

Letter to Robert Gouger

George Martin

1 March 1838

Introduction

This letter was written by George Martin, master of the schooner *John Pirie*. He was on the way to Hobart when she was stranded at Encounter Bay by the gale of 21 December 1837. He continued to Hobart on 8 January 1838, returning to Adelaide in the middle of March.

Robert Gouger was in Hobart at the time on his way to London to complain about his dismissal as Colonial Secretary by Governor Hindmarsh. He included the letter in his *South Australia in 1837; in a series of letters: With a postscript as to 1838*, published by Harvey and Darton, Gracechurch Street, London, 1838.

Text

Hobart Town, March 1st, 1838.

Dear Sir,

I have much pleasure in answering your enquiries relative to Encounter Bay and its eligibilities for shipping and by way of showing you how I have gained a knowledge of that place I propose first to inform you how many times and upon what occasions I have visited it.

I was there first in February 1837, in the *John Pirie*, for the purpose of landing provisions and whaling implements for the South Australian Company's fishery, and I stayed there four or five days. I put in again, on my return from Hobart Town in April, and landed all my cargo of sheep, having experienced heavy gales from the westward. I remained there about five days. In May I took the barque "South Australian" there, and moored her in Rosetta Cove, with two anchors a-head, with nearly all the chains out; one anchor to the S.S.E. and the other to E.S.E., one anchor and chain astern, and a cable fast to the rocks ashore astern. Under the vessel's stern, about half a cable's length from the shore, there was about seventeen or eighteen feet water. I remained there about ten days and then walked to Adelaide; I returned in about twelve days to Encounter Bay by land, and remained again about a week. I was there again in the *John Pirie* the latter end of June for the purpose of landing oil casks, but upon that occasion I remained but one day. I went there again in the *John Pirie* the latter end of December last, where I found the "South Australian" stranded. I went there for the purpose of saving the beef and pork she was loaded with. On these occasions I always made for Rosetta Cove, but I had ample opportunities of making myself acquainted with the bay as far as two or three miles to the eastward of Captain Blenkinsopp's station.

Rosetta Cove is capable of protection for two vessels during the winter season, but then they must be strongly moored. In the summer season, say from December to April, it would be dangerous. During

these months it is subject to heavy gales from south to east, which send in a very heavy sea. The strongest gales that blow during the winter season are from N.W. to S.W.; with these winds Rosetta Cove is smooth enough, and the holding ground is excellent.

In the winter season, four or five vessels may, if very strongly moored, ride safely to the eastward of Granite Island, where Captain Blenkinsopp's station was; but even there, I have seen such surf on the beach as to render it dangerous to land in a boat. The holding-ground is not good, being of a sandy and stony bottom; almost all the ships which have anchored there yet, have dragged, and that even with the wind off the land. The Francis Freeling, under these circumstances, broke an anchor, and drove very near the Seal Rock; she finally left, not conceiving the place safe. This anchorage is quite open to the E. and S.S.E., and these winds send in a tremendous sea, which in my opinion, renders the place quite untenable during the months those winds prevail. At the best, it cannot be called any thing but an open roadstead; and I am confident that no one who has the least pretension to the character of a seaman would ever call it a harbour.

When I was there in December and January last in the John Pirie, a heavy gale came on from the S.E. which caused a tremendous sea to roll into the bay. The Solway broke from her anchors and was wrecked on the reef. The Solway was lying to the westward of me, and though I had two anchors out a head, with all the cables out, to the bare ends, yards and masts all down, it was to no effect. The wind and sea still increasing, for three or four hours after the Solway was wrecked, and the sea breaking over us in a terrific manner, I expected the Pirie would go down at her anchors, or tear her bows out of her. I prepared to slip, (the only and least glimpse of hope of saving our lives,) and to force her over the reef under press of soil, which we fortunately succeeded in doing, after nearly beating her bottom out, and ran her on the beach to leeward of the reef.

After thirty years' experience at sea, I never saw a vessel ride to an anchor in such a terrific sea; and I am quite confident that I should not have had better protection under Granite Island.

I have not been nearer than four or five miles to the mouth of the Murray; I could see nothing but one foam of tremendous surf all along, and it is my opinion, that there must always be a very heavy sea there, from its being open to the whole swell of the southern ocean.

I remain, dear sir, very faithfully,
your obedient servant, George Martin.

To Robert Gouger, Esq.