143. The Australian Ethnological Expedition: Part of a Letter Received from Professor Baldwin Spencer.

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Australia.

The Australian Ethnological Expedition; part of a Letter received from Professor Baldwin Spencer. Communicated by J. Edge-Partington.

Writing from Barrow Creek, under date June 17, 1901, Professor Baldwin Spencer gives the following account of his work:

"On the whole we are having a very good time though travelling is rather rough and horribly monotonous in this part of the globe, which is about the last place created, and there were no picturesque features left. We have been riding for a week or two through a kind of broad road cut through the mulga scrub so as to make a clearing for the telegraph line. From the Alice to here is just about 200 miles and during the whole time we spent on the road we only saw two solitary blacks. The whole country has been stricken with a great drought, which has affected the natives as well as the plants and beasts. However, here we have a good number of Kaitish natives gathered together and are doing some work amongst them. At Alice Springs we got hold of some good things, and the British Museum shall certainly be remembered when we get back, but much will depend upon how many of our things get lost on the road. The loot which we have got during the past few days, and which is now lying in a heap close to where I am writing, would make your mouth water—Churinga spears, big and little bean-tree pitchis, shields, sacred hair girdles, knives, &c. Further north we ought to get much better things. Two hundred miles ahead the natives are already waiting for us with plenty of stone knives and hatchets. The difficult things to get are the sacred implements. The only way to secure these is to go and rummage about in their camps where they keep them concealed in the bushes out of which they build their miamas.

"As far as the Alice we carried a cinematograph with us and spent some time there recording sacred ceremonies, but I am afraid that they are not a great success as it is not easy to fix the instrument so as to include the whole performance. However, they will be better than nothing. We also had a phonograph and got twenty-four good cylinders with records of corroboree songs, initiation songs, and so on. These are decidedly good. We shall not get much that is new in the way of implements until we get north, but I have hopes of securing interesting things there. Near to Tennant’s Creek is the great place for making stone knives and hatchets, and I hope to secure several good series of these in different stages of development.

"When we have finished here we go north for 200 miles and intend to spend two months among the Warramunga tribe. Then we make north again for another 200 miles, and then probably work out north-east towards the Gulf of Carpentaria, on to the Macarthur River. We intended making out west on to the Daly River, but we shall not have time to do this before the summer rains come on and with them heavy floods, which if we happen to be caught in them will prevent our moving about for two or three months.

"This letter goes south by a stray wanderer who has just come in here. Goodness knows when you will get it. Our next post office lies 700 miles ahead of us. There are no such things as papers here and we know nothing of the world."

Anthropometry.


It is, I believe, the experience of most observers that the measurement of the vertical dimensions of the head, commonly called "projections," on the living subject presents some material difficulties. After several experiments I believe that I have discovered a simple method of overcoming these difficulties, which I venture to describe,