

# Descriptions of clear Murray-Darling rivers by the first explorers

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*Dates have been taken from the text of the journals themselves, which often did not mention the date for a number of days. The dates derived have not been checked against dates contained in contemporary sources of information on these expeditions.*

## **Hume and Hovell on the (strongly flowing, non-drought) Tumut River around Tumut town site or below 4 November, 1824**

“The tea-tree grows on the sides of this river. A fish\* was seen in the stream, but which refused the bait. This was the first fish that had been observed in the last two rivers, and closely resembled the cod fish of the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee.”

[\*A free swimming Murray cod or Trout cod. The sighting of this fish suggests extreme water clarity.]

## **Hume and Hovell on the (strongly flowing, non-drought) Murray River at Albury 16 November, 1824**

"This beautiful stream is found to be not less than eighty yards in breadth, apparently of considerable depth; the current about three miles an hour; **the water, for so considerable a current, clear.**"

## **Charles Sturt in the preface of his published Journals of Expedition**

Refers to being borne along the **Murray River's "broad and transparent waters"**

## **Charles Sturt on the (drought affected) Macquarie River around Burrendong Dam site Mid-December, 1828**

One long description of crystal clear water and the visually based spear-fishing techniques it allowed. Macquarie River described as "**hard and transparent**".

## **Charles Sturt on the (strongly flowing, non-drought) Murrumbidgee River below Jugiong 25 November, 1829**

"...the river was **hard and transparent**"

## **Charles Sturt on the (strongly flowing, non-drought) Murray River below the Murrumbidgee River junction 14 January, 1830**

"**Its transparent waters** were running over a sandy bed at the rate of two-and-a-half knots an hour, and its banks, although averaging eighteen feet in height, were evidently subject to floods."

**Charles Sturt on the junction of the (strongly flowing, non-drought) Murray River with the (strongly flowing, non-drought) Darling River  
23 January, 1830**

"The new river, whether the Darling or an additional discovery, meets its more southern rival on a N. by E. course; the latter, running W.S.W. at the confluence, the angle formed by the two rivers, is, therefore, so small that both may be considered to preserve their proper course, and neither can be said to be tributary to the other. At their junction, the Murray spreads its waters over the broad and sandy shore, upon which our boat grounded, while its more impetuous neighbour flows through the deep but narrow channel it has worked out for itself, under the right bank. The strength of their currents must have been nearly equal, since there was as distinct a line between their respective waters, to a considerable distance below the junction, as if a thin board alone separated them. The one half the channel contained the turbid waters of the northern stream, **the other [Murray] still preserved their original transparency.**"

**Charles Sturt on the (strongly flowing, non-drought) Murray River with the junction of the (strongly flowing, non-drought) Rufus River [outlet for Lake Victoria]  
1 April (?), 1830**

"... for nearly fifty yards below the mouth of the Rufus, **the waters of the Murray preserve their transparency**, and the line between them and the turbid waters of its tributary was as distinctly marked as if drawn by a pencil."

**Major Mitchell on the (low, but still flowing) Darling River  
1 June, 1831**

"**The water being beautifully transparent, the bottom was visible at great depths, showing large fishes in shoals, floating like birds in mid air.** At the narrows the quantity of running water was very inconsiderable, but, perhaps, as much as might have turned a mill."

**Major Mitchell on the (low, but still flowing) Darling River  
10 July, 1831**

These tribes inhabiting the banks of the Darling may be considered Ichthyophagi [Greek for "fish eaters"], in the strictest sense, and their mode of fishing was really an interesting sight. There was an unusually deep and broad reach of the river opposite to our camp, and it appear that they fished daily in different portions of it, in the following manner. The king stood erect in his bark canoe, while nine young men, with short spears, went up the river, and as many down, until, at a signal from him, all dived into it, and returned towards him, alternately swimming and diving; **transfixing the fish under water [indicating extreme water clarity]**, and throwing them on the bank. **Others on the river brink speared the fish when thus enclosed, as they appeared among the weeds, in which small openings were purposely made [indicating extremely rich submergent macrophyte growth] that they might see them.** In this manner, they killed with astonishing despatch, some enormous cod-perch; but the largest were struck by the chief from his canoe, with a long barbed spear.

**Major Mitchell on the (strongly flowing, non-drought) Murrumbidgee River around the (ephemeral) junction with the Lachlan River  
12 May, 1836**

".....I suddenly saw the water before me, and stood at last on the banks of the Murrumbidgee. This magnificent stream was flowing within eight feet of its banks, with considerable rapidity, **the water being quite clear**; and it really exceeded so much my expectations (surpassing far the Darling, and the Australian rivers I had then seen), that I was at first inclined to think it could be nothing less than the Murray; which, like the Darling, might have been laid down to far to the west. After thirsting so long amongst the muddy holes of the Lachlan, I witnessed, with no slight degree of satisfaction, the jaded cattle drinking at this full and flowing stream, resembling a thing of life, in its deep and rippling waters."

**Edward John Eyre on the (strongly flowing, non-drought) Murray River in South Australia  
1840-1841**

One long description of **extremely clear water** and the visually based spear-fishing techniques it allowed the aborigines, including spear fishing at night from canoes that were illuminated by small fires made on wads of clay mounted on the bows of the canoes.