

THOMAS BAINES (1820-1875)

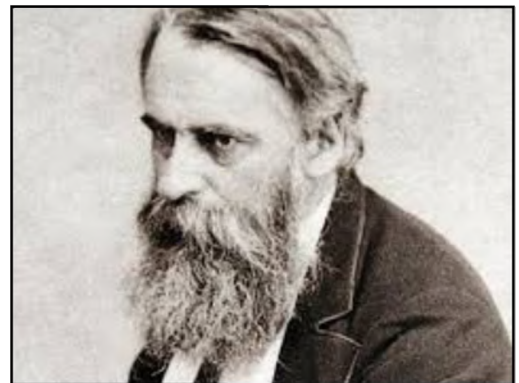
Artist, Traveller, Explorer

Journalist, Cartographer

by Rod Hooper-Box

A summary of the following presentation was delivered by Dave Hawkins to an audience of LAHS members at the AGM in October 2021

'Life of a Traveller' was the title of an 1873 presentation made by Baines to the Grey Institute in Port Elizabeth. Ever a modest man, he did not describe himself as an explorer, nor even as an artist. He stated he was *'driven by the adventure of Travel.'* It is true that he never led an expedition, never made any major discovery, never thought of himself as a great artist - rather, his goal was to represent in words and images what he had seen and experienced. And he did it so, so well. It is through him that we can visualise what it was like during the 1840s to 1870s - in Southern and Central Africa, as well as in Tropical Northern Australia.



After his death notable contemporaries praised him memorably. To quote the 1876 Presidential Address before the Royal Geographical Society, *'Probably no living man, not even excepting Dr Livingstone himself, had been so pertinaciously engaged in travelling. He was a man of marked individuality of character, a born artist and explorer, a lover of wild life, and skilled in all the shifts and resources of an explorer's career. Few men were so well endowed with these and other qualifications for successful African travel, and perhaps none other possessed greater courage and perseverance or untiring industry.'*

Thanks to Oppenheimer's prescient acquisition of Baines journals, sketches, and paintings, Wallis was able to publish the first book dealing with Baines since 1877.

Quote:

'The greatest of Southern Africa's artist-explorers - naturalist, navigator, cartographer, writer, and above all, prolific and talented painter.' **Prof. Wallis, Pretoria Uni., 1942.**

'He was a lively, imaginative, courageous little man; a man of many talents - with a penchant for fine writing and a wholesome respect for accuracy and truth; a man with a pawky sense of humour; a good-natured man; and above all, a modest man. He was generous in his judgements, and on his journeys made friends with equal facility with Briton, Boer, or Bantu. The man unconsciously depicted in the diaries is one of the most likeable and one of the most remarkable characters in the whole of Africana literature.' **R.F.Kennedy, Director of the Africana Museum. Editor, 1961.**

'A complex personality, he fascinates and intrigues... talented, prolific and energetic...it would be unjust to underestimate the explorer, his contributions to science and geography, or his resourcefulness under difficult circumstances... He had a somewhat difficult personality, counterbalanced by his conspicuous sense of humour. A loner who knew how to entertain...' **Carruthers & Arnold, Unisa lecturers (history and art) 1995.**

The focus of Wallis and Kennedy was on Africana. They valued Baines as a true recorder of what he observed. Carruthers and Arnold are 'woke' academics interested in gender identity and the sociological/political interpretation of art. They apply modern day values, deny that his art was true representation, and consider his paintings to be racist colonial propaganda. Be this as it may, the images in their book are outstanding.

Early Days: Baines was apprenticed in 1836 to an ornamental carriage builder in Kings Lynn, where he learnt heraldic painting. In 1842 he sailed from London to Cape Town and was employed by a cabinet-maker and a sign-maker. Encouraged by Frederick Logier to become a full-time artist, by 1846 he was advertised as a 'marine portrait painter'. Then, inspired by artist George F Angas to travel, in February 1848 he sailed to Algoa Bay.

Baines was often spoken of as '**A Traveller,**' not really a descriptor we'd apply to a person today. In 1842 he travelled 108 days in steerage, from London to Cape Town. In 1848, '*seeking adventure*', he sailed 13 days to Algoa Bay; then seven days by ox-wagon to Graham's Town. Between 1853 and 1868 (sleeping in his tent on deck)

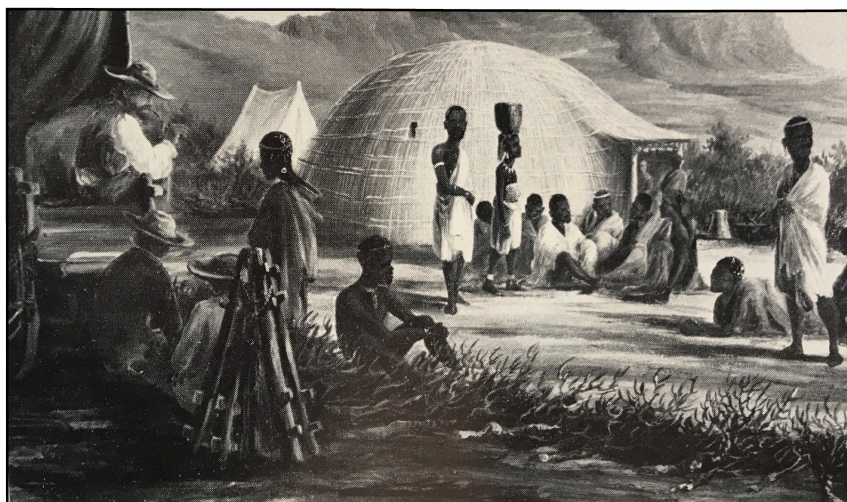
Baines sailed a further three times to and from the Cape and England - each direction averaging three months. That's 24 months' sea travel. Add to that the 1855 voyage England to Sydney (69 days); plus African travel and his circumnavigation of Australia - 25,760 km - and his voyages to Java and Timor. [A Traveller he certainly was!]

Wagons pulled by twelve, or even sixteen oxen, moved about 4 km (2.5 miles) per hour. Oxen required a long rest after eating, so the average distance covered by a loaded ox-wagon averaged 18km (11 miles) per day. Of course **exploration** beyond the settled Cape, into the unknown, where there were no roads, would be even slower. Travel by horseback is faster, at a walk of about 6.4km per hour. A horse can walk for about eight hours per day, thereby covering about 51,5km. But a horse cannot carry the supplies needed for lengthy exploration.

Two **Early Expeditions** were learning experiences for Baines:

1. **March 15th to June 22nd 1848, by wagons with the Liddle brothers**, visiting Graham's Town, Fort Beaufort, Eland's Post, Shilo, Whittlesea, Burghersdorp, Colesberg, Maestrom, Gola Post, Fort Beaufort, Graham's Town.

20 March, Fort Beaufort *'...retouching and finishing my morning sketches, my proceedings were watched with much interest and some suspicion by the Hottentot females of the establishment, who questioned their mistress as to my object in putting people's faces in my pocket...'*



9. THE TRADER'S, MR. HARRIS'S CABIN NEAR THE WHITE KEI (18 Apr. 1848).

17 June, *'We entered Beaufort, where our Hottentots regaled their wondering auditory with right wondrous tales of their and our achievements and the difficulties we had undergone. The cold was described as so severe as to reduce us to the necessity of hewing every morning a hole through ice of tremendous thickness.'*

Buffaloes and elephants had been seen covering the plain like herds of cattle; lions were running over the plains like flocks of sheep; and tigers, compelled by their very numbers to forsake the forest, had so swarmed upon the flat that we had much difficulty in making our way through them...'

2. August 6 to 18 October 1849, the 'Solitary Journey' to Graham's Town, Trompetter's Drift, Peddie, King William's Town, East London, Goonooobe, Fort Cox, Shiloh, Whittlesea, Fort Armstrong, Kat River Settlement, Post Retief, Tarka Post, Fort Beaufort, Graham's Town.



Right, above: Xhosa hut where Baines spent the night, near "Goonooobie". There were good relationships and trust on both sides, despite this being relatively shortly after the 7th Frontier War, and before the 8th.

Baines, having learnt to ride *'saddled up, and, with a couple of blankets behind my saddle, a few beads, tobacco and biscuit in the side-bag, my gun by my side, and pistols in the holsters, I left town about 11 a.m.'* [In England, I doubt he'd ever owned or shot a gun.]

His horse died towards the end of this expedition. There had been a drought and forage was inadequate. *'5th October, my gallant steed. Poor Hotspur!... memory depicted afresh the vicissitudes through which we had passed together; and the thought of the share which I might have had in hastening his end caused me regret unmixed with the selfish feelings which soon after followed, when I thought of my own situation, a penniless, ragged, and almost barefoot wanderer, with the Winterberg and a hundred and thirty miles of country between me and my home.'*

War Artist and Correspondent, 1851-1852.

As possibly the first embedded war artist and correspondent, Baines' reports on scenes and events during the 8th Frontier War, together with his illustrations, were

regularly printed in *The Illustrated London News*. Numerous military officers saw his work and requested similar paintings. Some are now treasured in British Regimental Museums.

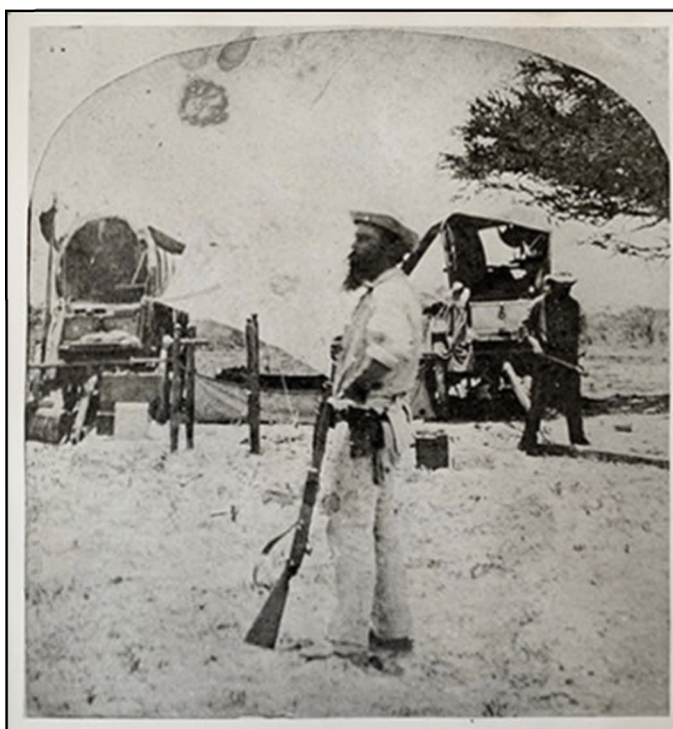
Shortly after being appointed to General Somerset's staff, in late June 1851, having moved from Fort Hare, Baines was involved in action in the Amatola Mountains and at Riet River. He was with the troops from June 1851 to January 1852 during the Frontier War (1850-53).

'I dismounted and was rapidly transferring the scene to paper, when a bullet, after narrowly missing the General, ...sang over my head. The sharp rattle of small arms followed.....Of my own feelings when first I raised my weapon against the life of a fellow creature I shall say nothing; the power of sight seemed gone from me, and a hazy indistinctness floated before my eyes. Nevertheless, my shot, though a trifle short, fell, as my friend informed me, in a good line.'

Right: photograph of Baines holding his 1859 Thomas Wilson breech loading rifle, *"We have loaded with facility while running from a wounded elephant and turned again to fire within eighty yards"*.

[He had managed to buy the latest technology. One recently sold for for £ 2,650]

Note: Chapman's Expedition was the first to be recorded using a Stereoscopic two lens camera.



Back in Graham's Town he wrote: *'I worked for nearly twelve months - indeed, so long as my health allowed me - almost unremittingly. My paintings were brought to the notice of His Royal Highness the Prince Consort, and...inspected by him and Her Majesty at the Royal Residence, with much satisfaction - more, of course, on account of the interest attaching to the scenes they represented than to the little artistic merit they possessed....I succeeded in obtaining my passage on board an Aberdeen vessel then in the Bay, and with three half crowns in my pocket, set sail for England, where after a voyage of three months during the greater part of which I slept in my calico tent on deck - arrived in London on 13th September 1853.'*

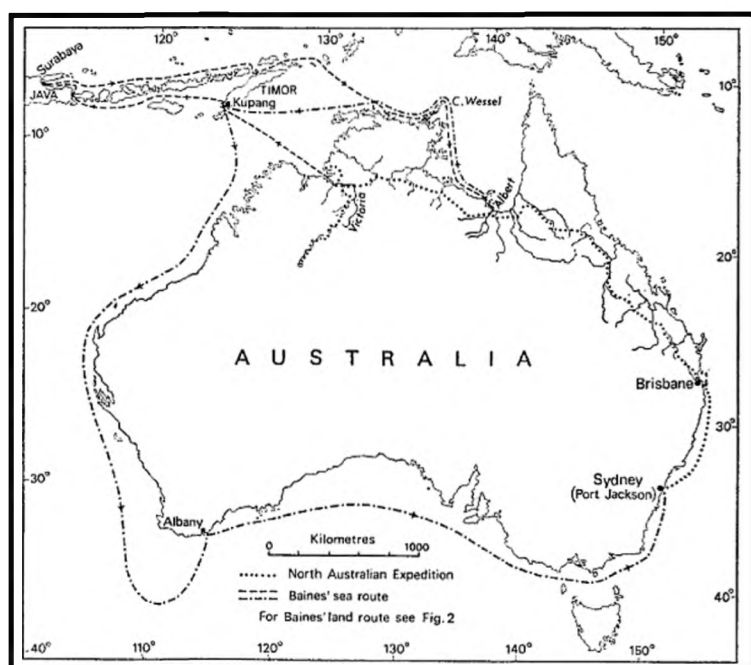
Baines' first **England interlude** was from September 1853 to March 1855.

Most of the summer of 1854 he was in Kings Lynn completing paintings; supervising the publication of 'Scenery and Events in South Africa'; working at the Royal Geographical Society in consultation with cartographers Arrowsmith and Hall and establishing a close relationship with Sir William Hooker at Kew Gardens.

The Gregory North Australia Expedition

In recognition of his achievements, Baines was commissioned as Artist and Storekeeper for the 1855-1857 Royal Geographical Society sponsored Expedition across Northern Australia - an area which had not yet been explored by Europeans. He and the expedition leader, Australian Augustus Gregory, soon established a good rapport during their record 69-day voyage in two ships up the east coast on the landward side of the Great Barrier Reef and across the Gulf of Carpentaria. Eventually the 'Victoria River' area became their base, but Baines and two other

men were involved in sailing from Timor in an open longboat 1,000 km across the Gulf. By March 1857 Baines had circumnavigated Australia.



'Seldom without a pencil and sketchbook in hand, and prodigious in his industry, he had produced detailed maps, a graphic record of the expedition unparalleled in contemporary Australian exploration. Always an observant naturalist, his washes and sketches of plants were accurate enough to be well regarded by the eminent botanist

Hooker. Likewise, his portraits of unfamiliar animals and insects and the attention he paid to the differing features of the Aborigines he painted were appreciated by geologists and anthropologists.. Seventeen plant specimens in the collection of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, bear his name, as does Bolbotritus bainesi, a new genus of beetle he discovered.' Extract from 'Dictionary of Australian Artists Online'

This Expedition is widely considered to be the highpoint of his career. He had done well and earned a good reputation in the face of an unknown land, an unhealthy

climate, often uncongenial and uncooperative companions, the hostility of Aboriginals, and the difficulties of provisioning stores and ships. His valuable contributions were acknowledged by Mount Baines and the Baines River in the Northern Territory being named in his honour.

He finally sailed for England in July 1857, taking with him 24 oil paintings, a panoramic view of the Victoria River, and 270 water colours and sketches. Back in London, on 27th November 1857 he was elected 'A Fellow of the Geographical Society' and awarded their Gold Medal. He further enhanced his relationship with some of the world's top geographers and botanists and gave lectures in London and in Lynn.

'Zambesi' Expedition 1858-1859

Meanwhile, missionary-explorer David Livingstone had returned to England in 1856, a national hero for his journey across Africa, from Luanda to Queiimane. His *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* was published in 1857. No longer a LMS missionary, but with huge public support, he persuaded the Foreign Ministry to sponsor an expedition to investigate the navigability of the Zambezi River as an 'economic highway' for British commerce through Portuguese occupied territory - destroying the slave trade in the process. Parliament agreed to a five thousand pound grant.

On 11 January 1858 Roderick Murchison, President of the RGS announced Baines' appointment to accompany Livingstone as Artist and Store Keeper. They sailed on 10th March, reached Cape Town on 21 April, and the 'Zambesi' Delta on 14th May 1858.

By early November most stores and staff were gathered at Tete. Two demanding expeditions by foot upstream proved that the primary aim of the expedition was doomed from the onset: rapids known as Cahora Bassa, above Tete, made it impossible for any vessel to sail upriver.

Baines and geologist Thornton had been exploring the natural resources around Tete, but were often sick with malaria; Charles, brother of David Livingstone, delivered reports of their underperformance. Suffering fever, dysentery, sores and prickly heat, Thornton lacked the energy to keep up his geological work and was dismissed. Baines was accused of petty pilfering after using spare pieces of canvas to paint pictures as presents for the Portuguese officials who had cared for him when he was prostrated with malaria at Tete; and of "carousing" with the Portuguese at various trading stations along the Zambezi. After Baines and Livingstone fell out Baines was sent back to Cape Town.

In 1864 The Foreign Office terminated the expedition as too costly and a failure. Baines, reputation damaged, unsuccessfully spent years trying to get a formal hearing.

The Chapman Expedition 1861-1862.'

In the year 1860, having returned to Cape Town from the Zambesi expedition, worn out with fever and literally destitute, I determined not to desist from the attempt to penetrate into the interior of Africa, and the generous hospitality of my friends, Mr. and Mrs. Logier, enabled me to devote to the purpose of my re-equipment all the proceeds of my art during my residence in the colony. I was fortunate, too, in meeting with an esteemed friend, Mr. James Chapman, who, since I had known him, ten years before, on the Vaal River, had been almost continually engaged in travel, and was then fitting out another expedition for the purpose of exploration combined with hunting and commerce.'

The plan was to sail from Cape Town to Walvis Bay in March 1861, to use two ox-wagons to carry stores and a copper hulled boat (designed and built by Baines) that could be dismantled, to Victoria Falls, then to travel downriver to the Zambezi mouth.

The journey proved to be a most harrowing one, across desert country during which cattle died, attempts were made to mislead them away from waterholes, and Damara tribesmen menaced violence.

They reached the Victoria Falls on 23 July 1862. For the next twelve days Baines explored, measured and sketched the Falls, and made extensive geographic observations. *'How shall words convey ideas which even the pencil of Turner must fail to represent?...tell me if heart of man ever conceived anything more gorgeous than these two lovely rainbows, so brilliant that the eye shrinks from looking.'*

Illness and lack of supplies caused the Expedition to abandon the attempt to travel to the Delta. Back in Cape Town in 1863, Chapman's photographs and lantern slides of paintings by Baines were used for illustrated lectures. Photographs such as these of little known Africa were completely new and created a profound impression. Baines and Chapman's accounts were published by Baines in his 'Explorations in South-West Africa' (1864), and Chapman's 'Travels in the Interior of South Africa' (1868).

Both Baines and Chapman kept journals of the expedition in which they remarked on each other's practices. Their accounts were published by Baines in his 'Explorations

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Final Interlude in England, June 1865 - December 1868.

At Lynn Athenaeum Baines gave lectures, where he received "...congratulations ...on the high position he has achieved as a traveller, an artist, and a man of enterprise..." Having realised the value of photography in scientific documentation, he took photography lessons from James Lawrence, of the celebrated Lawrence Brothers in 1865.

Still deeply troubled by his dismissal from the Zambesi Expedition, twice in June he requested a meeting with Livingstone to clear his name, but Livingstone ignored him and left the country in August. By that time Murchison knew that Baines had been innocent, but had had no stomach to confront the iconic Livingstone. Baines was advised to let the matter rest.

The Gold Fields, 1868-1872.

In 1868 Baines, in the hope of improving his financial position, became involved in the UK-based *South African Goldfields Exploration Company*. Setting out from Pietermaritzburg in 1869 he led one of the first gold prospecting expeditions to Hartley Hills (in today's Zimbabwe). Making two hazardous trips, he establishing a

sound relationship with Lobengula, 'King' of the Matabele, and was granted the first written agreement to mine gold in the area. But the company went bankrupt and Baines took it upon himself to pay off all debts, involving years of struggle.



Above: Lobengula receiving his Impis following a raid on the Mashonas, 15 November 1870. Baines is on the right, sketching. He was said to have got along well with Lobengula.

Cartographer

Baines had been taught cartographic skills by Sir Thomas Maclear, Royal Astronomer at the Cape (who laid the foundation for trigonometric surveys and accurate mapping of the Cape Colony). Thereafter mapping became an integral aspect of Baines' explorations, receiving perhaps even more dedicated detailed attention than his landscape paintings and journals. He carried a barometer to measure altitude, of high lands, and invariably measured distances covered by attaching a trocheameter to a wagon's wheel (as had Dr Burchell); used a compass and sextant; and paused every few miles to record the route taken.

He excelled particularly in mapping the route to the Gold Fields. The enormous *Thomas Baines 'Great Map'* is a treasure in the Campbell Collections, University of Natal. In 1873 he offered himself as a 'Special Correspondent' for the *Natal Mercury*, to accompany Shepstone's expedition into Zululand to the coronation of Cetshwayo - at Mahlabatini. He borrowed a sextant, set out on foot, without a tent. Soon he was offered a horse, a place in a buck wagon, and numerous offers to share tents. From Durban, the map he drew is meticulous and fully annotated, giving not only English names to features and settlements, but also records Zulu place names. He marked the territory as populated by Zulus, with isolated mission stations and trading stores in their midst. His maps of the Gregory expedition were the basis of his being elected a RGS Fellow; and his African maps were the basis for his being awarded a gold watch inscribed, for '*long-continuing service to Geography*'.

Final Years

In England, Baines had written, '*The idea of lying down to die in a London boarding house would start me off to the World's End, or any place beyond it.*' He was spared that dreaded fate. He had an aunt, Ann Watson, who owned a boarding house in central Durban, where he often stayed free of charge (his sale of pictures having '*barely kept him from **destruction***').

In 1875 he fell ill with dysentery; on April 30 he was moved to his cousin James Watson's home on the Berea, where he died. So passed "*This brave and distinguished man*" - Obituary, Cape Monthly Magazine, 1877. It was seven years before friends set up a stone over his grave, which can be viewed in the West Street Cemetery. His epitaph:

'I must either be justly proud of my success or not ashamed of my failure'

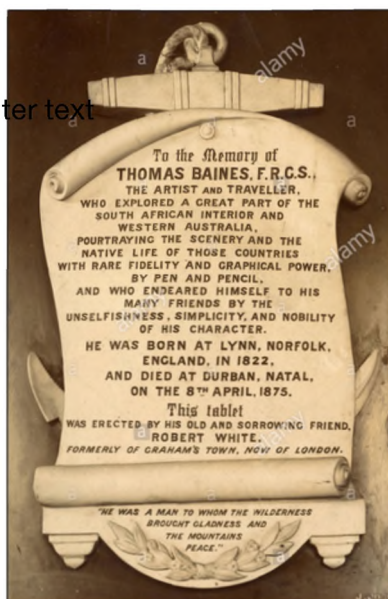
**TO MARK THE RESTING PLACE OF THOMAS BAINES F.R.G.S.
ARTIST AND TRAVELLER WHO WAS BORN AT LYNN NORFOLK 1822
DIED 1875**

**COMRADES, WHO DURING HARDSHIPS AND PERILS UNDERGONE
IN THE INTERIOR OF THE CONTINENT, LEARNT TO APPRECIATE
THE NOBILITY OF HIS CHARACTER**

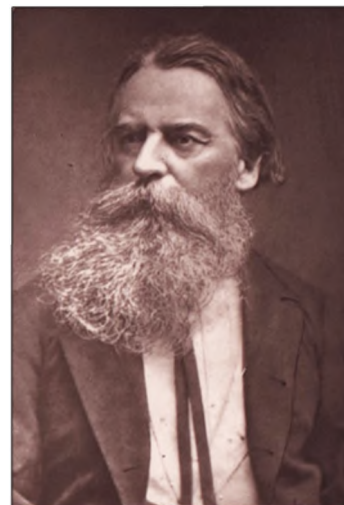


**Old West Street
Cemetery, Durban
1882**

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**St Paul's Church, Durban
1883**



**Date Errors - he was born in 1820,
died 8th May 1875**

Thomas Baines' Legacy

His maps and descriptions of all he observed, together with the sketches and paintings, provide the most valuable insight into life from the 1840s to the 1870s in Southern and Central Africa in particular, as well as in Northern Australia. The diaries, journals and pictures complement each other - together they form a unique record.

Below left: Baines sketching *Welwitschia mirabilis*



Plants named after Baines - list supplied by The Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew:
 Indigofera Bainesii Bak; Lotononis Bainesii Bak; Glinus Bainesii Pax; Kedrostis Bainesii Cogn; Ancyranthos Bainesii Hiern; Othonna coriifolia Sond; Vernonia Bainesii O and H; Alectra Bainesii Hemsl; Iboza Bainesii N.E., Br; Leucosphaera Bainesii Gilg; Babiana Bainesii hypogea Busch; Lapeyrouisia Bak; Eulophia Bainesii Rolfe; Ammocharis Tinneana Milne-Red-head and Schweickerdt; Albuca Bainesii Bak; Welwitschia Bainesii Carr; Commelina Bainesii G,B,Cl. **Entomological:** Bolbotritus Bainesii

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Rod Hooper-Box

'As a 1950s schoolboy, sight of Baines' paintings in the Port Elizabeth Library, and the King George V1 Art Gallery, made a considerable impression. 1960s: I did relief work for Standard Bank in Fort Beaufort, which provided an introduction to the Frontier Wars; followed by a Rhodes History major under Professor Winifred Maxwell (a one-time LAHS President). Teaching, then worked in Management Development, Strategy, and Innovation Consulting. Interest in Eastern Cape History continued, including a minor obsession with Baines, enflamed in the first instance by reading his *Journal of a Residence in Africa, 1842-1853*. '