

Mapping and promoting South Africa: Barrow and Burchell's rivalry

*Randolph Vigne**

This is the story of the rivalry of two pioneer travellers in early nineteenth-century southern Africa, both of heroic achievements and both of some historical significance. Sir John Barrow, Bt, remembered today as the long-serving Second Secretary of the Admiralty, promoter of Arctic exploration, and prolific author. William John Burchell's fame continues as naturalist and traveller in southern Africa and south America, identifier of Burchell's Zebra, Burchell's Gazelle and the White Rhino, his natural history collections one of the greatest benefactions to Kew Gardens, the Natural History Museum and the Oxford Museum of Natural History, and his account of his southern African journeys a classic of travel literature.

We shall look at Barrow's six years at the Cape, one of them spent on his travels, in three separate journeys, and at what they brought us; and Burchell's four years of exploration by ox-wagon, a decade or so later; and at their attacks on each other, yet they agreed on one major issue – the settlement of British emigrants in the new colony of the Cape of Good Hope. The effects of their support for the settlement scheme of 1820 will be examined and we shall finally compare their achievements, their rewards and the long-term impact of their South African experiences.

John Barrow, who had risen with great rapidity from obscure beginnings in rural Lancashire, was recruited to accompany Lord Macartney's failed mission to the Emperor of China in 1792. When in 1797 Macartney assumed the first governorship of the Cape of Good Hope, taken from the Dutch in 1795 to keep the French out, Barrow served as his private secretary, and later as auditor-general. Macartney had trouble with Dutch rebels in the Great Karroo district of Graaff-Reinet. He told Barrow:

We are shamefully ignorant even of the geography of the country; we have no map that embraces one-tenth part of the Colony; I neither know nor can I learn where this Graaff-Reinet lies – whether it is five hundred or a thousand miles from Cape Town.¹

So less than two months after his arrival Barrow made the journey to Graaff-Reinet, and found it to be a little less than 500 miles from Cape Town. He quelled the rebellion peaceably and travelled on to meet Ngqika, the young king of the Rharhabe section of the amaXhosa people near what is today King William's Town, turning back when he had reached the Keiskama River. He travelled back to Cape Town via the northern frontier of the Colony, at the confluence of the Seekoei and Orange rivers, and then

* Independent scholar, author of *Thomas Pringle, South African Pioneer, Poet and Abolitionist* (James Currey, Oxford, 2012) and many previous southern African and European historical studies.

1. J. Barrow, *An Auto-Biographical Memoir of Sir John Barrow, Bart., late of the Admiralty* ... (John Murray, London, 1847), p 141.

south through the Little Karroo. He made two other journeys, the first northwards beyond Saldanha Bay and back via the Roggeveld and finally to Mossel Bay and the Outeniquas to deal with a further dose of sedition.²

The fruits of his twelve months on foot, on horseback and in ox-wagons were of far greater value to Britain's interest in South Africa than the settlement of little local difficulties. Furthest reaching were his two-volume, widely read and acclaimed *Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*. Twice reprinted in his lifetime and translated into Dutch, French, German, Norwegian and Swedish. A "condensed abridgement" appeared, side by side with Levaillant at double the length, in Richard Phillips's 28-volume *Collection of Voyages from the Discovery of America to the Commencement of the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1810). Barrow's *Account of Travels* was acclaimed, its "description ... far superior to any which has hitherto been mingled with the writings of other travellers". The praise continued: "It is in the well-known and valuable publication of Barrow that we are first presented with a comprehensive and statesmanlike view of the Colony", wrote the Cape Town merchant George Thompson.³ Or was this the view of Thompson's ghost writer Thomas Pringle, to whom Barrow was very helpful when Pringle was preparing to take his party of Scottish settlers to the eastern Cape in 1820?⁴

There were also the three lengthy and detailed but unsigned reports on the revenues, administration and institutions of the Cape.⁵ Commissary De Mist, head of the Batavian Republican administration of the Cape after the Peace of Amiens, who obliged Britain to hand the colony back to the Dutch, wrote of Barrow's map of the Colony, inserted in volume 2 of his *Account of Travels*:

The geographical position and extent of the Cape, in so far as it has been found necessary to lay down any fixed boundary in such a vast expanse of land, can be studied nowhere so well as in [Barrow's] map ... the most up to date in existence.⁶

There was more: Barrow edited the journal of the artist Samuel Daniell, who had been the secretary of the expedition to the BaTswana. He also published further maps of the south-western coastal region based on Dutch sources and British naval surveys and in his 84th year, his autobiography, 115 of its 515 pages being devoted to his time at the Cape. There was also a two-volume life of Lord Macartney (1807) with much about the Cape, and among his almost 200 articles and reviews in the *Quarterly*

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2. J. Barrow, *Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, 2 vols (Cadell & Davies, London, 1801, 1804), 1, p 40.
 3. G. Thompson, *Travels and Adventures in Southern Africa*, 2 (Colburn, London, 1827; Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town, 1968).
 4. National Library of Scotland, MS 389 f 3, T. Pringle – Sir W. Scott, 5 February 1820.
 5. M. Boucher and N. Penn, *The British at the Cape, 1795–1803* (Brenthurst Press, Johannesburg, 1992).
 6. The Memorandum of Commissary J.A. de Mist, trans M.K.Jeffreys (Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town, 1920), p 166.

Review, a 43-page contribution in the November 1819 issue, entitled "The Cape of Good Hope".⁷

His South African writings were a minor part of his great output as an author and public servant. He is remembered for his books about and promotion of Arctic exploration; for his *Eventful History of the Mutiny and Piratical Seizure of HMS Bounty*⁸ and his long career at the Admiralty, serving much of it under the very unlikeable John Wilson Croker, father-in-law of Barrow's eldest son. The Reverend Sydney Smith called Croker "the Grand Caluminator" and perhaps a little of his harsh censoriousness and arrogance rubbed off on his junior.⁹ Although some, like Lady Anne Barnard, Governor Macartney's hostess at the Cape, and lower down the social scale, Thomas Pringle, found him in Lady Anne's case, "good-humoured, ambitious, very well informed", and Pringle "a fine, frank, friendly fellow",¹⁰ he wrote scathingly and abusively of a whole community, the trekboers he encountered on his travels, and of one fellow countryman in particular, the botanist and traveller William John Burchell. He was unsparing also in his criticism of his predecessors' writings on South Africa:

The earliest authors who have written on the subject of the Cape are Tachard, Merklin and Valentyn, none of whom were a day's journey from the town and consequently must have drawn up their relations from what they could collect from the inhabitants, which experience has found to be neither important nor correct.¹¹

Peter Kolb, whose *Caput Bonae Spei Hodiernum* (1731) held the field for many years, "retailed idle stories of the peasantry that betray his great credulity and imbecility of mind and filled his book with relations that are calculated to mislead rather than inform". The respected astronomer Lacaille's account was "very imperfect". The Swedish plant-hunter Sparrman repeated "absurd stories" told by Kolb and offered a map "so miserably defective and so incorrect in every part, that he must certainly have constructed it in his closet from recollection". Sparrman's fellow Linnaean, Thunberg's book "conveys neither accurate topography nor even a general idea of the colony", and William Paterson's was "a mere journal of occurrences" which "re-publishes the very defective map of Sparrman". Levaillant received the greatest scorn of them all: some "valuable matter and ingenious observations [are] jumbled together with fiction and romance" and "when he endeavours to mislead the world on subjects that are important ... he lays himself open to censure and ought, in justice to the public, to be exposed".¹²

7. See Barrow, *Auto-Biographical Memoir*.

8. Murray, London, 1831.

9. Private Collection, Revd S. Smith – G.T. Vigne, 30 June 1840.

10. *The Cape Journals of Lady Anne Barnard, 1797-98*, ed. A.M.L. Robison (Cape Town, Van Riebeeck Society, 1995); Library of Parliament, Cape Town, Fairbairn Papers, 1/1, T. Pringle – J. Fairbairn, 12 December 1819.

11. Barrow, *Account of Travels 1*, p 15.

12. Barrow, *Account of Travels 1*, pp 15-16.

Barrow had convinced himself, and set out to convince his readers that as he wrote in 1801, “of all the accessible parts of the earth, the interior of southern Africa is the least known to Europeans”.¹³ The way was open for John Barrow to fill the gap with the results of his long and laborious journeys, his exhaustive note taking and his use of his surveying equipment – “small pocket sextant of Ramsden of five-inch radius, an artificial horizon, a case of mathematical instruments, a pocket compass [and] a small telescope”.¹⁴ These were put to constant use to produce the map which in his view surpassed all its predecessors. He wrote:

Whenever a hill or a distant mountain was visible, I took its bearing, and noted the hour at the time, and having proceeded to a given distance ... I again intersected the line of bearing of the same mountain; thus, together with the observed altitude of the sun at noon ... I had the materials noted down for transferring them to my chart ... and this, with my notebook, occupied a part of the evenings in my tent.¹⁵

Barrow offers more detail on the mapping of Algoa Bay in collaboration with Lt William McPherson Rice RN of HMS *Hope*, “an expert and intelligent gentleman”, one of several who did much for the cartography of Africa. They were surprised to find Algoa Bay and Table Bay to be on the same latitude. The land, as Barrow put it,

juts out into the sea far beyond what was supposed, and laid down in the charts, and it was probably owing to the want of this knowledge that the unfortunate loss of the Grosvenor, East Indiaman, may be ascribed.¹⁶

– and several hundred such wrecks since the sixteenth century.

Barrow's eloquent contempt for his predecessors was more justified when directed at the maps they produced. He derides the map of the western Cape constructed by the Huguenot cartographer in London, Louis Stanislas d'Arcy de La Rochette and published in 1782, as “so incorrect, even the vicinity of the Cape, that the four and twenty rivers are made to flow in an opposite direction to that which is actually the case”.¹⁷ (Twenty-four Rivers was in fact a farming area north of Cape Town.) He also gave some small credit to De La Rochette, a prolific London cartographer of regions in all five continents described by his publisher, Faden, as “the late eminent and learned geographer”,¹⁸ and to the manuscript map of 1796 produced by two VOC officers, Johan Christof Frederici and the Cape-born Josephus Jones, a copy of which escaped the clear-out of some 95 maps the departing Dutch made from the Castle. (But for fifteen in the Rijksarchief in The Hague they have never been found.)¹⁹ Frederici and Jones mapped the coastal strip from Cape Agulhas to Algoa Bay, showing roads and the

13. Barrow, *Account of Travels*, 1, p 312.

14. Barrow, *Auto-Biographical Memoir*, p 143.

15. Barrow, *Auto-Biographical Memoir*, pp 151–152.

16. Barrow, *Auto-Biographical Memoir*, p 161.

17. Barrow, *Account of Travels*, 2, p 17.

18. W. Faden, Geographer to H.M. King George III, South America map, 1803.

19. V.S. Forbes, *Pioneer Travellers in Southern Africa* (Balkema, Cape Town, 1965), p 140.

farms and their owners, south of the first mountain ranges.²⁰ The map maker at that time had little to go on inland but the farm diagrams surveyed over a long period, and their own mapping of the coast superseded disastrously inaccurate sea charts. Rear-Admiral Pringle had dispatched the *Hope* to Algoa Bay “to explore and get information on the almost totally unknown coast of Africa to the Eastward of the Cape”.²¹

Barrow's two volumes were acclaimed and John Murray's handsome payment of £900 more than justified. At last there was also a map to be relied upon, although with limitations imposed by his having travelled over only a part of the territory himself. His “General Chart of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope constructed ... in the years 1797–8” was not published separately. The much-handled copy in the Royal Geographical Society's map room, taken from volume 2, has C.R. Fox's name on it. The eldest son of the Whig statesman, Lord Holland, Fox had transferred to the Cape Regiment in 1821–22,²² presumably to see Africa and hunt big game, and had clearly used Barrow's map on his travels to the Eastern Cape, where he visited Thomas Pringle and the Scottish settlers in the Winterberg.²³

Other travellers made use of the new freedom of movement into the interior that British rule had brought. The Revd John Campbell's accounts of his two African journeys, published in 1815 and 1822,²⁴ added to public awareness of South Africa. The “African traveller” as Campbell travelling on foot under a large sunshade was known, became a minor celebrity. Before him in 1812, the English edition of Martin Hinrich Carl Lichtenstein's *Travels in Southern Africa*, having been first published in German, gave instruction and pleasure to many. He had accompanied Commissary De Mist on his tour of the colony, after Barrow's *Account* had appeared. He was critical of Barrow, pointed out many errors in his text and expressed disapproval of Barrow's contempt for the trekboers, which he alleged encouraged contempt in his readers: “Nothing”, wrote Lichtenstein, “has been read with greater avidity or more eagerly treasured ... than his accounts of the ignorance, the brutality, the filthiness and the perverseness of the African farmers.”²⁵

He may have had a hand in the compiling of De Mist's Memorandum of 1802 on the government of the Cape. The memorandum slightly impugns Barrow's probity by suggesting that Barrow's map was “based on an accurate chart drawn by the late Colonel R. Gordon [which] has been known for some time although, for some reason, it was never published. Now, however, it has evidently come into the possession of this English writer. Be

20. Forbes, *Pioneer Travellers*, p 134.

21. G.M. Theal, *Records of the Cape Colony*, 11 (Longman, London, 1897), p 180.

22. NA Kew, WO 65, *War Office Annual Army List*, 1822.

23. T. Pringle, *African Sketches, Part 2, Narrative of a Residence in South Africa* (Moxon, London, 1834), pp 247–251.

24. J. Campbell, *Travels in South Africa Undertaken at the Request of the London Missionary Society* (Black & Parry, London, 1815).

25. M.H.C. Lichtenstein, *Travels in Southern Africa in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805 and 1806* (Colburn, London, 1812), p 9.

that as it may, anyone [comparing it with other maps will find it] by far the most accurate of them all."²⁶

A close comparison of Barrow's map with that of the great and glorious, and ultimately tragic, Robert Jacob Gordon, housed in the Rijksmuseum in The Hague, suggests otherwise.²⁷ Lichtenstein was, nonetheless highly critical of Barrow's map which was "by far the most accurate" only because its predecessors were so faulty. Lichtenstein "seldom found of any use, as, for example, Graaff-Reinet and Algoa Bay are laid down a whole degree too far eastwards". Dr Lichtenstein wrote reprovingly that Barrow: "in the second part of his travels acknowledges the defectiveness of his map, though not with the manly frankness and openness which might be wished."²⁸ Barrow hit back in the *Quarterly Review*: Lichtenstein's book was for "instruction and amusement" but "completely failed to effect either the one or the other ... Mr (note the "Mr") Lichtenstein has contrived to make just as dull and uninteresting a volume as we have been doomed to wade through". He stoops to sneering abuse:

We apprehend that Doctor Lichtenstein was made "Professor of Natural History in the University of Berlin" in consequence of a box of insects presented to that learned body: for we find nothing in his book which indicates the slightest knowledge of the science.²⁹

Barrow does not challenge Lichtenstein's complaints about his map, however. Lichtenstein's censure was to delight the author of the fullest description of them all on the Cape, its peoples and its natural life – the great naturalist William John Burchell.

Burchell was a solitary figure with few connections beyond his father's successful nursery in Fulham and his place of work, Kew Gardens, to the social world Barrow frequented. He invariably took on or involved himself in projects that overwhelmed him. He travelled 4 500 miles throughout South Africa, over a four and half year period, to the borders of what is now Botswana and east to the Keiskama River, without a break in Cape Town and with only Khoisan fellow travellers or servants for company. He collected and shipped home from South Africa 63 000 specimens of plant and animal life and a further 51 000 Brazilian specimens after his five-year stay there, from 1825.

He published in 1822 and 1824 two magnificent and beautifully illustrated volumes of his *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*,³⁰ just when the demand for such literature had died down after the settlement of

26. *Memorandum of Commissary De Mist*, 1802, p 166.

27. Forbes, *Pioneer Travellers*, p 134.

28. Lichtenstein, *Travels in Southern Africa*, 1, p 136.

29. J. Barrow, "Travels in Southern Africa ... by Henry Lichtenstein", *Quarterly Review*, 16 December 1812, pp 365–377.

30. By William J. Burchell, Esq, with an entirely new map and numerous engravings, 2 vols (Longman, London, 1822/1824). Edition quoted here "Reprinted from the original edition (1822/4) with additional material ... (Batchworth Press, London, 1953).

more than 4 000 British settlers in the eastern Cape. The volumes dealt only with his northward journey to the Molapo River beyond Litakun (near today's Vryburg) and eastwards over the Sneeuberg to Graaff-Reinet. The third volume, if it was ever written, would have taken the reader to the area of British settlement further east and back to Cape Town along the southern coastal route, of far greater interest than the Great Karroo and the north. Even his notebooks for the two years of this second half of his travels have vanished.³¹ The two volumes were priced at four and a half guineas each, which further limited their sales.

He was back in England by 1815 and spent the rest of his long life, after his books were written, classifying and describing his Cape and Brazilian collections. Barrow died aged 84, covered with glory and honours, having published his self-justifying autobiography two years before. Burchell's end came in comparative obscurity, at 81. And, disappointed perhaps by his failure to fulfil the great promise of his gifts and earlier days, he took his own life.

And his map? It surpassed Barrow's in many respects since he had covered far more of the ground he delineated than had Barrow, but the original was no less than 7 feet 6 inches by 8 feet 6 inches, and even the folded, reduced version in Volume 2 of his *Travels* was an unwieldy 84cm by 71cm, too large for such use as C.R. Fox made of Barrow's, or for study alongside the text.

Burchell's solitary life and total commitment to his collections was interrupted in 1819. An acquaintance of his, an enterprising merchant Henry Nourse, was one of the first to seize the opportunity for trade offered by the newly acquired Cape of Good Hope which had become a colony, by purchase from the Netherlands, in 1814. Nourse persuaded Burchell, at a day's notice, to give evidence before the Poor Law Commission of the House of Commons, on settlement prospects at the Cape.³²

Consternation at poverty, unemployment, disaffection among the country's "rude mechanicals", intensified by prolonged post-war depression, led a fearful government to seek ways of relieving the country of what was seen as excess population. Local councils were spending 50 percent of their budgets on poor relief and thus it was the Poor Law Commission before whom Burchell appeared in July 1819.³³

He spoke, and was questioned, for three hours. He persuaded the committee that the climate of the Cape was "exceedingly healthy, and the temperature very moderate ... and the country itself quite open to receive the plough", making it preferable to the rigours of north America, to which

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31. E.B. Poulton, *William John Burchell: The Materials for a Lecture* (Spottiswoode, London, 1907), p 61; Burchell, *Travels in the Interior*, 1 (1953), p xvii.
 32. Theal, *Records of the Cape Colony*, 17 (1903), pp 27–28, H. Nourse – Commissioners of Inquiry, 18 January 1824.
 33. British Parliamentary Papers, 1819, 2 (539). Report of the Select Committee on the Poor Laws, 1819. See also *Annual Register*, 1819.

Britain had been losing large numbers of men and women over a long period. He identified one area “with a view to the formation of one entire settlement of emigrants”, namely that lying between the Sundays and Great Fish rivers, known as the Zuurveld and proclaimed the district of Albany in 1814. He described it as “the most beautiful and probably the most productive part of the Cape Colony” and assured the committee that it was “of sufficient extent to receive a population of emigrants of several thousand persons”. When it was suggested that the Nguni people of the region might not be “very desirable neighbours”, he replied that he did not “conceive that to be any discouragement”.³⁴

Nothing was said then or later in the House of Commons debate about peopling this frontier area with British settlers as a buffer against the Xhosa that Cape governments had been trying to keep out for 40 years.³⁵ The governor at this time, Lord Charles Somerset, had indeed proposed such a scheme to the Colonial Secretary less than a year before³⁶ but it had fallen on deaf ears.

The 4 000 settlers were quickly chosen from some 90 000 enquirers and by January 1820 the transport ships were on their way to the eastern Cape and the Zuurveld, which Burchell, and Barrow, the latter in direct dealings with ministers, had recommended so confidently. Amongst the many pamphlets and newspaper articles that followed the announcement of the scheme, the most authoritative were, in August 1819, Burchell's 48-page *Hints on Emigration to the Cape of Good Hope*,³⁷ and in November, Barrow's 43-page article, “The Cape of Good Hope”, in the *Quarterly Review*.³⁸

Nourse had written that he had to persuade Burchell to overcome “his retired habits and disposition”.³⁹ His great contemporary at Kew, Sir Joseph Hooker, wrote that Burchell with his “sensitive mind and highly-strung nervous system, is a shy man of great mental powers and resources”.⁴⁰ In November the *Quarterly Review*, that occasionally merciless attacker of writers and artists, struck. Barrow, the anonymous contributor, analysed the settlement scheme and wrote favourably of the destination of the settlers, but had no praise for the literature the scheme had generated. Of Burchell's *Hints* he wrote:

34. Poor Law Committee Report, 1819, p 21.

35. N. Mostert, *Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1992), pp 224–295. A somewhat colourful but unusually reliable account of the struggle for possession of the Zuurveld.

36. I.E. Edwards, *The 1820 Settlers in South Africa. A Study in British Colonial Policy* (Longmans, London, 1934), pp 29–34.

37. W.J. Burchell, *Hints on Emigration to the Cape of Good Hope* (Hatchard, London, 1819).

38. No. 43 (Murray, London, 1819).

39. Theal, *Records of the Cape Colony*, 17, pp 27–28, H. Nourse – Commissioners of Inquiry, Cape Town, 20 January, 1824.

40. Poulton, *W.J. Burchell*, pp 96. See Burchell, *Travels in the Interior* (1953), p xvii.

Barrow and Burchell's rivalry

Mr Burchell, it seems travelled far into the interior and spent some years among the natives ... and we are only surprised that, under such circumstances, his book should contain so scanty a portion of actual information. He was, we understand, a "culler of simples" and he certainly seems to have culled little else.⁴¹

A "culler of simples"! This of the man a distinguished contemporary botanist William Swainson hailed as "one of the most learned and accomplished travellers of any age or country".⁴²

Barrow derided Burchell's suggestion of a reserve area for settlers "along the Nu-Gariep from the Zeekoe river and bounded on the west by [a] newly discovered river", which Burchell had been the first European to traverse. Burchell had also affirmed of that "flat and open country" that "it is particularly well suited for supporting sheep and for all the purposes of agriculture". It was "equally healthy with any part of the country and much more delightful".⁴³ Barrow was curtly dismissive:

To this point, and farther the colony may one day advance, but certainly will never begin there. Mr Burchell might as well talk of planting a settlement behind the Himalaya mountains. He means well, however, but we do not see that his book can be of any use to those who are about to emigrate.⁴⁴

Unlike John Keats who, a year after Barrow's superior, Croker, had savaged "Endymion" in the *Quarterly*, was "snuff'd out by an article,"⁴⁵ Burchell fought back. He wrote:

These *Hints* contain the most recent and authentic information relative to the subject notwithstanding the arrogance and wilful misrepresentation of the *Quarterly Review*, and when the Public shall have discovered who that reviewer is they may then be enabled to see through his motives.⁴⁶

For two and a half quarto pages of an appendix to his *Travels*, volume I, Burchell rebutted Barrow's detractions. He justified his evidence to the Poor Law Commission and the facts he had set down in *Hints* and made his bitter case against Barrow's account and his *Quarterly* article. He arraigned Barrow's "illiberality and arrogance", his "numerous errors and misrepresentations"; the "abuse" in the *Quarterly*; his book's "indelicate descriptions"; its "acrimonious aspersions on the Dutch natives"; and its "statistical matter [which] can only serve to mislead". Barrow's "petty, but important, tricks" as a reviewer are bad enough, wrote Burchell, but "in moral turpitude there is no difference between making a wilful misrepresentation and uttering the thing which is not". In the latter class belongs "this ... barefaced assertion", a "gross and palpable untruth". Barrow's motives, Burchell suggests, are jealousy of a rival author, or fear that his own failings will be exposed: "the vulgarity and malignity of his

41. J. Barrow, "The Cape of Good Hope", *Quarterly Review*, 43, 1819, p 209.

42. Poulton, *W.J. Burchell*, p 45.

43. Burchell, *Hints on Emigration*, p 40.

44. Barrow, "Cape of Good Hope", p 209.

45. Lord Byron, "Don Juan", canto 11, lxxvii.

46. "Advertisement" (1822), in Burchell, *Travels in the Interior* (1953), p xv.

language present a true and faithful portrait of his mind. Take from him his pen and he is nothing".⁴⁷

In his *Travels* Burchell poured scorn on Barrow's *Account* in four lengthy footnotes. On timber: "Our present Under Secretary to the Admiralty is rather unlucky in the display he makes of his knowledge and learning"; on the Korana: his book has "numerous errors and misrepresentations"; on his "wonderful account" of the Gnu (Sparrman was "an anatomist and zoologist and a man of *real* knowledge and consequently of some *modesty*"); on the Springbok, Barrow "proves how little he himself knows of a subject on which he is attempting to give information".⁴⁸

These gibes were on relatively minor matters. His most biting attack was in the appendix⁴⁹ (unfortunately omitted, with the map, from the 1953 edition edited by I. Schapera). He described his own use of telescope, sextant and the stars, which led him to find other maps "at considerable variance", with Barrow's.⁵⁰ He wrote:

As to the miserable thing called a map which has been prefaced to Mr Barrow's quarto, I perfectly agree with Professor Lichtenstein that it is so defective that it can seldom be found to be of any use. That which is given in Lichtenstein's book is certainly the best general map of the Colony that has hitherto appeared and is, as it is stated, indebted for its superiority to his use of a manuscript map made under the late Dutch government.⁵¹

This Dutch map, which Burchell had seen, was partly the work of the Chevalier Duminy and partly Frederici and Jones. He credits also Arrowsmith, Lacaille, Captain Arbuthnot, as well as Sparrman, Paterson and Levallant. Of Barrow's map, his contempt is manifest:

Its geographical deficiencies are so numerous that in order to give it some appearance by covering the blank paper with writing, the completion of it has been reduced to the necessity of spreading it over with scraps of information from the text and with lists of wild animals.⁵²

What was the outcome of all this? The settlement in the Zuurveld which Burchell had proposed and Barrow had eulogised as "the most beautiful division in the district ... well watered, has a great depth of soil and is well clothed with grass" began as a four-year nightmare. Prolonged drought, then floods, and a rust which destroyed the settlers' crops gave the lie to the depiction of the region as a demi-paradise. The settlers also suffered from neglect and a total lack of sympathy from officialdom in Cape Town.⁵³ Uncertain rainfall and the sour grass the name denoted (Barrow

47. Burchell, *Travels in the Interior*, 1967 reprint, pp 42–45.

48. Burchell, *Travels in the Interior*, 1, pp 54, 242, 299; 2 (1953 ed.), pp 78 ff.

49. See above. Burchell, *Travels in the Interior*, 1, pp 575–582 (1822 ed.), pp xvii, xviii.

50. "Remarks on the Map and Geographical Observations", Burchell, *Travels in the Interior*, 1 (1822 ed.), pp 577–578.

51. "Remarks", in Burchell, *Travels in the Interior*, 1 (1822 ed.), pp 577–578.

52. Burchell, *Travels in the Interior*, 1 (1822 ed.), pp 577–578.

53. Anon. (W.W. Bird), *State of the Cape of Good Hope in 1822* (Murray, London, 1822), pp 233–243; Pringle, *African Sketches*, pp 340–355.

translated Zuurveld as "Sour Grass plains")⁵⁴ meant that it would never be agriculturally ideal for European farmers as was envisaged.

The worst of it all was a complete misapprehension as to the attitude of the Xhosa to the occupation of land they had never willingly given over to British or Dutch rule. (To Burchell the Tswana-speaking BaTlhaping in the north-east were "peaceable, friendly and half-civilized", their virtues and vices were described with balance and sympathy.⁵⁵ Always more extreme, Barrow described the young Rharhabe king, Ngqika, as a paragon of virtue and beauty).⁵⁶ In 1781 a Boer commando leader, Adriaan van Jaarsveld, had ordered a massacre of a large party of the imiDange section of the Rharhabe whom he had failed to persuade to withdraw eastwards over the Great Fish River.⁵⁷ This was the start of the First Frontier War, and of what is now known as the Hundred Years War, which ended with the Ninth Frontier War in 1878. In September 1820 a settler herdboyc was killed by cattle thieves from across the Great Fish River border.⁵⁸ Just before Christmas 1834, there was a full-scale invasion by the Rharhabe with some 36 settlers killed and numerous farmhouses and mission stations burnt in a nine-month war. The nobility and high character of the Nguni which had so impressed Barrow and, less so, Burchell was shown only in the sparing of settler women and children by the invaders.⁵⁹

As the old chestnut has it, about Chou en Lai's dictum that it was too soon to judge the effects of the French Revolution (though he was, we are told, referring to the troubles of 1968), the effect of the placing of the British settlers on land claimed by the indigenous Nguni people has yet to be determined, now that national power has moved from the British to the Afrikaners and now to the Nguni-Sotho themselves.

As to Barrow's map and Burchell's vilification of it, it seems that Barrow became the standard for the Cape cartographers that followed. Its faults may have been obscured by a new generation of surveyors of the coast from the Royal Navy (Captain W.F.W. Owen in 1834 outstanding among them) and of the interior by Royal Engineers officers. Lichtenstein's and Burchell's maps must surely have been used by the Arrowsmiths, and later comers like Captain A.T.E. Vidal RN and in the 1850s, Henry Hall. The first surveyor-general at the Cape, Colonel C.C. Michell in 1828, recognised the need for an accurate map of the colony but it was not until after the arrival of the dynamic Sir David Gill at the Cape as Astronomer Royal in 1879 that "a gridiron network of trigonometrical chains covering the whole of

54. Barrow, *Account of Travels*, 1, p 110.

55. Burchell, *Travels in the Interior*, 2, chapter 18, pp 529–599, notably pp 555, 563–564.

56. Barrow, *Account of Travels*, 1, pp 193–199.

57. Mostert, *Frontiers*, pp 229–230. New light is shed in J. Peires, "The Other Side of the Black Silk Handkerchief: The Van Plettenberg Agreement of 1778", *Quarterly Bulletin of the National Library of South Africa*, 62, 1, March 2008, pp 9–35.

58. H.E. Hockly, *The Story of the British Settlers of 1820 in South Africa* (Juta, Cape Town, 1957), p 70.

59. Hockly, *The Story of the British Settlers*, p 121.

South Africa” was achieved and the first accurate large-scale map of South Africa was drawn.⁶⁰

It is a matter for regret that so few historians have examined the mapping of South Africa since, as one of them has written, “mapping ... in the name of science was the prelude to occupying it in the name of Empire”. Barrow’s work at the Cape has been described in the same study as “one of the most important legacies” of the first British occupation, in the form of “a massively comprehensive report on the state of the Cape and the composition of an accurate and adequate map of the Colony”.⁶¹ Furthermore, as Henry Dundas, Minister for War and the Colonies noted, Barrow’s *Account of Travels* “provided all of the arguments for the occupation of the Cape and the justification for the second British occupation”.⁶² For all his mastery, no such claim can be made for Burchell.

It remains only to notice that it is Burchell whose achievements and fame have been kept alive as have Barrow’s, outside South Africa. Burchell’s *Travels* has been reissued in three separate editions and a fourth in an abridgement for schools. There have been fresh printings of his paintings and recognition of his great artistic talent. Editions of Darwin’s letters bring him to life. Darwin wrote to Professor Henslow, who had recommended his former student for the *Beagle*, when he learned that Captain Fitzroy had accepted him for the voyage that he would “most probably call on Mr Burchell”. He did so and “Mr Burchell told me that when entering Brazil nothing struck him more forcibly than the splendour of the South American vegetation, contrasted to that of South Africa, together with the absence of all large quadrupeds”, a paradox that intrigued both men of science. Darwin wrote to his sister Catherine from Maldonado on the Rio Plata asking for seven books, one of which was Burchell’s *Travels*.

Finally, in April 1865, Sir Joseph Hooker wrote from Kew to “Dear old Darwin”: “All Burchell’s collections are coming here soon! Most valuable and excellent – Brazil and South Africa”. And a month later: “All Burchell’s enormous collections have come here. I have not only to train a new Clerk but a new Herbarium assistant.”⁶³

Kew Gardens received all the botanical specimens and manuscripts, many specimens having already been donated to the British Museum, Natural History (the Natural History Museum of today) where they were damaged, causing a bitter dispute between Burchell and the museum. Two years after his death, his sister, in 1865, gave his entomological,

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60. J.C. Stone, *A Short History of the Cartography of Africa* (Edwin Mellen, Lewiston, NY, 1995); D. Schrire, *Cape of Good Hope* (Map Collectors’ Circle, London, 1968), pp 47, 48. E. Liebenberg, *Topographical Maps of South Africa, 1879–1979* (Unisa Press, Pretoria, 1979), pp 3–4 and personal communication.
 61. N. Penn, “Mapping the Cape: John Barrow and the First Occupation of the Cape of Good Hope, 1795–1803”, in J.C. Stone (ed.), *Maps and Africa* (Aberdeen University, Aberdeen, 1994), pp 110, 115.
 62. Penn, “Mapping the Cape”, p 120.
 63. Darwin Correspondence Project, Letters 118, 206, 4836. www.darwinproject.ac.uk

ethnological, geological and zoological specimens and manuscripts to the new University Museum at Oxford, where had been given an Hon. DCL in 1831, and where his memory is honoured today.⁶⁴

Barrow's southern African reputation has not so well survived the end of empire. His excoriation of the trekboers probably accounts for the absence of a modern edition of his *Account of Travels*, unlike the major works of Burchell, Lichtenstein, Masson, Paterson, Sparrman, Thunberg and others. From the great open spaces of southern Africa he had moved on to frozen northern wastes, though as the organiser and administrator of the endeavours of others. A recent "global history of exploration" finds him "a genius of demonic energy ... irascible, ungenerous, and usually wrong-headed. His own geographical opinions were wayward [and] he was a poor judge of men". So far Felipe Fernández-Armesto's pen picture is recognisable from Barrow's post-southern African days. Nevertheless, "in the 1830s ... he used the ... Royal Geographical Society of London, of which he was the first President, to galvanize government, inspire patrons, harness explorers and enthuse the public".⁶⁵

A last word on William John Burchell from a little earlier. "He was a man of outstanding personality, meeting difficult situations with courage and resourcefulness ... a man of rare quality, with a powerful physique, a fine and penetrating intellect and a strong and most attractive character", wrote H.C. Notcutt in the abridged *Travels* (1938). To I. Schapera, editor of the two-volume 1953 edition, "his book not merely displays his proficiency in many spheres of knowledge and art; it is also written with a grace and balance which make it a pleasure to read".⁶⁶

Barrow in geopolitics, Burchell in science, and with that one Poor Law Commission venture into Barrow's sphere, made significant contributions to the development of southern Africa, found by Barrow in 1801 to be "the least known to Europeans". Barrow's map moved knowledge of the region forward, and Burchell's, though it is superior, did not. Despite their enmity as rivals both played their part in the 1820 British settlement in the eastern Cape. Of the two, it was Burchell who claimed to be "the first to advise and bring into notice [for] placing the new colony in the Zuureveld or Albany".⁶⁷

Typically of Burchell's fate, his key role in inspiring the Zuurveld location of the settlement has been overlooked by historians who are intent on making the case for its creation as a "buffer" against Xhosa inroads.⁶⁸

64. www.oum.ox.ac.uk

65. F. Fernández-Armesto, *Pathfinders: A Global History of Exploration* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006), p 340.

66. H.C. Notcutt, *Selections from Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1935). Burchell, *Travels in the Interior*, 1 (1953).

67. Burchell, *Travels in the Interior*, 2, appendix, p 631.

68. Edwards, *The 1820 Settlers in South Africa*, pp 18–53. On the "buffer" case see H.J.M. Johnston, *British Emigration Policy, 1815–1830* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1972); R. Vigne, "Barrow, Burchell and the 1820 Settlement", Unpub. seminar paper, Brenthurst Library, Johannesburg, 9 September 2005; R. Vigne, Paper at

Nevertheless, it was he and Barrow who moved the history of southern Africa into a new direction, in which it has not yet run its course.

Abstract

Barrow's six years at the Cape, with four long journeys, and Burchell's close on five years ox-wagon travel gave Barrow's *Account of Travels* pre-eminent authority status, with jealous attacks on rival travellers' books and their maps. This criticism included those of Burchell, as scientist and mapmaker largely his superior. Burchell hit back with equal vituperation. Despite their enmity they advanced knowledge of the interior "least known to Europeans" (Barrow) and came together in promoting the Zuurveld as place of settlement for the 5 000 emigrants dispatched in 1820 by a government aiming to export potential radicals among the unemployed. Burchell depicted the Zuurveld as a demi-paradise to the Poor Law Commission of parliament and Barrow did the same to ministers. The anti-Xhosa 'buffer' was never an issue and the 1834 Rharhabe invasion unforeseen. Barrow, public figure and prolific author, outshone Burchell, the retired botanist and benefactor of Kew Gardens: the latter's fame has come late. The long-term consequence of their case for Zuurveld settlement is still undecided.

Key words: Barrow; Burchell; maps; botanising; emigration; parliament; Zuurveld; drought; invasion; Kew Gardens.

Opsomming

Barrow se ses jaar aan die Kaap, met vier lang reise, en Burchell's se bykans vuf jaar lange ossewa reistogte het Barrow se *Account of Travels* autoriteits status gegee met jaloerse aanvalle op die reis boeke en karate van mede-reisgers. Dit het ingesluit aanvalle op Burchell, wie as wetenskaplike en karteerder sy meerdere was. Burchell het terug geveg met felle kritiek. Ondanks hul vyandighied het hulle op 'n gedeelde wyse kennis van die binneland wat "die minste bekend was aan Europeers" (Barrow) bekend gestel en sodoende tesame die Zuurveld as 'n plek van vestiging vir die 5 000 werklose immigrante uit Brittanje wat deur die 1820 regering landuit gestuur wou word – insluitende die radikales. Burchell het die Zuurveld as 'n demi-paradys voorgehou aan die Arm Wet Kommissie van die parlement en Barrow het dieselfde prentjie voorgehou aan die ministers. Die anti-Xhosa "buffer" was nooit 'n factor nie en die 1834 Rharhabe inval onvoorsien. Barrow, die publieke figuur en uitstaande outeur, se soter het helderder geskyn as die van Burchell, die afgetrede botanis en bevoordeelde van Kew Gardens: laasgenoemde se faam het eers later gekom. Die lang termyn gevolge van hul promosie van die Zuurveld as 'n plek vir nedersetting is nog nie beslis nie.

77th Anglo-American Conference of Historians, Institute of Historical Research, University of London, 2–4 July 2008. Burchell's achievements in many fields have recently been examined in R. Stewart and B. Warner, "William John Burchell: The Multi-skilled Polymath", *The South African Journal of Science*, 2012, 108 (11/12), pp 45–53.

Barrow and Burchell's rivalry

Sleutelwoorde: Barrow; Burchell; kaarte; botanisatie; emigrasie; parlement; Zuurveld; droogte; inval; Kew Gardens.