AUSTRALASIA AND AUSTRIA - GEOLOGISTS AND GEOLOGICAL COMMUNICATION

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The best known geological association between Austria and Australasia is the work of Ferdinand von Hochstetter, mainly in New Zealand during the late 1850s, work which is still highly regarded, and which laid the foundations of New Zealand geology. Hochstetter also spent brief periods in Australia, but this work is less well-known, although some of it was published. Hochstetter maintained contacts with antipodean geologists, particularly Julius von Haast, with whom he co-operated in the early mapping of New Zealand and with G.H. Ulrich in Victoria. Other members of the 'Novara' expedition, including Karl Scherzer also made geological observations and collections. An earlier visitor to Australia was Baron von Hügel, who spent nine months travelling widely, mainly in the southeast of the continent in 1833-4. Although Hügel's interest were mainly in biology, he made useful observations on palaeontology, caves and underground water, and took some "mineral" samples to Vienna. Robert Townson went to Australia as a settler in 1807, perhaps intending to continue his scientific work there, but he did almost no geology, being concerned with pastoral activities until his death in 1827. He spent the winter of 1792-93 in Vienna studying the respiration of amphibia, before setting off to travel through Hungary. He is well remembered in Hungary for his book "Travels in Hungary" which he published in 1797, and which includes an important geological map of that country.

Although Joachim Barrande never visited Australia, like most palaeontologists of the mid-19th century he was interested in the fossils there, and examined samples of Silurian cephalopods from Tasmania. Palaeobotanists such as F. Unger and C von Ettingshausen made particular contributions to the comparison of Australian flora and European Tertiary forms. A later, little-known, geological contact between Hungary and Australia was the examination of the mining district of Nagybanya then in NE Hungary (now Romania) in 1910 by Douglas Mawson. It was proposed by the Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton to develop the mines to finance further Antarctic exploration. Most recently a useful English summary of the geology of Hungary was prepared by G.Z. Foldvary, an Australian resident. This brief outline indicates that non-British influences played an important role in the understanding of geology in these antipodean British colonies during the 19th century. Many avenues of fruitful research concerning historical central European-Australasian geological contacts await interested researchers. In particular rock, mineral and palaeontology collections, and correspondence, mainly in Vienna, offer splendid opportunities for co-operative undertakings.