

THERE MUST BE A WAY

© Jim Low

a play for primary school students

Lyrics and/or music if required for the play available on:
<http://acrossthebluemountains.com.au/>

Characters:

Gregory Blaxland, William Lawson, William Wentworth, three narrators, four townspeople, two convicts.

SCENE 1: Blaxland's farm at South Creek

(drumbeat)

NARRATOR 1:

In the early years of our country's growth as a prison settlement, the Blue Mountains to the west of Sydney were a convenient gaol wall. However, with the coming of free settlers to Australia, the Mountains had to be crossed as there was a need for more land.

NARRATOR 2:

Many had tried already to cross the Mountains but had been unsuccessful. In 1813, three men named Gregory Blaxland, William Lawson and William Wentworth decided to conquer the Mountains. These men owned land and realised the growing urgency of finding new pastures for their cattle and sheep.

NARRATOR 1:

Our play begins at South Creek where Gregory Blaxland has his farm. The year is 1813, 25 years after the founding of the settlement at Sydney Cove.

(drumbeat)

LAWSON:

The cattle are in a bad way, Blaxland. (He lists the following on his fingers.) Little rain, caterpillar plagues, pastureland becoming scarce ...

BLAXLAND:

And constant criticism from Governor Macquarie that we should be growing grain instead.

WENTWORTH: *(with exasperation)*

What's the colony got to show for the last 25 years, anyway? How long can we expect those back in England to continue paying our way?

BLAXLAND: *(hand on Wentworth's shoulder)*

Look (pause) William. All I know is we desperately need more land for our cattle and sheep. *(pause)* Often, of an evening, I sit here and gaze out at those mountains. *(points)* They hold so much mystery. They jealously seem to guard all knowledge of what lies beyond them... *(Pauses and then walks to the stage front.)*

I've watched you rise
I've seen you touch the skies
I've watched you rise.

Many have lost
They say you can't be crossed
But at what cost!

At South Creek I stand
And to cross you I have planned
At South Creek I stand.

(Wentworth and Lawson come forward)

I've already seen the Governor and discussed with him our intentions to cross the Mountains. He has given us his permission, even if he was somewhat cool about it.

WENTWORTH:

Well, we've certainly spent a lot of time discussing our plan for the crossing.

BLAXLAND:

I think it's about time we put it to the test, gentlemen.

(Wentworth and Lawson nod in agreement)

LAWSON:

I know many have failed already. We could be adding our names to the list also. But I think our chances are better.

BLAXLAND: *(forcefully)*

Much better.

WENTWORTH:

But can we get further than George Caley? You know his findings weren't altogether encouraging.

BLAXLAND:

That was nearly 10 years ago, William. And we are approaching the Mountains from a different place.

LAWSON:

Look, as you know, I spoke to Caley when I returned to England. These talks made me more determined than ever to cross these mountains. (*clench fist when saying "more"*)

WENTWORTH:

When would you like to leave?

LAWSON:

The sooner the better. Winter will be here before we know it. I'd like to leave within the month. We all understand that the job ahead is not going to be easy. But ... (*pause*) there must be a way!

BLAXLAND:

There must be a way
That others have missed

LAWSON:

Avoiding the valleys

WENTWORTH:

Avoiding the cliffs

BLAXLAND:

The colony's doomed
If the mountains remain
A barrier to progress

ALL:

All work's been in vain.

BLAXLAND:

Our pastures are failing

LAWSON:

Our stock will be lost

BLAXLAND:

While we're stopped by a mountain
That cannot be crossed.

WENTWORTH:

People like Bass
And Caley have tried

LAWSON:

But both were defeated
Not reaching the other side.

BLAXLAND:

Our cattle need pastures
We cannot supply
I know it's a gamble
But I think we should try.
For there must be a way
That others have missed

LAWSON:

Avoiding the valleys

WENTWORTH:

Avoiding the cliffs

BLAXLAND:

The colony's doomed
If the mountains remain
A barrier to progress

ALL:

All work's been in vain.

SCENE 2: Sydney Street Scene
(Sign to the side of the stage saying George Street.)

(drumbeat)

TOWNSPERSON 1: (mockingly)
They can't really be serious. To cross the mountains!

TOWNSPERSON 2:
Well, that's what I heard. Mr Blaxland is to be accompanied by Lieutenant William Lawson and Mr William Charles Wentworth.

TOWNSPERSON 1:
Why? Wentworth's only a pup! They can't be serious, surely! Remember what happened to Bass and Caley? Remember what they said?

TOWNSPERSON 2:
They said they couldn't be crossed and they should have known.

TOWNSPERSON 1:
Too right. They should have.

(Enter Blaxland.)

TOWNSPERSON 2:
Look. Here comes Mr Blaxland now. (pause)
Mr Blaxland ... (pause) ... One moment please.

BLAXLAND:
Yes, Gentlemen?

TOWNSPERSON 1:
You're only fooling yourself
To think that you can achieve
What others have tried before you
What others have had to leave.

TOWNSPERSON 2:
The mountains can never be crossed
You'll be killed

TOWNSPERSON 1:
Or you'll be lost

TOWNSPERSON 2:
Be content with the land we have
And leave things just as they are.

TOWNSPERSON 1:

You're only fooling yourself

TOWNSPERSON 2:

Your chances are very slim

What makes you think your attempt will succeed?

TOWNSPERSON 1:

What makes you different from them?

TOWNSPERSON 2:

The mountains can never be crossed.

You'll be killed

TOWNSPERSON 1:

Or you'll be lost

TOWNSPERSON 2:

Be content with the land we have

And leave things just as they are. *(He spreads his hands widely.)*

BLAXLAND: *(impatiently)*

Gentlemen, please. Enough of this. If this settlement is to grow and prosper, surely we must try and cross the mountains. Good day to you.

(drumbeat)

SCENE 3: Sometime later in George Street

TOWNSPERSON 3: *(excitedly)*

Have you heard the news?

TOWNSPERSON 4:

Yes ... Listen

(choir sings or recites Seven Men and Four Horses)

TOWNSPERSON 3:

Grant them a safe return.

(drumbeat)

SCENE 4: A campsite in the Mountains

NARRATOR 3:

It is the fourth day of the journey. The explorers are faced with an important decision.

BLAXLAND:

Well, Gentlemen, it looks like we have no choice but to cut our way through this thick undergrowth.

LAWSON: *(pointing)*

I'm reasonably sure that this is the main ridge. I really think that we're just wasting our time trying to avoid it.

WENTWORTH: *(nodding)*

Yes, I agree. Trying to find an easier way, as we did yesterday, is just proving time wasting. And it's tiring too. *(Wiping his brow)*

BLAXLAND:

Then it's settled. *(Speaking to servants forcefully)*

You two men, wait here with the hoses and supplies. And keep your wits about you. *(Shaking his finger)*. I don't want any trouble if the Aborigines are about.

LAWSON:

It wouldn't be a bad idea to mark our path from here, Blaxland. The chances of any escaped convict following us are now limited. And I'd rather risk that than face the prospect of becoming lost.

WENTWORTH:

Yes. It will make our return journey much easier too.

NARRATOR 3:

And so the explorers begin to cut a path that will safely take them and their small party further into this strange, new country towards their goal...

(pause) ... to cross the Blue Mountains.

(Choir sings or recites To Cross the Mountains chorus, verses 1 and 2, chorus)

SCENE 5: Blue Mountains campsite

NARRATOR 1:

Some of the members of the party, however, have doubts as to the success of this attempted crossing.

(Convict servants talking as they prepare the campfire)

CONVICT 1:

I think a lot of Mr Blaxland, you know that. And I know he means well, too. But ... I'm scared, really scared.

CONVICT 2:

So am I. This country is unlike anything back home in England. I've never seen country as rough as this before. *(Gestures with his hand.)*

CONVICT 1:

I don't like this idea of following the ridges, as Mr Blaxland obviously plans to do. Have you noticed how deep these valleys are getting? *(Points downwards)*

CONVICT 2:

The ridges certainly don't give us much room to walk. And I'm sure we are being followed by Aborigines, too. I don't like it at all. I really don't.

SCENE 6: Mount York

NARRATOR 2:

But, despite these fears, the party moves further on into the mountains.

(choir sings or recites To Cross the Mountains chorus, verse 3 and 4, chorus)

NARRATOR 3:

They eventually reach the area later to be known as Mt York. The going has been very difficult. The constant possibility of the Aborigines nearby ...

NARRATOR 2:

The effort needed to cut out a path through the thick brushwood ...

NARRATOR 3:

The many trips into the valley for fresh water ...

NARRATOR 1:

The clearing of large stones from their way. All this and more has dampened some of the explorers' earlier enthusiasm and determination.

BLAXLAND: *(Speaking slowly, to show exhaustion.)*

It hasn't been easy. But then, we knew we were facing a difficult task... *(pause)*... How are you all feeling?

LAWSON:

Not too bad, considering the country we have had to cross. It's been quite a journey.

BLAXLAND:

And you, William, how are you?

WENTWORTH:

A few aches and pains but not much else to complain of, thank goodness. The cuts from the thorny undergrowth are healing too.

BLAXLAND:

Ah, that's good. Well, the next question is this. How on earth are we going to get the horses down this steep cliff face and into the valley? They desperately need grass.

LAWSON:

Perhaps if we dig a trench with the hoe, we can lessen their chances of slipping.

BLAXLAND:

A good idea. We can't afford to lose any through injury at this stage.

LAWSON:

I suggest that we unload the horses on the very dangerous sections of the descent and carry the supplies ourselves.

BLAXLAND:

Alright then. Let's get going.

SCENE 7: Mount Blaxland

(drumbeat)

NARRATOR 1:

Having reached the valley they continue on for another day until they climb a high hill. This hill will later be named Mount Blaxland.

BLAXLAND: *(enthusiastically)*

The other side, men! The other side! What a site!

LAWSON: *(excitedly)*

You're not kidding! When the Governor sets his sights on this view, he'll be very impressed. For surely this land will support the colony's stock for many years to come.

WENTWORTH: *(with enthusiasm)*

It's wonderful! ..(pause) .. We're like the prisoners, I guess, who have found the key to the gaol. No longer will the colony be a prison settlement, with country like this to develop.

BLAXLAND:

Our provisions are very low, as you well know. Our clothes and shoes need repairing. None of us is feeling a hundred percent. I suggest that we return to the settlement and tell of our successful discovery.

(Choir sings or recites To Cross the Mountains chorus verse 5, chorus)

BLAXLAND:

The future looks good.

LAWSON:

It does indeed. It does indeed.

WENTWORTH:

Think of the free settlers who are now going to make this country their home.

ALL:

For we've found the way
That others have missed

LAWSON:

Avoiding the valleys

WENTWORTH:

Avoiding the cliffs

BLAXLAND:

The colony now has a chance to expand

ALL:

To grow and become a prosperous, new land.

NOTES