial relationships in the landscape. Although the landscape was unsurveyed this was not an empty space - a *terra incognita* untrammelled by the foot of humankind. 'For by the act of place-naming, space is transformed symbolically into a place, that is, a space with a history.' (Carter 1987 : xviv)

'Mt. Ebenezer', which features so often in his journal, is a spatial touch-stone for Dobie. It's magnetic rocks, having confounded his compass, paradoxically serve to steer him in subsequent journeys: 'we had been looking out for it for the last two or three days and wondered where it could have got to...' (Dobie 1880 : 276) Though it is not intrinsic to the site, 'Ebenezer' is not an arbitrary name - it refers to the cairn of stones which Dobie discovered on its summit. Physically marked by a previous visitor as a significant point, the cairn asserts a human presence. The name refers not only to the cairn/ebenezer, but also to the occasion of its

discovery. In this manner ‘language does not give names to pre-existing things or concepts so much as it articulates the world of our experience.’ (Whorf cited in Gombrich 1977 : 78)

Translated from Hebrew, Ebenezer means ‘the stone of help’ and was the name of the memorial stone set up by Samuel after the victory of Mizpeh. It was also used by Methodists, Baptists and Independents as the name of a particular chapel or meeting-house - henceforth used contemptuously as a synonym for ‘dissenting chapel.’ (Oxford English Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition) Dobie’s adoption of the term to refer to a cairn is best understood in the light of Scottish religious mythos. Dr. Jamison’s Scottish Dictionary (1841), in reference to cairns, quotes Pennant’s Voyage to the Hebrides:

These immense accumulations of stones are the sepulchral protections of the heroes among the ancient natives of our islands: the stone chests, the repository of the urns and ashes, are lodged in the earth beneath. The people of a whole district assembled to shew their respect to the deceased, and by an active honoring of his memory, soon accumulated heaps equal to those that astonish us at this time. But these honours were not merely those of the day; as long as the memory of the deceased endured, not a passenger went by without adding a stone to the heap: they supposed it would be an honor to the dead, and acceptable to his *manes*. (Pennant : 208, cited in Jamieson 1841 : 189)

Dobie’s use of ‘Ebenezer’ represents a vast and complex layering of meanings: from Israelite conquest to ancient Celtic ritual; from the ascendancy of Christianity in Europe and successive invasions of Scotland, to European colonisation of Africa.

‘Ebenezer’ is self-referential in the sense that the name has very little to do with the hill itself. The hill is named after the naming process - one which proclaims with a cairn or a map or a drawing - that this space is now a place. ‘Ebenezer’ thus describes the hill’s historical function. As a landscape it implies successive views of the hill, as well as declaring the prospect from the summit to be significant. In discussing Captain Cook’s naming of Botany Bay in Australia, Paul Carter interprets a process of naming similar to Dobie’s ‘Ebenezer’:

It faithfully preserves the traveller’s sense of facts, not as discrete objects, but as horizons increasingly inscribed with spatial meanings, defined not in terms of objective qualities, but

as directional pointers articulating and punctuating the explorer's destiny. (Carter 1987 : 16)

Dobie's 'Ebenezer' is expressive of his engagement with the landscape he journal-journey's through. Names like 'Sawteeth range', 'Land-Mark' and 'Conical hill' are tools of travel and only make sense in that context. These are not the names of colonisation, but of exploration. At each point of re-orientation, taking of bearings, drawing, the explorer enters into a dialogue with the landscape he is traversing. This is not the naming practice of settlement, but of exploration.

We are now on the boundary of surveyed land and near to civilized life again. What a Bore! The Giant fired the opening gun from the Castle at a quarter past 12 & there was an end to my hopes of seeing the Berg again. (Dobie 1880 : 130)

At this point we become aware of the distinction that Dobie himself seems to draw between exploration and survey. His exploratory treks to Queenstown constitute space in terms of a track: the survey presupposes occupation and constitutes space in terms of boundaries between economically useful acreages.

Coming from Australia, Dobie was a keen advocate for 'squatting': the practice of cheaply leasing vast 'runs' of Crown lands for pastoral farming. His eye was by no means innocent in appraising the 'empty' country he was travelling through. The rivers he prophetically declares fit for trout (Dobie 1880 : 292) whilst Fred Bucknall has selected himself a tract of 'virgin' territory: 'Fred's Happy Valley looking very picturesque [...] Fine sheep country.' (Dobie 1880 : 335)

In contrast to the unsurveyed territory, settled land required a different type of name - a language of possession. Although he did not name it, Dobie's farm name, 'Cotswold', is typical. (The farm was leased by Henry and Fred Bucknall - perhaps Dobie too. (Guy 1996 : unpaginated)) 'Most of the farm names [...] recalled places from the settlers' past, a process common in English-speaking communities, facilitating the acceptance of a strange and unknown area as a home and known place' (Pickles 1978 : 210) In evoking a 'home' that is in England - elsewhere - the name defines a semantic order. It is an order which sees Africa in terms of Europe and is therefore a licence for colonisation. When Dobie comes to draw

‘Cotswold’ the subject is the ‘improvement’ of the farmstead. [Fig. 26] Buildings, fences, and gardens are enumerated in a display of possession - precisely the traditional function of the topographical sketch in a seventeenth century rural England. The drawing and description serve to naturalise the transformative project of the colonist.

Dobie seems well aware of the influence of the colonists on the landscape and appears partial to the effects. ‘Nature has been supplemented by imported trees, ...’ (Dobie 1945 : 147) In “The Origin and Development of the Woolled Sheep Industry in the Natal Midlands in the 1850's and 1860's” J. M. Sellers points out the ‘various methods and hints which [Dobie], among others, had brought from Australia.’ (Guest and Sellers 1985 : 164) The mobile colonists sets up a network of trade routes - not only for sheep and exotic trees, but a trade in knowledge and culture too.

Possibly the most insistent of all the named features in the landscape Dobie traversed are the rivers. To extend Carter’s metaphor: if mountains punctuate the spacial text of the journey, rivers are paragraph and chapter breaks. Running from the Drakensberg in the west to the Indian Ocean in the east, the rivers of Nomansland and Kaffraria were a formidable barrier to waggons. Gardiner’s journey from the Cape to Natal is a litany of river-inspired woes. Sandra Klopper, writing on the drawings of Thomas Baines, maintains that presenting the landscape as a locus of struggle against natural barriers provides a justification for the penetration and taming of the landscape. (Klopper 1989 : 67) Indeed, rivers like the ‘Umcamas’ and ‘Umzimvoobu’ provide a dramatic foil for Gardiner’s pious missionary zeal. Arnold and Carruthers make a similar point concerning Thomas Baines’ work. (1995 : 92)

Dobie and his party experience great difficulties in fording the rivers - particularly on the return trips when the sheep are required to swim across the larger rivers. Unlike Baines, Dobie has left no drawings of these logistics. Presumably he was too busy sheparding his flocks to the far banks to brandish his pencil. His final crossing of the ‘Umcomanzi’ in November 1864 is memorably documented. Rain had swollen the river and the resultant wait had reduced Dobie to subsisting on molasses, bread and gin. Spenser, the ferryman, is recorded as dead drunk and ‘quite unable to handle either boat or horse’! (Dobie 1880 : 452)

Rivers are extremely important for navigation. Again, Dobie's Journal bears ample testimony. In November of 1863 he records a 'geological puzzle':

After reaching the foot of the burn that comes down the recess, the river turns sharp round the low point of that high hill just seen on the right hand of sketch. The puzzle was to make out its course by the eye at any distance. Often the case in this country & have been frequently deceived. In this instance the deep recess made it necessary that the river should drain it, but the difficulty was to see how it got out of it. (Dobie 1880 : 275) [Fig. 15]

As usual the observations are accompanied by a drawing. The drawing cannot solve the visual conundrum on its own. Presumably that would require a general survey of the area - a series of observations that together would constitute a three-dimensional understanding.

It is significant that none of these rivers were themselves navigable. Instead of Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' at the head of an imperial-scaled river, the dominant mythos is a series of compulsory obstacles - stations of the cross. Politically and economically liminal as far as colonial discourse was concerned, the region between Natal and the Eastern Cape was a territory of trials: especially by river. Their consolation was that they marked off the progress of the colonial traveller.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

The aim of this chapter is to explore some of the complexities implicit in Dobie's topographical drawings through an investigation of the distinction between the optical and experienced world; between seeing and drawing.

What exactly do we mean when we say that, in Dobie's work, drawing and navigation share a mode of perception? There is clearly not a strict psychological link: to what extent can one claim that the brain is doing essentially the same thing? Using a compass and reading a map are, from this point of view, not very like drawing. However, they both involve the solving of spatial problems and are based on certain kinds of observation. Of primary concern to both is the investigation of spatial relationships between parts. In navigation the changing of those relationships implies both the spatial extension of the landscape and the navigator's movement through that landscape. The discussion which follows will focus on the kinetic basis of drawing as it relates to spatial extension and cognitive mapping.

In their illuminating study Maps in Minds: reflections on cognitive mapping, Downs and Stea define cognitive mapping as the mental organisation of spatial information. (Downs and Stea 1977 : 6) The authors regard cognitive mapping as an activity geared to meet a fundamental human need: the need to know about the world around us and to solve spatial problems. These problems accrue to all mobile creatures whose survival depends upon the ability successfully to negotiate the spatial and temporal world. In essence, they argue, the solving of spatial problems is achieved by adding and confirming spatial knowledge, and by developing and confirming heuristics or stratagems with which to deal with that knowledge. This is the context in which Dobie's Journal was discussed in the preceding chapters. What was also alluded to was the manner in which his drawing of the landscape contributed to the interactive process of cognitive mapping:

In claiming that cognitive mapping is an interactive process, we are stressing that it rarely proceeds solely by way of armchair contemplation. Rather, the problem solutions themselves and the developing nature of the ability itself emerges from continual interaction with the spatial environments being mapped. At the heart of this claim is the idea of an information feedback process in which learning by doing is crucial. [...] Held and Rekosh (1963) developed a series of ingenious experiments which showed that *correct, or*



*veridical, perception is dependent upon direct interaction between the perceiving organism and the environment being perceived. Motor activity (e.g., spatial behaviour) is essential for linking the external environment to the internal representation. (Downs and Stea 1977 : 73)*

Motor activity is also responsible for the production of drawings. Drawing provides a platform - only one of many, no doubt - from which interaction with the optical world is possible. Drawing is thus a means of experiencing the world in the manner which Downs and Stea describe above. This is the sense in which drawing is distinguished from seeing. Both drawing and navigation are based on the active experience of a spatially extended universe and are therefore dependent for their meaning upon movement. Indeed it is the kinetic basis of drawing which serves to set it apart from other visual arts:

Finished painting tends to cover its traces. Whereas drawing, in its apparent impulsiveness, seems more open: scanning it, you can guess at the sequence of the network of marks (however partially) and enter the story of its construction. [...] This is why drawing seems, though it may not actually be, a more 'intimate' medium than painting. It offers a narrative of perception, the gaze probing at the object, the hand converting its messages into marks... (Hughes 1990 : 195)

'Drawings are done with a point that moves' and so it is a corollary that the drawing medium is a means of crystallizing the implicit movement of lines. (Rawson 1969 : 15) It is optical movement - the scanning eyes - which first create the perception of space. Drawings, in turn, are read by scanning.

Real visual perception is actually the work of our two continually scanning and refocusing eyes, capable of complicated parallax, which are carried in a constantly moving head. (Rawson 1979 : 47)

Dobie's drawings are part of a complex web of perceptual structures. In moving through the landscape his understanding of spatial relationships is reinforced by the need to navigate a course through unsurveyed territory and by the acute visual perception demanded by his drawing of the landscape. Drawing, in turn, aids the process of navigation. This active experience of the environment we can associate with walking, cycling or driving - in contrast to the passive experience of being driven around. (Downs and Stea 1977 : 236)

Perhaps the rather simplistic distinction between active and passive experience of the world is one which demands further investigation. Gombrich supports a related distinction in The Image and the Eye (1982) as one between the optical world and the world of our visual experience. Firstly, our optical stimuli are limited to a narrow range of light frequencies. (Similar claims can be made for the other senses.) Secondly, those stimuli are subject to ‘the influence of past experience and of expectations, the variables of interest, “mental set” and alertness, not to speak of variations in the observer’s physiological equipment and in the adjustment of the perceptual system to changing conditions.’ (Gombrich 1982 : 178) A static and one-eyed Cartesian view of the world epitomises the passive visual experience, in contrast to the world as it is actively experienced: constantly changing and stereoscopic. What is so strikingly evident in Dobie’s drawings is their embrace of the active experience of the landscape he was traversing. This is evidenced not only by the details of incident, light and weather they record, but by the extensive cross-referencing discussed in Chapter Two.

Such a strong implication of the artist in the landscape can of course be interpreted as an attempt to naturalize the colonist’s presence and contribute to the self-justifying rhetoric of imperialism. Writing on the Linnaean systematization of nature, Pratt termed such an apparently benign and abstract project an ‘anti-conquest’. She suggests how natural history provided a means for narrating inland travel and exploration aimed at territorial surveillance, appropriation of resources and administrative control. (Pratt 1992 : 38)

That there appears to have been very little critical appraisal of Dobie’s drawings requires that the present author should draw on analogous examples of nineteenth century visual culture. There is a considerable volume of criticism concerning major figures such as Angas, Bowler and Baines. Liese van der Watt, writing on Thomas Baines, claims that:

With every move the explorer asserts his infinite mobility in the landscape in contrast to the fixed status of the colonised object. The explorer himself becomes a frontier, a shifting line between what is perceived as culture and what is nature. For Baines every sketch that is finished is a successful appropriation of the land and another border crossed. (Van der Watt 1993 : 30)

This passage represents orthodox post-colonial discourse in its attempt to decipher cultural meanings within images of the landscape. Mobility is interpreted in terms of nineteenth

century imperialist projects. In this context the topographical drawing is seen as being in the service of the exploitation and subjugation of the colonised subject - both the landscape and the people which inhabit it. The links that bind the drawings of colonists like Baines and Dobie to the instruments of navigation, survey and surveillance implicate these images in a cultural cartography which aids and abets the imperialist project.

Paul Carter furnishes a useful distinction - that between discovery and exploration - which examines the observer's place in *terra incognita*:

For while discovery rests on the assumption of a world of facts waiting to be found, collected and classified, a world in which the neutral observer is not implicated, exploration lays stress on the observer's active engagement with his environment: it recognizes phenomena as offspring of his intention to explore. (Carter 1987 : 25)

In this light we can see why it is that Dobie's drawing project runs against the current of imperialism. Their emphasis on the process of exploration preserves the sense of travelling on as opposed to settling. It also explains the two contrary aspects of his drawings: the topographical drawings of conventionally picturesque subjects in Natal proper (his drawing of Howick Falls [Fig. 27] ), and those which were the product of his exploratory treks through Nomansland and Kaffraria. The former slot effortlessly into the established genre of the nineteenth century picturesque sketch, whilst the latter shed convention and convey a sense of the landscape as an intimately felt experience.

In part, that sense of the landscape as intimately experienced is achieved by the orders of spatial relationships in his drawings. First, there is the relationship between each drawing and those which precede and follow it in the journey. This is the literal navigation by the series of images and the journal entries which serve to link them together. Secondly there is the relationship between the explicit subject (rocky promontories, glancing light across the Drakensberg, the endless succession of hills...) and the drawing itself. This is the manner in which each mark addresses itself to the tactile, sensory world of our experience. Finally there is the internal subject of drawing: the relationship of one mark to another. This internal subject is 'drawing itself, its energies and tensions, its ability to move one's eye from one node of form to another, to make the gaze appreciate lines and areas of grey as signs of force

and displacement as well as literal shadow or physical edge.’ (Hughes 1990 : 197-198)

Dobie’s marks respond to his motifs: the small scale of the drawings demands a judicious use of line. His draughting achievement lies in his ability to respond to the complexity of the interlocking ranges of hills with a degree of discipline which does not preclude visual excitement. Their amplitude arises from the range of his use of line: here acute and descriptive, there expansive, light and airy.

In stressing this web of spatial relationships one becomes aware of the landscape as a personally mediated arena of experience. The artist is implicated at every level of interaction between his colonial culture and the ‘wild’ nature beyond the boundaries of surveyed land. Post-colonial discourse claims that this is precisely the point at which the colonial ‘prospect’ is achieved - from which future development and exploitation flow. (Mitchell 1994 : 17) But the purpose of the ‘prospect’ for Dobie is to enable him to move on. This, after all, is the significance of his favourite landmark, Ebenezer.

As a cultural construct the meaning of a landscape is not inherent. It depends, at the very least, upon the visual embrace of a piece of the earth. Given the widely accepted subjectivity of human sight this condition alone rules out the possibility of an ‘objective’ landscape. However, cultures tend to find their own rhetoric convincing. Alternative mappings are disregarded or effaced. To the extent that colonists like Dobie contributed to the displacement of people and exploitation of the land by imperial interests, they displaced existing cartographies. The temptation to regard Dobie’s drawings in the same light as his racism, as unfortunate products of his time whose purpose is the appropriation of land, is a reading which, in turn, effaces their more subtle and enduring meaning. This, in common with the cartographies they shattered, lies in the expression of an existential need to bridge the gap between the individual and a disorientating world.

...the basic project of art is always to make the world whole and comprehensible. To restore it to us in all its glory and occasional nastiness, not through argument, but through feeling. And then to close the gap between you and everything that is not you, and in this way to pass from feeling to meaning. (Hughes, The Future that Was)

## **CONCLUSION:**

...by this time it was not a blank space any more. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery - a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness. (Conrad 1987 : 39)

After compiling his South African Journal fifteen years after leaving Natal, Dobie appended a 'Finale' to his text:

And, tho' I cannot look back on South Africa and its waggon tracks without a great deal of pleasure, and a liking for and admiration of its many natural beauties and peculiarities, it nevertheless still carries with it the impression of some peculiar curse hanging over that land. On my first arrival in D'urban the old Botanist's warning to beware of the many poisonous plants, and also the poisonous varieties of plants elsewhere considered wholesome, was too truly verified in my sheep farming experience. Together with the climatic diseases affecting all the domestic animals they constituted a combination of physical evil hard to be borne - the chief moral and political difficulty being the proper management of the Kafirs.

-“If ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell”- Numb: XXXIII. 55.  
(Dobie 1880 : 549)

One could scarcely find a more pessimistic and racist polemic against Natal and its people! As hinted at above, Dobie's sheep farming enterprise had been a dismal failure, which probably accounts for a good deal of his pessimism. The recently concluded Anglo-Zulu War (1879) is most likely to have contributed to his patronising anxieties concerning the 'proper management of the Kafirs'.

The Anglo-Zulu War was a seminal event in Colonial Natal's history and the influx of all manner of draughtsmen, from amateurs to journalistic professionals like Milton Prior, recorded and publicised the events. An unprecedented volume of images of Natal and Zululand were produced. Although these images have been subjected to analysis in the context of historical accuracy and iconography (Verbeek 1976), their contribution to what

Paul Carter refers to as the ‘spatial history’ of Colonial Natal remains a fertile field for investigation in the manner of this dissertation. The territory was extensively mapped: ‘It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery’.

Topographical drawing has been the subject of two major, if not entirely compatible, criticisms. Firstly, that it ‘merely’ involved the slavish transcription of nature - not an authentic artistic response to the environment. The only questions worth asking of such drawing were those concerning veracity because, so the implicit argument runs, they told us no more about a felt experience of the world than a bland diagram attempts to. Secondly, topography is alleged to be no more than an adjunct to imperial discourse. This critique shifts the dogged, uninspired and essentially benign drawings of the above criticism into the culpable role of mapping, surveillance and colonial conquest.

The example in this dissertation of Dobie’s drafting efforts was not intended as a representative case study to contradict these critiques of topographical drawing. Rather, the informing methodology uses the concordance of text, image and landscape in Dobie’s Journal to show the limits of such critiques. Apart from the skill displayed in their execution, the drawings answer criticism of the first kind with complex linkages of meaning which belie their status as ‘mere’ topography. The second kind of critique challenges the selective blindness encouraged by imperial discourse - a discourse subscribed to by Dobie. Yet this reading precludes the active engagement of the draughtsman as an explorer; that he might have experienced anything but the predictable, charted, reactions of the coloniser towards the colonised. This dissertation’s implicit aim was to point out that under the strewn rubble of empires, there exist alternative, sometimes contradictory, and complex meanings. On turning over one such stone, the material evidence of Dobie’s treks through Nomansland, one may find all manner of scuttling, slithering life.

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Dimensions unavailable

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Pencil on paper  
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Pencil on paper

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**ILLUSTRATIONS:**



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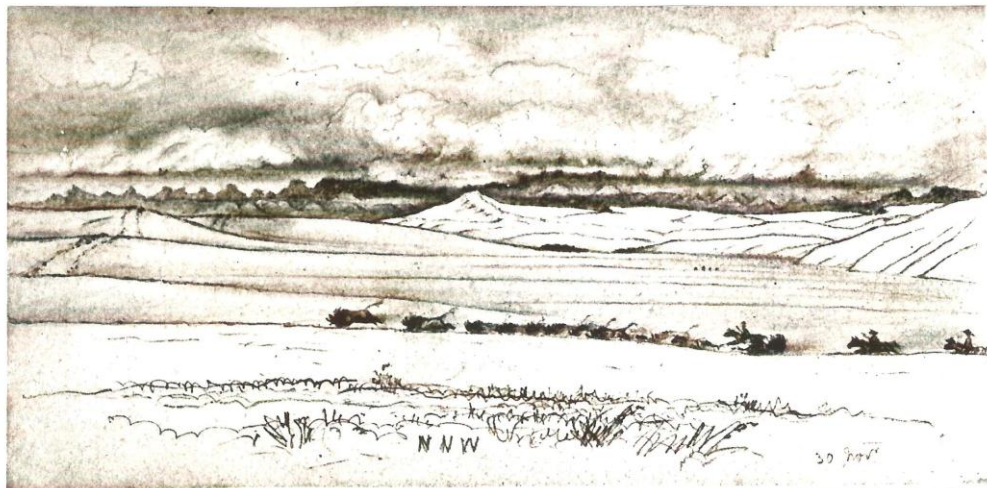
Fig. 3



Fig. 4



**Fig. 5**



**Fig. 6**





Fig. 7



Fig. 8

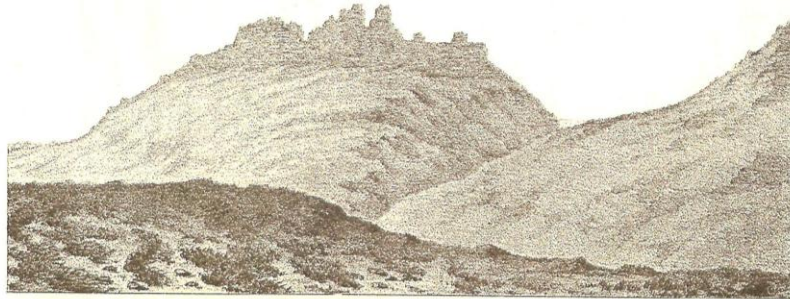


**Fig. 9**



*— Cavernglan Mountain*

*Outline of Mountains about Cavernglan Oct, 22<sup>nd</sup>*



*Giants Castle W. & N. by compass, from a hill near the Binnua, Oct, 10<sup>th</sup>*



*— Cavernglan Mountain N.W. by N. by compass*

*Mountains about Cavernglan Oct, 23<sup>rd</sup>*



*Giants Castle N.E. the Giants Cup, at the same time, bearing E. & N. & N. by compass.*



*Giants Cup N.W. & N.*

*Saddle-back N. & W.*

*Appearance of part of the Quaidhamba Range, as seen from the heights just beyond Wyngard's Ford.*

*Published by W. Crofts Chancery Lane.*

**Fig. 10**





Fig. 11



Fig. 12

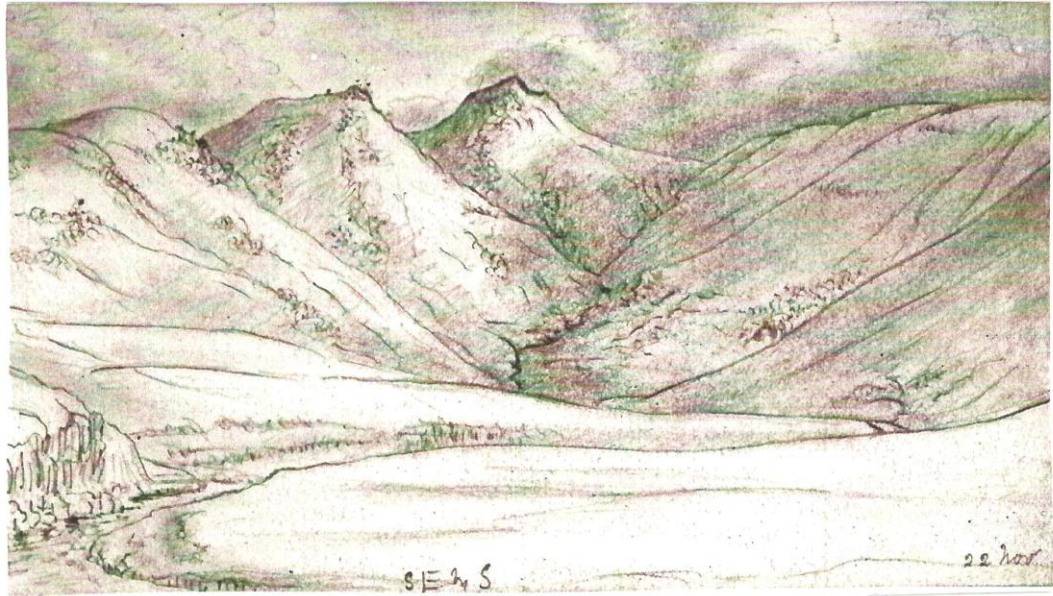


Fig. 13



Fig. 14





**Fig. 15**



**Fig. 16**



Fig. 17

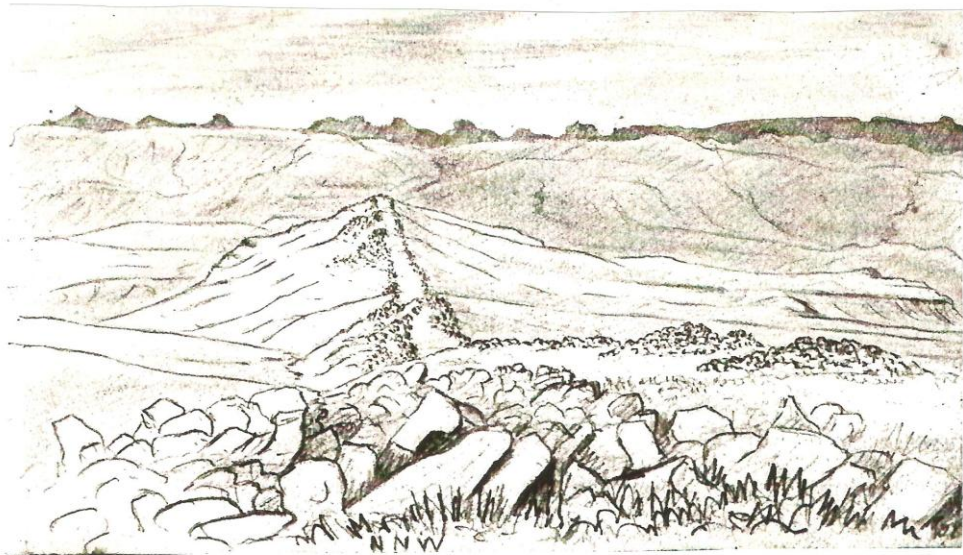


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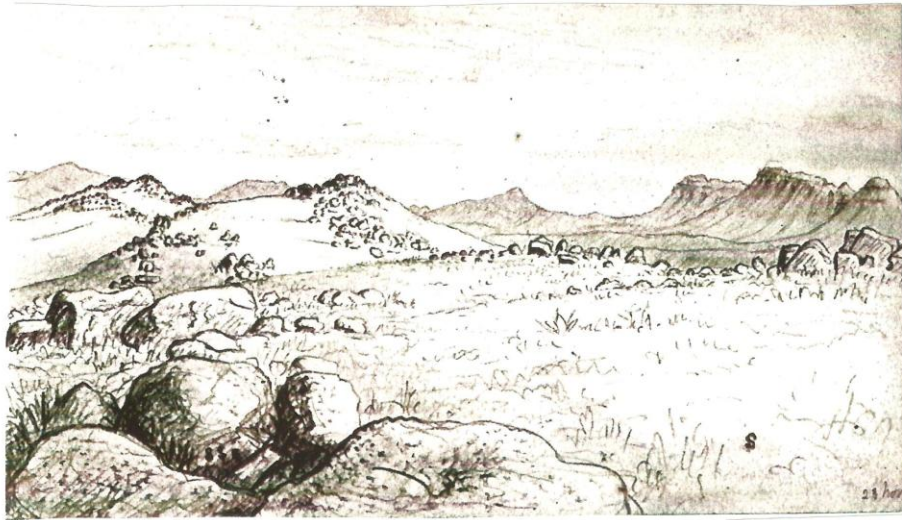


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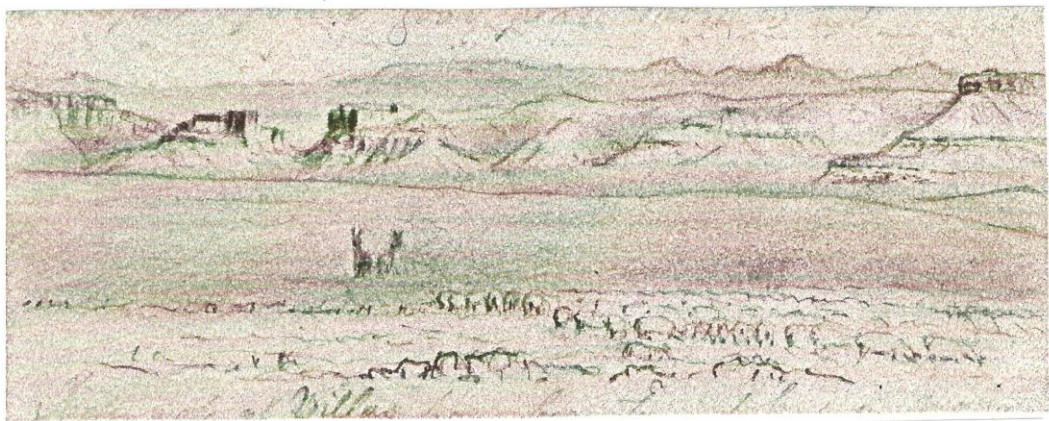


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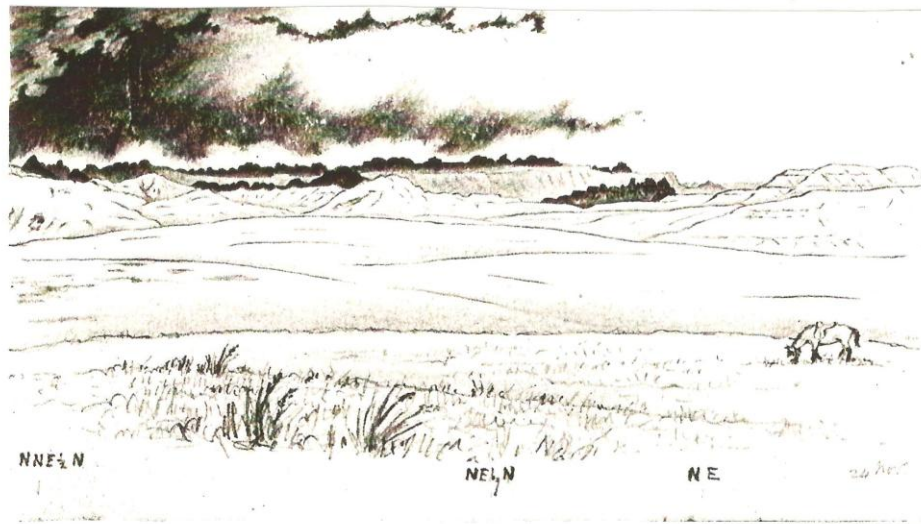


Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23

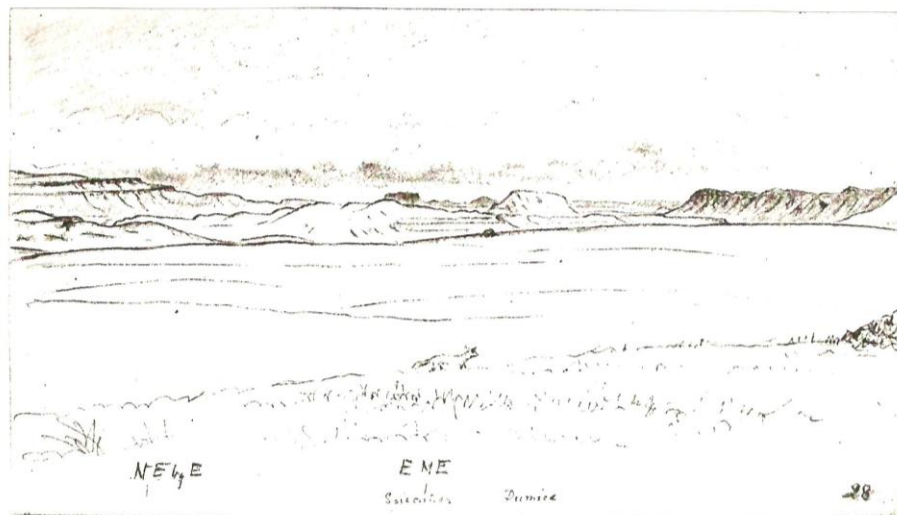


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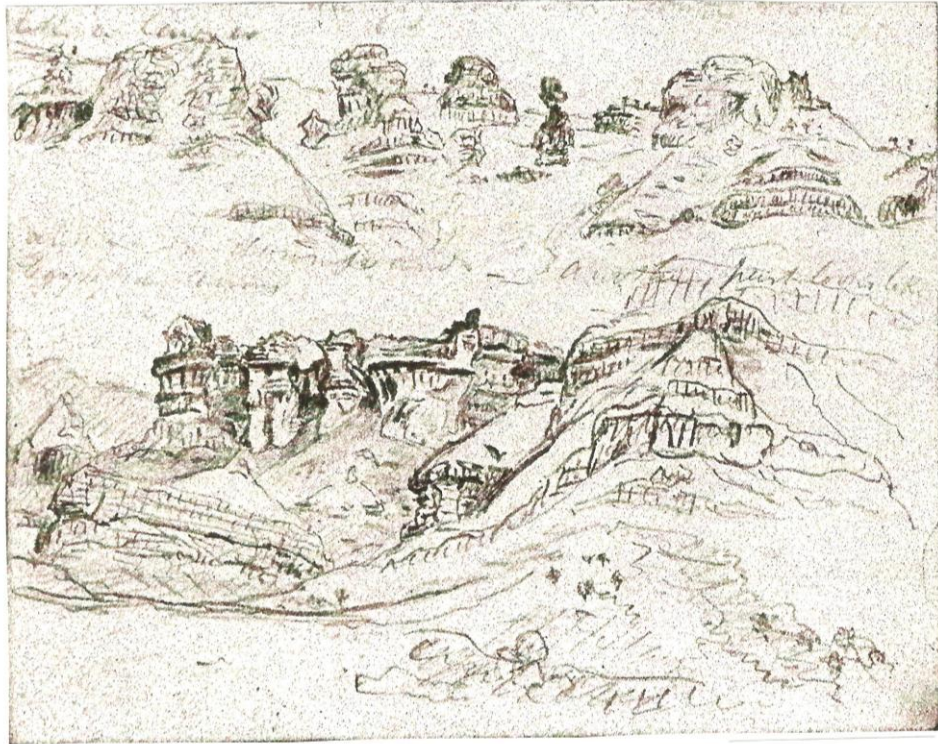


Fig. 25





Fig. 26

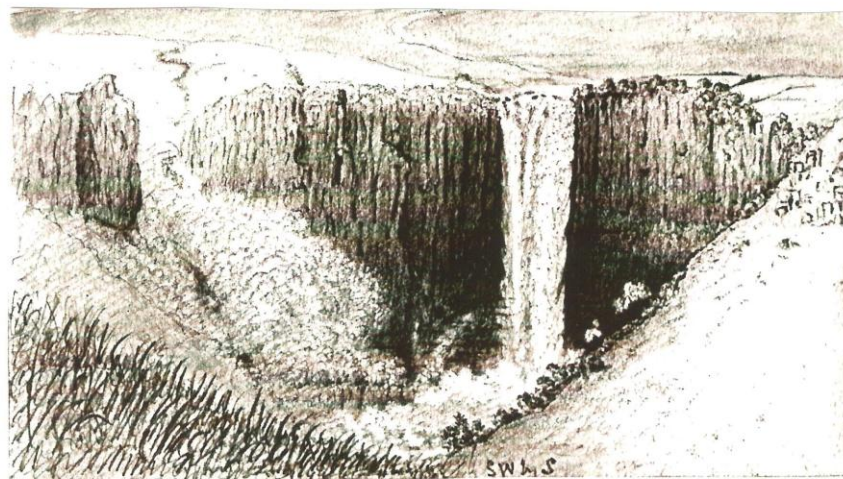


Fig. 27