

STEAVENSON FALLS - MARYSVILLE

First Tourist Party To Steavenson Falls, Sunday 11th June 1866:

Jonathan Sheldrake (Senior) writing to his daughter Rebecca from Wallan Wallan on 20th June 1866. Jonathan Sheldrake (Senior) reported on his participation in the first visit (11th June 1866) of a tourist party to the Steavenson Falls, a cataract to which a bridle track had been cut from Marysville in the preceding few weeks. The letter's content follows, apart from almost a page of religious homily towards the end, which has no relevance to the subject of this article, which is the actual visit to the Falls. The content is cited verbatim, (sic) and breaks are as in the original.

Wallan Wallan 20th June 1866

My Dear Rebecca

As I have but little time to spend with my dear children and less time with you I embrace the present time to relate to you my visit to the waterfalls of Mount Strickland 3 ½ miles from the Township of Marysville and 3 miles from Paradise Plains on that Mount and as you have been on that track with me you will best understand the beautiful scenery of that track. The mountains, the ravines, the rivers the trees and scrub, you have seen and have wondered at and admired. But the waterfalls which forms the Steavenson River you have not seen. Some few weeks ago those waterfalls attracted the attention of some of the inhabitants of the Township of Marysville, and some men were employed to cut a Bridle Track the nearest way to them and on Sunday June 11th. A number of interested persons started off to visit them, hearing this I started off with one of the men who had been cutting the Track and we arrived there at ½ past 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Traversing a path round the side of the hills being cut through a very dense scrub of fern trees and fallen timber through which the sun has not been permitted to shine for many years, as we neared the falls you could feel the wind become colder as some snow had fallen the previous day and a very heavy frost during the night. After winding our way for nearly an hour as fast as we could travel we came to the head of the river and bottom of the falls. Here we stayed, looked, listened and wondered, for a while, we then crossed the stream over some immense boulders of granite stone, so as to climb up to the second and third falls – this we did by the aid of small saplings growing out of the crevasse of the rocks. We climbed up to the third fall, 700 or 800 feet, and about 400 feet perpendicular here we rested and beheld one of the most beautiful sights that I have been permitted to behold since I have been in the Colony. From this

Stand we could behold each of the three falls. It would be impossible to describe the scenery here – the form of the dashing plunging stream rose in the sun and reflected every hue of the rainbow. The sun was clear and the day very calm, which added much to the beauty of the scenery. The noise of the falling water seemed to drown every other sound and we could scarcely hear each other's voice – some of the parties who came brought a bottle of spirits and after the bottle was empty each one wrote his name on paper and put it in the bottle and hung up the bottle on one of the trees at the bottom of the falls - mine of course was added to the rest and when I left it was nearly full of names – swinging about telling who had been the first to visit the spot. We returned Back to the Township at 5 in the evening much pleased and gratified.

And now my Dear Rebecca I have told you what I am sure will please you, this I am always glad to do and I must now draw this to a close.

Believe me to be Your Loving father.

Jonathan Sheldrake

Postscript:

The letter contains an element of exaggeration as the Steavenson Falls are actually 82 metres (270 feet) high, not 700 or 800 feet or even 400 feet. Strangely enough, the claim is in line with modern day Marysville tourist literature, which often has them as the highest in Victoria, which they patently are not being surpassed by Dandongadale and Wulgulmerang Falls, even nearby Snobs Creek Falls and several others. One inexperienced in judging height, however, could easily make such a mistake as the falls do look very high.

Today, despite the Falls having become a mecca for thousands of tourists each year, with floodlights, tree plaques, manicured trails and spotless facilities, they still evoke some of that awe, which those first visitors felt on that winter's day over hundred and twenty-five years ago.

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