On May 16th, 1820, a caravan of British settlers reached the southeastern coast of what is today South Africa. Standing amidst this uneasy crowd was the Wesleyan missionary Reverend William Shaw. The following account, taken from his memoirs, paints the episode.

As the sun rose over the wide expanse of ocean towards the east, and gilded with his light the hills and shores of the Bay towards the west and north, a gloom gradually spread itself over the countenances of the people. As far as the eye could sweep, from the south-west to the north-east, the margin of the sea appeared to be one continued range of low white sand hills: wherever any breach in these hills afforded a peep into the country immediately behind this fringe of sand, the ground seemed sterile, and the bushes stunted. Immediately above the landing-place, the land rose abruptly into hills of considerable elevation, which had a craggy and stony appearance, and were relieved by very little verdure. Two or three whitewashed and thatched cottages, and Fort Frederick, a small fortification crowning the height, and by its few cannon commanding the anchorage, were all that arrested the eye in the first view of Algoa Bay; with the exception of the tents of the British settlers, many of whom had already disembarked, and formed a camp half a mile to the right of the landing-place. The scene was at once dull and disappointing. It produced a very discouraging effect on the minds of the people, not a few of whom began to contrast this waste wilderness with the beautiful shores of Old England, and to express fears that they had foolishly allowed themselves to be lured away by false rep-
resentations, to a *country* which seemed to offer no promise of reward to its *cultivators*.

At first glance, then, the South African landscape repulsed the British gaze. Its topography was "dull" and "disappointing". It appeared a "sterile" "country" possessed of "little verdure" accepting "stunted" shrubbery. So powerful was this first impression from afar that the settlers felt discouraged and deceived. What hope was there for fruitful "cultivation" of the African wastes? Perhaps this "wilderness" was *no place* for an Englishman.

Southeastern Africa was from the very start, then, decidedly un-beautiful. But why? What was it about his land that produced such a sense of dread? This paper takes this question as a point of departure for an inquiry into the missionary experience of the South African landscape. I center my discussion around the Wesleyan Mission efforts beginning in 1820 and lasting until the 1850's, a span approximately coeval with the already introduced Reverend Shaw's active career in the area (1820-1856). During this period, the Wesleyan Mission advanced in successive waves from Grahamstown to Makuasi, eventually meeting with the Baralong, a southern Tswana contingent, northwest of the Caledon River and east of the tributaries to the Modder. In that region, and then along the Caledon itself, they would establish several important missions, the largest located at Thabu Nchu.

This paper, to an extent, chronicles the Wesleyan travels into the South African interior, but in no way pretends to be a comprehensive, or even a necessarily chronological account. Rather, I will focus upon odd bits of narrative selected from memoirs and journals of the first Wesleyan missionaries of the southeast African interior: Revs. Hodgson, Archbell, Edwards, Broadbent, Schreiner, and Shaw. In piecing them together, I hope to elucidate Wesleyan attitudes toward and conceptualizations of the terrain in which they traveled. In so doing, I will begin to unravel a number of compelling puzzles including (and this list is not exhaustive): How did Europeans think *through* the southeastern African landscape? How did they find their way? What role did the physical terrain, and the meanings inscribed upon it, play in shaping the character of early evangelization efforts? First, though, we must ask a more fundamental question: Did South Africa possess a landscape prior to the arrival of these British settlers?

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