Abstract

‘It is my fixed determination to do something great some day’ Preface to George Morrison’s diary of his 1880 canoe trip down the Murray.

In Aboriginal tradition, rivers were created by travelling ancestral Dreamtime figures. The Murray below its junction with the Darling was carved through the landscape by the thrashings of Pondi, the Murray cod, as he was chased by the ancestral hero Ngurunderi. The Murray has always offered travellers – Aborigines, explorers, overlanders, settlers, traders, tourists - a route into or a way through the interior. Some have journeyed the length of the river as a personal challenge, canoeing, rowing or swimming (nowadays rewarded by a certificate issued at Goolwa). There are formal published accounts of ‘firsts’ such as Charles Sturt’s expedition by whale-boat (1830-31), Joseph Hawdon’s overlanding trip (1838) and the first steam navigation by the PS Lady Augusta and PS Mary Ann (1853). But there are also diaries, journals or travel accounts (not to mention the logs of trading paddleboats), published and unpublished, by a diversity of travellers. Diarists include 15-year old governor’s daughter Julia Gawler, voyaging by whaleboat from Blanchetown to Nor’ west Bend in 1839, Victorian Protector of Aborigines G.A. Robinson, travelling on horseback and contacting Aboriginal people along the river from Swan Hill to Moorundee in 1846, and 18-year old George Morrison (later Morrison of Peking) who took his cedar canoe, The Stanley, by train from Melbourne to Albury in 1880, and rowed downriver to the Coorong. Walter Kilroy Harris claimed “the longest Overlanding journey ever attempted in Australia with a single horse”, from Blanchetown to Euston, in 1912 and in 1996 retirees Pam and Sam Hawson took their small houseboat from Karadoc to Mannum and back. I started compiling previous accounts after writing my own journal when I crewed on the replicas of the PS Lady Augusta and PS Mary Ann between Goolwa and Mildura, on the 2003 Randell and Cadell Run, celebrating 150 years of Shipping on the Murray. River Murray Journeys considers the motives and experiences of travellers along the river. It is a work in progress, with a book in view, and information about other travel journals or riverboat logs would be welcomed.