

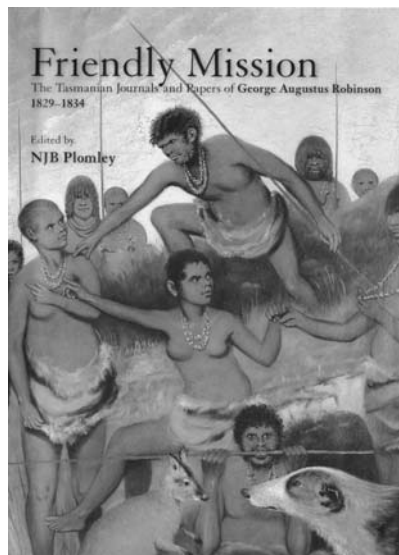
BOOK REVIEWS

Friendly Mission: the Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson, 1829–1834 Edited by N.J.B. Plomley, *Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (Launceston) and Quintus Publishing (Hobart)*, 2nd edition (2008), hardback, 1162 pages (ISBN 978 0 9775572 2 6)

REVIEWED BY: Bob Mesibov, PO Box 101, Penguin, Tasmania 7316, email: mesibov@southcom.com.au

The late Brian Plomley first published this scholarly presentation of Robinson's writings in 1966. *Friendly Mission* is more like an ore deposit than a book: it's been enthusiastically mined by historians, linguists, anthropologists, ethnographers and genealogists over the past four decades, and its lodes are far from exhausted.

I suspect that *Friendly Mission* is less familiar to naturalists than to historians, which is unfortunate. Like *Immense Enjoyment**, the extraordinary 1987 compilation of Wells family writings from the Don, *Friendly Mission* has natural history observations on almost every page. Robinson walked over a great deal of coastal and northern Tasmania (see map) and recorded landforms, vegetation, fire, flora, fauna and weather as he went. He also noted what Aborigines and colonists said about things natural. If you abstracted all of Robinson's brief notes and commentaries, you would have a book of Tasmanian natural history far more comprehensive and readable than anything published by his long-winded colonial contemporaries.

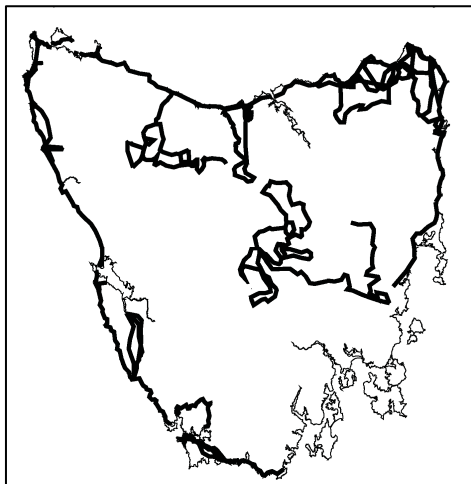


Friendly Mission is rich in *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* moments. Here are two of my favourites:

Oatlands, 3 November 1831

The trees in the low land and small hills are fast decaying, that in a few years there will be no trees left. I am informed that at the Clyde and Shannon it is the same and that the settlers say that they

commenced falling to decay about three years ago. Probably their stated period for growth had arrived as they are for the chief part stunted trees, or it might be blight, or the continual burnings of the natives have tended to hasten it. So fast are they falling to decay that the ground is covered with dead timber and the top branches of trees was heard falling as we journeyed along. The natives caught numerous opossums today. This animal is in abundance. (p. 533)



Circular Head [Stanley], 30
May 1832

It rained incessant during the whole of this night and whilst at Circular Head there had been continual rains. Mr Curr said for the whole time he had been at Circular Head he had never known so much rain as there had been this season. (p. 643)

Some of Robison's journeys (heavy black lines), compiled from route maps in *Friendly Mission*.

The new edition of *Friendly Mission* is very reasonably priced (8.5 cents a page!) and I recommend it highly to Tasmanian naturalists State-wide.

*Gardam, F. (ed.) *Immense Enjoyment. The Illustrated Journals and Letters of William L. Wells 1884-1888. The Life of an Early Quaker Family in Tasmania.* Devon Historical Society, Devonport). ISBN 0 9593219 1 8.

Wings: An Introduction to Tasmania's Winged Insects by Elizabeth Daley, Riffles Pty Ltd, 2007, softback, 236 pages (ISBN 978 0 9804006 2 5)

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In this eclectic book the author, Elizabeth Daley, has made a valiant attempt to give us a compact introduction and field guide to Tasmania's bewildering array of winged insects. There was a gap in the market, and this book fills it. In any other developed nation, there would have been no gap by this stage of the twenty-first century, and this book would have had to compete with many others on a similar theme. But this is Australia – biologically megadiverse (even the tiny portion of its