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**" MORE LIKE A PICNIC PARTY "**  
**BURKE AND WILLS:**  
**AN ANALYSIS OF THE**  
**VICTORIAN EXPLORING EXPEDITION**  
**OF 1860-1861.**

Thesis submitted by  
DAVID GARY PHOENIX BSc. (Hons.)  
in April 2017

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in History  
within the College of Arts, Society and Education  
James Cook University.



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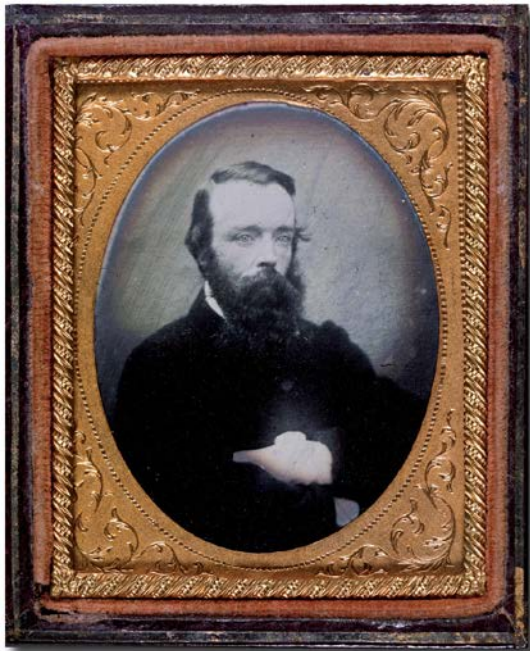
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see: *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th edition, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

*Everything has been very comfortable so far; in fact,  
more like a picnic party than a serious exploration.*

William John Wills, 'Letter to his sister Bessie, dated Cooper's Creek, 6 December 1860'.  
Correspondence and press cuttings, 1839-1861, MS 9504, State Library of Victoria.



'Robert O'Hara Burke'  
Portrait of Robert O'Hara Burke  
c.1860.  
Image f1185, Item 1, D 179,  
State Library of New South Wales.



'William John Wills'  
Thomas Adams Hill, Wm. J. Wills, 1834-1861.  
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Image a128695, MIN 50,  
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## Statement on Sources

### DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education.

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## Statement on the Contribution of Others

Nature of Assistance	Contribution	Names
Intellectual support	Geomatic interpretation	Ian Andrews Richard Cork David Corke David Hillan
Postgraduate Research Funding Support		James Cook University
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Data collection	Support during field work	Annie Fishburn Garry Fischer Richard Cork The Ferryman Pty. Ltd.





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## Acknowledgement of Country



I would like to acknowledge the Aboriginal people of the many different indigenous nations that the Burke and Wills Expedition passed through on their journey across the continent and pay respect to the traditional custodians of this land and their elders past and present.

The subject of this work includes images and names of deceased people; it may also include words and descriptive terms that may be offensive to Aboriginal people. The endeavour to understand the past necessitates use of the terminology of the past,<sup>1</sup> therefore this work is presented as part of the record of the past; contemporary readers should interpret the work within that context.



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<sup>1</sup> Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the doomed race theory, 1880-1939*, (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1997), x-xi.

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## Acknowledgements

This thesis represents more than a decade of work pursuing my interest in all things Burke and Wills, and it would not have been possible without the support and guidance that I received from many wonderful people. I would like to thank everyone who has contributed.

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## Abstract

The Burke and Wills Expedition is one of the icons of Australian history, but surprisingly it has attracted little academic attention, with most of the vast body of literature about the Expedition being written by amateur historians for popular audiences. Few writers have thoroughly investigated and analysed the primary sources available. In addition, many of these sources are more difficult to interpret than the records of other Australian exploring expeditions because a number of important records went missing soon after the Expedition. The Expedition leader, Burke, did not keep a journal, almost uniquely for such an expedition, and this means that there is not even a clear understanding of the actual route taken. While some authors have travelled through the country traversed by Burke and Wills, none have tried to find and follow the exact route. The lack of solid information means that some aspects of the Expedition have become shrouded in myth. This thesis aims to investigate the Expedition from its inception to its end, placing it in the context of Australian colonial exploration. It corrects many of the myths and misconceptions that have crept into the Burke and Wills story, provides a reasonably accurate route and detailed chronology for the Expedition, explains some of the puzzles about the actions of the participants, and re-evaluates the Expedition's importance for Australian history. This was done by finding and analysing all the records left by and about the Expedition, using navigation and surveying techniques to evaluate Wills' performance as expedition navigator, and walking the route of the Expedition, initially in short stages, and then in 2008 following the entire route at the same time of the year as the Expedition took place. By analysing the Expedition records, including art by Expedition scientists, and the landscape and its relation to the Expedition – a methodology called 'historical human ecology' – the author was able to trace the actual route more closely than anyone to date, and thereby found why Burke and Wills did not reach the open sea at the Gulf, and why on their return they failed to reach their goal of Mount Hopeless, resulting soon after in their deaths. The study looks at the first use of camels in inland exploration, their procurement and utilisation and how camels allowed Burke to attempt a rapid journey from Cooper Creek to the Gulf. The study also explains the Expedition's relations with Aboriginal people, and shows that contrary to myth, the Expedition did use Aboriginal guides and even preferred Aboriginal placenames. Burke's decision not to rely on Aboriginal guides in northern Australia was a consequence of his use of camels, which freed him from the need to use guides to find water, rather than to racism. It further explains the circumstances of the Expedition leaders' deaths and shows that they were not 'poisoned' by nardoo, and that their relations with the Yandruwandha people of Cooper Creek can be explained by normal cultural beliefs and standards on both sides rather than inexplicable hostility by Burke as myth has it. The study also briefly considers how Eurocentric ideas of the arid interior of Australia changed as a result of the Expedition.

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## Table of Contents

### FRONTMATTER

Title Page .....	i
Statement on Sources.....	iii
Statement of Access .....	v
Statement on the Contribution of Others .....	vii
Acknowledgement of Country .....	ix
Acknowledgements .....	xi
Abstract .....	xiii
Table of Contents .....	xv
List of Tables.....	xix
List of Figures .....	xxi
List of abbreviations.....	xxvii
Imperial measures and metric conversions .....	xxviii
Glossary.....	xxxix

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction .....	5
Scope of the Study.....	12
Research Aims.....	13
Findings.....	14
Methodology .....	17
Outline of Chapters.....	28
Significance of the Study .....	30
Further Research.....	31

<b>Chapter 1 LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>33</b>
1.1 Introduction.....	37
1.2 Exploration in Australia.....	38
1.3 The VEE in Literature .....	43
1.4 Specific areas of interest .....	69
1.5 Relief Expeditions .....	72
1.6 Summary.....	75

<b>Chapter 2 AUSTRALIAN EXPLORATION BEFORE 1860 .....</b>	<b>77</b>
2.1 The concept of colonial exploration.....	81
2.2 Overview of early exploration .....	84
2.3 Exploration of the western plains & the inland rivers.....	86
2.4 Exploration to the north coast .....	96
2.5 Exploration of the arid interior and the horse-shoe barrier of salt lakes.....	101
2.6 Summary: Exploration of the arid interior, 1788-1851.....	109
2.7 A.C. Gregory's expeditions, 1855-1858 .....	110
2.8 Conclusion .....	113



<b>Chapter 3 ESTABLISHING THE VICTORIAN EXPLORING EXPEDITION .....</b>	<b>119</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	123
3.2 Scientific Societies in Australia .....	124
3.3 Scientific Societies in Victoria .....	127
3.4 Exploration Proposals .....	133
3.5 Early plans for the Expedition's route .....	136
3.6 Funding the Expedition .....	147
3.7 Organising the Expedition .....	160
3.8 Conclusion .....	167
<b>Chapter 4 EXPEDITION CHRONOLOGY .....</b>	<b>171</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	175
4.2 Melbourne to Menindee .....	178
4.3 Menindee to Cooper Creek: Burke's Advance Party .....	197
4.4 Cooper to Carpentaria: The Gulf Party .....	204
4.5 Return from Carpentaria .....	212
4.6 Death of Burke and Wills .....	223
4.7 Brahe's Depot Party .....	226
4.8 Wright's Supply Party .....	229
4.9 Conclusion .....	236
<b>Chapter 5 BURKE &amp; WILLS AND CAMELS .....</b>	<b>241</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	245
5.2 The introduction of camels into Australia .....	248
5.3 The arrival of the first camels into Australia .....	252
5.4 Camels for Victoria .....	255
5.5 Purchasing Victoria's camels .....	261
5.6 Camels in Melbourne .....	270
5.7 Putting the camels to work .....	275
5.8 The fate of the camels that survived the Expedition .....	300
5.9 Sepoy camel handlers .....	306
5.10 Conclusion .....	310
<b>Chapter 6 ABORIGINAL INTERACTIONS .....</b>	<b>315</b>
6.1 Introduction .....	319
6.2 Aboriginal people and exploration prior to 1860 .....	322
6.3 Aboriginal encounters prior to the arrival of the VEE .....	328
6.4 The VEE and Aboriginal interactions .....	343
6.5 Aboriginal recollections .....	379
6.6 Ngardu and other indigenous foodstuffs .....	390
6.7 The 'Land of Plenty' .....	404
6.8 Conclusion .....	407

<b>Chapter 7 THE BURKE &amp; WILLS CULTURAL LANDSCAPE .....</b>	<b>413</b>
7.1 Problems and issues posed by the landscape in understanding the expedition: An investigation of historical human ecology .....	417
7.2 Using the landscape as an historical document: Methodological issues .....	419
7.3 Using the landscape as an historical document: My approach to the investigation.....	439
7.4 Using the landscape as an historical document: A larger scale study and a walk across Australia .....	463
7.5 Perceptions of the landscape .....	496
7.6 Conclusion .....	506
 <b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	 <b>511</b>
 <b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	 <b>523</b>
Manuscripts .....	527
Published primary sources .....	533
Books and Book Chapters .....	542
Journal Articles.....	560
Unpublished Reports .....	574
Theses.....	574
Newspapers .....	575
Maps .....	580
Movies, Television and Radio.....	584
Dictionaries, Encyclopaedia and Databases.....	585
 <b>APPENDIX.....</b>	 <b>589</b>
Navigation.....	591
Brief Chronology of Australian Inland Exploration.....	592
People employed on the VEE and Relief Expeditions .....	593
Members of the Exploration Committee .....	599
Biographies of the camels associated with the VEE .....	600
 <b>INDEX .....</b>	 <b>605</b>



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## List of Tables

Table 1: Place names recorded by Wills from Menindee, New South Wales, to the Bulloo River, Queensland. ....	479-480
Table 2: Place names recorded by Wills from Cooper Creek, South Australia, to the Gulf of Carpentaria, Queensland. ....	482-483
Table 3: Chart showing the relationship between the numbers of men and animals on the VEE compared to the distance travelled from Melbourne. ....	515



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## List of Figures

Figure 1:	<i>Argus</i> , 'Press sheet from the <i>Argus</i> Office announcing the death of Burke and Wills' .....	3
Figure 2:	Cooper Creek at Innamincka.....	6
Figure 3:	2010 Sesquicentenary Burke and Wills memorabilia .....	11
Figure 4:	Some of the Expedition's archives at the Public Record Office of Victoria.....	19
Figure 5:	Burke and Wills' route from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria [map] .....	24
Figure 6:	Burke and Wills' return route from the Gulf of Carpentaria to Cooper Creek [map] ....	25
Figure 7:	Dave Phoenix walking in the Strzelecki Desert in the tracks of Burke and Wills .....	27
Figure 8:	James Rigg, <i>The Great Trek: The Burke and Wills story</i> .....	35
Figure 9:	David Boyd, 'Burke and Wills bed down for the night'.....	52
Figure 10:	Nicholas Chevalier, 'Memorandum of the start of the exploring expedition' .....	54
Figure 11:	Publicity material for Birtles' film <i>Across Australia: On the Track of Burke and Wills</i> .....	55
Figure 12:	Frank Clune, <i>Dig</i> (Third Edition).....	56
Figure 13:	John Longstaff, 'Arrival of Burke, Wills and King at Cooper's Creek' .....	57
Figure 14:	Sidney Nolan, 'Burke and Wills at the Gulf' .....	60
Figure 15:	Samuel Thomas Gill, 'The sandy ridges of Central Australia'.....	79
Figure 16:	Gallery of images of members of the VEE.....	81
Figure 17:	Bartholomew's, <i>Australasian school atlas</i> [map] .....	82
Figure 18:	John Oxley, 'A chart of part of the interior of New South Wales' [map] .....	88
Figure 19:	Thomas J. Maslen, 'Sketch of the coasts of Australia' [map] .....	90
Figure 20:	Thomas Mitchell, 'Geological sketch of Wellington Valley'.....	92
Figure 21:	John Michael Crossland, 'Charles Sturt' .....	94
Figure 22:	'Sir Thomas Livingstone Mitchell' .....	95
Figure 23:	'Portrait of Ludwig Leichhardt' .....	97
Figure 24:	Ferdinand Jean Joubert, 'Edward John Eyre' .....	102
Figure 25:	Edward Stokes, 'Charles Sturt's Expedition 1844-45' [map].....	105
Figure 26:	Arrowsmith's 'Sketch map of Captain Sturt's tracks' [map].....	106
Figure 27:	John Rapkin, 'Australia' from <i>Tallis's Illustrated Atlas</i> , 1851 [map].....	107
Figure 28:	Arid areas in Australia with explorers' routes as at 1850 [map] .....	109
Figure 29:	Thomas Baines, 'Bowman ... threatened with spears'.....	111
Figure 30:	Thomas Baines, 'Alligator, Victoria River' .....	111
Figure 31:	Comparison of the size of Sturt's, Mitchell's and Burke's parties.....	115
Figure 32:	Edgar Ray, 'Presentation of the King testimonial'.....	121
Figure 33:	Thomas Baines, 'Party on shore on Quail Island'.....	126
Figure 34:	Population growth by colony during the gold rush decade 1851-1861.....	127
Figure 35:	De Gruchy & Leigh, 'Canvas Town, South Melbourne in 1850s'.....	128
Figure 36:	Ludwig Becker, 'Andrew Clarke' .....	130
Figure 37:	'Dr. Foozle', <i>Melbourne Punch</i> , 1860.....	131
Figure 38:	Thomas Foster Chuck, 'David Elliot Wilkie' .....	135
Figure 39:	Wilkie's proposed east-west route through NSW and WA [map].....	137
Figure 40:	Wilkie's proposed route showing arid areas and named deserts [map] .....	140
Figure 41:	Mueller presented several options as an alternative to Wilkie's route [map] .....	141
Figure 42:	The EC agreed to form a depot on the Thompson-Barcoo [map] .....	142
Figure 43:	Gregory's suggestion as the best way to approach the 'unexplored' land [map].....	143
Figure 44:	The expedition's route as proposed in the <i>First Progress Report</i> [map] .....	144
Figure 45:	Johnstone & Co., 'Ferdinand Mueller' .....	145

Figure 46: 'William Blandowski' .....	145
Figure 47: C.F. Gregory, 'Leichardt's Exp. travelling over the Desert' .....	148
Figure 48: 'Rough sketch shewing the route of the Leichhardt Expedition' [map] .....	149
Figure 49: Yet another suggestion from Mueller about the proposed route [map] .....	151
Figure 50: Embling's grand plan to join the railways ... to steamers on the Murray [map] .....	152
Figure 51: Lang's 1854 proposal to ... to link Murray River ... to Albert River [map] .....	154
Figure 52: Barkly's proposal for exploring north of Mount Murchison [map] .....	155
Figure 53: Gregory's alternate suggestion, proposed to the EC by Mueller [map] .....	156
Figure 54: T.W. Cameron, 'Portrait of Ambrose Kyte' .....	158
Figure 55: Burke announced the route he would follow [map] .....	163
Figure 56: McCoy and Ligar's last minute proposal to start from Blunder Bay [map] .....	164
Figure 57: Neumayer's last minute proposal to start from Port Augusta [map] .....	165
Figure 58: Dates of EC Meetings between 1857 and 1860 .....	168
Figure 59: 'Squaring Ye Circle', <i>Melbourne Punch</i> , 1860 .....	169
Figure 60: 'The Bay of Blunder O!', <i>Melbourne Punch</i> , 1860 .....	170
Figure 61: Sidney Nolan, 'Burke and Wills leaving Melbourne' .....	173
Figure 62: Sign at 'The Clump', Burke and Wills Camp 14 .....	176
Figure 63: William Strutt, 'The first day's order of march' .....	179
Figure 64: William Strutt, 'The exploring party encamped' .....	181
Figure 65: Ludwig Becker, 'Wakool River, near Talbet's, 14 Sept. 60' .....	183
Figure 66: Ludwig Becker, 'Camping-ground at Bilbaka, Darling, 11 October 1860' .....	185
Figure 67: 'River steamer Moolgewanke'. .....	186
Figure 68: 'The Great Australian Exploring Race', <i>Melbourne Punch</i> , 1860 .....	187
Figure 69: Ludwig Becker, 'Minindie, Octb. 15. 60, bearing E. by S. 15 October 1860' .....	188
Figure 70: The Expedition's track from Melbourne to Bulla [map] .....	190
Figure 71: The Expedition's track from Bulla to Knowsley [map] .....	191
Figure 72: The Expedition's track from Knowsley to Tragowel [map] .....	192
Figure 73: The Expedition's track from Tragowel to Swan Hill [map] .....	193
Figure 74: The Expedition's track from Swan Hill to Balranald. [map] .....	194
Figure 75: The Expedition's track from Balranald to the Darling [map] .....	195
Figure 76: The Expedition's track along the Darling River from Camp 30 to Camp 34 [map] .....	196
Figure 77: The Expedition's track from Menindee to Camp 40 [map] .....	200
Figure 78: The Expedition's track from Camp 40 to the Queensland border [map] .....	201
Figure 79: The Expedition's track from Camp 49 to the Bulloo River [map] .....	202
Figure 80: The Expedition's track over the Grey Range to Cooper Creek [map] .....	203
Figure 81: The Expedition's track from Cooper Creek to the Diamantina River [map] .....	208
Figure 82: The Expedition's track from the Diamantina to the Tropic of Capricorn [map] .....	209
Figure 83: The Expedition's track from Tropic to the Selwyn Range [map] .....	210
Figure 84: The Expedition's track from Selwyn Range to the Gulf of Carpentaria [map] .....	211
Figure 85: Sidney Nolan, 'Burke and Wills Expedition: Gray sick' .....	217
Figure 86: The Expedition's return track from the Gulf to the Selwyn Range [map] .....	219
Figure 87: The Expedition's return track from the Selwyn Range to the Tropic [map] .....	220
Figure 88: The Expedition's return track from the Tropics to the Diamantina [map] .....	221
Figure 89: The Expedition's track from the Diamantina to Cooper Creek [map] .....	222
Figure 90: William Strutt, 'The Burial of Burke' .....	224
Figure 91: Burke, Wills and King's track attempting to reach Mount Hopeless [map] .....	225
Figure 92: Brahe's Depot Party. Return journey from Cooper Creek to the Bulloo River [map] ..	228
Figure 93: Ludwig Becker, 'River Darling and the mouth of the Bamamero Creek' .....	230

Figure 94: Ludwig Becker, 'Rough sketch of the route of Lyons & M'Pherson' [map] .....	231
Figure 95: William Oswald Hodgkinson, 'Koorliatto, New South Wales' .....	232
Figure 96: Wright's Supply Party. Journey from Menindee to Paldromata [map] .....	234
Figure 97: Wright's Supply Party. Journey from Paldromata to Bulloo [map] .....	235
Figure 98: Sidney Nolan, 'Burke and Wills expedition' .....	243
Figure 99: Charles Joseph Hullmandel, 'The expedition in a desert in Australia' .....	249
Figure 100: George Edwards Peacock, 'View of old Government House, Sydney' .....	252
Figure 101: Samuel Thomas Gill, 'Travelling through the brush and sandridges' .....	253
Figure 103: 'Dr Embling in Arcadia', <i>Melbourne Punch</i> , 1856 .....	255
Figure 103: Grouzelle & Co., 'Dr. Embling' .....	258
Figure 104: Captain George Francis Lyon R.N., 'A Tuarick on his Maherrie' .....	259
Figure 105: William Strutt, 'George Landells' .....	261
Figure 106: William Theodore De Bary, 'Nineteenth Century camel market, Peshawar' .....	263
Figure 107: Receipts for the purchase of camels from the Bikaner markets .....	265
Figure 108: William Strutt, 'Camel driver of Burke & Wills Exploring Expedition' .....	266
Figure 109: 'Adult male Bikaneri camel' .....	266
Figure 110: Landells' 2,500 kilometre journey with the camels, India, 1859-1860 [map] .....	268
Figure 111: 'Dr Embling hears of the arrival of the camels' <i>Melbourne Punch</i> , 1859 .....	270
Figure 112: George Slater, 'The Exploring Expedition' .....	271
Figure 113: William Strutt, 'Camels of the Victorian Exploring Expedition' .....	272
Figure 114: William Strutt, 'The Start of the Burke and Wills Exploring Expedition' .....	275
Figure 115: Ludwig Becker, 'Crossing the Terrick-Terrick Plains' .....	276
Figure 116: William Strutt, 'Camel with saddle cloth' .....	277
Figure 117: 'Love at first sight', <i>Melbourne Punch</i> , 1860 .....	282
Figure 118: Satellite image of the anastomosing channels of the Wilson River .....	286
Figure 119: Helena Forde, 'No. 2. Camel's shoe' .....	291
Figure 120: Feral camels in the Selwyn Range .....	293
Figure 121: Map of Burke & Wills' route, EXP22A, [map] .....	295
Figure 122: Modified version of previous figure showing the northbound route [map] .....	295
Figure 123: Modified version showing only the southbound route [map] .....	296
Figure 124: Artefacts found in 1994 by Chris Tangey .....	297
Figure 125: Map showing where Burke's animals died [map] .....	298
Figure 126: Map showing locations of the five camels who escaped [map] .....	301
Figure 127: Samuel Calvert, 'Departure of the M'Intyre Expedition' .....	303
Figure 128: Dalgona Station and current feral camel distribution [map] .....	304
Figure 129: William Strutt, 'Indian Camel drivers at the Camp' .....	307
Figure 130: 'Map of Burke & Wills route from Cooper's Creek to Carpentaria' [map] .....	312
Figure 131: Ludwig Becker, 'Arrival of the party at Duroadoo' .....	317
Figure 132: Mitchell <i>et al</i> , 'Portraits of Turandurey and her child, Ballandella' .....	324
Figure 133: Edward John Eyre, 'Wylie' .....	325
Figure 134: Ludwig Leichhardt 'Portraits of Charley Fisher and Harry Brown' .....	327
Figure 135: Aboriginal language groups between Melbourne and Menindee [map] .....	329
Figure 136: Aboriginal language groups between Menindee and the Cooper [map] .....	330
Figure 137: Samuel Thomas Gill, 'Native village in the northern interior of S. Australia' .....	331
Figure 138: Sturt's 'Central Australian Expedition' route [map] .....	332
Figure 139: Silver breastplate presented to Jackey Jackey' .....	333
Figure 140: Kennedy's 1847 route from Sydney to the Cooper [map] .....	333
Figure 141: Thomas Baines, 'Bowman near the Baines River' .....	334



Figure 142: Gregory's 1858 'Leichhardt Search Expedition' route [map] .....	334
Figure 143: Possible route of Hack's 1859-1860 journey [map] .....	335
Figure 144: Aboriginal language groups in the Bulloo, Wilson, Cooper, etc. [map] .....	336
Figure 145: Aboriginal language groups in the Diamantina, Georgina etc. [map] .....	337
Figure 146: Leichhardt's 1844-1845 route from Jimbour to Port Essington [map] .....	339
Figure 147: Thomas Baines, 'The artist ... treacherously attacked by natives' .....	340
Figure 148: Gregory's 1855-1856 'North Australian Exploration' route [map] .....	340
Figure 149: Aboriginal language groups in the Gulf of Carpentaria [map] .....	341
Figure 150: George French Angas, 'Elizabeth Springs' .....	342
Figure 151: Ludwig Becker, 'Billy' .....	345
Figure 152: Ludwig Becker, 'Jemmy (Tilki)' .....	345
Figure 153: Ludwig Becker, 'Near our camp at Spewah' .....	347
Figure 154: Ludwig Becker, 'Watpipa the 'Old Man', our guide' .....	348
Figure 155: Ludwig Becker, 'Women in mourning' .....	349
Figure 156: Ludwig Becker, 'Reservoir in Mootwanji Ranges' .....	351
Figure 157: Thaaklatjika/Wright's Cave, Mutawintji National Park .....	352
Figure 158: Cuthbert Clarke, 'Arrival at the Stoney Desert' .....	356
Figure 159: Memorial plaque, Corella Creek .....	359
Figure 160: John Dick, 'Depot Camp 65 showing the remains of Brahe's stockade' .....	361
Figure 161: Ludwig Becker, 'Australian native song, Lower Murray' .....	363
Figure 162: Ludwig Becker, 'Portrait of Dick, the brave and gallant native guide' .....	364
Figure 163: Ludwig Becker, 'Native from the Darling' .....	365
Figure 164: William Oswald Hodgkinson, 'Bulla, Queensland' .....	366
Figure 165: '.568" calibre rifle bullet found at Wright's Bulloo Lake Camp .....	367
Figure 166: Samuel Calvert, 'Cooper's Creek' .....	372
Figure 167: Eugene Montagu Scott, 'Natives discovering the body of William John Wills' .....	374
Figure 168: William Strutt, 'King with the Cooper's Creek blacks covering Burke's remains' .....	375
Figure 169: Two breastplates presented to the Yandruwandha by Howitt .....	376
Figure 170: Map of locations on the Cooper visited by Burke, Wills and King [map] .....	378
Figure 171: Alfred William Howitt, 'Cooper's Creek' .....	380
Figure 172: John Davis, 'Keri Keri, A Native of Kadhibaerri' .....	381
Figure 173: Batchelder & O'Neill, 'William Landsborough with Jemmy and Jack Fisherman' .....	382
Figure 174: 'Aboriginal Warriors wearing body art at Innamincka' .....	383
Figure 175: 'Brahe's tree, Cooper's Creek, aboriginal crouching at the foot of the tree' .....	384
Figure 176: 'Old Chief, 'Wompi', 'King's hut companion', <i>The Australasian</i> , 1915 .....	386
Figure 177: Herbert Basedow, 'Interviewing Danbidlelli, Innamincka' .....	387
Figure 178: 'Portrait of Billy Williams' .....	388
Figure 179: Mike Steel, 'Murtee Johhny' .....	388
Figure 180: 'Lunch break at Innamincka for Jack' .....	389
Figure 181: Edgar Ray, 'Nardoo plant' .....	391
Figure 182: The author harvesting portulaca .....	392
Figure 183: Nardoo plants with sporocarps on a grinding stone .....	369
Figure 184: Home and Aiston, 'Crushing nardoo with a koolkie and a piddinie' .....	399
Figure 185: 'Nardoo grinding stones used by Burke, Wills and King at Cooper's Creek' .....	400
Figure 186: Ngardu ( <i>Marsilea drummondii</i> ) growing at Cooper Creek .....	402
Figure 187: 'Pitchery, Nardoo cake and Nardoo seed' .....	406
Figure 188: Ludwig Becker, 'Border of the Mud-Desert near Desolation Camp' .....	415
Figure 189: Philp & Collis, 'Burke and Wills' route from Cooper's Creek to Carpentaria' [map] ...	421

Figure 190: ‘Man (Francis Birtles?) trying to dig the car out of a bog’ .....	424
Figure 191: Frank Clune, ‘A group of people at Tibooburra’ .....	425
Figure 192: ‘Burke’s trees at Burke’s camp 119 at the Gulf of Carpentaria’ .....	426
Figure 193: Alfred Cory Towner, ‘Doonmulla WH, Wills lost camels here’ .....	427
Figure 194: Alfred Towner’s three interpretive signs erected between 1961 and 1963 .....	428
Figure 195: Extract of ‘Maps showing route of Burke and Wills 1961’ [map] .....	429
Figure 196: Josephine Flood’s map showing Aboriginal trade routes [map] .....	436
Figure 197: Map of Leg 1, Melbourne to Balranald [map] .....	440
Figure 198: Map of Leg 2, Balranald to Cooper Creek [map] .....	441
Figure 199: Map of Leg 3, Cooper Creek to the Gulf of Carpentaria [map] .....	442
Figure 200: Map of Leg 4, Gulf of Carpentaria to Cooper Creek [map] .....	443
Figure 201: Map of Leg 5, Cooper Creek towards Mount Hopeless [map] .....	444
Figure 202: Alexander Hutchinson Salmond, ‘Burke’s depot, Cooper’s Creek’ .....	449
Figure 203: Emmanuel Spiller, ‘Mr Herbert Kenny at Burke’s grave’ .....	450
Figure 204: Map of Strzelecki Creek and the lower Cooper Creek [map] .....	453
Figure 205: John Arrowsmith, ‘Sketch map of Captain Sturt’s tracks’ [map] .....	455
Figure 206: A.C. Gregory, ‘The route of the Leichhardt Expedition’ [map] .....	455
Figure 207: Extract of Arrowsmith’s map showing Sturt’s route [map] .....	456
Figure 208: Bessie Threadgill, Extract of ‘Gregory’s map’ [map] .....	456
Figure 209: Strzelecki Creek’s bifurcation/divergence from Cooper Creek .....	457
Figure 210: Strzelecki Creek looking south near the bifurcation with Cooper Creek .....	457
Figure 211: Nguranni / Oorannie Creek’s divergence from Cooper Creek .....	458
Figure 212: William John Wills’ ‘Seperation’ .....	460
Figure 213: Tingana dunes in the Strzelecki Desert .....	461
Figure 214: Vegetation: Pre-European Settlement (1788) [map] .....	465
Figure 215: Vegetation: Post-European Settlement (1988) [map] .....	465
Figure 216: Wills, ‘Plan showing the route of the VEE from Balranald to the Darling’ [map] .....	471
Figure 217: Wills and Byerley, ‘Plan of the goldfields at Kingower’ [map] .....	471
Figure 218: Wills, ‘Tracing showing the Route taken from Menindie to Torowoto’ [map] .....	474
Figure 219: William John Wills, ‘Tracing to accompany Wills’ Second Surveyor’s Report’ [map] .....	474
Figure 220: Charles Sturt, ‘Cooper’s Creek’ .....	476
Figure 221: Sarah Murgatroyd, ‘Near the Selwyn Ranges, Wills noted a single conical peak’ .....	484
Figure 222: Map extract from EXP22A [map] .....	486
Figure 223: ‘Map shewing route of North Western Exploration Party’ [map] .....	486
Figure 224: Map extract from ‘Duchess, 1:250K topographic map’ [map] .....	487
Figure 225: The Monument .....	487
Figure 226: Salt flats at the northern end of the Stokes Range during the wet season .....	489
Figure 227: Murgatroyd, ‘Camp 119, Burke’s dismal most northern camp’ .....	490
Figure 228: Satellite image of the salt-flats at the northern end of the Stokes Range .....	491
Figure 229: Crossing the salt flats at the northern end of the Stokes Range .....	491
Figure 230: The Coorabulka tussock grasslands in drought .....	494
Figure 231: Edgar Ray, ‘The Burke and Wills Expedition crossing the desert’ .....	497
Figure 232: William John Wills, ‘Pretty country, lightly timbered and well grassed’ .....	499
Figure 233: Burke and Wills Camp 71 .....	501
Figure 234: Sturt Stony Desert .....	501
Figure 235: Koonchera Waterhole, Burke and Wills Camp 73(A) .....	502
Figure 236: Wills, ‘Section of map showing route from Cooper to Diamantina [map] .....	503
Figure 237: Branigan Hill .....	507

Figure 238: Hoyts Edgley, 'Manipulating the Burke and Wills landscape' .....	509
Figure 239: 'Public funeral of the Australian explorers', <i>Illustrated Australasian News</i> , 1863 .....	513
Figure 240: Sidney Nolan, 'Burke' .....	525
Figure 241: Sidney Nolan, 'Wills' .....	525



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## List of abbreviations

<b>CAE</b>	Central Australian Expedition (Sturt, 1844-1845).
<b>Commission</b>	Commission of Inquiry. <sup>2</sup>
<b>Depot Camp 65</b>	VEE Camp LXV established on Cooper Creek. <sup>3</sup>
<b>EC</b>	Exploration Committee of the Royal Society of Victoria.
<b>EFC</b>	Exploration Fund Raising Committee.
<b>Expedition</b>	The VEE / The Burke and Wills Expedition.
<b>H.M.C.S./HMCss</b>	Her Majesty's Colonial Sloop (a.k.a Her Majesty's Colonial steam sloop).
<b>LSE</b>	Leichhardt Search Expedition (A.C. Gregory 1858).
<b>MLA</b>	Member of the Legislative Assembly, Victoria's Lower House.
<b>MLC</b>	Member of the Legislative Council, Victoria's Upper House.
<b>NAE</b>	North Australian Expedition (A.C. Gregory, 1857-8).
<b>PIV</b>	Philosophical Institute of Victoria.
<b>PSV</b>	Philosophical Society of Victoria.
<b>QRE</b>	Queensland Relief Expedition (Landsborough, 1861-2).
<b>RGS</b>	Royal Geographical Society (of London).
<b>RSV</b>	Royal Society of Victoria.
<b>SABRE</b>	South Australian Burke Relief Expedition, (McKinlay 1861-2).
<b>RGS (SA Branch)</b>	Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (South Australian Branch).
<b>VIAS</b>	Victorian Institute for the Advancement of Science.
<b>VCP</b>	Victorian Contingent Party (Howitt, 1861).
<b>VEE</b>	Victorian Exploring Expedition (The Burke and Wills Expedition).
<b>VEP</b>	Victorian Exploring Party (Howitt, 1862).
<b>VRE</b>	Victorian Relief Expedition, (Walker, 1861-2).




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<sup>2</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *Burke and Wills Commission. Report of the Commissioners appointed to enquire into and report upon the circumstances connected with the sufferings and death of Robert O'Hara Burke and William John Wills, the Victorian Explorers* (Melbourne: John Ferres Government Printer, 1862).

<sup>3</sup> Depot Camp 65 was Burke's second depot camp on Cooper Creek, at the site of the famous Dig Tree. Howitt referred to it as 'Fort Wills'. The camp is at S27°37'26", E141°04'33" (GDA2020).

Note: All positions described in this thesis are shown using the Geocentric Datum of Australia 2020 projection (GDA2020), which was introduced in January 2017. GDA2020 positions are around 1.8 metres north-east of positions plotted using the superseded GDA94 projection, so readers do not need to apply a correction if plotting positions given in this thesis using the old datum.  
[icsm.gov.au/gda2020/index.html](https://icsm.gov.au/gda2020/index.html)

## Imperial measures and metric conversions

The colony of Victoria used the Imperial system of weights and measures. This system remained in place in Australia until the introduction of decimal currency on 14 February 1966 and the more widespread adoption of the metric system in 1972. In order to remain faithful to the original documents, the Imperial system of measurement is used in this thesis.

### Distance

inch (in/“)	---	1 inch = 2.54 cm
foot (ft/‘)	12 inches	1 foot = 30.5 cm
yard	3 feet	1 yard = 0.914 metres
fathom	---	1 fathom = 1.8 m
mile	1,760 yards	1 mile = 1.609 km

### Surveyor's measures

link	7.92 inches / 0.01 chain	1 link = 20.12 cm
chain	22 yards	1 chain = 20.11 metres

### Mass

ounce (oz.)	---	1 oz = 28.35 grams
pound (lb. or lbs.)	16 oz	1 lb = 0.45 kg
stone (st.)	14 lb	1 stone = 6.35 kg
hundredweight (cwt.)	112 lbs or 8 stone	1 cwt = 50kg
ton (t.)	2,240 lbs or 20cwt	1 ton = 1.016 tonnes

### Volume

pint	20 fl. oz.	1 pint = 0.57 litres
quart	4 pints	½ gallon = 2.27 litres
gallon	8 pints	1 gallon = 4.55 litres

### Grains

The bushel is a unit of measure used for weighing grains. Originally one bushel equalled eight gallons (36.4 litres).

1 bushel of oats	32 lbs	32 lbs = 14.5 kg
1 bushel of barley	48 lbs	48 lbs = 21.7 kg
1 bushel of wheat	60 lbs	60 lbs = 27.2 kg

## Numbers

dozen	12
gross	144 or 12 dozen

## Temperature

Wills recorded temperatures in degrees Fahrenheit (°F) and also as degrees Réaumur (°r). The Réaumur temperature scale was proposed by the French entomologist, René-Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur, in 1730. The freezing point of water of 0°r was equivalent to 0°C (32°F), but the boiling point of water (100°C/212°F) was set to 80°r. This obsolete temperature scale was quite commonly used in continental Europe.

Fahrenheit (°F)	Réaumur (°r)	Celsius (°C)
0°F	-13°r	-17°C
32°F	0°r	0°C
50°F	8°r	10°C
60°F	12°r	15°C
70°F	17°r	21°C
80°F	20°r	26°C
90°F	26°r	32°C
100°F	31°r	38°C
110°F	35°r	43°C
120°F	39°r	49°C
212°F	80°r	100°C

The recorded temperature on the Expedition ranged from a minimum of -2°C at Bookoo in September 1860, to a maximum of 43°C at Cooper Creek in December 1860.

## Currency

pence (d. or p.)	
shilling (s.)	1s. = 12d.
half-crown	2s.6d.
Pound (£ or L.)	£1 = 20s.
guinea	£1.1s. or 21s.

When Australia adopted decimal currency in 1966, \$AU2 was equivalent to £AU1. However, monetary values in the nineteenth century were not equivalent to the 1966 figure. It would be meaningless to give contemporary decimal equivalents for 1860 money. To give an indication of the value of money at this date, the following costs are offered;

## Costs in 1860

Average weekly wage for a labourer in 1860	£2.10s. to £4.
Burke's weekly wage whilst on the expedition	£9.12s. 3d.
Indian sepoy's weekly wage whilst on expedition	2s.
Cost of daily newspaper	6d.
Cost of 1 lb of flour	2½d.
Cost of 1 lb sugar	4¾d.
Cost of a carbine rifle	£15.
Cost of a riding-horse	£25 to £50.



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## Glossary

### Food

**biscuit** see: meat biscuit.

**farinaceous** used by Wills; meaning made of flour or meal. It is not clear whether Wills meant floury carbohydrates in general, or ngardu in particular (see: ngardu).

**fish** Wills recorded the Yandruwandha names for three types of fish found in Cooper Creek:

- cawiltchi (Yandruwandha: thawirritji) black bream, *Hephaestus fuliginosus*.
- cupi (Yandruwandha: kapi) small catfish, *Plotosidae* spp.
- peru (Yandruwandha: parru) bony-bream, *Flavialoas richardsoni*.

**jerking, jerked** process of preserving raw meat by air-drying it. From the Spanish ‘charqui’ meaning dried meat.

**meat biscuit** pemmican mixed with flour to make a dough biscuit. The biscuit was then fried and eaten or mixed with water to make soup, known as ‘soup and bully’. The expedition made half a ton of biscuit in Melbourne which was then packed into barrels. The ratio of meat, meat-juice and fat to flour was 26:40.

**padlu** (Yandruwandha: mudlu), bean-tree. Used by Wills to describe the *Bauhinia* bean.

**pemmican** North American Indian word from the Cree language meaning preserved meat. Lean meat with fat removed is cut into thin slices and then sun dried. The dried meat is pounded and mixed with melted fat (and sometimes dried fruit or berries) before being compressed into cakes.

**pannikin** shallow pan or drinking cup made of metal, usually tin.

**skilligolee** (also: skilligalee, skillygalee, skilly or smiggins) convict or criminal cant word of the London underworld meaning thin weak broth, watery oatmeal porridge or drink made of oatmeal, sugar and water.

### Geographical terms

**argillaceous** resembling or containing clay; composed mostly of clay.

**claypan** shallow depression floored with impermeable clay, which can hold rainwater after other groundwater has disappeared.

**Cooper’s Creek** Yandruwandha-Yawarrawarrka people called the creek kini-papa. It was named Cooper’s Creek by Charles Sturt on 13 October 1845 honouring South Australian judge, Chief Justice Sir Charles Cooper (1795-1887. Modern orthography is Cooper Creek.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping: Permanent Committee on Place Names with assistance from National Geographic Information Group, *Gazetteer of Australia* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2012).



This thesis uses both terms; transcripts of historical documents maintain the original term Cooper's Creek, while contemporary references use the term Cooper Creek.

**indurated** from indurate meaning to make hard or harden. Used by Wills as a geological term as 'indurated clay' = hardened clay.

**infusorial** meaning consisting of infusorians, i.e. infusorial earth: a deposit of fine, usually white, siliceous material, composed mainly of the shells of the microscopic plants called diatoms, also called diatomaceous earth.

**mallee** generic term for various trees of the species *Eucalyptus*; also as a term for the semi-arid areas in which these grow.

**silicious, siliceous** relating to, consisting of, or resembling silica.

**zodiacal light** also known as 'false dawn'. A faint, whitish glow in the night sky sometimes visible before sunrise or after sunset which extends up from the vicinity of the sun along the ecliptic or zodiac. It is caused by sunlight being scattered by a fine dust cloud, known as the zodiacal cloud, which occupies the same plane as the ecliptic. The zodiacal light is so faint that it is masked by either moonlight or light pollution.

## Botany, Flora & Fauna

**coolabah, coolibah** from Kamilaroi 'gulubaa', *Eucalyptus coolabah* Blakely & Jacobs. Formerly *Eucalyptus microtheca* F. Muell.<sup>5</sup>

**Compositae** *Compositae*, or the more recent term *Asteraceae*, are the 23,000 species of the daisy family (also called the aster family or sunflower family). An exceedingly large and widespread family of *Angiospermae*.

**holotype** the single specimen on which the taxon was based.

**lectotype** a specimen later selected to serve as the single type specimen for species originally described from a set of syntypes.

**marsh mallows** used by Wills; the marsh mallow plant is *Althaea officinalis*, a native of Africa. Wills was referring to one of a number of native mallows, *Malva* spp.

**mesembryanthemum** meaning 'midday flowering' and generally applied to a member of the family *Aizoaceae* which is native to South Africa. Explorers in Australia used the term to refer to a range of succulent, salt-tolerant herbs, some native and some introduced. Three species are naturalised in Australia *M. nodiflorum*, *M. aitonis* and *M. crystallinum*. However, Beckler notes mesembryanthemum was found in the arid interior where it "enjoys a great reputation in Australia as an anti-scorbutic",<sup>6</sup> which would indicate he was referring to a native pig-face such as *Carporobrotus* spp., *Disphyma* spp or *Sarcocolla praecox*.

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<sup>5</sup> Ferdinand Mueller, *Journal of the proceedings of the Linnean Society: Botany*, Vol. 3 (1859): 87.

<sup>6</sup> Hermann Beckler, *A journey to Cooper's Creek*, trans. Stephen Jeffries and Michael Kertesz (Carlton: Melbourne University Press at the Miegunyah Press in association with the State Library of Victoria, 1993).

- native companion** colloquial name for the Brolga, *Grus rubicunda*, a large bird of the crane family.
- pitchery, pituri, pitjidi, pedgery, bedgery** Aboriginal word from western Queensland meaning the shrub, *Duboisia hopwoodii*. The leaves were chewed as a narcotic.
- polygonum** bushy herb, *Polygonum cunninghami* which grows low to the ground. Later reclassified as *Muehlenbeckia cunninghamii*, then *Muehlenbeckia florulenta* and now *Duma florulenta*.
- portulac, purslane, pigweed** plant of the genus *Portulaca* with fleshy, edible leaves which contain vitamin C, most likely *Portulaca oleracea*.
- rank vegetation** grassland or marsh vegetation that has grown abundantly or profusely without being cut or grazed for some time, and as a result has become tall, tussocky, and dominated by coarse species of grass.
- salsolaceous** of plants that favour or are able to tolerate salt-impregnated soil, i.e.: saltbush (*Atriplex* of the sub-family *Chenopodioidae* in the family *Amaranthaceae*) and bluebush (*Maireana*, also in the family *Amaranthaceae*).
- specimen** a plant; dried and curated in a herbarium.
- syntype** each specimen of a type series (of equal rank) when no holotype or lectotype has been named.
- type** a specimen to which the name of a taxon is permanently attached. The scientific name of every taxon is based on one particular specimen.
- vetch** herbaceous leguminous plant of the genus *Vicia* within the pea family *Fabaceae*.

### Aboriginal terminology

- billabong, billibong** Wiradjuri word from central and southern New South Wales meaning branch of a river or creek that runs into a dead end or a waterhole that dries up or flows intermittently.
- gin** Port Jackson word meaning Aboriginal woman, now considered a derogatory term.
- gunyah** Dharuk word of the Sydney region first recorded in 1803 meaning Aboriginal shelter, constructed of bark and leafy boughs.
- lubra** Tasmanian word first recorded in 1834 meaning Aboriginal woman, now considered a derogatory term.
- mia-mia** either Wathawurung and Wuywurung word of the Melbourne region or a Nyungar word from Western Australia meaning Aboriginal shelter, constructed of bark and leafy boughs. Variations include ‘miam-miam’ and ‘mya-myam’ etc.
- piccaninny** West Indian variation on the Spanish word *pequenino* meaning tiny one. First used in English around 1687 and as a term of endearment towards black children. Used by Wills to mean Aboriginal child and now considered a derogatory term.

**pitchery, pituri, pitjidi, pedgery, bedgery** Aboriginal word from western Queensland meaning the shrub, *Duboisia hopwoodii*. The leaves were chewed as a narcotic.

**white-fella** 'white fellow' meaning European.

**yabber** Aboriginal pidgin word for talk, often talk fast or excitedly.

**yarraman, yarrowman** Aboriginal pidgin word for horse.

## Military

**sepoy** from the Persian 'Sipâhi', meaning 'soldier'. A native of India employed as a soldier in the service of a European power, specifically the rank of infantry private in the British Indian Army.

**sowar, suwar** Persian meaning 'the one who rides' (Hindustani = suwar). A military rank during the Mughal period, later used during the British Raj for a horse-soldier belonging to the cavalry troops of the native armies of British India and the feudal states.

**lascar** from the Persian 'lashkar', meaning military camp, and 'al-askar', the Omani word for a guard or soldier. The Portuguese used the term 'lascarim' to refer to an Asian militiaman or seaman. Lascars served on British ships under 'lascar' agreements. The name lascar was also used to refer to Indian servants, typically engaged by British military officers.

## Letter writing

**inst.** abbreviation for *instant mense*, Latin for this month. Commonly used in 19th Century letters, i.e.: "reference your letter of the 12th *inst*".

**ult.** abbreviation for *ultimo*, meaning the previous month.

**prox.** abbreviation for *proxima*, meaning next month.

## Clothing

**merino shirt** shirt made of merino wool.

**oilcloth** fabric treated with oil so as to be waterproof.

**regatta shirt** heavy cotton shirt characterised by a striped pattern and a particular kind of weave.

**swag** traveller's bundle of equipment and supplies.

**wide awake** soft felt hat with a wide brim and low crown.

**Cabbage-tree hat, Cabbage-palm hat** distinctively Australian hat, popular with early European settlers. It was made from the boiled, dried and bleached leaves of the cabbage-palm (*Livistona australis*). It was finely woven, had a high tapering domed crown and a wide flat brim.

**Other**

**cooey** 'Coo-ee': loud call used for signalling in the bush.

**Mr. Micawber** used by Wills; character in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* who typifies the eternal optimist.

**camel pad** stitched leather or cloth pad, stuffed with straw or horse-hair, used as padding between the camel's body and the saddle or loaded pack. The Gulf Party of the VEE used camel pads as mattresses and pillows.



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# INTRODUCTION

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## CONTENTS

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Introduction	5
Scope of the Study	12
Research Aims	13
Findings	14
Methodology	17
Outline of Chapters	28
Significance of the Study	30
Further Research	31

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*THE VICTORIAN EDXPLORING EXPEDITION.*

*The Continent Crossed*

*All Burke's books, &c., have been saved.*

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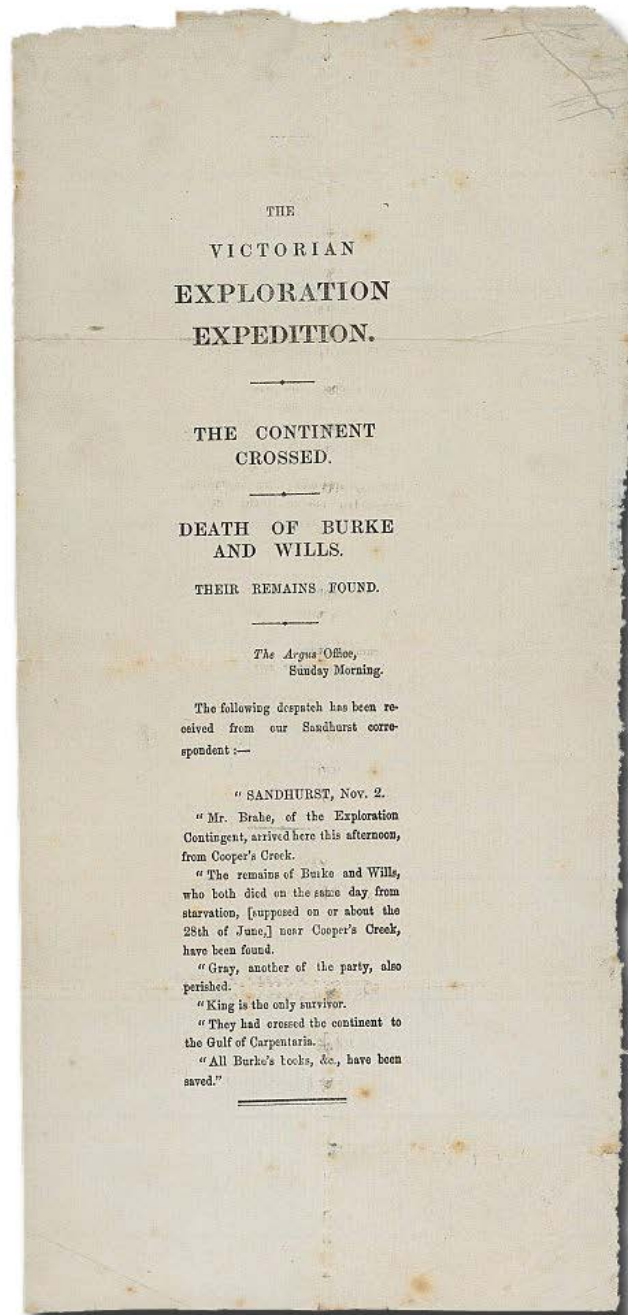


Figure 1: *Argus*, 'Press sheet from the *Argus* Office announcing the death of Burke and Wills'.  
*Argus* Office, 74-76 Collins-street East, Melbourne, 3 November 1861.



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## Introduction

This thesis is the result of a fascination I developed with the Burke and Wills Expedition<sup>7</sup> while living at Cooper Creek in the remote northern outback of South Australia, where many of the dramatic events of 1860-1861 took place. Sitting under a River Red Gum on the banks of the Cooper reading William John Wills' description of the expedition as a "picnic party"<sup>8</sup> seemed at odds with the generally held belief the expedition was a shambles destined for failure from the outset.<sup>9</sup> Having spent time walking in the Strzelecki Desert, I realised Robert O'Hara Burke's decision to cross the continent on foot in summer was not something to be undertaken lightly, and in fact it required a great deal of commitment and determination. The annals of Australian exploration history are littered with the names of those who proposed and organised expeditions which progressed little further than the planning stages or disintegrated rapidly once they left the security of European infrastructure. Surely men who were hopelessly inept and badly organised would not have got as far as the Victorian Exploring Expedition (VEE) did? Burke's party was supposedly the greatest expedition ever assembled in the Australian colonies: was it a picnic party, an ill-fated shambles, or just beset by an unfortunate sequence of events?

The Expedition was formed in Melbourne in 1860 to make the first crossing of the continent from the south coast to the Gulf of Carpentaria. The ambitions of the wealthy young colony of Victoria rested with this attempt to unravel the mysteries of the interior of the continent, the land which Europeans referred to as "the ghastly blank".<sup>10</sup> No expense was spared. The Expedition was one of the best equipped of the colonial exploration parties and was the first to use camels in the arid interior. Although early reports of dissent within the party led to some speculation that the outcome of the Expedition may not be favourable, no one expected seven fatalities among the Expedition members. The deaths caused uproar in the colony of Victoria and the deceased explorers, particularly the two leaders, were lauded as heroes. The Expedition's organisers, the Exploration Committee (EC) of the Royal Society of Victoria (RSV), capitalised on public displays of emotion to promote the memory of Burke and Wills as a way of deflecting criticism of their role in establishing and supervising the Expedition.

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<sup>7</sup> The Expedition was originally called the 'Victorian Exploring Expedition' (VEE). It was officially renamed after the deaths of Burke and Wills at the suggestion of the Governor of Victoria, Sir Henry Barkly. To avoid repetition, the Burke and Wills Expedition will be referred to as the Expedition.

<sup>8</sup> William John Wills, 'Letter to Elizabeth 'Bessie' Wills, dated Cooper's Creek, 6 December 1860', Correspondence and press cuttings: 1839-1861, MS 9504, State Library of Victoria; Dr William Wills, *A successful exploration through the interior of Australia, from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria: from the journals and letters of William John Wills* (London: Richard Bentley, 1863), 145.

<sup>9</sup> The Expedition is invariably referred to as an "ill-fated" expedition. The first time this term was applied was two days after the deaths of Burke and Wills were announced, see: *South Australian Register*, 5 November 1861: 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Argus*, 1 September 1858: 4.



Figure 2: Cooper Creek at Innamincka.  
'Cooper-Creek-Innamincka-SA0118-11x17', 2011.  
© Ian Rolfe Photography Southern Lightscapes.

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This process of memorializing continued for several generations. Because Australia lacked home-grown national heroes, which in other countries had been provided by military men, Burke and Wills' accomplishments played a role in the development of a national identity. Eventually ANZAC provided the military heroes that Australia craved, but even after Gallipoli, Burke and Wills secured a place in the education curriculum. Their function there went beyond the teaching of history, as they served a fundamental role in promoting British Imperialist ideals of courage, bravery and achievement in the service of British colonialism and the expansion of Empire.

Although there was limited interest in the centenary commemorations in 1960, author Alan Moorehead still believed that every Australian child was familiar with the strange drama that took place in the remote interior of the continent.<sup>11</sup> More recently, the sesquicentennial anniversary resulted in much wider coverage, with commemorations, conferences and exhibitions staged in four Australian states as well as England, Ireland and Germany. Much of the impetus for marking the sesquicentenary was generated by the RSV, who, as organisers of the Expedition, had traditionally distanced themselves from any association, but were now reassessing their history and reclaiming Burke as part of their heritage.

What is apparent is that the Expedition is still well-known and the human drama that played out on Cooper Creek is ingrained in the national psyche. While the achievements of other explorers are seldom remembered today, Burke and Wills have become part of the lexicon of popular Australian

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<sup>11</sup> Alan McCrae Moorehead, *Cooper's Creek* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1963), Liner notes.

history.<sup>12</sup> However, 150 years of mythologising has resulted in a contemporary view of events that is significantly different from the historical records. No longer is the Expedition's story about bravery and Empire; the 'History Wars' has seen the narrative shift towards a more cautionary tale of the consequences of European ignorance and insensitivity towards the environment and Aboriginal knowledge. As the national myth has evolved, it has shifted from an inspiring imperial narrative to a post-colonial anecdote. However, this has not just been the process of subsequent generations re-interpreting and 're-presenting' their history of the Expedition. Retelling the story has added additional layers of modern myth to the narrative.<sup>13</sup>

A consequence of this process is that many books, articles and documentaries perpetuate misinformation.<sup>14</sup> The large body of secondary source literature is influenced and dominated by the three most popular accounts of the Expedition: Clune,<sup>15</sup> Moorehead,<sup>16</sup> and Murgatroyd.<sup>17</sup> These books claim to be factual accounts, and they have had a great influence on people's perceptions of the expedition. The different styles of these three books, written in 1937, 1963 and 2002, is not simply a result of different literary approaches. The books differ primarily in the way the authors approached contemporary attitudes to exploration, colonial expansion, environment and Aboriginal history. Although all three authors followed the Expedition's route, even a rudimentary perusal of the primary source archives raises questions that are at odds with the neatly packaged stories they tell. Despite their various claims about the way the Expedition was managed and the success, or otherwise, of its progress across the continent, no one actually knows the route the Expedition travelled. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to accurately plot the Expedition's route in its entirety, this thesis makes the best attempt to date, based on the primary sources available. It seems incongruous that authors with a limited understanding of the environmental, topographical and meteorological challenges facing the Expedition, should postulate about Burke's management skills, his use of

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<sup>12</sup> Andrea Dunn, 'Legends of the outback: The tragedy of Burke and Wills', *R.M. William's Outback Magazine*, June-July (2002): 55. Only the disappearance of Ludwig Leichhardt in 1848 has generated more literature.

<sup>13</sup> Cultural historian, Tim Bonyhady, has chronicled this transformation from historical actuality to modern myth in Tim Bonyhady, *Burke and Wills: From Melbourne to myth* (Balmain: David Ell Press, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> The two studies considered suitably comprehensive are:

- 1). Thomas John Bergin, 'Courage and corruption: An analysis of the Burke and Wills Expedition and the subsequent Royal Commission of Enquiry', (MA thesis, 1982) and,
- 2). Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*.

During the preparation of this thesis, the Royal Society of Victoria and Federation University (Ballarat) published two edited compilations of papers reflecting on the scientific contribution made by the VEE and the Expedition's interactions with Aboriginal people. These books provide a valuable addition to our understanding of the Expedition's actions, see: Douglas Andrew McCann and Edmund Bernard Joyce, eds., *Burke & Wills: the scientific legacy of the Victorian exploring expedition* (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2011); Ian D. Clark and Fred Cahir, eds., *The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills: Forgotten Narratives* (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Frank Clune, *Dig: A drama of central Australia* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1937).

<sup>16</sup> Moorehead, *Cooper's Creek*.

<sup>17</sup> Sarah Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree: The story of Burke and Wills* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2002).

camels, his inability to reach the open ocean, his decision to attempt to reach Mount Hopeless, and his alleged lack of interest in Aboriginal guides and Aboriginal assistance. These issues and the myths around them are investigated in this thesis: why the Expedition allegedly refused to use Aboriginal guides; why the explorers did not reach the open ocean at the Gulf; why Burke chose to go to Mount Hopeless instead of returning to Menindee; and why camels were specially imported for the Expedition, and whether they proved their worth. The secondary sources that address these issues make assertions based on tenuous foundations which are not supported by archival evidence or geographical investigation. While this thesis does not set out to specifically focus on issues of a geographical nature, it does spend a considerable amount of time investigating the 'historical human ecology' – the historical landscape and the Expedition's interactions with it – of the Burke and Wills landscape and analyses the perceptions of the 'harsh' unforgiving 'empty wilderness' which made up the "ghastly blank".<sup>18</sup> The Expedition helped to shape perceptions of Australian exploration and the arid inland. Sometimes this has been in a reactive way – as our social values have changed, so our evaluations of the Expedition have changed and therefore our relationship with landscape has changed. Increasingly our attitude towards the desert has moved away from that harsh landscape that played such a significant role in the deaths of Burke and Wills, towards a place of intrinsic beauty. In addition, as increasing value has been placed on Aboriginal knowledge and skills, there has been a change of attitude towards the sterile aridity of the desert, and these landscapes are now often described as "a land of plenty".<sup>19</sup>

Much of the uncertainty regarding the conduct of the expedition results from Burke and Wills' failure to return to Melbourne to relate their experiences. This is exacerbated by the fact that the leader did not keep a regular journal, Wills did not draft a comprehensive map, and the surviving archives are incomplete, fragmented, and, in some cases, incorrectly attributed.<sup>20</sup> Burke's lack of literary prowess makes the Expedition unique in Australian exploration history. He wrote irregular notes in a small leather-bound pocket book and only issued verbal orders, never written ones.<sup>21</sup> Although his handwriting was acknowledged as "most difficult to read"<sup>22</sup> and he apologised to his

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<sup>18</sup> *Argus*, 1 September 1858: 4.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Cathcart, *Starvation in a Land of Plenty: Wills' Diary of the Fateful Burke and Wills Expedition* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> For examples, see: Dave Phoenix, 'All Burke's books &c have been saved': the Burke and Wills Papers in the State Library of Victoria', *La Trobe Journal*, Vol. 86, December (2010); Dave Phoenix, 'Every Hour, On the Hour, From Sun Up 'til Sun Down: William Brahe and the establishment of central Australia's first weather station during the Burke and Wills Expedition', *La Trobe Journal*, Vol. 92, December (2013): 68-79.

<sup>21</sup> Although Burke has recently been described as "almost illiterate" this assessment does not take into account Burke's fluency in several languages. Jane Hendtlass, *Finding in the 'mock' Coronial Inquest into the deaths of Robert O'Hara Burke, William John Wills, and Charles Gray* (Melbourne: Royal Society of Victoria, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Frederick Charles Standish, 'Letter to William Henry Archer, dated Melbourne, 5 November 1861', Group 2/183, William Henry Archer Collection, University of Melbourne.

friends for his “scrawl”<sup>23</sup> he was able to write coherently and competently when required. Rather, he chose not to; in his previous occupation of police inspector, he had objected to the structure and discipline of official paperwork.<sup>24</sup> Even though Wills compensated for Burke’s inadequacies to a certain degree by making relatively regular and often lengthy entries in his field books, many of the records disappeared shortly after being returned to Melbourne, and the extant records are incomplete and unreliable.<sup>25</sup> Burke’s reluctance to commit his verbal orders to paper contributed to the death of both himself, Wills and Charley Gray, and the lack of a leader’s journal has meant the chronology of events, the track of the expedition and the location of important events have remained uncertain. The problem of incomplete historical data has been identified by Gerard Hayes, curator of manuscripts at the State Library of Victoria, which holds the largest collection of Expedition archives:

The Australian Manuscripts Collection ... is often visited or contacted by ... travellers [who] ... expect to find in the [Burke and Wills] papers ... a clear and simple guide to the route taken by the explorers, but are confronted instead by a mass of material which is reluctant to yield its secrets to any but the most determined researcher.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the popularity of the Expedition, or possibly because of it, there have been very few scholarly studies which have analysed it in any depth, other than works by Kathleen Fitzpatrick,<sup>27</sup> Tom Bergin<sup>28</sup> and Tim Bonyhady.<sup>29</sup> Fitzpatrick and Bonyhady analysed the expedition through the lens of Victorian political ambition and both concluded the expedition’s failure was as much a product of the way it was established as the way it was conducted. Bergin took a different approach to his research and familiarised himself with the landscape in which the events of 1860-1861 had been played out.<sup>30</sup> He too found that failure was inevitable when trying to rush across the continent. Other scholarly literature which deals with Australian exploration more generally, either avoids the Expedition or dismisses it summarily. Increased understanding of Aboriginal history, post-structuralism and literary critiques of explorers’ journals have resulted in a reappraisal of the Anglo-

<sup>23</sup> Robert O’Hara Burke, ‘Letter to Turner, dated Terek Terek, 31 August 1860’, Box 29/5(a), MS 7698, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Robert O’Hara Burke’, *Argus*, 11 December 1861: 5, reproducing an article from *Bell’s Life in Adelaide*, 7 December 1861; John Sadlier, *Recollections of a Victorian police officer* (Melbourne: George Robertson, 1913), 73-74; William Henry Manwaring, ‘A contemporary’s view of Robert O’Hara Burke’, *La Trobe Library Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 6, October (1970): 51-56.

<sup>25</sup> Gerard Hayes, ‘Paper Trails: The navigational records of the Burke and Wills Expedition in the State Library of Victoria’, *La Trobe Library Journal*, Vol. 58, Spring (1996): 14-18.

<sup>26</sup> Hayes, ‘Paper trails’, 14.

<sup>27</sup> Kathleen Fitzpatrick, ‘The Burke and Wills Expedition and the Royal Society of Victoria: Being a lecture given to the Royal Society on the occasion of its centenary and that of the Burke and Wills Expedition, 11th August, 1960’, *Historical Studies of Australia and New Zealand*, Vol. 10, No. 40 (1963): 470-478.

<sup>28</sup> Bergin, ‘Courage and corruption’.

<sup>29</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*.

<sup>30</sup> The one serious attempt to understand how the Expedition interacted with the landscape was Bergin’s 1977 journey from Cooper Creek to the Gulf of Carpentaria with seven camels. The journey was reported in Joseph Judge and Joseph J. Scherschel, ‘First across Australia: The journey of Burke and Wills’, *National Geographic Magazine*, February (1979): 152-191; Thomas John Bergin, *In the steps of Burke and Wills* (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1981). The findings were later used in Bergin, ‘Courage and corruption’.

centric ideals upon which Australian exploration history has traditionally been founded and consequently attitudes towards exploration have changed, which, Bill Peach believes, leads us to treat nineteenth century heroes as clownish flag-wavers and self-seekers.<sup>31</sup> Exploration is now understood to represent expropriation and the advance parties of European 'settlement', which is seen as invasion.

The existing scholarly literature treats the Expedition in one of two ways: either as an isolated incident of no value in explaining major themes in Australian history, or an anomaly to be summarily dismissed, even to the point of ignoring the Expedition altogether. Henry Reynolds' study of explorers and Aboriginal people concentrates heavily on the expeditions conducted by Major Thomas Mitchell and barely mentions Burke.<sup>32</sup> Paul Carter's work is equally reliant on explorers with military backgrounds like Mitchell, George Grey and Captain Charles Sturt, but is equally distant when dealing with the Expedition, despite Burke's military background and training and the militaristic manner in which the Expedition was conducted during the early stages.<sup>33</sup> Simon Ryan even opens *The Cartographic Eye* by stating that Burke and Wills "is an expedition this book does not discuss".<sup>34</sup> Recently, there have been only two academics actively researching Australia's exploration history, Darrell Lewis and Glen McLaren.<sup>35</sup> McLaren proposed a framework of developing skills of bushmanship from 1788 which resulted in more mobile, more efficient and ultimately more successful expeditions. McLaren's primary aim was to establish the place of Ludwig Leichhardt in this framework, but in the process, he avoided assessment of the Expedition and almost completely ignored the Relief Expeditions. Was the Expedition such an anomaly? Why do scholars struggle to place the Burke and Wills Expedition into the bigger picture of colonial expansion?

Burke's Expedition was the colony of Victoria's first, and essentially its only, attempt at exploration, and from even the most cursory glance it appears to be markedly different to expeditions organised by other colonies. Why did Victoria take such a radically different approach and what did the colony hope to achieve by doing things differently? The expedition has not been placed into context in this way.

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<sup>31</sup> Bill Peach and Australian Broadcasting Corporation, *The Explorers* (Sydney: ABC Enterprises for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1984): 17.

<sup>32</sup> Henry Reynolds, *With the white people: The crucial role of Aborigines in the exploration and development of Australia* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1990); Henry Reynolds, *Black pioneers* (Ringwood: Penguin, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> Paul Carter, *The road to Botany Bay: An essay in spatial history* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987).

<sup>34</sup> Simon Ryan, *The cartographic eye: How explorers saw Australia* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 12.

<sup>35</sup> Darrell Lewis, *Where is Dr Leichhardt?: the greatest mystery in Australian history* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2013); Glen McLaren, 'The development of the tradition of scientific research and bushmanship in the 19th Century with specific reference to the contributions of Ludwig Leichhardt' (PhD thesis, Curtin University, 1994).



Figure 3: 2010 Sesquicentenary Burke and Wills memorabilia from Australia Post, the Perth Mint and the Royal Mint. From left: Stamps and First Day Covers, Perth Mint \$1 coins, Royal Mint 20 cent and \$1 coins.

There was more public interest in the sesquicentenary anniversary of the Expedition in 2010 than there was in the centenary anniversary in 1960.

One common consensus was that Burke was not a suitable leader. I cannot disagree with these sentiments, nor do I wish to. This thesis does not aim to rehabilitate Burke's reputation. Burke was not a suitable leader; he was thrust into the position as a result of politics, pride and desperation by a Committee that found themselves over-committed to executing a venture on which they mistakenly believed the status of Victoria rested. However, one does not have to venture too deeply into the archives to realise that Wills joined the expedition for very different reasons to Burke. Wills' reputation as a scientist and navigator is in need of a certain degree of redemption, a process which was initiated elsewhere during the writing of this thesis.<sup>36</sup>

Given the heightened interest from the sesquicentenary, the recent publication of three books focussing on different aspects of the Expedition by CSIRO Publishing,<sup>37</sup> and continued national fascination with the ill-fated events of 1860-1861, a more detailed appraisal of certain aspects of the Expedition, which cuts through the myths and misconceptions, is due.

<sup>36</sup> Frank J. Leahy, 'Locating the 'Plant Camp' of the Burke and Wills Expedition', *Journal of Spatial Science*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (2007): 1-12.

<sup>37</sup> McCann and Joyce, *The scientific legacy*; Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*; Dave Phoenix, *Following Burke and Wills across Australia: A touring guide* (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2015).



## Scope of the Study

This thesis primarily investigates the 1860-1861 VEE, led by Burke. It subsequently split into several parties, including William Wright's Supply Party, William Brahe's Depot Party, Lyons and Macpherson's dispatches party and Burke's Gulf Party. In order to make comparisons with expeditions conducted at a similar time and in similar environs, the thesis occasionally refers to the relief expeditions conducted between 1861-1863 under Alfred Howitt (both the 1861 'Victorian Contingent Party' and 1862 'Victorian Exploring Party'), John McKinlay's 'South Australian Burke Relief Expedition', William Landsborough's 'Queensland Relief Expedition', Frederick Walker's 'Victorian Relief Expedition' and Commander William Henry Norman's voyage to the Gulf in the H.M.C.S. *Victoria* in 1861.

In order to establish the methodology used for Australian inland exploration in the 1860s and place the VEE into this context, earlier inland expeditions are analysed, including those sent out by New South Wales under George Evans, John Oxley, Mitchell, Edmund Kennedy, Sturt and the Gregory brothers, South Australian expeditions under Edward Eyre, Sturt, Benjamin Herschel Babbage and Peter Egerton Warburton, and the private expeditions led by Leichhardt and John McDouall Stuart. Expedition's in Western Australia are mentioned briefly, while expeditions in Van Diemen's Land/Tasmania and maritime exploration are not considered.<sup>38</sup> To establish what lessons were learnt from the VEE's use of camels, Duncan McIntyre's 1865-1867 'Ladies' Leichhardt Search Expedition' is also considered.

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<sup>38</sup> Tasmania is generally not included on any of the maps of Australia included in this thesis.

## Research Aims

The hypothesis for this study is that the colony of Victoria's first attempt at exploration, its establishment, operation use of camels, use of Aboriginal guides and interaction with Aboriginal people, was anomalous in terms of developing trends in Australian inland exploration.

The aims are:

- to explore a wide range of primary sources as a means of compensating for the lack of a proper Expedition journal. This includes including using the historical cultural landscape as a primary source.
- to understand the contribution made by the colony of Victoria to the European exploration of inland Australia.
- to explain why the VEE is considered to be different to other Australian inland expeditions in the 1860s.
- to revise previous histories, which were written with less complete evidence, and correct misconceptions.
- to propose new answers to some of the mysteries of the Expedition, such as the reasons why Burke and Wills were unable to reach the open ocean and why they were unable to reach safety upon their return to the Cooper, and what role ngardu had in the deaths of the two leaders.

These aims are addressed by analyzing:

- developing trends in Australian inland exploration methodology, mobility and explorers' motivation.
- the manner in which the VEE was conceived, established, funded and operated by one of the first scientific societies established in Australia.
- Burke's management and leadership style.
- the importation and use of camels in Australian inland exploration.
- the use of Aboriginal guides and interactions with Aboriginal people, including analysis of Aboriginal oral traditions about the Expedition and the use of Indigenous foodstuffs by the VEE.
- the influence of landscape on the operation of the VEE.

## Findings

The findings relate to the establishment of the Expedition, the use of camels, interactions with Aboriginal people and the relationship between the Expedition and the landscape it passed through.

The Expedition was established in an unusual manner, practically unique by Australian standards. It was initiated by a learned society that proposed a grand plan, which was watered down somewhat, but which the Exploration Committee (EC) expected to be organised and led by experienced explorer Augustus Charles Gregory, meaning they did not have to become overly involved in its operation and management. This did not happen, as first Gregory, then Warburton, refused the leadership role. The EC were then forced into a hurried decision to choose a leader, who was inexperienced in exploration, meaning the EC became overly involved in the establishment, provision and operation of the Expedition to a much greater extent than they originally envisioned.

In addition, the Victorian Legislature and public were not as keen to fund the venture as the EC imagined, and the process became drawn out, with the Committee investing more than two years promoting their vision to the public in order to raise sufficient funds. Unfortunately, the EC did not agree in advance what the Expedition would achieve and therefore the various members of the EC, and their ostensibly independent committee the Exploration Fund Committee (EFC), formed different ideas about what the Expedition would accomplish. When the EC finally raised sufficient monies, they were under pressure to avoid any further delays, so they hurriedly selected a leader and never bothered to clearly define the Expedition's aims.

Burke's management style might be expected to be overbearing and authoritarian, and a reflection of his military background. However, when faced with conflict or dissent on the Expedition, Burke preferred to walk away from the situation and leave one of his subordinates to deal with it.

This was the first major expedition in Australia to use camels, and prior to 1860 there had only been twelve camels imported into Australia. The debate about the introduction of camels into Victoria ran separately, but concurrently to the fund-raising efforts of the EC, and the EC's plans did not initially include camels. Originally Landells' was commissioned to import camels for acclimatisation purposes and form a breeding stud. Excitement about the Expedition and the appointment of Landells as second-in-command meant that the breeding and acclimatisation ideals were forgotten in order that the VEE take as many animals as they required. The animals were of three breeds, and were purchased from Bikaner, Multan and the Khanate of Kalat. While Burke was initially uninterested and even hostile towards the camels, by the time they reached the Cooper he understood their capabilities. He selected the finest Bikaneri riding-camels to take to the Gulf, but instead of exploiting their capabilities as saddle-animals, he used them as pack-animals. By loading

the camels with water, Burke was able to travel independent of water supplies, did not need Aboriginal guides and could travel along the most direct route to the Gulf. Camels allowed Burke to explore in a manner that was not available to any other Australian explorer. Without camels, Burke would not have been able to make his dash to the Gulf.

The VEE relied on Aboriginal guides during its early stages when the Expedition was large, slow moving and required copious amounts of water. Burke wished to continue using Aboriginal guides, but was unable to convince anyone to guide him through the waterless Grey Range. Once the Gulf Party left the Cooper, they travelled light and fast and carried sufficient water to be independent of water courses for days at a time, and therefore did not need Aboriginal guides. The Expedition regularly sampled Aboriginal foodstuffs, although it has been argued that has received the most attention. The hypothesis that the incorrect preparation of ngardu may have poisoned Burke and Wills does not stand up to examination.

The VEE's use of Aboriginal guides as far as Bulloo meant for much of the early stages, Wills was not required to navigate, merely record their progress. Wills was interested in the local knowledge he could glean from their Aboriginal guides, but was still wary of trusting them. During this part of the journey he noted and used Aboriginal place names whenever possible. Once their Aboriginal guides left them in the Grey Range, it was Wills' responsibility to navigate the party to the Cooper, which he did using data from Sturt's map and journal. Finding the Cooper was more difficult than expected, and the first camp on the Cooper was actually on the Wilson River. This distinction has caused much confusion among contemporary authors.

Beyond the Cooper, their rate of progress was so rapid that Wills recorded only the essential details that would be needed to navigate the Gulf Party back to the Cooper. Naming features took second place to survival, and significant features like The Monument and the Diamantina River went un-named in the dash to the Gulf. Therefore the trope of Burke as the 'heroic' explorer, bringing country into being by overwriting Aboriginal places with European names is rejected. The Expedition suffered from a lack of water, despite the large supplies carried by the camels, and once Burke left the Diamantina at Camp 78, he took a gamble on finding water within the next five days or the Expedition would have been in jeopardy. When they reached the Gulf, the men managed to reach the flooded salt water flats which were covered by the tidal waters from the Gulf, but they were unable to cross the flooded flats and see the open ocean. This corrects the common misconception that they could not reach the sea because of mangroves.

Once back at the Cooper, Burke's decision to attempt to reach Mount Hopeless was not an irrational move as has been suggested. However, asking Wills to navigate down the Strzelecki Creek without access to Sturt's map or Gregory's journal was an error in judgement. The nature of the

landscape also contributed to the failure of the venture, and this can only be appreciated by travelling over it.

## Methodology

*As I find it impossible to keep a regular diary,  
I shall jot down my ideas when I have an opportunity.*

Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Portion of diary kept by Robert O'Hara Burke on the expedition,  
16 December 1860 - 20 January 1861,' MS 30/1, National Library of Australia.

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Research was predominantly based on a qualitative assessment of the Expedition's primary sources combined with a detailed investigation of the historical human ecology of the landscape found by the Expedition. As noted earlier, 'historical human ecology' is the term used to explain the methodology of analysing the relationship between the expedition and the landscape through which it travelled. Analysis of the archives used the standard historical method of analysing the documents in the context of the times and comparing different sources. Once the primary sources had been analysed, the data was placed in a chronological framework (see Chapter 4), from which the analysis of the historical human ecology could be conducted.

To answer the research aims, it was necessary not only to examine the decisions that Expedition members made, but also to determine what other options were available to the Expedition and what courses of action they could have taken after leaving Melbourne. The framework in which the analysis was conducted was an extension of Bergin's field research methodology, where primary source archives were analysed in the context of the historical human ecology in order to determine how the Expedition interacted with the landscape using the resources they had available. These findings make up a significant part of the investigation into the manner in which the VEE used camels (see Chapter 5), the interactions between Burke, Wills and King and the Yandruwandha-Yawarrawarrka people at the Cooper in April-September 1861 (see Chapter 6.4.6), and the influence the landscape had on the Expedition's actions (see Chapter 7).

The Expedition's archives are an interesting, somewhat eclectic collection which present a range of problems in their interpretation.<sup>39</sup> As noted above, the Expedition was anomalous in the paperwork it generated. Most expeditions were recorded primarily through means of the leader's journal. Although Burke wrote regular telegrams and dispatches at the start of the Expedition, once he was beyond the regular postal service, he made very few notes, admitting that he found it

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<sup>39</sup> For a more detailed examination of the Expedition's archives, see: Dave Phoenix's chapter in McCann and Joyce, *The scientific legacy*, x-xxiv and Phoenix, 'All Burke's books', 3-22.

"impossible to keep a regular diary".<sup>40</sup> Instead he decided to simply jot down his ideas whenever he had the chance.<sup>41</sup> After leaving Cooper Creek for the Gulf, his good intentions resulted in 25 diary entries over the next 125 days, with each entry averaging just 30 words.<sup>42</sup> On the journey from Cooper Creek to the Gulf and back, he made only 18 entries in his journal over a period of 128 days. Rarely did these entries contain more than a couple of dozen words, and often his observations were restricted to the date and a single word.<sup>43</sup>

Fortunately, other members of the Expedition were more productive when it came to recording their journey. Because the Expedition had a scientific purpose, the scientific officers submitted a large number of reports, which, in addition to the scientific data, also contained details about the progress of the expedition. Consequently, there is a lot of archival material to interpret: diaries, letters, telegrams, dispatches, field books, medical reports, maps, receipts, cheques, vouchers, invoices, artefacts and specimens, scattered through more than two dozen repositories.<sup>44</sup> There are also over 1,100 botanical specimens acquired by six different collectors with associated archival information, as well as over 100 sketches and paintings executed by four explorers. In addition, there are thousands of newspaper reports of the Expedition's progress and the proceedings of the RSV and EC.

Researching the newspaper archives has become much simpler now than it was for earlier researchers, because of digitisation.<sup>45</sup> The initial preparation of this thesis relied on information painstakingly gleaned from the *Index to the Argus* and referrals to microfilms in the Newspaper Reading Room at the State Library of Victoria.<sup>46</sup> The National Library of Australia's 2008 newspaper

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<sup>40</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Portion of diary kept by Robert O'Hara Burke on the expedition. 16 December 1860-20 January 1861', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Burke wrote three words a day on average between 16 December 1860 and 20 April 1861. By comparison, Sturt averaged around 500 words a day in his diary during his journey along Cooper Creek in 1845 and Mitchell averaged 600+ words a day during his exploration of the Barcoo River in 1846.

<sup>44</sup> There are Expedition archives in the National Library of Australia, National Museum of Australia, State Library of Victoria, Royal Historical Society of Victoria, Parliamentary Library of Victoria, Public Record Office of Victoria, Royal Society of Victoria, Museum Victoria, National Herbarium at the Royal Botanical Gardens, National Gallery of Victoria, Swan Hill Library, State Library of New South Wales, State Records Authority of New South Wales, State Library of South Australia, South Australian Museum, State Records of South Australia, Royal Geographical Society of South Australia, State Library of Queensland, Queensland State Archives, Queensland Museum, Royal Geographical Society of Queensland, Royal Historical Society of Queensland, British Museum, Royal Society of London, Royal Geographical Society, Luigi Pigorini National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography and Höchstädter Heimatmuseum.

<sup>45</sup> In 1991 Bonyhady claimed to be the first to comprehensively research "the rich storehouse of information" contained in the press. Tipping and Fitzpatrick were somewhat taken aback by this claim, having spent considerable time themselves investigating the press archives.

<sup>46</sup> John Andrew Feely, *Index to the Argus: 1855-1859* (Melbourne: Library Council of Victoria, 1988); Geraldine Suter, *Index to the Argus 1860* (Melbourne: Council of the State Library of Victoria, 1990); *Indexes to the Argus; 1860-1869*, 5 vols. (Melbourne: La Trobe University. Department of History, Argus Index Project, 1999).



Figure 4: Some of the Expedition's archives at the Public Record Office of Victoria, showing the ubiquitous foolscap blue bond paper commonly used in 1860 by the RSV and Government of Victoria.  
© 2012 Dave Phoenix.

digitisation project and its inclusion in the online collection at Trove in 2009 means finding press archives is much simpler. The problem now is to find relevance among a mountain of digitised archives, as the search term 'Burke and Wills' returns just short of a million newspaper articles in Trove.<sup>47</sup>

Finding manuscripts archives has also become easier, with the 1997 Register of Australian Manuscripts being incorporated into Trove, and the State Library of Victoria's efforts to digitise many of the Expedition's archives to mark the Expedition's sesquicentenary in 2010.<sup>48</sup> In addition, while working on the digitisation project in conjunction with the State Library of Victoria, I was able to compile a comprehensive finding aid for the collection.<sup>49</sup>

Despite easier access to the manuscript archives that digitisation has provided, first-hand accounts from the Expedition are fragmented and sometimes contradictory. This meant that establishing a comprehensive Expedition chronology and the subsequent reconstruction of events needed to use a wide range of sources, which made the historical methodology more complicated than normal. In

<sup>47</sup> In April 2017, a Trove search for 'Burke and Wills' returned 951,740 newspaper articles, and the number is increasing as more newspapers are digitised.

[trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/result?q=burke+and+wills](http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/result?q=burke+and+wills)

This search term 'Burke and Wills' is, of course, used merely as an indicator of the vast array of archival material now available on Trove, as the expedition was not referred to as the Burke and Wills expedition until after its termination, and not all 951,740 articles refer specifically to the Expedition.

<sup>48</sup> 'Records of the Burke and Wills Expedition, 1857-1875', MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

[handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/32064](http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/32064)

<sup>49</sup> Manuscript Finding Aid: 'A Guide to the records of the Burke and Wills Expedition. MS 13071', State Library of Victoria, 2013. This finding aid "incorporates additional detailed data provided to the State Library by Dave Phoenix".

[handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/32064](http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/32064)

As part of the project, I answered 'Ask the Expert' questions relating to the VEE on the State Library of Victoria's 'DIG: The Burke and Wills Research Gateway'

[burkeandwills.slv.vic.gov.au/content/ask-expert](http://burkeandwills.slv.vic.gov.au/content/ask-expert)



addition, the provenance of some of the manuscripts is uncertain, unknown or inaccurate and this presents further problems when interpreting the material. It was therefore necessary to establish the provenance of documents in order that they could be analysed accurately.<sup>50</sup>

The reason the manuscripts have such questionable provenance is a result of the manner in which they were curated by the EC. The manuscripts were created by a number of different people and were sent back to Melbourne in a variety of different ways. Initially, the EC took great interest in the Expedition and followed its progress closely. They met promptly to discuss the arrival of new telegrams and dispatches, which were then forwarded on equally promptly to the press for publication.<sup>51</sup> However, once the Expedition ventured beyond Menindee, and out of range of regular mail services, their interest waned and the EC became more complacent, presumably waiting for news of the successful outcome of the Expedition. Although they were still receiving documents from the scientists in Menindee, these were not treated as having much importance. Later in 1861 when the EC's energies were directed towards organising the relief parties, copious amounts of paperwork were generated. Once the news of the deaths of Burke and Wills reached Melbourne, the EC were careful to suppress any information they considered incriminating. Some documents had sections censored and were only partially transcribed for the press, other documents were suppressed altogether, and some notebooks had pages missing and clearly torn out. It was not just the EC that was accused of censorship; Dr Wills suspected Brahe had destroyed some of Burke's notebooks as well.<sup>52</sup>

The EC discussed what they should do with the Expedition's archives; they wanted to place some of them on public display and compile all of them into a comprehensive narrative for publication. They recognised the manuscripts were fragile and "could therefore be easily defaced" and they suggested taking an inventory of all the documents.<sup>53</sup> However, the inventory was never made and there was no standard procedure for curating the manuscripts. The EC did not look after the original documents particularly well: some were taken by members of the EC, some were sent to the Botanical Gardens or Flagstaff Observatory for analysis and were not returned, some were loaned to journalists

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<sup>50</sup> For an example, see Phoenix, 'Brahe's meteorological observations'.

While digitization projects have made finding manuscripts somewhat easier, viewing digitized documents on a computer screen is a somewhat clinical and detached process. Establishing provenance often necessitates visiting the repository and handling the original documents, something Griffiths describes as a magical act of pilgrimage, Tom Griffiths, *The Art of Time Travel: historians and their craft* (Carlton: Black Inc., 2016), 16-17. During the preparation of this thesis I viewed most of the original manuscripts in MS 13071 at the State Library of Victoria, almost all of the manuscripts at VPRS 1189/P0000 at the Public Record Office of Victoria, and some of the collection at MS 30 at the National Library of Australia, see Figure 4.

<sup>51</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'EC Minutes', ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>52</sup> Wills, *Successful exploration*, 54-55.

<sup>53</sup> *Argus*, 5 November 1861: 5.

for publication and were not returned, and other items simply disappeared.<sup>54</sup> The most important documents detailing the Expedition's progress from Cooper Creek to the Gulf, along with the maps drafted by Wills, disappeared shortly after they arrived in Melbourne. Equally remarkable is that many of the extant documents which were alleged to have been made by Wills during that part of the journey were actually made by Brahe.<sup>55</sup>

Public criticism as a result of the unfavourable findings of the Commission of Inquiry and the subsequent drop in membership and financial crisis faced by the RSV meant the Expedition's archives were forgotten and the official history of the Expedition was never published. The surviving documents were bundled up and deposited in the Melbourne Public Library in 1875. Many of these documents have never been transcribed or published and, other than Bonyhady's comprehensive investigation, they appear to have been overlooked by many contemporary authors.

In 2010, as part of the Expedition's sesquicentenary, the RSV undertook an innovative project to address this oversight and bring some of the forgotten manuscripts to light.<sup>56</sup> Academics, predominantly from the University of Melbourne, analysed the scientific data and published the findings, albeit with the benefit of contemporary scientific understanding. The resulting publication was "a fine book which redresses the imbalance between the hype and what was actually achieved by the Victorian Exploring Expedition".<sup>57</sup> While the scientific data was not revolutionary, the book demonstrates the previous lack of understanding about the extent and nature of the Expedition's manuscripts and their scientific value. Although there are still claims that the Expedition "accomplished little",<sup>58</sup> this new book used "the dispersed, unanalysed and largely unknown" scientific data to challenge this assumption.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> See Phoenix, 'All Burke's books' for examples of lost and mislaid manuscripts, i.e.: Burke's notebook which appeared in the deceased estate of Victoria's Registrar-General William Henry Archer almost 50 years after it went missing, a notebook of Wills' astronomical observations which the Melbourne Observatory donated to the State Library of Victoria in the 1930s, and Wills' field books (and the only known transcriptions of these field books) going missing after Mueller loaned them to the press in 1861. In addition to missing manuscripts, firearms, watches and artworks were pawned or went missing as well. For details of one of Becker's Expedition paintings which was in a private collection and fetched \$65,000 AUD at auction in August 2001, see: Gerard Hayes, 'Annotation: Ludwig Becker's first camp from Duroodoo', *La Trobe Journal*, Vol. 68, Spring (2001): 39-41

<sup>55</sup> For an explanation of the provenance of the surviving documents made on the journey from Cooper Creek to the Gulf, along with a discussion showing that some of the documents supposedly written by Wills during this part of the journey have incorrectly been attributed to him and were actually written by Brahe, see: Phoenix, 'Brahe's meteorological observations'.

<sup>56</sup> See: Dave Phoenix, 'Introduction' in McCann and Joyce, *The scientific legacy*, x-xxiv.

<sup>57</sup> Anne Morton, *Victorian Naturalist*, Vol. 129, No. 3, June (2012): 122.

<sup>58</sup> Western Catchment Management Authority, *Burke and Wills 150th Anniversary: An expedition into the unknown* (Sydney: Parliament: New South Wales, 2010).

<sup>59</sup> Arthur Lucas, [Book review], *Reviews in Australian Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2013).

Consequently, when analysing the Expedition's archives and placing them into a chronological framework from which further analysis could occur, it was necessary to establish provenance. It was not merely sufficient to identify and transcribe the archives, but also to establish who made these records, where, when and why, and then determine how they came to be returned to Melbourne and what the EC did with them once they took possession of them. Only then could provenance and authenticity be established, and the archives could then be placed into context. The archives were then analysed to establish a research framework. The first stage was to develop a detailed chronology. The different parties were identified (Advance Party, Gulf Party, Depot Party, Supply Party, Howitt's two expeditions, etc.) along with the personnel assigned to each of these parties, their livestock and provisions. This has not been done in a comprehensive manner before. Previous attempts at establishing the Expedition's chronology have not clearly defined the movements of the various parties as the Expedition divided and reformed and were therefore not sufficiently detailed to determine the interaction between the parties. A chronology was necessary to provide the framework within which analysis of certain issues can occur. The chronological framework is outlined in brief in Chapter 4 and a more comprehensive version was published in Dave Phoenix, *Following Burke and Wills across Australia: A Touring Guide*, (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2015).

The second stage was to determine where the Expedition travelled and add a georeferenced layer to the chronological framework so that the landscape could be incorporated into the analysis of the Expedition's historical human ecology. The problems outlined earlier – the lack of a leader's journal, incomplete and fragmented narratives, questionable provenance and missing archives, and more importantly, the lack of a comprehensive Expedition map, mean the Expedition's track has never been clearly defined. For the purposes of understanding the Expedition's historical human ecology, the entire route from Melbourne to the Gulf and back to Cooper Creek was identified, as well as the route Burke, Wills and King took when attempting to get from Cooper Creek to Mount Hopeless in mid-1861.

There has been a great deal of interest in identifying the route, although this has predominantly been undertaken by amateur historians, many of whom are primarily concerned with identifying specific locations, like Camp 46R, 'the Plant Camp' where Wills abandoned his scientific instruments. There is a tendency among these historians to concentrate on identifying Expedition campsites, particularly locating blazed trees as evidence. Nevertheless, all previous work was considered and assessed for accuracy.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Other work included: Dr Thomas Bergin, David G. Corke, Robin Hill and the Adelaide Group, Hon. John Don, Ian Andrews, Richard Cork *et. al.*, Chris Tangey, David N. Hillan, Graeme Wheeler, Noel Wyeth, Brigadier Lawrence Fitzgerald and Alfred Cory Towner. People who claim to have followed Burke and Wills, but whose work was dismissed include Ernest Morrison and George McGillivray.

Identifying the entire 6,000-kilometre route and 400+ campsites was clearly a task beyond the scope of this thesis and so it was determined to break the route into sections and assign an error margin to each section based on the accuracy of the plotted route. Sections where there was abundant archival data were plotted precisely and field-tested to ensure a high degree of accuracy. Areas with limited archival data were plotted more generally and field-tested to ensure that the landscapes and environment the Expedition encountered were identified. The primary aim was to identify the landscapes the Expedition had encountered, rather than identify Expedition campsites. Areas where there was uncertainty were visited several times and the process of identifying the Expedition's route is still ongoing.

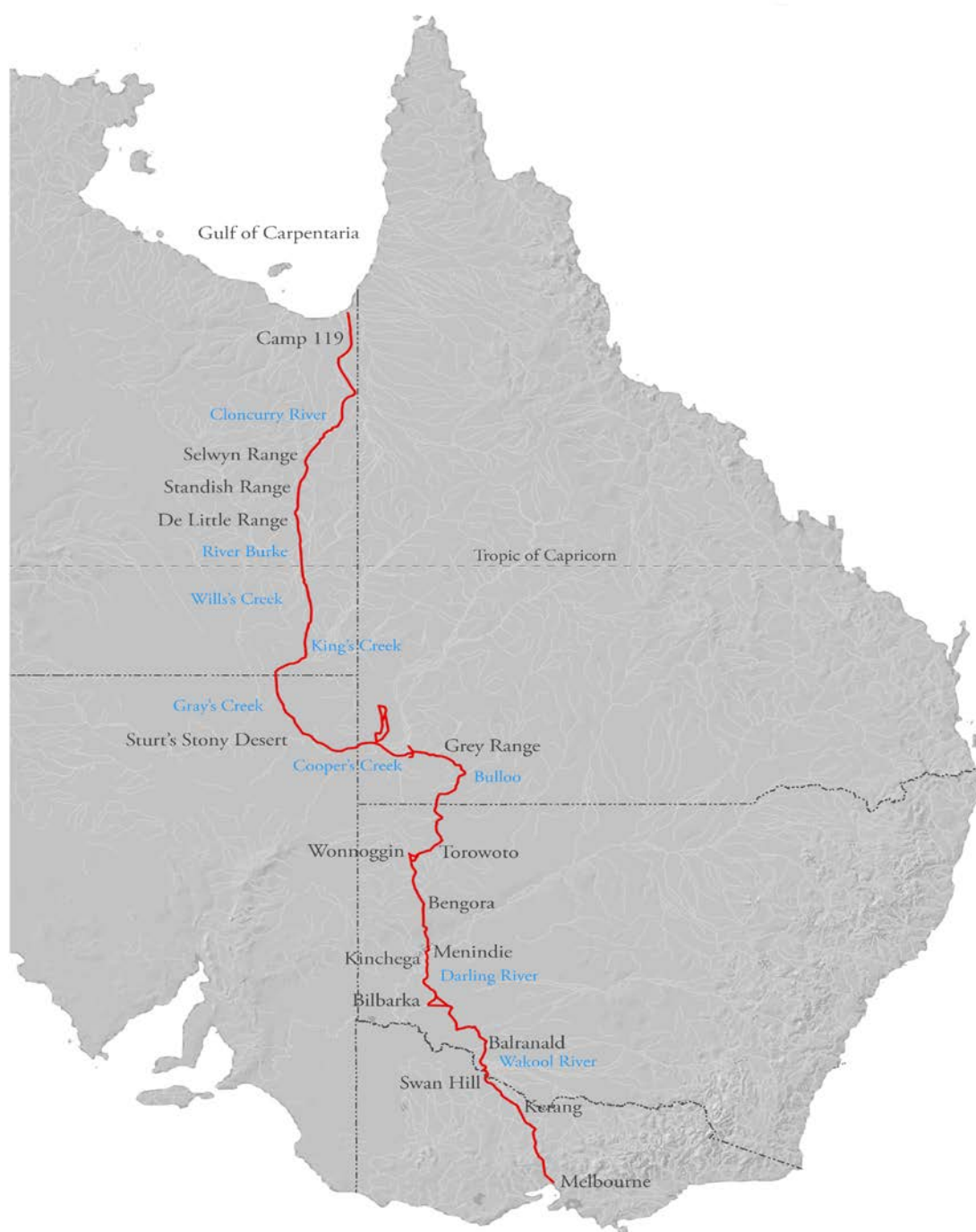


Figure 5: Burke and Wills' route from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria.  
20 August 1860–11 February 1861.

© Dave Phoenix, *Following Burke and Wills across Australia*,  
(Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing) 2015.

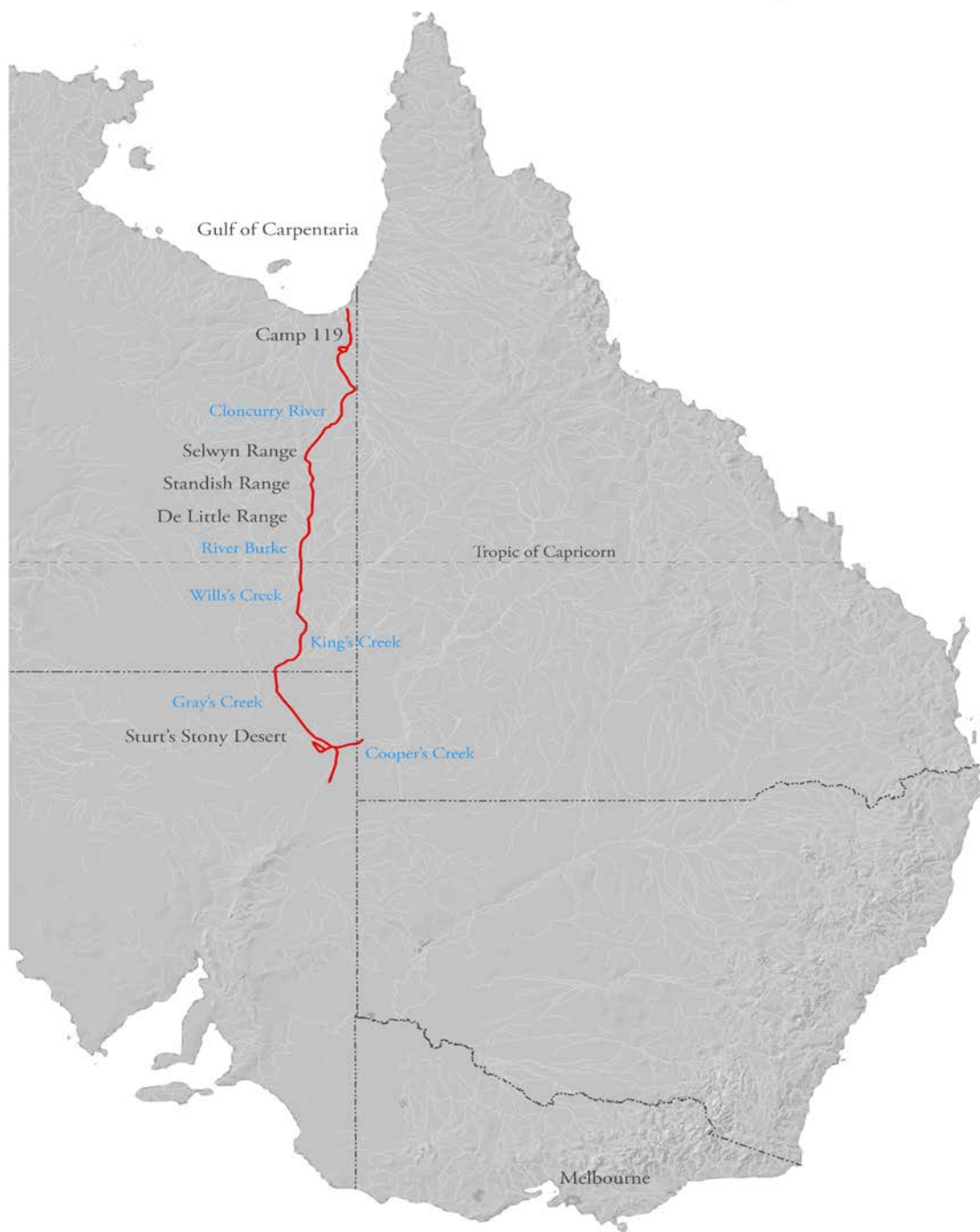


Figure 6: Burke and Wills' return route from the Gulf of Carpentaria to Cooper Creek.  
11 February–early July 1861.

© Dave Phoenix, *Following Burke and Wills across Australia*,  
(Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing) 2015.

At the commencement of this thesis, a feasibility study was carried out to establish the validity of historical human ecology as a methodology. Wills' journal<sup>61</sup> and King's narrative<sup>62</sup> were used to plot the movements of Burke and Wills during the last ten weeks of their lives as they attempted to reach Mount Hopeless. In May 2005, the route was field-checked by walking from Depot Camp 65 down Cooper Creek for 125 kilometres and then a further 90 kilometres into the Strzelecki Desert. While the study raised some important questions, it also gave valuable insights into Burke's decision to try and reach Mount Hopeless rather than return to Menindee, explained why they could not identify Strzelecki Creek as the route to take to Mount Hopeless, and identified the location where the men first discovered ngardu (*Marsillea drummondii*) and the furthest south the men reached on their self-rescue mission before turning back to Cooper Creek to their deaths (for more details see Chapter 7.3.2). Follow up visits in 2006, 2007 and 2009 assisted further in clarifying the Expedition's route.

Based on the outcomes of this pilot study, the larger study was initiated, which involved walking 3,750 kilometres from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria at a similar time of year and at a similar pace to the Expedition, in order to establish the Burke and Wills cultural landscape, investigate the historical human ecology of the Expedition and identify the relationship between the expedition and the landscapes they passed through. Although most contemporary cultural landscape and historical ecology studies focus predominantly on the effect humans have had in modifying the environment, this study proposes that on the Burke and Wills Expedition, (like most other European exploring expeditions), the landscape had a far greater effect and modified human behaviour much more than the reverse.

As part of the process, Wills' surviving field books were transcribed and the navigational data used to accurately plot the Expedition's route from Balranald to Cooper Creek. The initial intent was to establish Wills' navigational methodology for the sections where his survey records were extant and extrapolate that methodology to try and understand how Wills navigated in the sections north of Cooper Creek where the records are missing. However, it soon became apparent that no one else had attempted this methodology before and that this was the first time that Wills' field notes had been plotted and followed. This resulted in unexpected insights into the way Wills navigated, his use of historical data from earlier explorers and his interactions with Aboriginal people, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 and Chapter 6 respectively. Wills' field books and maps were combined and cross-referenced with diary entries from King, Burke, Brahe, Wright, Becker, Beckler,

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<sup>61</sup> William John Wills, 'Journal of trip 'from Cooper's Creek towards Adelaide', 23 April 1861-26 June 1861', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>62</sup> Alfred William Howitt wrote John King's 'Narrative' in his field book in September 1861, and then transcribed it onto seven pages of blue foolscap and sent it on to the EC in Melbourne. Alfred William Howitt, 'Diary, 13 August-7 October, 1861', ex3007-005, FB 33 (Item 7); John King, '[Howitt's] Transcription of 'Narrative of John King', sole survivor of Burke's advance party, which reached the Gulf of Carpentaria on 11 February 1861', ex2009-007, Box 2083/1f, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.



Figure 7: Dave Phoenix walking in the Strzelecki Desert following the tracks of Burke and Wills, May 2005.  
© 2005 Dave Phoenix.

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Hodgkinson, Welch, Aitkens and Howitt, Becker's pictures, the details of Beckler's botanical collections, receipts issued for services and provisions along the way, recollections from settlers' memoirs, Aboriginal oral histories, historical survey and parish maps.

The route was investigated in sections between 2003 to 2008, and the walk along the entire route was undertaken in 2008. Follow up field visits were made between 2009 to 2015 with the assistance of a retired Queensland surveying associate.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Registered Survey Associate (QLD) (retired) Kevin Ian Andrews.



## Outline of chapters

Chapter 1 reviews the literature relating to the VEE and relief expeditions. It shows how early publications were written with the aim of alleviating guilt and apportioning blame. These early volumes had a lasting effect on subsequent works, which rarely questioned established wisdom. More recently, the Expedition's tale has evolved and is now told as an iconic yarn with an increasing degree of myth mixed into the narrative, and the chapter demonstrates how the myth has far outlived the influence of the historical events themselves.

Chapter 2 sets the context of the Expedition by looking at Australian inland exploration prior to the departure of the VEE in 1860. It establishes the rationale of inland exploration and determines the factors that motivated colonial governments and private individuals to mount expeditions. The chapter looks at goals for inland exploration such as the search for the inland sea, the theory of the horse-shoe of salt lakes, and the search for navigable rivers. It establishes the criteria for success as an explorer and the benefits of exploration for sponsors. It also identifies and expands on trends in the conduct of expeditions, particularly their mobility.

Chapter 3 investigates how the Expedition originated. The analysis starts with an overview of the slow and uncertain establishment of learned societies in Australia, and then looks at the development of similar institutions in Victoria and the unique situation that colony experienced as a result of the gold rush, before examining early proposals to mount an expedition. The efforts of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria to raise funds, decide the Expedition's route and secure a leader are traced from their grand beginnings in 1857, through the uncertainty and doubt of 1858, to the point in early 1860 when the funds were finally secured, but no leader, route or aims had been agreed upon. The deliberations of the EC are compared to the manner in which earlier expeditions were proposed, established, funded and dispatched in other colonies.

Chapter 4 is a detailed (but concise) chronological framework of events from which later analysis of issues can occur. The chronology looks at the various expeditionary parties as Burke divided, and occasionally re-joined, the Expedition. It also looks at Burke's management style and foreshadows his attitude towards using camels, which is described in more detail in the next chapter. A more detailed description of the chronology contained in this chapter can be found in the following publication:

Dave Phoenix, *Following Burke and Wills across Australia: A Touring Guide*, (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2015).

Chapter 5 is a detailed examination of the first use of camels in Australian inland exploration. It starts with the discussions about the introduction of camels into Australia, which was proposed as early as 1822. Early efforts to import animals and the first six camels to be brought in to the country

in the 1840s are identified. There is a more specific analysis of Victoria's attempts to introduce camels and how this debate ran concurrently with the EC's attempt to raise funds for a Victorian expedition. George James Landells' efforts to purchase the finest animals during his trip to India are examined, and the breeds of camels are identified for the first time. The selection of camels for the Expedition and Burke's early relationship with the animals is examined and compared to Burke's subsequent use of the animals after Landells' resignation. The chapter concludes with the fate of the camels that survived the Expedition and a discussion about their possible contribution to today's feral camel herds.

Chapter 6 is a detailed examination of European explorers' interaction with Aborigines and the extent to which traditional knowledge was sought and utilised. The chapter begins with an overview of explorers' interactions with Aboriginal people prior to 1860, particularly the actions of Mitchell, Sturt, Eyre, Gregory and Stuart and how their dealings with Aboriginal people would be likely to affect subsequent meetings with Europeans. There is an analysis of the VEE's use of Aboriginal guides between Balranald and Bulloo and their subsequent interactions with Aboriginal people between the Cooper and the Gulf. The actions of Brahe's Depot Party and Wright's Supply Party are scrutinised, and detailed consideration is given to the meetings between Burke, Wills and King and the Yandruwandha-Yawarrawarrka people at the Cooper between April and September 1861. Aboriginal oral recollections of their experiences with the VEE are investigated, and the recent suggestion that the explorers poisoned themselves by their incorrect preparation of ngardu is examined and the premises of this argument refuted. The chapter concludes by discussing how the Strzelecki Desert has more recently been described as a 'land of plenty' for Aboriginal people.

Chapter 7 looks at the historical human ecology of the Expedition and outlines a methodological approach to investigating the VEE's interaction with the landscape which takes into account geographical determinism. The chapter describes the process of using the Expedition's archives in the landscape where they were created and interrogating them in conjunction with the landscape, firstly as a small-scale study at Cooper Creek, then in a larger study involving walking across the continent following the Expedition's track. The chapter examines earlier attempts at identifying the Expedition's route, and then argues that Burke's decision to attempt to reach Mount Hopeless was not as irrational as has previously been suggested. It then analyses Wills' abilities as a surveyor and navigator and looks at the process by which the Expedition named topographical features. The reason that Burke did not reach the open ocean is explained and the myth that mangroves blocked his way is refuted. The chapter concludes by showing how Eurocentric perceptions of the desert changed as a result of the death of Burke and Wills.

## Significance of the Study

This thesis presents the most comprehensive chronology of events and the most accurate tracing of the Expedition's route compiled so far. The Expedition's track is depicted in the comprehensive maps contained in this thesis and the chronology has been published in an accessible format<sup>64</sup> in Dave Phoenix's CSIRO publication.

It extends Bergin's<sup>65</sup> work of using archives in the landscape in which they were created, and this study was the first time Wills' field books were transcribed, plotted and then followed through that landscape. The insights gained from interrogating the landscape have revised myths perpetuated by popular writers, meaning important aspects of the Expeditions progress have been re-evaluated.

The investigation also adds to our understanding of the importation, breeds, utilisation and fate of some of the first camels in Australia, thereby adding more depth to earlier works by Barker<sup>66</sup> and McKnight,<sup>67</sup> and also adds to the works by Rajkowski,<sup>68</sup> Stevens,<sup>69</sup> and Jones and Kenny<sup>70</sup> which explain the contribution made by Australia's Muslim cameleers.

This thesis adds to Clark and Cahir's work,<sup>71</sup> which looked at the VEE's interactions with Aboriginal people. It adds greater detail to our understanding of the Expedition's use of Aboriginal guides, and the VEE's interactions with Aboriginal people and use of Aboriginal foodstuffs.

This work builds on a number of previous academic studies. It places the VEE into the framework proposed by McLaren,<sup>72</sup> with reference to the size, speed and mobility of the Expedition and its use of Aboriginal guides. It adds to Bonyhady's comprehensive work<sup>73</sup> and complements the work of McCann and Joyce<sup>74</sup> by showing that while the Expedition's archives can be problematic, aspects of the manuscripts can reveal a comprehensive picture of, not only the operation of the Expedition, but also its scientific and social impacts.

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<sup>64</sup> Phoenix, *Following Burke and Wills across Australia: A touring guide*.

<sup>65</sup> Bergin, *In the steps*.

<sup>66</sup> Herbert M Barker, *Camels and the outback* (Melbourne: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1964).

<sup>67</sup> Tom McKnight, *The camel in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1969).

<sup>68</sup> Pamela Rajkowski, *In the tracks of the camel men: Outback Australia's most exotic pioneers* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1987).

<sup>69</sup> Christine Stevens, *Tin mosques & ghantowns: a history of Afghan camel drivers in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>70</sup> Philip G. Jones and Anna Kenny, *Australia's Muslim cameleers: pioneers of the inland, 1860s-1930s* (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2007).

<sup>71</sup> Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*.

<sup>72</sup> McLaren, 'Development of bushmanship'.

<sup>73</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*.

<sup>74</sup> McCann and Joyce, *The scientific legacy*.

## Further Research

The original idea for this thesis came from a single footnote in Bergin's 1983 Master's thesis. When mentioning the relief expeditions, Bergin noted:

Each of these expeditions is of themselves worthy of study.<sup>75</sup>

Bergin indicated there were relief expeditions led by Landsborough, McKinlay and Walker, as well as Commander William Henry Norman's in the H.M.C.S. *Victoria*. However, preliminary investigations revealed that the *Victoria* was assisted by the S.S. *Firefly*, S.S. *Native Lass* and S.S. *Gratia* and there was an additional private expedition sponsored by James Orkney MLA, in his ship the S.S. *Sir Charles Hotham*. These expeditions employed more than 130 people, including a botanist and Aboriginal guides, and four of these expeditions used camels as a means of transport. Furthermore, Howitt's 1862 'Victorian Exploring Party' returned to the Cooper and then made extended trips into the Strzelecki and Sturt Stony Deserts, as well as visiting the Diamantina and exploring the Cooper and Strzelecki Creeks.

These relief expeditions covered more ground and mapped more territory than the original Expedition could ever hope to achieve. Although the aims of the relief parties were much clearer and simpler than those of the VEE, the rescue parties were established more quickly and dispatched hastily. This was in sharp contrast to the deliberations associated with the formation of the Expedition, yet the relief expeditions covered much of the eastern half of the continent with minimal loss of life.<sup>76</sup> McKinlay's party became the second European expedition to cross Australia from south to north, and Landsborough's was the second, after John King, to cross from north to south, with both expeditions completed several months ahead of John McDouall Stuart's celebrated south-north crossing of Australia.

These relief expeditions, however, have attracted little scholarly attention, which is surprising, particularly as Howitt's expeditions laid the foundations for his interest in anthropology. Although this thesis began with the idea of investigating these relief expeditions and comparing and contrasting them with the VEE to see how the various parties interacted with the landscape and Aboriginal people, once the preliminary work into the VEE was completed, it became apparent that there was still much to learn about the actions of Burke's party and unfortunately the relief expeditions became

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<sup>75</sup> Bergin, 'Courage and corruption', 22.

<sup>76</sup> Deaths as a result of the relief expeditions 1861-3: Gunner James Frost, crew member of the H.M.C.S. *Victoria* dispatched to the Gulf of Carpentaria to search for Burke and Wills was killed in a firearms mishap on 31 December 1861. Frederick Walker's expedition opened fire killing at least twelve Mbarra people at the Stawell River near Hughenden and another man at the Woolgar River a few days later. John McKinlay's expedition opened fire on Aboriginal people on several occasions.

of secondary importance and did not get the recognition or analysis they deserve. This is an opportunity for future research.



# 1

## LITERATURE

## REVIEW



### CONTENTS

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1.1	Introduction	37
1.2	Exploration in Australia	38
1.3	The VEE in Literature	43
1.4	Specific areas of interest	69
1.5	Relief Expeditions	72
1.6	Summary	75

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*I was reading a review of some new books on Burke and Wills the other day and liked what was said about us retelling that story in a completely false way, because it reasserts certain basic things we believe about ourselves.*

Author Ron Elliott interviewed by the *Freemantle Press*, 1 September 2010.

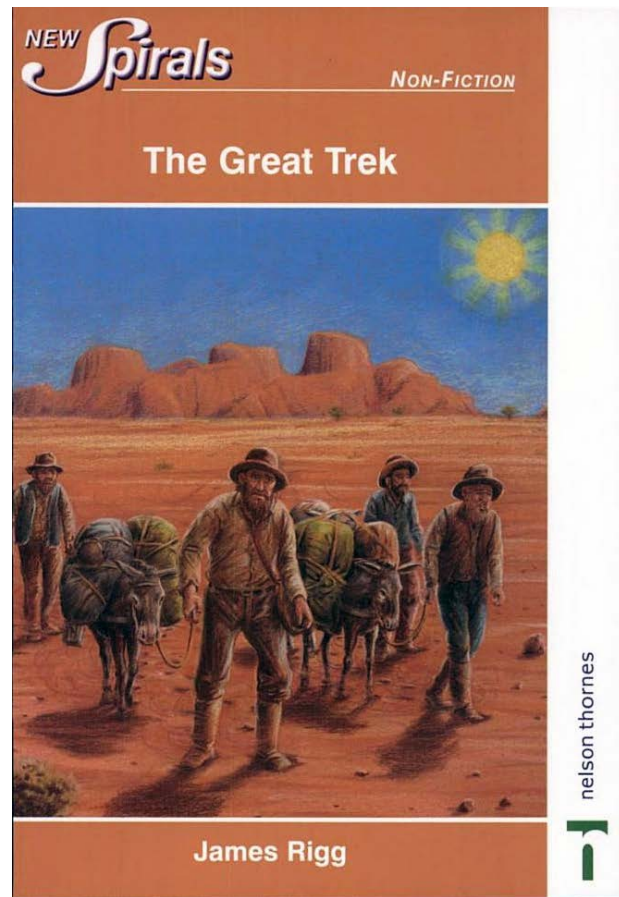


Figure 8: James Rigg, *The Great Trek: The Burke and Wills story*. (Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes, 2004).<sup>77</sup>

<sup>77</sup> The 2004 book *The Great Trek: The Burke and Wills story* from educational publishers Nelson Thornes is an example of the large corpus of poorly researched children's literature on the Expedition. It is labelled as non-fiction and is used in the UK's school curriculum. The cover, drawn by illustrator Gordon Lawson, depicts four old men (at the time of the Expedition, King was 23 and Wills was 26), with two heavily laden donkeys and not a camel or horse in sight. They are walking near what appears to be Kata Tjuta / The Olgas in the Northern Territory, which are more than 900 kilometres west of Burke's track and were unknown to Europeans until 1872.



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## 1.1 Introduction

This literature review examines the current state of knowledge about the VEE and its place in nineteenth century Australian exploration. There is also an assessment of how the focus of blame for the deaths of the expedition leaders has shifted over time.

While it may appear there has been a large amount of literature published about the Expedition, much of this material is in narrative form and consists of recycled myths and mythinformation.<sup>78</sup> Much of the literature focuses on reasons for the success and/or failure of the Expedition and what went wrong. This review will focus on the reputable literature and will exclude most juvenile and educational literature, as much of this is derived from poorly researched secondary sources.<sup>79</sup> As Deidre Slattery notes, even among the literature aimed at an adult audience, “the story lends itself to debate” and interest in the Expedition’s narrative “lies in its potential for interpretation, argument and judgement”.<sup>80</sup> Consequently, she recognises the Burke and Wills story is “not just about fact” but also takes on “the dimensions of myth” and “imaginative engagement in events”<sup>81</sup>, a process which Neal Ascherson identifies as one “used to support wider assumptions about national values or identity”.<sup>82</sup> Consequently, Slattery notes:

It seems that the great [Burke and Wills] disaster has been capable of spawning interesting variations on the myth, showing as much about changing Australian society as the events themselves do: from macho imperialism to beaches and four wheel drives, all have found their place.<sup>83</sup>

This review looks first at literature relating to how exploration in Australia is perceived, followed by a review of literature relating to the VEE and concluding with a review of literature relating to Relief Expeditions of 1861-1863.

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<sup>78</sup> 'Mythinformation' is defined by the online Urban Dictionary as "widely held and promoted but false information that has taken on a mythic quality" [urbandictionary.com](http://urbandictionary.com)

<sup>79</sup> Charles Long notes how the story of Burke and Wills has long been a part of standard school texts, often depicted as a tragic but necessary event in colonial achievement. Charles Richard Long, *Stories of Australian exploration*, Austral history readers (Melbourne: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1903).

<sup>80</sup> Deidre Slattery, 'Chapter 10: Telling and retelling national narratives' in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 179-190.

<sup>81</sup> Slattery, 'Telling and retelling', 180.

<sup>82</sup> Neal Ascherson, *Stone voices: The search for Scotland* (London: Granta Books, 2002).

<sup>83</sup> Deirdre Slattery, 'If Burke had been a naturalist... : telling and retelling national narratives', *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2004): 17.

## 1.2 Literature Review: Exploration in Australia

*explore: to travel over new territory for adventure or discovery*

*discover: to obtain sight or knowledge of for the first time*



Ken Inglis notes that Australian expedition leaders hoped for honour and glory and the successful leader could achieve celebrity status.<sup>84</sup> While other countries had military heroes who distinguished themselves in battle, before the 1915 Gallipoli campaign Australia's heroes were the explorers. This view of explorers as heroes has changed more recently, as a result of post-Imperial interpretations of the implications of colonial expansion. One of the more perceptive works on the Expedition was produced by Kathleen Fitzpatrick<sup>85</sup>; a celebrated historian, but also a person to whom explorers were "all heroes".<sup>86</sup> Recently, the compiler of an anthology of exploration texts challenged this view. Jan Bassett felt Fitzpatrick's "great men of history" were "dead white males whose behaviour spans the spectrum from admirable to despicable".<sup>87</sup> Bassett also broadens the definition of the term 'explorer' by adding overlanders and surveyors to the traditional 'deliberate' explorers of Fitzpatrick. These changes in attitude have continued with the increasing understanding of the role of Aboriginal people in Australian history. The idea that Europeans were the first to 'explore' Australia is now recognised to be derogatory towards Aboriginal people, who clearly explored the continent well in advance of other peoples. The publication in 1970 of Rowley's *Destruction of Aboriginal Society*<sup>88</sup> challenged the traditional view of a static, unchanging Aboriginal society and the 1988 Bicentenary caused many to reconsider the traditional view of 'exploration' and 'discovery'. Aboriginal protest at the Bicentenary equated settlement to invasion, civilisation to genocide and depicted pioneers as invaders and progress as subjugation.<sup>89</sup> John Mulvaney points out that Aboriginal people were the "original discoverers, explorers and colonists"<sup>90</sup> and reminds us that although it is convenient to commence

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<sup>84</sup> Kenneth Stanley Inglis, *The Australian colonists: An exploration of social history, 1788-1870* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1974), 253.

<sup>85</sup> Fitzpatrick, 'Burke & Wills'.

<sup>86</sup> Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Australian explorers: A selection of their writings* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 27.

<sup>87</sup> Jan Bassett, ed. *Great explorations: An Australian anthology* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996), viii.

<sup>88</sup> Charles Dunford Rowley, *The destruction of Aboriginal society* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1970).

<sup>89</sup> Jack Davis *et al*, ed. *Paperbark: A collection of black Australian writings* (St. Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 1990).

<sup>90</sup> Derek John Mulvaney and Johan Kamminga, *Prehistory of Australia* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), 12.

the European history of Australia in 1788, this only represents 0.5% of the period of human existence in Australia.<sup>91</sup>

John Hirst noted that although popular history still celebrates explorers and pioneers, the intellectual foundations of this legend have been questioned.<sup>92</sup> Henry Reynolds believes the reason for this is the continued emergence of Aboriginal history. Reynolds has been one of the most active historians in the area and he depicts Aborigines as “black pioneers”<sup>93</sup>, arguing that behind the heroic façade of the European explorer was a heavy dependence on Aboriginal knowledge, guides, trackers and ambassadors.<sup>94</sup> Despite the pretence perpetuated in explorer’s journals of the ‘discovery’ of great tracts of ‘new land’, Reynolds shows explorers identified country with good prospect for settlement as also being the most densely populated. Consequently, he states the explorers were “not looking for empty land ... [but] were seeking well-populated districts ... indicating the availability of water, native fauna, grass, good country”.<sup>95</sup> This may very well have been the situation for expeditions that did not venture into desert country, and, in fact, much of Reynolds’ work is based on these types of accounts, particularly Mitchell’s three expeditions. The quest to redress the balance of an Anglo-centric history will no doubt continue.

In 1987 traditional schools of historical thought were challenged by poststructuralist Paul Carter. His book, *The Road to Botany Bay*<sup>96</sup> critiqued history written in an empirical narrative form, asserting it was a “linear history” that was not free from imperialist ideology. Instead he introduced “spatial history”, the origin of which is based on the naming of space. In order to grasp the intention of the process of transforming space into place,<sup>97</sup> Carter used journals, diaries, poetry and letters as a mode of travel writing. This concept that a place has no historical significance until named,<sup>98</sup> most commonly by European explorers, has been criticised by Keith Windschuttle among others.<sup>99</sup> Lars Jensen also criticised Carter for regarding expedition texts in isolation from the motivating imperial strategies, a move Jensen believes is dangerously naïve.<sup>100</sup> Marian Aveling finds Carter’s approach works well when both text and context are rich, as demonstrated in the explorer’s journals he chooses

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<sup>91</sup> Mulvaney and Kamminga, *Prehistory of Australia*, 2 & 410.

<sup>92</sup> John B. Hirst, 'The pioneer legend', *Historical Studies of Australia and New Zealand*, Vol. 18, No. 71 (1978).

<sup>93</sup> Reynolds, *Black pioneers*.

<sup>94</sup> Henry Reynolds, 'The land, the explorers and the Aborigines', *Historical Studies of Australia and New Zealand*, Vol. 19, No. 75 (1980).

<sup>95</sup> Reynolds, *Black pioneers*, 22.

<sup>96</sup> Carter, *Botany Bay*.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiii.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiv.

<sup>99</sup> Keith Windschuttle, *The killing of history: How a discipline is being murdered by literary critics and social theorists* (Paddington, NSW: Macleay, 1994).

<sup>100</sup> Lars Jensen, 'Is there no end to travelling? Paul Carter in the linguistic no-man's-land', *Australian Literary Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (1995): 90.

to interpret.<sup>101</sup> While not restricting himself solely to exploration texts, Carter does rely heavily upon maritime explorers, particularly Cook and Flinders, for much of his analysis. He tries to define the difference between exploration and discovery by contrasting Banks' Enlightenment scientific approach to discovery with Cook's exploration through active engagement with his environment via navigation.<sup>102</sup> In terms of overland exploration, the journals of the military men Mitchell, Sturt and Grey are quoted frequently. The VEE fails to receive any mention, presumably as the lack of a leader's journal makes textual criticism difficult.<sup>103</sup>

Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra believe despite the massive popularity of the explorers in the nineteenth century, they have little effect on the contemporary Australian psyche. They argue the semiotic impact has been surprisingly narrow and the explorers' loss of prestige is due to other reasons such that the explorers' main legacy today is the bronze statue on a stone block.<sup>104</sup> Simon Ryan disagrees with this view, arguing that while convicts, swagmen and bushrangers have received more attention than explorers, the explorers have still formed "a touchstone in the construction and reconstruction of Australia's national identity",<sup>105</sup> particularly through their portrayal as heroic figures by the education system. This is an area where the VEE has been extensively reworked to provide a range of imperial stereotypes, but surprisingly Ryan fails to analyse the VEE, stating that it is "an expedition this book does not discuss".<sup>106</sup> Although Ryan adds a new dimension to the debate on the methodology of exploration, he concentrates on the familiar military men, Mitchell, Sturt and Grey, whose extensive journals lend themselves more easily to re-interpretation. Ryan notes European exploration was done by "women, sealers, travellers and drovers" as well as by "celebrated explorers" and feels many of the latter are overdue for a de-canonisation, but believes Australia is not ready to shake off its colonial ideologies and challenge the legitimacy of Anglo-European occupation.<sup>107</sup> Tim Flannery also feels many contemporary Australians see exploration as "a kind of abomination – the penetration of a fragile continent by ruthless, rough handed, pale-skinned men who probed, desecrated and killed in their quest for personal vainglory", but he adds balance with his personal view that exploration was heroic and has enriched us immeasurably.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Marian Aveling, 'Going places?', *Meanjin*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (1988): 746.

<sup>102</sup> Carter, *Botany Bay*, 25.

<sup>103</sup> Carter refers to John McKinlay, leader of the 'South Australian Burke Relief Expedition', briefly on page 52 of *Botany Bay*, but identifies him as a Western Australian explorer. Peter Egerton Warburton also receives the same treatment. While Warburton spent several months in Western Australia, both men lived in South Australia and never identified themselves as West Australians.

<sup>104</sup> Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, *Dark side of the dream: Australian literature and the postcolonial mind*, ed. Robert Ian Vere (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991), 157.

<sup>105</sup> Ryan, *Cartographic eye*, 12.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>108</sup> Tim Flannery, ed. *The explorers* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1998), 3.

Explorers' journals have been the cornerstone of analysis of the methodology of exploration, the leader's journal being the premier interpretation of the journey. Many explorers wrote their journals with the intention of subsequent publication and it has been suggested exploration should be seen as two journeys, firstly the expedition itself, and secondly the narration of events to the reader from the leader's journals. Generally, only the expedition leader kept a journal, and indeed Sturt expressly forbade his men from keeping their own private journals.<sup>109</sup> The VEE was different, in fact unique, as the leader did not keep a journal, but several of the officers did, although their combined literary efforts only amount to a partial coverage of events. All relief expedition leaders kept journals; their styles and construction were markedly different from each other.<sup>110</sup> Analysis of the VEE using traditional methodology is difficult because Burke failed to keep a comprehensive journal, Wills' journal was more of a dispassionate scientific record than a diary, and the two main narratives were from the two German officers, Becker and Beckler who never reached Cooper Creek, let alone the Gulf of Carpentaria.

One of the few recent works analysing Australian exploration methodology has been from Glen McLaren.<sup>111</sup> His 1994 thesis establishes a framework for the development of exploration knowledge in Australia. McLaren predominantly used explorer's journals to demonstrate advances in the skill of bushmanship from the first short journeys from Sydney Cove to the foot of the Blue Mountains, through to the scientific expeditions of the western deserts in the 1890s. He also examined changes in private and public expectations of the outcomes generated by expeditions, both scientific and economic. McLaren's primary aim was to assert Leichhardt's competence in all fields of exploration

<sup>109</sup> Despite Sturt forbidding his men from keeping their own private journals, at least one member kept a comprehensive journal. Daniel George Brock, 'Diary, Australia, 10 Aug 1844-28 Jan 1846', RAAM-ID 19058, Royal Geographical Society of South Australia Library; *To the desert with Sturt: a diary of the 1844 expedition* (Adelaide: Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (S.A. Branch), 1975).

<sup>110</sup> Alfred William Howitt, 'Diary, 13 August-7 October 1861', ex3007-005; 'Diary of Victorian Contingent Party, 6 October-17 November 1861', ex3007-006 FB 33 (Item 8); 'Diary of Victorian Exploring Party, 27 January-16 March 1862', ex3007-008, Box 2085/6a (Item 2); 'Diary of Victorian Exploring Party, 20 March-3 June 1862', ex3007-002, Box 2085/6a (Item 3); 'Diary of Victorian Exploring Party, 3 July-21 August 1862', ex3007-004, Box 2085/6a (Item 4), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria; John McKinlay, 'Diary, 16 August-6 December 1861', PRG 834/1/1; 'Diary, 2 December 1861-10 July 1862', PRG 834/1/2; 'Diary, 12-31 July 1862', PRG 834/1/3, State Library of South Australia; William Landsborough, 'William Landsborough diaries and letters, 1861-1884', OM69-30, State Library of Queensland; Frederick Walker, 'Journal of Mr Walker from the day he left Macintosh's Station on the Nogoia to that of his arrival at the Albert River, Gulf of Carpentaria', *Royal Geographical Society Journal*, Vol. 33 (1863); 'Journal [of Queensland Relief Expedition], 1861-2', MS 9996; 'Journal of the return journey, 16 December 1861-25 January 1862', ex4001-037, Box 2088A/3c (Item 3); 'Conclusion of Frederick Walker's journal, 25 January-29 April, 1862', ex4001-038, Box 2088A/3c (Item 4), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria; Commander William Henry Norman, *Exploration Expedition: Letter from Commander Norman reporting the return of the Victoria from the Gulf of Carpentaria, together with reports and correspondence*, Victorian Parliamentary Paper 108/1862 (Melbourne: John Ferres, Government Printer, 1862); *Exploration Expedition: Report of Commander Norman, of H.M.C.S. Victoria, together with copy of his journal of the late expedition to the Gulf of Carpentaria*, Victorian Parliamentary Paper 109/1862 (Melbourne: John Ferres Government Printer, 1862).

<sup>111</sup> McLaren, 'Development of bushmanship'.

by placing him into this framework. The VEE is rarely mentioned in the thesis and is dismissed in a few short paragraphs, presumably because the Expedition is anomalous and is difficult to place in the framework. More surprisingly, the relief expeditions get scant reference despite representing four very different expeditions which traversed large areas of the eastern half of the continent. Nevertheless, McLaren's framework is a useful analytical tool and the hypothesis that expeditions became lighter and swifter moving while relying on the leader's bush skills, will be examined in relation to the VEE's interaction with Aboriginal people (Chapter 6) and Burke's approach to the landscape (Chapter 7).

### 1.3 The VEE in Literature

In the immediate aftermath of the VEE, the emphasis was on explaining the disaster and allocating blame. Early analyses of the conduct of the Expedition had significant influence over later histories, and many of the statements made between November 1861 and February 1862<sup>112</sup> by the RSV, EC and Victorian Legislature were reprinted in secondary source material, with the claims going unchallenged for many years. As the controlling body of the EC, the RSV wanted to deflect blame and criticism from themselves. They wanted to conduct their own investigation in order to keep affairs ‘in-house’, but a lack of public confidence in the RSV’s handling of the Expedition soon led to questions being asked in the Victorian Legislative Assembly<sup>113</sup> and the Heales’ Ministry promptly announced their intention to hold a Commission of Inquiry<sup>114</sup>, chaired by a board comprised of “three men not connected to the Royal Society of Victoria”.<sup>115</sup>

Although the Commission’s terms of reference were very limited, politically influenced and publicly criticised at the time, the Commissioners’ findings resonated with later authors and were repeated in secondary sources, often without question, for more than 100 years. The Commissioners found that Burke had made an error in judgement employing William Wright as third-in-command and had been injudicious in dividing the party. In an attempt to avoid censuring the dead, the Commissioners expressed their admiration for the gallantry and daring of the leader, ensuring that Burke and Wills would be seen as heroes. Wright’s conduct was described as reprehensible and he was accused of “fatal inactivity and idling”.<sup>116</sup> Brahe, whose actions in leaving Depot Camp 65 at Cooper Creek had brought about considerable censure in the press, was found to have acted conscientiously after having been placed in a position of responsibility far beyond his expectations. Nevertheless, many later writers placed equal blame on the two subordinates.

The EC was also criticised in the Commission’s report for having committed errors of a serious nature. The RSV attempted to vindicate itself and, in the face of rapidly diminishing membership subscriptions, tried desperately to rehabilitate their sullied reputation. Lectures and public meetings were met with a mixture of “cheers and hisses”, often so unruly that the speaker was unable to continue.<sup>117</sup> Consequently the RSV decided to publish an ‘official account’ of the Expedition, which

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<sup>112</sup> The news of the deaths of Burke and Wills reached Melbourne on 2 November 1861 and the Commission of Inquiry reported on 21 February 1862.

<sup>113</sup> ‘Parliament: Legislative Assembly, Tuesday 5 November 1861’, *Argus*, 6 November 1861: 5.

<sup>114</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. The Commission of Inquiry was often referred to incorrectly as a Royal Commission, see: ‘Burke and Wills’ Exploration Party: Royal Commission of Inquiry’, *Age*, 23 November 1861: 5; Bergin ‘Courage and Corruption’; Moorehead, ‘*Cooper’s Creek*’, Chapter 14: The Royal Commission.

<sup>115</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 6 November 1861: 3.

<sup>116</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Report of the Commissioners.

<sup>117</sup> *Argus*, 25 January 1863: 5.



would defend its actions in the affair.<sup>118</sup> It was hoped that James Smith, journalist, newspaper editor and member of the RSV and EFC, would undertake the task and funding was sought from the McCulloch Ministry. Unfortunately, Smith succumbed to "overstrain from his severe intellectual labours" and the work was never completed.<sup>119</sup> The RSV's lack of literary output was questioned in a scathing editorial in the *Argus*, which enquired:

is the publication of a brief and imperfect transcription of the few and bald notes recovered from the possession of the dead, all that the managers of the Exploring Expedition propose to do for the name and fame of our first heroes?<sup>120</sup>

In an attempt to defend their actions and deflect further criticism, the EC released a bound compilation of their first eight *Progress Reports* as a single edition, which did little to change the public's perception and merely supported the *Argus*' criticism that the RSV were not presenting a balanced account of events.<sup>121</sup>

In the absence of an officially sanctioned account, two independent books were published: one by Ensign Andrew Jackson, a military acquaintance of the Burke family,<sup>122</sup> and the other by Dr William Wills, the explorer's father.<sup>123</sup> Because the deaths were so recent and because of the relationship of the authors to the explorers, both of these works were emotive and reflected the culture of blame that was prevalent at the time. Both books relied heavily on the same primary source material – the diaries and notebooks that had already been published in the Melbourne newspapers<sup>124</sup> – and both books claimed the Expedition had been a success. However, they gave very different accounts of how the Expedition was managed.

Jackson had never written a book before and while his work purported to be a compilation of facts based on the expedition's journals, he frequently expressed his personal opinion. Burke was

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<sup>118</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes of a meeting of the EC, 17 August 1863', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria, 297.

<sup>119</sup> Australian National University: National Centre of Biography. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. [adb.anu.edu.au/biography/smith-james-4604](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/smith-james-4604)

<sup>120</sup> *Argus*, 30 July 1863: 4.

<sup>121</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports and Final Report of the Exploration Committee of the Royal Society of Victoria* (Melbourne: Mason and Firth Printers, 1863); *Age*, 1 September 1863: 6.

<sup>122</sup> Andrew Jackson, *Robert O'Hara Bourke and the Australian Exploring Expedition of 1860* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1862).

<sup>123</sup> Wills, *Successful exploration*.

<sup>124</sup> *Argus*, *The Burke and Wills exploring expedition: An account of the crossing the continent of Australia from Cooper's Creek to Carpentaria, with biographical sketches of Robert O'Hara Burke and William John Wills* (Melbourne: Wilson and Mackinnon, 1861); *Argus*, *Supplementary pamphlet to the Burke and Wills Exploration Expedition: containing the evidence taken before the Commission of Inquiry appointed by Government. With Portraits of John King and Charles Gray* (Melbourne: Wilson and Mackinnon, 1861); *The Herald*, *Burke and his companions: The Victorian Exploring Expedition. From its origin to the return from Carpentaria, and the death of Burke, Wills and Gray, from starvation: with Burke's and Wills Journals, King's Narrative, Howitt's Diary & Co.* (Melbourne: Herald Office, 1861); *Age*, *The exploring expedition: Diary of Burke and Wills, Howitt's journal and dispatches, King's narrative, portraits of Burke and Wills, together with a biographical sketch of their lives* (Melbourne: Age, 1861).

depicted as a noble man, worthy of the position of leader, who applied himself diligently to mental and physical preparation in order to face the severe privations he might encounter on the expedition. According to Jackson's interpretation, Landells was a man big with his own importance and his resignation as second-in-command just nine weeks out of Melbourne placed the expedition in a position of gravest difficulty. Burke's decision to divide the party at Menindee and employ Wright was a sensible move that made the most of the health and vigour of the men and beasts without compromising the safety of the outfit. Had Burke been more protracted in his advance then Jackson felt the success of the entire operation would have been placed in doubt. Jackson made it clear that despite the deaths of seven expedition members, he considered the venture a success and thought Burke had fulfilled his obligations. An entire chapter was devoted to Wright,<sup>125</sup> blaming the deaths of Burke and Wills on his "inexcusable apathy and neglect".<sup>126</sup>

Jackson's book was "the first substantial book on the expedition"<sup>127</sup>, but its arrival in Australia in November 1862 passed relatively unnoticed.<sup>128</sup> Presumably the uncontroversial style, the praise of Burke, the reinforcement of the findings of the Commission and the reprinting of diaries and journals already widely available meant the publication did not ruffle too many feathers.

Wills' father published his book a few months after Jackson.<sup>129</sup> It also portrayed the outcome of the expedition in favourable terms, hence the title of the book, *A Successful Exploration through the Interior of Australia*. Initial press releases in the London literary papers carried a quote claiming to have been "taken from the Australian press", but which were clearly written by Dr Wills:

Mr Wills, the martyr, whose history of the journey is all that is left to us, is deserving of a nation's tears. His extreme youth, his enduring patience, his evenness of temper, his lively disposition even in extremities, his devotion to his leader, all tend to stamp him as the master-mind of the expedition.<sup>130</sup>

The Melbourne press were aware that Dr Wills "was in the habit of studiously disparaging Mr Burke's share in the great exploit, stigmatising him as unworthy to hold the command of an expedition of this kind" and they expressed concern that this latest book would be likely to glorify Wills' role at Burke's expense and "give the English public a very one-sided and incomplete version of the whole affair".<sup>131</sup> It was suggested that Dr Wills was attempting:

to filch from the actual leader the laurels he has so hardly earned, and to place them on the head of the second-in-command.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Jackson, *Australian Exploring Expedition*, Chapter 8.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>127</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 190.

<sup>128</sup> Published in London in September 1862, Jackson's book arrived in Melbourne with the September English mails on P&O's R.M.S.S. *Northam* on 12 November 1862. *Argus*, 14 November 1862: 2; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 November 1862: 9.

<sup>129</sup> Dr Wills' book arrived in Melbourne with the February English mails on P&O's R.M.S.S. *Madras* on 14 April 1863. *Argus*, 15 April 1863: 3.

<sup>130</sup> *Mount Alexander Mail*, 27 December 1862: 2.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

Therefore, it was thought desirable that Australians "should have a complete and impartial narrative of the whole affair ... [and] the Government of Victoria ought to take upon itself the duty of authorising and defraying the cost".<sup>133</sup> Dr Wills did not disappoint Australian readers who had become used to his public displays of emotion and attempts to embarrass the RSV. As a father in mourning, he was critical of everyone associated with the Expedition. He portrayed his son as an intelligent, industrious young man who was the intellectual mainstay of the Expedition.<sup>134</sup> Wills' diary entries had demonstrated his friendship and respect for Burke and consequently Dr Wills' criticism of Burke was mild. However, his attacks on others associated with the Expedition were vitriolic, with Brahe and Wright receiving the severest criticism. Brahe's decision to leave Depot Camp 65 was described as a fatal error which was contrary to orders. Burke did not leave written orders before departing for the Gulf of Carpentaria, but he did deposit a package of pocket-books with Brahe, leaving instructions that should he not return, Brahe was to destroy the package.<sup>135</sup> Brahe burned the books before leaving Depot Camp 65, and Dr Wills questioned what else he may have burnt "or placed out of the way?"<sup>136</sup>, intimating that Burke and/or Wills may have left written instructions which Brahe destroyed and then disobeyed. Brahe's decision to leave Depot Camp 65 to get medical assistance for Patten, was also questioned by Dr Wills. Despite Patten's death on the return trip to Menindee, Dr Wills asserted his illness at Depot Camp 65 was a mere sprain. Brahe was described as lacking consistency, his "miserable prevarication" making him unfit to direct.<sup>137</sup> Wright also received harsh criticism, with Dr Wills highlighting his poor literacy and claims to the Commission to have written letters himself. Dr Wills felt that a more ignorant being than Wright "could not have been extracted from the bush".<sup>138</sup> Brahe and Wright's return to Depot Camp 65 in May 1861 was described as a useless visit, and he attributed their failure to rescue Burke and Wills to apathy, stupidity and carelessness beyond comprehension. The EC were criticised for not having replaced Wright at the first opportunity; Dr Wills ignored the confidence Burke had displayed in him.<sup>139</sup> The inactivity of the EC was quite accurately attributed to the effects of leaving a large organisation to make decisions that were influenced by the conceits and opinions of committee members whose attendance at meetings was irregular. Dr Wills' critical assessment did not stop with individuals directly associated with the death of his son but included all involved in the Expedition. The Expedition surgeon Dr Beckler, artist and naturalist Dr Becker, Honorary Secretary of the EC Dr John Macadam, Expedition assistant McDonough, and Landells, were variously described as untrustworthy dissenters, lacking in

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<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> 'Memoir of Wills the Explorer by his Father', *Cornwall Chronicle*, 2 May 1863: 2.

<sup>135</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 173 to Brahe.

<sup>136</sup> Wills, *Successful exploration*, 215.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>139</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Dispatch, dated Torowoto, 29 October 1860', ex2002-012, Box 2082/1a (Item 12), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

courage and ability. Dr Wills also claimed the Commission was unaccountably sympathetic towards Brahe.

Although Dr Wills was considered to have “performed his task with judgement and good taste”, he was also criticised for the “unprofitable, but not unnatural bitterness” displayed in the book.<sup>140</sup> Beckler however, was not so measured with his criticism. Having left Australia about the same time as Dr Wills, Beckler returned home to Germany, where he planned to publish his own account of the Expedition titled *Burke's Expedition: Reise nach Mittelastralien*.<sup>141</sup> He responded to Dr Wills' publication but then failed to publish his own manuscript. He claimed Dr Wills book:

censures the members of Burke's expedition in a manner that really knows no bounds ... he wanted the blame for the death of his son placed squarely on either the Committee or on Burke himself, or on some other members of the expedition, or on all of them together ... It would seem, then, that since Dr Wills has not been able to satisfy his yearnings for revenge against some person by other means, he is now seeking partial compensation through defaming the surviving companions of his son.<sup>142</sup>

The combined narrative of the books by Jackson and Wills reflected the feelings of the majority of Victorians in the immediate aftermath of the expedition and they influenced the way the Expedition narrative would be told for the next 100 years: Burke and Wills were heroes who had laid down their lives for the honour of the colony. They had ventured into the unknown desert that Landells and Beckler had been scared to face; Burke's leadership decisions were a result of vigour and enthusiasm and the Expedition would have been an unqualified success had the leaders not been abandoned in their hour of need; Wright was an incompetent malingerer, whose conduct was inexcusable and on whom the majority of the blame fell, and despite the Commission excusing Brahe, public sentiment meant he continued to be portrayed as a deserter.

The Reverend Tenison-Woods, a Catholic missionary, geologist and naturalist from South Australia, produced a comprehensive work on the European exploration and discovery of Australia in 1865, just two years after Burke and Wills' state funeral.<sup>143</sup> He had been a member of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria (PIV) since 1857 and he maintained his membership of the RSV until 1869, although living in South Australia meant he was not actively involved with the VEE. While Tenison-Woods dedicated his two-volume work to the President of the RSV, Sir Henry Barkly, for his support of Australian exploration,<sup>144</sup> his association with the RSV did not prevent him from

<sup>140</sup> *The Athenaeum Journal of Literature, Science and the Fine Arts* (London: John Francis, 1863), No. 1842, 14 February (1863): 223.

<sup>141</sup> Hermann Beckler, 'Burke's Expedition: Reise nach Mittelastralien', unpublished manuscript held at Heimatmuseum, Höchstädt an der Donau, Bavaria. There is a transcription by Dr Michael Renner (in German) at PA 260, MS 14676, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>142</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 193-194.

<sup>143</sup> Reverend Julian Edmund Tenison-Woods, *A history of the discovery and exploration of Australia: or an account of the progress of geographical discovery in this continent, from the earliest period to the present day* (Melbourne: H.T. Dwight, 1865).

<sup>144</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 191.

levelling criticism at it for the operation of the Expedition. While he celebrated the Expedition as "the most important that was done", with "great and unexpected" results, he nevertheless considered the appointment of Burke "unfortunate" and thought it would have been an inexcusable mistake were the committee more experienced in exploration.<sup>145</sup> Burke was accused of bad management from the outset, taking too large a party and excessive equipment. Although letters had been published in the press questioning Burke's management and decisions, Tenison-Woods was the first to openly criticise Burke in print. Wills, however, was praised as the hero of the expedition, Tenison-Woods having "not met with so courageous, so noble, so fine an explorer as W.J.W."<sup>146</sup> The EC was censured for sending the party out at the wrong time of year and this was ascribed as the main cause of the disaster, a point that Bergin took up again in 1977.

After the flurry of books, diaries and expedition journals served up to the public in the 1860s, there were few publications that dealt with the Expedition in the 1870s. Bonyhady believes the abundance of works had left colonists with "little appetite for more ... debate, celebration and recrimination".<sup>147</sup> The only book published in the 1870s that studied exploration was Charles Henry Eden's *Australia's Heroes*,<sup>148</sup> which added little to the discussion. Eden had lived in Queensland for eight years during the 1860s and wrote the book on his return to England, for the British market. He described the Expedition as a dark page in the history of Australian exploration, but avoided expressing "even the slightest opinion regarding the conduct of individuals".<sup>149</sup> The narrative was certainly bland and non-judgmental and was unique in its time for the distant and superficial way the Expedition was portrayed.

The Victorian Jubilee and centenary of European settlement in Australia, in 1884 and 1888 respectively, saw a number of books released which focussed on the history of Anglo-Australian discovery and exploration. These books were published around 25 years after the state funeral and the intervening years had taken much of the emotion out of the writing, but most were still highly critical of aspects of the Expedition's conduct. Many of the previous ideas expressed in publications were repeated. Victoria's efforts in organising an exploration party whose findings did not materially benefit the colony were still applauded, the EC continued to be portrayed in a poor light and the criticism of Burke's leadership style intensified. William Thomas Pyke devoted the first four chapters of his short work on Australian exploration to "Burke and Wills: two heroes of exploration".<sup>150</sup> While

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<sup>145</sup> Tenison-Woods, *Discovery and exploration*, 347.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>147</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 273.

<sup>148</sup> Charles Henry Eden, *Australia's heroes: Being a slight sketch of the most prominent amongst the gallant band of men who devoted their lives and energies to the cause of science and the development of the fifth continent* (London: Society for promoting Christian knowledge, 1875).

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>150</sup> William Thomas Pyke, *Australian heroes and adventurers* (Melbourne: E.W. Cole Book Arcade, 1889).

this book was reprinted three times, becoming the biggest selling account of the Expedition,<sup>151</sup> it was also the least critical. Pyke quoted Tenison-Woods and echoed many of his sentiments, including calling Wills the real hero of the Expedition.<sup>152</sup> However, he avoided making any real assessment by relying heavily on primary sources, namely John King's narrative, the Commission's Report and Governor Darling's speech at the 1865 unveiling of Charles Summers' statue of Burke and Wills, to tell the story. The Reverend George Grimm's centennial work was slightly more perceptive.<sup>153</sup> While still holding Burke and Wills up as heroes of the golden age of Australian exploration, he saw Burke's appointment as a mistake and despite the leader's heroic enthusiasm, Grimm considered him destitute of special qualifications for the work.<sup>154</sup> The unwieldy nature of the Expedition and also the time of departure were questioned. Grimm felt everyone connected with the Expedition held some degree of blame, but he ultimately returned to the traditional scapegoats: Brahe and Wright were "guilty of unpardonable neglect" with Wright being accused of cruel conduct for which there was "neither justification or defence".<sup>155</sup>

The most comprehensive work of the time was Calvert's two volume *The Exploration of Australia*, which devoted seven chapters to the VEE and relief expeditions.<sup>156</sup> Calvert had some experience of exploration in South Australia and Western Australia through his employment as a mining engineer.<sup>157</sup> He suggested the Expedition was entitled to the chief place in the history of Australian exploration because Burke and Wills had been the first to cross the continent. However, he did not consider it a success in any other sense, describing it as "a rank failure" and "an unparalleled tissue of unpardonable blunders".<sup>158</sup> The primary cause of the ensuing disasters was attributed to the EC and their lack of exploration experience. Calvert openly criticised the actions of the EC and questioned Burke's competence, but stopped short of finding fault with Burke's leadership. He felt Burke's decision to employ Wright was one of his most serious blunders and the decision to "dash" to the Gulf was one that sacrificed the primary scientific aims of the expedition.<sup>159</sup> However Calvert admired the "great and unprecedented feat" of crossing the continent, an achievement which did

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<sup>151</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 276.

<sup>152</sup> Pyke, *Australian heroes and adventurers*, 12.

<sup>153</sup> Reverend George Grimm, *The Australian explorers: Their labours, perils, and achievements, being a narrative of discovery from the landing of Captain Cook to the Centennial Year* (Melbourne: George Robertson & Co., 1888).

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>156</sup> Calvert devoted two chapters to Burke, and one chapter each to Brahe, Howitt, McKinlay, Landsborough and Walker, see: Albert Frederick Calvert, *The exploration of Australia: From 1844 to 1896* (London: George Phillip & Son, 1896), 132-210.

<sup>157</sup> Australian National University: National Centre of Biography, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. [adb.anu.edu.au/biography/calvert-albert-frederick-5469](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/calvert-albert-frederick-5469)

<sup>158</sup> Calvert, *Exploration of Australia*, 136.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

"much to redeem the grievous errors of [Burke's] judgement".<sup>160</sup> He also felt it was unfair that Burke paid for his incompetence with his life while the incompetence of the EC remained unpunished.<sup>161</sup>

The most critical work in this period, however, came from Ernest Favenc. He had been employed as a surveyor and explorer, mainly in north Queensland where he had received acclaim for his efforts assessing the feasibility of a rail link between Brisbane and Darwin. His centennial history of Australia,<sup>162</sup> commissioned by the New South Wales government, was written with the experience of a bushman and explorer and Favenc devoted very few pages to the Victorian expedition. While acknowledging the VEE's success in being the first to cross the continent from south to north and describing this effort as "noble and unselfish", he accused Burke of frittering away his resources and "wantonly sacrificing his own life and those of his men".<sup>163</sup> Favenc questioned the logic that allowed sentiment to elevate Burke to hero status while Edmund Kennedy,<sup>164</sup> who led the only expedition to lose more lives than the VEE, fought much greater odds and yet was forgotten by the public. Favenc argued that Burke was much better equipped than Kennedy, yet he failed to acknowledge that Burke was hampered by excessive stores and that both Burke and Kennedy found wagons an inconvenience, which both explorers abandoned at the earliest opportunity. The selection of Burke as leader was again questioned. Favenc did not see the EC's decision to limit the selection of leader to a Victorian as unreasonable, even given the lack of experience amongst the Victorian applicants.<sup>165</sup> The choice of Burke as leader was, however, a "fatal blunder" on the part of the inexperienced EC and Favenc thought too much emphasis had since been placed on Burke's personal bravery which served only to highlight his failings compared to:

the calm and simple courage of Sturt, the cool judgment and forethought of Mitchell [and] the devotion of Austin.<sup>166</sup>

Favenc was also critical of Wills' role in the Expedition. When all other writers were elevating Wills to an equal of Burke, Favenc found Wills' diary "sadly uninteresting ... the baldest record of the day's doings, and destitute of the sympathetic style which is so essential in an explorer's log".<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>162</sup> Ernest Favenc, *The history of Australian exploration from 1788 to 1888* (Sydney: Turner & Henderson, 1888).

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>164</sup> Edmund Beasley Court Kennedy (1818-1848) worked as assistant surveyor under Mitchell and then led two expeditions in northern New South Wales (now Queensland). In 1847 he explored the Barcoo River and in 1848 he landed at Rockingham Bay before travelling to Cape York, where he was fatally speared. This expedition lost ten of the 13 men, the greatest loss of life on any Australian expedition.

<sup>165</sup> Of the 15 applicants for the position of Expedition leader in March 1860, only one Victorian, William Lockhart Morton, had any experience of Australian exploration. He was not seriously considered as a leadership contender and became one of the EC's staunchest critics.

<sup>166</sup> Favenc, *Australian exploration*, 210.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

Vice-President of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (Queensland Branch), George Phillips, read a paper before the Society in 1907 outlining the history of the Expedition.<sup>168</sup> Although he claimed to have witnessed King's return to Melbourne in 1861 and had "carefully studied all the available official documents", he relied heavily on Favenc's critical assessment of the VEE.<sup>169</sup> However, he was less critical of Wright and Brahe's involvement than earlier correspondents had been, attributing "much of the failure primarily to the absence of detailed and well-considered written instructions from Burke to the officers he left behind him".<sup>170</sup> Interestingly, Phillips noted that Wright "lacked means to purchase the horses he required to give effect to Burke's instructions", a point later taken up in Bergin's thesis.<sup>171</sup> Phillips also called on "the State [of Queensland]" to make efforts to locate Burke's most northerly camp, Camp 119 near the Gulf of Carpentaria. Although 46 years had elapsed since the Expedition reached the Gulf, Phillips stated that no one had positively identified whether the explorers had reached tidal water at the Flinders or Albert River. Two years later the RGSA (Queensland Branch) dispatched their secretary, James Park Thomson, to the Gulf where he located what he considered to be Burke's campsite.<sup>172</sup>

Wills' role on the Expedition was only questioned in print on one other occasion, also by an experienced explorer, Ernest Giles, whose introduction to the publication of his expedition journals was dismissive of the VEE.<sup>173</sup> Despite considering himself as a Victorian<sup>174</sup> he thought the exploration of only 600 miles of unknown country was carried out on the grandest scale, which he felt was typical of anything the colony of Victoria did. Wills' journal was of no geographic value and the money expended on the Expedition was thrown away because Wills' map was, according to him, incorrect and unreliable.<sup>175</sup> A.C. Gregory, also an outstanding surveyor and explorer, similarly questioned Wills' ability based on the accuracy of his map.<sup>176</sup>

In the early part of the twentieth century, Australia's lack of home-grown heroes meant Burke and Wills were still seen as national icons. Accounts of the expedition were now more frequently

<sup>168</sup> George Phillips, 'The Victorian Exploring Expedition, 1860-1', *Queensland Geographical Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 9 (1908): 1-20.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 & 15.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> James Park Thomson, 'Expedition to the Gulf of Carpentaria', *Queensland Geographical Journal*, Vol. 25 (1910). Thomson found what he considered to be Burke's Camp 119. More recently the location of the campsite has been questioned by retired survey assistant, Ian Andrews.

<sup>173</sup> William Ernest Powell Giles, *Australia twice traversed: The romance of exploration, being a narrative compiled from the journals of five exploring expeditions into and through central South Australia, and Western Australia, from 1872 to 1876* (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1889).

<sup>174</sup> W.E.P. (Ernest) Giles (1835-1897) was born in Bristol, England. His family migrated to South Australia in 1848 and he joined them in 1850. He then worked in Victoria and New South Wales.

<sup>175</sup> Giles, *Australia twice traversed*, xxiii.

<sup>176</sup> John Howard Lidgett Cumpston, *Augustus Gregory and the inland sea* (Canberra: Roebuck Society, 1972), 120.





Figure 9: David Boyd, 'Burke and Wills bed down for the night', 1957-1958.  
© Private collection.

Boyd produced several paintings which were visual representations of Joseph Furphy's suggestion that Burke wore a top hat and swell toggery, and slept in a bedstead.

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published as juvenile and educational literature. While the expedition saga filled a place in the history curriculum, much of this and subsequent educational literature was poorly researched and began a trend of myth and legend. The publication of Joseph Furphy's novel *Such is Life* helped cement this mix of myth and mythinformation into the Expedition's narrative.<sup>177</sup> Furphy's book was not particularly popular or well-received when it was released.<sup>178</sup> Nevertheless, his colourful description of Burke as an officer and gentleman having "Burked that expedition, right enough" and then dying "for want of his sherry an' biscuits", with Wills "a pore harmless weed" at his side has become cemented in the nation's psyche, along with the idea that Burke:

camped with his carpet, an' his bedstead, an' (sheol) knows what paravinalia; an' a man nothin' to do but wait on him; an' - look here! - a cubbard made to fit one o' the camels, with compartments for his swell toggery, an' - as true as I'm a livin' sinner - one o' the compartments made distinctly o' purpose to hold his belltopper!<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Joseph Furphy, *Such is life: Being certain extracts from the diary of Tom Collins* (Sydney: Bulletin Newspaper Co., 1903).

<sup>178</sup> Australian National University: National Centre of Biography, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. [adb.anu.edu.au/biography/furphy-joseph-6261](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/furphy-joseph-6261)  
University of Queensland and National Library of Australia, *AustLIT Australian literature database*. [austlit.edu.au/austlit/page/C58578](http://austlit.edu.au/austlit/page/C58578)

<sup>179</sup> Furphy, *Such is Life*, Chapter 1. Although Furphy used the phrase "burked that expedition" to mean Burke made a mess of affairs, the term 'being a berk' to mean 'fool' comes from the Cockney rhyming slang Berkeley Hunt and was first used in England in the 1930s, and therefore has no connection to Robert O'Hara Burke.

In 1904, the banker and writer Henry Gyles Turner published his two-volume history of Victoria,<sup>180</sup> and while this was predominantly a political history, the VEE was reviewed. Turner was particularly critical of Landells, calling him ignorant, aggressive and a deserter. However, the main point of note in Turner's work is his assessment of Burke's failings, which repeated earlier criticisms such as having no bushcraft or surveying skills and lacking tact and patience. It also questioned for the first time in print Burke's inexperience dealing with Aboriginal people.<sup>181</sup> This point highlights changing attitudes towards Aboriginal people in the early twentieth century and the role they were perceived to have played in Australian exploration. The relationship between the Expedition and Aboriginal people, particularly the Yandruwandha-Yawarrawarrka people, would not be considered again for some time.

In addition to Turner's work, the adult audience were given romantic alternatives to the story, particularly from religious authors such as the Reverends Watson<sup>182</sup> and Fitchett.<sup>183</sup> They told the story in terms of bravery and blunder. Watson thought not many "tales of romance possess more interest" than this story of these "brave men".<sup>184</sup> Fitchett thought the story was a paradox of success and failure but felt the passage of time allowed him a perspective on the Expedition that was better than that of the Commission. Even with the hindsight of half a century, Fitchett still thought the main factors of blame were Burke's "failure in leadership" and Wright's "inexcusable delay", and remarkably he thought the EC had been unfairly blamed by the Commission and found it difficult to understand why.<sup>185</sup> The descriptive prose continued in Ernest Scott's *A Short History of Australia*, which had eight editions published between 1916 and 1964.<sup>186</sup> The Melbourne University history professor thought the Expedition was an outstanding achievement which had an atmosphere of romance; Burke was of "dashing appearance" and Wills was a "brilliant young man of science".<sup>187</sup>

Given that Scott had published extensive historical works previously,<sup>188</sup> the inaccuracies in this book are surprising: Scott has Burke driving on to the Gulf "at such a pace that his camels died"<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Henry Gyles Turner, *A history of the colony of Victoria from its discovery to its absorption into the Commonwealth of Australia; 1797-1854*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans Green & Co, 1904).

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>182</sup> The Reverend Michael J. Watson, *The story of Burke and Wills: With sketches and essays* (Melbourne: William P. Linehan, 1911).

<sup>183</sup> Reverend William Henry Fitchett, *The New World of the South: The romance of Australian history* (London: G. Bell & Sons Ltd, 1913), 366-382.

<sup>184</sup> Watson, *Story of Burke and Wills*, 1.

<sup>185</sup> Fitchett, *New world of the south*, 380.

<sup>186</sup> Ernest Scott, *A short history of Australia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1916).

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>188</sup> Ernest Scott, *Terre Napoléon* (1910); *Lapérouse* (1912); *The life of Captain Matthew Flinders* (1914).

<sup>189</sup> Scott, *Short history*, 228.



Figure 10: Nicholas Chevalier, 'Memorandum of the start of the exploring expedition', 1860.  
M.J.M. Carter A.O. Collection 1993, Art Gallery of South Australia.

Chevalier's painting of the Expedition's departure misrepresents Burke's cabbage-tree bush hat as a top-hat, reinforcing the stereotype and, according to Haynes, causing Burke to resemble a ringmaster leading a circus into town, see: Roslynn D. Haynes, *Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 106.

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when in fact Burke reached the Gulf without a single fatality in his livestock; and he describes the "thirst-tortured" explorers perishing miserably – while Burke, Wills and Gray may have perished miserably, it was certainly not through a lack of water at Cooper Creek. This romantic style of writing, while captivating the audience at the time, has led to more myths and inaccuracies.

In 1915, Francis Birtles made the first of five outback motor-car trips following Burke and Wills' track.<sup>190</sup> This was the first time anyone had attempted to follow the Expedition's route<sup>191</sup> and his adventures were serialised and published in 25 weekly instalments.<sup>192</sup> Birtles also took a movie camera to record his journey, capitalising on the immense popularity of motion pictures at the time.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Francis Edwin Birtles (1881-1941). Birtles made many cycle and motor-car trips, including: February-September 1915 from Sydney to Adelaide and the Gulf of Carpentaria in a T Model Ford; October-November 1915 from Geelong to Cooper Creek in the same T Model Ford; February-April 1925 Melbourne to Darwin on an Oldsmobile 30; December 1928-January 1929 in a Bean car and trailer; November 1932, Sydney to Cooper Creek in a Rolls Royce.

<sup>191</sup> Earlier claims to have followed Burke and Wills' tracks had been made by George McGillivray (who left Eddington Station near Julia Creek on 23 December 1873 on horseback and travelled via the Diamantina River, Cooper Creek and Strzelecki Creek to Beltana and then Wilcannia on the Darling River) and George Ernest Morrison (who left Normanton on 19 December 1882 and walked to Melbourne, arriving on 21 April 1883).

<sup>192</sup> Francis Birtles, 'Across Australia: In the tracks of Burke and Wills' was serialised in 25 weekly instalments in *The Mirror of Australia* between 12 September 1915 and 26 February 1916.

<sup>193</sup> Francis Edwin Birtles, 'Across Australia: On the tracks of Burke and Wills [film]', (Co-Operative Film Exchange Ltd, Melbourne, 1915). The film opened at Hoyts' Olympia Theatre, Melbourne on Christmas Day 1915.



Figure 11: Publicity material for Birtles' film *Across Australia: On the Track of Burke and Wills*, 1915. Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

Birtles' travel documentary was received with great acclaim. Most notable was the information Birtles gained from talking to Aboriginal people. Birtles' brother, Clive, who accompanied him on his second trip following Burke and Wills, noted:

We got a lot of strange history about the Burke and Wills expedition, from the old blacks, one old fellow named 'Wompie' having lived with King [the only survivor] during his stay with the blacks here.<sup>194</sup>

This was the first time serious consideration was given to Aboriginal involvement in the Expedition. Birtles findings are discussed in more depth in Chapter 6.

It was more than 75 years after the death of Burke before the next work concentrating solely on the expedition was published. Frank Clune's *Dig*, released in May 1937, claimed to be the first work which told the complete story in a continuous narrative.<sup>195</sup> Clune conducted his research in the archives in Sydney and Canberra, but spent surprisingly little time in Melbourne where the majority of the Expedition's archives are kept.<sup>196</sup> He supported his research with field-work on the Darling River, Cooper Creek and in north Queensland.<sup>197</sup> His "unbiased examination of all of the records" claimed to shed new light on the legend and he set out to show Burke had been a success who deserved an honourable and undying place in the annals of Australian exploration.<sup>198</sup> Clune's research was not as thorough as he reported and the book included fictional conversations. He felt Australian history was being represented in a morbid and melancholic way and he thought that Burke was

<sup>194</sup> Warren Brown, *Francis Birtles: Australian adventurer* (Sydney: Hachette Australia, 2011), 101.

<sup>195</sup> Clune, *Dig*, Foreword.

<sup>196</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 294.

<sup>197</sup> Frank Clune, *Roaming Around the Darling* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1936).

<sup>198</sup> Frank Clune, 'With O'Hara Burke to the Gulf', *Walkabout*, Vol. 4 (1938): 13-14.

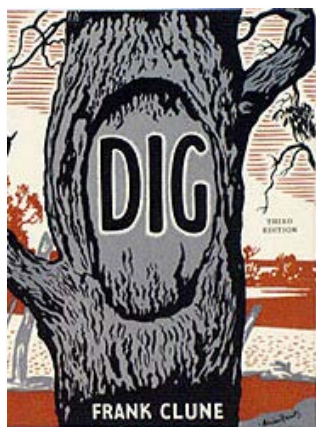


Figure 12: Frank Clune, *Dig* (Third Edition).  
(Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1937).

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increasingly being portrayed as a failure. In order to represent Burke in as favourable way as possible, Clune portrayed Landells, Wright and Brahe as the villains. While this was not a new concept, previously only Wills' father had used such emotive terms to denigrate these men. Clune established Burke's motivation early in the book, depicting him as an adventurer who was tempted by the £2,000 prize offered by South Australia for the first crossing of the continent from south to north, a common theme that arises regularly from this point forwards. Ambrose Kyte, who contributed most to the expedition's finances, was not featured at all and the EC received only passing mention and no blame. Landells was portrayed as a drunk, another theme that surfaces regularly in later works. While 60 gallons of rum was taken on the Expedition,<sup>199</sup> this was to be administered to the camels as either a tonic to prevent scurvy or a stimulant to revive tired animals and there is no evidence to show Landells imbibed. Wright is labelled a "spellbinder" who lied to Burke about his abilities in order to secure a position on the VEE. Clune is Wright's fiercest critic, believing he lingered and malingered, devising ingenious pretexts to remain mouldering at Menindee. The EC granted Wright £400 to buy the equipment required to follow Burke to Cooper Creek; Clune accuses Wright of taking 16 days to buy a few sheep and provisions which he could have purchased in 16 minutes, ignoring the fact that Wright bought and broke in ten horses, made pack-saddles for provisions, killed and jerked four bullocks and hired three more men.<sup>200</sup> Brahe is predictably labelled a "backslider" and a "deserter" for leaving Depot Camp 65, but this was not fuelled by the anti-German sentiments that were common in the lead-up to WWII. Clune's hasty research failed to identify Brahe's place of birth in the Westphalia region of Germany and Clune repeatedly refers to him as a Swede. Despite the historical inaccuracies, fictional conversations and character assassinations, *Dig* generally received favourable reviews and over the next twenty years sold 100,000 copies in Australia.<sup>201</sup> It has been

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<sup>199</sup> Richard Nash, 'Articles required for the provisioning of twenty men for twelve months', ex2011-001, Box 2084/3a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>200</sup> Bergin, 'Courage and corruption', 88-93; Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 89-94.

<sup>201</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 297.





Figure 13: John Longstaff, 'Arrival of Burke, Wills and King at the deserted camp at Cooper's Creek, Sunday evening, 21st April 1861', 1907. Accession Number 343-2, Gillbee Bequest, © National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

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reprinted many times under the various titles of *Dig: The Burke and Wills saga*, *Dig: The tragic story of the Burke and Wills expedition* and *Dig: A drama of Central Australia*. In 1971, the year of Clune's death, an abridged version with illustrations by Wolfgang Graesse was released as a children's book titled *The incredible outback adventures of Burke and Wills*.<sup>202</sup> Due to the success of the book, within Australia at least, many of the inaccuracies espoused are often repeated, particularly in educational material.

One lasting effect of Clune's book is that the tree at Burke's Depot Camp 65 on Cooper Creek has become known as the 'Dig Tree'. Depot Camp 65 was known variously as "Cooper's Depot Camp 2", "Brahe's Depot" or "Camp LXV". Howitt named it "Fort Wills" *post factum*, in reference to the small timber stockade that Brahe and the Depot Party had erected in December 1860. The Dig Tree was referred to as "Brahe's Tree" or "the Depot Tree". The tree had been referred to locally as "the Dig tree" from around 1929, but because the Depot and tree were associated with Brahe and the Depot Party rather than with Burke and Wills, they were not given as much precedence as the tree at Burke's grave. Longstaff's 1907 painting depicted the tree as iconic, but it was Clune's book that placed it at the centre of the story and identified it as the place where Burke's hopes and dreams came crashing down.<sup>203</sup>

Interest in these historic trees had begun when the first white settlers arrived on the Cooper in late 1873.<sup>204</sup> However, there was confusion over the many blazed trees in the area. In 1911, Sidney Kidman proudly showed Scottish reporter, James Cassidy, a piece of a tree which Kidman claimed

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<sup>202</sup> Frank Clune, *The incredible outback adventures of Burke and Wills* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1971).

<sup>203</sup> The first recorded occurrence of the name 'Dig Tree' was in *The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser*, 12 March 1912: 35. The name was in common usage by 1929, see: *Barrier Miner*, 25 October 1929: 1.

<sup>204</sup> Charles Edwin Woodrow Bean, *The 'Dreadnought' of the Darling* (London: Alston Rivers, 1911), 171.

was "the very tree under which Burke and Wills died". It was reported to be the Dig Tree which stood on Kidman's Innamincka Station.<sup>205</sup> Burke and Wills died under separate trees, some 20 kilometres apart, and neither explorer died under the Dig Tree, which was never on Innamincka Station. A comprehensive yet vague attempt at clearing up this confusion was published in 1928 by the South Australian Director of Education, Dr Charles Fenner.<sup>206</sup> Sixteen years later Ferdinand Lucas Parker adding his interpretation to the discussion, and although he contacted Edward Gerald "Ted" Conrick, manager of Nappa Merrie station, to get local insight, Conrick's recollections only added to the confusion.<sup>207</sup>

After retiring from the Hansard Staff, Principal Parliamentary Reporter Joseph Stewart Weatherston spent four years researching the Expedition. In 1944 he produced a manuscript<sup>208</sup> but was unable to find a publisher. Weatherston made extensive use of the RSV minute books and newspaper articles, particularly the *Argus* and *South Australian Register*. Although the writing style was that of a journalist, his research was far more comprehensive than anything attempted previously. He traced the evolution of the Expedition from an initial desire to establish a small, light party to cross Australia from east to west, to the large scientific outfit that left Melbourne to cross the continent from south to north. He identified the political influence exerted by Chief Justice Sir William Stawell on the RSV and also highlighted inter-colonial rivalry between Victoria and South Australia.

Between 1947 and 1963, Queensland grazier Alfred Cory Towner began retracing the track of the expedition and marking trees at campsites along the way. Although he hoped to publish his findings as a book, he failed to do so. Nevertheless, some of his work became known and was influential for later accounts of the VEE. Most notable was his positive contribution towards identifying the Expedition's track, while conversely the many trees he marked along the way have more recently caused confusion.<sup>209</sup> Although it was common for settlers to use explorer's maps and journals to follow closely on the heels of explorers, the Expedition's track has remained elusive, with very few blazed trees being located to positively identify Burke's route.

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<sup>205</sup> Jill Bowen, *Kidman: The forgotten king* (North Ryde, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1987), 181-182.

<sup>206</sup> Charles Albert Edward Fenner, 'Two historic gumtrees associated with the Burke and Wills Expedition of 1861', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (SA Branch)*, Vol. 29 (1928).

<sup>207</sup> Ferdinand Lucas Parker, 'Further notes on two historic gum trees: Addendum A to the Annual Report of the Historical Memorials Committee', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (SA Branch)*, Vol. 46 (1945).

<sup>208</sup> Joseph Stewart Weatherston, 'Burke's Dash to the Gulf', MS 1136, National Library of Australia.

<sup>209</sup> Alfred Cory Towner, 'Correspondence 17 Apr 1950-21 Jun 1961', OM78-04/26, State Library of Queensland; 'Burke's route across New South Wales', (n.d., c.1933-1960?), ML:Z/M2 810p/1860/1, Mitchell Map Collection, State Library of New South Wales; 'Maps showing route of Burke and Wills (on Queensland Dept. of Public Lands map of Queensland)', 1961, MS 1391, National Library of Australia. (Note: Photocopy. Location of original unknown); *The Explorers Burke and Wills and their searchers* (Brisbane: Queensland Department of Mapping and Surveying, 1999).

The centenary of the expedition in 1960 resulted in a number of studies being published. Ian McLaren, president of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, published two papers. One was a biography of Wills<sup>210</sup> published after McLaren's visit to Wills' birthplace in Devon. The other was the address McLaren gave to the Royal Historical Society of Victoria as retiring president.<sup>211</sup> The address was a comprehensive and well-researched look at the events leading to the establishment of the Expedition, and while it had no new findings it did include a brief overview of the relief expeditions, which is an area generally neglected in the literature. Also in 1960, Kathleen Fitzpatrick gave a controversial speech to the RSV which shifted blame away from the traditional scapegoats of Brahe and Wright and placed it firmly onto Burke and the RSV itself<sup>212</sup>. Fitzpatrick, an Associate Professor of history at the University of Melbourne, looked at the relationship between the VEE and the RSV, particularly the EC's role. She questioned Burke's leadership, particularly his motivations and use of provisions and livestock, and she believed the way the VEE was established and its ill-defined aims led to its fatal conclusion. Fitzpatrick's assessment was the most perceptive to date. Rather than apportion blame as a result of decisions made during the Expedition, she questioned the reasons these decisions were made. Her inspiration came from a 1958 undergraduate paper by Margaret Muller.<sup>213</sup> Fitzpatrick intended expanding this paper into a book, but Alan Moorehead went to print first, publishing *Cooper's Creek* in 1963. This book claimed to be the first "fully documented account of the story ... ever written".<sup>214</sup>

Moorehead spent most of his adult life in Europe, but a visit to Australia in 1952 encouraged him to write about important events in Australia's history. *Gallipoli* was published in 1957 and Sidney Nolan then convinced him to study the VEE.<sup>215</sup> The research and writing were done predominantly at Moorehead's home in Italy and the book was researched, written and at the printers within twelve months.<sup>216</sup> Moorehead's reputation and journalistic style meant the book received good reviews and few journalists questioned his research. The geographer and historian Marcel Arousseau did.<sup>217</sup> While complimenting Moorehead on an account that was straightforward and unbiased, he disagreed with some of Moorehead's conclusions and doubted he had added much beyond the conclusions of the Commission in 1862.

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<sup>210</sup> Ian Francis McLaren, 'The Victorian Exploring Expedition and Relieving Expeditions, 1860-1: The Burke and Wills tragedy', *Victorian Historical Magazine*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (1959).

<sup>211</sup> Ian Francis McLaren, 'William John Wills 1834-1861', *Victorian Historical Magazine*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (1962).

<sup>212</sup> Fitzpatrick, 'Burke & Wills'.

<sup>213</sup> Margaret L. Muller, 'The background to the Burke and Wills Expedition of 1860' (Honours thesis, University of Melbourne, 1958).

<sup>214</sup> Moorehead, *Cooper's Creek*, Liner notes.

<sup>215</sup> Tom Pocock, *Alan Moorehead* (London: Bodley Head, 1990).

<sup>216</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 303.

<sup>217</sup> Marcel Arousseau, 'Books in review: The Burke and Wills Expedition', *Meanjin Quarterly: a review of arts and letters in Australia*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (1964).





Figure 14: Sidney Nolan, 'Burke and Wills at the Gulf' 1962.  
© NGV114859, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Nolan used Burke and Wills as his inspiration several times between 1948–1985. The early paintings influenced Moorehead and he used one of Nolan's first images, 'Burke and Wills' (1948), (see: Figure 98), as the cover for the first edition of *Cooper's Creek*. The image above was one of several depicting Burke and Wills at the Gulf which influenced Manning Clark while he was researching his chapter on the Expedition. Nolan's final series of Expedition paintings was done in 1985 after he visited Cooper Creek for the first time in 1984 as the official artist to Graeme Clifford's movie, *Burke and Wills*.

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Later that decade, Manning Clark planned to conclude volume three of his *History of Australia*<sup>218</sup> with the story of Burke and Wills.<sup>219</sup> In the end, he devoted a chapter in volume four to the Expedition.<sup>220</sup> Clark was also influenced by Nolan, having been mesmerised by his images of Burke and Wills on camels at the Gulf (see Figure 14)<sup>221</sup> and Clark visited many of the Expedition's sites as part of his research. The story of his "beloved Burke and Wills" encapsulated the essence of what Clark wanted *A History of Australia* to capture, "a story of failure set in a primeval landscape that stretched on forever".<sup>222</sup> Clark's biographer, Mark McKenna, suggests his account of the Expedition was "one of his most evocative set pieces"<sup>223</sup> but, typically for Clark, archival research took second

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<sup>218</sup> Charles Manning Hope Clark, *A history of Australia* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press). 6 vols. 1962-1986.

<sup>219</sup> Mark McKenna, *An eye for eternity: the life of Manning Clark* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2011), 477.

<sup>220</sup> Charles Manning Hope Clark, *A history of Australia: Volume 4 - The earth abideth for ever 1851-1888* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1978), Chapter 8: Glory, Folly and Chance, 144-162.

<sup>221</sup> The Nolan paintings were exhibited at the 'Sidney Nolan: Retrospective Exhibition: Paintings from 1937-1967' at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 13 September to 29 October 1967. Clark wrote to Nolan several times expressing his admiration for his art and how it had influenced his research and writing. McKenna, *Eye for eternity*, 477-478.

<sup>222</sup> McKenna, *Eye for eternity*, 476-488.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 484.

place to imagination and emotion.<sup>224</sup> Clark relied heavily on Moorehead, while other details were insights of his visits to the Cooper and the Gulf, with whole paragraphs referenced with a single footnote “Personal visit to the site, 1975”.<sup>225</sup> In addition to the often quoted line about Burke suffering from “attacks of the sillies”,<sup>226</sup> Clark repeated Furphy’s claim that Burke wore a top hat during the Expedition, imagined that he called his faithful deputy ‘Wil’, announced that Burke was a prude who objected to the camels fornicating, muddled the chronology with regards to Burke’s appointment, Stuart’s competing expedition, the burial of the instruments at the Plant Camp and Howitt’s finding of King, erroneously claimed that the foreman, Charles Ferguson, resigned because he was put on short rations, and completely failed to realise that Becker died on the Expedition, stating instead that he resigned at Menindee and returned to Melbourne. To Clark none of this detail mattered; his interest was telling his readers of “Burke’s swellishness”, savage rages, rash impulses, wild decisions, and that Burke had “no bump for locality”, but did have “the huge eyes of a desperate man”.<sup>227</sup>

In 1977, Tom Bergin, veterinary and curator of mammals at Taronga Park Zoo, postulated that Burke may have survived had he crossed the desert in the cooler winter months. He believed that camels were unsuited to the Tropics during the wet season when their large feet would become stuck in the mud. The VEE was the first major Australian expedition to use camels and Bergin felt Burke had concentrated too much on their ability to survive without water and not considered the monsoon conditions he would experience in the Gulf.<sup>228</sup> In fact, on the trip from Cooper Creek to the Gulf, Burke had been fortunate with the weather and had found ample water. There had been few delays searching for water, which was opportune as it would have been a more difficult prospect with camels than with horses, due to the reluctance of camels to rise once stopped. Burke was, therefore, free to march all day with few distractions and would have expected endurance and stamina from the camels, based on Landells’ claim of riding them for 50 miles a day while in Peshawar.<sup>229</sup> Bergin set out to prove his theory by walking the 1,600 miles from Cooper Creek to the Gulf and back with camels. Bergin, his three-man team and seven camels took two days fewer than Burke to reach the Gulf, but the fast pace meant the camels rapidly lost condition and showed symptoms of ‘founder’.<sup>230</sup> Bergin

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<sup>224</sup> Ellis controversially critiqued volume one of Clark’s *A History of Australia* as “history without facts”. Malcolm Ellis, ‘History Without Facts’, *Bulletin*, 22 September 1962.

<sup>225</sup> Charles Manning Hope Clark, *A history of Australia: Volume 4 - The earth abideth for ever 1851-1888* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1978). Chapter 8: Glory, Folly and Chance. 144-162.

<sup>226</sup> Mark McKenna, ‘Being there: The strange history of Manning Clark’, *The Monthly*, March 2007.

<sup>227</sup> Clark, *A history of Australia: Volume 4 - The earth abideth for ever 1851-1888* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1978), Chapter 8: Glory, Folly and Chance, 144-162.

<sup>228</sup> Bergin, *In the steps*, 24.

<sup>229</sup> Bergin claims Landells rode 600 miles from Peshawar to Karachi at the rate of 50 miles a day, but Landells did not visit Peshawar with camels. For a more detailed discussion of purchase of the camels, see Chapter 5.5, pages 262 to 265. Bergin, *In the steps*, 118.

<sup>230</sup> For a more detailed discussion about Bergin’s work and the effect of founder on camels, see Chapter 5, page 287. Bergin did not state how much weight each camel carried on his 1977 trip, nor how their loads

abandoned the attempt at the half-way point, having shown that irrespective of the season, Burke had travelled too fast with the camels. The use of camels on the Expedition is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Bergin then went on to produce an MA thesis at the University of New England<sup>231</sup> which studied the reasons for the deaths of the explorers and analysed the Commission and apportioning of blame. He was the first historian to challenge the findings of the Commission generally and show they were politically motivated. Bergin demonstrated that the Commission omitted to attribute a cause of death to Burke and Wills in order to avoid closer examination of the issues relating to transport and provisioning, and, therefore, minimise the blame directed at the EC and the government. He further showed the Commission did concentrate on blaming the two junior officers, Wright and Brahe, who had little chance to defend themselves against overwhelming public opinion. Bergin explains that the Commission's frame of reference was limited to establishing the cause of the sufferings and death of Burke and Wills, but he fails to analyse why only these two were included in the Inquiry. Bergin attributes this to "the class-consciousness of the Victorian era"<sup>232</sup> that deemed only the death of the Expedition's officers to be investigated but then does not explain why Becker's death was not investigated.

In 1978, art historian Marjorie Tipping produced an MA Thesis on Becker's life and work.<sup>233</sup> Tipping followed this a year later with a book.<sup>234</sup> Becker was somewhat of an enigma: at 52 he was the oldest participant and he was the only member of the RSV on the Expedition. Tipping, an authority on Becker's life, portrayed him as a talented and gentle man, who diligently recorded the wildlife and scenery, despite being made to perform gruelling manual labour. Tipping believes that had he been a younger and fitter man, he would have been suitably qualified as a scientific leader.

While the Expedition had been covered regularly, though not extensively, in print, it received little attention in visual media. So it was surprising when, in October 1985, two films were released, each apparently unaware of the other. The \$9.3 million blockbuster *Burke and Wills*, starring Jack Thompson and Nigel Havers, attempted to recreate the period with accurate costumes and on-

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compared to Burke's. Bergin's water requirements would have been significantly less than Burke's as he travelled in the winter. Nevertheless, Bergin was forced to leave some provisions behind at the start of his trip (bacon and dried meat), so one would assume his camels were reasonably well loaded. Bergin, *In the steps*, 23.

<sup>231</sup> Bergin, 'Courage and corruption'.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>233</sup> Marjorie Tipping, 'The life and work of Ludwig Becker (1808-1861): With a critical analysis of his Australian oeuvre and an appreciation of his contribution to artistic and scientific developments in Victoria' (MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 1978).

<sup>234</sup> Marjorie Tipping (ed.), *Ludwig Becker: Artist and naturalist with the Burke and Wills expedition* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press on behalf of the Library Council of Victoria, 1979).

location film shoots.<sup>235</sup> The Expedition was depicted as a politically fuelled land grab for Victoria. However, in a move that replicated Clune's earlier depiction, artistic licence was used to exclude the RSV from the film. The funding of the expedition was shown coming entirely from Ambrose Kyte, who despite his anonymity at the time of the expedition and Irish heritage, is depicted as a greedy Yorkshire-man who masterminds Burke's race across the continent under the guise of scientific advancement. While the critics discussed the characterisation and use of landscape, the historical accuracy of the film was never questioned.<sup>236</sup>

The second film, *Wills and Burke*, was a spoof, a low budget production filmed in a quarry in country Victoria.<sup>237</sup> Despite the film being savaged by the critics, Bonyhady correctly surmises it "revealed a much surer understanding of the expedition than its more pretentious rival".<sup>238</sup>

The most comprehensive assessment of the Expedition to be published was art historian Tim Bonyhady's *Melbourne to Myth*. Bonyhady set out to write about the German involvement in the Expedition as part of the scientific development of the colony. However, the book he published examined an Expedition that put Germans and Irish together in an attempt to win glory for Victoria. The work was very well researched, although Bonyhady's claims to be the first person to have made a comprehensive study of the archives of the RSV<sup>239</sup> surprised historians like Tipping and Fitzpatrick. His analysis of the Expedition avoided a physical account of the workings of the Expedition and equally avoided merely critiquing the explorers' journals. While there is a strong focus on the workings of the RSV and the German contribution, the Expedition is very much treated as an isolated historical event. The main area of study in this work is the creation of the heroic myth, the effect that has had on Australian society and the way it has evolved over time. When reviewing this work, Tipping found little to criticise and felt Bonyhady had placed the "metamorphosis from fact to legend in historical context".<sup>240</sup>

The 'Bush Tucker Man', Les Hiddins, included the Expedition in his book and television series *Stories of Exploration and Survival*.<sup>241</sup> Hiddins' army career involved the collection and identification of bush foods for army survival purposes and resulted in his comprehensive knowledge of Aboriginal food sources. Hiddins' interpretation of the Expedition is not particularly comprehensive, but it is

<sup>235</sup> Graeme Clifford, 'Burke and Wills [film]', ed. Graeme Clifford (Hoyts Edgley, 1985).

<sup>236</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 310.

<sup>237</sup> Philip Dalkin, 'The Wacky World of Wills & Burke [film]', ed. Bob Weis (Greater Union, 1985). The film, originally named *Wills and Burke*, was rebadged as *The Wacky World of Wills and Burke* to distinguish it from the larger budget movie released at the same time.

<sup>238</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 310.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>240</sup> Marjorie Tipping, 'Back of Burke', *Overland*, Vol. 127 (1992): 78-81.

<sup>241</sup> Les Hiddins, *Stories of Exploration and Survival* (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Corporation Books, 1996); 'The Great Misadventure', *Stories of Exploration and Survival* (Sydney: ABC TV), Episode 3, 22 June 1996.

unique as it combines the traditional 'heroic explorer' view with an appreciation of the Aboriginal culture that existed on the Cooper in 1860. The interaction between the explorers and Aboriginal people is still an area that has only recently been the subject of research beyond the continual portrayal of stereotypes.

In 1997, William Henry, a distant relative of Burke and a native of Burke's home of Galway, believed the town had neglected to celebrate its famous son and so released the only biography of Burke.<sup>242</sup> While Henry's history of the Burke family in Ireland was well researched, the facts pertaining to the expedition were sketchy at best. Henry stated the book was not meant to be a study of the VEE, yet devoted two-thirds of the 127 pages to the story. Burke was portrayed as a dashing and courageous leader who "rose to the challenge...[of] the great test"<sup>243</sup> and few, if any, of his decisions were questioned. No doubt Henry was writing for a local audience, but his study makes him an apologist for Burke.

More recently, and published to coincide with the Expedition's sesquicentenary, biographies of Wills<sup>244</sup>, King<sup>245</sup> and Becker<sup>246</sup> were released. Van der Kiste, a prolific author who lives in Devon near Wills' birthplace of Totnes, claimed his biography of Wills was "a gripping tale of human endeavour".<sup>247</sup> However he cited just two primary sources and generally just reworked one of them – Dr Wills' 1863 book.<sup>248</sup> The genealogy of the Wills family and the history of Devon was excellent, but the story of the Expedition was stilted.

Ulster journalist Eric Villiers set out to write a feature article on King for the *Belfast Newsletter*, but during the course of his research uncovered more material than he expected. He realised little was known about King and his character and motivation had been misrepresented in his home in Ulster.<sup>249</sup> Villiers noted that it was not unusual for ex-British soldiers like Burke and King to be excluded from Ireland's history, and published a book which celebrated King as an intelligent, well-educated Expedition member, whose contribution to the successful crossing of the continent was deliberately overlooked by the RSV and the government of Victoria in order to protect Burke's reputation.

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<sup>242</sup> William Henry, *The shimmering waste: The life and times of Robert O'Hara Burke* (Galway, Ireland: W. Henry Publisher, 1997).

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>244</sup> John van der Kiste, *William John Wills: Pioneer of the Australian Outback* (Stroud: History Press, 2011).

<sup>245</sup> Eric Villiers, *John King: Ireland's Forgotten Explorer, Australia's First Hero* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2012).

<sup>246</sup> Martin Edmond, *The Supply Party: Ludwig Becker on the Burke and Wills expedition* (Adelaide: East Street Publications, 2009).

<sup>247</sup> van der Kiste, *William John Wills*, Liner notes.

<sup>248</sup> Wills, *Successful exploration*.

<sup>249</sup> Villiers, *John King*.

Of the three biographies, Villiers' is the most comprehensive and uses a reasonably comprehensive selection of primary sources. All three biographies have good local history and genealogy, but their depictions of the Expedition are lacklustre and show limited understanding of the environment in which the VEE operated. These books were written for an overseas audience and were more about telling a local history story than the story of the Expedition.

New Zealand writer Martin Edmond's interest in Becker was unrelated to the VEE but, before writing his biography, Edmond admitted that "it didn't seem possible to understand either Becker or the Burke and Wills story without traversing the actual country in which it unfolded".<sup>250</sup> Edmond decided to visit Becker's grave on the Bulloo River in south-west Queensland, which was "a trip into the heart of a country that still appears delusive, if not actually dangerous".<sup>251</sup> While Edmond's desire to know the country better was commendable, his dreary and diffident depiction of the country was in stark contrast to Becker's experience. Edmond grudgingly suffered the harshness of remote area travel in an air-conditioned four-wheel drive, with overnight stops in motels and lunches in roadhouses, while Becker, who died on the Expedition, suffered hardship and privation in silence while simultaneously embracing the beauty and harshness of nature in true Humboldtian fashion. Rather bizarrely, after driving 2,219 kilometres from Melbourne, Edmond turned around less than 50 kilometres from Becker's grave and went home.<sup>252</sup>

The latest popular release was in 2002 when BBC reporter Sarah Murgatroyd published the narrative *Dig Tree*.<sup>253</sup> Just as forty years earlier Moorehead had written for an international audience, so did Murgatroyd. Released under various guises to appeal to the different colonial histories of the US and UK (in the UK the book was called *The extraordinary story of the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition* and in the US it was *The story of bravery, insanity and the race to discover Australia's wild frontier*), the book claimed to "reveal new and historic scientific evidence"<sup>254</sup> but merely committed to print the findings of Bergin's 1982 thesis. She states that Burke was instructed to divide his party and that the division at Menindee may not have been Burke's idea, although this statement is not backed with any evidence. Murgatroyd further revealed "conclusive evidence [that] there had always been a secret plot to divide the party at Cooper's Creek"<sup>255</sup> based on a letter written by the government geologist Alfred Selwyn. While he was searching for a second surveyor, Selwyn had written, "the party will have to divide after leaving Cooper's Creek". Murgatroyd interprets this to mean the EC never expected the entire party to cross the continent, leaving Burke free to "make a dash" for the north coast. However, the second surveyor had been proposed by the EC as an assistant to Wills in order to allow him more time to

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<sup>250</sup> Edmond, *Supply party*, 4.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>253</sup> Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree*.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, Liner notes.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

pursue his scientific investigations. Also, Burke's instructions had been quite specific about establishing a depot on the Cooper as the base for his operation which would naturally have involved a division of the party.

Murgatroyd's book has sold well and has become a cornerstone which is regularly referenced and quoted by heritage consultants, educators and government departments. Unfortunately, because Murgatroyd did not reference her sources, it is difficult to know where some of her ideas came from (this issue is discussed further in Chapter 7). Unfortunately, Murgatroyd died shortly after the book was released and so an updated and corrected version is not possible, and the original text has been reprinted several times along with an abridged version for schools and young adults and an edition released for the sesquicentenary with a foreword by Geoffrey Blainey.<sup>256</sup> While Blainey complemented Murgatroyd's clear and lucid prose, he echoes my criticism of her hypothesis:

a few historians think she is perhaps a shade too critical, overall, of Burke and Wills. In being critical, however, she is in a long tradition. It is easier for each of us to judge explorers harshly when we are sitting in a cool library or a Land Rover than if we were walking into unknown and arid country, far from help, and with no map in front of us.<sup>257</sup>

When considering the more recent work of Leahy<sup>258</sup> and Joyce and McCann<sup>259</sup>, Blainey speculated that Murgatroyd "would today, if she were alive, modify several pages of her story in the light of the latest findings".<sup>260</sup>

Recent research, carried out after *The Dig Tree* appeared, reveals that the expedition in one vital aspect was not such a failure. One of its major aims was to advance the sciences: after all, it was organised by a scientific academy, the Royal Society of Victoria. It included experts in astronomy, geology, botany and other sciences, and many of the official instructions given to them were fulfilled diligently. ... Eventually in 2011 the diligent and systematic conclusions of a group of scientists were published in the eye-opening book, *Burke and Wills: The Scientific Legacy of the Victorian Exploring Expedition*, edited by E.B. Joyce and D.A. McCann.<sup>261</sup>

The circumstances leading to the publication of *Burke and Wills: The scientific legacy of the Victorian Exploring Expedition*<sup>262</sup> have been described in the Introduction (see page 21). The book was awarded a commendation in the Royal Historical Society of Victoria's Collaborative Community History Award and was well-received as a contribution "to the historiography of Burke and Wills" and "a valuable example of how old records can be used to address current scientific topics".<sup>263</sup> There was surprise that the Expedition had generated any scientific data at all and the authors were "to be congratulated for putting a wrong to rights – in an erudite but immensely readable book".<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Sarah Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree* (Introduced by Geoffrey Blainey) (Melbourne: Text Classics, 2012).

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>258</sup> Leahy, 'Locating the 'Plant Camp'', 1-12.

<sup>259</sup> McCann and Joyce, *The scientific legacy*.

<sup>260</sup> Murgatroyd, *Dig Tree* (2012), xi-xiii.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> McCann and Joyce, *The scientific legacy*.

<sup>263</sup> Arthur Lucas, *Reviews in Australian Studies* Vol. 7, No. 1 (2013).

<sup>264</sup> David Mabberley, *Australasian Plant Conservation*, Vol. 21, No. 1, June-August (2012): 32.

A complementary sesquicentennial project, initiated by the RSV and the University of Ballarat<sup>265</sup> and funded by an ARC Linkage Grant, was a second CSIRO Publications book, *The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills: Forgotten Narratives*<sup>266</sup>. The authors represented a range of disciplines, including anthropology, art history, linguistics and ethnobotany, and the book details the Aboriginal contribution to the Expedition and highlights the VEE's moral tale as their "failure to profit from Aboriginal expertise."<sup>267</sup> This book received generally good reviews, although the quality of the chapters was noted to be "uneven", with some of the chapters being "very good indeed", some being reprinted or reworked from earlier publications and some chapters considered "flawed".<sup>268</sup> Chapter 6 of this thesis examines Aboriginal interactions with the Expedition.

Given this recent level of literary attention, when Peter Menkhorst was asked to review Michael Cathcart's 2014 book *Starvation in a Land of Plenty: Wills' diary of the fateful Burke and Wills Expedition*<sup>269</sup> he asked: "do we need another book about Burke and Wills?"<sup>270</sup> Menkhorst noted Cathcart's book was different to previous works, as it concentrated "on the persona of Wills" rather than on Burke or 'Burke and Wills'.<sup>271</sup> Cathcart set out to show that although Burke and Wills "were yoked together by tragedy"<sup>272</sup> they were in fact very different individuals and he suggests "Wills is denied his rightful place in history".<sup>273</sup> He advanced a theory, initiated by George Bennet of the School of Surveying and Geospatial Engineering at the University of New South Wales in 2003<sup>274</sup> and advanced by Cathcart's colleague Frank Leahy in 2007<sup>275</sup> and 2010<sup>276</sup>. This hypothesis, that Wills was a competent surveyor and explorer, is examined in detail in Chapter 7. Although Don Gibb thought Cathcart's title was "an appropriate epitaph to the tragedy/folly"<sup>277</sup>, Menkhorst disagreed, and, rather controversially, commented:

One theme, laboured in the title, with which I do not concur, is that Burke, Wills, and King ought to have been able to survive their eleven-week ordeal at Cooper's Creek because the area was a 'land of plenty'.<sup>278</sup>

<sup>265</sup> The University of Ballarat is now Federation University.

<sup>266</sup> Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*.

<sup>267</sup> Tiffany Shellam, 'Book Reviews', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 38 (2014): 221.

<sup>268</sup> Hilary Howes, 'Reviews', *Historical Records of Australian Science*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2012): 350-351.

<sup>269</sup> Cathcart, *Land of plenty*.

<sup>270</sup> Peter Menkhorst, 'Three pale strangers', *Australian Book Review* No. 368, January-February (2015): 50-51.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>272</sup> Cathcart, *Land of plenty*, 2.

<sup>273</sup> Helen Stagg, 'Starvation in a land of plenty' [Book Review], *Journal of Australian Colonial History* Vol. 17 July (2015): 211-213.

<sup>274</sup> Burke and Wills Outback Conference 2003, *The Inaugural Burke & Wills Outback Conference: Cloncurry 2003: a collation of presentations* (Cairns: Dave Phoenix, 2005).

<sup>275</sup> Leahy, 'Locating the 'Plant Camp'.

<sup>276</sup> Frank Leahy, 'Chapter 2: William John Wills as scientist' in McCann and Joyce, *The scientific legacy*.

<sup>277</sup> Don Gibb, 'Starvation in a land of plenty', *Victorian Historical Journal*, Vol. 85, No. 2, December (2014): 362-363.

<sup>278</sup> Menkhorst, 'Three pale strangers', 51.



This post-colonial interpretation of the arid environment and Aboriginal interactions with it and the VEE is discussed further in Chapter 6.

In conclusion, the historiography of the Expedition has improved recently, but it still suffers from the continued influence of under-researched popular histories and the myths they have generated. The ongoing fascination in the story of Burke and Wills will continue in 2017 with the forthcoming publication of Peter Fitzsimons' book about the Expedition.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Peter Fitzsimons, 'The Fitz Files', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 January 2017: 20.

## 1.4 Specific areas of interest

In addition to the above-mentioned texts which studied the Expedition in general, there have been several specific issues that have prompted discussion. As with many analyses of Australian exploration, these discussions have typically focussed on geographic locations. However, unlike many other expeditions, the VEE's track was not well marked and there were few reports from settlers and surveyors of marked trees or evidence of Expedition campsites. Initially Victorian colonists were satisfied with commemorating the Expedition by means of the memorials, statues and monuments which they erected in central locations in Victorian towns and cities.<sup>280</sup>

This approach changed in the twentieth century with the emergence of a 'memorial movement'<sup>281</sup> and the focus shifted away from commemorating the deeds of individuals, and turned towards commemorating the process of exploration.<sup>282</sup> In 1890 the first monument was erected on the Expedition's track,<sup>283</sup> and in 1909 the RGSA (Qld Branch) marked the location of the Expedition's most northerly campsite. As mentioned in the previous section, Thomson located what he considered to be Burke's Camp 119 and he published a lengthy report,<sup>284</sup> illustrated with glass-plate slides he had developed in the Gulf using an upturned water-tank as a dark room.<sup>285</sup>

The grave of Charley Gray has been another area of interest which has attracted attention. Wills called the place where Gray died 'polygonum swamp'.<sup>286</sup> McKinlay found a grave which he considered to be that of a European at a place he called Lake Kadhibaerri,<sup>287</sup> which King suspected might be Gray's grave.<sup>288</sup> Early studies by Morphett<sup>289</sup> and Hambridge<sup>290</sup> analysed journals and newspaper reports without visiting the area. Later research included field-work, with Graeme Wheeler

<sup>280</sup> See: Dave Phoenix, 'Chapter 7: A Monumental Task' in Burke and Wills Outback Conference 2003, *Burke and Wills Conference Proceedings 2003*.

<sup>281</sup> Charles Richard Long, 'Monuments Local Histories and Commemoration Days' in *Save Australia: a plea for the right use of our flora and fauna* edited by Sir James Barrett (Melbourne: Macmillan & Co.), 1925; Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and collectors: the antiquarian imagination in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996), 158.

<sup>282</sup> Graeme Davison, *The use and abuse of Australian history* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 43-45.

<sup>283</sup> William Alexander Sanderson, 'Royal Park', *Victorian Historical Magazine*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1932): 109-139.

<sup>284</sup> The location of Camp 119 as determined by James Park Thomson in 1909 has been disputed by retired Queensland surveying associate Kevin Ian Andrews, pers. comm., 2013.

<sup>285</sup> Thomson, 'Expedition to the Gulf of Carpentaria'.

<sup>286</sup> William John Wills, '[James Smith's transcription of] Journey from Cooper's Creek to Carpentaria and return', ex2009-003, Box 2083/1a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria. See also: *Argus*, 7 November 1861: 5-6.

<sup>287</sup> John McKinlay, *McKinlay's journal of exploration in the interior of Australia (Burke Relief Expedition). With three maps* (Melbourne: F.F. Bailliere, c.1863).

<sup>288</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 988 to John King.

<sup>289</sup> George Cummins Morphett, 'Gray's grave at Lake Massacre', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (SA Branch)*, Vol. 40 (1939): 12-42.

<sup>290</sup> Clive Melville Hambridge, 'McKinlay's Lake Massacre', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (SA Branch)*, Vol. 44 (1943): 35-42.

visiting the site in 1982,<sup>291</sup> followed by Roger Collier the year after. Collier was convinced his 1983 discoveries proved Gray was buried at Lake Massacre<sup>292</sup> although David Corke disagrees and his later work, though not conclusive, places Gray's grave at Lake Amagooranie.<sup>293</sup> The debate was rekindled in 2006 after a Department of Environment and Heritage (South Australia) report<sup>294</sup> acceded to political and departmental pressure and suggested the removing Lake Massacre from the South Australian State Heritage Register.<sup>295</sup> There is a more detailed discussion about Gray's death in Chapter 4.5, pages 215-217.

More recently there has been archaeological interest in locating Camp 46R, the 'Plant Camp' where Wills buried his instruments.<sup>296</sup> Several groups of amateur researchers have visited the site and between 1984 and 2009 "at least five collections of artefacts have been recovered".<sup>297</sup> The inherent secrecy of amateur research means very little has been published about their findings. In 2007 the discovery of artefacts claimed to have belonged to Wills was announced<sup>298</sup> and two years later an archaeological dig was conducted and the site was placed on the Queensland State Heritage List.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Graeme Wheeler, *Walk the timeless land* (Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1976); Matt Abraham, 'Cairn is Monument to Present and Past', *Advertiser*, 5 June 1982: 6.

<sup>292</sup> Roger Collier, 'The Lake Massacre expedition', *The [Melbourne] Walker*, Vol. 56 (1985); Lindsay Murdoch and Roger Collier, 'The quest for Gray's Grave', *Age*, 21 May 1983: Saturday Extra, 1-2.

<sup>293</sup> David G. Corke, 'Riddles in the sand', *Geographical Magazine*, Vol. 63, No. 12 (1991): 36-41; 'Where did they bury Charlie Gray?', *Victorian Historical Journal*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (1994).

<sup>294</sup> Department of Environment & Heritage (South Australia), *Heritage of the Birdsville and Strzelecki Tracks (Region 13)* (Adelaide: Historical Research Pty. Ltd., 2002), 94.

<sup>295</sup> Roger Collier, 'Gray's grave at Lake Massacre revisited', (Melbourne: R. Collier [for] South Australian Department of Environment and Heritage, 2006).

<sup>296</sup> Edwin James Welch, 'An Explorer's Plant: Will It Ever be discovered?', *The World's News*, 5 March 1910: 11.

<sup>297</sup> Nicholas Hadnutt, 'Identifying Camp 46R: the Burke and Wills 'Plant Camp'' (BA Honours thesis, School of Social Science, University of Queensland, 2010).

<sup>298</sup> University of Melbourne, 'Burke and Wills give up their long lost navigational instruments after more than a quarter of a century of University of Melbourne research' [Media Release] (Melbourne: University of Melbourne), 12 June 2008; Penelope DeBelle, 'Signs said dig here for Burke and Wills' tools, says researcher', *Age*, 12 June 2008; 'Discovery sheds light on Burke and Wills', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 June 2008: 3; Ray Holmes, 'The Search for and Discovery of Burke and Wills' Plant Camp 46R', A paper presented at the Burke and Wills Historical Society biennial conference, Melbourne 2009.

<sup>299</sup> Penelope DeBelle, 'Bid to grant 'Burke and Wills' campsite heritage protection', *Age*, 13 June 2008; 'Burke and Wills' last campsite at Plant Camp vandalised', *Advertiser*, 12 December 2008; Leanne Edmestone, 'Bans on explorer campsite', *Courier Mail*, 13 December 2008: 16; 'Burke, Wills safeguard', *Sunday Mail*, 14 December 2008: 5; 'Burke, Wills camp rescue', *Sunday Tasmanian*, 14 December 2008: 4; 'State moves to protect explorers' last dig', *Time & Place: Sustainable Heritage* (Brisbane: Queensland Heritage Council), January 2009.

Since then, several papers,<sup>300</sup> reports<sup>301</sup> and an Honours thesis<sup>302</sup> have been produced, but the authenticity of the site and artefacts is still uncertain.<sup>303</sup>

The emphasis on identifying Burke's camps, particularly locating blazed trees, combined with the 'treasure hunting' appeal of Wills' instruments at the Plant Camp, has dominated the literature on the Expedition's route, at the expense of analysing the landscape and its influence on the Expedition.

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<sup>300</sup> Leahy, 'Locating the 'Plant Camp''; Anthony Simmons and Carl Porter, 'Up a creek with a broken chronometer: Managing the legacy of the Burke and Wills Plant Camp', Australian Archaeological Association annual conference, Noosa, 2008.

<sup>301</sup> Eddie S. Cichocki, Senior Surveyor SGV and Colin J. Hall, Senior Surveyor SGV, 'Calibration report on spirit level held at the State Library of Victoria' (Melbourne: Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment), 25 November 2008; Jeanne Harris, 'Artefact Report for Bilpa Morea Claypan', Report produced for Cosmos Archaeology, Sydney, 2009; Michael N. Westaway, Nicholas Hadnut and D. Hacklin, 'A Summary of Historic Artefacts Collected During Archaeological Investigations at the Bilpa Morea Claypan', (Brisbane: Queensland Museum, 2009).

<sup>302</sup> Hadnutt, 'Identifying Camp 46R'.

<sup>303</sup> Chris Tangey, 'Letter to the Editor', *Age*, 14 June 2008.

## 1.5 Relief Expeditions

By the middle of 1861, the lack of intelligence from the Expedition caused concern and relief expeditions were mounted. Victoria organised two land expeditions<sup>304</sup> and one maritime expedition,<sup>305</sup> South Australia<sup>306</sup> and Queensland<sup>307</sup> mounted one land expedition each and there was one privately funded maritime expedition.<sup>308</sup>

There has been very little literature published relating to the relief expeditions and no critical assessments of these events have been made. Most historical texts include details of the relief expeditions as addenda to the main story as a way of closing the chapter and the published literature is mainly biographies of the expedition leaders. The most complete accounts of the relief expeditions are contained in Tenison-Woods 1865 work<sup>309</sup> and Calvert's 1895 work.<sup>310</sup> While Tenison-Woods had been very critical of the operation of the VEE, he was far more pragmatic with the relief expeditions, describing the daily discoveries of the expeditions with little comment. He praised Howitt's efficiency and prudence in executing his task, stating Howitt had carried out his task "with less fuss and inconvenience...than was ever seen in exploration before".<sup>311</sup>

Howitt went on to become a renowned geologist and anthropologist and he published several books about Aboriginal culture,<sup>312</sup> but received little publicity for the foundational anthropological work he undertook during his second expedition to Cooper Creek in 1862. Howitt regularly presented talks about his recollections of the VEE and his role in finding King.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> Alfred William Howitt's 1861 'Victorian Contingent Party' (Melbourne to Cooper Creek) and Frederick Walker's 'Victorian Relief Expedition' (Rockhampton to Gulf of Carpentaria).

<sup>305</sup> Captain William Henry Norman commanded H.M.C.S. *Victoria* from Hobson's Bay to the Albert River.

<sup>306</sup> John McKinlay's 'South Australian Burke Relief Expedition', Adelaide to the Gulf then Bowen.

<sup>307</sup> William Landsborough's 'Queensland Relief Expedition' by S.S. *Firefly* under Captain Thomas Kirby, from Brisbane to the Albert River, then overland to Melbourne.

<sup>308</sup> James Orkney's S.S. *Sir Charles Hotham* from Sandridge to Brisbane under Captain Ebenezer Wyse.

<sup>309</sup> Tenison-Woods, *Discovery and exploration*.

<sup>310</sup> Calvert, *Exploration of Australia*.

<sup>311</sup> Tenison-Woods, *Discovery and exploration*, 429.

<sup>312</sup> Alfred William Howitt, 'Notes on the Aborigines of Cooper's Creek', in *The Aborigines of Victoria*, ed. Robert Brough Smyth (1878); 'Note as to descent in the Dieri tribe', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 19 (1889); 'The Dieri and other kindred tribes of Central Australia', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 20 (1890); *The native tribes of south-east Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1904).

<sup>313</sup> Alfred William Howitt, 'Explorations in Central Australia and the Burke and Wills Expedition', *Gippsland Times*, 15 March 1870; 'Australia and the Burke and Wills Expedition', *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 11 July 1874: 1-3; 'Exploration in Central Australia', *Gippsland Times*, 13 May 1876: 3; 'Explorations in Central Australia', *Gippsland Times*, 18 August 1880: 3; 'The Burke and Wills Expedition: Reminiscences of the Rescuer', *Argus*, 16 April 1890: 7; 'Reminiscences of Central Australia', *Alma Mater*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1898); 'An episode in the history of Australian exploration', *Journal of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science*, Vol. 8 (1901); 'Personal reminiscences of Central Australia and the Burke and Wills Expedition: President's inaugural address', *Journal of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science* (1907).

Howitt's surveyor, Edwin James Welch, became nostalgic in later life and, after Howitt's death in 1908, he published a number of articles in the Sydney newspapers about the Expedition, many of which contained unique insights into the rescue of King.<sup>314</sup> He also drafted a manuscript, which he submitted to Angus & Robertson, but it was never published.<sup>315</sup>

Frederick Walker's expedition has received very little attention.<sup>316</sup> William Landsborough's expedition has similarly been overlooked. His expedition was praised for completing the second European crossing of Australia from the Gulf to Melbourne, but shortly afterwards, Landsborough was criticised for diverting his search away from Burke's tracks to search for pastoral land for himself.<sup>317</sup> Gwen Trundle produced an unpublished biography and Gordon Landsborough's descendants posthumously published his biography.<sup>318</sup>

Of all the relief expeditions, John McKinlay's South Australian Burke Relief Expedition has received the most attention. A paper of his achievements was delivered to the Cowal Society in Glasgow<sup>319</sup> in 1881 and on the centenary of the expedition in 1961, C.L. Alexander presented a similar paper in Australia.<sup>320</sup> Recently Kim Lockwood has compiled a biography which was comprehensive

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<sup>314</sup> Edwin James Welch's articles in *The World's News*: 'Homing pigeons with false tails', 11 July 1908: 10; 'An Explorer's Plant: Will it ever be discovered?', 5 March 1910: 11; 'Dry Plate Photography', 1 October 1910: 10; 'How King got back to Melbourne', 15 October 1910: 10; 'Tragic fate of Charley Gray', 12 November 1910: 10; 'Aboriginal message carriers', 5 August 1911: 10; 'Christmas with a Mad Camel', 23 December 1911: 8; 'A vicious camel: and a mangled limb', 3 May 1913: 10; 'Aboriginal Artists and Cave Drawings', 17 January 1914: 10; 'History in the Making', 18 September 1915: 10; 'The Victorian explorers', 25 December 1915: 10; 'Black Magicians: Aboriginal graves in Stony Desert', 15 April 1916: 10; 'In Camp at Yantrawunta', 15 January 1916: 10. Welch died in 1916, and between 1920 and 1925 additional articles were published by his step-daughter, Elizabeth 'Bessie' Balclutha Stewart-Welch with the by-line "from my father's journal". Iain Brash, pers. comm., 2017.

<sup>315</sup> Edwin James Welch, 'The tragedy of Cooper's Creek, being the story of the Burke and Wills Exploring Expedition', ML MSS 314, State Library of New South Wales.

<sup>316</sup> William T. Johnston, 'Frederick Walker and the Native Mounted Police', *Cairns Historical Society Bulletin*, No. 193, December (1975).

<sup>317</sup> During a reading of the Pastoral Occupation Bill on 14 May 1862, Queensland's Colonial Treasurer, Robert Ramsey Mackenzie, accused several explorers of looking for pastoral land, see: *Yeoman and Australian Acclimatiser*, 28 May 1862; 'Landsborough's Expedition', *Courier*, 16 July 1862: 4.

<sup>318</sup> Gwen Trundle, 'William Landsborough, explorer, 1965', State Library of Queensland, unpublished manuscript; Gordon Landsborough, *In search of Burke and Wills: The story of William Landsborough, Queensland's forgotten explorer* (Mandurah: WA Equilibrium Books, 2015). See also: Thomas Welsby, 'William Landsborough: Explorer', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (1935): 296-303; William T. Johnston, 'Diedrich Henne (Botanical Collector)', *Cairns Historical Society Bulletin*, No. 133 (August 1970) and No. 134 (September 1970).

<sup>319</sup> Duncan Whyte, *Sketch of explorations by the late John M'Kinlay in the interior of Australia, 1861-2: being a paper read before the Cowal Society, October 28th 1878* (Glasgow: Aird & Coghill, 1881).

<sup>320</sup> Charles Leonard Alexander, 'John McKinlay: Explorer', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia* (SA Branch), Vol. 63 (1962): 1-22.

and well researched.<sup>321</sup> He compared McKinlay's journals with those of his men, Hodgkinson<sup>322</sup> and Davis,<sup>323</sup> to establish a comprehensive picture of the conditions of a trans-continental expedition.

Although the relief expeditions have received additional attention recently, Bergin's 1983 comment still holds true that "Each of these expeditions is of themselves worthy of study".<sup>324</sup> More research is needed to clarify the contribution the relief expeditions made to the European exploration of Australia, with Howitt's expeditions in particular being particularly deserving of further investigation.

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<sup>321</sup> Kim Lockwood, *Big John: The extraordinary adventures of John McKinlay 1819-1872* (Melbourne: State Library of Victoria, 1995).

<sup>322</sup> William Oswald Hodgkinson, 'Papers, 1861-3' Box 9265, OM91-71, State Library of Queensland; *South Australian Advertiser*, 23 November 1861: 2, 15 October 1862: 3, 25 October 1862: 4; *South Australian Register*, 15 October 1862: 2, 25 October 1862: 3; M.O. Walmsley, 'William Oswald Hodgkinson 1835-1900', *Cairns Historical Society Bulletin*, Nos. 58 & 59, January (1964).

<sup>323</sup> John Davis and William Westgarth, *Tracks of McKinlay and party across Australia by John Davis, one of the expedition - Edited from Mr Davis's manuscript journal* (London: Sampson, Low & Son & Co., 1863).

<sup>324</sup> Bergin, 'Courage and corruption', 22.

## 1.6 Summary

The explorers of the nineteenth century may not yet have been de-canonised, but their status as heroes has been challenged in late 20<sup>th</sup> century and 21<sup>st</sup> century history. Attitudes towards exploration have evolved as a result of a range of factors, the most significant being the emergence of Aboriginal history. The re-appraisal of Anglo-centric ideals may have moved historians into a post-colonial era, but not necessarily into a post-imperial one. Despite the recent decline in exploration studies, Carter has attempted to place the topic in a postcolonial context and McLaren has presented a framework which attempts to stratify bushcraft skills into an ordered progression from 1788 to 1890. The VEE and Relief Expeditions have yet to be fixed into this framework.

The early histories of the VEE were characterised by the need to alleviate guilt and apportion blame. The blame was distributed fairly evenly among the leader, the RSV and the minor members of the Expedition, although the lesser members of the Expedition felt the sting of public recrimination more severely than the major figures, the RSV and the EC. The dead explorers were turned into heroes and the EC's funereal drama and the process of canonisation served as a distraction, which effectively silenced the few people who challenged the findings of the Commission. The passage of time distanced researchers from the emotion and allowed some writers to question Burke's leadership abilities and even suggest that Wills' contribution was of little value, but the focus of blame remained steadfastly on Brahe and Wright. By the 1930s, Clune felt the pendulum had swung too far and attempted to redress the balance by re-establishing Burke as a hero. Despite the obvious inconsistencies in his book, it was used to educate and influence many generations.

The Expedition's saga endures as a result of the poignancy of the underlying human drama, and the story is regularly retold as an iconic tale. However, the process of mythologising Burke and Wills has resulted in myths being incorporated into the narrative. The minutiae become blurred as they are woven into a seemingly unending stream of blogs, articles in travel magazines, children's books, plays, songs, movies and documentaries. The story is told as a tragedy with an underlying message of the dangers of foolhardy, inexperienced Europeans venturing into the interior and ignoring Aboriginal advice. Drunken camels,<sup>325</sup> forgotten frying pans,<sup>326</sup> top hats, swell toggery, attacks of the sillies and poison ngardu act as punchlines to the moral of the story.<sup>327</sup> Bonyhady has shown how the myth has endured and has far outlived the influence of the historical events themselves. Only Bergin has

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<sup>325</sup> "Drunken camels were the bane of the Burke and Wills Expedition" Tim Flannery, *The Explorers*, (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1998), 1.

<sup>326</sup> David Greagg and Ronald Harvey, *It's true! Burke and Wills forgot the frying pan* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2005).

<sup>327</sup> Charles Manning Hope Clark, *A history of Australia Vol.1: From the earliest times to the age of Macquarie* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1962); Furphy, *Such is life*; John W. Earl and Barry V. McCleary, 'Mystery of the poisoned expedition', *Nature*, Vol. 368 (1994).



attempted substantially to challenge the myths and reappraise the facts, and he has been the first to reappportion the blame that was distributed 120 years earlier. The following chapters aim to add to that revisionist history and revisit the primary sources and place them into context in the landscape in which they were written.



# 2

## AUSTRALIAN EXPLORATION BEFORE 1860



### CONTENTS

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2.1	The concept of colonial exploration	81
2.2	Overview of early exploration	84
2.3	Exploration of the western plains & the inland rivers	86
2.4	Exploration to the north coast	96
2.5	Exploration of the arid interior & the horse-shoe barrier of salt lakes	101
2.6	Summary: Exploration of the arid interior, 1788-1851	109
2.7	A.C. Gregory's expeditions 1855-1858	110
2.8	Conclusion	113

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*Good Heavens,  
did ever man see such country !*

John Harris Browne, Expedition surgeon,  
Sturt's 'Central Australian Expedition', September 1845.

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Figure 15: Samuel Thomas Gill, 'The sandy ridges of Central Australia', c.1846.  
obj-134371152, PIC Solander Box A47 #R343, National Library of Australia.

Sturt's 1845 expedition to the Simpson Desert.

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## 2.1 The concept of colonial exploration

Exploration was a pre-requisite of the process of colonisation and therefore a part of the expansion of Empire. Because the British presence in Australia was ostensibly initiated as an answer to the convict problem and not colonisation for free settlement, it could be assumed that exploration would form only a minor part of the agenda of Phillip and subsequent Governors. However, the desire to control trade and an expectation that the convict colony would become financially self-supporting through exports, meant exploration did occur, both government-sponsored and privately-funded, and the results of these expeditions had a social, scientific, economic and environmental impact on the development of Australia.

There have been many histories of Australian exploration which take a chronological approach towards describing the tracks of the various expeditions as they spread out firstly from the convict settlement of Sydney, and then later from Moreton Bay, Swan River and Adelaide. This chronological approach was widely used in the education system and, as Stuart Macintyre comments:

When force-fed to school students, the explorers blurred into a bearded bore.<sup>328</sup>



Figure 16: Gallery of images of members of the VEE (from left: Burke, Wills, Becker, Neumayer). Reproduced from Joanna Gilmour, 'The importance of being bearded', *Portrait Magazine*, Issue 42, (2012).

This is not a criticism *per se* of the chronological approach, and in fact this chapter uses a chronological framework to analyse Australian inland exploration. However, few of the historical works go beyond the tracks of the explorers and selected quotes from their journals to explore the reasons behind mounting these expeditions, the political and financial motivations of the public servants who proposed the ventures, and the reasons the expeditions suffered the hardships and privations that accompanied surveying remote areas. One notable exception is Glen McLaren's thesis

<sup>328</sup> Stuart Macintyre, *A concise history of Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 57.

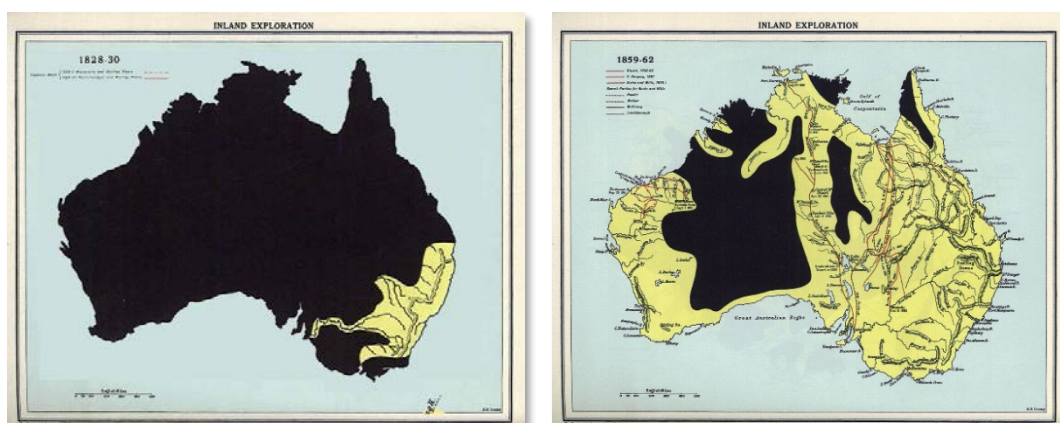


Figure 17: John George Bartholomew, *Australasian school atlas: physical, political economic and historical*. (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1919).

Maps of explorers' routes 1830 (left) and 1862 (right), showing Australia being 'discovered' by Europeans. The 'ghastly blank' is reduced as the continent is revealed to Europeans.

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which analysed the development of exploration skills that led to the advances in knowledge necessary to mount longer expeditions into more remote areas.<sup>329</sup>

This chapter reviews land exploration in Australia from 1813 to 1860 and examines the reasons expeditions were established. It analyses trends in explorers' methodologies, so that later chapters can establish the VEE's place in the framework of contemporary developments in exploration. While all Australian land exploration is considered, the main focus is on the larger, officially sanctioned desert expeditions rather than the smaller ad-hoc and private ventures whose primary motives were the acquisition of land and expansion of the pastoral industry. There is also an assessment of the various factors which motivated men to undertake exploration.<sup>330</sup> The risks associated with venturing beyond the boundaries of European occupation were not restricted to the more immediate dangers of starvation or Aboriginal attack. The success or failure of any venture would determine self-worth and impact career, salary, promotion, social status and the prospect of honours – factors about which later expedition leaders became acutely aware. Not all expedition leaders suffered privations and hardships merely to achieve fame, and scant few admitted openly to such ambition. Nevertheless, many were driven by this desire, and the accompanying knighthoods, governorships and public displays of admiration which saw statues and monuments erected in honour of achievements, were rewards more usually bestowed for military achievement.

The outcome of any particular expedition affected the terms, structure and organisation of subsequent ventures, although ultimately the leader appointed to the later expedition had a great deal

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<sup>329</sup> McLaren, 'Development of bushmanship'. See also: Glen McLaren, *Beyond Leichhardt: Bushcraft and the exploration of Australia* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1996).

<sup>330</sup> In the male dominated field of exploration, female preclusion meant appointment to an exploration party in the nineteenth century was almost exclusively a male affair.

of influence on employment and provisioning. Initially there was surprisingly little continuity in terms of personnel and therefore little continuity of experience. This changed by the 1830s and expeditions covered greater distances and traversed increasingly inhospitable terrain. In the process, exploration outcomes shifted from the 'discovery' and acquisition of pastoral land in the 'golden west' or 'Australia Felix' to 'conquering' the interior through hardship and suffering in the desert.



## 2.2 Overview of early exploration

The exploration of the Australian continent began as a maritime affair when the first Aboriginal people arrived across the sea from the Pleistocene subcontinent of Sundaland.<sup>331</sup> Subsequent arrivals by European mariners<sup>332</sup> saw the northern and western coasts mapped and traversed extensively prior to the First Fleet's arrival in 1778.<sup>333</sup> From 1606 the Dutch mariners William Janszoon and then Jan Carstenszoon had entered and charted the Gulf of Carpentaria.<sup>334</sup> In 1616 Dirk Hartog landed near Cape Inscription on what is now Dirk Hartog Island in Shark Bay, becoming the first of many Dutch mariners who arrived at the west coast due to difficulties in determining longitude.<sup>335</sup> After British colonisation, subsequent maritime exploration concentrated on surveying the coastline and charting shipping routes and hazards. Maritime explorers made limited landfall, their exploration was restricted mainly to the coastal fringe and they rarely ventured far inland.

Inland exploration by Europeans began with the settlement of Sydney Cove and was almost complete by the end of the nineteenth century. It was precipitated for different reasons to those which motivated maritime expeditions. Initially self-sufficiency and survival were the main aims of the fledgling colony. Food supplies were needed to supplement the meagre rations available and Governor Phillip dispatched exploring parties to identify pastoral opportunities. There was also a desire by the British government to find items for export in order to make the convict colony of New South Wales financially viable.

Initial progress exploring the country around Sydney town was slow and expansion was hampered by the Blue Mountains. Expedition leaders were military men, used to controlling subordinates and convicts. Human resources were not in short supply in the colony and convicts, soldiers and Marines were used as expedition assistants. Expeditions were conducted as military operations and a lack of understanding of, and empathy with, the Australian environment meant outings were limited in duration and geographical extent. Very few horses were available so men had to walk, which meant

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<sup>331</sup> Mulvaney and Kamminga, *Prehistory of Australia*, 1.

<sup>332</sup> Gavin Menzies suggests that Chinese fleets under Admiral Hong Bao and Admiral Zhou Man visited Australia in 1421, but this is generally rejected by most historians, most notably Professor Victor Prescott of the University of Melbourne. Gavin Menzies, *1421: the year China discovered the world* (London: Bantam, 2002). Others claim that French and Spanish mariners arrived in the 1500s.

<sup>333</sup> It has been suggested, based on interpretations of the Franco-Portuguese Dieppe Maps, that Portuguese mariners charted the Australian coast between 1521 and 1524.

<sup>334</sup> Jan Carstenszoon named the gulf in 1623 in honour of Pieter de Carpentier, the newly appointed Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies at Batavia.

<sup>335</sup> Dutch skipper, Hendrik Brouwer, pioneered a new route across the Indian Ocean in 1611. This was adopted by the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in 1616, with Dutch ships instructed to cross from west to east between 35°S and 44°S. Although this shortened the journey to Java considerably, difficulties in determining longitude meant a late course change to the north meant ships often encountered the west coast of Australia unintentionally.

the carrying capacity of the expeditions was reduced. On some expeditions oxen were used as pack-animals and bullock carts were used to carry supplies, which led to further difficulties negotiating rough terrain.

Pioneer societies had little time for culture and there was a lack of professional researchers in the colony. Therefore, the advancement of scientific knowledge was not a priority during this early period of exploration.<sup>336</sup> In 1798 Joseph Banks expressed his disappointment to Under-Secretary King at the neglect of exploration which had failed to discover a single article worthy of export, despite ten years of occupation.<sup>337</sup>

The restricted geographical nature of overland exploration came to an end in May 1813, when the Blue Mountains were crossed by Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson, and Governor Macquarie appointed the colony's Deputy-Surveyor, George William Evans, to ascertain the nature of the country to the west of the divide.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> McLaren, 'Development of bushmanship', 37.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>338</sup> Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson were not the first Europeans to explore or cross the Blue Mountains: Francis Barrallier led two expeditions into the Blue Mountains in 1802 and George Caley went on regular botanical excursions into the Blue Mountains.

## 2.3 Exploration of the western plains and the puzzle of the inland rivers

Governor Macquarie had taken a keen interest in the expansion of European knowledge of the Sydney area and he appointed Evans to survey a road over the mountains along the line taken by Blaxland and then to explore the land beyond Mount Blaxland. Evans made three trips over the mountains between 1813 and 1815 and was the first European to map and name a river flowing westward into the interior.<sup>339</sup> This river he named the Lachlan after the Governor and he also named the Macquarie Plains in his honour, describing it as "the handsomest country I ever saw".<sup>340</sup> Macquarie, realising the importance of Evans' exploration, granted him 1,000 acres in Van Diemen's Land and paid him £130 from colonial funds,<sup>341</sup> a gesture which would be repeated more often than not by later Governors and one which established expectation of reward in addition to the leader's salary.

Evans' reports of significant rivers flowing westward rekindled speculation regarding the nature of the drainage pattern of the interior. As early as 1798, Banks had written "It is impossible to conceive that such a body of land as large as Europe, does not produce vast rivers, capable of being navigated into the interior".<sup>342</sup> Flinders had also proposed that "the interior might be principally occupied by a Mediterranean Sea".<sup>343</sup> Flinders' circumnavigation had shown Australia to be a single land mass and not two islands and he had been unable to locate any major river outflow on the west coast. Macquarie decided to send Evans on a second expedition and McLaren notes that Macquarie had formed a hypothesis regarding the possible drainage system of south-east Australia and the possibility of a great river entering the sea on the south coast.<sup>344</sup> Secretary of State for War and the Colonies (Colonial Secretary<sup>345</sup>), Henry Bathurst, was surprised by news of a westward flowing river,

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<sup>339</sup> George William Evans' (1780-1852) 1812 expedition party comprised of Evans, two free men and three prisoners. His 1815 expedition party comprised Evans and three other men.

<sup>340</sup> Evans to Lachlan Macquarie, 'Enclosure No. 4' in Commonwealth of Australia, *Historical records of Australia Series I: Governors' despatches to and from England* (Sydney: Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1914-1925), Vol 8: 165-177.

<sup>341</sup> Charles Manning Hope Clark, *A history of Australia Vol.1: From the earliest times to the age of Macquarie* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1962), 279.

<sup>342</sup> Joseph Banks, 'Letter to John King, Under Secretary of State, dated 15 May 1798' in Commonwealth of Australia, *Historical Records, Series I*, Vol. 2: 231-232.

<sup>343</sup> Matthew Flinders, *A Voyage to Terra Australis: undertaken for the purpose of completing the discovery of that vast country, and prosecuted in the years 1801, 1802, and 1803 in His Majesty's ship the Investigator, and subsequently in the armed vessel Porpoise and Cumberland Schooner; with an account of the shipwreck of the Porpoise, arrival of the Cumberland at Mauritius, and imprisonment of the commander during six years and a half in that island* (London: G. & W. Nicol, 1814), Vol. 1: Introduction, lxxiii.

<sup>344</sup> McLaren, 'Development of bushmanship', 54.

<sup>345</sup> The British Cabinet position responsible for the colonies was created in 1768 and named 'Colonial Secretary'. The office was abolished in 1782 and responsibility transferred to the 'Home Secretary'. In 1794 responsibility for the colonies was transferred to the 'Secretary of State for War' and in 1801 the position

but thought Evans' reports afforded only a very general description of the face of the country and he wished for more detail.<sup>346</sup>

John Oxley was appointed leader of subsequent expeditions west of the Blue Mountains. He was instructed to follow the course of the Lachlan River, as Macquarie wanted to establish if its north-westerly course continued inland or turned south to join the Macquarie River, and, more importantly, determine whether a port could be established at the embouchure of these rivers.<sup>347</sup> Oxley found swamps and proposed that the interior of the continent was a marsh, subject to inundation from the rivers rising in the Blue Mountains, and was therefore uninhabitable. He returned the following year, again finding travel through the swamps difficult and he turned around at the Macquarie Marshes, which he believed were near a shallow inland sea. After travelling north-east he was more impressed by the potential of the country and thought his discoveries would "throw open the whole interior to the Macquarie River, for the benefit of British settlers".<sup>348</sup>

Both Macquarie and Bathurst showed particular interest in exploration and Macquarie actively supported the exploration and survey of the colony. The expeditions of this time, while significant in terms of expanding European control of the colony, were still only minor outings compared to later desert exploration. Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson were only out for three weeks and Evans' first expedition travelled only around 250 kilometres. As McLaren notes, explorers in Australia at this early stage were ill-prepared for the environment they encountered. Evans' horses soon became galled and the men's footwear wore out quickly. Evans saw traces of Aboriginal people but interacted with them on only one occasion. Favenc believes Oxley to have been "essentially a successful explorer, for although he had not in every case attained the issue aimed at, he had always brought his men back in safety, and had opened up vast tracts of new country".<sup>349</sup> By this measure Oxley certainly was successful, for many subsequent expeditions would suffer fatalities. However, McLaren sees Evans and particularly Oxley less favourably, mainly due to the ill-treatment of their livestock. Horses were in short supply in New South Wales during the early 1800s, so Oxley did not have as many animals as he would have liked. Limited availability of pack-animals and a poor understanding of the environment to be encountered meant Oxley overloaded his animals; three died and he was repeatedly held up by lame and sick animals. Interestingly, Oxley travelled during particularly wet

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was renamed 'Secretary of State for War and the Colonies'. In 1854, colonial responsibility separated from the War Office and the position was renamed 'Secretary of State for the Colonies'.

<sup>346</sup> Henry Bathurst to Lachlan Macquarie, 'Dispatch No. 58, dated 4 December 1815' in Commonwealth of Australia, *Historical Records, Series I*, Vol. 8: 638-646.

<sup>347</sup> John Joseph William Molesworth Oxley's (1783-1828) 1817 expedition party comprised of 13 men, with Evans as second in command and Alan Cunningham as botanist. His expedition party of 1818 comprised of 15 men, with Evans as second in command again.

<sup>348</sup> John Oxley, *Journals of two expeditions into the interior of New South Wales, undertaken by order of the British government in the years 1817-18* (London: John Murray, 1820), 326-327.

<sup>349</sup> Favenc, *Australian exploration*.



Figure 18: John Oxley, 'A chart of part of the interior of New South Wales', 1822. (London: A. Arrowsmith 1822). MAP T 939, National Library of Australia.

years when there was an abundance of water and feed. The large amount of water hampered the party at the inundated Macquarie Marshes, but would have meant Oxley avoided many of the issues relating to water supply that would face most subsequent explorers. Despite travelling in a good season, Oxley's reports were pessimistic and he incorrectly predicted the area would remain uninhabited. Oxley published his expedition journal in 1820, the first inland explorer to do so.<sup>350</sup> His publication set the tone for later explorer's journals, which Paul Genoni points out "were constructed in a manner which reflected the values and interests of the Empire".<sup>351</sup>

The 1820s saw social changes in British and Australian society resulting from the popularisation of science and the subsequent increase in the pursuit of scientific knowledge. This change was seen in the composition of Oxley's exploration party, with the inclusion of two botanists and a mineralogist.<sup>352</sup> However, the pursuit of science had fiscal motives, with Oxley's instructions requiring him to note flora and fauna that might have economic benefit or be imported into Great Britain.<sup>353</sup> Later, Governor Darling continued the Government's aim of cautious expansion, appointing Allan Cunningham to lead an expedition to investigate the potential for settlement north of Bathurst. Cunningham's work opened up a viable route to Moreton Bay but he received little or

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<sup>350</sup> Oxley, *Two expeditions*. Evan's 'Account of excursions beyond the Blue Mountains in New South Wales' was summarised in the *Journal of Science* (1817), Vol 11: 453-7.

<sup>351</sup> Paul Genoni, *Subverting the empire: Explorers and Exploration in Australian fiction* (Altona: Common Ground Publishing, 2004), 22.

<sup>352</sup> Erwin Herman Josef Feeken, Gerda Elizabeth Emma Feeken, and O.H.K. Spate, *The discovery and exploration of Australia* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1970), 86.

<sup>353</sup> Oxley, *Two expeditions*, Appendix 1: 'Instructions for John Oxley', 355-359.

no reward for his work. He did however achieve a degree recognition for his work by having species and geographical features named after him.<sup>354</sup>

The 1820s also saw an increase in world trade. After the initial decline in Britain's economy at the end of the Napoleonic war, the Imperial Government decided to relax protectionist policies and remove duties on colonial imports. Wool exports from Australia started slowly with only 900 tonnes entering Britain in 1830,<sup>355</sup> but the expansion of the pastoral industry led to an almost insatiable demand for land on the western plains. This desire for pasture had driven Blaxland to find additional grazing land over the Blue Mountains in 1813 and it encouraged further private expeditions to explore the country to the south of Sydney. In 1818, Australian born Hamilton Hume had accompanied Charles Throsby and James Meehan on an expedition to Jervis Bay and the following year he accompanied Oxley on a survey of the same area. In 1823 Governor Brisbane, aware of the urgent need to provide adequate land to pacify the squatters, planned an overland expedition to Port Phillip. Hume was a favoured leader along with William Hilton Hovell, who, having retired from a naval career in 1816, had also been exploring south of Sydney. Brisbane was constrained by instructions from Bathurst which attempted to control pastoral expansion by keeping it restricted to the coastal districts and the plan failed to materialise. Hume and Hovell agreed to jointly fund the venture themselves, each providing supplies and equipment for a four-month expedition.<sup>356</sup> They successfully negotiated a viable overland route from Sydney to Port Philip and were awarded 1,200 acres of land for their efforts.

Hume's career as an explorer continued when he was selected as second in command on Sturt's 1828 expedition, and his previous experience proved useful when he was required to lead the land party after Sturt took to the rivers in his boat. Earlier Evans had been assigned as second in command to Oxley, but there were surprisingly few other examples at this time of expedition leaders seeking experienced assistants when assembling their parties and continuity of experience was the exception rather than the rule.

Drought conditions prevailed in New South Wales during the years 1824-1826<sup>357</sup> and Governor Darling considered it to be a good opportunity to investigate the swampy country around the Macquarie Marshes that Oxley had found difficult to traverse in 1819 when water levels were

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<sup>354</sup> Eleven species are named to commemorate Allan and his botanist brother, Richard, including the hoop pine, Bangalow palm, a sheoak, a fig, a myrtle and a beech. The genus *Alania* was created in Cunningham's honour and Cunningham's Gap and the Cunningham Highway are named after him.

<sup>355</sup> Frank Welsh, *Great southern land: A new history of Australia* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), 76.

<sup>356</sup> Hume and Hovell's expedition party of 1824 consisted of the two leaders, six men, two carts, five bullocks and three horses.

<sup>357</sup> Charles Manning Hope Clark, *A history of Australia Vol. 2: New South Wales and Van Diemen's land, 1822-1838* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1962), 97.



Figure 19: Thomas J. Maslen, 'Sketch of the coasts of Australia and the supposed Entrance of the Great River: principally designed to illustrate the Narrative of M. Baudin's voyage on the West and N.W. coasts'. *The friend of Australia; or, a plan for exploring the interior and for carrying on a survey of the whole continent of Australia* (London: Hurst, Chance & Co., 1830).

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higher.<sup>358</sup> Oxley was too ill to lead a new expedition and the position was given to Darling's military secretary, Captain Charles Napier Sturt. Sturt had a long, if undistinguished military career and had been in the colony less than 18 months when the expedition departed in 1828. Sturt claimed he accepted the position of leader in order to contribute to the public good as well as from a love of adventure and ambition.<sup>359</sup> He later told his cousin, Isaac Wood, that by leading an expedition he hoped to earn some credit, as promotion was unlikely for a serving military officer in peacetime.<sup>360</sup> Sturt had seen active service early in his career, but his advance through the ranks had been slow: he had been an ensign for ten years before advancing to lieutenant and after 15 years of service he was still only a captain. Although Sturt had been reluctant to leave England for New South Wales he saw opportunities in a colony that had few educated officers.<sup>361</sup>

Darling's instructions to Sturt did not refer to an inland sea, but rather to ascertain the extent of the Macquarie Marshes. Sturt was convinced of the existence of the inland sea, a belief that he shared with Flinders, Cunningham and Oxley and which stayed with him even when he later stood atop the longitudinal red sand dunes of the Simpson Desert. He thought the Macquarie and Murrumbidgee

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<sup>358</sup> Charles Napier Sturt, *Two expeditions into the interior of southern Australia, during the years 1828, 1829, 1830, and 1831: with observations on the soil, climate, and general resources of the colony of New South Wales*, 2 vols. (London: Smith, Elder, 1833), Vol. 1: Appendix I, 'Letter of Instructions', 183-188.

<sup>359</sup> Keith Swan and Margot Carnegie, *In step with Sturt* (Armada, Vic: Graphic Books, 1979), 8.

<sup>360</sup> Swan and Carnegie, *In step with Sturt*, 8.

<sup>361</sup> Sturt, *Two expeditions*, Vol. 1: 25.

Rivers ran parallel without confluence and entered into a sea he described as Mediterranean and upon encountering the Darling River, his views remained the same.<sup>362</sup> Just as Oxley had taken a boat to assist him plot the course of the inland rivers, Sturt was also provided with a boat and he eventually took boats on all three of his expeditions.<sup>363</sup>

Upon returning to Sydney, Sturt raised the idea of a second expedition to follow the Darling.<sup>364</sup> His failure to locate an inland sea and his report of the Darling River flowing south-westerly and contrary to the north-westerly course of the rivers previously discovered in the area, prompted Governor Darling to instruct Sturt to follow the Murrumbidgee River, not the Darling, as the basis for the second expedition. Darling had received reports from sealers on the schooner *Prince of Denmark*, who had discovered a large lagoon near Gulf St Vincent, and he now suspected the Darling River drained into this lagoon and that there was no inland sea. Having possibly solved the mystery of the westward flowing rivers, Darling outlined his ideas in a dispatch to the Colonial Secretary, George Murray.<sup>365</sup> Darling hoped that the discovery of navigable rivers might encourage settlement.<sup>366</sup> Sturt did indeed encounter navigable rivers, the largest of which he named after Murray.<sup>367</sup>

It is often suggested that settlement followed in the tracks of expeditions, with squatters spurred on by explorers' glowing reports of new grazing land. Clark demonstrates this supposed linear progression:

very soon word got around Sydney that the captain [Sturt] had laid open a boundless extent of ... country.<sup>368</sup>

However, very often the squatters were ahead of the explorers, the desire for land encouraging settlement well in advance of the sanctioned government land grants, and Sturt regularly came upon these squatters during the first few weeks of his journeys. Sturt received little acclaim for his work and was dispatched to Norfolk Island with his regiment upon his return. Although Darling was appreciative of Sturt's work, London ignored his requests for Sturt's promotion.<sup>369</sup> Ill-health and failing eyesight resulted in Sturt taking leave and returning to England where he prepared his

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<sup>362</sup> Sturt, *Two expeditions*, Vol. 1: 174.

<sup>363</sup> Sturt's expedition party of 1828 comprised of Sturt, Hume as second in command, two soldiers and eight prisoners.

<sup>364</sup> Michael Langley, *Sturt of the Murray: The Father of Australian Exploration* (London: Robert Hale, 1969), 79.

<sup>365</sup> Ralph Darling to George Murray, 'Dispatch No. 117, dated 21 November 1829' in Commonwealth of Australia, *Historical Records, Series I*, 253-254.

<sup>366</sup> Langley, *Sturt of the Murray*, 78.

<sup>367</sup> Sturt's expedition party of 1829 was slightly larger than his previous expedition party, with Sturt, George McLeay as second in command, three soldiers and nine prisoners.

<sup>368</sup> Clark, *History of Australia*, Vol. 2: 101.

<sup>369</sup> Australian National University: National Centre of Biography, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. [adb.anu.edu.au/biography/sturt-charles-2712](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/sturt-charles-2712)



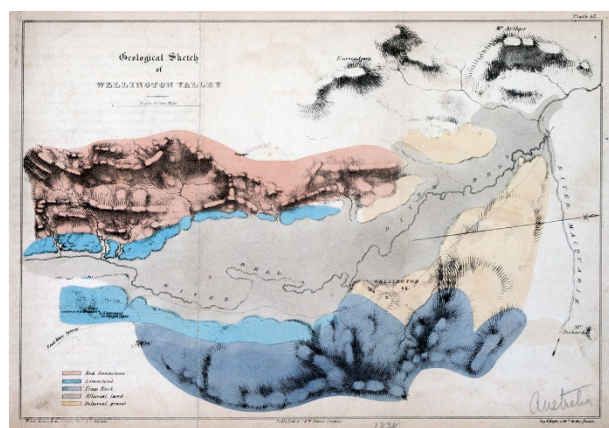


Figure 20: Thomas Mitchell, 'Geological sketch of Wellington Valley from nature on stone'. *Three expeditions into the interior of Eastern Australia* (London, T. & W. Boone 1838), Plate 42. MAP NK 2456/117, National Library of Australia.

Mitchell was a competent artist and like many explorers he prepared maps and illustrations for inclusion in the published version of his journals and diaries.

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journal.<sup>370</sup> This publication raised Sturt's profile in England and after repeated petitions to the Colonial Office for a land grant in recognition of his services he was awarded 5,000 acres.

Murray had earlier appointed the controversial figure, Mitchell, as Oxley's assistant.<sup>371</sup> Mitchell was a competent surveyor, artist and cartographer, having gained experience surveying battlefields of the Peninsula War. His first Australian survey was of the Nineteen Counties where settlement was sanctioned by the government and in this Mitchell proved more professional than his predecessor. However, he doubted the existence of an inland sea and ridiculed the idea of Sturt taking a boat to sail "on the new Australian Caspian".<sup>372</sup>

While Mitchell was at odds with Flinders, Oxley, Sturt and Cunningham over the existence of an inland sea, he was motivated by tales of water in the inland. An escaped convict named George 'The Barber' Clarke had lived with Aboriginal people north of the Liverpool Plains and upon recapture claimed to have followed a large river the Aborigines called 'Kindur', to the coast. Darling was not inclined to let the Surveyor-General undertake exploration and so Mitchell had to wait until 1831 when Darling returned to England before gaining consent from Acting Governor Lindesay, to verify Clarke's story. Mitchell claimed, as Sturt had done before, that he undertook the task of leadership

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<sup>370</sup> Sturt, *Two expeditions*.

<sup>371</sup> Thomas Livingstone Mitchell, 'Letter to Robert William Hay, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office, dated 24 March 1833', quoted in John Howard Lidgett Cumpston, *Thomas Mitchell, Surveyor General & Explorer* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), Chapter 6.

<sup>372</sup> Langley, *Sturt of the Murray*, 65.

because “there are few undertakings more attractive to the votaries of fame or lovers of adventure than the exploration of unknown regions”.<sup>373</sup>

Mitchell was ill-prepared for the expedition but expressed his confidence of success upon departure, his journal noting “the principal object of my plan was the exploration of Australia, so that whether the report of the river proved true or false, the results of the expedition would be, at least, useful in affording so much additional information”.<sup>374</sup> During the expedition Mitchell allowed his party to become separated and strung out over great distances which resulted in difficulties keeping open lines of supply and communication. The rear party bringing up supplies from the Hunter Valley were attacked by Aboriginal people, with two men killed and a substantial proportion of the stores and supplies destroyed. The expedition provided more information about the rivers in New England, but was not the success Mitchell had hoped for. He failed to find the fabled ‘Kindur’ and, upon return, ascertained from Clarke that he had not reached the ocean and had probably only travelled as far as the Namoi River. Mitchell returned to Sydney to find Lindesay had been replaced by Governor Bourke, whose reception of Mitchell’s report was less than favourable. Mitchell was hoping his efforts would be rewarded with a grant of land, as Oxley’s had been, but he was to be disappointed.

The Colonial Office was still concerned with establishing the course of the Darling River and wanted to confirm whether the river visited by Sturt in 1828 was the same watercourse that discharged into the Murray, so Bourke was instructed to send an expedition under the auspices of the Survey Department. Mitchell was appointed leader, but his commitments at the survey office meant the expedition was delayed until 1835.<sup>375</sup> Although Mitchell thought he could “indulge in exploratory schemes, free from all the cares of office”,<sup>376</sup> he approached this expedition as an extension of his role as Surveyor-General and determined to survey his route by triangulation to extend existing surveys. While all explorers used elevated view points as a method for ascertaining the nature of the country, Mitchell’s methodology resulted in slow progress with frequent diversions to mountains and hills, which he would climb with his barometers, sextant and theodolite. As with his first expedition, Mitchell had violent encounters with Aborigines; on one occasion the botanist Richard Cunningham was killed and on another occasion Mitchell’s men opened fire, killing several Aboriginal people. Mitchell followed the Darling downstream as instructed, but once he felt satisfied that the river flowed into the Murray he turned back, still some 250 kilometres before its confluence. As a result of this decision, Bourke felt the expedition had not been satisfactorily completed and he wrote “Major

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<sup>373</sup> Thomas Livingstone Mitchell, *Three expeditions into the interior of Eastern Australia: with descriptions of the recently explored region of Australia Felix and the present colony of New South Wales* (London: T. & W. Boone, 1838), Vol. 1: iii-iv.

<sup>374</sup> Mitchell, *Three expeditions*. Mitchell left Sydney in November 1831 with two officers and 15 men. Equipment included two boats on a carriage, two light carts and four drays drawn by bullocks.

<sup>375</sup> Langley, *Sturt of the Murray*, 114.

<sup>376</sup> Mitchell, *Three expeditions*, Vol. 1: 163.



Figure 21: John Michael Crossland, 'Charles Sturt', n.d., c.1853.  
NPG 3302, National Portrait Gallery, London.

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Mitchell as you are aware, did not finish the course of the Darling on his last expedition” and he added “the Surveyor-General is a difficult man to manage”.<sup>377</sup>

On his third expedition, which was meant to trace the Darling to its confluence with the Murray, Mitchell again disobeyed instructions and, after briefly following the Darling for a short distance, he returned to the Murray and then followed the Loddon River to the fertile grazing land of what today is Victoria. This area Mitchell dubbed ‘Australia Felix’ and he valued his discovery as “at present worth sixty millions to the Exchequer of England”.<sup>378</sup> However Mitchell left the main aim of his expedition unanswered, allowing his continued belief in a northerly flowing river system and his professional rivalry with Sturt to influence his decisions. Had he not returned to Sydney with news of new pastoral opportunities, he would have completed his third successive expedition without having ever ventured far beyond the country already visited by previous expeditions.

Mitchell capitalised on the interest his expedition generated, travelling to England where he published his journal,<sup>379</sup> lectured to the Royal Geographical Society of London and lobbied for a knighthood; an honour which was bestowed on him in 1839 along with an honorary doctorate from Oxford.<sup>380</sup> However Mitchell still had his detractors; Bourke was pressured into ordering an official inquiry into the expedition’s attacks on the Aboriginal people of the Murray-Darling region. In

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<sup>377</sup> Richard Bourke 'Letter to Robert William Hay, dated 1 February 1836', in Commonwealth of Australia, *Historical Records, Series I*, Vol. 18: 286-287.

<sup>378</sup> Granville William Chetwynd Stapylton, 'Journals', MS 2014, State Library of Victoria; Alan E.J. Andrews, ed., *Stapylton with Major Mitchell's Australia Felix expedition, 1836: largely from the journal of Granville William Chetwynd Stapylton* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1986). Stapylton (1800-1840) was Mitchell's second-in-command on the 1836 expedition.

<sup>379</sup> Mitchell, *Three expeditions*.

<sup>380</sup> Langley, *Sturt of the Murray*, 120.



Figure 22: 'Sir Thomas Livingstone Mitchell', n.d., c.1830s.  
Album ID 874691, ML 24, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

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addition, because Mitchell had encountered the substantial but illegal grazing enterprise of the Henty brothers at Portland Bay, and John Batman had formed the Port Phillip Association, Gipps realised the squatters were in advance of the explorers. He felt “the fertile land of Australia Felix ... would surely have been reached by the ordinary advance of our graziers, even though he [Mitchell] had never visited it”.<sup>381</sup>

In the 25 years since Evans surveyed a road over the Blue Mountains, inland exploration had gained knowledge of the semi-arid interior and proposed several hypotheses of the possible nature of the arid centre. These hypotheses would be tested by later expeditions, although Gipps believed the same knowledge would eventually have been attained anyway by the expansion of the pastoral industry. While pastoralists did mount some small-scale, privately funded expeditions, most expeditions were government funded and commanded by public servants with a military background. Expeditions were dispatched to solve geographical puzzles, but there was also an expectation of scientific discoveries and new pastoral opportunities. Regardless of the success, or otherwise, of an expedition, leaders could expect both tangible and intangible rewards.

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<sup>381</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *Historical Records, Series I*.

## 2.4 Exploration to the north coast

The isolated settlement of Victoria, established at Port Essington in 1838, was the third attempt the British had made to establish a trading centre and port on the northern coast of Australia. Gipps and Sturt discussed an overland expedition from the Brisbane River to Port Essington and the newly formed Legislative Council in Sydney was keen to establish a trade route to the north coast and then to Asia and India. Mitchell, Sturt and Edward John Eyre were considered as potential leaders for this expedition. Eyre had already established himself as a competent explorer but his proposed budget of £5,000 was far in excess of the £1,000 initially assigned in 1843 by the New South Wales Legislature,<sup>382</sup> who were constrained by the current labour shortage and economic depression.<sup>383</sup> Although Sturt had demonstrated an ability to operate frugally, his two earlier expeditions costing less than £500,<sup>384</sup> the expedition was placed under the control of the Surveyor-General and Mitchell prepared for his fourth attempt at locating the 'Kindur' river. The departure date of the expedition was delayed a number of times as Gipps referred the budget and plan to the Colonial Secretary, Lord Stanley. During the delay, the Prussian scientist who had been considered for the post of expedition naturalist, decided to undertake his own expedition to the north coast.

Leichhardt had been in Australia a little over two years when he set out on his privately funded venture. He planned to take seven months to reach Port Essington,<sup>385</sup> and, unlike Mitchell who proposed to venture into the interior in search of navigable rivers, Leichhardt decided to follow the well-watered regions near the coast. There had been many privately funded expeditions in Australia prior to Leichhardt's departure. Some, such as Hume and Hovell's 1824 expedition, had been widely celebrated as they opened new trade routes and lines of communication to the squatters and graziers. However, the majority of the privately funded ventures were small affairs involving graziers and squatters in their search for land. These expeditions usually departed with little public acknowledgement and with the express aim of finding suitable land for the explorer or sponsor. Immediately before Leichhardt left Moreton Bay, Cunningham's reports of good grazing lands on the Darling Downs had resulted in speculative forays by numerous squatters and explorers in the region.<sup>386</sup> However, none of these excursions had raised public interest to the level that Leichhardt's

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<sup>382</sup> Favenc, *Australian exploration*, 142.

<sup>383</sup> Francis Gordon Clarke, *Australia: a concise political and social history* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1989), 109.

<sup>384</sup> Langley, *Sturt of the Murray*, 115.

<sup>385</sup> Port Essington, also known as Victoria, was a British settlement on the Coburg Peninsula of Arnhem Land, which was occupied from 1838 to 1849. It was the third attempt at European settlement in the area, after the failure of Fort Dundas in 1828 and Fort Wellington in 1829.

<sup>386</sup> Favenc, *Australian exploration*, 126-127.



Figure 23: 'Portrait of Ludwig Leichhardt', n.d., c.1848.  
PIC Drawer 7681, #PIC/3772, National Library of Australia.

expedition did. Mitchell ascribes this interest as a “cheering prospect amid the general gloom and despondency”<sup>387</sup> and settlers around Moreton Bay were certainly enthused by the prospect of a trade route to the north and frustrated by the delays in government sanctioned expeditions in the area.

The party was relatively small, provisions were barely sufficient for the proposed journey,<sup>388</sup> and Leichhardt faced a common problem among exploration leaders: that of balancing the amount of provisions available with the required work force. Additional provisions required additional pack-animals which in turn required additional expedition assistants to manage the animals. Originally departing Sydney with five men, Leichhardt found the large amount of equipment and provisions provided by the squatters and graziers in Brisbane meant an additional four men were required. Once underway he also found the provisions insufficient for ten individuals and two men returned after just five weeks. The party travelled slowly and took almost 15 months to reach Port Essington, by which time many believed the group must have perished. Leichhardt, who claimed he undertook the journey because he was “inspired with the desire at attempting it”<sup>389</sup> was welcomed back in Sydney as a hero and his reception was so great he thought “the whole town would go mad with joy”.<sup>390</sup> The Auditor General awarded the party £1,000, of which £600 was for Leichhardt himself. The colonists of New South Wales raised £1,518, 18s, 6d. as a testimonial, £854 of which went to Leichhardt.<sup>391</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> Thomas Livingstone Mitchell, *Journal of an expedition into the interior of tropical Australia, in search of a route from Sydney to the Gulf of Carpentaria* (London: Longmans, 1848), 1-2.

<sup>388</sup> Leichhardt left Jimbour Station on the Darling Downs in September 1844 with nine men, two of whom returned after a month. There were 17 horses, 16 oxen, 1200 lbs. of flour, 200 lbs. of sugar, 80 lbs. of tea and 20 lbs. of gelatine. Ammunition consisted of 30 lbs. of powder and eight bags of shot of different sizes, chiefly of No. 4 and No. 6. Each man had two pair of trousers, three shirts, two pair of shoes and some ponchos.

<sup>389</sup> Ludwig Leichhardt, *Journal of an Overland Expedition in Australia 1844-5* (London: T. & W. Boone, 1847), ix.

<sup>390</sup> Alec Hugh Chisholm, *Strange new world: The adventures of John Gilbert and Ludwig Leichhardt* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1941), 297.

<sup>391</sup> Leichhardt, *Overland Expedition*, 538-539.

The Royal Geographical Society of Paris awarded Leichhardt a gold medal and the RGS awarded him a Patron's Gold Medal.

Leichhardt then proposed to cross the continent from east to west and, assisted by ready financial support from the colonists of New South Wales, he made two attempts at the crossing. Leichhardt's privately funded expeditions were unique in the 1840s, but, unfortunately, neither of these two later attempts were as successful as his original journey. The first trans-continental attempt was delayed by heavy rain and then ended due to illness and the loss of the livestock, the second attempt vanished without trace.<sup>392</sup> The expedition's disappearance prompted several search expeditions,<sup>393</sup> and there were numerous reports of remnants and relics purporting to be linked to the expedition.<sup>394</sup>

When Mitchell's officially sanctioned and government funded expedition from Moreton Bay to Port Essington finally started, some 14 months after Leichhardt's departure, the composition of the two parties could not have been more different. Mitchell had progressively increased the size of his expedition team as the distance he travelled and duration of his ventures increased, and his fourth and last expedition was the largest so far assembled.<sup>395</sup> Mitchell was still preoccupied by the existence of a large river, but was aware that the stringent economic climate meant an expedition that merely served to advance geographic knowledge was insufficient reason for expenditure and he drew attention to the possibility of opening a road from Sydney to the head of the Gulf of Carpentaria, where he postulated a considerable river would be found and a port could be established for the Singapore steamer. This would, according to Mitchell, provide cheaper and safer access to the Indian cavalry horse export trade and be "the first step in the direct road home to England".<sup>396</sup> After nine months on the road, Mitchell's ponderously large expedition encountered a river which after 15 years of unsuccessful searching seemed to Mitchell to be "like a reward direct from Heaven for perseverance".<sup>397</sup> The fact that the river took a considerable trend to the south-west rather than north-westerly, combined with the party being at an altitude of only around 200 metres above sea level with the Gulf still over 800 kilometres away, did not deter Mitchell from naming his 'El Dorado'

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<sup>392</sup> The mystery surrounding Leichhardt has generated more literature than any other Australian explorer, including Burke and Wills. For example see Colin Roderick, *Leichhardt: The dauntless explorer* (North Ryde, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1988); Chisholm, *Strange New World*; McLaren, 'Development of bushmanship'; McLaren, *Beyond Leichhardt*; Lewis, *Where is Dr Leichhardt?*.

<sup>393</sup> Expeditions sent out to search for Leichhardt included Hovenden Hely (1852), A.C. Gregory's 'Leichhardt Search Expedition' (1858) and Duncan McIntyre's 'Ladies' Leichhardt Search Expedition' (1865-1867) which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>394</sup> Darrell Lewis, *Where is Dr Leichhardt?: the greatest mystery in Australian history* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2013).

<sup>395</sup> Mitchell left Boree Station in central west New South Wales in December 1845. His expedition party comprised Mitchell, Kennedy as second in command, 27 other men (23 of whom were convicts), eight drays drawn by 103 bullocks, three light carts, two boats, 17 horses and 250 sheep.

<sup>396</sup> Mitchell, *Journal of an expedition*, 2.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

the Victoria River and claiming it was “a river leading to India”.<sup>398</sup> Mitchell’s second-in-command, Edmund Besley Court Kennedy, was later to show that the Victoria was in fact the upper reaches of the Cooper drainage system which terminated not on the north coast, but in the inland drainage basin of Lake Eyre. The value of Mitchell’s final expedition is questionable; after 14 months of travel he had not reached Port Essington, not found a river “to India” and had not even reached the Gulf of Carpentaria, having turned back just north of the Tropic of Capricorn. Mitchell nevertheless craved recognition in England and decided to take time off to go to London to publish his journal. Before he left, Mitchell dispatched Kennedy from Parramatta to ascertain the course of the Victoria and complete the overland route to Port Essington.

Kennedy was only 29 years old at the time of his appointment as expedition leader and he was keen to establish a credible reputation as an explorer; he used his own funds to supplement the government expenditure allocated by Governor Fitzroy<sup>399</sup> and he maintained a daily journal which he hoped to have published.<sup>400</sup> Instructions to expedition leaders usually came from the Colonial Secretary through the Governor but in this case the Surveyor-General drafted the instructions himself.<sup>401</sup> Mitchell was so confident that the Victoria would continue its northerly course and discharge into the Gulf of Carpentaria that his instructions to Kennedy were to follow the river’s course and open a trade route to Port Essington; assuming both objectives could be achieved simultaneously.<sup>402</sup> It took Kennedy just five months to establish the true course of the river and rename it with its Aboriginal name, the Barcoo.<sup>403</sup> While this expedition could be considered successful, in that it determined its objective of establishing the course of the Barcoo, Kennedy’s original intention was to travel to Port Essington, or at least the Gulf of Carpentaria, which was something that Mitchell had failed to achieve. However, the 400 lbs of flour that Kennedy had buried as a cache was uncovered and destroyed by Aboriginal people and he was forced to abandon his plan to reach the Gulf. Kennedy expressed his disappointment at his perceived failure to render anything of practical use to the colony,<sup>404</sup> but by including Mitchell’s ambiguous instructions in his report he avoided censure.<sup>405</sup> Kennedy was nominated as leader of a further expedition to the Gulf and then to Cape York. The plan was reversed at the suggestion of Captain Owen Stanley RN, master of the HMS *Rattlesnake*, the vessel destined to re-supply Kennedy, and Kennedy sailed from Sydney for

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<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.

<sup>399</sup> Edgar Beale, *Kennedy: The Barcoo and beyond* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1983), 46.

<sup>400</sup> Inglis, *Australian colonists*, 253.

<sup>401</sup> Beale, *The Barcoo and beyond*, 81.

<sup>402</sup> Mitchell, *Journal of an expedition*, 406-411.

<sup>403</sup> Kennedy’s expedition party of 1847 comprised of Kennedy, five men, three prisoners and one Aboriginal man from Nammoi. They took three carts and 20 horses.

<sup>404</sup> Beale, *The Barcoo and beyond*, 57.

<sup>405</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *Historical Records, Series I*, Vol. 26: 281-282.



Rockingham Bay less than three months after his return from the Barcoo.<sup>406</sup> This expedition could be considered one of the least successful expeditions in Australia's history as it resulted in the deaths of ten of the 13 men, including Kennedy himself, the highest number of European fatalities on any Australian expedition.<sup>407</sup>

Exploration sponsored by New South Wales between 1820 and 1850 can therefore be summarised as having been predominantly about identifying the course of rivers. This task frustrated both Sturt and Mitchell, the two most prominent explorers in this period. While Sturt was becoming increasingly certain that he would find an inland sea, Mitchell pinned his hopes on the mythical Kindur river which would open up trade with India. Neither man would be successful in their attempts to prove their hypotheses, but neither man lost hope, even in the face of mounting evidence against their suppositions. Probably the most successful expedition during this period was the most unconventional – Leichhardt's 1845-1846 expedition was privately funded and privately run, and it travelled nearly 5,000 kilometres over country that other explorers had not even contemplated visiting. Although expeditions were still large, slow-moving affairs, they were becoming more adventurous and travelled far beyond the pastoral frontier. Entering more challenging terrain also increased the risk of fatality.

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<sup>406</sup> Kennedy's expedition party of 1848 comprised of twelve men and their Aboriginal guide, Jacky Jacky. Of the 13 men, only William Carron, William Goddard and Jacky Jacky survived.

<sup>407</sup> William Carron, *Narrative of an expedition undertaken under the direction of E.B. Kennedy for the exploration of the country between Rockingham Bay and Cape York* (Sydney: Kemp and Fairfax, 1849).

## 2.5 Exploration of the arid interior and the horse-shoe barrier of salt lakes

Initial exploration in the new colony of South Australia, founded in 1834, concentrated on establishing overland trade routes to Melbourne and Sydney. Exploration to the west was limited until 1840 when a committee was formed to establish an overland trade route to Perth. When the impracticality of this objective was suggested the idea of reaching the centre of the continent arose and South Australia began a series of expeditions into the arid interior. These expeditions subjected the participants to new levels of privation and introduced endurance and hardship into the criteria for an expedition worthy of acclaim.

Edward John Eyre had been droving sheep and cattle around New South Wales and the Port Phillip District, occasionally in the company of Sturt, and in 1838 he successfully overlanded stock into Adelaide. Although still only 24 years old, Eyre decided to use some of the profit from his droving ventures to fund exploration. European knowledge of the land north of Adelaide was limited to John Hill's excursion to the Hutt River, a mere 100 kilometres away, and it was in this direction that Eyre headed. He made two excursions during 1839<sup>408</sup>, but found little water and scant feed for livestock.<sup>409</sup> Captain George Grey, later to become the Governor of South Australia, had aroused interest in the prospect of overlanding stock from South Australia to the Swan River settlement and a committee was formed with the aim of raising funds for an expedition to establish a line of communication to Western Australia.<sup>410</sup> The lack of water and feed encountered on his previous expeditions around the head of the Spencer Gulf meant Eyre felt overlanding stock around the Great Australian Bight was impracticable. His suggestion to Governor Gawler was that the best route would be found by first heading north before turning west. The Government provided £100 towards the expedition, the committee raised £541 and Eyre, who was appointed leader, raised a third of the cost

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<sup>408</sup> Eyre's expedition party of May 1839 comprised Eyre, his overseer John Baxter, two other men, two Aboriginal guides and two drays. The expedition party of August 1839 comprised of Eyre, Baxter, and the two Aboriginal guides.

<sup>409</sup> Feeken, Feeken, and Spate, *Discovery and exploration*, 128-129.

<sup>410</sup> Edward John Eyre, *Journals of expeditions of discovery into central Australia, and overland from Adelaide to King George's Sound, in the years 1840-1* (London: T. & W. Boone, 1845), Vol. 1: 2-4.



Figure 24: Ferdinand Jean Joubert, 'Edward John Eyre', n.d.  
(London: Richard Bentley, 1865). PIC Drawer 7531, #U7205 NK3324, National Library of Australia.

of the expedition himself.<sup>411</sup> He assembled the party and stores in just 17 days, but the high cost of horses meant his budget expanded to over £1,391.<sup>412</sup> On his departure from Adelaide, Sturt presented him with a flag. Gawler hoped Eyre would:

endeavour to plant the British flag - the flag which in the whole world has 'braved for a thousand years the battle and the breeze' - on the tropic of Capricorn...in the very centre of our island continent.<sup>413</sup>

Eyre failed to reach the centre of the continent, instead encountering five of the six salt lakes that circled the northern Flinders and Gammon Ranges. Unable to identify a land bridge between these lakes he believed them to be a single, continuous feature, a horse-shoe barrier of salt lakes which would prevent further northward exploration. His disappointment at this cheerless prospect culminated in his climbing a 125-metre high peak which he disconsolately named Mount Hopeless.

The thought of returning to Adelaide without having achieved his aim did not appeal to Eyre and he determined to reduce the size of his party<sup>414</sup> and continue his expedition by an advance to either the east or west. He outlined his plans in a dispatch to Sturt and Gawler, explaining that following the Murray and Darling Rivers would lead him too far to the east to attempt a crossing to the west coast, and therefore he would attempt to cross the Nullarbor to King George Sound. Eyre acknowledged that he would have to cross barren country which was all but destitute of water, at a time of year when temperatures were likely to be intense, but heading this way was the least

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<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1: 8.

<sup>412</sup> Eyre's expedition party of 1840 comprised of eight men, 13 riding and pack-horses, two horse-drawn drays and 40 sheep.

<sup>413</sup> Eyre, *Journal of expeditions*, Vol. 1: 11.

<sup>414</sup> Eyre's reduced party consisted of Eyre, Baxter (who died on the expedition), three Aboriginal guides, Wylie, Joey and Yarry, ten horses, six sheep and one horse-drawn dray.

objectionable course.<sup>415</sup> In addition, he would be unable to fall back on the safety and support of the established depot at Streaky Bay and the option of re-supply from the accompanying cutter, the *Waterwitch*. Many writers have speculated on the futility of such an undertaking, given that this option was one Eyre had initially argued against, and his eventual track closely followed the coastline charted by Flinders and therefore did little to advance geographical knowledge. Favenc thought Eyre's venture "could lead to no good nor useful result" and his desire to become "the first white man to cross the desert between the two colonies...was bound to be profitless and resultless".<sup>416</sup> Indeed, upon returning to Adelaide, Eyre did not have reports of new grazing land or navigable rivers and he had not accomplished his original aim of establishing a stock route to the west. However, his story of endurance and the incredible privations suffered by himself and his Aboriginal companion Wylie meant he was received as a hero and the RGS awarded him the Founder's Gold Medal. For Eyre, success in inland exploration was measured not in financial gain, but in terms of suffering, perseverance and courage; factors which were to occur frequently in subsequent inland expeditions. This was an important step in the shift towards the perception of the inland explorer having to endure hardships in order to be able to 'conquer' the desert interior. As the greater proportion of the viable pastoral land in the south-eastern crescent of the continent from Port Augusta to Port Curtis was now known to colonists, explorers would no longer be able to return with tales of fantastic pastoral opportunities, as Mitchell had done with his *Australia Felix*.

Two years after completing his expedition, Eyre travelled to England where he prepared his journal for publication. In his concluding remarks he drew on his extensive travels to state "circumstances connected with my own personal experience have led me to the conclusion, that there is no inland sea now occupying the centre of New Holland".<sup>417</sup> Eyre based his assumptions on three observations: the "oppressive and scorching" hot winds which blew from the north and which would be unlikely to have come from a large body of water, no knowledge amongst the Aborigines of a large expanse of water in the inland, and an assumption of common ancestry for all Aborigines based on linguistic and cultural similarities. Eyre's good friend, Sturt, disagreed with this view and as a result would suffer similar privations making one last attempt at finding the inland sea.

Under pressure from Gawler, Sturt had taken on the role of Surveyor-General in South Australia, but this unofficial position was terminated when London, not aware of Sturt's appointment, sent Frome to take up the role.<sup>418</sup> Sturt was offered the position of Assistant Commissioner of Lands at a slightly reduced salary, and in the position he maintained a good relationship with both Gawler and

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<sup>415</sup> Eyre, *Journal of expeditions*, Vol. 1: 98.

<sup>416</sup> Favenc, *Australian exploration*, 132.

<sup>417</sup> Eyre, *Journal of expeditions*, Vol. 2: 126.

<sup>418</sup> Australian National University: National Centre of Biography, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. [adb.anu.edu.au/biography/sturt-charles-2712](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/sturt-charles-2712)

Frome. Gawler was recalled to London to be replaced by George Grey, a man 17 years Sturt's junior who had also been involved in the exploration of Australia, although his expedition to the Kimberley was one of the least capable outings in the annals of exploration. Sturt felt slighted by Grey's appointment and offered himself as a candidate for Governor but the offer was not accepted. The move angered Grey, who was under instructions to rein in public spending, an edict he interpreted to include reducing Sturt's salary. Sturt returned to exploration, claiming once again that he embarked on this course for the public good, but he was driven by a desire to achieve a worthy name for himself back in England.<sup>419</sup> He wrote to Colonial Secretary, Lord Edward Geoffrey Smith-Stanley, through his old colleague, Darling, suggesting an expedition to cross the continent from east to west and south to north in just two years for a cost of around £4,000.<sup>420</sup> Privately he wrote to Darling:

it would be better for me to run the risk of allowing my bones to blemish in the desert than to remain where I am without any prospect of future advancement.<sup>421</sup>

Despite Eyre's convincing arguments that the centre of the continent was arid and lacked surface water, Sturt's observations of migratory birds flying north from Adelaide and north-west from the Darling reinforced his conviction of the existence of the inland sea (see Figure 25). Stanley thought Sturt's plan was too ambitious, but was interested to establish whether a mountain range separated the Murray-Darling basin from the interior and therefore agreed to mount a limited excursion into the interior. Sturt outfitted his party in the large, military style which he had used previously, and his methodology remained unchanged – establish depot camps at permanent or semi-permanent water and send out small, light reconnaissance parties to scout the country ahead before moving the main expedition party forward.<sup>422</sup> The instructions Grey received from Stanley did not refer to an inland sea, but they did allow Sturt to choose the route northwards from Adelaide.<sup>423</sup> Stanley preferred a route via the head of the Spencer Gulf, but both Eyre and Frome had encountered difficulties progressing north of the 'horse-shoe salt lake' and Sturt opted to travel upstream along the Murray and then the Darling to access the interior. In doing this Sturt confirmed that the Darling did flow into the Murray, the task that had been assigned to Mitchell some eight years earlier. He encountered

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<sup>419</sup> Langley, *Sturt of the Murray*, 192.

<sup>420</sup> Edward Stokes, *To the inland sea: Charles Sturt's Expedition 1844-45* (Hawthorn, Vic: Century Hutchinson, 1986), 18.

<sup>421</sup> Langley, *Sturt of the Murray*, 192.

<sup>422</sup> Sturt's 'Central Australia Expedition' comprised of 17 men in the roles of leader, assistant, surgeon, draughtsman (John McDouall Stuart), storekeeper, collector and armourer, two servants, stockman, groom, four bullock-drivers and shepherd as well as two sailors and a number of Aboriginal guides. He took eleven horses, one horse dray, one spring cart, three bullock drays with 30 bullocks, one boat mounted on a carriage, 200 sheep, two sheep dogs and four kangaroo dogs. The stores weighed seven tonnes and their daily water usage was around 5,000 litres.

<sup>423</sup> Stokes, *To the inland sea*, 20.

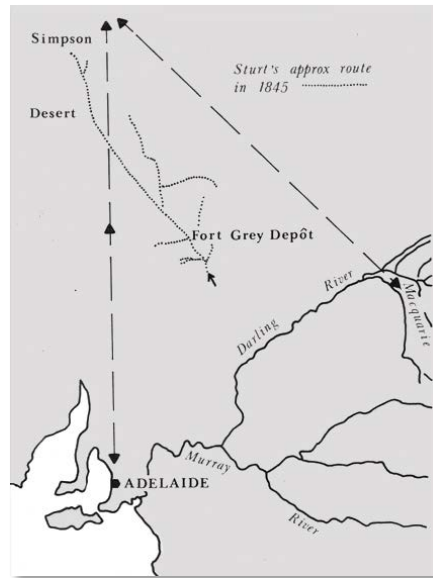


Figure 25: Edward Stokes, *To the Inland Sea: Charles Sturt's Expedition 1844-45*. (Hawthorn: Century Hutchinson, 1986), 17-18.

Sturt's observations of migratory bird from the Darling River and later from Adelaide strengthened his belief in the existence of an inland sea. He wrote to Lord Stanley, "If a Line be drawn from Latitude  $29^{\circ} 30'$  and Longitude  $144^{\circ}$  to the NW and another from Mt. Arden due north, they would meet a little to the northward of the tropics and there, my Lord, I will be bound to say a fine country will one day or another be discovered".

severe drought and extreme summer temperatures and the party became trapped at Depot Glen, "locked up in the desolate and heated region, into which we had penetrated, as effectually as if we had wintered at the Pole".<sup>424</sup> The men suffered scurvy and the second in command, James Poole, died while they waited for rain.

When it did rain and Sturt had the opportunity to return to Adelaide, he decided instead to divide his party.<sup>425</sup> He sent the weaker men home and then continued northwards. In doing so he failed to find an inland sea, but did cross several notable inland rivers, and, being the first European in the area, was the first to describe the varied landscapes typical of the Channel Country and Lake Eyre Basin. He crossed a watercourse the Yandruwandha people called Tinga Tingana<sup>426</sup> and re-named it Strzelecki Creek. Gregory, Burke and Howitt would all follow this ephemeral watercourse south towards the settled districts of South Australia. Sturt renamed the watercourse called Kini-papa to honour Judge Cooper, and he named another desert watercourse after his friend and fellow explorer Eyre. Sturt was the first European to see the longitudinal dune system of the Arunta Desert which

<sup>424</sup> Charles Napier Sturt, *Narrative of an Expedition into Central Australia. Performed under the Authority of Her Majesty's Government during the Years 1844, 5, and 6* (London: T. & W. Boone, 1849), Vol. 1: 264.

<sup>425</sup> Sturt reduced the size of his party to eleven men; five men returned to Adelaide and James Poole died at Depot Glen and was buried at Mount Poole.

<sup>426</sup> Helen Mary Tolcher, *Seed of the coolibah : a history of the Yandruwandha and Yawarrawarrka people* (Linden Park, SA: H.M. Tolcher, 2003).

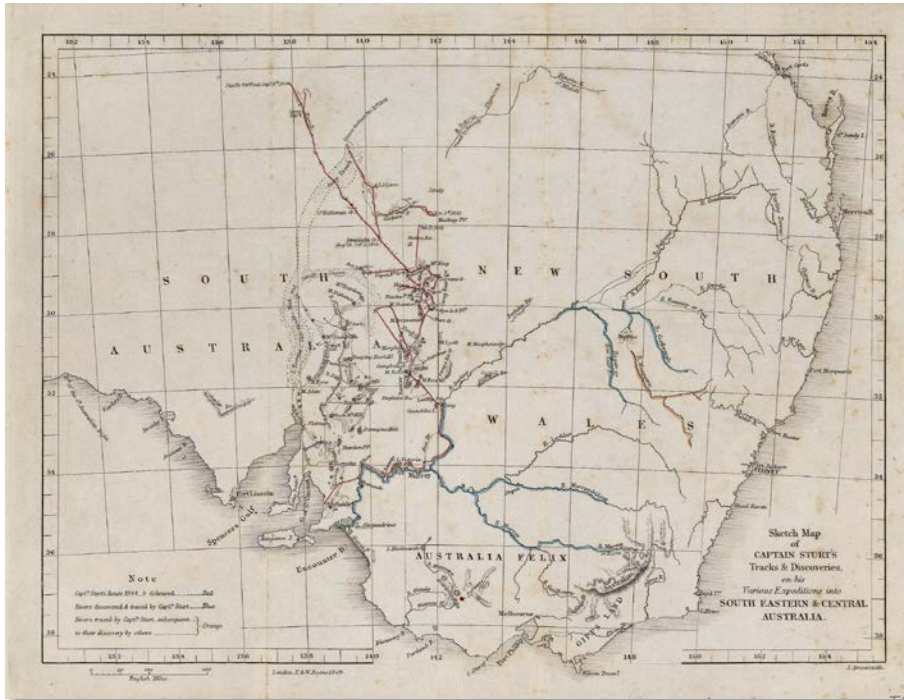


Figure 26: John Arrowsmith, 'Sketch map of Captain Sturt's tracks & discoveries on his various expeditions into south eastern central Australia', 1849. (London: T. & W. Boone, 1849). Tooley Collection Map, MAP T 115, National Library of Australia.

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was later named the Simpson<sup>427</sup>, and he also encountered a desert environment new to European explorers. He called it "that iron region", an area where aeolian deflation removed surface silcrete exposing the underlying laterite pebbles to form a wind-blown pavement of gibbers covered in desert varnish. Now known as Sturt Stony Desert, the area is sparsely vegetated, having large, open expanses of bare gibber and lacking the saltbush (*Atriplex* spp.) and Mitchell grass (*Astrebla* spp.) commonly found on other gibber plains.<sup>428</sup> Sturt pushed hard to cover the waterless stages and with minimal water and virtually no food the horses suffered greatly. They weakened rapidly and their hooves wore down on the hard gibbers. Sturt wrote of the area:

It was indeed a terrific region, and absolutely made me shudder as I gazed upon it. I conscientiously believe there is not a parallel to it on the earth's surface. Other Deserts there are, but they present not the street shod appearance of this desperate region.<sup>429</sup>

Sturt made two attempts to reach the centre of the continent, ignoring the advice of the party's surgeon, John Harris Browne, who thought Sturt was a desperate man who faced certain

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<sup>427</sup> Mark Shephard, *The Simpson Desert: Natural history and human endeavour* (North Adelaide: Corkwood Press, 1992). Cecil Madigan named the Simpson Desert in 1929 after Alfred Allen Simpson, president of the RGSA (S.A. Branch).

<sup>428</sup> F.J. Badman, B.K. Arnold, and S.L. Bell, eds., *A Natural history of the Lake Eyre region: a visitor's guide* (Port Augusta: National Parks and Wildlife Service's Northern Consultative Committee, 1991), 19.

<sup>429</sup> Stokes, *To the inland sea*, 202.



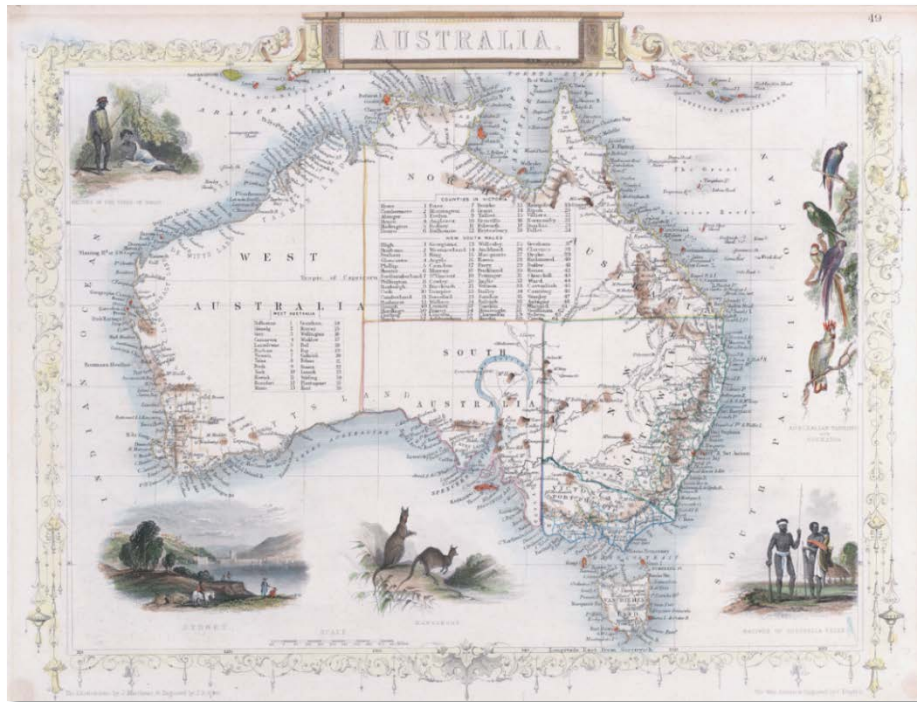


Figure 27: John Rapkin, 'Australia'  
*Tallis's Illustrated Atlas and Modern History of the World, Geographical, Political and Statistical*  
 (London: John Tallis & Company, 1851). MAP NK 4617, National Library of Australia.

Published maps showed the supposed horseshoe barrier of salt lakes into the 1850s.

destruction.<sup>430</sup> When by his calculations he was only 240 kilometres from the centre,<sup>431</sup> he was forced to retreat. Sturt turned back “with a feeling of bitter disappointment”<sup>432</sup> and a belief that he had made no discovery worthy of credit and therefore had failed “in the only object for which I sought and undertook this tremendous task”.<sup>433</sup> The rigours of desert travel had left Sturt suffering ill-health. He was partially blind, suffering from scurvy and paralysed from muscle cramps and yet in spite of his sufferings, Sturt was determined to achieve his objective and he pressed the Colonial Secretary, Lord Grey, to allow him a further chance to lead an expedition to search for the inland sea, or at least the series of lakes that Sturt thought must extend to the north-west beyond the Lake Torrens horseshoe. However, Sturt was now 50 years old and Grey declined the offer.

Despite Sturt's critical self-appraisal, the Colonial Office expressed their satisfaction with his efforts and the South Australian public extended a warm reception. A public dinner was held upon Sturt's return to Adelaide and he was awarded a cash testimonial. The RGS presented him one of

<sup>430</sup> Edgar Beale, *Sturt: The chipped idol* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1979), 212.

<sup>431</sup> Sturt believed he was only 150 miles from the centre of the continent, but in fact he was 300-400 miles away from either the Lambert Centre, the median centre of Australia, the Australian centre of gravity or Central Mount Stuart.

<sup>432</sup> Sturt, *Narrative of an expedition*, Vol. 1: 263.

<sup>433</sup> Langley, *Sturt of the Murray*, 215.



the two Gold Medals awarded in 1846, and the following year he received their highest award, the Founders Medal. Sturt took leave of absence to return to England to publish his latest journal.<sup>434</sup> He also applied for a knighthood; an honour which was bestowed on him posthumously.

The hardships and privations that beset Sturt and Eyre and the courage and endurance displayed by the men on their expeditions now epitomised the Anglo-Australian struggle with the desert. Although Sturt and Eyre did not return with news of fertile land or inland seas, they became heroes and figures of public admiration. For his contribution to the understanding of the geographical nature of the continent, Sturt became known as "the "Father of Australian exploration". Sturt and Eyre approached Aboriginal people with a more sympathetic attitude than previous explorers and both devoted a considerable proportion of their published journals to their observations of Aboriginal culture. As a result of his efforts Sturt was proud to state "I can look back to my intercourse with the Australian aborigines, under a consciousness that I never injured one of them, and that the cause of humanity has not suffered at my hands"<sup>435</sup> and in direct contrast to Mitchell's antagonistic treatment of Aboriginal people along the Murray-Darling, he also added "my path amongst savage tribes has been a bloodless one".<sup>436</sup>

Sturt and Eyre employed different methods of exploration yet they both covered vast distances. Eyre's smaller party achieved greater mobility than Sturt, but took greater risks as a result of the reduced ability to carry water and provisions. Sturt's used an established military technique of using depot camps with reconnaissance parties to scout ahead for water. Despite the large area covered, the puzzle of the horseshoe of salt lakes remained and it was 1858 before A.C. Gregory showed the salt lake barrier was not a complete horseshoe but a series of independent lakes with intervening land barriers.

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<sup>434</sup> Sturt, *Narrative of an expedition*.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1: 431.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2: 326.

## 2.6 Summary: Exploration of the arid interior, 1788-1851

The following maps show the extent of the arid and semi-arid areas<sup>437</sup>, and explorers' routes up to 1850. Superimposing these maps upon each other shows that very few explorers had ventured into the arid zone, and only Sturt's 1844-5 expedition spent any time in arid terrain. Sturt's journal and reports contain some of the harshest descriptions of the inland and set the tone for expeditions for the next decade.

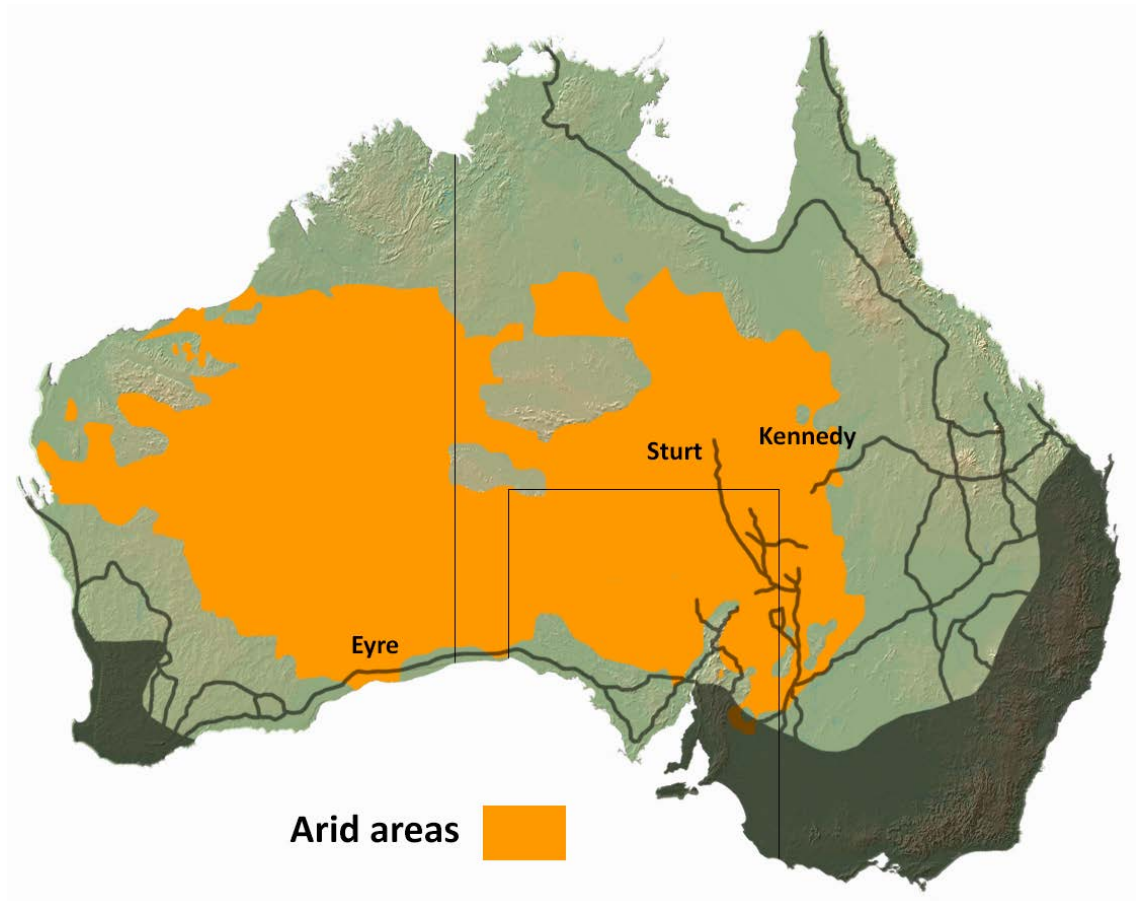


Figure 28: Arid areas in Australia with and colonial boundaries as at 1850.  
European exploration to 1850 superimposed in black.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.

<sup>437</sup> Arid and semi-arid areas defined by the Bureau of Meteorology interpretation of Köppen's climate classification and the Interim Bioregional Assessment, Version 7, 2012 (Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Government of Australia).

## 2.7 A.C. Gregory's expeditions, 1855-1858

A.C. Gregory had gained exploration experience in Western Australia while employed in the government survey department. On two occasions Gregory had covered considerable distances and surveyed large areas north of Perth<sup>438</sup> and in 1854 the Colonial Secretary, the Duke of Newcastle, asked Gregory to lead the 'North Australian Expedition' (NAE).<sup>439</sup> This expedition was overseen by the RGS, the first time they had taken an active interest in Australian exploration. The society planned to investigate areas of potential trade that Captain John Lort Stokes had previously identified while surveying the north coast in the HMS *Beagle*.<sup>440</sup> Although many previous expeditions had professed an interest in science, attempts at professional research had been limited and were often restricted to natural history collections gathered by the party's scientific officer whilst *en route*. Eyre and Sturt had taken along experienced bushmen who were able to handle the rigours of desert travel, but neither party had appointed scientists. The RGS sought advice from prominent scientists and assigned qualified personnel to research tasks on the NAE.<sup>441</sup> Stokes was an advisor to the expedition and he recommended to Newcastle that Sturt, a member of the RGS and now living in England, assist in organising the expedition and Sturt advised on the selection of the route and personnel. Of the 18 men in the party, five had scientific duties: Ferdinand Mueller was the botanist; Joseph Elsey the surgeon and naturalist; James Wilson the geologist; Thomas Baines the artist; and Sturt's stockman, Robert Flood, was the collector and preserver of specimens. Despite the best intentions of the expedition's backers, the scientists still found conditions difficult. The artist, Baines, who had been on two expeditions with Livingstone in Africa, was offered an additional £50 per annum on the condition he accepted the responsibility of storekeeper in addition to the duties of artist. Sturt assured Baines this additional responsibility would not conflict with his professional duties.<sup>442</sup> Elsey however found that the dual responsibilities of surgeon and naturalist, combined with the daily chores of camp life infringed on his scientific studies almost to the point where having two roles was untenable. He wrote:

It is certainly a great mistake to send out persons for the advancement of science when the fact is they can only avail themselves of a rare hour of leisure.<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> In 1846 Gregory covered 953 miles (1,500 kilometres) in just under seven weeks and in 1848 he covered 1,500 miles (2,400 kilometres) in ten weeks.

<sup>439</sup> Gregory's 'North Australian Expedition' party of 1855-1856 comprised of 18 men, 50 horses, 200 sheep and 18 months' rations.

<sup>440</sup> John Lort Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia: with an account of the coasts and rivers explored and surveyed during the voyage of HMS Beagle, in the years 1837-38-39-40-41-42-43, by command of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty* (London: T. & W. Boone, 1846).

<sup>441</sup> McLaren, *Beyond Leichhardt*, 137.

<sup>442</sup> Langley, *Sturt of the Murray*, 232.

<sup>443</sup> Wendy Birman, *Gregory of Rainworth: a man in his time* (Nedlands, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 1979), 104.



Figure 29: Left: Thomas Baines, 'Bowman the horse keeper and the artist threatened with spears while searching for stray horses near the Baines River, Victoria River, Northern Territory', c.1856. obj-153487060, PIC Row 45/1/3 #T1152 NK6954/D, National Library of Australia.

Figure 30: Right: Thomas Baines, 'Alligator, Victoria River', c.1856. obj-134417798, PIC Solander Box A24 #R4234, National Library of Australia.

Baines sketched some of the challenges faced by Gregory's 'NAE': crocodile attack, rugged terrain, pack-horse stampedes, flooded river crossings and confrontations with Aboriginal people.

This conflict between achieving scientific goals versus the practical demands of expeditionary travel would also hamper the scientists on the VEE.

Gregory's NAE spent 16 months travelling 3,200 kilometres by sea and 8,000 kilometres overland. Governor Denison praised Gregory and attributed the expedition's success to his zeal, energy and intelligence<sup>444</sup> and the RGS awarded him a gold medal.

Gregory had only been back in Sydney for a few months when a public meeting, held on 11 September 1857, proposed an expedition to search for the missing Leichhardt expedition. Gregory was asked to consider an expedition which connected Kennedy's furthest point on the Barcoo with Gregory's own track through the Gulf of Carpentaria. In a memorandum to the Leichhardt Association, Gregory estimated the cost of this venture to be under £4,500<sup>445</sup> and the Minister for Lands in New South Wales subsequently authorised Gregory to organise the expedition.<sup>446</sup> This expedition was fitted out quickly and left the Western Downs at the end of the wet season, but found little water or feed along the Barcoo and Thompson Rivers and Gregory was forced to abandon the

<sup>444</sup> Cumpston, *Augustus Gregory*, 60.

<sup>445</sup> Augustus Charles Gregory and Francis Thomas Gregory, *Journals of Australian Explorations* (Brisbane: James C. Beal, 1884).

<sup>446</sup> Gregory's 'Leichhardt Search Expedition' left Juandah Station on the Western Downs on 24 March 1858 and comprised of nine men. A.C. Gregory as leader, C.F. Gregory as Assistant Commander, G. Phibbs as Overseer, S. Burgoyne as Assistant, Selby, Robert Bowman, von Weddel and Worrell as stockmen. Bowman, Selby and Phibbs had been on Gregory's 'North Australian Expedition'. They took nine saddle-horses, 31 pack-horses, 300 lbs of dried meat, 500 lbs of bacon, 1600 lbs of flour, 100 lbs of rice, 350 lbs of sugar, 60 lbs of tea, 40 lbs of tobacco, one Minie rifle, eight double-barrelled guns, nine revolvers, 25 lbs gunpowder and 150 lbs of shot and ball. The total weight of the equipment was 4,600 lbs (2 tonnes) which meant each horse had a load of 150 lbs (70 kilograms).

main objective of the expedition. He was faced with a choice of heading towards the east coast and following the Belyando River northwards, or turning south-west and following the Barcoo downstream to ascertain whether this watercourse (originally named the Victoria by Mitchell) flowed into the Darling or Sturt's Cooper Creek. Gregory chose the latter option and followed the Barcoo down to the junction with the Thompson where the rivers join and become the Cooper. He then became the second party of Europeans to follow the Cooper, before turning south and following Strzelecki Creek to its termination at Lake Blanche. Gregory passed between Lakes Blanche and Callabonna thereby demonstrating that the salt lakes did not form a continuous barrier.

Gregory did not achieve his intended aim; he did not ascertain Leichhardt's fate, nor did he join the surveys of Mitchell and the NAE. However, his reception in Adelaide was "of the most flattering nature".<sup>447</sup> He was entertained by the Mayor, and Governor MacDonnell paid tribute to an expedition which would ultimately benefit the interests of South Australia. In his published journal, Gregory referred to the success of his expedition and the benefits it had for physical geography. He also expressed doubt on the existence of an inland sea:

It is, perhaps, with reference to the physical geography of Australia that the results of the Expedition are most important; as by connecting successively the explorations of Sir T. Mitchell, Mr. Kennedy, Captain Sturt, and Mr. Eyre, the waters of the tropical interior of the eastern portion of the Continent are proved to flow towards Spencer's Gulf ... This peculiar structure of the interior renders it improbable that any considerable inland lakes should exist in connection with the known system of waters.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>447</sup> Gregory and Gregory, *Journals*, 208.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

## 2.8 Conclusion

Expeditions' aims changed during the period in review, as new geographical information became available. The aims of the earliest expeditions progressed from finding a way across the Blue Mountains into solving the puzzle of New South Wales' inland rivers and South Australia's horse-shoe of salt lakes. These expeditions resulted in the rapid expansion of the colony's Merino flocks. Continued exploration entered increasingly inhospitable country which offered more marginal prospects for the pastoral industry. Although Sturt's 1844-5 expedition should have extinguished any hope of an inland sea, it remained a topic of discussion until Stuart returned from his fourth expedition in October 1860.<sup>449</sup> Kennedy's 1847 expedition certainly ended any speculation about navigable rivers flowing to the Gulf.

The methodology used in exploration also changed as parties travelled greater distances and entered more inhospitable terrain. In 1813 the seemingly impassable barrier presented by the Blue Mountains was crossed and three of the party of seven who made the trip, Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson, were celebrated for their achievement. However, the party was only in the mountains for four weeks and the short journey has been described as "hardly more than an enjoyable extended bushwalk".<sup>450</sup> Certainly their expedition was minor in comparison to later forays into the desert which lasted more than a year. McLaren has shown that explorers and administrators were initially slow to learn from experience and early expeditions were characterised by slow and difficult progress and the men endured unnecessary discomfort caused by a lack of understanding of Australian conditions.<sup>451</sup>

The common exploration practice of following rivers, which had proved successful in Africa and the Americas where there is higher precipitation and lower evaporation, proved frustrating in Australia. Following the rivers led to dead ends in the Blue Mountains, swamps and marshes in the interior of New South Wales and a seemingly impenetrable barrier of salt lakes in South Australia and no matter how far the rivers were traced downstream, they never led to an inland sea. Once all fertile land in the south-east had been traversed and mapped, the concept of exploration as the agent of expansion of the pastoral industry inevitably shifted towards ambitious curiosity-driven struggles to

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<sup>449</sup> When John McDouall Stuart returned from his second expedition in 1859, it was reported that he had "penetrated three hundred miles further north than he had reached before ... and reports a river three miles wide running to the east. He feels confident of the existence of an inland sea" *Sydney Morning Herald* 19 July 1859: 5. However, when Stuart returned from his fourth expedition in October 1860, any hopes of an inland sea were extinguished.

<sup>450</sup> Chris Cunningham, 'Discovery or diffusion? Heroes or human?: A perspective of Australia exploration myths', *Lock Haven International Review*, Vol. 13 (1999).

<sup>451</sup> Glen McLaren and William Cooper, 'Field research in 19th century Australia', *Australasian Science*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Winter (1996); Glen McLaren, J.M.R. Cameron, and William Cooper, 'Bushmanship: the explorer's silent partner', *Australian Geographer*, Vol. 30 (1999); William Cooper and Glen McLaren, 'The development of mobility in the exploration of Australia', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (1997).

map a hostile wilderness.<sup>452</sup> Exploration now involved enduring hardships and privations in the most inhospitable of deserts. However, finding water was still a fundamental requirement in the arid interior and this led to a divergence in exploration methodology. Military leaders with their large parties and many animals had high water requirements and, as a consequence, needed to establish base camps on a reliable supply and then conduct reconnaissance. The resulting slow moving expeditions suited surveyors and scientists, and Mitchell took the slow cumbersome expedition model to unmanageable levels (see Figure 31). The alternative was the small, light party whose lower water requirements meant they could travel faster. This style of travel would be used by Stuart when he crossed the continent in the early 1860s. There was also a move towards more scientifically based observation and discovery, and this is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Leaders of government sponsored expeditions received instructions, outlining their responsibilities and intended area of operation. Comprehensive and detailed though these instructions were, they failed to include performance criteria that could be used to determine whether the outcome was successful or otherwise. The initial assessment of the effectiveness of an expedition usually came from the leader himself and as a consequence many went to great lengths to protect their reputation, justify the route they had followed and praise the benefits their 'discoveries' would have for the colonial administration. Subsequent assessment then came from higher echelons of government, usually the Surveyor-General, Governor and then the Colonial Secretary. The Governor almost always supported the leader's reasons for his course of actions when forwarding the report on to the Colonial Secretary.<sup>453</sup> As a consequence of this process, the colonial administration refrained from openly questioning the success of an expedition, even when the primary aims were not met. An exception to this was Mitchell's continued reticence to follow the course of the Darling as a result of his rivalry with Sturt. Bourke felt Mitchell did not satisfactorily complete the survey of the Darling and Gipps felt Mitchell's expedition was protracted and costly. Despite this reference to cost, expenditure was rarely a factor in establishing the success of an expedition and although budgets were set during the planning stages, leaders regularly exceeded the budget.

The trend towards publishing journals invited further scrutiny from the public, as well as comment from the press. Although instructions stipulated the leader should maintain a journal, they were often written with future publication in mind and heavily edited and re-written after the completion of the expedition. This gave the leaders further opportunities to explain their actions and spell out how successful their expedition had been. The *Royal Geographical Society Journal* became the preferred place

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<sup>452</sup> The term 'wilderness' is used in the Anglo-Australian context to mean an arid, uncultivated and inhospitable region.

<sup>453</sup> For an example of this, see Macquarie's support for Oxley's second expedition, which was tasked with following the Lachlan and Macquarie Rivers, but which failed to do so. Oxley, *Two expeditions*, Appendix 1: 'Instructions for John Oxley', 355-359.

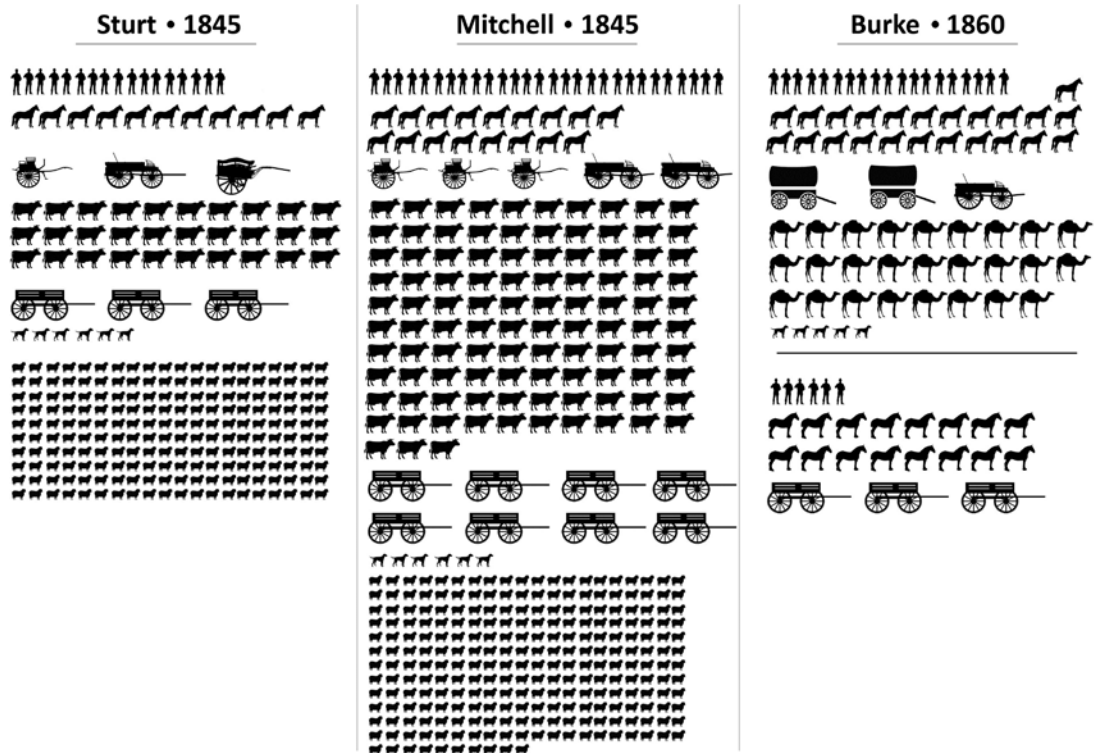


Figure 31: Comparison of the size of Sturt's, Mitchell's and Burke's parties.

Burke was criticised for the cumbersome nature of his expeditionary party, but when the VEE left Melbourne, it was nowhere near the size of the expeditions that preceded him under Sturt and Mitchell.

Sturt's 1845 expedition comprised 17 men, a spring cart, a boat mounted on a carriage and a horse dray with eleven horses, three bullock drays with 30 bullocks, six dogs and 200 sheep.

Mitchell's 1845 expedition comprised 29 men, three light carts and two boats on carts with 17 horses, eight bullock drays with 103 bullocks, six dogs and 250 sheep.

Burke's 1860 Expedition comprised 19 men, two American wagons and a punt wagon with 23 horses, 26 camels and five dogs. The three hired wagons, horses and drivers are depicted below the dividing line.

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to publish and a visit to London gave leaders the opportunity to promote their journals, as well as themselves. Formed in 1830 as the Geographical Society of London, the RGS promoted exploration and the honours it dispensed became a powerful incentive to explorers. Ryan notes the RGS went to great lengths to differentiate exploration from "mere adventuring"<sup>454</sup> and by doing so they assisted in the process of professionalising exploration. Consequently, receiving an award and the concomitant support of the RGS became an essential part in defining the success of an expedition, even for expeditions that were not specifically funded or supported by the Society. In fact, the RGS provided relatively little funding for Australian exploration compared to the amount expended on

<sup>454</sup> Ryan, *Cartographic eye*, 32-38.



Africa. Australian explorers were however well rewarded, with eleven Australian explorers receiving medals.<sup>455</sup>

Expedition participants faced a range of hazards, although other than the Kennedy and Leichhardt expeditions, there were few fatalities. Although attacks by Aboriginal people were considered the greatest risk, just as many men died of starvation as from spears. Probably more died of long-term health issues associated with prolonged periods of poor diet. The risks were certainly more mundane than those faced by military men in the battles of the Peninsula War. Between 1830 and 1860, 27 European explorers died pursuing their duties. The greatest threats were: starvation (seven men)<sup>456</sup>; Aboriginal attack (seven men)<sup>457</sup>; disappearing into the desert to an unknown fate (seven men)<sup>458</sup>; accidental discharge of firearms (three men)<sup>459</sup>; dying of thirst (one man)<sup>460</sup>; dying of scurvy (one man)<sup>461</sup>; drowning (one man).<sup>462</sup>

Despite the hazards, a successful outcome, however it was defined, could lead to numerous benefits, particularly for the leader. Land grants and pecuniary rewards became common place, although changes to laws regulating the amount of land that could be granted by the governor meant Mitchell was frustrated in this aim and Sturt had to repeatedly petition the Colonial Office for his reward. A political career became a possibility for the leader, an option that was normally beyond the reach of most middle-ranking military men, and success did not seem to be a criterion in securing political office. Both Eyre and Grey entered office, despite Eyre's 1840 expedition having taken an entirely different route to the one instructed and Grey's two miserable attempts at exploration, one of which resulted in the death of one of the men. Explorers could achieve fame and celebrity through their efforts to further the cause of the Empire, a fact that was not lost on most expedition leaders. Participation in exploration also allowed access to levels of society that would otherwise be restricted or unavailable. Gaining the approval of the Governor and the support of the RGS could promote one through the social ranks remarkably quickly. Awards and honours, including knighthoods, were

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<sup>455</sup> The RGS awarded the Founder's Medal to Eyre (1843), Strzelecki (1846), Sturt (1847), A.C. Gregory (1857), Burke (1862) and F.T. Gregory (1863). They awarded the Patron's Medal to Leichhardt (1847), Stuart (1861), Warburton (1874), Forrest (1876) and Giles (1880).

<sup>456</sup> Died of Aboriginal attack: Edmund Kennedy and James Luff (1848), Dennis Dunn (Kennedy's 1848 expedition), John Gilbert (Leichhardt's 1845 expedition), Richard Cunningham (1835), The bullock driver (Mitchell's relief party 1832), John Baxter (Eyre's 1840 expedition).

<sup>457</sup> Died of starvation: Frederick Smith (Gray's 1839 expedition), Edward Carpenter, Thomas Mitchell, John Douglas, Edward Taylor, Charles Niblett and Thomas Wall (Kennedy's 1848 expedition).

<sup>458</sup> Disappeared without trace: Joseph Gellibrand and George B.L. Hesse (1837), Ludwig Leichhardt (1848) along with Adolf Classen, Arthur Hentig, Donald Stuart and Mr Kelly.

<sup>459</sup> Died from accidental discharge of firearms; John Horrocks (1846), William Costigan (Kennedy's 1848 expedition), Charles Farmer (Austin's 1854 expedition).

<sup>460</sup> Died of thirst: William Coulthart (1858).

<sup>461</sup> Died of scurvy: James Poole (Sturt's 1845 expedition).

<sup>462</sup> Drowned: James Taylor (Mitchell's 1836 expedition).

also presented to the successful explorer. It would therefore appear that the terms of success in exploration were crafted primarily by the leader.



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# 3

## ESTABLISHING THE VICTORIAN EXPLORING EXPEDITION

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### CONTENTS

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3.1	Introduction	123
3.2	Scientific Societies in Australia	124
3.3	Scientific Societies in Victoria	127
3.4	Exploration Proposals	133
3.5	Early plans for the Expedition's route	136
3.6	Funding the Expedition	147
3.7	Organising the Expedition	160
3.8	Conclusion	167

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*The [Exploration] Committee ... is that old spinster  
who has won an elephant in the lottery and  
does not know what to do with it.*

Ludwig Becker to Ferdinand Mueller, 'letter, dated 9 March 1860'.  
(translated from German by Marjorie Tipping)  
Original item held at the MS 1236, National Library of Australia.

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Figure 32: Edgar Ray, 'Presentation of the King testimonial', 1862.  
*Illustrated Australian Mail*, 25 September 1862: 168.

Meeting of the Exploration Committee in the Royal Society of Victoria's hall, Victoria Street, Melbourne.

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### 3.1 Introduction

The VEE was the colony of Victoria's first attempt at exploration and the manner in which it was proposed, funded and established was different to the established methodologies used in other colonies as outlined and examined in the previous chapter.

Mounting an expedition required an investment of capital and there was an expectation of a return for that investment, usually realised through expansion of the pastoral industry. Privately funded expeditions hoped for preferential access to this land for the benefactors, while officially sanctioned expeditions anticipated the regulated expansion of European settlement and increased export revenue. Establishing an expedition to increase scientific knowledge was not commonplace in Australia in the early nineteenth century and science was peripheral in most expeditions and usually represented in terms of botanical collections.<sup>463</sup> Funding an expedition by public subscription was rare, as was organising an expedition with the intention of exploring another colony. Equally rare in Australia was sponsorship or patronage of exploration by learned or scientific societies. Nevertheless, a unique set of circumstances initiated by the discovery of gold, the separation of the Port Phillip District from New South Wales, and the formation of the RSV, resulted in the colony of Victoria organising a large-scale, publicly funded, officially sanctioned, scientific expedition which would explore exclusively in neighbouring colonies.

This chapter looks at the context of the RSV, the development of scientific societies in Australia in the nineteenth century and examines how the RSV (and its predecessors, the Victorian Institute for the Advancement of Science, the Philosophical Society of Victoria and the Philosophical Institute of Victoria) established the VEE, raised funds, determined the Expedition's aims, selected a leader and chose a route using a methodology which was significantly different to the way earlier inland expeditions had been established. While the Expedition's camels are mentioned in this chapter, a detailed examination of the introduction and use of camels in Australian exploration is in Chapter 5.

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<sup>463</sup> Ann Moyal, *A bright and savage land: Scientists in colonial Australia* (Sydney: William Collins, 1986).



### 3.2 Scientific Societies in Australia

Modern scientific societies began with the formation of the Royal Society in London in 1660.<sup>464</sup> By 1850 there were more than a dozen learned societies in London, with the Linnean Society (founded 1788), the Geological Society (1807), the Astronomical Society (1820), the [Royal] Geographical Society (1830), the British Archaeological Association and the Ethnological Society (both founded 1843), all promoting the advancement of natural sciences. Similar developments in Paris, Berlin and Bavaria meant that Europe represented the hub of 'metropolitan science'.<sup>465</sup>

There was endless fascination in London with antipodean flora and fauna and Banks sent a series of collectors and observers to the colonies.<sup>466</sup> However, scientific societies were slow to develop in Australia and the colonies remained at the periphery of scientific advance.<sup>467</sup> Survival and economic advance were the main priorities, and it has been suggested that despite the best intentions of the educated minority "pioneering did not lend itself to culture".<sup>468</sup> Rod Home notes that:

despite the [scientific] attention focused on Australia, we cannot assume that the growth of a scientific tradition in Australia would be the inevitable product of the passage of scientists through Australia and their study of Australian phenomena. Important in themselves, and intensely exciting to the scientists, they were not necessarily immediately relevant to a struggling penal settlement.<sup>469</sup>

The first scientific society in Australia,<sup>470</sup> the Philosophical Society of Australasia, was established in New South Wales in 1821.<sup>471</sup> Despite the enthusiasm of its select membership, which included explorer John Oxley, the "exclusivist and conservative" nature of its members meant the society folded after a year.<sup>472</sup> The conservative members' scientific aspirations were easily diverted, however, by technology and they also attended, and often dominated, meetings at Mechanics' Institutes and Agricultural Societies – practical institutions that suited the pioneer nature of the colonial society and

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<sup>464</sup> Physicians and natural philosophers held meetings in London from around 1645. The Royal Society began at a meeting held on 28 November 1660 and received a Royal Charter two years later. Henry George Lyons, *The Royal Society, 1660-1940: A history of its administration under its charters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1944), 19-70.

<sup>465</sup> Roy Malcolm MacLeod, 'On Visiting the 'Moving Metropolis': Reflections on the architecture of imperial science', *Historical Records of Australian Science*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1982): 1-16.

<sup>466</sup> Banks sponsored George Caley and the Imperial Government sent Robert Brown, Allan Cunningham and Ferdinand Bauer to Australia. Colin Michael Finney, *To sail beyond the Sunset: Natural History in Australia 1699-1829* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1984), 88-9, 105-6, 112-3, 119-24.

<sup>467</sup> Moyal, *Bright and savage land*, 87.

<sup>468</sup> Roderick Wier Home, ed. *Australian science in the making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 50.

<sup>469</sup> Home, *Australian science*, 46.

<sup>470</sup> In 1818 Judge Advocate Wylde's attempt to establish an agricultural society failed due to opposition from Governor Macquarie. Marion Phillips, *A colonial autocracy New South Wales under Governor MacQuarie 1810-1821* (London: P.S. King, 1909), 270. Agricultural and horticultural societies flourished in New South Wales between 1821 and 1855, whereas philosophical societies struggled.

<sup>471</sup> Moyal, *Bright and savage land*, 182.

<sup>472</sup> Home, *Australian science*, 56.

which were flourishing at the time, along with Schools of the Arts and Athenaeum.<sup>473</sup> Other colonies faced similar difficulties with the Van Diemen's Land Scientific Society (formed 1829) lasting just two years.<sup>474</sup> The Tasmanian Society of Natural History (formed 1838) fared better, mainly as a result of support from Lieutenant-Governor Franklin, and the society attracted membership and papers from other colonies that lacked their own outlets for scientific advance.<sup>475</sup> Sympathetic support from the higher echelons of colonial society, particularly Governors Franklin and Denison, was one of the few ways a learned society could hope to survive the indifference of a pioneer culture.<sup>476</sup>

By the 1840s, science in Britain was becoming dominated by professional specialists, while in Australia it was still the domain of enthusiastic amateurs, particularly botanists and naturalists,<sup>477</sup> who were driving scientific debate. John Gilbert, for example, arrived in Australia with John Gould and conducted numerous privately funded collecting excursions, before joining Leichhardt's 1844 expedition.<sup>478</sup> While Australia was slow to adopt new agricultural and pastoral technologies, the focus of scientific societies continued to be on the practical applications of science, as the aims of the Royal Society of Van Diemen's Land demonstrate:

The leading objects of the Society were to develop the physical character of the Island, and illustrate its natural history and productions.<sup>479</sup>

It was therefore not surprising that geology became one of the main areas of interest, promoted enthusiastically from London by Sir Roderick Murchison.<sup>480</sup> In 1844 Murchison foreshadowed the discovery of gold in Australia and called for increased focus on the exploration of the inland and the development of settlement on the north coast and Gulf of Carpentaria. As a member of the Royal Society and founder member of the RGS, Murchison had already supported the sponsorship of

<sup>473</sup> Home, *Australian science*; Royal Society of New South Wales, 'Review of Society's Activities', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, Vol. 107, Part 4 (1974): 122-123.

<sup>474</sup> The Van Diemen's Land Scientific Society was formed in December 1829. *Hobart Town Courier*, 12 December 1829.

<sup>475</sup> The Tasmanian Society of Natural History (originally The Society of Van Diemen's Land) was formed in 1838, the year after Franklin was appointed Lieutenant-Governor. In 1841 the society was renamed The Philosophical Society of Tasmania and began publishing *The Tasmanian Journal of Natural Science, Agriculture, Statistics etc.* Edmund Leolin Piesse, 'The foundation and early work of the Society with some account of other institutions of early Hobart', *Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania* (Hobart: H.H. Pimblett, 1913): 117-166.

<sup>476</sup> James Dugald Somerville, 'The Royal Society of Tasmania, 1843-1943', *Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania* (Hobart: H.H. Pimblett, 1944): 199-221.

<sup>477</sup> When John Gould was adding to his private collection during a trip to Australia in 1838-1840, he employed naturalists John Gilbert, George Bennet, James Drummond and Charles Coxen.

<sup>478</sup> John Gilbert was employed by John Gould as a zoological collector. He arrived in Van Diemen's Land in 1838 and stayed in Australia after Gould returned home. Gilbert travelled widely, but was fatally speared on Leichhardt's expedition. Moyal, *Bright and savage land*, 53-55; Leichhardt, *Overland Expedition*; Alec H. Chisholm, *Strange new world: the adventures of John Gilbert and Ludwig Leichhardt* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1941).

<sup>479</sup> Somerville, 'The Royal Society of Tasmania'.

<sup>480</sup> James A. Secord, 'King of Siluria: Roderick Murchison and the Imperial Theme in Nineteenth-Century British Geology' *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 4, Summer (1982): 413-442.



Figure 33: Thomas Baines, 'Party on shore on Quail Island, Paterson's Bay, NW coast, Australia', 1855.  
PIC Solander Box A24 #R4235, National Library of Australia.

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George Grey's 1837 expedition to Western Australia. Now, with the prospect of the discovery of payable gold, he supported Sturt's 1845 expedition and called for an expedition to the north coast. Sturt collected geological and botanical specimens, as well as making notes about flora and fauna, particularly birds.<sup>481</sup> Mitchell also collected, sketched and commented on geology, zoology and botany, and took botanist Richard Cunningham on his 1835 expedition. Edmund Kennedy, who had served as second-in-command to Mitchell, took botanist William Carron on his 1848 expedition to Cape York, and as mentioned earlier, Leichhardt took botanist John Gilbert on his 1844 expedition. The expedition to the north coast that Murchison had suggested was organised by the British government and was dispatched under A.C. Gregory in 1855. As noted earlier, the party included Mueller as botanist, Joseph Elsey as naturalist, and Thomas Baines as artist. Although Gregory did not take scientists on his next expedition, the idea that exploration was not just about discovering pastoral land, rivers or the inland sea, but also an opportunity for scientific discovery was established. Australia, however, had not yet mounted an expedition with scientific discovery as its primary aim.

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<sup>481</sup> Sturt, *Narrative of an expedition*.

### 3.3 Scientific Societies in Victoria

The discovery of payable gold in Australia resulted in rapid economic growth and a remarkable increase in population. This growth was most pronounced in Victoria and was “unprecedented in the annals of British colonies”.<sup>482</sup> The decade from 1851 to 1861 saw a seven-fold increase in the population of Melbourne which became the second largest city in the British Empire and the financial capital of Australia. Victorians, who comprised 18% of the country’s population in 1851, made up 47% of the population by 1861.

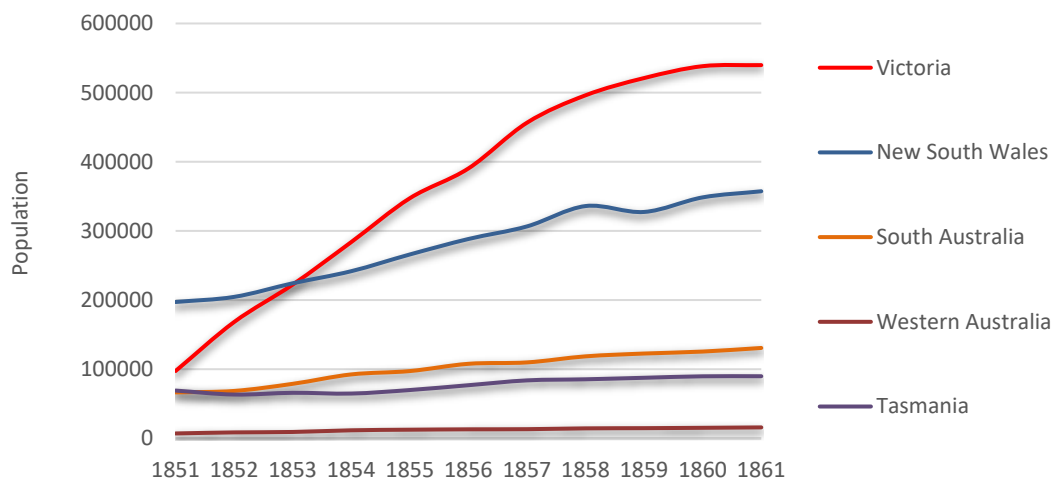


Figure 34: Population growth by colony during the gold rush decade 1851-1861.<sup>483</sup>

Despite the new-found wealth, the development of Melbourne’s infrastructure was hindered by a shortage of labour and inflated wages. A loss of investor confidence during 1854 resulted in economic depression which further hampered growth. Wills arrived in Melbourne in January 1853 and, like many ‘new chums’ who came in search of gold, was taken aback by the city’s poor appearance, lawlessness and high prices, where “a shilling here is worth very little more than a penny at home”.<sup>484</sup> He commented on the preoccupation with gold and the lack of interest in science. When forced to sell some scientific texts, he got:

a mere nothing for them; scientific works are no use, the people who buy everything here are gold diggers and they want little story books.<sup>485</sup>

During the initial frantic scramble for gold in the early 1850s, scientific advance was mainly undertaken by government appointees – the Government Geologist, Government Meteorologist etc.

<sup>482</sup> Michael Cannon, *Melbourne after the gold rush* (Main Ridge, Victoria: Loch Haven Books, 1993).

<sup>483</sup> Data sourced from Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Population by sex, states and territories, 31 December, 1788 onwards*, 3105.0.65.001 Australian Historical Population Statistics, 2006.

<sup>484</sup> William John Wills, 'Letter to Dr Wills, dated Deniliquin, 12 February 1853', Correspondence and press cuttings: 1839-1861, MS 9504, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*



Figure 35: De Gruchy & Leigh, 'Canvas Town, between Princess Bridge and South Melbourne in 1850s'. H25127, State Library of Victoria.

Wills arrived in Victoria on 3 January 1853, aged 18, accompanied by his 15-year-old brother Thomas. They found a town swamped with new arrivals. The Wills brothers stayed in Melbourne for twelve days and were fortunate enough to be able to afford accommodation at the Immigrants Home on the south bank of the Yarra. Other, less fortunate arrivals lived nearby in 'canvas town'.

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Their work was restricted by a lack of facilities, a lack of expertise and even a lack of scientific texts.<sup>486</sup> The natural sciences needed university supervision to develop further "as questions of the most ordinary character are being daily referred to England".<sup>487</sup> Although the University of Melbourne was proclaimed in November 1852, the professors took time to arrive from England and classes did not commence until 1855. To develop further, the scientific community needed the infrastructure and network necessary for reportage and discussion.<sup>488</sup>

The first specialist society in the new colony was, not unsurprisingly, a geological society.<sup>489</sup> Established in 1852, and followed shortly afterwards by the arrival of the first government geological surveyor, A.R.C. Selwyn,<sup>490</sup> the society started out with grand aims and an expectation of royal assent, even offering patronage to Prince Albert.<sup>491</sup> However, Governor La Trobe requested they widen their aims to embrace the whole range of natural history before he would allocate funds. Attendance at meetings dropped and the society folded the following year.<sup>492</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> Richard Thomas Martin Pescott, 'The Royal Society of Victoria from then, 1854 to now, 1959', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria*, Vol. 73 (1961).

<sup>487</sup> Pescott, 'RSV from then to now'.

<sup>488</sup> Home, *Australian science*, 107.

<sup>489</sup> The Geological Society of Victoria, see: *Argus*, 4 October 1852: 6, 8 October 1852: 10, 4 December 1852: 5, 1 January 1853: 5, 8 January 1853: 5.

<sup>490</sup> Alfred Richard Cecil Selwyn (1824-1902) was born in England, studied geology and arrived in Melbourne in November 1852. He established a geological survey of Victoria, was a member of the Geological Society of Victoria, sat on the council of the Philosophical Society of Victoria, Philosophical Institute of Victoria and the Royal Society of Victoria, and was a member of the EC from 1860-1862.

<sup>491</sup> Michael Edward Hoare, 'Learned societies in Australia: The foundation years in Victoria 1850-1860', *Records of the Australian Academy of Science*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1967): 11.

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*

However, “industrious and talented scientists”<sup>493</sup> continued to arrive in Melbourne and this resulted in the formation of two learned societies whose aims were to aid and advance the institutionalisation of science in the colony. The Victorian Institute for the Advancement of Science (VIAS) was proposed by chemist and former secretary of the defunct Melbourne geological society, William Sydney Gibbons, on 15 June 1854 and founded six weeks later. Acting Chief Justice Redmond Barry was nominated as president and Surveyor-General Captain Andrew Clarke<sup>494</sup> vice-president.<sup>495</sup> Their first conversazione, held at the Mechanics’ Institute in September, was attended by more than 200 ladies and gentlemen.<sup>496</sup> The VIAS concentrated on building the economy through commercial development and was modelled on the British Association for the Advancement of Science, which had been established for 23 years.

Less than a fortnight after the VIAS was founded a second society, the Philosophical Society of Victoria (PSV), held their first meeting.<sup>497</sup> From the outset the PSV was not only modelled on the Royal Society, but set its sights on royal assent, an honour that had only previously been bestowed on the Royal Society of Van Diemen’s Land (RSVDL).<sup>498</sup> The inaugural president was the Surveyor-General and it was largely due to his efforts that the society was formed.<sup>499</sup> Clarke, formerly an active member of the RSVDL, had just been promoted to captain and had recently arrived in Melbourne from New South Wales to take up the post of Surveyor-General and take a seat in the Legislative Council. When a recommendation to establish a museum of natural history was received by the Legislative Council, it was Clarke who arranged the committee, controlled the finances and provided the premises at the Assay Office of the Crown Lands.<sup>500</sup> Clarke would leave the colony for England

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<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>494</sup> Lieutenant General Sir Andrew Clarke, GCMG, CB, CIE, (1824-1902) was born in England, arrived in Tasmania in 1847 and was in Melbourne from 1853-1858.

<sup>495</sup> The first office bearers of the Victorian Institute for the Advancement of Science were Lieutenant-Governor Hotham as patron; Barry as president, Clarke as vice-president, John Maund M.D. as treasurer, Gibbons as honorary secretary and F. Sinnett, E. G. Mayne, Captain Pasley R.E., M. B. Jackson, Alfred R.C. Selwyn, A.K. Smith, George Higginbotham, George Holmes and Ferdinand Mueller as council members.

<sup>496</sup> *Argus*, 25 September 1854: 5.

<sup>497</sup> *Argus*, 8 August 1854: 8. The organisation was originally called 'The Melbourne Philosophical and Literary Association', but at the first meeting Mueller’s suggestion of 'The Philosophical Society of Victoria' was adopted. Royal Society of Victoria, 'Victorian Philosophical and Literary Society preliminary meeting, 17 June 1854', Series 1, Minute Books, Vol. 1a, Records of the Royal Society of Victoria, 1854-1982, MS 11663, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>498</sup> *Argus*, 18 September 1854: 5.

<sup>499</sup> Pescott, 'RSV from then to now', 5.

<sup>500</sup> Ian Wilkinson, 'The battle for the museum: Frederick McCoy and the establishment of the National Museum of Victoria at the University of Melbourne', *Historical Records of Australian Science*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1996).



Figure 36: Ludwig Becker, 'Andrew Clarke', 1855.  
PIC Drawer 7381, #U6442, NK3678, National Library of Australia.

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before the VEE started, but the committee he formed had members who would promote exploration as a means of advancing the discipline of natural history.<sup>501</sup>

The VIAS and PSV would eventually merge to become the PIV, which became the RSV in 1860. However, the attempt by these institutes to unite the scientific community were not always well received by the Victorian public. As Hoare points out:

these institutions came into existence amidst much criticism and scepticism concerning their role and future in a colonial society. Some colonists predicted that there would be little return for an investment in abstract science ... There were, it is true, other pressing demands upon public finance. Melbourne in 1854 was without adequate water, power supplies, drainage and sewerage facilities; road and railway development was only just beginning; even the winning and processing of gold was still often very rudimentary.<sup>502</sup>

He quotes a letter in the contemporary press where the "contributor ... laconically observed" that:

in all probability the advancement of science in a new country is better obtained by constructing good roads and excellent railways than by setting up telescopes and gazing at the stars.<sup>503</sup>

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<sup>501</sup> The first office bearers of the Philosophical Society of Victoria were Lieutenant-Governor Hotham as patron; Clarke as president; Godfrey Howitt as vice-president; Dr David Elliot Wilkie M.D. (physician, arrived in Melbourne 1838 and established the Mechanics' Institute) as treasurer; Sigismund Wekey honorary secretary; Dr Richard Eades (physician, studied botany & chemistry, arrived in Melbourne 1852), Dr Ferdinand Mueller (government botanist, arrived in Adelaide 1847 and Melbourne 1852, explored South Australia and Victoria in pursuit of botany); Alfred R. C. Selwyn (government geologist); Reverend A. Morison; Solomon Iffla M.D.; Frederick Collier Christy; Dr John Hutchinson, M.D.; William Blandowski; council members. Royal Society of Victoria, 'Philosophical Society of Victoria meetings, 24 June 1854-23 June 1855', Series 1: Minute Books, Vol. 1b, Records of the Royal Society of Victoria, 1854-1982, MS 11663, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>502</sup> Hoare, 'Learned societies', 8.

<sup>503</sup> *Illustrated Journal of Australasia*, Vol 3, July-December 1857: 154, quoted in Hoare, 'Learned societies'.



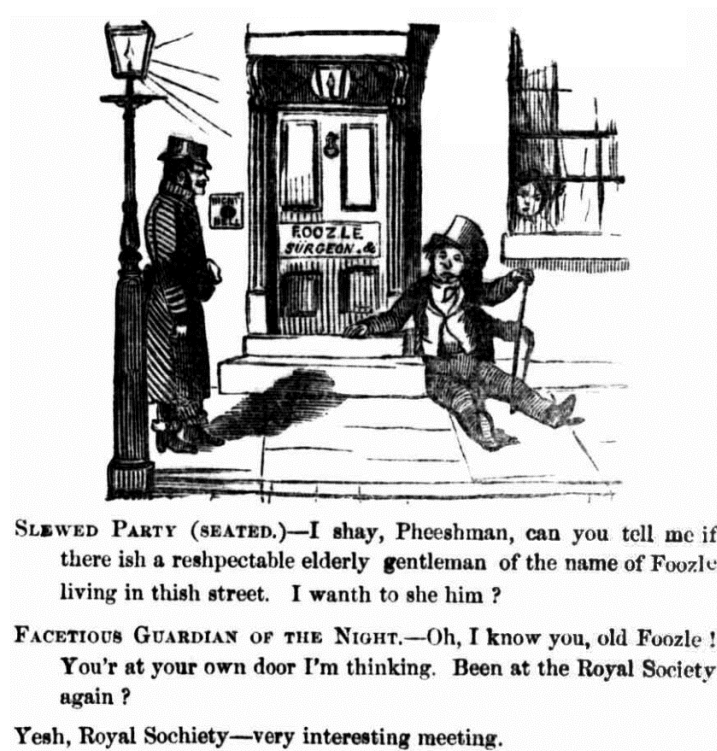


Figure 37: 'Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria ... the following is a well authenticated report of the proceedings ... at the meeting on Saturday night / Dr Foozle in the chair'. *Melbourne Punch*, 15 March 1860: 2-3.

Although Melbourne offered an opportunity for young scientists like Mueller, Selwyn, Frederick McCoy<sup>504</sup> and Georg Neumayer<sup>505</sup> to pursue the principles of Humboldtian science,<sup>506</sup> earn good money, advance their careers and work in a new environment where there was much to learn and discover,<sup>507</sup> the laconic observer cautioned against providing government funds for every project proposed by Melbourne's learned societies as he suspected that many of these scientists, particularly

<sup>504</sup> Frederick McCoy (1817-1899), later Sir Frederick, was born in Dublin and arrived in Australia in 1855 to take up the newly created position of professor of natural science at the University of Melbourne. He was one of the first four professors at the university.

<sup>505</sup> Georg Balthasar von Neumayer (1826-1909) was a scientist, magnetician, hydrographer, oceanographer and meteorologist. Born in Bavaria, he arrived in Australia in 1852. With the assistance and support of Alexander Humboldt and King Maximilian, he established the Flagstaff Hill Magnetic Observatory in Melbourne. He returned to Germany in 1869, where he made a significant contribution to hydrography and polar science.

<sup>506</sup> Alexander Humboldt (1769-1859) is credited with advancing a scientific movement, which Susan Cannon referred to in 1978 as "Humboldtian Science". Humboldt built on the earlier work of Linnaeus, Kant and others to combine scientific field work with ideals of the age of Romanticism and his quantitative methodology was the catalyst which encouraged many German scientists to travel around the world to advance scientific understanding using Humboldt's principles.

<sup>507</sup> In 1860 the EC had 22 members, ten of which were 40 years old or younger. The average age of the EC was 41 years old. Government scientists Mueller, Macadam, Neumayer and Selwyn were all in their thirties and the youngest member of the EC, Dr McGillivray, was just 26 years old.



the 'foreigners', were "soi-disant<sup>508</sup> philosophers".<sup>509</sup> This mistrust of the "savans" at the PSV would hamper their attempts at establishing the VEE.<sup>510</sup> Despite the veneer of science, trained scientists were in the minority at the VIAS and PSV. Meetings were as much about the social aspect of colonial life, and the eclectic assortment of papers presented covered practical aspects of establishing the new colony, such as supplying Melbourne with water from Yan Yean Reservoir and the gradients of railway lines, as well as diverse topics such as new instruments to establish the dew point, a new mode of life insurance and the introduction of the British song-bird.<sup>511</sup> Hoare admits the two societies "had many hangers-on and served as a concourse for the social élite [and] pseudo intellectuals".<sup>512</sup> Bonyhady also points out that:

the membership depended principally on class ... every month an assortment of politicians, engineers and magistrates, chemists, surgeons and merchants, solicitors, teachers and surveyors sought out its membership, and occasionally even its meetings.<sup>513</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> 'Soi-disant' = French, meaning 'so called', 'self-styled', 'pretended' or, 'as claimed by and for yourself often without justification'.

<sup>509</sup> Hoare, 'Learned societies', 7-9.

<sup>510</sup> *Age*, 1 July 1861: 4; *Argus*, 15 November 1861: 7.

<sup>511</sup> Philosophical Society of Victoria, *Transactions of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria: Including the papers and proceedings of the society. For the past year ending in July 1855*, Vol. 1 (Melbourne: James J Blundell & Co., 1855); Philosophical Institute of Victoria, *Transactions of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria: From January to December 1858 inclusive. Edited for the Council of the Institute by John Macadam MD, Hon Sec.*, ed. John Macadam, Vol. 3 (Melbourne: The Institute, 1859).

<sup>512</sup> Hoare, 'Learned societies', 25.

<sup>513</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 12.

### 3.4 Exploration Proposals

The first meeting of the PSV was on the 12 August 1854 in the Museum of Natural History in the Crown Lands Office.<sup>514</sup> After Clarke gave the President's Inaugural Address,<sup>515</sup> the members passed a motion to organise "exploring expeditions into the interior of Australia".<sup>516</sup> Pescott suggests it is hardly surprising that exploration was one of the first topics raised, when the PSV council comprised of the Surveyor-General, the Government Botanist, the Curator of the Natural History Museum and the Government Geologist; men who had recently been actively involved in exploring the new colony.<sup>517</sup> However, it was unusual for a learned society to propose to organise and run an expedition, and unheard of in Australia. While the Royal Society of London had promoted exploration, their only involvement in organising expeditions was the botanical collectors dispatched by Banks. The idea of organising an expedition was more in keeping with the aims of the RGS rather than the Royal Society, upon which the PSV had based their constitution. The RGS had supported Grey's 1837 expedition and Sturt's 1845 expedition and they were currently considering Murchison's proposal for the exploration of northern Australia.

The PSV's honorary secretary, Sigismund Wekey,<sup>518</sup> prepared "a project for the organisation of exploring expeditions for the purpose of 'prospecting' in different parts of the colony" which was presented to the PSV at their second meeting held the following month.<sup>519</sup> A sub-committee was appointed to consider the project<sup>520</sup> and at the third meeting they agreed:

That the Society shall organise exploring expeditions, which shall be despatched from time to time to prospect in different parts of the country, with the view of discovering new auriferous metals, mineral, coal, &c., and to collect additional information respecting the various mineral and vegetable resources of the country.<sup>521</sup>

Wekey's original proposal mentioned exploring the interior of Australia, but by the third meeting the proposal was scaled down and it was decided that any expedition would be conducted within the

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<sup>514</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Victorian Philosophical and Literary Society preliminary meeting, 17 June 1854', Series I, Minute Books, Vol. 1a, Records of the Royal Society of Victoria, 1854-1982, MS 11663, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>515</sup> Philosophical Society of Victoria, *Transactions*, Vol. 1: 1-4.

<sup>516</sup> *Argus* 12 September 1854: 3.

<sup>517</sup> Pescott, 'RSV from then to now', 7; Wilkinson, 'McCoy and the Museum'.

<sup>518</sup> Sigismund Wekey (1825-1889), Hungarian born solicitor and author, arrived in Melbourne as an assisted migrant early in 1854.

<sup>519</sup> *Argus*, 19 September 1854:4; Philosophical Society of Victoria, *Transactions*, Vol. 1: i. The second meeting was held on 10 September 1854.

<sup>520</sup> The sub-committee comprised Mueller, Iffla, Wekey and Robert Brough Smyth. Mueller and Iffla would continue on to become members of the EC. Iffla sat on the EC until 1864, while Muller sat on the EC until it was disbanded in 1874. Royal Society of Victoria, 'Philosophical Society of Victoria meetings, 2 August 1854-12 June 1855', Series I, Minute Books, Vol. 1a, Records of the Royal Society of Victoria, 1854-1982, MS 11663, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>521</sup> *Argus*, 18 September 1854: 5.

boundaries of the colony with the aim of identifying mineral resources rather than identifying pastoral land. Nevertheless, these discussions show the PSV had its sights set on exploration from the outset.

With a membership of 132 and only £179 in available funds, the Society was not in a financial position to mount an expedition independently and they decided on a public appeal to raise funds. There was little enthusiasm and the PSV turned to the government for help. Lieutenant-Governor Hotham was equally reluctant to fund exploration and refused to see the delegation, stating that private enterprise would continue to discover gold and that the coal resources at Western Port were sufficient to last a generation.<sup>522</sup> Victoria's economic boom was slowing and a lack of investor confidence combined with unsustainable expenditure resulted in depression by the end of 1854.<sup>523</sup> Despite the Society's promise of further discoveries of gold and coal reserves, the Government was not prepared to place money on the estimates for the plan and the PSV's first attempt at exploration was put on hold.

The public call for funds was unusual, as previously only Leichhardt had raised enough funds from public subscription to establish an expedition. Citizens were not used to being asked to fund exploration, as it was usually considered a Government responsibility. When the New South Wales legislature were organising Gregory's 'NAE' in 1855 it was only the suggestion that there was a humanitarian aspect to the venture in searching for Leichhardt that resulted in "some generous offers" being made by private individuals.<sup>524</sup> The EC would raise the idea of public subscription again in 1857 when they asked the Victorian public to fund their expedition.

The population of Melbourne was unable to sustain two learned societies and in 1855 the VIAS and PSV amalgamated to form the PIV.<sup>525</sup> Although the plans for mounting an expedition had received a setback, Clarke used the President's Anniversary Address to the new combined Institute

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<sup>522</sup> The petition to Hotham was proposed at the fifth meeting, held on 14 November 1854, drafted at the sixth meeting held on 12 December and presented to Hotham the following day. Hotham replied in writing on 18 December, see: Philosophical Society of Victoria, *Transactions*, Vol. I: vi-ix.

<sup>523</sup> Turner, *A history of Victoria*, 364.

<sup>524</sup> Favenc, *Australian exploration*, 184.

<sup>525</sup> Geoffrey Serle, *The Golden Age: A history of the colony of Victoria, 1851-1861* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1963), 367.

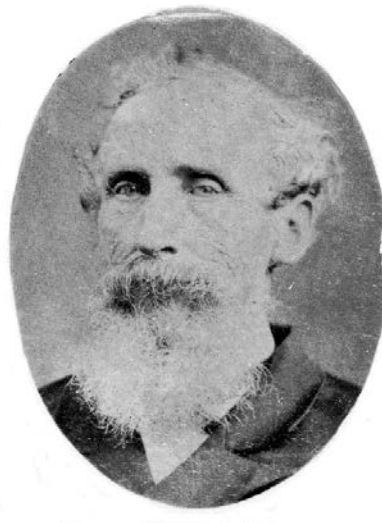


Figure 38: Thomas Foster Chuck, 'David Elliot Wilkie', 1872.  
H5056/532, State Library of Victoria.

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to remind the membership of their intention to organise an exploration party.<sup>526</sup> He further explained that in order to recommend the scheme to the Government it had been necessary to restrict its scope to be within the boundaries of the colony, but he hinted that the PIV should set their sights on a more extensive expedition and he reiterated the benefits of exploration for Victoria:

It may be as well here to repeat the reasons which led the society to believe that had this scheme been undertaken it would have benefited the country at once, and in the manner most needed. More than now our knowledge of the physical character of the province was circumscribed. Efficiently organised exploring parties would have supplied the information in an acceptable form.<sup>527</sup>

Despite Clarke's reminder, the exploration debate made no further progress until late in 1857 when the PIV's Vice-President, Dr David Elliot Wilkie,<sup>528</sup> a Scottish physician who was in his mid-forties and had been in Australia for 20 years, proposed that the Institute consider fitting out a geographical expedition.

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<sup>526</sup> *Argus*, 6 February 1856: 5.

<sup>527</sup> Andrew Clarke, 'Anniversary Address of the President' delivered at the Philosophical Institute of Victoria's first annual meeting held on 4 February 1856 at the Melbourne Exhibition Building on the corner of William and Little Lonsdale Streets. *Argus*, 25 February 1856: 9.

<sup>528</sup> Dr David Elliot Wilkie M.D. (1815-1885) was born in Scotland, arrived in Adelaide in 1838 and moved to Melbourne the following year. Howard Boyd Graham, *The Honourable David Elliot Wilkie M.D.: A Pioneer of Melbourne* (Sydney Australasian Medical Publishing Co., 1956).

### 3.5 Early plans for the Expedition's route

In 1857 Wilkie moved:

That a Committee be appointed to consider and report on the practicality of fitting out in Victoria a geographical expedition, for the purpose of carrying out the great idea of the lamented Leichhardt, of exploring from east to west, and for the purpose, if possible, of gathering some tidings of the fate of Leichhardt and his party. The proposed expedition to start from Curtis Bay on the east coast and to make a direct course westward in the latitude of the Tropic of Capricorn to Shark's Bay on the west coast, embracing at the same time, any fitting opportunity of exploring the interior both to the north and south of this line.<sup>529</sup>

Wilkie's plan was a bold one which, unlike Clarke's earlier proposals, did not restrict the expedition to the colony of Victoria; in fact, his proposed 3,800 kilometre east-west crossing of the continent, from Port Curtis (the termination of Gregory's 1855-6 North Australia Expedition) to Shark Bay in Western Australia, did not enter Victoria at all (see Figure 39).

Wilkie's motive for suggesting such a grand plan is difficult to determine. As one of the first doctors to settle in Melbourne, Wilkie was well-known and respected.<sup>530</sup> He was active in many societies and institutes and did not restrict himself merely to medical matters. However, he had no intention of participating or profiting from any expedition. Bonyhady describes him as:

an armchair traveller with no desire to risk exploration himself or even exploit its discoveries by taking up new pastoral land. In almost twenty years in Victoria, he had rarely been outside Melbourne, let alone beyond the 'settled districts'.<sup>531</sup>

Through his friendship with Mueller, Wilkie had developed an interest in Leichhardt's fate. Even though nine years had elapsed since the Prussian explorer had disappeared, there was still a belief that he, or some of his party at least, might have survived and could still be rescued.<sup>532</sup> When delivering his proposal Wilkie tried to appeal to as wide an audience as possible, a feature often repeated in the subsequent quest for funds. He stressed the 'national'<sup>533</sup> importance of exploration and noted that Victoria, as the wealthiest and most populous colony, had neglected its responsibilities in this area.

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<sup>529</sup> Philosophical Institute of Victoria, *Transactions of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria: From January to December 1857 inclusive. Edited for the Council of the Institute by John Macadam MD, Hon Sec.*, Vol. 2 (Melbourne: The Institute, 1858).

<sup>530</sup> Graham, *David Elliot Wilkie*.

<sup>531</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 12.

<sup>532</sup> Mueller writing in the *Adelaider Deutsche Zeitung*, 23 July 1851, reprinted in *Geelong Advertiser*, 4 September 1851: 2; *Age*, 2 October 1857: 4; David E Wilkie and Ferdinand Mueller, 'Report on white men's graves in the interior', *Transactions of the Royal Society of Victoria*, Vol. 6 (1865): lxi-lxx; Duncan McIntyre, 'Mr D McIntyre's journey across Australia, from Victoria to the Gulf of Carpentaria, and discovery of supposed traces of Leichhardt', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, Vol. 9, No. 6, August (1865).

<sup>533</sup> 'national' - Although there was no Australian 'nation' *per se* in 1857, Wilkie stressed the importance of the expedition for all of the continent with the hope that other colonies may assist in the search for Leichhardt. Victorian Chief Secretary Haines suggested "the best time to undertake the exploration of the interior ... [was] when the colonies were united under a federal government" (Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports*, 'Second Progress Report, 26 May 1858') and the *Argus* stated "the exploration of the interior should be regarded as a federal matter, in which all the colonies should combine" (*Argus*, 20 November 1857: 4).

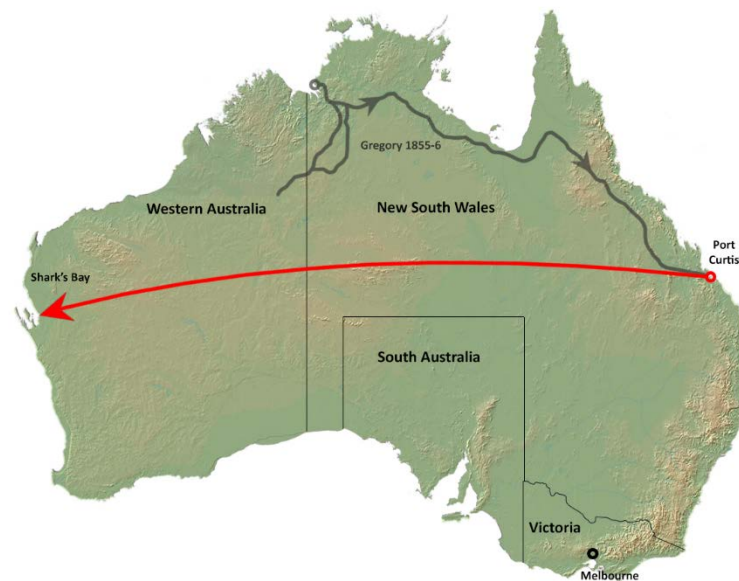


Figure 39: Wilkie's proposed east-west route through New South Wales and Western Australia, (showing the route of Gregory's North Australian Expedition).

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He thought it was the scientific duty of the PIV to promote the venture and the land in the arid interior would eventually become home to the surplus population of the old world. The expedition would complete the work of the 'prince of explorers' Leichhardt, and a search for the missing explorer would "command the warmest sympathy of the members of the public".<sup>534</sup> Wilkie suggested a budget of £6,000 would equip a party for two years and putting this party in the field would not interfere with Gregory's 'Leichhardt Search Expedition' (LSE), which was soon to depart from New South Wales, had much narrower aims, and was only planning to be out for six months.<sup>535</sup>

The meeting was very well attended, with Wilkie's plan receiving a mixed response. Macadam suggested the proposal be postponed until the results of Gregory's search were known; Reverend Bleasdale liked Wilkie's idea, but wanted to work in cooperation with New South Wales, a move supported by Mueller who had recently returned from Gregory's 'NAE'; Dr Gillbee and Mr Broad thought the proposal needed further consideration and suggested postponing any decision until the next meeting – a stalling tactic which would be used regularly by the EC in the future when faced with difficult decisions. No one asked how the proposal would be funded; the PIV had more than 250 members, but they only had £1,676 in the bank and so were not in a position to finance an expedition of this magnitude.<sup>536</sup> Wilkie's only suggestion was to appeal to Governor Barkly, who was

<sup>534</sup> Philosophical Institute of Victoria, *Transactions*, Vol. 2: xlv-xlvi. Minutes, 11 November 1857.

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.*; *Argus*, 13 November 1857: 5.

<sup>536</sup> Philosophical Institute of Victoria, *Transactions*, Vol. 2: liv-lv. Balance sheet of the PIV for the year 1857.

"a friend and patron of science".<sup>537</sup> The objections were overruled and an Exploration Committee was nominated to consider the proposal.

Forming a committee was not a particularly unusual act for the PIV. They had already appointed dozens of committees and sub-committees, including a Songbird Committee and a Murray Cod Committee, an Observatory Committee, an Auditing Committee, a Museum Committee and a Mining Committee.<sup>538</sup> However, the EC would be the largest committee the PIV had appointed, with 32 of "the most influential members",<sup>539</sup> increasing to 34 members at their first meeting.<sup>540</sup> This unwieldy number meant one in seven members of the PIV, or nearly 14% of the Institute, sat on the EC.

The EC met for the first time just three days later, which may have been an indication of their enthusiasm for the task, except only ten of the 34 members attended.<sup>541</sup> Their second meeting a week later only attracted seven members. Poor attendance at committee meetings was not unusual at the PIV, not just for the EC, but with all the PIV committees and, in fact, several of the above mentioned committees failed to report at all due to "pressure of work".<sup>542</sup> In the three years between the formation of the EC and the departure of the VEE, the average attendance at EC meetings was just 40%, and this figure drops to 32% when the entire lifespan of the EC is considered.<sup>543</sup> Further investigation of the EC Minute Books shows that eleven people nominated to the EC did not attend a single meeting and four members attended just one meeting. Among these absentee members were high profile Victorians like Chief Minister Haines, former Chief Minister O'Shanassy and Murphy, the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. Some of these members, O'Shanassy for example, approved of Wilkie's plan and supported the PIV, so their absence was not a sign of dissent – presumably he was just too busy to attend EC meetings. In addition, there was a lack of consistency during the

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<sup>537</sup> *Argus*, 13 November 1857: 5.

<sup>538</sup> Philosophical Institute of Victoria, *Transactions*, Vol. 2; Philosophical Institute of Victoria, *Transactions*, Vol. 3.

<sup>539</sup> *Argus*, 13 November 1857: 5.

<sup>540</sup> The EC comprised of Clarke as president, Wilkie as chairman, James Bonwick as honorary secretary, Macadam as assistant secretary, Chief Secretary Haines, O'Shanassy, Hodgson, Murphy (Speaker of the Legislative Assembly), Hope M.L.C., Professors Wilson, Irving, McCoy Neumayer and Hearn, Drs. Mueller, Iffla Gillbee, Knaggs, MacLean and Turnbull, Reverends Bleasdale and Morrison, Messrs. Selwyn, Wilson, Rawlinson, Blandowski, Knight, Dobree, Elliott, Bland, Acheson and Farewell; with Dr Mackenna and Lieutenant Pascoe being added at the first meeting.

<sup>541</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Report of the Committee appointed to consider a report upon a Victorian scheme of exploring the interior of Australia, 14 November 1857', Minutes of the RSV EC, ex1001-001, Box 2075/1a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>542</sup> Hoare, 'Learned societies', 19.

<sup>543</sup> The EC was in existence from 1857 to 1873. The Committee had 48 different members during this time and they met 238 times. The EC started out with 34 members, but soon reduced in size to 25 and then 16 members, then rose to 21 members while the Expedition was underway, before finally reducing to just ten members in the late 1860s. Although some of the more important meetings attracted an 80% attendance, many of the later meetings failed to make a quorum and the average attendance throughout the 15-year life of the Committee was 32%.

preliminary meetings: it was rare for members to attend consecutively. Many of the initial appointees to the EC had little or no influence on the outcome of the VEE, but a small core group, most notably Wilkie, Macadam, Mueller and Stawell, were regular attendees and subsequently had an inordinate influence establishing and operating the VEE.

Initially, the public supported Wilkie's proposal, with the press announcing:

Hitherto Victoria has done nothing in the way of Australian exploration, beyond granting leave of absence to Dr. Mueller to accompany Mr. Gregory on his northern expedition, and kindly stopping the Doctor's pay during his absence.<sup>544</sup>

They lauded Britain's recent efforts to ascertain the fate of missing Arctic explorer Sir John Franklin and suggested that it was "shameful" that Australia had not made a greater effort to rescue Leichhardt from "the burning plains of Central Australia".<sup>545</sup> The *Argus* hoped any future Australian explorer might feel:

tolerably secure, when he undergoes toil, and danger, and suffering, to extend the boundaries of knowledge, that, at all events, he may rely; if his own means fail, that the strongest efforts will be made to succour him.<sup>546</sup>

While admitting that colonists should feel indebted to Wilkie for raising the issue, the *Argus* did not approve of his "pedantically precise and almost ludicrous obligation" to blandly travel in a straight line from Point Curtis to Shark Bay. It was hoped that:

the Philosophical Institute will succeed in maturing some plan which both the Government and the public will be inclined to support.<sup>547</sup>

They made several suggestions about the Expedition's possible route, most of them equally 'pedantically precise' and based around connecting the routes of previous explorers: joining "Kennedy's Victoria Run ... with Captain Sturt's northern track"; travelling from Eyre's track at the head of the Great Australian Bight towards the centre of the continent; or travelling from Gregory's track on the Plains of Promise to "Sturt's farthest".<sup>548</sup> While admitting an inland sea was a "vague and ill-founded belief", they dismissed the suggestion that the centre was a "great desert", which was the discouraging impression Sturt's last expedition had presented.<sup>549</sup> While calculating there were 900 million acres of 'Terra incognita', or 15 times the area of the colony of Victoria, they asked:

Surely there may be something worth finding ... Would not Mother Earth have good ground of action against us for defamation of character if we affirm this very respectable portion of her surface to be valueless?<sup>550</sup>

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<sup>544</sup> *Argus*, 17 November 1857:4.

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>547</sup> *Argus*, 17 November 1857:4, 20 November 1857:4.

<sup>548</sup> *Argus*, 20 November 1857: 4.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*



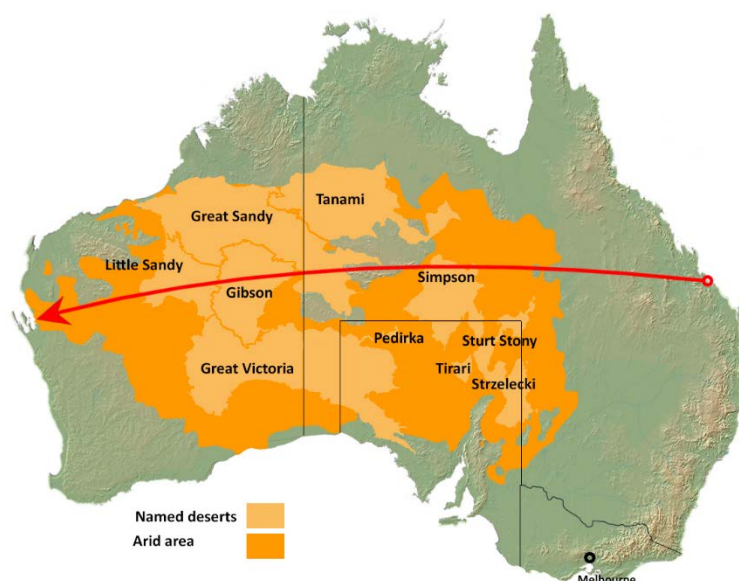


Figure 40: Wilkie's proposed route showing arid areas and named deserts.  
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In fact, had Wilkie's proposal been carried out, it would have confirmed the idea that the centre was a great desert (see Figure 40). There are ten named deserts in Australia covering 18% of the land mass. However, the arid area is considerably larger, accounting for 35% of the continent.<sup>551</sup> Wilkie's proposed route would have crossed five of these deserts and almost 80%, or 3,000 kilometres of the Expedition's route, would have been in the arid zone.

Mueller, one of the few members of the EC who had exploring experience, also disagreed with the route Wilkie was proposing. At the second EC meeting he suggested the Expedition should start from the Darling River rather than from Port Curtis.<sup>552</sup> Mueller told the committee:

By adopting the Darling as a starting point a new and large portion of country in close proximity to the northern goldfields of the colony of Victoria, and probably in part available for pastures, would be opened. Further, it seemed preferable to explore a new tract of country, on the route to the Victoria River [Cooper Creek] and situated between the Darling, Grey Range and the Warrego, than proceeding over the well-known country to the Victoria River from the eastward.<sup>553</sup>

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<sup>551</sup> The ten named deserts are (by decreasing area): Great Victoria; Great Sandy; Tanami; Simpson; Gibson; Little Sandy, Strzelecki; Sturt Stony; Tirari; Pedirka. Mike Smith, *The archaeology of Australia's deserts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Commonwealth Government: Geoscience Australia, *Landforms: Deserts*.

[ga.gov.au/scientific-topics/national-location-information/landforms/deserts](http://ga.gov.au/scientific-topics/national-location-information/landforms/deserts)

<sup>552</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes, 23 November 1857', EC Minutes, ex1001-002, Box 2075/1a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>553</sup> *Argus*, 26 December 1857: 6.

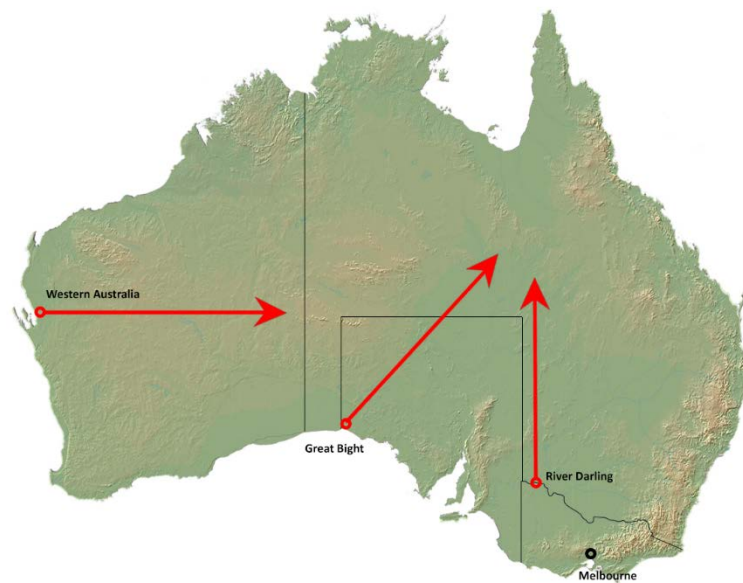


Figure 41: Mueller presented several options as an alternative to Wilkie's suggested route.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.

Two days later, at a special meeting of the PIV, he read a lengthy paper titled 'An Historical Review of the Explorations of Australia'<sup>554</sup> where he offered two additional options for the route (see Figure 41).<sup>555</sup> Mueller said:

in a geographical point of view, exploration in a line from the top of the Great Bight towards the north-east, and from the western coast in a line due east would be the best.<sup>556</sup>

The third meeting of the EC focussed mainly on the discussion about the proposed route. It was decided that a depot would be established at the junction of the Victoria (Barcoo) and Thompson Rivers and stocked with provisions sufficient for two years (see Figure 42).<sup>557</sup> Mueller once again proposed the Darling River as the starting point for the Expedition. Wilkie agreed to the formation of a depot, but insisted the Expedition should still commence at Port Curtis. Any expectations about a joint venture in cooperation with New South Wales and South Australia were abandoned. It was

<sup>554</sup> Ferdinand Mueller, 'Article XIX: An historical review of the explorations of Australia', in *Transactions of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria: From January to December 1857 inclusive. Edited for the Council of the Institute by John Macadam MD, Hon Sec.* (Melbourne: The Institute, 1858), 148-168.

<sup>555</sup> *Argus*, 26 November 1857: 5.

<sup>556</sup> *Age*, 26 November 1857: 5.

<sup>557</sup> The junction of the Victoria (Barcoo) and Thompson Rivers was also suggested to be the "probable place" where Leichhardt had been killed based on the fact that Aboriginal informants told Gideon Scott Lang "that a party of five white men and two blackfellows (the exact number of Leichardt's staff) had been killed on a large water after one month's travelling westward from the source of the Maranoa River". In addition, when Kennedy's expedition visited the area, he "had found the natives very troublesome" *Age*, 2 October 1857: 4.

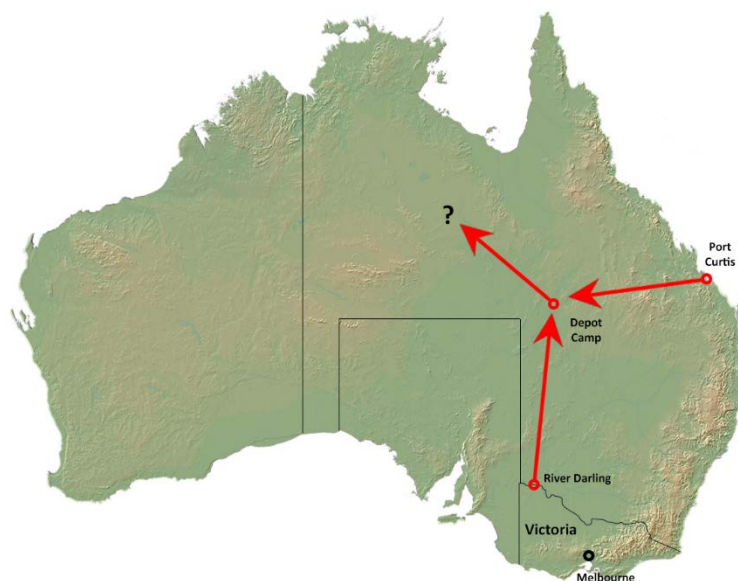


Figure 42: The EC agreed to form a depot on the Thompson-Barcoo. Mueller wanted to reach the depot from Victoria, Wilkie wanted to travel from Port Curtis.  
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agreed that advice should be sought from A.C. Gregory and that any further decisions should be postponed to await his communication.<sup>558</sup>

Gregory's reply was not quite what the EC expected. He noted that although Wilkie's east-west traverse along the Tropic of Capricorn might seem like a good choice when "simply viewing it on the map", the country proposed for examination was barren and forbidding and therefore Wilkie's proposal was "almost hopeless to attempt".<sup>559</sup> Gregory identified the 'unexplored' tract of land worth examining and thought "the only prospect of success would be to penetrate it in the direction of its shorter diameter (north or south)".<sup>560</sup> However he thought the prospects of approaching this land from the north, south or west to be discouraging with "scarcely any prospect of success".<sup>561</sup> He suggested any expedition planning to leave from the east coast should depart from Moreton Bay, follow the Victoria (Barcoo) downstream and then form a depot, "from which a lightly equipped party could push to the westward by taking a sweep to the north of Sturt's furthest point" (see Figure 43).<sup>562</sup> Gregory warned that "undue haste may be disastrous" and "failure must be the result unless judicious preparations are made to overcome the obstacles which interpose".<sup>563</sup>

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<sup>558</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes of the meeting of the Exploration Committee, 30 November 1857', EC Minutes, ex1001-003, Box 2075/1a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>559</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports*, 'First Progress Report: 22 December 1857'.

<sup>560</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>561</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>563</sup> *Ibid.*

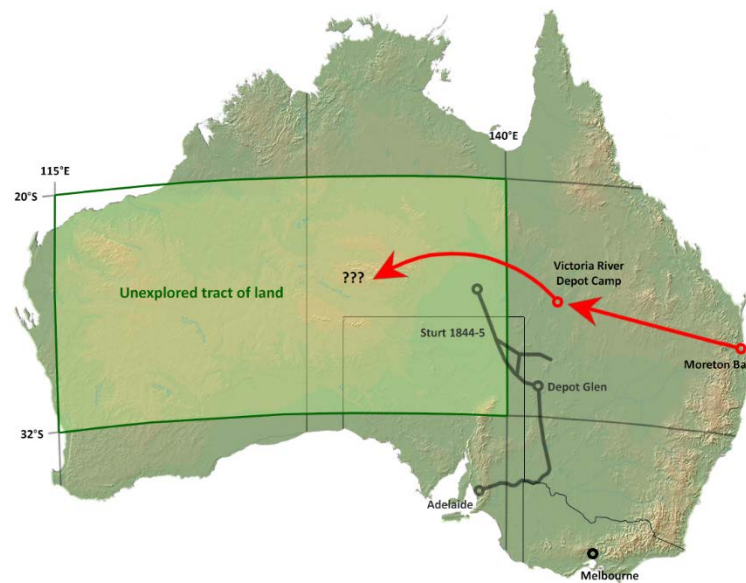


Figure 43: Gregory's suggestion as the best way to approach the 'unexplored' tract of land compared to the route of Sturt's 'Central Australian Expedition'.

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The EC was not daunted by Gregory's advice or his "unrivalled experience"<sup>564</sup> and they did not bother to discuss departing from Moreton Bay. Wilkie was adamant that they should depart from Port Curtis. Mueller disagreed, arguing that a departure from the junction of the Murray and the Darling would mean the stores could be transported by "Murray steam navigation almost to the point of unexplored country".<sup>565</sup> In addition, the expedition could make use of the "oasis in the desert" provided by the Paroo River, which Mueller erroneously claimed was "to the north of the River Darling".<sup>566</sup> Most significantly, by departing from the banks of the Murray in Victoria, "a direct line of communication would most probably be established between our own colony and the Victoria River [Barcoo]".<sup>567</sup> The fourth meeting of the EC had the highest attendance thus far, possibly because the EC's meeting preceded the PIV's Annual Meeting,<sup>568</sup> and Mueller's amendment was carried by one vote.

<sup>564</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>565</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes of the meeting of the Exploration Committee, 7 December 1857', EC Minutes, ex1001-004, Box 2075/1a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>566</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>568</sup> *Argus*, 8 December 1857: 5.

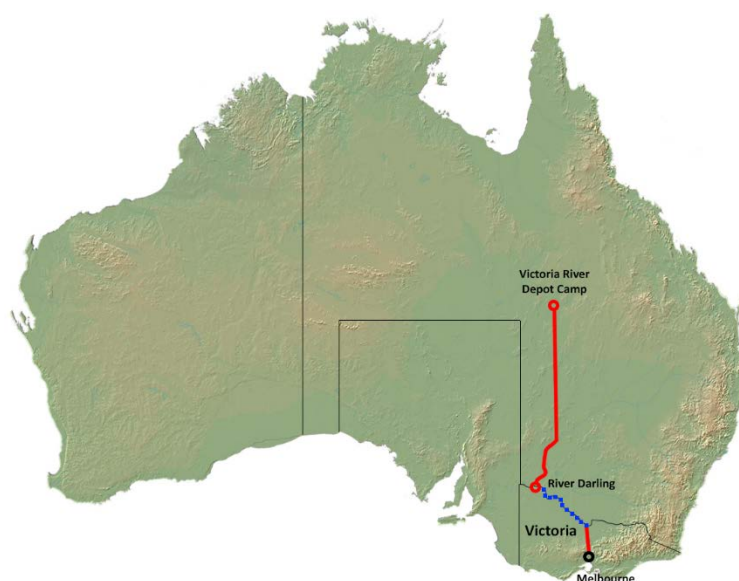


Figure 44: The expedition's route as proposed in the EC's *First Progress Report*.  
Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports*, 'First Progress Report: 22 December 1857'.  
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A special meeting of the PIV was called a few days before Christmas 1857<sup>569</sup> and, just five weeks after having been appointed, the EC tabled their *First Progress Report* which proudly detailed their new plan for five men and twelve pack-horses to depart in March 1858:

from the Darling to the junction of the Victoria [Barcoo] and Thomson Rivers ... for the purpose of opening up, if practicable, a line of communication between the Darling and the Victoria Rivers ... their primary objects should be firstly, to discover any available country for depasturing stock, secondly, to examine the nature of the country near the junction of the Thomson and Victoria Rivers, with a view to determine the practicability of forming a suitable Depot, with permanent water, for ulterior exploration.<sup>570</sup>

£2,000 was "deemed sufficient for efficiently carrying out this exploit", although this was soon increased to £2,500, and the work was expected to be completed within five months.<sup>571</sup> The EC also hinted that the Expedition would be:

leading the path of civilisation into a portion of the interior which, although politically belonging to New South Wales, may commercially be regarded as an enlargement of the Victorian territory.<sup>572</sup>

Wilkie's grand plan had been modified quite dramatically in a short space of time (see Figure 44). Bonyhady highlights Mueller's role as the primary instigator of change, noting his previous exploring experience gave him a certain air of authority in his deliberations among the overwhelmingly inexperienced Committee.<sup>573</sup> Mueller even drafted a list of equipment and supplies needed to outfit

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<sup>569</sup> *Argus*, 8 December 1857: 5.

<sup>570</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports*, 'First Progress Report, 22 December 1857'.

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>572</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>573</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, Chapter 1.





Figure 45: Left: Johnstone & Co., 'Ferdinand Mueller', 1864.  
P1/1209, a4359009, State Library of New South Wales.

Figure 46: Right: 'William Blandowski', 1860.  
Leaf 22, 1995.26.22.b, Album 1995.26.1.a-1995.26.60, National Gallery of Victoria.

his proposed reconnaissance expedition.<sup>574</sup> The only other Committee member with any claim to experience as an explorer was William Blandowski,<sup>575</sup> who considered himself a potential candidate for expedition leader, and who vigorously and vocally supported Wilkie's bold plans.

The *Argus* approved of the EC's plans, although it suggested the proposed depot camp should be further downstream on Cooper Creek "at or near the point where it was encountered by Captain Sturt".<sup>576</sup> Others, including Blandowski, thought the EC were being too cautious. PIV member Thomas Belt<sup>577</sup> and his brother Anthony offered to ride alone from the Gulf of Carpentaria to Adelaide if the government would provide them "with five horses ... waterbags, and a small supply

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<sup>574</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports*, 'First Progress Report, 22 December 1857'; *Argus*, 26 December 1857: 6.

<sup>575</sup> William Blandowski (1822-1878) was born in Upper Silesia and arrived in Australia in 1849. He worked as a zoologist and botanist and was a founder member of the Geological Society of Victoria and Philosophical Society of Victoria. He was a founder member of the Exploration Committee and attended ten of the first eleven meetings, before leaving Australia in March 1859 after clashing with various influential colonists, including McCoy, Bleasdale and Eades. He was "ambitious, eccentric, stubborn, impulsive, quarrelsome individualist, and his scientific integrity was sometimes questioned" Australian National University: National Centre of Biography, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.  
[adb.anu.edu.au/biography/blandowski-william-3014](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/blandowski-william-3014)

<sup>576</sup> *Argus*, 26 December 1857: 4.

<sup>577</sup> Thomas Belt (1832-1878) was an English geologist who arrived in Australia in 1852. He applied for leadership of the Expedition, but left Australia early in 1860 before the VEE departed. Dave Phoenix, *The Thomas and Anthony Belt Expedition*,  
[burkeandwills.slv.vic.gov.au/ask-an-expert/thomas-and-anthony-belt-expedition](http://burkeandwills.slv.vic.gov.au/ask-an-expert/thomas-and-anthony-belt-expedition)

of provisions and oats" and a ship to land them at the mouth of the Albert River.<sup>578</sup> Ignoring these peripheral arguments, the EC reduced in size to 24 members and turned their efforts towards raising money to fund their Expedition and finding a leader. The Expedition's route became of secondary importance and was only mentioned when new geographical information came to hand after the return of the expeditions under Gregory and Babbage in 1858.

In a few short weeks at the end of 1857, the PIV had resurrected their plan to mount an expedition. Instead of repeating the 1854 suggestion, with its modest and practical aims of exploiting the colony's pastoral and mineral potential, Wilkie proposed a 'heroic' but impractical venture to cross the continent. Mueller soon modified the plan and reframed it with more practical aims. Very few members of the EC had exploration experience, and none of those had been an expedition leader, so they were happy to defer to a more experienced person like Gregory.

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<sup>578</sup> Thomas Belt, *The naturalist in Nicaragua: A narrative of a residence at the gold mines of Chontales; Journeys in the savannahs and forests; With observations of animals and plants in reference to the theory of evolution of living forms* (London: J. Murray, 1874); Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports*; 'Thomas Belt, application, 1858-1860', Applications to join the Victorian Exploring Expedition Received by the Exploration Committee, ex1004-035, Box 2076/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

### 3.6 Funding the Expedition

Raising sufficient funds to mount the Expedition was a much more difficult process than first envisaged, and it would take the EC nearly two years. As part of the process they established a second committee, the EFC, petitioned the government for a grant and tried to solicit support from the public. During this time the aims and objectives of the Expedition were never clearly defined, and various Committee members tried to raise public money by promoting the Expedition as a scientific venture, a search for Leichhardt, a chance to extend the boundaries of Victoria and an altruistic venture.

The EC and EFC's proceedings and minutes of their meetings were not reported in the PIV's *Transactions and Proceedings*. The EC reported on an ad hoc basis through *Progress Reports*, with nine reports being produced in the 15 years between 1857 and 1873,<sup>579</sup> four of which were published in the Society's *Transactions and Proceedings*. The *Progress Reports* give some indication of the EC's actions, but they are somewhat self-congratulatory and do not give much insight into the Committee's inner workings and political wrangling. The EC and EFC did keep minute books, seven of which survive.<sup>580</sup> However, the minutes are not always comprehensive: some of the meetings only warrant a few words jotted on a page; some of the minutes are undated; and at least four meetings were unrecorded or the minutes have subsequently been lost. Fortunately, the press attended some of the meetings and ran articles in the Melbourne newspapers.

Analysis of the extant archives shows the EC decided to hold a public meeting to canvass support, which in turn would place pressure on the Haines Ministry<sup>581</sup> to include exploration on the next round of budget estimates. The EC knew that a similar public meeting of 'The Leichhardt Committee' in Sydney in September 1857 had helped to persuade the New South Wales legislature to fund Gregory's 1858 'LSE'.<sup>582</sup>

<sup>579</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports*: 'First Report, 22 December 1857'; 'Second Report, 26 May 1858'; 'Third Report, 29 September 1858'; 'Fourth Report, 9 January 1860'; 'Special Report, 23 January 1860'; 'Fifth Report, 1860'; 'Sixth Report, 17 April 1862'; 'Seventh and Final Report, 17 August 1863'; 'Supplemental Final Report, 19 November 1872'.

<sup>580</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, Minutes of the RSV EC: ex1001-001 to ex1001-018, Box 2075/1a; ex1001-019 to ex1001-024, Box 2075/1b; ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c; ex1001-027 to ex1001-043, Box 2075/2c (Items 1-16); ex1044 to ex1001-058, Box 2075/3a; ex1001-059, Box 2075/3b; ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1.

<sup>581</sup> William Clark Haines (1810-1866) was born in England and arrived in Australia in 1842. He was Chief Secretary of Victoria for a second term from 29 April 1857 to 10 March 1858.

<sup>582</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 September 1857: 4; Augustus Charles Gregory, 'Diary of the Leichhardt Search Expedition, 11 Sept. 1857-5 April 1858, and accounts, 18 Dec. 1857-22 Dec. 1858', B 867, State Library of New South Wales.





Figure 47: Charles Frederick Gregory, 'Leichardt's Exp. travelling over the Desert on the Vic[toria] River [Barcoo], 6 miles below the junction of the Thompson', 24 May 1858. SSV4B/Coo Cr/1, a4776001, State Library of New South Wales.

The only descriptions of Cooper Creek came from Sturt and Gregory.  
Their experiences influenced the EC's decision to establish a depot on the Cooper.

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The EC's public meeting was well attended and a deputation was appointed to approach Governor Barkly and Chief Secretary Haines.<sup>583</sup> However, neither the Haines Ministry, nor its successor under O'Shanassy,<sup>584</sup> felt inclined to fund exploration, despite having previously pledged their support for the venture. After holding just two meetings in February,<sup>585</sup> the EC produced its *Second Progress Report*<sup>586</sup> in which it suggested A.C. Gregory be offered the leadership of the Expedition upon his return from the 'LSE', and with that the meetings lapsed.<sup>587</sup>

When the 'LSE' arrived unexpectedly in Adelaide little over three months after departing Moreton Bay, Gregory's findings on the nature of the Thomson and Barcoo (Victoria) Rivers dispensed with the need for Mueller's reconnaissance by a light exploratory party.<sup>588</sup> Gregory proved the Thomson and Barcoo flowed into the Cooper, he found permanent water on the Cooper west of 140°E and

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<sup>583</sup> Age, 5 January 1858: 5; Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes of the meeting of the EC 4 January 1858', EC Minutes, ex1001-010, Box 2075/1a; 'Typescript resolutions on the exploration of Australia', EC Minutes, ex1001-011, Box 2075/1a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>584</sup> John O'Shanassy (1818-1883) was born in County Tipperary and arrived in 1839. He was Chief Secretary of Victoria for a second term from 10 March 1858 to 27 October 1859.

<sup>585</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes, 8 February 1858', EC Minutes, ex1001-012, Box 2075/1a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria. There are no minutes extant for the EC meeting held on 17 February 1858.

<sup>586</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports*, 'Second Progress Report, 26 May 1858'.

<sup>587</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports*. In the 13 weeks since its inception, the EC met eight times, organised one public meeting and produced two *Progress Reports*.

<sup>588</sup> Gregory and Gregory, *Journals*. Gregory's party arrived in Adelaide on 22 July 1858, *South Australian Register*, 22 July 1858: 2.



Figure 48: 'Rough sketch shewing the route of the Leichhardt Expedition by A.C. Gregory', 1858. (Sydney: J. Eccles, 1859). a4779010h, State Library of New South Wales.

Compare this map of Gregory's 1858 track with Figure 43 of Gregory's suggestion to the EC as the best way to approach the 'unexplored' tract of land. Gregory originally intended to head north-west from Moreton Bay, but drought conditions forced him to follow the Thompson and Cooper downstream. Gregory hoped to find a possible route from the Cooper to the west and north-west. If conditions had been more favourable, Gregory may have crossed into the 'unexplored' tract of land, gone to the north of Sturt's furthest point in the Simpson Desert and pre-empted the EC's expedition.

he showed there was not a horse-shoe of salt lakes blocking access into the interior from South Australia. Given this information, it appeared that there was little need for a Victorian expedition.<sup>589</sup>

However, while South Australia was celebrating Gregory's arrival, interest in exploration was being revived in Victoria.<sup>590</sup> Melbourne merchant, Ambrose Kyte,<sup>591</sup> made an unexpected and surprising donation of £1,000 for exploration, with two conditions: that he remain anonymous and the public raise an additional £2,000 for the venture.<sup>592</sup> The EC, suddenly enthused after an unproductive six months, held another public meeting, not only to reignite support but also to raise

<sup>589</sup> Gregory and Gregory, *Journals*; Augustus Charles Gregory, *Expedition in search of Dr Leichhardt (Report of Proceedings)* (Sydney: Government Printer, 1858); 'Diary of the Leichhardt Search Expedition, 11 Sept. 1857-5 April 1858, and accounts, 18 Dec. 1857-22 Dec. 1858', B 867, State Library of New South Wales; *Route of Leichhardt Expedition by A C Gregory, May and June 1858*, EXP7, L9008, Historic Plan Collection, Item 849, VPRS 8168/P0002, Public Record Office of Victoria; 'Expedition from Moreton Bay in search of Leichhardt and party', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1858-1859); *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 October 1858: 9.

<sup>590</sup> *South Australian Register*, 10 August 1858: 3.

<sup>591</sup> Ambrose Henry Spencer Kyte (1822-1868) was born in County Tipperary and arrived in Melbourne in 1840.

<sup>592</sup> *Argus*, 19 August 1858: 4.

the required funds.<sup>593</sup> The Committee believed if they could secure £3,000, the O'Shanassy Ministry would be obliged to match the sum.

At the meeting, the EC established a second, ostensibly independent committee, the EFC, which supposedly had nothing to do with the PIV, even though six of its seven members were members of the PIV and sat on the EC.<sup>594</sup> The EC claimed exploration of the interior was:

an object which is national in character, and must secure the approbation of every Australian who is anxious to promote the material prosperity of his country, to enlarge the boundaries of knowledge, to clear up the mystery which envelopes the fate of poor Leichhardt and to facilitate our intercourse with the other hemisphere.<sup>595</sup>

Once again, the expedition was proposing to fulfil many purposes in order to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. It was expected to have commercial benefit, advance scientific knowledge, identify pastoral land, increase geographical understanding and search for Leichhardt; and for the first time a potential route for the electric telegraph was mentioned in connection with Victorian exploration.<sup>596</sup> There were many possible coastal sites where the telegraph could be landed, but the only ones which could benefit Victoria would be those which allowed the telegraph line to run overland to Victoria, i.e.: the north or north-west coast. The Expedition's aims had now expanded to include the possibility of a crossing from the south coast to the north or north-west coast.

The public meeting was also notable as the first time that camels were mentioned in connection with the VEE. The use of camels for exploration had been debated previously, but at this public meeting Dr Thomas Embling,<sup>597</sup> a staunch advocate of the use of camels, announced that the

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<sup>593</sup> *Argus*, 30 August 1858: 8; Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports*, 'Third Progress Report, 29 September 1858'.

<sup>594</sup> The Exploration Fund Committee comprised Stawell as chairman, Wilkie as treasurer, Macadam as honorary secretary, Mueller, McCoy, Hodgson MLC and James Smith as committee members. James Smith (1820-1910) was born in England, arrived in Australia in 1854. He was a journalist and the only person on the Exploration Fund Committee who was not a member of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria and Exploration Committee. However, he later joined the Royal Society of Victoria and was elected to the Exploration Committee.

<sup>595</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports*, 'Third Progress Report, 29 September 1858'.

<sup>596</sup> The telegraph was one of the most significant developments in nineteenth century Australia and it had a huge impact on social and commercial development. Domestically it connected the large, sparsely populated colonies, and internationally it connected the country to its major trading partners in Europe, which reduced the sense of isolation. The first telegraph line in Australia was built by the Victorian government, went eleven miles from Melbourne to Williamstown, and opened in March 1854. By the time the Exploration Fund Committee held their meeting in August 1858, the Victorian telegraph network had linked Melbourne with all the major gold-mining centres. The first inter-colonial connections were also built in 1858, with Melbourne being connected to Adelaide in July 1858 and to Sydney in October 1858. Tasmania was not reliably connected to the mainland until 1869, Perth was not connected to the eastern colonies until 1877. The international telegraph line via Java and Darwin was opened in 1872 and a link to New Zealand was established in 1876. Tom Standage, *Victorian internet: The remarkable story of the telegraph and the nineteenth century's on-line pioneers* (London: Wiedenfield & Nicholson, 1998); David H. Thompson, *The Australian telegraph network 1854-1877* (Melbourne: Museum Victoria Collections, 2008).

<sup>597</sup> Dr Thomas Embling (1814-1893) was born in England and arrived in Melbourne in 1851.

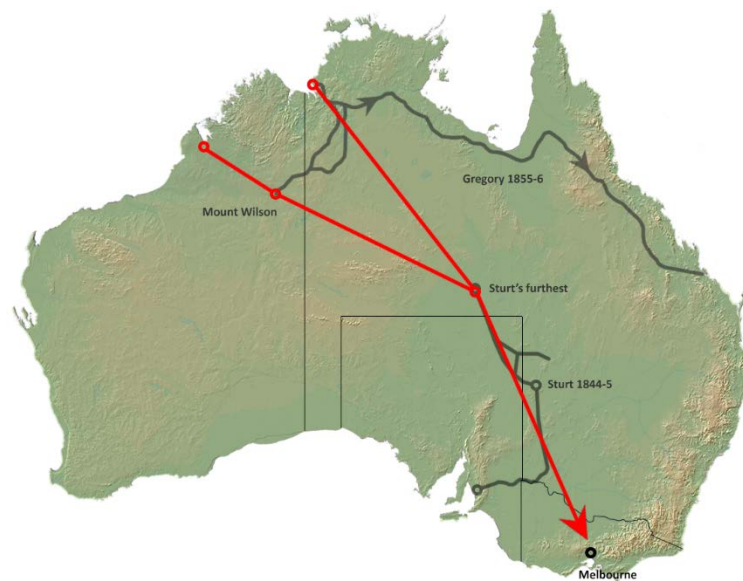


Figure 49: Yet another suggestion from Mueller about the proposed route: this time to land the camels on the north-west coast, at either King's Sound or Gregory's landing point on the Victoria River, and then cross the country in one direction, via Gregory's Mount Wilson and Sturt's furthest.

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Government had agreed to import camels into the colony. A fuller discussion on the importation of camels and their role in exploration can be found in Chapter 5.

Embling's enthusiasm was premature, because at that stage O'Shanassy had only agreed to include the expenditure in the next budget estimates. Nevertheless, the suggestion that camels might be utilised resulted in a heated argument on the expedition's route. Mueller thought it would be more economical to land the camels on the north-west coast, start the expedition there and cross the continent in one direction only (see Figure 49). An expedition organised within the next four months could be landed on the north coast in March 1859 in order to take advantage of the most favourable season for travel through the inland.<sup>598</sup> Embling thought it would be ten months before the camels became available and recommended they were landed at the safety of a jetty in Melbourne rather than risk them by swimming them through the surf on the north-west coast.<sup>599</sup> Wilkie did not wish to delay until March 1860, and he proposed the expedition leave in March 1859, without waiting for the camels.<sup>600</sup> Bleasdale suggested depots be established in the interim, so that the expedition could depart as soon as the camels were landed.<sup>601</sup>

Until this point, Embling had not been involved in the EC's deliberations and he was not a member of the RSV. However he had already gained a reputation for promoting eccentric ideas,

<sup>598</sup> *Argus*, 1 September 1858: 5.

<sup>599</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>600</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>601</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes, 11 October 1858', EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c; 'Minutes, 11 October 1858', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

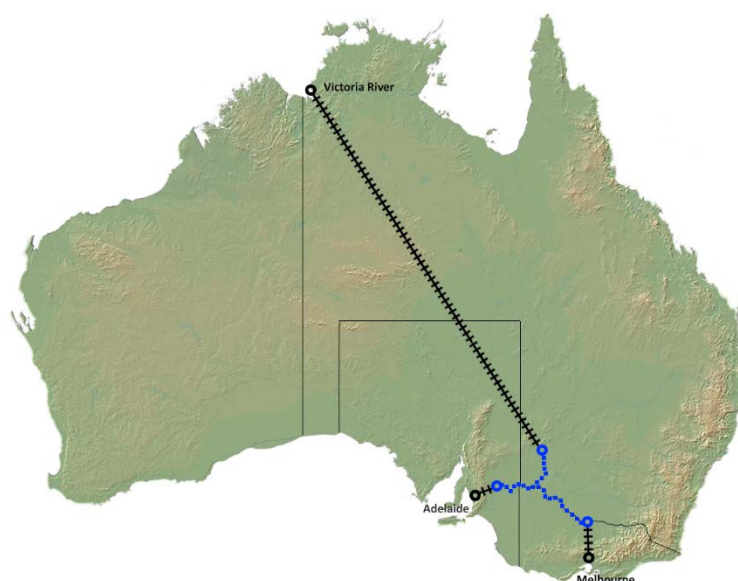


Figure 50: Embling's grand plan to join the railways being constructed in Melbourne and Adelaide to steamers on the Murray River. At the limit of navigation on the Darling River a tramway would take passengers and mail across Australia in three days, to a port at the Victoria River.

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usually relating to the acclimatisation of exotic species, and his long speeches to Parliament on the subject were often met with ridicule from the honorable members. Embling's grandest plan was the construction of a tramway and telegraph line across Australia, and he saw an opportunity to promote his idea as part of the EC's latest round of fund raising. Embling hijacked a public meeting in his Collingwood constituency, which had originally been called to discuss dissatisfaction with the irregular arrival of the English mail steamers, to suggest the problem could be solved if the eastern colonies spent £3,000,000 "constructing a tramway through the heart of a desert" to the Victoria River, with a telegraph line buried alongside it (see Figure 50).<sup>602</sup> Embling argued that his scheme for a "regular, expeditious, permanent and reliable Euro-Australian overland communication" was not "as impracticable and Quixotic"<sup>603</sup> as it sounded and it would "bring London within 30 days' mail delivery of Melbourne".<sup>604</sup> When he presented the idea to the Legislative Assembly by way of a lengthy speech, there were roars of laughter and the house thought Embling's extraordinary tales of "ships camels and electric cables to the Indus" had left them in "a sort of phantasmagoria, or some kind of hideous dream".<sup>605</sup> Nevertheless, the members were cautioned not to treat the motion with contempt, lest a similar scheme be successfully prosecuted by New South Wales.

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<sup>602</sup> *Age*, 26 October 1858: 5, 2 November 1858: 5; *Argus*, 2 November 1858: 5; *South Australian Register*, 2 November 1858: 2.

<sup>603</sup> *Age*, 28 October 1858: 5, 2 November 1858: 5.

<sup>604</sup> *Argus*, 28 December 1858: 6.

<sup>605</sup> *Argus* 28 October 1858: 5.

Although Embling's scheme was ahead of its time<sup>606</sup> and his motion was withdrawn as "the House was not satisfied as to its practicability", the commercial impacts of an unreliable mail service only served to increase the frustration with isolation from European trading partners.<sup>607</sup> Undaunted, and apparently immune to insults, Embling continued to promote his scheme. In 1860, in partnership with several Melbourne merchants and the Australian Association in London, he petitioned the Imperial Government to establish a separate northern colony and settlement at the Victoria River.<sup>608</sup> Embling joined the RSV in 1860 and was appointed to the EC, where he rarely missed an opportunity to express an opinion on the use of camels in exploration or the need for the VEE to travel to the Victoria River.

The Reverend John Dunmore Lang published a letter disagreeing with Embling's proposal, suggesting instead that the 'tramroad' and telegraph be constructed at "the point at which there is the shortest distance from navigable water on the south to navigable water on the north", which Lang identified as being:

from some suitable point of departure on the Murray River, as near the great bend as possible, to the head of the Gulf of Carpentaria.<sup>609</sup>

In fact, Lang had already proposed this idea to the New South Wales Legislature in 1854, shortly after the first paddle-steamers opened up commercial navigation on the Murray River (see Figure 51).<sup>610</sup>

At the PIV's Annual Dinner in March 1859, Barkly complimented the efforts made by explorers in other colonies,<sup>611</sup> while noting that Victoria's contribution in that area had been limited to mere talk.<sup>612</sup> In addition to commending the efforts of riverboat pioneers, Francis Cadell and William Richard Randell, in opening up the Darling to navigation by paddle-steamer, he echoed Lang's earlier sentiments by pointing out:

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<sup>606</sup> The telegraph line across Australia from Adelaide to Darwin was completed in 1872. Construction of a railway from Adelaide to Darwin commenced in 1878, but was not completed until 2004.

<sup>607</sup> *Age*, 28 October 1858: 4 & 5; *Argus* 28 October 1858: 4; Victoria. Parliament, *Victorian Hansard: containing the debates and proceedings of the Legislative Council & Assembly of the Colony of Victoria* (Melbourne: W. Fairfax), Vol. 4, Session 3, 1857-1858: 140-142.

<sup>608</sup> *Adelaide Observer*, 15 March 1862: 6; *Age*, 12 May 1860: 6; *Argus*, 5 August 1858: 1, 31 August 1858: 5; *Courier*, 3 March 1862: 2; *Empire*, 26 February 1862: 3; *South Australian Register*, 8 March 1862: 2, 9 August 1858: 2; see also: 'Correspondence', PRO 833: 166-170 & PRO 834: 160-162, The National Archive, Kew, UK, reporting correspondence from: Embling to Barkly, 10 March 1860; Barkly to Embling, 13 March 1860; Lewis to Barkly, 20 July 1860; Timins to Embling, 14 September 1860; Embling to Westgarth, 24 September 1860; Barkly to Embling, 3 November 1860; Childers to Embling, 23 November, 1860; Westgarth to Embling, 25 November 1861; Westgarth to Embling, 26 November 1860; Newcastle to Barkly, 6 December 1860; Westgarth to Embling, 26 December 1860; Timins to Embling, 18 February 1861.

<sup>609</sup> *Argus*, 12 November 1858: 5

<sup>610</sup> John Dunmore Lang, 'The Murray River' *Adelaide Times*, 1 March 1854: 3; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 October 1854: 5.

<sup>611</sup> Barkly was referring to Benjamin Herschel Babbage, Augustus Charles Gregory and Francis Thomas Gregory.

<sup>612</sup> *Argus*, 29 March 1859: 5.





Figure 51: Lang's 1854 proposal to build a tramroad to link Murray River paddle-steamers to a steam-packet station at the mouth of Stokes' Albert River. Lang was sure the town that developed at the Albert would become the New Orleans of Australia.

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In a fortnight all stores and supplies for an expedition could be sent without difficulty, and at no great expense, to Mount Murchison, which is more than a third of the distance from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria.<sup>613</sup>

Consequently he thought it "would be most prudent" to direct the Expedition "directly north" from Mount Murchison, rather than to "venture on the more perilous course of sending it to the north-west, either to the Victoria River or Shark's Bay" (see Figure 52).<sup>614</sup> However, Barkly thought there were far more practical issues that the PIV could be concentrating on. He did not think there was any prospect of running a telegraph line to the north coast, regardless of whether it was Victoria's proposed line to the Gulf or Victoria River, South Australia's proposed line through the centre, or New South Wales' proposed line to Cape York. Acting on the advice of the superintendent of telegraphs,<sup>615</sup> Barkly announced the only feasible landing place for the underwater cable, from Java, Sumatra or Ceylon, was Freemantle and he thought they should lose no time in laying a cable across the Great Southern Bight towards King George's Sound. He thought this, rather than exploration, was a matter which fell peculiarly within the scope of the PIV and he urged the Institute to "turn its attention to practical questions of this sort".<sup>616</sup>

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<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>615</sup> The general superintendent of the Electric Telegraph Department of Victoria was Samuel Walker McGowan (1829-1887). Born in Ireland, he arrived in Victoria in 1853 and in 1854 opened the first telegraph line in the southern hemisphere.

<sup>616</sup> *Argus*, 29 March 1859: 5.

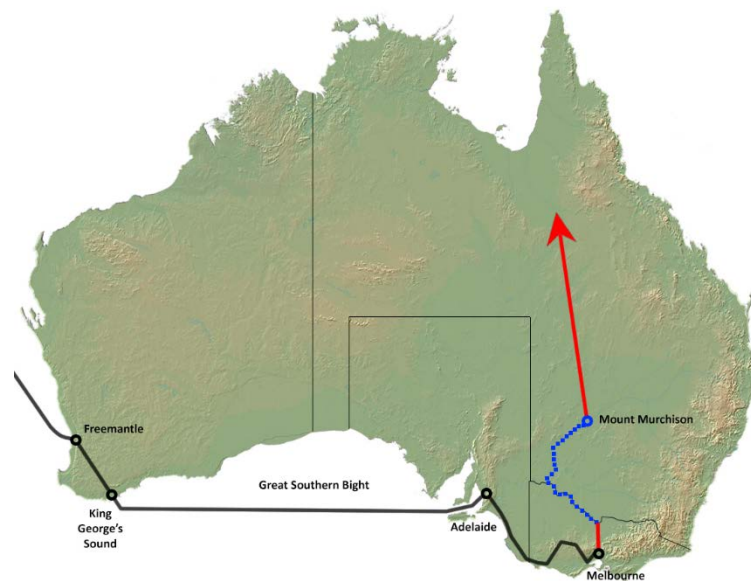


Figure 52: Barkly's proposal for exploring north of Mount Murchison, and, in his opinion, the more important matter of constructing a telegraph line to King George's Sound.

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Mueller, as the newly elected president of the PIV, responded graciously to the Governor's suggestions and there was no further discussion on the subject that evening.<sup>617</sup> However, Mueller disagreed with Barkly's route and used his influence, past experience and friendship with Gregory to advance his case.<sup>618</sup> At the next meeting of the PIV he presented the honorary secretary with a personal letter, written to him by Gregory, who, based on his recent discoveries during the 'LSE', had reconsidered his earlier advice to Mueller, and now suggested the best route would be to follow Strzelecki Creek into the South Australian desert, form a depot on the Cooper and then head north-west or west-north-west into "the unknown portion of the interior" (see Figure 53).<sup>619</sup>

Mueller, who was a prolific letter writer,<sup>620</sup> had continued to correspond with Gregory, urging him to accept leadership of the Victorian expedition. Gregory once again rejected the offer.<sup>621</sup> By

<sup>617</sup> Philosophical Institute of Victoria, *Transactions of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria: From January to December 1859 inclusive*. Edited for the Council of the Institute by John Macadam MD, Hon Sec., ed. John Macadam, Vol. 4 (Melbourne: The Institute, 1860): 1-8.

<sup>618</sup> *Argus*, 21 April 1859: 5.

<sup>619</sup> Philosophical Institute of Victoria, *Transactions*, Vol. 4.

<sup>620</sup> R.W. Home, A.M. Lucas, S. Maroske, D.M. Sinkora and J.H. Voigt (eds) *Regardfully yours: selected correspondence of Ferdinand von Mueller*, Vol. 1: 1840-1859. (Bern: Peter Lang, 1998); Rod W. Home, 'Ferdinand Mueller and the Royal Society of Victoria' *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria*, Vol. 127, Issue 1 (2015): 105-109.

<sup>621</sup> Philosophical Institute of Victoria, *Transactions*, Vol. 4: vi-ix. 'Letter from A.C. Gregory to Mueller, dated Sydney, 31 December 1858'.



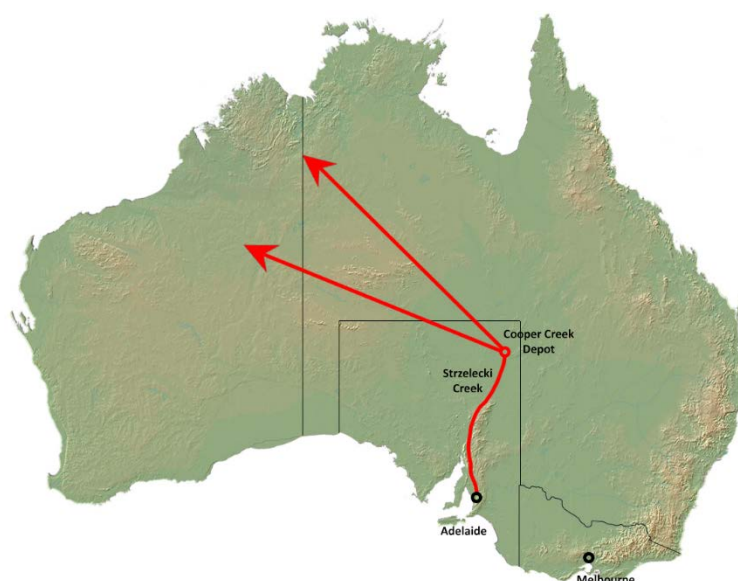


Figure 53: Gregory's alternate suggestion, proposed to the EC by Mueller.  
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allowing the honorary secretary to read out Gregory's letter in full, Mueller inadvertently highlighted some of the shortcomings in the EC's proposal. Gregory warned that:

even under the most favorable circumstances, the results [of the Expedition] must fall far short of public expectation, and, even were as fine a country to be found (which is scarcely possible), it could only benefit South Australia, as that colony would intervene between it and Victoria; and the people of the latter province would be far from satisfied when they found they had paid a large sum for discoveries which were to benefit others, while they were inaccessible to themselves.<sup>622</sup>

He therefore felt if he accepted the position of expedition leader, it "would be construed into an approval of the undertaking generally" and Gregory was not sure he had "reasonable expectations of attaining the objects desired".<sup>623</sup> The EC remained resolute, even obstinate, in the face of Gregory's rejection and moved a motion:

That a letter be addressed to the Chief Secretary, recommending Mr Gregory for the appointment [of leader of the Expedition].<sup>624</sup>

The *Age* was critical of the EC and the "off-hand manner" in which they had just selected the leader. They were also dismissive of Gregory's idea that "the discovery of fresh fertile territory in the interior" was the sole objective of the Expedition.<sup>625</sup> They thought that when a direct route was discovered through the central deserts, it would be "in spite of many of our savans [at the Philosophical Institute] rather than with their help".<sup>626</sup> The EC tried to distance themselves from the

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<sup>622</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>623</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>624</sup> *Ibid.*; *Argus*, 21 April 1859: 5.

<sup>625</sup> *Age*, 9 May 1859: 4-5.

<sup>626</sup> *Ibid.*

criticism, claiming the motion had been moved prematurely by the PIV without reference to the EC, but they made no effort at subsequent meetings to overturn the decision.<sup>627</sup>

In fact, the Committee's deliberations over the route and leader were pointless, as the EFC had made little progress raising funds. In the nine months since Kyte made his offer they had raised only £600.<sup>628</sup> Although the EFC started out, somewhat enthusiastically, holding three public meetings a week, by the sixth meeting interest had dwindled to the extent that they failed to make a quorum.<sup>629</sup> The meetings of the Sandhurst 'Exploration Movement' committee likewise resulted in "a very small attendance"<sup>630</sup> and a public meeting in Geelong, called by the mayor to raise funds, attracted only two people.<sup>631</sup> EC and EFC meetings lapsed over the Christmas holidays and were not resumed in 1859, as it was obvious the Expedition would not be ready to depart in March and would therefore miss the next favourable season. Although Mueller's public release of Gregory's letter had sparked "an interesting and lengthy discussion",<sup>632</sup> when the EC and EFC finally got around to calling their first meeting for the year, it attracted just seven people.<sup>633</sup> The joint Committees "found it difficult to account for the extremely small attendance" and were forced to adjourn,<sup>634</sup> much to the disgust of the *Argus*, who thought Kyte's offer might lapse and asked:

is the city of Melbourne willing to incur the reproach of so discreditable an act of parsimony, and of manifesting so profound an indifference to so important an object?<sup>635</sup>

EC member John Watson added a note of reason to the EC's debates when he made one of his rare comments, reminding the Committee:

that they should try to provide the sinews of war<sup>636</sup> before recommending any appointment whatever. Their appointment, or recommendation, would be of little use unless they could provide funds.<sup>637</sup>

The EFC began collecting funds with renewed vigour, holding regular meetings, canvassing city businesses, staging a fund-raising 'dramatic performance' at Kyte's Theatre Royal, and petitioning all

<sup>627</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes, 12 May 1859', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 23; *Argus*, 13 May 1859: 6.

<sup>628</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes, 15 November 1858', EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>629</sup> *Argus*, 30 November 1858: 4; *Bendigo Advertiser*, 2 December 1858: 2, 8 December 1858: 2.

<sup>630</sup> *Bendigo Advertiser*, 29 October 1858: 2, 30 October 1858: 3, 17 November 1858: 3, 1 December 1858: 3.

<sup>631</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 21 July 1859: 2.

<sup>632</sup> *Age*, 21 April 1859: 5.

<sup>633</sup> *Argus*, 6 May 1859: 5.

<sup>634</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes, 5 May 1859', EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c; 'Minutes, 5 May 1859', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 22; *Age*, 6 May 1859: 5.

<sup>635</sup> *Argus*, 10 May 1859: 4.

<sup>636</sup> The term 'sinews of war' refers to the money and equipment needed to wage a war. The phrase was first used in English in the mid-16th century, and refers a quote from Marcus Tullius Cicero's Fifth Philippic, 1 January 43 C.E. "*quid est aliud omnia ad bellum civile hosti arma largiri, primum nervos belli, pecuniam infinitam qua nunc eget, deinde equitatum quantum velit? equitatum dico*" (to present the enemy with ... the sinews of war, a limitless supply of money of which he now stands in need, then cavalry, all he wants).

<sup>637</sup> *Argus*, 21 April 1859: 5.



Figure 54: T.W. Cameron, 'Portrait of Ambrose Kyte', n.d.  
MS 13867/41, State Library of Victoria.

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the squatters in Victoria.<sup>638</sup> The EFC told the squatters that exploration of the interior was “an enterprise which should engage the sympathies and command the support of the merchant, the squatter and the miner, no less than those of the man of science”<sup>639</sup> and they kept the aims and objectives of the Expedition as broad as possible to attract interest from as wide an audience as possible. They stated the Expedition would:

promote the material prosperity of this country, to enlarge the boundaries of knowledge, to clear up the mystery which envelopes the fate of poor Leichhardt and to facilitate our intercourse with the other hemisphere ... [and] indicate how we may obtain access to vast areas of pastoral land from which we are at present cut off, owing to our ignorance of the intervening country.<sup>640</sup>

The reference to vast areas of new pastoral land was no doubt an attempt to appeal to the squatters, who were under increasing pressure to surrender their extensive land-holdings to the small selectors under the impending Nicholson Land Act.<sup>641</sup> Several squatters donated sums of between £50 and

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<sup>638</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports*, 'Fourth Progress Report, 9 January 1860'; 'Minutes, 23 May 1859', EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c; 'Minutes, 12, 17, 23, 30 May 1859, 6 June 1859', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria; *Argus*, 13 May 1859: 6, 18 May 1859: 4, 24 May 1859: 4, 31 May 1859: 5, 7 June 1859: 4, 27 July 1859: 5.

<sup>639</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Exploration Fund Committee fund raising circular, typescript letter from Macadam, dated 15 September 1858', EC Minutes, ex1001-015, Box 2075/1a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>640</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>641</sup> Land reform had been a contentious issue throughout the 1850s in Victoria, with the left-wing Land League being formed in 1856, followed by the Victorian Convention in 1857. In 1859, the Nicholson Ministry passed legislation in the democratically elected Legislative Assembly, which limited the squatters control, but it was rejected several times by the more conservative Legislative Council with their rural franchise. The *Sale of Crown Lands Act (1860)* ('The Nicholson Act') finally passed in 1860, see: Phillippa Nelson and Lesley Alves, *Lands Guide: A guide to finding records of Crown land at Public Record Office Victoria* (Melbourne: Public Record Office Victoria in association with Gould Genealogy and History, 2009).

New South Wales passed Robertson's *Crown Lands Act (1861)* and South Australia passed the *Strangways Act (1869)*. This colonial legislation led to squatters looking further afield for pastoral land.

£100, so that by the end of September 1859, the EFC had £2,199 in hand and were in a position to claim Kyte's donation.<sup>642</sup>

Interestingly, while the EC and EFC were raising trivial amounts canvassing Melbourne businesses and discussing half-crown collections, sixpenny lotteries, bazaars and amateur theatrical performances,<sup>643</sup> the South Australian Legislative Council announced a reward of £2,000<sup>644</sup> for:

the first person who shall succeed in crossing through the country lately discovered by Mr Stuart, to either the north or north-western shores of the Australian continent, west of the 143° of east longitude and north of the southern parallel of latitude at 23½° [S].<sup>645</sup>

This reward was precipitated when William Finke and James Chambers asked the South Australian Parliament to fund Stuart's next expedition. The legislature decided against backing any one particular expedition, and offered a reward instead.<sup>646</sup> Frank Clune used the reward as the opening paragraph for his book in the Expedition:

Chapter 1: Two Thousand Pounds Reward!  
Police-Inspector Robert O'Hara Burke, of Castlemaine, in the colony of Victoria, opened his eyes in amazement, as he read in the Melbourne *Argus* that the Government of the adjoining colony of South Australia had offered £2000 reward ...<sup>647</sup>

Murgatroyd also refers to the reward and claims "the prize succeeded in jolting Melbourne's Philosophical Institute out of its summer somnolence".<sup>648</sup> Burke may well have read about the reward, although the *Argus* only made the briefest of references to it, tucked away on the bottom of page five.<sup>649</sup> However it was not the reason he applied for the leadership. As far as jolting the PIV, neither the EC, EFC or PIV made any mention of the reward at any of their meetings and it had no influence on their decisions.<sup>650</sup>

<sup>642</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports*, 'Fourth Progress Report, 9 January 1860'; 'Minutes, 21 October 1859', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 29; *Age*, 27 October 1859: 6; *Argus*, 17 October 1859: 5, 27 October 1859: 6.

<sup>643</sup> *Argus*, 26 April 1859: 6, 13 May 1859: 6, 7 July 1859: 5; *Mount Alexander Mail*, 22 October 1858: 3.

<sup>644</sup> Initially the South Australian Parliament voted £1,000 as a reward, then added certain stipulations and increased it to £2,000.

<sup>645</sup> *South Australian Advertiser*, 20 July 1859:3.

<sup>646</sup> *South Australian Advertiser*, 4 August 1859: 3; *Adelaide Observer*, 6 August 1859: 2.

<sup>647</sup> Clune, *Dig*, 1.

<sup>648</sup> Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree*, 47.

<sup>649</sup> The South Australian initiative was reported briefly in the *Argus*, 1 August 1859: 5.

<sup>650</sup> A £2,000 reward would have not gone very far towards offsetting the total cost of the VEE of £14,391.2s.10d. Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports*, 'Supplemental Final Report, 19 November 1872'.

### 3.7 Organising the Expedition

Once the EC and EFC had raised £2,000, they applied to Kyte for his £1,000 donation, approached Chief Secretary O'Shanassy for an additional contribution from the legislature and wrote their *Fourth Progress Report* congratulating themselves on a job well done.<sup>651</sup> Promised donations continued to trickle into the EC's account at the Bank of Victoria and the legislature voted £6,000 for exploration<sup>652</sup> in addition to the sum promised for the camels, so that by the end of October 1859, the EFC had £9,029.5s.10d. to spend on their Expedition.<sup>653</sup> However, the camels were not due to arrive until early next year and the EC had not appointed a leader, selected a route, or specified the Expedition's aims, and, with summer approaching, there was no prospect of an Expedition setting out before March 1860. The EC was unsure what to do next. In addition, the PIV had more pressing issues to deal with, and lately had become absorbed with building their new hall and acquiring Royal assent.<sup>654</sup> The press noted:

The Exploration Committee are apparently having a short nap. We may echo the cry which has been more than once raised in our columns - what are the Committee about? The complete exploration of our continent has been sufficiently long deferred, and it is high time that so important a work should come to be regarded as a national undertaking.<sup>655</sup>

With the camels expected to arrive between January and March 1860, the EFC resumed their meetings early in the new year. Their first decision was to merge the two Committees into a single entity. The 21 members of this 'new' EC formed the most stable of all the Exploration Committees and, except for a couple of additional nominations, a few deaths and the occasional emigration from Victoria, remained almost unchanged until the EC disbanded in 1873. Although the EC and EFC had convened 36 meetings thus far, these members and the meetings they would hold in 1860 would be the most crucial for the way the VEE was established and operated.<sup>656</sup> The *Argus* realised the huge task that now faced the Committee:

The joint Committees entrusted with the administration of the Exploration Fund have now to commence the performance of an arduous duty, and one which will demand the exercise of no ordinary sagacity, foresight, prudence, and discrimination. They will have to select as explorers men combining varied and peculiar qualifications; to prescribe the best starting-point, and the most eligible route; to omit no precaution calculated to diminish the perils and facilitate the objects of the expedition; to discuss multitudinous points of detail, to foresee and provide for a wide range of contingencies, and so to husband the finances of the undertaking as that, while no waste is permissible, nothing which can add to the health, protect the safety, and promote the efficiency of all persons engaged in the enterprise, shall be omitted or withheld.<sup>657</sup>

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<sup>651</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports*, 'Fourth Progress Report, 9 January 1860'.

<sup>652</sup> *Argus*, 27 October 1859: 6.

<sup>653</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports*, 'Special Progress Report, 23 January 1860'.

<sup>654</sup> Hoare, 'Learned societies', 17-18.

<sup>655</sup> *Argus*, 15 October 1859: 4.

<sup>656</sup> The EC in 1860 comprised of Stawell as chairman, Hodgson as vice-chairman (until his death on 2 August 1860), Wilkie as treasurer, Macadam as honorary secretary, and Embling, Ligar, James Smith, McCoy, Mackenna, Neumayer, Elliott, Mueller, Iffla, Cadell, McMillan, Selwyn, Watson, Bleasdale, Eades, Gillbee and Clement Hodgkinson as committee members.

<sup>657</sup> *Argus*, 26 January 1860: 4.

The EC decided to start this long list of tasks by returning once again to the appointment of a leader. Mueller pointed out that there were no experienced candidates available: Leichhardt, Mitchell and Kennedy were dead, Sturt was in England, Gregory had been appointed Surveyor General of the new colony of Queensland and his younger brother was on his way to England.<sup>658</sup> Babbage and Stuart were not mentioned. “It was therefore necessary to bring a new man into the field” and Mueller nominated Major (ret.) Peter Edgerton Warburton, the South Australian Commissioner of Police, who had already shown interest in a trans-continental exploring expedition from Adelaide to the Gulf of Carpentaria.<sup>659</sup> After lengthy discussions, the EC decided to take the extremely unusual step of advertising for a leader in the newspapers. The advert, placed under ‘Public Notices’, asked for “Gentlemen desirous of offering their services for the Leadership of the forthcoming Expedition”<sup>660</sup> to communicate with Macadam by 1 March. As a concession to Mueller, Macadam wrote a curt note to Warburton, asking him to “direct your attention to an advertisement, for which please examine the ‘Argus’ of this day”.<sup>661</sup> Naturally, Warburton did not apply.

With the advert in place, the meetings lapsed once again, and when they resumed in March 1860, a sub-committee was appointed to consider the sixteen applications they had received.<sup>662</sup> Bonyhady chronicles the leadership selection process in sufficient detail that there is no need to repeat it here, other than to note that the sub-committee failed to identify a suitable candidate in March, and without a clear idea of what to do next, the EC decided to defer any leadership decision for three months and their meetings lapsed once again.<sup>663</sup> The *Argus* pointed out:

The Exploration Fund Committee are in embarrassing position. Time presses. The season of the year at which the expedition should set out is rapidly passing away; the camels have not yet arrived; and no leader has been appointed.<sup>664</sup>

The situation came to a head in June when the S.S. *Chinsurah* arrived in Hobson’s Bay carrying 24 camels and nine sepoy camel-handlers.<sup>665</sup> Unable to defer proceedings any longer, the EC watched the procession of camels and immediately announced “that the expedition would set out in six or seven weeks”.<sup>666</sup> After several hastily convened, but very well-attended meetings, the EC held a

<sup>658</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, ‘Minutes, 25 January 1860’, EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c; ‘Minutes, 25 January 1860’, EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria; *Age*, 31 January 1860: 4; *Argus*, 26 January 1860: 4-5; *South Australian Register*, 18 April 1859: 2.

<sup>659</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>660</sup> The advertisement ran in the *Argus* everyday throughout February 1860 under ‘Public Notices’ and in the *Age* each Wednesday and Saturday in February 1860.

<sup>661</sup> John Macadam, ‘Letter to Warburton, dated 13 February 1860’, Correspondence sent by the EC, ex1008-002, Box 2079/3, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria; *Age*, 31 January 1860: 4.

<sup>662</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, ‘Minutes, 2 March 1860’, EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria; *The Star*, 5 March 1860: 2.

<sup>663</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 26-42.

<sup>664</sup> *Argus*, 8 March 1860: 4.

<sup>665</sup> *Age*, 15 June 1860: 4; *Argus*, 11 June 1860: 4.

<sup>666</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, ‘Minutes, 14 June 1860’, EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 49; *Age*, 15 June 1860: 4; *Mount Alexander Mail*, 18 June 1860: 2.

leadership ballot. Just six days after the camels were landed, Burke was announced as the successful candidate.<sup>667</sup>

Fixing the route was substantially more difficult. At their next meeting, called by the EC "to confer with the Leader", Burke expressed a desire "of making an immediate start".<sup>668</sup> Even though his appointment had not been officially confirmed by Chief Secretary Nicholson, Burke stated he proposed to follow the EC's earlier suggestion of travelling down the Murray and then up the Darling, where the supplies would be transported by one of Cadell's paddle-steamers.<sup>669</sup> From the Darling:

the party will make for Cooper's Creek - the last known ground on the southern side - where a large depot will be formed. From that point to Gregory's farthest south on his expedition from the Gulf of Carpentaria, is 600 miles as the crow flies, and, as far as is known, over a desert of sand.<sup>670</sup>

Burke repeated a similar plan a week later at a dinner held in his honour at his home town of Castlemaine. "Starting from Cooper Creek", he said (see Figure 55):

They would then proceed northwards, either direct to Carpentaria, or bearing to the west, in order to endeavour to meet Gregory's track.<sup>671</sup>

Burke and the EC then busied themselves appointing the Expedition's officers, interviewing applicants for Expedition assistants, moving the camels to their new stables in Royal Park and packing equipment from the government stores ready for shipment to Adelaide to meet Cadell's steamer. Then, at an EC meeting in mid-July, the subject of the route was raised again, with McCoy and Ligar proposing the camels be placed back on the S.S. *Chinsurah* and shipped to either Port Augusta, the Victoria River or the Gulf of Carpentaria, to start the Expedition there.<sup>672</sup> Burke spoke to the master of the S.S. *Chinsurah* and reported back that the ship was available and the fittings for securing the camels were still in place.<sup>673</sup> Angus McMillan, Watson and Ligar moved that the Expedition should

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<sup>667</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes, 20 June 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c; 'Minutes, 20 June 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 48; *Age*, 21 June 1860: 4-5, 26 June 1860: 5; *Argus*, 21 June 1860: 4, 22 June 1860: 5; *Geelong Advertiser*, 21 June 1860: 2; *Mount Alexander Mail*, 22 June 1860: 5; *The Star*, 25 June 1860: 2.

<sup>668</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes, 28 June 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c; 'Minutes, 28 June 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 51; *Argus*, 29 June 1860: 4.

<sup>669</sup> *Argus*, 29 June 1860: 4; 'Complimentary Dinner to R. O'H. Burke, Esq., Leader of the Exploring Expedition', *Mount Alexander Mail*, 9 July 1860: 2.

<sup>670</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes, 28 June 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c; 'Minutes, 28 June 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 51; *Argus*, 29 June 1860: 4.

<sup>671</sup> *Mount Alexander Mail*, 9 July 1860: 2.

<sup>672</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes, 13 July 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c; 'Minutes, [undated]', EC Records, ex1001-029, Box 2075/2c (Item 3); 'Minutes, 13 July 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 55; *Argus*, 14 July 1860: 4.

<sup>673</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes, 17 July 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c; 'Minutes, 17 July 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 58; *Argus*, 20 July 1860: 4; *The Star*, 19 July 1860: 3.

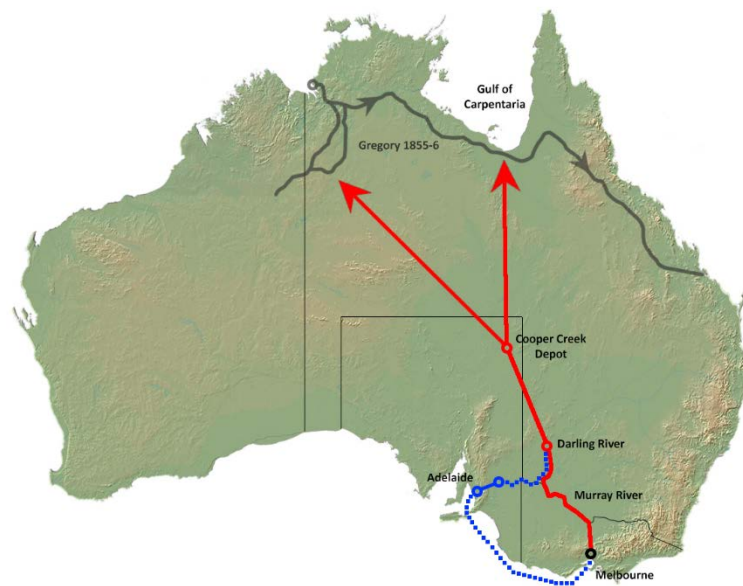


Figure 55: Burke announced the route he would follow would be down the Murray and up the Darling, where he would collect the Expedition's stores, before proceeding to the Cooper to form a depot.  
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sail in the S.S. *Chinsurah* and land at Blunder Bay on the Victoria River, “and proceed thence by the most direct practicable route south to Cooper’s Creek” (see Figure 56).<sup>674</sup> A similar route had been proposed 22 months earlier by Mueller, but this time the change of plan was not of his doing. Feeling slighted at the selection of Burke over Warburton, Mueller had withdrawn somewhat from the EC’s deliberations. When he heard about the change of route he pointed out the “disadvantages arising from landing the camels and party on the north-western coast” and strongly supported “the original plan of forming a depot at Cooper's Creek”.<sup>675</sup> *The Star* thought Blunder Bay was “A radical and very important alteration”. The *Argus* agreed, noting this would “give a totally new character to the

<sup>674</sup> *Bendigo Advertiser*, 19 July 1860: 4.

<sup>675</sup> *Age*, 21 July 1860: 5.



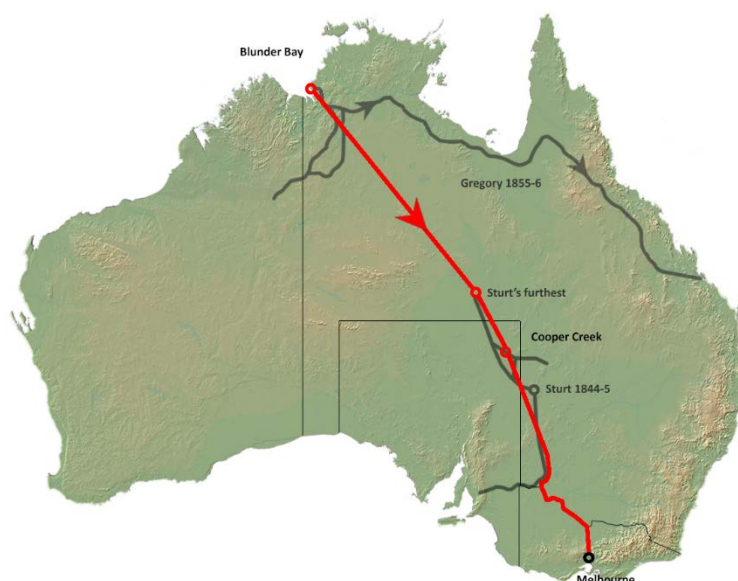


Figure 56: McCoy and Ligar's last minute proposal to start from Blunder Bay and travel south-east to Sturt's furthest point in the Simpson Desert, then on to Melbourne.  
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undertaking" a move they were sure would "be unhesitatingly condemned by a vast majority of the Victorian public as a most unwarrantable departure from the original project".<sup>676</sup> They asked:

Why, after all the details of the route had been settled to the satisfaction of all practical people, has this precious committee of ours blundered to Blunder Bay? What have we to do with Blunder Bay, or Blunder Bay with us? Who has talked of Blunder 'Bay at all in connexion, with the scheme? What, in the name of all the dromedaries, has Victoria to do with an expedition to discover the interior from Blunder Bay? And who are the great philosophers, the renowned geographers, and experienced men of travel by whose advice Blunder Bay has been substituted for Cooper's Creek as the point of departure for the Victorian national Expedition?<sup>677</sup>

The *Age* was equally critical

Blunder Bay! Was there ever more appropriate or more significant designation? All the planning and projecting, altering and amending, turning back and stumbling forward, of our Victorian savans with respect to the intended Exploring Expedition have only led them, whither they desire to send the camels, — to Blunder Bay! Ominous this, decidedly; but natural at the same time - quite natural, with such a business in such hands. How came a matter of this kind to be committed to a small knot of colonial doctors?<sup>678</sup>

Stawell was furious. He had not attended the recent meetings and so had not voted for the change of route. He insisted the minutes of the last meeting should not be confirmed, whereupon a series of lengthy, heated debates followed, with Neumayer and Selwyn adding to the confusion by suggesting

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<sup>676</sup> *Argus*, 21 July 1860: 5.

<sup>677</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>678</sup> *Age*, 23 July 1860: 4.

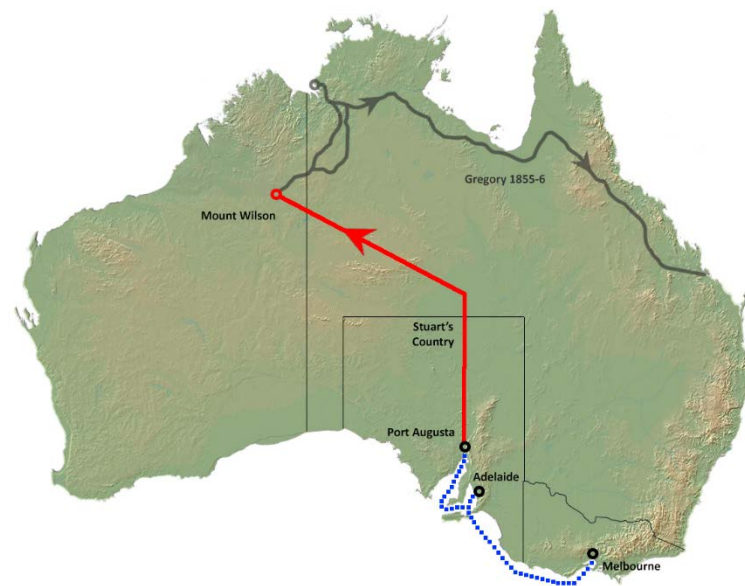


Figure 57: Neumayer and Selwyn's last minute proposal to start from Port Augusta and travel through 'Stuart's country' before heading north-west to Gregory's Mount Wilson.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.

the Expedition travel from Port Augusta via 'Stuart's country' to Gregory's Mount Wilson (see Figure 57).<sup>679</sup> From the lengthy press reports and meagre official minutes, it is clear that these debates were fuelled by the fact that the Expedition had no clear aims. Each of the EC members had spent the last two and a half years fund raising, all the while promoting and justifying the need for a Victorian expedition. Now everything was in place ready for the Expedition to start, each of the protagonists had formed a different idea about what it was supposed to achieve.

Eventually Stawell, with Mueller's support, convinced the EC to reverse the decision to go to Blunder Bay, but the Committee were still divided over whether to head to Cooper Creek or start from Port Augusta. By a narrow margin, the EC finally settled on sending the Expedition to Cooper Creek, based primarily on the notion that, as the Expedition was a Victorian one, it should start from Victoria. After such a long and contentious debate, the meeting ended without discussing what the Expedition was supposed to do once it reached Cooper Creek.<sup>680</sup>

Embling, who vacillated and who managed to support all three propositions in succession, was appalled at the reversal and the following day raised the matter in Parliament, asking the Upper House to pass legislation forcing the RSV to start from Blunder Bay, or failing that, postpone the departure

<sup>679</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes, 20 July 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c; 'Minutes, 20 July 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-030, Box 2075/2c (Item 4); 'Minutes, 20 July 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 61; *Age*, 21 July 1860: 5; *Argus*, 21 July 1860: 4.

<sup>680</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes, 23 July 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c; 'Minutes, 23 July [1860], 1, 23 July 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-031, Box 2075/2c (Item 5); 'Minutes, 23 July 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 63; *Age*, 24 July 1860: 5, 27 July 1860: 4; *Argus*, 24 July 1860: 4; *Empire*, 2 August 1860: 4; *Geelong Advertiser*, 24 July 1860: 2.

subject to further discussion. Embling also hoped the Nicholson Ministry would relieve the EC of command of the venture.<sup>681</sup> While the press and the Legislative Council lampooned Embling as the self-appointed 'Minister of the Interior' and dismissed his claims as 'petty grievances', the *Argus* questioned whether the Royal Society was "competent to be charged, from the first, with this undertaking" and announced they had "very little faith in the philosophers ... and there is very, little reason why any one should have faith in them".<sup>682</sup> With only three weeks until the Expedition's departure, there was chaos and dissent over where Burke should go.

The EC did not revisit the matter again, and when they drew up Burke's instructions they told him that "The Committee having decided on Cooper's Creek, of Sturt's, as the basis of your operations, request that you will proceed thither".<sup>683</sup> Beyond the Cooper, their instructions were vague, even contradictory, and ended thus:

The Committee is fully aware of the difficulty of the country you are called on to traverse; and in giving you these instructions has placed these routes before you more as an indication of what it has been deemed desirable to have accomplished than as indicating any exact course for you to pursue. The Committee entrusts you with the largest discretion as regards the forming of depots, and your movements generally.<sup>684</sup>

The Expedition's proposed route had been debated at length numerous times since the venture was first proposed in 1857. However, the decision over where Burke's party should go was only decided upon at the last minute by a small majority of the EC. Consequently it is not surprising that the EC did not give clear instructions to Burke. Compounding the problem was the fact that many of the EC members had formed their own ideas of what the Expedition would achieve. It was not possible for all of these aims to be fulfilled and the scientific aspects of the Expedition would be sacrificed to allow Burke to cross the continent as swiftly as possible.

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<sup>681</sup> Victoria. Parliament, *Victorian Hansard* (1859-1860) Vol. 6: 1638-1641; *Age*, 2 August 1860: 6; *Argus*, 2 August 1860: 4, 6; 3 August 1860: 5.

<sup>682</sup> *Argus*, 2 August 1860: 4.

<sup>683</sup> EC, 'Instructions issued to Robert O'Hara Burke, Leader of the Victorian Exploration Expedition', 18 August 1860, ex2001-001, Box 2082/3a (Item 1), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>684</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3.8 Conclusion

Scientific societies were slow to establish themselves in Australia, with the pioneering nature of colonial society favouring practical institutions such as agricultural and horticultural societies and Mechanic's Institutes over philosophical and learned societies. Science in Australia remained at the periphery, even though antipodean flora and fauna was of great interest to London's scientific elite. Although many naturalists conducted their own private collecting excursions, exploring expeditions offered wider opportunities for discovering new flora and fauna, and from 1837 botanists accompanied some of the larger expeditions. Expedition leaders with a rudimentary knowledge of geology, zoology and ornithology also made their own contributions. However the primary aim of inland exploration continued to be the discovery of pastoral land and water resources, and the advance of scientific knowledge remained an ancillary function.

It is not surprising that a Victorian scientific society was the first and only such organisation in Australia to organise a major exploring expedition. The discovery of gold transformed Victoria more than any other Australian colony. The wealth and population growth resulted in the establishment of public institutions in Melbourne, which in turn attracted an influx of educated people, particularly from England, Ireland and Germany. They were mostly young and ambitious, driven by Enlightenment ideals and Humboldtian science and they formed a series of scientific societies which eventually merged to become the RSV. Although the early philosophical institute presented a scientific façade, its primary function was a social one, offering regular meetings for the 250 members of Melbourne's political, medical and mercantile elite. Trained scientists like Mueller, McCoy, Selwyn and Neumayer were in the minority.

The first council of the PSV comprised of surveyors, naturalists and geologists, and from the outset they declared an interest in establishing exploring expeditions. This was an unusual move for a scientific society and unique in Australia. It was interesting that, although that the PSV modelled themselves on the Royal Society, their ideas about exploration were more in line with the objectives of the RGS. Although the PSV's exploration proposal was quickly scaled back to prospecting parties investigating the mineral wealth of the colony, it was suggested they should be funded by public subscription, which was yet another novel idea. These proposals did not eventuate, but the desire to explore remained with the Institute, along with the idea that the public would be willing to fund the venture. When the Institute next raised the subject of exploration, it was Wilkie's grand proposal to carry out Leichhardt's 1848 proposal to cross Australia from east to west.

The Institute readily accepted the idea of mounting an expedition, but members of the EC differed on the specifics of who should lead the expedition, where it should go and what it should achieve. The EC met 47 times in the 34 months between its inception and the Expedition's departure and a



Figure 58: Visual depiction of the dates of EC Meetings between the Committee's formation in October 1857 and the Expedition's departure in August 1860. Each red dot is a single meeting.

timeline depicting those meetings reveals an interesting pattern (see Figure 58). The schedule of meetings was characterized by short periods of intense activity, separated by long periods of inactivity. This cycle of bursts of enthusiasm interspersed with lengthy periods of lethargy epitomized the way the Committee operated prior to the Expedition's departure. The first series of meetings discussed Wilkie's proposal, but they were followed by a lengthy hiatus. Meetings resumed again after Kyte's offer, but halted at the end of 1858. There was a brief flurry of interest in the middle of 1859, initiated when Mueller released the private letter written to him by Gregory. In early 1860, meetings were held to appoint a leader, but again, this was more difficult than the EC anticipated and the meetings halted after a couple of months. Then, in June 1860, the camels arrived and the EC was forced into a series of hurried meetings, leading to the Expedition's departure.

The EC's method of organising an expedition was unlike anything done previously in other colonies, where the usual methodology was for an exploratory aim to be formulated, then a leader chosen and a route determined. The EC came up with a grand, but vague idea, spent several years raising funds, then, upon the arrival of the camels, hurriedly selected a leader and argued over a route. This was not the original intention, but once the Institute announced their desire to organise an expedition, they set themselves on a course of action from which they were unwilling to back down. Mueller's idea was that once Gregory accepted the leadership position, he would oversee the organisation, planning, provisioning and staffing of the expedition and provide guidance and direction to the EC. When Gregory and then Warburton declined the position, the EC then found themselves without expert advice and under pressure to find an alternative leader. Consequently, many of the operational decisions were made by the 'philosophers' who had no practical exploration experience. Even Mueller's limited experience was not utilised to the full extent, as he absented himself from proceedings following Burke's nomination.

A further obstacle to organising a successful expedition was that the aims were never clearly defined. The EC underestimated how difficult it would be to finance the venture. Fund raising took more than two years, during which time the EC became preoccupied with lobbying the Legislature and collecting paltry donations from the public. In the process of promoting the Expedition, Committee members promised it would perform many functions. Once sufficient money had been raised, the EC returned to the pressing issues of filling the leadership position and determining the route, and the Expedition's aims and objectives were never discussed. The various members of the



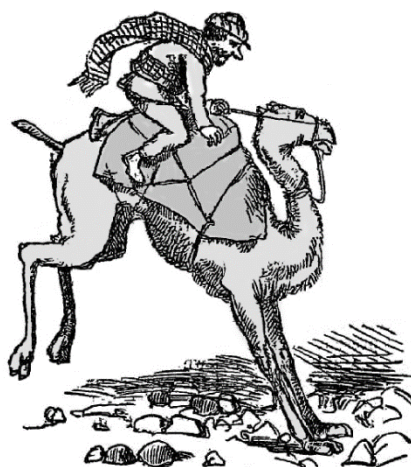
Figure 59: 'Squaring Ye Circle', 1860.  
*Melbourne Punch*, 5 July 1860: 188.

Mr. Punch's depiction of the meeting of the RSV, Monday, 25 June 1860 – five days after Burke had been appointed Expedition leader. Present at the meeting, and depicted in the engraving, are EC members McCoy, Eades, Stawell, Wilkie, Macadam, Bleasdale and O'Shanassy, as well as Dr Ludwig Becker. Wilkie, who originally proposed that the RSV should mount an expedition, is at the blackboard discussing the quadrature of the circle, a function of Euclidean geometry. Wilkie's paper was "of a very technical nature" and of such a tedious length that it "had a depressing effect on the meeting". The EC, as a sub-committee of the RSV, took delight in the administrative process of holding meetings, so much so that they often argued over technicalities while achieving little of value. *Melbourne Punch* realised this, as the caption 'Squaring Ye Circle' is a metaphor for striving without chance of success, see: *Argus*, 26 June 1860: 5 and Christine Ammer, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

EC had their own ideas of what the Expedition would achieve, as evidenced by their discussions of the route: the German contingent advocated scientific investigation and a search for Leichhardt, others thought it was the altruistic thing for the richest colony to do, while the merchants and pioneers on the Committee wanted a telegraph line, grazing land and commerce. Eventually the Leichhardt search was forgotten about and the commercial benefits to Victoria were never outlined.

By not specifying the aims of the Expedition and by appointing an inexperienced leader, the chances of success were diminished.

## Mr. Punch's summary ... The Bay of Blunder, O!



**THE BAY OF BLUNDER, O!**

Figure 60: 'Burke would fail' / 'Should he sail' / 'To the Bay of Blunder O!'  
*Melbourne Punch*, 26 July 1860: 2.



'Mr. Punch's Summary'  
*Melbourne Punch*, 26 July 1860: 1.

The camels are ready, but then, more's the pity,  
Doubts beset our acute Exploration Committee.

One thought they should start on their arduous way,  
From a place call'd (significant name!) Blunder Bay.

Port Augusta was much by a second preferr'd,  
Cooper's Creek was the favourite point of the third.

At length 'twas decided the leader's discretion,  
The course should prescribe of our fam'd expedition:

You shall hear how they speed on their perilous way;  
When I shan't have to mention, I hope, Blunder Bay.



# 4

## EXPEDITION CHRONOLOGY



### CONTENTS

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4.1	Introduction	175
4.2	Melbourne to Menindee	178
4.3	Menindee to Cooper Creek: Burke's Advance Party	197
4.4	Cooper to Carpentaria: The Gulf Party	204
4.5	Return from Carpentaria	212
4.6	Death of Burke and Wills	223
4.7	Brahe's Depot Party	226
4.8	Wright's Supply Party	229
4.9	Conclusion	236

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*On the 16th December 1860, Burke ... started on this tramp, which for perverse absurdity stands unequalled.*

Ernest Favenc, History of Australian exploration from 1788 to 1888.  
(Sydney: Turner & Henderson, 1888), 211.

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Figure 61: Sidney Nolan, 'Burke and Wills leaving Melbourne', 1950.  
Mr Denis Gowing, private collection, Melbourne.

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## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a brief chronology of the VEE. It includes material already published in Dave Phoenix, *Following Burke and Wills across Australia: A Touring Guide*, (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2015). A more comprehensive chronology and narrative can be found in this publication.

Although the Expedition's story has been told many times in different formats, there has never been a complete chronological analysis of the progress of the Expedition and the various parties as they divided and reformed. Only fragmented or partial chronologies have been compiled previously, usually as part of a larger project to identify sections of the Expedition's track, or as a framework for narrative and analysis (there is a detailed discussion about attempts to locate the Expedition's track in Chapter 7). A detailed chronology is important, as it provides the framework for later analysis, particularly identifying the Expedition's track.

Compiling a detailed chronology is particularly difficult because Burke did not keep a detailed account and Wills' journal is fragmented. As mentioned in the Methodology section (pages 17 to 23), some of the Expedition's manuscripts have been lost, and only transcriptions are extant, which makes it difficult to interpret the data.<sup>685</sup> In addition, some of the dates written in diaries are incorrect,<sup>686</sup> and most of the journals are incomplete.<sup>687</sup> Cross referencing diaries with oral accounts raises similar problems. Wills' diary suggests that after the death of Charley Gray, it took four days to reach Depot Camp 65, while King's evidence at the Commission said they took five days. The importance of this discrepancy is that Wills' account has the Gulf Party arriving back at Depot Camp 65 on the same day that Brahe's Depot Party left, while in King's account the Gulf Party arrived a day later which would have made a significant difference had Burke attempted to try and catch up to Brahe. Similarly, Brahe's report indicates he met Wright's Supply Party at Bulloo on 28 April while Wright recalled their meeting to have been on the following day.<sup>688</sup>

Many historians and amateur researchers have concentrated on one event or location, such as the C46R, 'the Plant Camp' or the death of Charley Gray at the lignum lake, and attempted to construct

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<sup>685</sup> All of Wills' field books and maps of the journey from Cooper Creek to the Gulf and return have been lost. Although some of the field books were partially transcribed by EC members Mueller and Smith, some of the transcriptions were also lost when they were loaned to the Melbourne press for publication. Consequently, the only extant record of the journey between 13 March and 21 April 1861 is the account that was published newspapers.

<sup>686</sup> Wills' final diary entries are incorrectly dated, see: Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>687</sup> For an example of the difficulties of interpreting Wills' incomplete field books, see: Richard Cork, 'The Search for the Sandstone Cave' in Burke and Wills Outback Conference 2003, *Burke and Wills Conference Proceedings 2003*: 21-38.

<sup>688</sup> Graeme Wheeler, 'Rendezvous at Camp 52 with Burke and Wills', *Geo: Australia's Geographical Magazine*, June-August (1987).



Figure 62: Mallee Heritage Sub-Committee 1998 sign at 'The Clump', Burke and Wills Camp 14.  
© 2014 Dave Phoenix.

This sign shows the Expedition's track and first 54 camps from Melbourne to Bulloo. It is based on Marjorie Tipping's interpretation of Becker's reports, but is inaccurate because it unsuccessfully attempts to merge the 55 numbered camps that Wills made on his trip north with the 61 camps Becker made. Because Becker travelled with the wagon party and then Wright's Supply Party, he camped in at least a dozen places that Wills did not. Tipping, ed., *Ludwig Becker* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1979), 184-185.

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a fragmented chronology around that event or locality, which often leads to conflict or confusion.<sup>689</sup> Other chronologies rely too heavily on a single source, or unsuccessfully attempt to merge two separate accounts such as Tipping's<sup>690</sup> unsuccessful attempts to reconcile Becker and Wills (see Figure 62).<sup>691</sup> All the chronologies dealing with the Expedition's route between Swan Hill and Bulloo contain inaccuracies as a result of not identifying the numerous divisions Burke, and later Wright, made to the parties.<sup>692</sup> Other chronologies are simply inaccurate. Manning Clark's chronology misplaces Stuart's return to Adelaide and therefore claims the VEE was a race<sup>693</sup> – something that is discussed, and refuted, later in this chapter.<sup>694</sup>

The methodology for establishing this chronology was to identify as wide a range of archive sources as possible: not just Expedition journals, but also more obscure data such as cheque stubs, receipts and payroll information, and place them into context. The chronology covers the Expedition from the date of departure, 20 August 1860, through to John King's return to Melbourne on 25

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<sup>689</sup> Corke, 'Where did they bury Charlie Gray?'; Leahy, 'Locating the 'Plant Camp'.

<sup>690</sup> Tipping, *Becker*.

<sup>691</sup> Ludwig Becker, 'First Report, Swan Hill, 8 September 1860', ex2004-004, Box 2082/4c; 'Second Report, Gambana, 30 September 1860', ex2004-005, Box 2082/4d; 'Third Report, Pamamaro Creek, 12 November 1860', ex2004-006, Box 2082/4e; 'Fourth Report, Darling River, 26 November 1860', ex2004-007, Box 2082/4f; 'Fifth Report, Darling River, 22 January 1861', ex2004-008, Box 2082/4g, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>692</sup> For example, see: John Don, *Burke and Wills: A Practical Guide with Maps and Detailed Notes* (Melbourne: Avenue Press, 2015).

<sup>693</sup> Charles Manning Hope Clark, *A history of Australia: Volume 4 - The earth abideth for ever 1851-1888* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1982), 150.

<sup>694</sup> The discussion of the race between Burke and Stuart is on pages 187 to 189.

November 1861 and encompasses all the various parties, including the hired wagons. This also meant compiling the first comprehensive chronology of Wright's Supply Party.

Details regarding establishing the Expedition, including the transactions and proceedings of the EC, EFC, RSV and Parliament of Victoria between 1857 and 1860, have already been discussed in the previous chapter. Details of the importation of camels for use in exploration, the use of camels on the Expedition and the subsequent fate of the animals is discussed in Chapter 5.

## 4.2 Melbourne to Menindee

Packing for the Expedition began in early July 1860, and over the next seven weeks the VEE amassed around 21 tonnes of provisions and supplies. There was too much equipment to fit on the three wagons that the EC supplied and Landells was reluctant to load the camels at this early stage as he wanted them fresh for the desert.<sup>695</sup> In order to move the mountain of stores, Burke hired an additional three wagons and drivers, intending to use them only as far as Swan Hill. Packing the wagons and other preparations delayed their departure and it was 4.00 pm on 20 August 1860 before the Expedition left Melbourne's Royal Park and headed along Mount Alexander Road, the well-travelled path out of town toward the goldfields.<sup>696</sup> They only made six kilometres on the first day, and the winter sun had set by the time they set up camp at Moonee Ponds (Camp 1). The next day broken-down wagons delayed their departure until 2.30 pm and Burke considered halting for a day or two to sort out their stores.<sup>697</sup> Eventually they got underway and reached the Inverness Hotel at Bulla after sunset (Camp 2).<sup>698</sup>

The following morning, the Hindu sepoy, Samla, left the Expedition, reducing the caravan to 18 men, six hired wagon drivers, six wagons, 26 camels, between 39-41 horses and four dogs.<sup>699</sup> An enthusiastic Wills unpacked his barometers and thermometers and began his scientific observations as the VEE crossed Deep Creek and headed north towards Lancefield to cross the Great Dividing Range. As they headed over the hills the winter weather worsened, wagons became bogged and the camels found the muddy ground difficult to walk on.

The land north of Melbourne had been occupied by graziers for some time, and the Expedition spent three nights camped at stations or near a settlement: Bolinda Vale station (Camp 3), Deep Creek township (Camp 4) and Darlington station (Camp 5). On the north side of the range they camped at inns: Mia Mia (Camp 6) and Matheson's (Camp 7).<sup>700</sup> Each night the men braved the weather and slept in tents, while the five officers found accommodation in inns and homesteads

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<sup>695</sup> 'The Expedition Started', *Herald*, 21 August 1860: 4-5.

<sup>696</sup> 'Departure of the Exploring Expedition', *Argus*, 21 August 1860: 5; 'The Ship of the Desert', *Age*, 21 August 1860: 4; 'Starting of the Exploration Expedition', *South Australian Advertiser*, 27 August 1860: 3.

<sup>697</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Account Book', Financial Records of the EC, ex1003-001, Box 2088B/2, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>698</sup> William John Wills, 'Memorandum book containing miscellaneous meteorological observations, astronomical calculations and notes', ex2009-006, Box 2083/1e; Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Dispatch, dated Inverness Hotel, 22 August 1860', ex2002-001, Box 2082/1a (Item 1), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>699</sup> See Figure 31.

<sup>700</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Telegram to Macadam, dated Sandhurst, 28 August 1860', ex2006-004, Box 2080/5a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.





Figure 63: William Strutt, 'The Burke and Wills expedition: the first day's order of march', 1862. H5107, State Library of Victoria.

Strutt sketched the Expedition heading north from their first camp at Essendon on Tuesday afternoon, 21 August 1860.

whenever possible.<sup>701</sup> At Mia Mia, on the northern side of the range, the Expedition had been on the road for a week and were ready for a rest.<sup>702</sup> They took a day off to repack the wagons and repair their equipment and Burke employed an additional man to assist in managing the animals.<sup>703</sup> The Expedition was generating a great deal of interest and was visited in camp each evening by “a great many visitors”.<sup>704</sup> These “curious-loving people” and their “time-robbing questions” were a hindrance,<sup>705</sup> so Burke avoided further disruptions and bypassed the larger gold mining towns of McIvor (Heathcote), Mount Alexander (Castlemaine) and Sandhurst (Bendigo).

Although Wills had access to the finest navigational instruments, the Expedition left Melbourne without any maps of the area the Expedition was heading to or journals of the explorers who had visited the Cooper and Gulf. Burke sent a messenger into Bendigo asking Dr John Hutchinson to bring “some maps of the North Australian coast”<sup>706</sup> and sent a telegram to the EC asking for books “bearing on the exploration of Australia”.<sup>707</sup> Wills “made a selection of several [of the maps], which he stated would prove of most valuable service to the Expedition”<sup>708</sup> and the EC purchased £5 worth

<sup>701</sup> *Bendigo Advertiser*, 28 August 1860: 3.

<sup>702</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Telegram to Macadam, dated Mia Mia, 26 August 1860', ex2006-003, Box 2080/5a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>703</sup> At Mia Mia, Burke employed Frenchman Jean Prolongeau (1838-1915), who was born in Bordeaux and migrated to Australia in 1854, see: Jean Prolongeau, 'The Exploring Party', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 20 September 1860: 3. Burke referred to him as 'John Polongeaux', see: Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Dispatch, dated Mia Mia, 26 August 1860', ex2002-002, Box 2082/1a (Item 2); 'Dispatch, dated Swan Hill, 8 September 1860', ex2002-005, Box 2082/1a (Item 5), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>704</sup> Becker, 'First Report', ex2004-004, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>705</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>706</sup> *Bendigo Advertiser*, 30 August 1860: 2.

<sup>707</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Telegram to Macadam, dated Sandhurst, 28 August 1860', ex2006-004, Box 2080/5a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>708</sup> *Bendigo Advertiser*, 30 August 1860: 2.



of journals, including those of Sturt, Leichhardt, Mitchell and the Gregory brothers and forwarded them on to Swan Hill.<sup>709</sup> The *Bendigo Advertiser* commented on this lack of foresight:

It does appear to us very difficult to understand why the best charts of Australia that have been compiled could not have been obtained in the wealthy and important capital of Victoria, and why it was reserved for a gentleman on one of the goldfields in the interior to supply the Expedition with articles which it is essential for its success, and even for its safety, that it should possess.<sup>710</sup>

As the VEE travelled from the goldfields onto the grassland plains of the Victorian Riverina, the weather improved and the Expedition made better progress.<sup>711</sup> The Expedition crossed the Campaspe on Kennedy's punt at Barnadown (Camp 8) and then headed north-west, following Piccaninny Creek.<sup>712</sup> The Expedition was still camping at stations, but the roads they followed were no longer the well-trodden tracks to the goldfields, but bush tracks linking outlying station homesteads: Barnadown, then Piccaninny Creek (Camp 9), Terrick Terrick (Camp 10), Mount Hope (Camp 11) and Tragowel on the Loddon (Camp 12), where rain hampered their progress once again.<sup>713</sup>

Torrential rain at Tragowel forced the VEE to take a day off to dry out. When they got underway again, they crossed the Loddon at the old drover's crossing at Kerang and then camped at Reedy Lake station (Camp 13). The next day they made their first bush camp in a belt of timber near Lake Boga (Camp 14).

The following morning, 6 September 1860, journalist William Oswald Hodgkinson arrived from Melbourne on the Cobb & Co coach to join the party. Hodgkinson brought the EC's 'Leader's Instructions' and 'Instructions for Scientific Observers'.<sup>714</sup> Superintendent Henry Foster rode out from Swan Hill to guide his police colleague into town.<sup>715</sup>

Later that afternoon the Expedition arrived in Swan Hill, having travelled 350 kilometres from Melbourne in 18 days. The VEE set up camp on the south bank of the Murray (Camp 15) and halted for five days to allow two of the hired wagons that had been delayed to catch up. Burke used the time to prepare an inventory of their equipment, as he was still unsure what stores the party had. He

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<sup>709</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes of the EC meeting, 5 September 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>710</sup> *Bendigo Advertiser*, 30 August 1860: 2.

<sup>711</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>712</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Telegram to Macadam, dated Sandhurst, 30 August 1860', ex2006-005, Box 2080/5a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>713</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Dispatch, dated Kerang, 3 September 1860', ex2002-003, Box 2082/1a (Item 3), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>714</sup> Exploration Committee, 'Instructions issued to Robert O'Hara Burke, Leader of the Victorian Exploration Expedition', 18 August 1860, ex2001-001, Box 2082/3a (Item 1); 'Instructions to VEE officers', RSV EC outward correspondence, August 1860-July 1869: 1-14, ex1008-001, Box 2088B/5, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>715</sup> Henry Foster, 'Letter to Macadam, dated Swan Hill, 20 September 1860', ex1007-070, Box 2077/5, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.



Figure 64: William Strutt, 'The exploring party encamped', c. 21 August 1860.  
A collection of drawings ... illustrating the Burke and Wills exploring expedition.  
a1485007, 1ff.6b, DL PXX 3, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

Strutt wrote in his diary that on the day of departure from Royal Park, the Expedition camped "a few miles out of town". The next morning, 21 August 1860, he "proceeded to the camp & had some photographs taken". This photograph is a salted paper print of a glass plate negative and is one of only two surviving photographs of the Expedition. It shows Burke, Landells, Becker and Beckler in camp.

dismissed four men,<sup>716</sup> employed an additional four men<sup>717</sup> and sent a number of confused and contradictory telegrams to the EC.<sup>718</sup> Wills' boss from the Flagstaff Hill Magnetic Observatory, Georg Neumayer, arrived from Melbourne to join the party for the next three weeks, and he and Wills began their scientific observations in earnest.<sup>719</sup>

Because of contradictory advice about the best route to take, Burke was unsure which way to go to Menindee.<sup>720</sup> The EC had originally anticipated that the Expedition would go to the junction of the Murray and Darling<sup>721</sup> as EC member, Cadell, had offered to take the stores there by paddle-

<sup>716</sup> Burke dismissed the sepoy Esau Khan, who had been ill, Thomas Brooks, James Lane and Jean Prolongeau.

<sup>717</sup> Burke employed Robert Bowman at Tragowel, sent to Melbourne for William Oswald Hodgkinson, sent to Bendigo for the saddler Alexander Macpherson and employed Charley Gray in Swan Hill.

<sup>718</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Dispatch, dated Swan Hill, 6 September 1860', ex2002-004, Box 2082/1a (Item 4); 'Dispatch, dated Swan Hill, 8 September 1860', ex2002-005, Box 2082/1a (Item 5); 'Dispatch, dated Swan Hill, 10 September 1860', ex2002-006, Box 2082/1a (Item 6); 'Dispatch, dated Swan Hill, 12 September 1860', ex2002-007, Box 2082/1a (Item 7), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>719</sup> Georg Neumayer, *Results of the Magnetic Survey of the Colony of Victoria. Executed during the years 1858-1864* (Mannheim: J. Schneider, 1869).

<sup>720</sup> Superintendent Henry Foster, 'Letter to Macadam, dated Swan Hill, 20 September 1860', ex1007-070, Box 2077/5, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>721</sup> 'Complimentary dinner to R.O'H Burke, Esq., Leader of the exploring expedition', *Mount Alexander Mail*, 9 July 1860: 2.

steamer.<sup>722</sup> However Burke had objected to this idea, most likely because Cadell had opposed his appointment as leader and therefore Burke claimed not to trust him to deliver the stores promptly.<sup>723</sup> Instead Burke decided to haul the stores overland. Now the Swan Hill locals advised him against following the Murray down to the junction. Faced with several different opinions, Burke struggled to make a decision, finally opting to go north to Balranald before heading north-west to arrive at the Darling further upstream. Finding he could not manage without the three hired wagons, he agreed to take them on to the Darling.<sup>724</sup> Burke explained to the EC that he was "well aware that our baggage is too cumbersome" and he planned to "leave the greater part of it behind" at a depot on the Darling.<sup>725</sup> This was the first time a depot on the Darling was mentioned.<sup>726</sup>

The Expedition's route from Swan Hill to Balranald was dictated by crossing places on the Murray, Wakool and Murrumbidgee Rivers. The Expedition left the colony of Victoria on 11 September 1860, crossing the Murray on the punt and camping on the northern bank in New South Wales, still within sight of the township (Camp 16). The next day they headed off on a bush road and, after a wrong turn, they halted and camped on a backwater of the Murray at Speewa (Camp 17).<sup>727</sup> The following day they reached the Wakool (Camp 18). Crossing the river on Henry Talbett's punt took some time and that night they camped on the plains on the road to Lake Yanga (Camp 19). The next day they crossed the Murrumbidgee on Dennis Hannan's decrepit punt and set up camp in a bend of the river near the town of Balranald (Camp 20).<sup>728</sup>

The four-day journey from Swan Hill to Balranald had highlighted a problem which would continue all the way to the Darling – the heavily laden wagons could not keep up with the pack-horses and camels, and Burke was increasingly frustrated with their slow rate of progress. Despite Burke's admission that the Expedition was carrying too much weight, they were not carrying a great deal of food, and at this stage, they were not carrying water either. Nevertheless, the Expedition was too large and unwieldy, and as water was becoming scarce and the roads had degenerated into faint tracks in the mallee the wagon drivers demanded a reduction in the loads they were carrying.<sup>729</sup> Burke

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<sup>722</sup> *Argus*, 29 June 1860: 4; Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes of the meeting of the EC, 28 June 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>723</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes of the EC ordinary meeting, 10 August 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 69.

<sup>724</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Dispatch, dated Swan Hill, 8 September 1860', ex2002-005, Box 2082/1a (Item 5), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>725</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>726</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>727</sup> Becker, 'Second Report', ex2004-005, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>728</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Dispatch, dated Balranald, 16 September 1860', ex2002-008, Box 2082/1a (Item 8), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>729</sup> *Ibid.*; *Argus*, 9 October 1860: 5.



Figure 65: Ludwig Becker, 'Wakool River, near Talbet's, 14 Sept. 60', 1860.  
Image b36036, H16486/F.6, State Library of Victoria.

Beckler sketched the Expedition crossing the Wakool in Talbett's punt.  
It took four hours to get all the men, wagons, horses and camels across the river.

left some equipment behind,<sup>730</sup> including the lime juice.<sup>731</sup> Burke also decided to dismiss some of the men, claiming it would help speed their progress, but more likely as a cost-cutting measure as the EC had warned him "to insure the greatest economy".<sup>732</sup> Cartage costs for the hired wagons were £110 per week, significantly more than the £69.2s. weekly wages bill for all the men and officers, and the EC was concerned at this additional expense.

At Balranald Burke split the Expedition for the first time.<sup>733</sup> Landells led the main party north to Lake Paika (Camp 21) while Burke remained behind to deal with "the unpleasant affair" of dismissing the men. Burke held a meeting with the officers and put the dismissals to the vote, with four men to be relieved of their duties including the foreman, Charles Ferguson.<sup>734</sup> It was Burke's responsibility

<sup>730</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'EC Accounts', ex1003-001, Box 2088B/2, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 47-49; Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Questions 123-124 to Brahe.

<sup>731</sup> Scurvy had been identified as a disease in the late 1400s, but the cause was not identified as a lack of Vitamin C (ascorbic acid) until 1912. In 1860 there was uncertainty about which foods would prevent scurvy and Burke took lime juice, citric acid and preserved vegetables as anti-scorbutics. He left the lime juice at Balranald. Fresh lime juice contains ascorbic acid which would prevent/cure scurvy, but aged lime juice which had been exposed to air or sunlight or which had come into contact with copper piping during production did not contain any ascorbic acid. Burke took citric acid (tricarboxylic acid  $C_6H_8O_7$ ) to Depot Camp 65 and the men diluted it with creek water. Despite its lemon flavour, citric acid does not contain ascorbic acid and therefore does not prevent or cure scurvy. Harriette Chick and Ruth F. Skelton, 'The relative content of antiscorbutic principle in limes (*Citrus medica*, var *acida*) and lemons (*Citrus medica*, var *limonum*)', *Lancet*, Vol. 2 (1918): 735-738; Jeremy Hugh Baron, 'Sailors' scurvy before and after James Lind: a reassessment', *Nutrition Reviews*, Vol. 67, No. 6 (June 2009): 315-332.

<sup>732</sup> John Macadam, 'Letter #44 to Burke acknowledging receipt of dispatches, dated Melbourne, 20 September 1860', ex2005-044, Box 2083/5, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>733</sup> William John Wills, 'Surveyor's Field Notes: Balranald to Linklinkwho, 17 to 23 September 1860', ex2008-009, Box 2082/6a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>734</sup> George James Landells, 'Report, dated Melbourne, 14 November 1860', ex2004-011, Box 2082/4j, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

to dismiss the men, but for a man used to the responsibilities of command, he found this task particularly difficult. Instead of informing four men they were fired, Burke selected six men, telling them they were the best men in the party and he had chosen them to stay at Balranald with the stores, and they would be sent for "in a week or so".<sup>735</sup> Burke intended two of the men to re-join the party, but not the other four. When Ferguson challenged the decision to be left behind indefinitely, Burke told him it was the EC's decision and the matter was out of his hands. He offered a compromise whereby he would take Ferguson and one other man on at reduced salaries, an offer that Ferguson refused.<sup>736</sup> In the end, Burke dismissed three men.<sup>737</sup> Landells was highly critical of the way Burke conducted himself:

Mr Burke's conduct struck me from the first as strange ... At Balranald a similar want of candour evidenced itself so much so that I lost all respect for him. He there told the men that he had received instructions from the [Exploration] Committee to reduce the party, which you, sir, have since denied.<sup>738</sup>

This was not the first rift between Burke and Landells: Landells had already expressed his disapproval at the impetuous manner in which Burke had organised the punt crossing at Balranald. In addition, Landells had also accused Wills of endangering a camel during the punt crossing at the Wakool.<sup>739</sup> Tension between Burke and Landells would continue to escalate, but for now, the scientific officers, Wills, Becker and Beckler, avoided any confrontation and busied themselves with their scientific investigations.

The VEE continued on across the mallee, camping at shepherds' huts at Tin (Camp 22) and Terekencom (Camp 23), where the men left behind in Balranald finally caught up with the main party.<sup>740</sup> From Terekencom there was a choice of a longer, easier route to the Darling, or the more direct, but difficult route via Prungle. Burke chose the shortest route, and the wagons became bogged in the soft sand.<sup>741</sup> They did not reach the outstation at Prungle and were forced to camp in the bush at Bookoo (Camp 24) without water.<sup>742</sup> The next day Burke waited impatiently at Prungle (Camp 25) for the wagons to negotiate the Prungle Hills.<sup>743</sup> Increasingly frustrated at their slow progress, Burke split the party and headed off to the Darling with the camels and saddle-horses, leaving the wagons and pack-horses to struggle along at their own pace.<sup>744</sup> Instead of working out a solution to the

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<sup>735</sup> Charles Darius Ferguson, 'Exploration Party', *Age*, 26 September 1860: 4.

<sup>736</sup> Charles Darius Ferguson, *Experiences of a Forty-Niner during the thirty-four years residence in California and Australia* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Williams Publishing Co., 1888).

<sup>737</sup> Burke dismissed the foreman, Charles Darius Ferguson, James McIlwaine and Patrick Langan. Ferguson took legal action against the EC for unfair dismissal and was awarded damages of £183.6s.8d.

<sup>738</sup> Landells, 'Report', ex2004-011, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>739</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>740</sup> Wills, 'Surveyor's Field Notes: Balranald to Linklinkwho', ex2008-009, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>741</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 34.

<sup>742</sup> Neumayer, *Results of the Magnetic Survey of the Colony of Victoria*.

<sup>743</sup> William John Wills, 'Surveyor's Field Notes: Linklinkwho to Bilbarka, 23 to 27 September 1860', ex2008-010, Box 2082/6b, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>744</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 33-34.



Figure 66: Ludwig Becker, 'Camping-ground at Bilbaka, Darling, 11 October', 1860.  
Image b36048, H16486/F.17, State Library of Victoria.

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problem, Burke delegated, or rather abdicated, his responsibility, riding away from the problem and leaving someone else to deal with it.

Burke's saddle-horse party reached the Darling in four days and established a camp on the river bank at Bilbarka (Camp 30).<sup>745</sup> The wagons struggled due to the soft sand and dense mallee scrub. There was limited feed for the horses and little or no water and it took them twelve days to reach the Darling. Wills was in the lead party to the Darling, and it seems likely he advised Burke to return to the wagons with the saddle-horses and camels to share some of their burden.<sup>746</sup> This caused further problems between Burke and Landells when Landells refused Burke's order to take charge of the pack-horses (this event is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5).

When the Expedition reassembled at Bilbarka on 4 October 1860, Burke decided to dispense with the hired wagons and abandon the bulk of the Expedition's stores and their three wagons at nearby Tarcoola station. He told the men they would have to walk "inch for inch, all the way up to the Gulf of Carpentaria", <sup>747</sup> instructed them that they could only take 30 lbs of personal baggage each, and informed the scientific officers:

from this time you have to give up your scientific investigations but to work like the rest of the men, as long as you are on the road or not free from camp-duties.<sup>748</sup>

Burke's restrictions seem to have been meant for Becker and Beckler rather than Wills, as the Expedition could get to the Gulf without an artist and a botanist, but could not get far without a

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<sup>745</sup> William John Wills, 'Dispatch, dated Darling River, 28 September 1860', ex2002-014 Box 2082/1b (Item 1); 'Dispatch, dated Bilbarka, 4 October 1860', ex2002-015, Box 2082/1b (Item 2); 'Dispatch, dated Bilbarka, 7 October 1860', ex2002-016, Box 2082/1b (Item 3), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>746</sup> William John Wills, 'Letter to Neumayer, dated Menindie, 16 October 1860', ex2005-011, Box 2083/4, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>747</sup> Becker, 'Fifth Report', ex2004-008, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>748</sup> *Ibid.*





Figure 67: 'River steamer *Moolgewanke*', c.1860.  
Image B 7085, State Library of South Australia.

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surveyor. Nevertheless, Wills dutifully weighed his own belongings and instruments to see if they exceeded 30 lbs, but then continued with his observations regardless.<sup>749</sup>

Burke expected to be at Bilbarka for just a couple of days while the stores were reorganised, but there were a number of incidents which delayed them for more than a week. Firstly, the camels wandered off while grazing and could not be found. Some of the camels were recovered the next day and Burke considered abandoning the nine other missing camels altogether and leaving without them.<sup>750</sup> Hodgkinson went looking for the missing animals, only to be accused by Burke of “staying away all night wilfully”.<sup>751</sup> Then the Tarcoola shearers got drunk on rum, which Landells claimed they purchased from a hawker’s cart, but which Burke believed to be from the 60 gallons of rum that Landells brought for the camels to prevent scurvy. Burke threatened to leave the rum behind and Landells tendered, and then withdrew, his resignation.<sup>752</sup> Robert Bowman also left the Expedition.<sup>753</sup>

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<sup>749</sup> Wills, 'Memorandum book', ex2009-006; 'Dispatch, dated Bilbarka, 4 October 1860', ex2002-015, Box 2082/1b (Item 2), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>750</sup> Robert Cay, 'The Exploring Expedition', *Argus*, 26 October 1860: 5.

<sup>751</sup> Landells, 'Report', ex2004-011, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>752</sup> William Oswald Hodgkinson, 'The Exploring Expedition', *Argus*, 7 November 1860: 5; 'Victorian Exploring Expedition', *Age*, 15 November 1860: 3.

<sup>753</sup> Robert Bowman was a stockman on A.C. Gregory's 'North Australian Expedition' and farrier on his 'Leichhardt Search Expedition'. Bowman submitted an application to join the VEE, addressing it to Dr Mueller, who had also been on the 'North Australian Expedition', and Mueller recommended Bowman, stating he "was one of the very best men of Mr Gregory's last expedition" Robert Bowman, 'Application, dated Kyneton, 23 January 1860', ex1004-053, Box 2076/2, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria. Burke, however, did not select Bowman. When the VEE arrived at Tragowel Station on 2 September 1860, Bowman was working there as a stockman and Burke decided to employ him.



Figure 68: Nicholas Chevalier, 'The Great Australian Exploring Race'.  
*Melbourne Punch*, 8 November 1860: 124.

The VEE might not have started as a race, but once the Melbourne press realised the Victorian expedition was ahead of South Australian efforts, they published a poem proclaiming the Australian Exploring race to be the greatest race the world had ever seen, pitting the Adelaide horseman against the camels' powers.

Bowman was the VEE's most experienced explorer – he had been on Gregory's expeditions to the Gulf and the Cooper, and his knowledge would have been invaluable later, particularly as he had travelled from the Cooper down Strzelecki Creek to Mount Hopeless.<sup>754</sup>

Burke did have some good fortune, however, when the P.S. *Moolgewanke* arrived at Tarcoola and shipped eight tonnes of the Expedition's stores to Menindee.<sup>755</sup> The *Moolgewanke* was the first vessel to steam up the Darling that year and only the fourth vessel ever to reach Menindee.

The *Moolgewanke* had Adelaide newspapers on board and they reported John McDouall Stuart had returned from his latest expedition without reaching the north coast.<sup>756</sup> Although the VEE is often referred to as an inter-colonial race between Stuart and Burke, the South Australian explorer left

<sup>754</sup> The circumstances surrounding Bowman's departure were disputed: Becker claimed Bowman did not like being with the Expedition so he left; Neumayer claimed Bowman was dissatisfied with the method of payment; Landells claimed Burke dismissed Bowman after his leadership style was compared to Gregory's. Lockhart Morton also claimed Burke dismissed Bowman because of a statement about Burke's inability to manage the camels.

<sup>755</sup> 'The Victorian Exploring Expedition', *Argus*, 17 November 1860: 5.

<sup>756</sup> Stuart's early expeditions were privately funded by James Chambers and William Finke, so Stuart did not readily share his expedition maps and journals with the government or the public. The South Australian press gradually published details of Stuart's 1860 expedition from Chamber's Creek to Attack Creek in Waramungu country as details emerged. The newspapers aboard the P.S. *Moolgewanke* only had brief details: on 28 September 1860 the Adelaide newspapers reported "that Mr. Stuart had been compelled to turn back in consequence of the hostility of the natives ... Stuart had nearly crossed the continent". They stated he had reached S18°47' and there were calls for the South Australian government to immediately organise another expedition so that the laurels that Mr. Stuart had won would not be carried off by Victoria, see: *South Australian Register*, 28 September 1860: 2, 3; 29 September 1860: 2, 3. A more detailed report was published after Stuart arrived in Adelaide in October, but Burke would not have been aware of this report as the P.S. *Moolgewanke* left Wentworth on 2 October 1860, see: 'Mr. Stuart's Return', *South Australian Register*, 8 October 1860: 2.





Figure 69: Ludwig Becker, 'Minindie, Octb. 15. 60, bearing E. by S.', 1860.  
Image b36045, H16486/F.14, State Library of Victoria.

The VEE's Camp 34-A at Menindee, 15 October-23 October 1860. The Expedition camped on the river bank, while the officers stayed at Pain's pub, shown in the centre-left of Becker's sketch.

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Chamber's Creek in South Australia's mid-north on 2 March 1860 to cross to the north coast.<sup>757</sup> As the VEE had not yet reached the same latitude as Chamber's Creek, Burke was at least eight months behind Stuart and could not have expected to race him to the north coast. Now, however, he had the opportunity of leading the first Expedition to cross Australia.

The Expedition finally left Bilbarka on 11 October 1860 and followed the eastern bank of the Darling upstream to the crossing point at Kinchega (Camp 34-A).<sup>758</sup> Burke was impatient, angry with Landells, and had little faith in the wandering camels, so he loaded the horses and took off with a party of six men, arriving at Menindee five days later.<sup>759</sup> Landells and the camels struggled to keep up with the horses and took an extra day to cover the 125-kilometre journey.<sup>760</sup>

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<sup>757</sup> John McDouall Stuart, *Explorations in Australia: The journals of John McDouall Stuart during the years 1858, 1859, 1860, 1861 & 1862* (London: Saunders, Otley & Co., 1865), x; 'The North', *South Australian Register*, 9 April 1860: 3.

<sup>758</sup> William John Wills, 'Field Book No. 1: Bilbarka to Torowoto (11-19 October 1860)', ex2008-011, Box 2082/6c, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>759</sup> William John Wills, 'Letter to Neumayer, dated Menindie, 16 October 1860', ex2005-011, Box 2083/4, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>760</sup> Becker, 'Fifth Report', ex2004-008, State Library of Victoria.

Landells objected to swimming the camels across the Darling at Kinchega, insisting they be ferried across in a punt.<sup>761</sup> Burke refused, the two men argued and Landells resigned.<sup>762</sup> The camels were swum across the river and the VEE moved onto Menindee where they set up camp in town near Thomas Pain's pub (Camp 34).<sup>763</sup> Overnight, Beckler reconsidered his position and resigned as well.<sup>764</sup>

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<sup>761</sup> William John Wills, 'Dispatch, dated Bilbarka, 7 October 1860', ex2002-016, Box 2082/1b (Item 3), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>762</sup> George James Landells, 'Mr Landells' resignation', ex1012-212, Box 2081/4, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>763</sup> Wills, 'Field Book No. 1: Bilbarka to Torowoto', ex2008-011, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>764</sup> Herman Beckler, 'Copy of Beckler's letter of resignation', ex2003-002, Box 2082/2e (Item 1); 'Letter to Burke of reasons for his resignation', ex2003-003, Box 2082/2e (Item 2), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

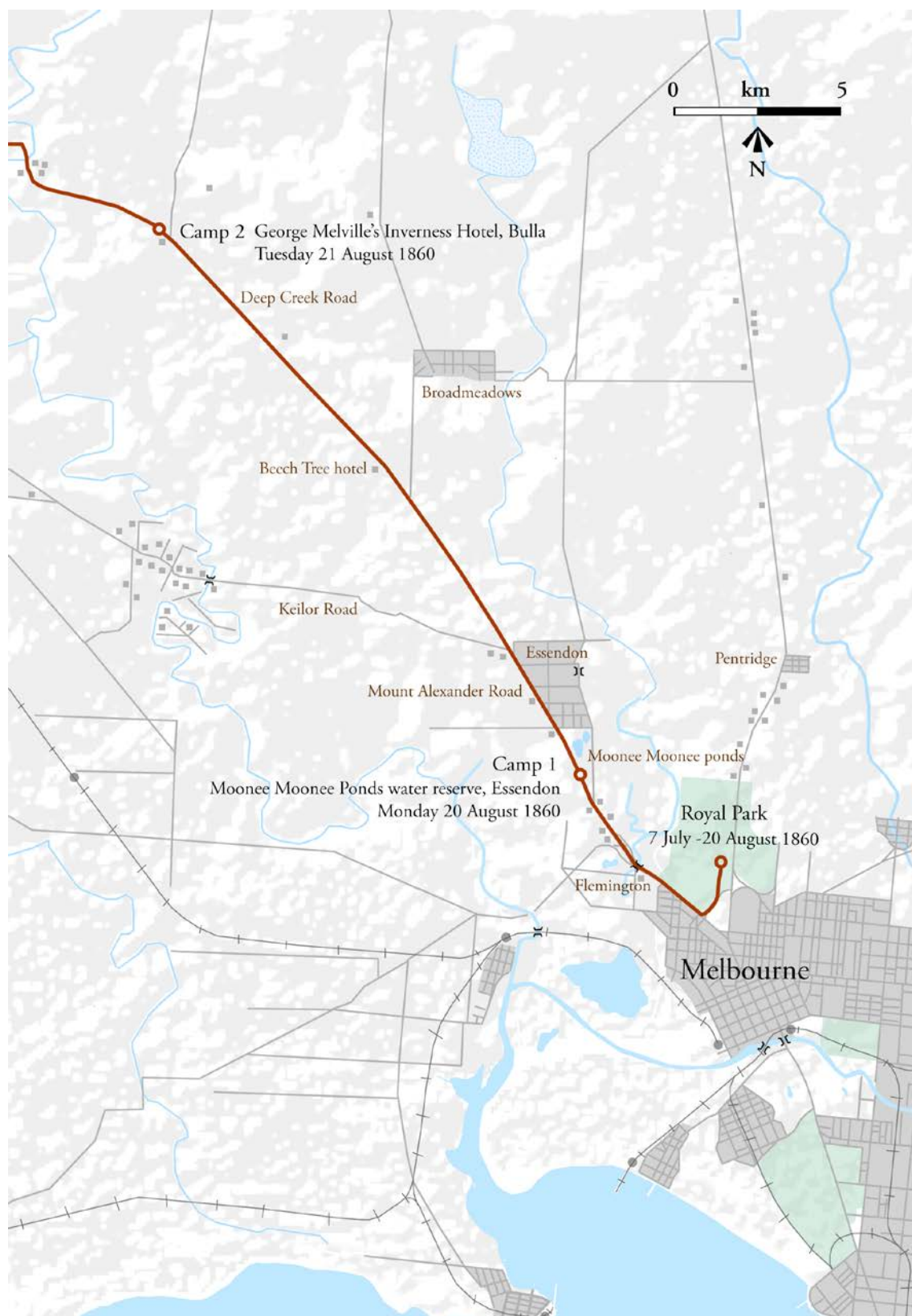


Figure 70: The Expedition's track from Melbourne to Camp 2 at Bulla.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.



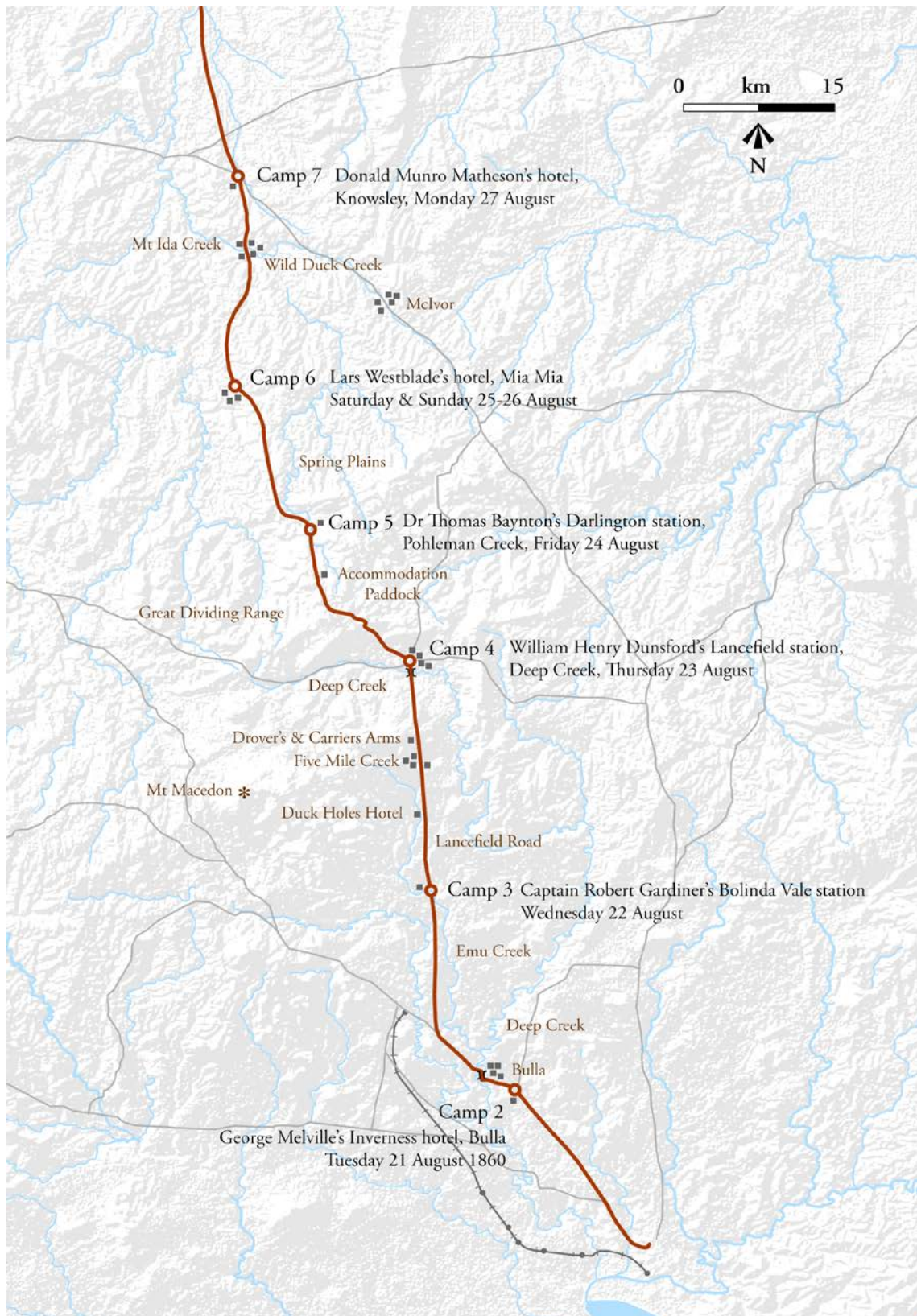


Figure 71: The Expedition's track from Camp 2 at Bulla to Camp 7 at Knowsley.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.



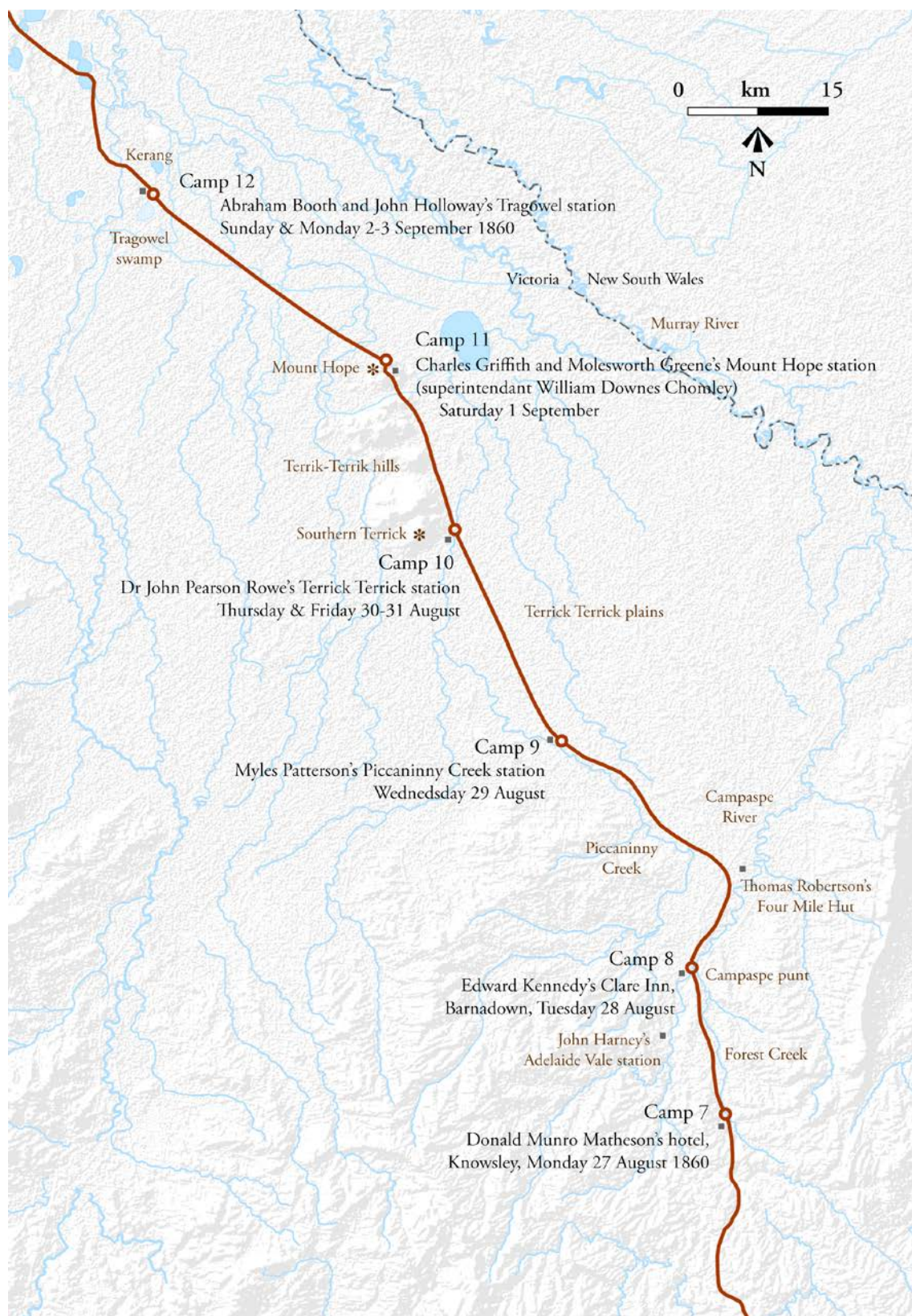


Figure 72: The Expedition's track from Camp 7 at Knowsley to Camp 12 at Tragowel.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.



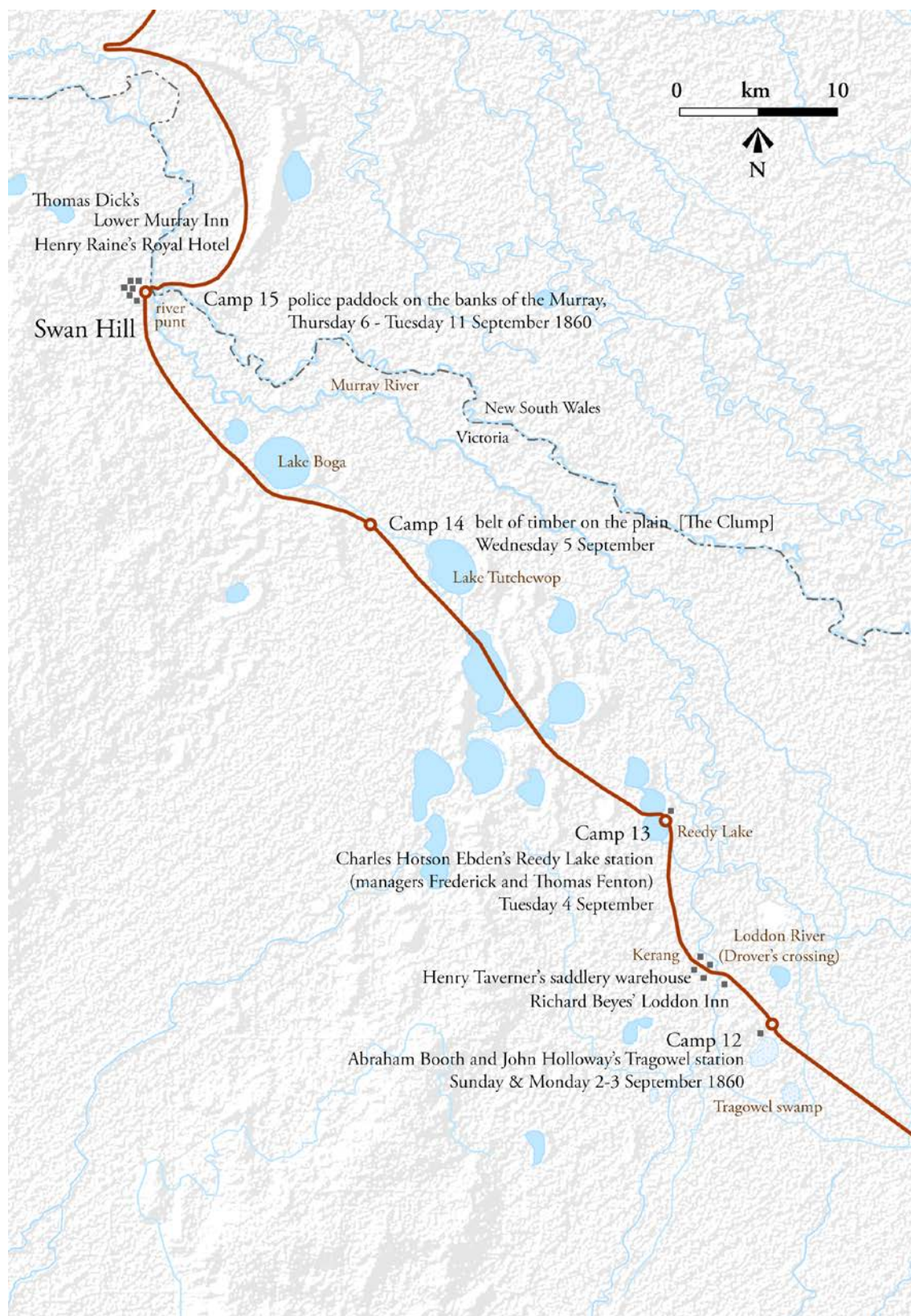


Figure 73: The Expedition's track from Camp 12 at Tragowel to Camp 15 at Swan Hill.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.



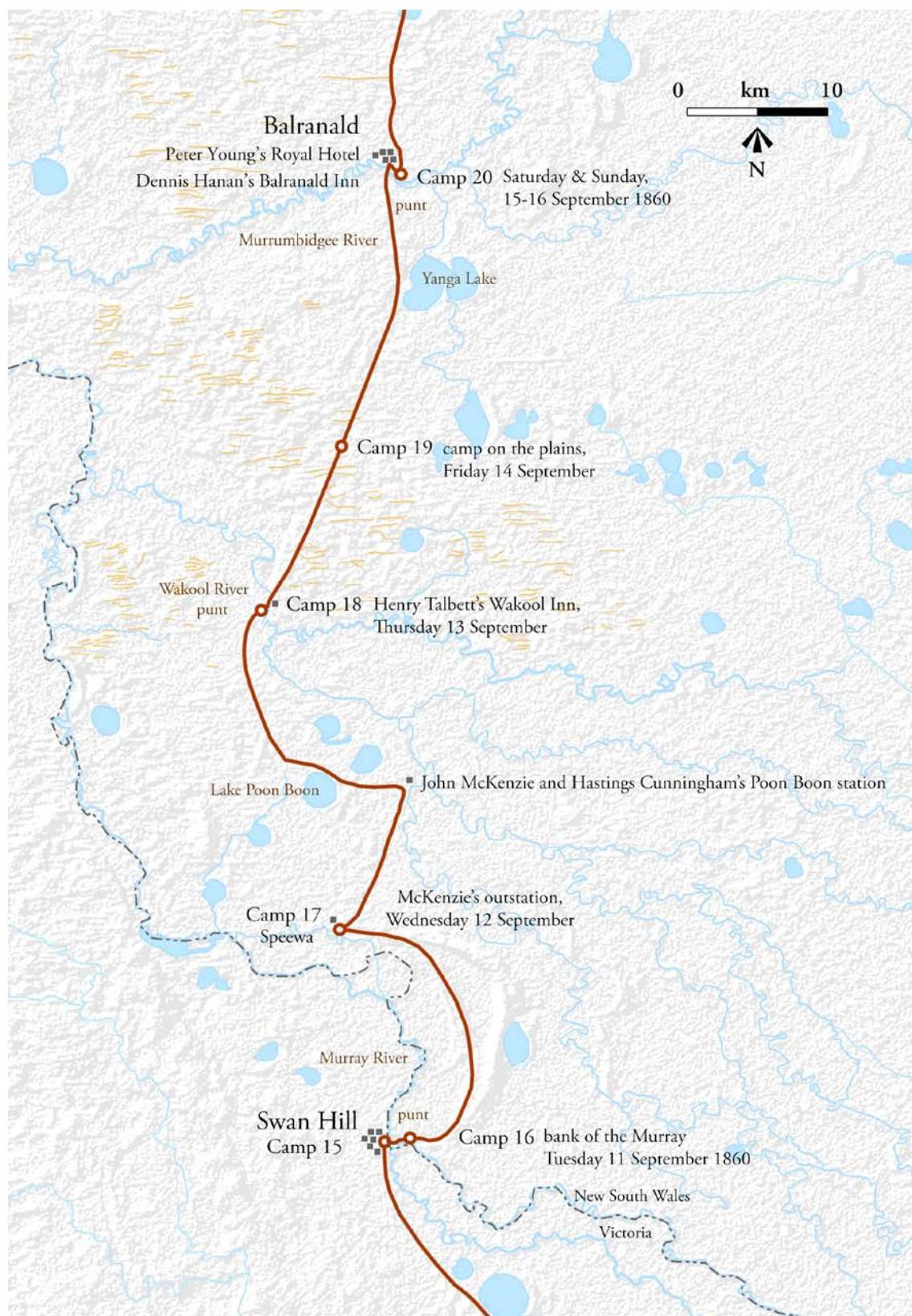


Figure 74: The Expedition's track from Camp 15 at Swan Hill to Camp 20 Balranald.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.



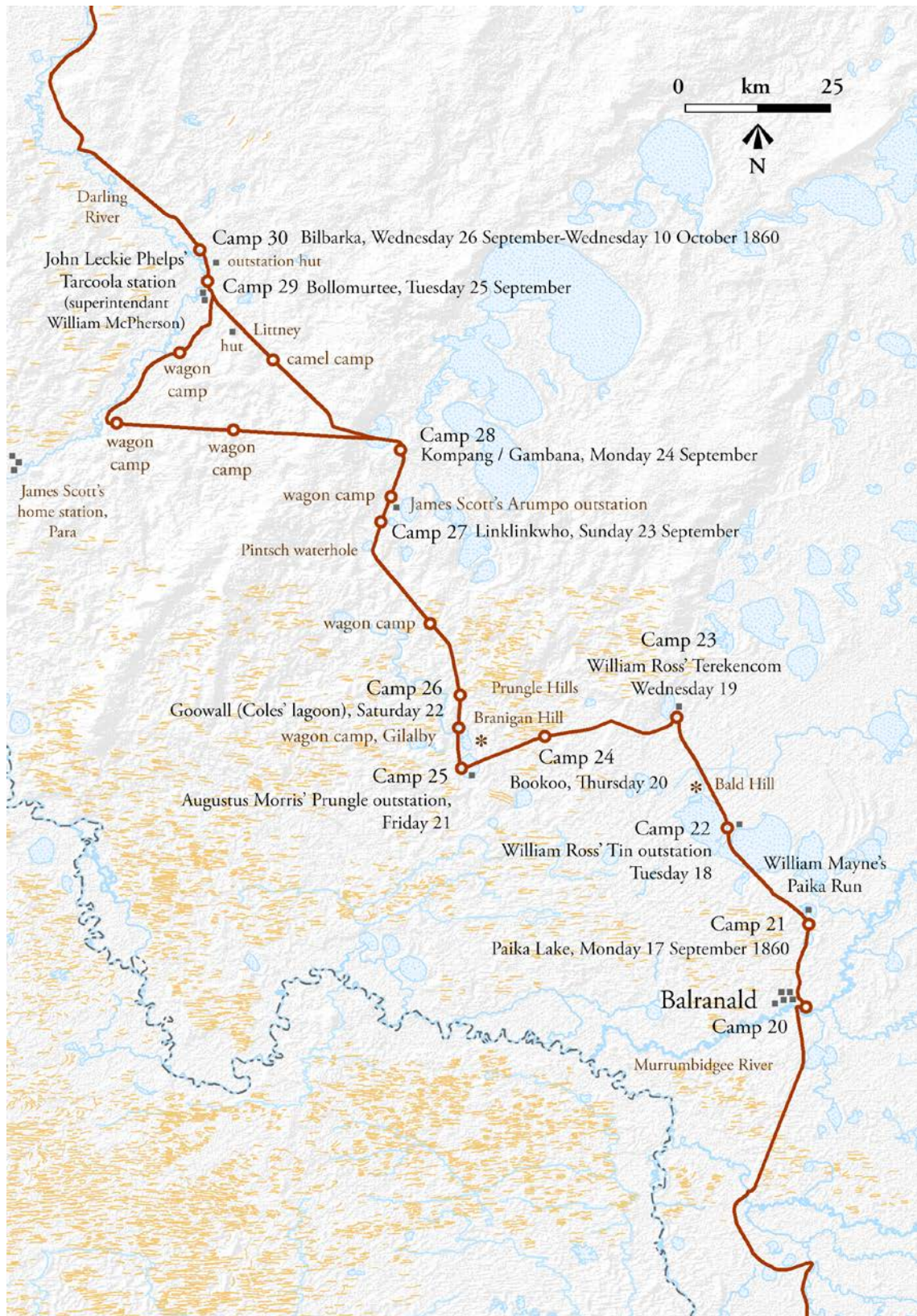


Figure 75: The Expedition's track from Camp 20 at Balranald to Camp 30 at the Darling River.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.



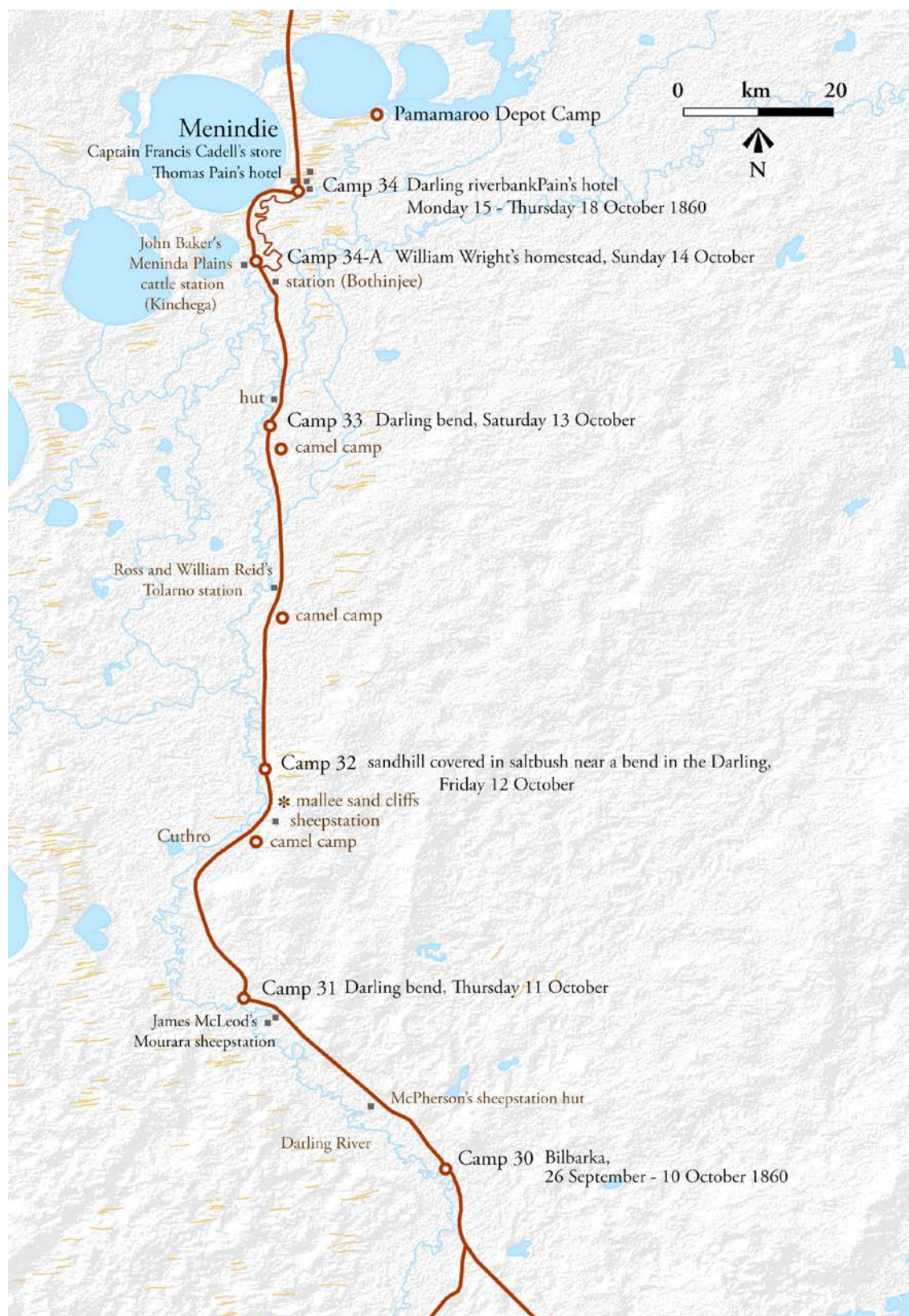


Figure 76: The Expedition's track along the Darling River from Camp 30 to Camp 34.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.

### 4.3 Menindee to Cooper Creek: Burke's Advance Party

Burke had already split the Expedition party several times on the journey from Melbourne to Menindee, but the divisions were only temporary and the parties eventually re-joined. At Menindee, he split the party again, but this time it was permanent.

The *Moolgevanke* had deposited around eight tonnes of equipment, stores and provisions on the riverbank and the horses and camels brought another five tonnes. Without their wagons Burke had no means of moving this mountain of supplies to the Cooper, so he split the party, leaving five men, the majority of their stores and twelve of the weaker animals behind with instructions to form a depot on the Darling. Burke promoted Wills to second-in-command and the two men left Menindee on 19 October 1860 accompanied by six others,<sup>765</sup> five of whom had been with the Expedition from the start.<sup>766</sup> They took 16 camels as pack-animals and 15 horses, a few of which were for riding but most as pack-animals, and they carried provisions for 24 weeks. William Wright<sup>767</sup> and two Aboriginal guides volunteered to guide Burke over the first 200 miles of their journey.<sup>768</sup>

Burke was much happier. He now had a hand-picked group of men and had selected the best of the animals to take with him. He no longer had the wagons to slow him down, or their additional expense. He was free of the squabbles between himself and Landells and so he was able to manage the camels as he saw fit. He was also free of the tension between himself and Becker and Beckler over how much time and energy they could expend on their scientific investigations. He was beyond the postal service, so he could not be recalled or reprimanded by the EC, he was ahead of John McDouall Stuart and he was heading into country that only a handful of Europeans had visited. In addition, they were travelling in a good season, water and fodder were plentiful and they covered ten to 15 miles a day, occasionally more.

Wright was a competent bushman who knew the country and he found water to camp at each night. He guided the VEE north from Menindee, crossing the Scropes Range (Camps 36 and 37), and continuing on to a claypan at Camp 38, and creeks at Langawirra (Camp 39), Bengora (Camp 40) Noonthorangee (Camp 41), Teltawongee (Camp 42) and Wonnaminta (Camp 43), before reaching

<sup>765</sup> Burke, Wills, Brahe, Gray, King, McDonough, Patten and Mahomet.

<sup>766</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Dispatch 1, dated Menindie, 16 October 1860', ex2002-010, Box 2082/1a (Item 10), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>767</sup> William Wright had been the manager of John Baker's 'Meninda Plains cattle station' at Kinchega for three years but was now looking for work as the station had recently been sold. Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 1221 & 1222 to Wright. The new owner, Peter McGregor, wrote to the RSV threatening to sue them if the Expedition's camels scared his stock. *The Star*, 16 November 1860: 3.

<sup>768</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Dispatch 2, dated Menindie, 16 October 1860', ex2002-011, Box 2082/1a (Item 11), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

Torowoto swamp (Camp 45) on 29 October 1860. They had travelled 300 kilometres from Menindee in eleven days and Burke decided to halt for a rest day.

Burke was impressed with Wright's abilities and appointed him third-in-command of the Expedition, with instructions to return to Menindee and bring up the remainder of the men and supplies to the Cooper.<sup>769</sup> Bergin's MA Thesis explores in greater detail the difficult position faced by Wright, given the mountain of stores left at Menindee coupled with the lack of pack-animals with which to transport them to the Cooper.<sup>770</sup> Wright and the two Aboriginal guides returned to Menindee and Burke carried on with new guides (see Chapter 6.4.2, page 353). They went north-east to Altoka (Camp 46) and then north along the western side of the Bulloo Overflow to Cannilta (Camp 47), Tongowoko (Camp 48) and then the Caryapundy swamp (Camp 49). The VEE crossed into the recently declared colony of Queensland on 4 November 1860.

Burke's party continued to make good progress as they headed along the western edge of the Bulloo River Overflow and their Aboriginal guides led them to waterholes on Poria Creek (Camp 50 and 51). They crossed the Bulloo River and marched across the black soil floodplains, making Camp 52 and Camp 53 on the river bank. Finding the river trending too far to the east, they headed north-north-east along McDonough's Creek into the Grey Range with the intention of heading over the range to the Cooper. Burke travelled in a good season; they camped by water each night and moved quickly through to the Bulloo River, averaging over 35 kilometres a day. Wright's Supply Party followed Burke's track four months later. Their journey could not have been more different and demonstrates that Australia truly is a land of extremes. They travelled in the summer heat and the water had gone. Their arduous journey was one of suffering and misery for the men and the animals (see Section 4.8, Wright's Supply Party).

On 8 November 1860 the Expedition left the permanent waterholes at the Bulloo River and headed north into the rugged Grey Range. Their Aboriginal guide led them to water at McDonough's Creek (Camp 54), but then left and Wills was called on to navigate the rest of the way to Cooper Creek (see Chapter 7.4.2, pages 475 to 477).<sup>771</sup> For the first time, the Expedition had no idea when they would next find water. They encountered rough, stony ground as they travelled west across the Grey Range and camped without water for the first time in nearly two weeks (Camp 55).

The next day they found water in Brahe's Creek (Camp 56) and then found a small waterhole in a creek draining to the west and made Camp 57 on 11 November 1860. Wills was certain this was Cooper Creek (it was the Wilson River), but after following the creek downstream for a few miles it

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<sup>769</sup> Burke, 'Dispatch, dated Torowoto, 29 October 1860', ex2002-012, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>770</sup> Bergin, 'Courage and corruption'.

<sup>771</sup> William John Wills, 'Field Notes No. 2: Torowoto to Cooper's Creek (3-9 November 1860)', ex2008-014, Box 2082/6f, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

ran out onto an earthy flat and was lost (for more details on Wills' attempts to locate the Cooper, see Chapter 7.4.2, page 476).<sup>772</sup> Eventually, after much frustration and searching, the Expedition reached the junction of the Cooper and Wilson, and established their first depot camp (Camp 63).<sup>773</sup>

The VEE made several unsuccessful reconnaissance trips to the north to find water.<sup>774</sup> Wills almost died on one of these trips when their camels ran off, and he was forced to walk 90 miles in extreme heat with a limited supply of water.<sup>775</sup> Plague rats forced Burke to move the Depot Camp downstream and they made Camp 64 on the Cooper before finally halting at Pula Pula waterhole where they established Depot Camp 65, their second depot and the site of the famous Dig Tree.<sup>776</sup>

Back in Menindee, while Beckler waited for his resignation to be accepted, he and Becker established a Depot Camp twelve kilometres upstream at Pamamaroo Creek. Both men would later join Wright's Supply Party and travel north towards the Cooper (see Chapter 4.8 pages 229 to 233).

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<sup>772</sup> Wills, 'Field Notes No. 2: Torowoto to Cooper's Creek', ex2008-014, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>773</sup> William John Wills, 'Field Notes No. 4: Torowoto to Cooper's Creek (14-20 November 1860)', ex2008-016, Box 2082/6h, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>774</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Dispatch, dated Cooper's Creek, 13 December 1860', ex2002-013, Box 2082/1a (Item 13), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>775</sup> William John Wills, 'Field Notes No. 5: Cooper's Creek (24-27 November 1860)', ex2008-017, Box 2082/6i, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>776</sup> William John Wills, 'Field Book No. 6: Cooper's Creek (5-10 December 1860)', ex2008-018, Box 2082/6j, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.



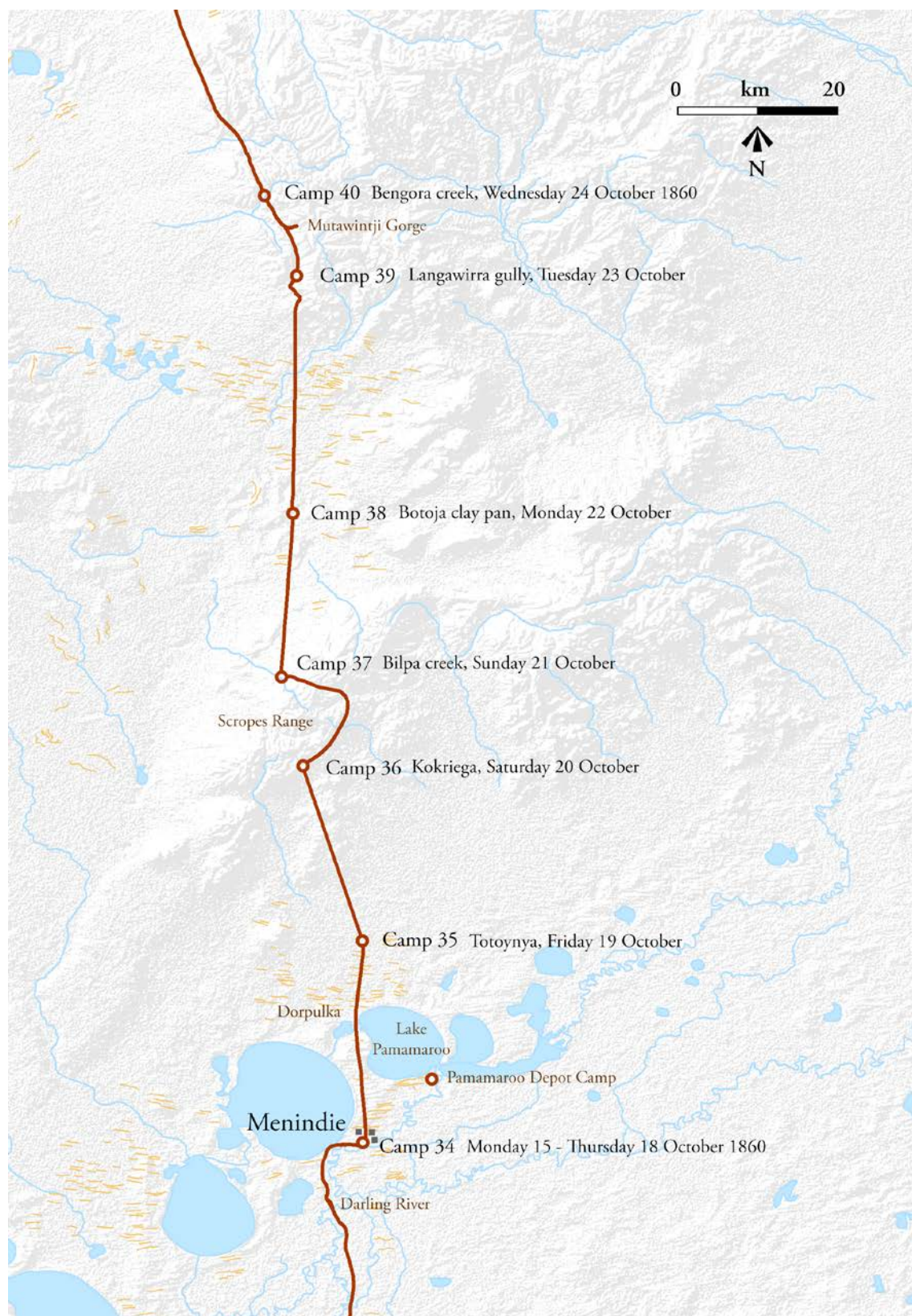


Figure 77: The Expedition's track from Menindee to Camp 40.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.



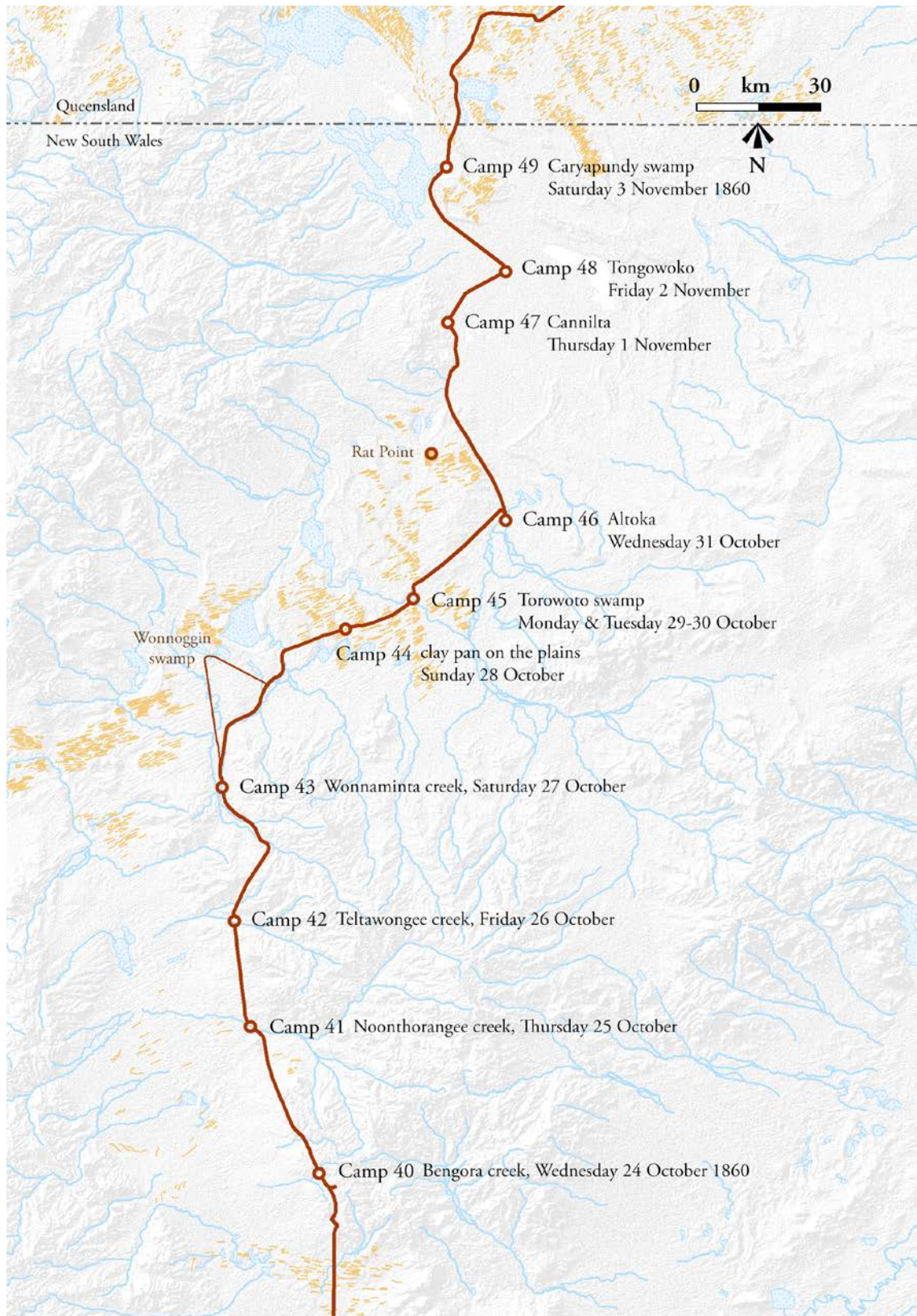


Figure 78: The Expedition's track from Camp 40 to the Queensland border.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.



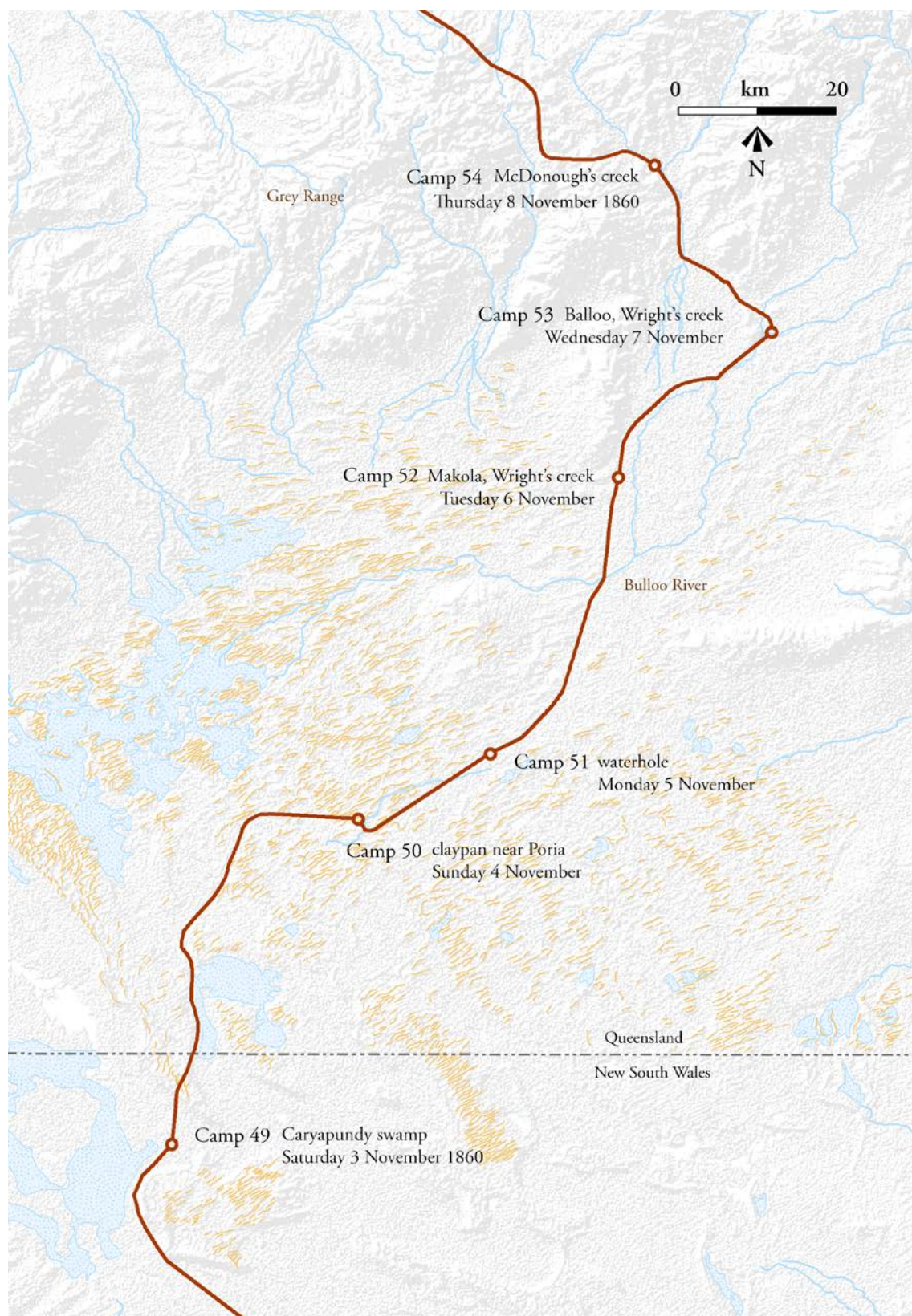


Figure 79: The Expedition's track from Camp 49 to the Bulloo River.  
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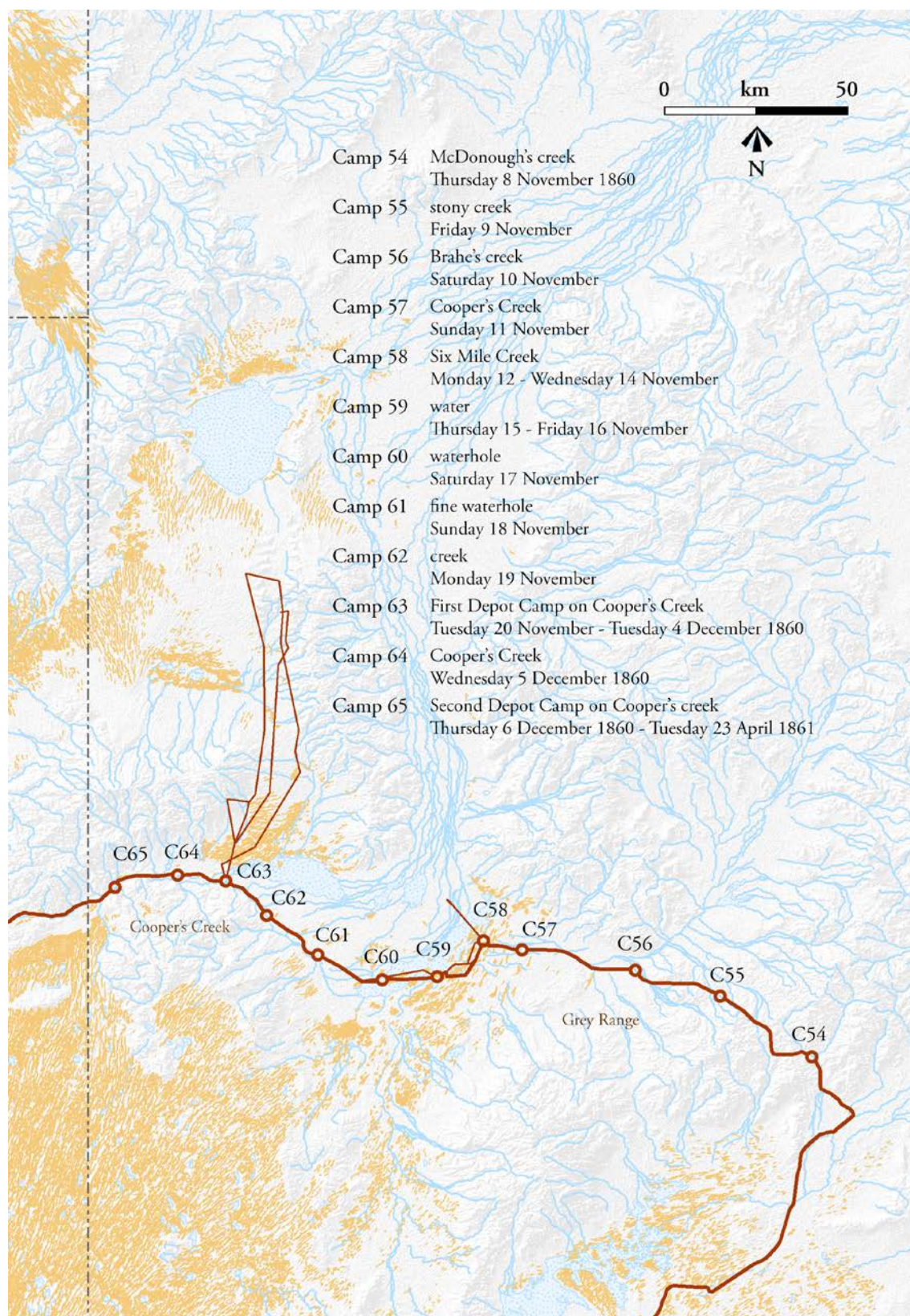


Figure 80: The Expedition's track over the Grey Range to Cooper Creek.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.



## 4.4 Cooper to Carpentaria: The Gulf Party

Because Wills had been unable to find water to the north of the Depot Camp 63, Burke decided to head north-west across Sturt Stony Desert towards Eyre Creek, the only known water beyond the Cooper. Burke divided the party once more, leaving four men at Depot Camp 65 with instructions to wait for three months (see Chapter 4.7 for more details about Brahe's Depot Party).<sup>777</sup>

It has been suggested that Burke's decision to 'dash to the Gulf' was impetuous and made on the spur of the moment. Favenc thought "The long delay and inaction [at Cooper Creek] worked sadly upon Burke's active and impatient temperament, and he suddenly announced his intention to subdivide his party".<sup>778</sup> Clune argues that "Tormented by flies and ambition, Burke now became tormented by a desire to cross the ... desert".<sup>779</sup> Favenc and Clune arrived at this erroneous conclusion based on the belief that the VEE's first camp on the Cooper, made on 11 November 1860, was also their depot.<sup>780</sup> Therefore, by 16 December, these authors conclude that Burke had been waiting aimlessly for five weeks and that impatience got the better of him and he set off for the Gulf. Firstly, the camp of 11 November was on the Wilson, not the Cooper, and Depot Camp 65 was not established until 6 December. Secondly, their time at the Cooper had been spent engaged in reconnaissance journeys. In addition, Expedition archives show the decision to head north was not a rash one made as a result of boredom from waiting at the Cooper Depot Camp, and neither was it a response to the news that Stuart had returned to Adelaide. A letter that Wills wrote to his mother from Balranald in September shows Burke had already decided his schedule. Wills wrote:

it seems probable that we shall finish our work in a much shorter period than was anticipated; very likely in ten or twelve months.<sup>781</sup>

If Wills was expecting to be finished and back in Melbourne in July 1861, ten months after writing his letter, then Burke was clearly not planning to wait out the summer. Wills' letter was written before Burke found out about Stuart, before he had decided to split the party at Menindee and before he met Wright, so none of these were significant factors in setting the agenda. Whether Burke was planning to wait at the Cooper for Wright to arrive before setting off to the Gulf is not clear, although he told King that "he expected Mr Write daily".<sup>782</sup>

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<sup>777</sup> William Brahe, 'Report, dated Melbourne, 30 June 1861', ex2004-009, Box 2082/4h, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>778</sup> Ernest Favenc, *The explorers of Australia and their life-work* (Christchurch, NZ: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1908), Chapter 14: Burke and Wills.

<sup>779</sup> Clune, *Dig*.

<sup>780</sup> Charles Manning Hope Clark, *A history of Australia: Volume 4 - The earth abideth for ever 1851-1888* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1982), Chapter 8: Glory, Folly and Chance, 144-162.

<sup>781</sup> William John Wills, 'Letter to his mother, Sarah Wills, dated Balranald, 17 September 1860', Correspondence and press cuttings: 1839-1861, MS 9504, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>782</sup> John King, 'Part of the retrospective account by John King, relating to the journey to the Gulf, December 1860-January 1861', MS 30/11, National Library of Australia.

On 16 December 1860, Burke, Wills, King and Gray loaded twelve weeks' provisions<sup>783</sup> on six camels and one horse and followed the Cooper downstream into South Australia, making Camps 66 and 67 on the northern bank.<sup>784</sup> On 18 December 1860 they followed the North-West Branch of Cooper Creek, making Camp 68 at a waterhole on a polygonum flat that Wills believed marked the end of the creek. Although the Gulf Party struck off from the creek across the sand dunes and lignum swamps, they managed to find water for their next three camps: Camp 69 was at a series of small waterholes, Camp 70 was at an ephemeral lake near a large Yawarrawarrka camp, and Camp 71 was at a "magnificent waterhole" on the Northern Overflow of Cooper Creek.<sup>785</sup> On 21 December 1860 they headed into the sand dunes of the Strzelecki Desert and made Camp 72 at the end of a sand ridge jutting out into Sturt Stony Desert. The following day's journey across the stony gibber desert filled them with apprehension, but they found it "far from bad travelling" and crossed the Stony Desert in one day.<sup>786</sup> On the morning of Christmas Eve 1860, they found a large waterhole at the end of Koonchera Dune, where they made Camp 73 and halted for the rest of the day.<sup>787</sup>

On Christmas Day they headed north across the Goyder Lagoon floodplain, eventually striking the main channel of the Diamantina River, which they followed for four days (Camps 74-78).<sup>788</sup> At Camp 78 they decided to leave the Diamantina, and so on 30 December 1860 they struck off to the north (this decision is studied in detail in Chapter 7.4.4). The waterbags only held a limited supply, so the next few days became long marches in search of water. The first day they walked more than 50 kilometres and halted to the south of Bilpa Morea claypan (Camp 79). The following day was another strenuous walk, with another dry camp made in the sand dunes east of Lake Machattie (Camp 80). On New Year's Day 1861 they found water at a place they called King's Creek, so they halted early (Camp 81). North of King's Creek the Gulf Party crossed vast gibber plains and grasslands and had several more dry camps: Camp 82 was on a small stony creek and Camp 83 was on a black soil plain. It was the height of summer, there was no water to be found and the Expedition's supplies soon ran short. Water was rationed and the men and Billy the horse suffered in the heat.<sup>789</sup> Camp 84 was also on the plain, but fortunately there were a few small depressions nearby containing a little water. On 5 January 1861 they found a waterhole on Wills's Creek (Camp 85), followed by an even

<sup>783</sup> Burke took around 300 kilograms of provisions from Depot Camp 65: c.~300 lbs flour, 100 lbs jerked horse, 100 lbs bacon and salt pork, 50 lbs of oatmeal, 50 lbs sugar, 50 lbs rice, 30 lbs meat biscuits, twelve lbs tea, five lbs salt and assorted tins of preserved vegetables and ghee.

<sup>784</sup> William John Wills, '[Mueller's transcription of] Field Book 1: Cooper's Creek to Carpentaria, 16 December-21 December 1860', ex2009-003, Box 2083/1a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>785</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 1: Cooper's Creek to Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>786</sup> William John Wills, '[Mueller's transcription of] Field Book 2: Lat 27-25½ S, Camp 72 to 78, 22 December-26 December 1860', ex2009-003, Box 2083/1a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>787</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 2: December 1860', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>788</sup> William John Wills, '[Mueller's transcription of] Field Book, No. 3: (Lat S. 25½° to 23¾°, Camps 78 to 85, 30 December 1860)', ex2009-003, Box 2083/1a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>789</sup> William John Wills, '[Mueller's transcription of] Field Book, No. 4: (Lat 23¾° to 22¼°, Camps 85 to 90 Fine Country Tropics, 5-11 January 1861)' ex2009-003, Box 2083/1a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

larger waterhole the next day (Camp 86) and it seemed that Burke's decision to head north from the Diamantina into waterless country had paid off.

Camp 87 was made on a nondescript plain, but the camp was significant to Wills as it was close to the Tropic of Capricorn. On 8 January 1861 there was a violent thunderstorm, and they found water at a stony pan at the foot of a sand rise (Camp 88). Now they were in the Tropics, the men noticed there was more water around and more feed for the animals compared to the arid desert stages they had just endured, and for the next eleven days they camped at creeks: a sandy overflow channel of the Burke River (Camp 89), Patton's Creek, Mahomet Creek (Camp 90), Wills's Creek (Camp 92), and the junction of three sandy creeks (Camp 93).

Wills thought the open grassy plains north of Camp 88 were "fine country".<sup>790</sup> However, as they headed north from Camp 89 they noticed a "perceptible rise".<sup>791</sup> At first the elevation gain was gentle, but after Camp 91 the four men crested a rise and saw a large mountain range to the north. The soft Mitchell grass gave way to prickly spinifex as they entered the De Little Range and then the Standish Range. Between Camp 93 and Bindon's Creek (Camp 95) they threaded their way carefully along the creek beds and around the spurs of the mountains, but at Foster's Creek (Camp 96) they found their way blocked by the mountains.<sup>792</sup> Burke called a rest day on 17 January 1861 and Wills rode out to search for a way through the ranges.

The next day they pushed on to the north, and were forced to drag the camels over the rocky ridges in single file. After leaving Camp 97 on 19 January 1861 they found themselves in the foothills of an even more rugged country, the Selwyn Range.<sup>793</sup> Camp 98 was made at "a fine waterhole in a rocky basin" on Scratchley's Creek and the next day Burke decided to head straight for the mountains.<sup>794</sup> They passed O'Hara's Gap, Turner's Creek (Camp 99) and then King's Gap before camping at the top of the Selwyn Range (Camp 100).

On 22 January 1861 the Gulf Party followed a small creek and clambered down from the hills onto the vast Gulf plains. They continued to follow the creek as it broadened into a river, which Burke named the Cloncurry,<sup>795</sup> making Camps 101 to 119 on successive days. On 30 January 1861

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<sup>790</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 4: January 1860', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>791</sup> William John Wills, '[Mueller's transcription of] Field Book, No. 5: (Lat 22¼° to 21¼°, Camps 92 to 95 Standish Ranges, 12-13 January 1861)', ex2009-003, Box 2083/1a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>792</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 5: January 1860', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>793</sup> William John Wills, '[Mueller's transcription of] Field Book, No. 6: (Lat 21¼° to 20¼°, Station 98 to 105 Upper part of Cloncurry, 19 January 1861)', ex2009-003, Box 2083/1a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>794</sup> William John Wills, '[Mueller's transcription of] Field Book, No. 7: (Lat 20¼° to 19¼°, Camps 105 to 112 Middle part of Cloncurry, 27-30 January 1861)', ex2009-003, Box 2083/1a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>795</sup> There is no specific diary entry that records exactly where Burke and/or Wills decided to name the river they were following 'the Cloncurry'. Wills' father, Dr William Wills, stated "my son remarked that it

the men were forced to leave one of the camels behind when he got stuck in the creek bed near Camp 108.

From Camp 115 to the Gulf there was permanent water in the river and the four men travelled down the eastern bank. On 9 February 1861 the rain was so heavy and the ground so soft that they were forced to move away from the river to the east to avoid boggy ground. After skirting around the base of a range, they returned to the river and made Camp 119.

On 10 February 1861, Burke and Wills headed north with Billy the horse, leaving King, Gray and the five camels at Camp 119. After travelling for 24 kilometres Burke and Wills halted, still about 20 kilometres short of the coast. The following day they left the horse short hobbled and continued north, but the flooded salt flats prevented them from reaching the coast (this event is described in detail in Chapter 7.4.4).<sup>796</sup>

Burke and Wills returned to King and Gray at Camp 119 on 12 February 1861. Burke allegedly told King:

We have vainly tried to get a glimpse of the sea; but we have accomplished our task for here is the tide. Our rations are running short and it is not worthwhile to incur any further risks for a nominal object when the actual work is achieved.<sup>797</sup>

The four men made preparations for the long walk back to Depot Camp 65 on Cooper Creek.

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might be a new river. 'If it should prove so' said Mr Burke, 'we will call it after my old friend Lord Cloncurry'." Burke's 'old friend Lord Cloncurry' was Edward Lawless of Lyons Castle, County Kildare. In 1839 Lawless had married Burke's cousin, Elizabeth Kirwan, and following his father's death in 1853, succeeded to the title of Third Baron Cloncurry. Lawless was a good friend of Burke's and Burke was also very fond of Kirwan. In the last letter, Burke asked to be remembered to Lady Cloncurry. Lawless committed suicide in 1869 when he jumped out of a third-floor window of the family castle.

<sup>796</sup> William John Wills, '[Mueller's transcription of] Field Book, No. 9: (Returning from Carpentaria to Cooper's Creek, Sunday, February 1861)', ex2009-003, Box 2083/1a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>797</sup> James Smith, 'John King's story, Part III', *The Australasian*, 21 May 1870: 648.



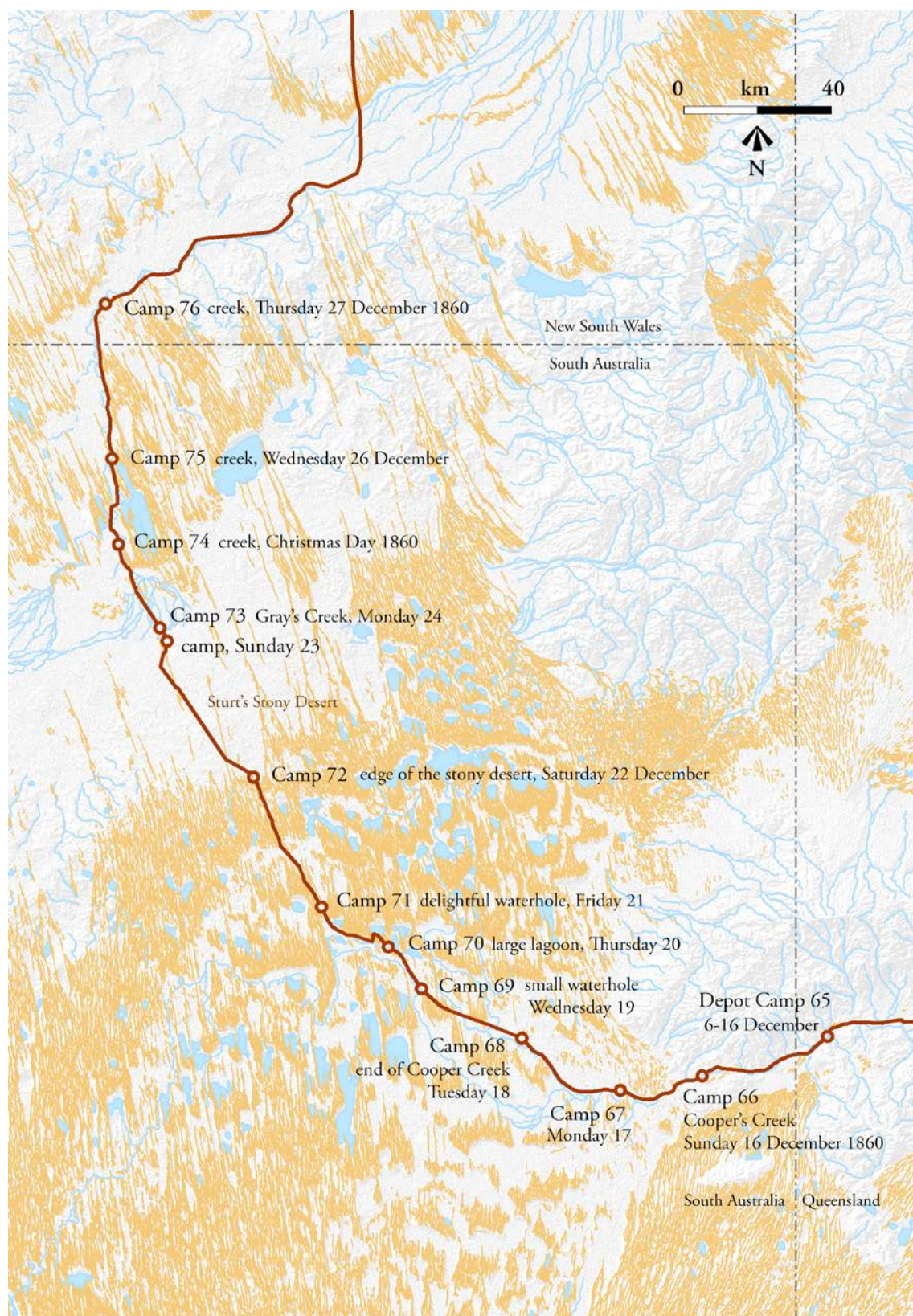


Figure 81: The Expedition's track from Cooper Creek to the Diamantina River.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.



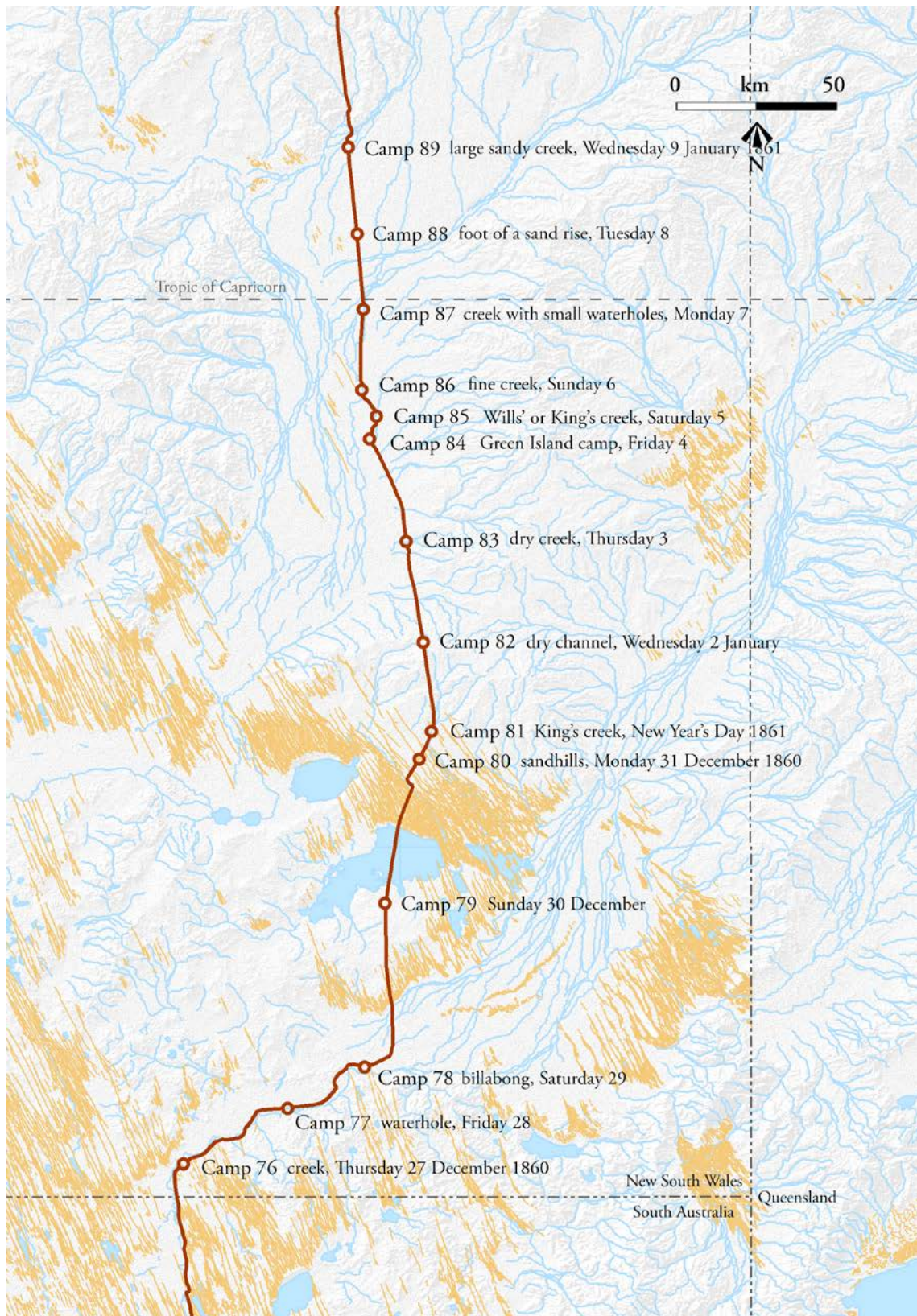


Figure 82: The Expedition's track from the Diamantina to the Tropic of Capricorn.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.



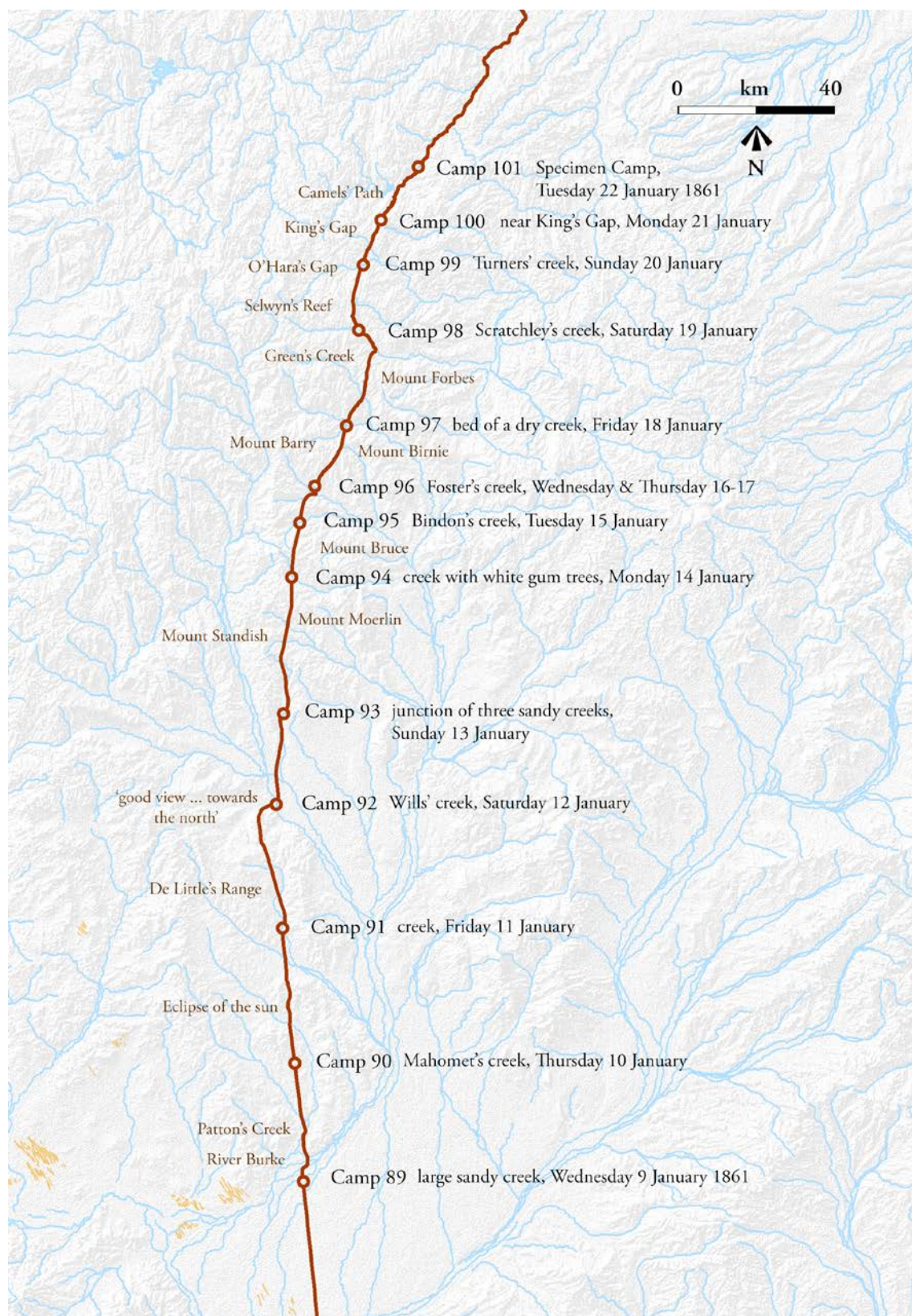


Figure 83: The Expedition's track from Tropic to the Selwyn Range.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.



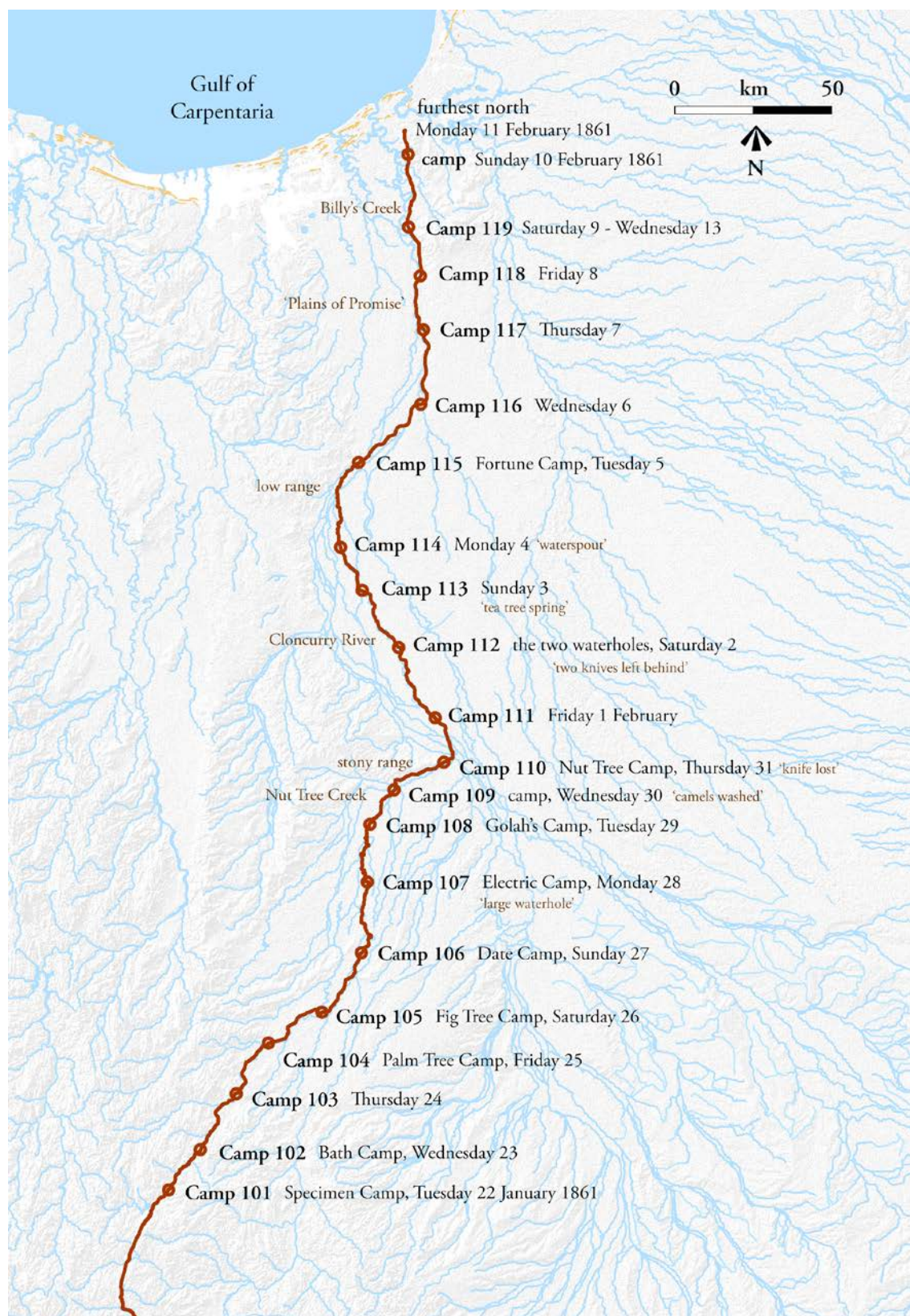


Figure 84: The Expedition's track from Selwyn Range to the Gulf of Carpentaria.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.



## 4.5 Return from Carpentaria

On 13 February 1861, Burke, Wills, King and Gray packed the remainder of their depleted supplies<sup>798</sup> on the horse and camels and turned south on the long trek back to the Depot Camp 65.<sup>799</sup> The men were exhausted and their animals were much weaker than they had been on their journey north.<sup>800</sup> The monsoonal rains began in earnest and King recalled:

the weather was very wet, it had been raining continually and the camels were up to their knees in mud. The first few days after starting we could not travel more than four or five miles a day in consequence of the wet.<sup>801</sup>

There is a gap in Wills' diary between 11–20 February 1861, so there is little record of what the men did during this difficult time (there is a detailed discussion of this period in Chapter 5.7, pages 294 to 296).<sup>802</sup> The Gulf party moved slowly, hampered by flooded rivers, boggy ground and incessant mud. They struggled with the sultry and oppressive conditions and were tormented by mosquitos, so Burke decided to travel by moonlight when it was cooler. When Wills resumed entries in his diary, his comments were dominated by the state of the weather. He noted:

The evening was most oppressively hot and sultry, so much so that the slightest exertion made one feel as if he were in a state of suffocation. The dampness of the atmosphere prevented any evaporation, and gave one a helpless feeling of lassitude that I have never before experienced to such an extent. All the party complained of the same symptoms, and the horse showed distinctly the effect of the evening trip, short as it was.<sup>803</sup>

One can imagine the terrible conditions the men had to endure; floundering along through mud, their feet swollen and wrinkled in soaking wet boots, trying to start a fire to cook their limited rations. Because they did not have any tents, each evening they searched for some drier ground to lay out their damp, mouldy blankets, hoping that the incessant rain would ease as exhaustion took over and they drifted off to sleep in a cloud of mosquitoes.

Their provisions were running desperately low and their slow progress only exacerbated the problem, so Burke placed the party on short rations.<sup>804</sup> The men attempted to supplement their dwindling supplies with bush food, with mixed results (see Chapter 6.6, pages 390 to 403).

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<sup>798</sup> Of the 300 kilograms of provisions that Burke took from Depot Camp 65, only 83 kilograms remained when leaving Camp 119 (i.e. they had consumed 73% of their provisions in the first 45% of their journey). The remaining provisions were c.~83 lbs flour, 35 lbs jerked horse, 31 lbs bacon and salt pork, twelve lbs meat biscuits, twelve lbs rice and ten lbs sugar.

<sup>799</sup> Burke, 'Diary', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia.

<sup>800</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 795 to King.

<sup>801</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*.

<sup>802</sup> Wills, 'Journey from Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>803</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>804</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Questions 893-896 to King.

On 24 February 1861, twelve days and 120 kilometres from Camp 119, they reached the junction of the Cloncurry River and Sandy Creek (Camp 10R).<sup>805</sup> Daytime temperatures were still reaching 40°C but there had been less rain, the ground was drier and there was more feed for the animals.<sup>806</sup> The men began to make better progress, and Wills optimistically commented that they had a “delightful day”.<sup>807</sup>

Between Saltbush Camp (Camp 14R) and Eureka Camp (Camp 15R), they found the camel, Golah Singh, who had been abandoned four and a half weeks ago, on the northbound journey. He was stressed and in poor condition and was unable to keep up with the other camels, so King was forced to abandon him again two days later (see Chapter 5.7, pages 296 to 297).<sup>808</sup> On 6 March 1861, they travelled more than 30 kilometres, their best progress since leaving Camp 119 three weeks earlier. The next night was calm and clear and the temperature fell to 18°C, which Wills noted was “very low compared with what we have been accustomed”.<sup>809</sup> Temperatures can get as low as 12°C in this area in March, but, as Wills pointed out, they had not seen night time temperatures drop below 26°C for nearly two months.<sup>810</sup> Gray, who had been complaining of severe headaches on the northbound trip,<sup>811</sup> was now badly affected by the cold weather. Wills reported that:

Charley is again very unwell and unfit to do anything; he caught cold last night through carelessness in covering himself.<sup>812</sup>

Gray’s health continued to deteriorate, but neither Burke nor Wills paid much attention, as they had more pressing matters to deal with. They were approaching “the most dangerous part”<sup>813</sup> of their journey as they climbed into the Selwyn Range, and, more importantly, they had been away from Depot Camp 65 for twelve weeks. Burke had brought only twelve weeks’ provisions but the Gulf Party still had 1,000 kilometres to go to get back to the Cooper.

In the Selwyn Range, the weather deteriorated once again and, after the party sheltered from a storm in a cave (Camp 26R), flooded creeks and boggy ground meant Wills had to keep to the stony ridges and was unable to retrace their outbound track. He headed a little to the east and followed a new route, south along the Burke River. They abandoned 60 lbs of equipment to lighten their load

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<sup>805</sup> William John Wills, 'Astronomical observations made on the return journey from the north', ex2008-022, Box 2083/1d, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>806</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia. Wills wrote assorted meteorological notes in this field book on the return journey from the Gulf. He then re-used the field book as a diary of their attempts to reach Mount Hopeless in May-June 1861. The meteorological notes made in February-March 1861 have been isolated from the later diary notes and incorporated into this chronological framework.

<sup>807</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>808</sup> Wills, 'Journey from Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>809</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>810</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>811</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 796 to King.

<sup>812</sup> Wills, 'Journey from Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>813</sup> *Ibid.*

(Camp 32R), but the wet conditions meant some days they only managed five or ten kilometres. Wills' camp names reflect the difficulties they faced: Humid Camp (Camp 33R), Muddy Camp (Camp 34R), Mosquito Camp (Camp 35R).<sup>814</sup>

On 16 March 1861, the Gulf Party halted at Camp 29R and Wills spent the evening making astronomical observations.<sup>815</sup> It was exactly three months since they left the Cooper and Brahe was expecting their return. However, Burke had nearly 900 kilometres still to go and so far they had only averaged 15 kilometres a day. At this rate, it would take them another two months to get back, but they only had enough food for a few more days. It is interesting to speculate if Burke and Wills recognised the date as such and discussed their situation in camp that evening.

Wills began to suspect the river they were following was the Burke River, which they had crossed on their outbound journey, and at Native Dog Camp (Camp 37R) on 24 March 1861, he realised they were back on their outbound track.<sup>816</sup> Shortly after leaving Native Dog Camp the next morning, Wills found Gray behind a tree eating skilligolee. Gray explained "that he was suffering from dysentery, and had taken the flour without leave".<sup>817</sup> Gray's health had worsened to the point where he was struggling to walk and he had been permitted to ride the horse.<sup>818</sup> Burke did not record the punishment meted out to Gray and Wills did not witness it, as he conveniently excused himself from proceedings. Burke told Wills that Gray "was called up and received a good thrashing".<sup>819</sup> King was the only witness and he is alleged to have told a number of versions of the nature and severity of the punishment. William Lockhart Morton claimed when King was at Cooper Creek he told Howitt:

that Mr Burke knocked Gray down, kicked him when he was down, and so treated him that if he (King) had had a pistol, he would have shot Mr Burke.<sup>820</sup>

South Australian stock-agent Alfred Varndell claimed that when King was at the Darling on his return to Melbourne:

King ... made a statement to the effect that Charles Gray was thrashed by Burke unmercifully.<sup>821</sup>

King denied making these statements<sup>822</sup> and when he gave evidence at the Commission he said:

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<sup>814</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>815</sup> Between 8.50 pm and 2.00 am, Wills made observations of Arcturus ( $\alpha$  Bootis) and Rigil Kentaurus ( $\alpha$  Centauri).

<sup>816</sup> Wills, 'Journey from Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>817</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>818</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Questions 905-908 to King.

<sup>819</sup> Wills, 'Journey from Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>820</sup> William Lockhart Morton, 'Exploration: History of the Victorian Exploring Expedition', *Yeoman and Australian Acclimatiser*, Seven part series run weekly from 21 December 1861 to 1 February 1862 1861-2.

<sup>821</sup> Alfred Varndell, 'Burke and Gray', *South Australian Register*, 24 December 1862: 3, 27 December 1862: 2, 29 December 1862: 2-3, 7 January 1863: 3.

<sup>822</sup> *South Australian Register*, 23 December 1862: 3.

Mr Burke then gave him several boxes on the ear with his open hand, and not a sound thrashing as Mr Wills states. Mr Wills was at the other camp at the time, and it was all over when he returned. Mr Burke may have given him six or seven slaps on the ear.<sup>823</sup>

One of the Commissioners<sup>824</sup> then asked a number of leading questions, aimed at protecting Burke's reputation, even going so far as to correct King's evidence when he claimed Burke abused Gray.

Murphy:	The whole party were on very good terms, were they not?
King:	On very good terms; they were very social.
Murphy:	Even after that?
King:	Even after that, though he abused him at the time.
Murphy:	Scolded him.
King:	Yes, scolded him. <sup>825</sup>

Gray was relieved of his responsibilities and King was placed in charge of the stores. Despite King's claim that the men were still on good terms, the incident clearly destroyed any camaraderie there was between them. Wills had little time for Gray's deteriorating health, dismissing his symptoms as "gammoning" and he suspected Gray had taken food on previous occasions.<sup>826</sup>

After the incident with Gray, the men stayed in camp for the day, but that evening set off at 7.00 pm for a night march. Whether or not the incident with the provisions reinforced how perilous their situation was is debateable, but that night they walked until 4.30am, covering more than 40 kilometres, their longest march since leaving the Gulf six weeks earlier. For the next week, the men travelled around 25 kilometres a day. Wills' sparse diary entries give no indication of the hunger and privations they suffered, but it was not long before King also started to feel the effects of physical exertion and the limited diet and he complained of "very severe pains in the legs and back", possible symptoms of thiamine deficiency (see Chapter 6.6).<sup>827</sup>

When their third last camel collapsed on 3 April 1861 while crossing Bilpa Morea Claypan, their situation became desperate. Burke ordered that all superfluous equipment be abandoned, including Wills' valuable surveying and meteorological instruments (Camp 46R).<sup>828</sup> Wills would have to navigate the remaining 400 kilometres across Sturt Stony Desert using just his pocket compass.<sup>829</sup> A week later, Billy the horse was shot and the men halted for a day to jerk his flesh (Camp 52R).<sup>830</sup>

Because Gray was unable to walk, he was put on the camel, Landa. The men carried some supplies on their backs and the remaining supplies and water were loaded on Rajah, the other camel, as they

<sup>823</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 938 to King.

<sup>824</sup> Speaker of the Legislative Assembly Sir Francis Murphy, (1809-1891).

<sup>825</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Questions 939-943 to King.

<sup>826</sup> Wills, 'Journey from Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>827</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 916 to King.

<sup>828</sup> Wills, 'Astronomical observations 1861', ex2008-022, State Library of Victoria. The equipment was buried at Camp 46R, 'The Plant Camp'.

<sup>829</sup> The EC purchased four square pocket compasses worth 10s. each, five square pocket compasses worth 8s. each and three compasses in morocco cases worth 6s. each.

<sup>830</sup> Wills, 'Journey from Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

crossed Sturt Stony Desert. Gray became so infirm he was unable to hold his seat, so they were forced to tie him to the saddle. The halted at a polygonum swamp near a lignum lake (Camp 58R). The next morning, 17 April 1861, Gray died.<sup>831</sup> Burke, Wills and King halted for the day, scooping out a hole three feet deep in the sand with their hands in order to bury Gray.<sup>832</sup>

Controversy has surrounded Gray's death, particularly Burke's role in his demise. The other deaths on the Expedition could be attributed to Brahe or Wright,<sup>833</sup> but Gray's death was a direct consequence of Burke's actions. Initially, news of Gray's death was overshadowed by the deaths of Burke and Wills. Gray was one of the lesser known employees who had been appointed in Swan Hill and he had no immediate family to memorialise his contribution to the Expedition. The Commission was not instructed to investigate Gray's death and the EC did not trouble themselves over the fatality. However a heated debate was played out in the Melbourne and Adelaide newspapers between Burke's supporters and his detractors over the way Burke treated Gray while he was ill, particularly the severity of the reprimand for the skilligolee incident at Native Dog Camp, 22 days prior to Gray's death. Landells' sister thought Burke's actions were so base they had "no parallels in the annals of modern history".<sup>834</sup> Burke's apparent indifference to the bereavement was noted, although King jumped to Burke's defence claiming:

nothing could surpass the kind attentions of both Mr Burke and Wills to him [Gray], after it was found that he was really ill; ... I could wish that those who are now so cruelly attempting to blacken the name and memory of Mr Burke saw him on the morning of the next day, weeping over the corpse, as only a brave and generous man could; declaring that if he had thought he should have lost even one of his party, he never would have entered on so perilous an enterprise.<sup>835</sup>

The debate reignited when news reached Adelaide that McKinlay had found a corpse buried at Lake Kadhibaerri, which McKinlay considered to be Gray.<sup>836</sup> McKinlay found scars on the skull, which was lying face down and detached from the body.<sup>837</sup> Some questioned whether the severed skull was a result of a nefarious act on the part of Burke.<sup>838</sup> Suspicions were aroused further when the EC

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<sup>831</sup> Accounts of Gray's death differ slightly. King said "the following morning we found him dead" whereas Wills wrote "This morning, about sunrise, Gray died. He had not spoken a word distinctly since his first attack, which was just as we were about to start".

<sup>832</sup> Edwin Welch, 'Journal of original observations between the Darling River and Cooper's Creek, 8 August-23 September, 1861', ex3006-005, Box 2087/7a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>833</sup> Wills' death could also be attributed to Burke's actions, but Dr Wills did not pursue this course as it was clear that Burke and Wills were comrades and his son's correspondence showed he remained loyal to his leader. Instead, Dr Wills blamed everyone else except Burke for his son's death. Wills, *Successful exploration*.

<sup>834</sup> Margaret Isabella Morris Landells Keating, 'Remarks on the Exploring Expedition', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 27 December 1861: 2.

<sup>835</sup> John King, 'Gray's Death', *Argus*, 7 January 1863: 5.

<sup>836</sup> John McKinlay, *Exploration: McKinlay's diary of his journey across the continent of Australia. With a portrait* (Melbourne: E. & D. Syme, Elizabeth Street, 1863).

<sup>837</sup> John McKinlay, *Mr McKinlay's explorations: diary of Mr J McKinlay, leader of the Burke Relief Expedition, being journal of explorations in the interior of Australia, together with chart*, South Australian Parliamentary Paper 12/1862 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1862), 5.

<sup>838</sup> An Inquirer, 'The Fate of Gray', *Argus*, 5 January 1863: 5.



Figure 85: Sidney Nolan, 'Burke and Wills Expedition: Gray sick', 1949.  
445.1995, Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Nolan was intrigued by the idea of Gray tied to his camel and used it as the subject of one of his first series of Burke and Wills paintings. Haynes suggests that Nolan's image shows that it is not the ropes that are the real agent of bondage, but the desert, see: Roslynn D. Haynes, *Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 212-213.

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announced that Howitt would be returning to Cooper Creek to exhume the remains of Burke and Wills for public reinterment, but that Gray's body was not to be brought back.<sup>839</sup> Questions were also asked why pages were missing from Burke's notebook, intimating that there was an attempt to cover up details of the death.<sup>840</sup> Details surrounding Gray's death and McKinlay's discovery have never been resolved satisfactorily (see Chapter 6.5, pages 379 to 381).

Burke, Wills and King abandoned more equipment at Gray's grave and set off for the Cooper with the few sticks of dried horse meat that was all that remained of their provisions. The following day, 19 April 1861, they reached a creek, either the Cooper or the North-West Branch (Camp 60R). They followed the creek, making Camp 61R between Malkanpa and Yinimingka. They still had 30 miles to go to the Depot, but Burke was optimistic, as King recalled:

we were allowed to eat as much dried meat as we chose, so confident was Mr Burke of finding the depot party there and of obtaining plenty of provisions.<sup>841</sup>

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<sup>839</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes of a meeting 9 December 1861', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 164; *Age*, 10 December 1861: 5; *Argus*, 6 December 1861: 6, 10 December 1861: 7, 13 December 1861: 4; 'The Burke and Wills Mystery', *South Australian Register*, 29 December 1862: 2-3.

<sup>840</sup> Burke made notes in a pocketbook which he gave to King, with instructions that it be handed to Sir William Stawell. The notebook is now at the National Library of Australia, but thirteen pages have been torn out. Burke, 'Diary', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia; Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Questions 1070-1072 to King.

<sup>841</sup> Smith, 'John King's story, Part III'.

On 21 April 1861, Burke rode Landa and Wills and King mounted Rajah and they began a desperate ride along the northern bank of the Cooper into Queensland.<sup>842</sup> Burke expected to find a permanent camp at the Depot: Wright would have arrived from Menindee with the Supply Party, they would have a second surveyor who would be mapping "the country convenient to Cooper's Creek",<sup>843</sup> Beckler would be collecting plants and Becker would be sketching the scene. Burke expected to spend five days at the Depot before heading to Melbourne,<sup>844</sup> while Wills expected to return to the Plant Camp to recover his instruments.<sup>845</sup> Burke told King he could "accompany him to town ... for a few weeks" before he had to return to Depot Camp 65 on the Cooper.<sup>846</sup>

At 7.30 pm that evening they arrived back at the Depot. Burke was in the lead and thought he could see the tents in the moonlight. He called out to Brahe and Patten and McDonough but there was no reply. The camp was deserted and there was a blaze on a tree with instructions to 'Dig'.<sup>847</sup>

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<sup>842</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 1006 to King.

<sup>843</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 971 to King.

<sup>844</sup> 'Traducers of Burke', *Castlemaine Advertiser*, reprinted in the *Age*, 14 February 1862: 7.

<sup>845</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 985 to King.

<sup>846</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 1034 to King.

<sup>847</sup> There is uncertainty over what words Brahe carved in the 'Dig' blaze. Research by David G. Corke and Dave Phoenix shows the tree currently referred to as 'The Dig Tree' is not the tree Brahe blazed his 'Dig' message onto. Phoenix, *Following Burke and Wills across Australia: A touring guide*: 239-242; Sarah Elks, 'In the shade of Burke and Wills' old coolibah tree: a fabled twist', *Australian*, 9 February 2016: 3; David G. Corke, 'Brahe's Cache', *Victorian Historical Magazine*, Vol. 87, No. 285 (2016): 58-75.



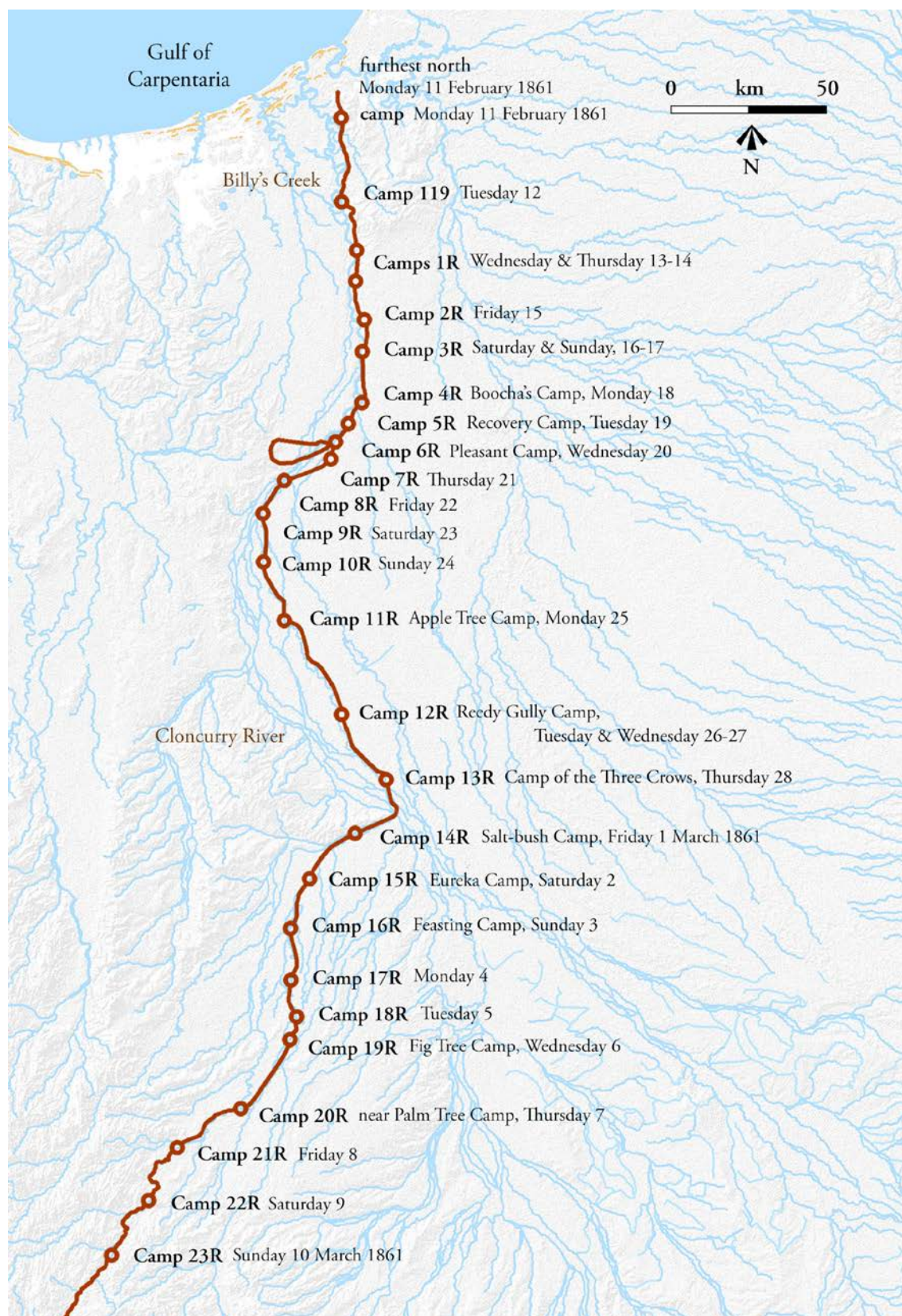


Figure 86: The Expedition's return track from the Gulf to the Selwyn Range.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.



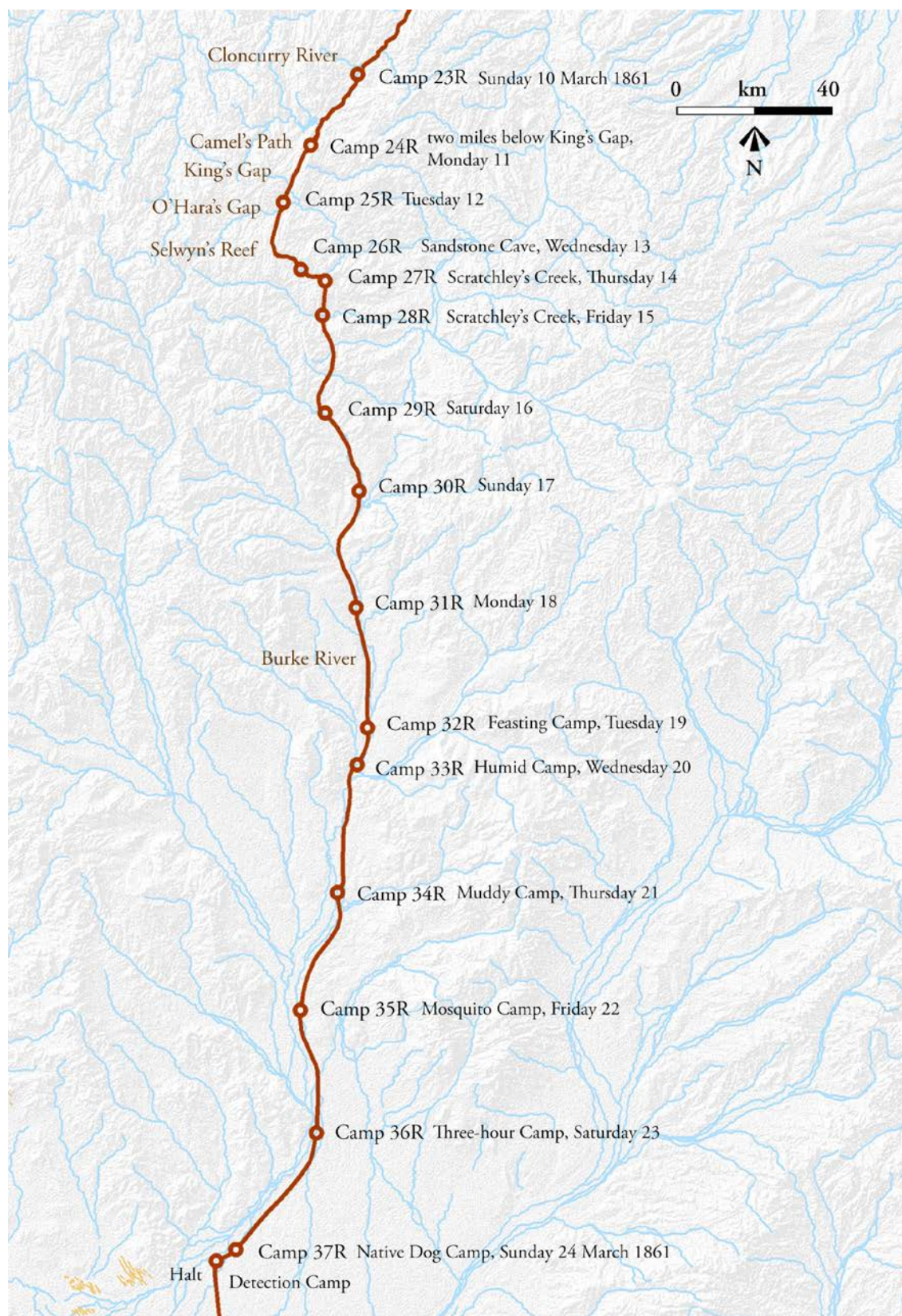


Figure 87: The Expedition's return track from the Selwyn Range to the Tropic.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.



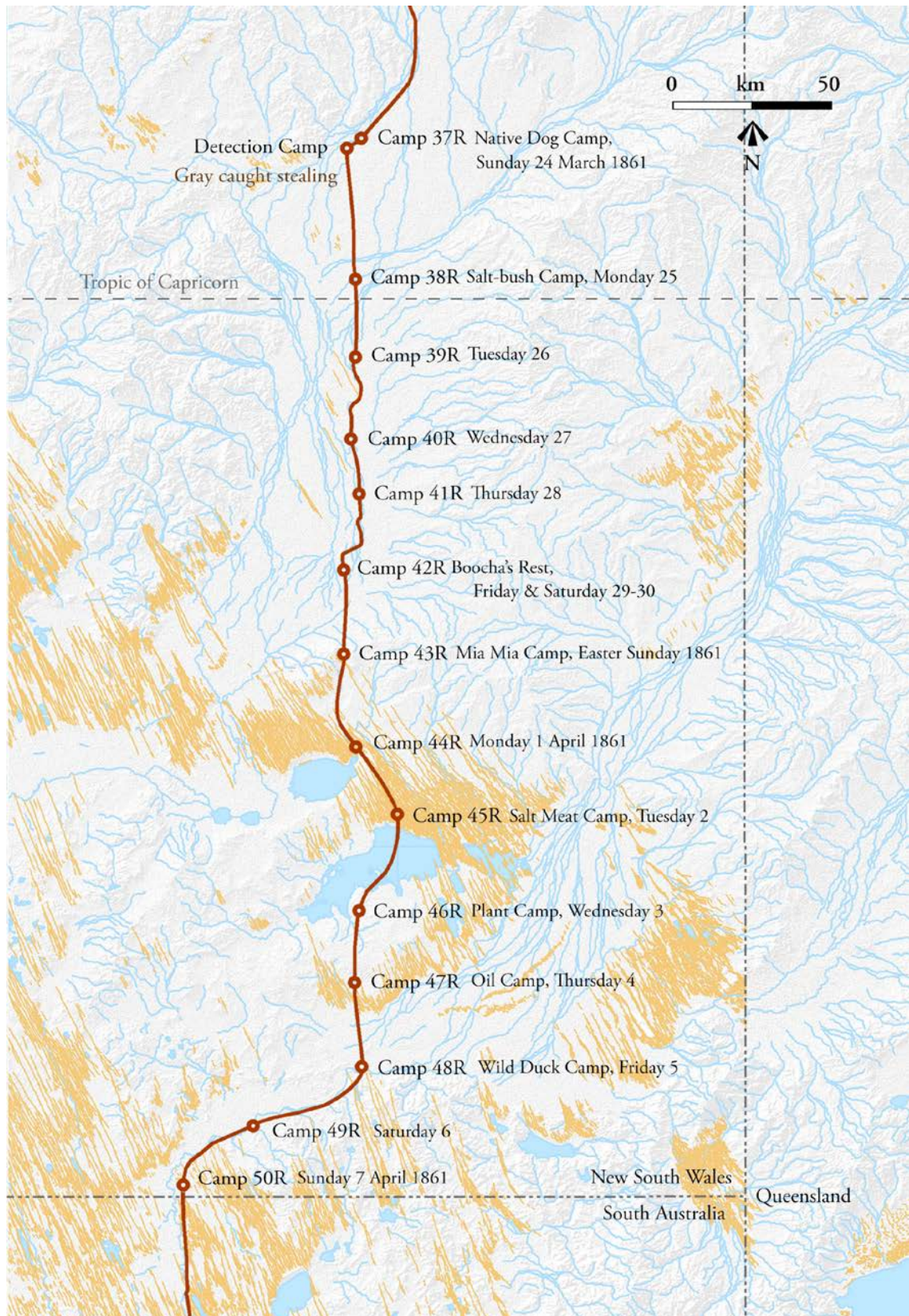


Figure 88: The Expedition's return track from the Tropics to the Diamantina.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.



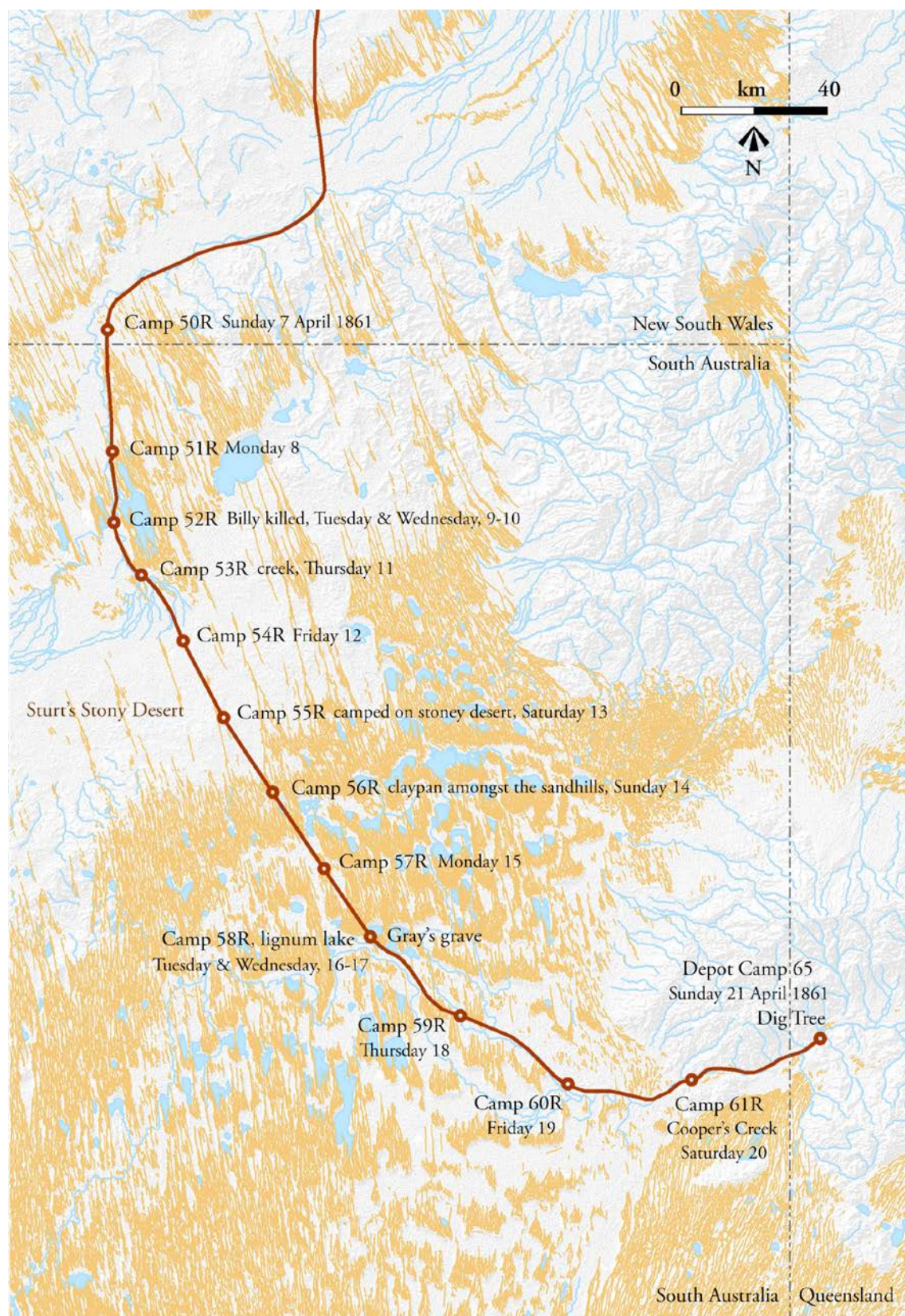


Figure 89: The Expedition's track from the Diamantina to Depot Camp 65 on Cooper Creek.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.

## 4.6 Death of Burke and Wills

This section presents a brief summary of events at Cooper Creek between April-September 1861. These events are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.4.6.

At Depot Camp 65, Wills and King dug out the camel-box, which contained provisions and a note left by Brahe.<sup>848</sup> Wills wrote:

A note left in the plant by Brahe communicates the pleasing information that they have started today for the Darling; their camels and horses all well and in good condition. We and our camels being just done up, and scarcely able to reach the depot, have very little chance of overtaking them.<sup>849</sup>

The three men rested for a day and discussed their options, eventually deciding to head towards John Baker's station at Mount Hopeless (this decision is analysed in more detail in Chapter 7.3.2). They placed a note and some of Wills' journals in the camel-box before burying it again.<sup>850</sup> Their fatal error was not changing the blaze to show they had returned to the Depot.

On 23 April 1861 they set off downstream along the south bank of the Cooper, searching for the bifurcation with Strzelecki Creek which would lead them south towards Mount Hopeless. While investigating the various creeks that broke off to the south, they encountered several groups of Yandruwandha who gave them gifts of fish, rats and ngardu. The men supplemented their meagre rations by shooting crows and hawks and digging mussels out of the mud.

On 29 April 1861, Landa became bogged and was shot. Rajah collapsed with exhaustion and was shot ten days later.<sup>851</sup> Without pack-animals the men could not carry sufficient water to cross the Strzelecki Desert, although this did not stop them making an unsuccessful attempt between 17 and 22 May 1861.<sup>852</sup> With their provisions exhausted, the men attempted to survive on ngardu, but found it hard work (the Expedition's use of ngardu is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.6). They tried to find the Yandruwandha, but were unable to locate them in the myriad of creek channels.

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<sup>848</sup> Brahe left c.~99 kilograms of provisions in the camel-box: c.~60 lbs oatmeal, 60 lbs sugar 50 lbs flour, 20 lbs rice, 15 lbs dried meat, two lbs ginger, one lb salt, and a little tea and cocoa. Brahe, 'Report, ex2004-009; 'Dispatch, dated Cooper's Creek, 21 April 1861', ex2002-018, Box 2082/1d (Item 1), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>849</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 9: Returning from Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>850</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Last notes of Robert O'Hara Burke', ex2009-002, Box 2083/2b, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>851</sup> John King, 'Transcription of 'Narrative of John King', ex2009-007, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>852</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.



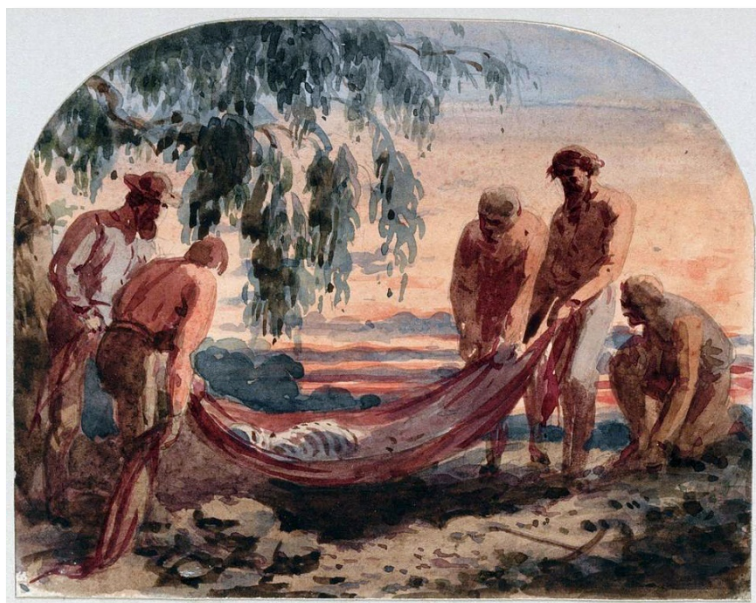


Figure 90: William Strutt, 'The Burial of Burke', 1862.

A collection of drawings ... illustrating the Burke and Wills exploring expedition.  
a1485015, 1ff.15a, DL PXX 3, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

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Wills decided to return to Depot Camp 65 in order to bury his “journals and a record of the state of affairs here”.<sup>853</sup> During his eight-day journey at the end of May, he met some Yandruwandha people who fed him and extended great hospitality. During Wills’ absence, the Yandruwandha also fed Burke and King, but Burke took exception to a Yandruwandha man who presented him with fish but then helped himself to an oilcloth. Burke fired his revolver in the air and the Yandruwandha left. Wills, realising that the Yandruwandha were their only hope, chastised Burke and the two men fought. The Yandruwandha were not seen again and Burke and Wills died in early July 1861.

Finding himself alone on the Cooper, King slept in deserted gunyahs surviving on crows and ngardu until he was found by the Yandruwandha (see Chapter 6.46, pages 374 to 377).<sup>854</sup> They cared for him until 15 September 1861, when he was found by Edwin Welch, surveyor on Howitt’s relief expedition.<sup>855</sup>

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<sup>853</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia; William John Wills, 'Last notes, dated 30 May 1861', SAFE 1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>854</sup> Smith, 'John King's story, Part III'.

<sup>855</sup> Alfred William Howitt, '[transcription of] Diary, 1 September-9 October 1861', ex3007-001, Box 2085/6a (Item 1), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria; Edwin James Welch, 'Finding of King', *Worlds News*, 15 October 1916.



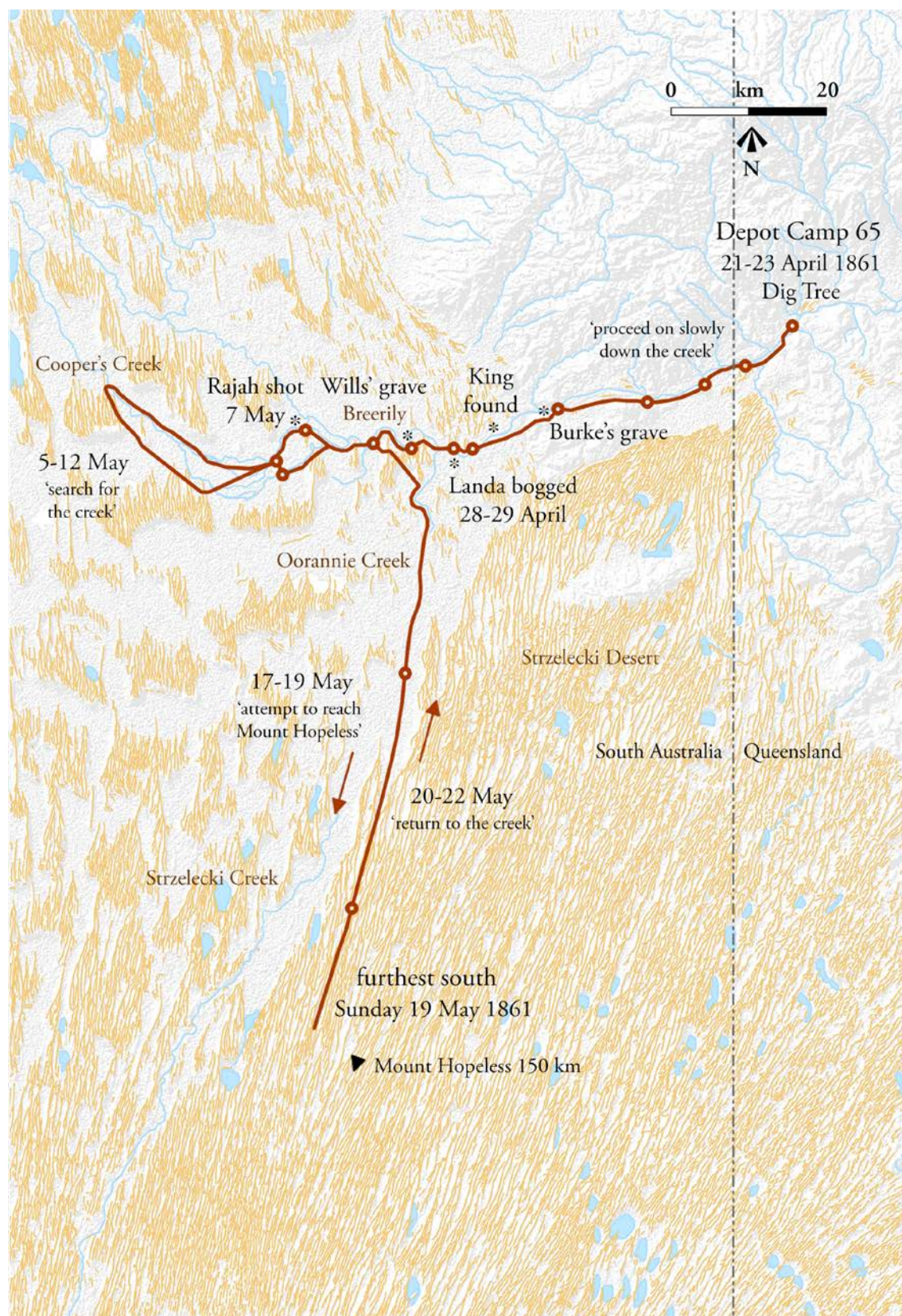


Figure 91: Burke, Wills and King's track from Depot Camp 65 attempting to reach Mount Hopeless.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.

## 4.7 Brahe's Depot Party

From the outset, the Expedition's plan had been to set up a depot camp at one of the permanent waterholes on Cooper Creek.<sup>856</sup> The EC's plan was that the whole Expedition, including the wagons, would reach the Cooper,<sup>857</sup> so the Depot would be a large, semi-permanent encampment. Quite what was to happen from there was not specified (as discussed earlier).<sup>858</sup> Given that Macadam and Stawell were anxious to send a messenger to Burke with news of Stuart's return, they expected him to dash to the north coast. However, some members of the EC expected Burke to prioritise securing communications with Melbourne, while others expected him to sit out the summer while the scientific officers commenced detailed investigations using the Depot as a base.

Burke's division of the party at Menindee meant that the Depot was not going to be as large or as well-staffed as initially planned, and consequently Burke did not have anyone to leave in charge while he journeyed to the Gulf. Brahe was the logical choice, as he could use a compass and would be able to lead the other men back to Menindee if Burke did not return. Brahe, however, did not want the distinction and refused Burke's request, asking instead that he be selected as one of the Gulf Party.<sup>859</sup> Burke did not press the matter, but Wills was less sympathetic and forced Brahe to accept the position.<sup>860</sup> Burke told Brahe he expected Wright to arrive from Menindee soon, but if he failed to arrive Brahe was to wait for three months before returning to Menindee.<sup>861</sup> Wills allegedly asked Brahe to wait for four months.<sup>862</sup>

With Brahe in charge of the Depot Party, Burke left three other men behind: Thomas McDonough, whom Burke planned to take to the Gulf but who had not fully recovered from the exertions of the 90-mile walk during the reconnaissance trip with Wills; Dost Mahomet, who had experience with camels, but whom Burke overlooked in favour of the inexperienced John King; and the Expedition blacksmith, William Patten.<sup>863</sup>

On 17 December 1860, the day after Burke, Wills, King and Gray left for the Gulf, the Depot Party began building a small stockade in which Burke's tent was erected to store the firearms and

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<sup>856</sup> EC, 'Instructions issued to Robert O'Hara Burke, Leader of the Victorian Exploration Expedition, 18 August 1860', ex2001-001, Box 2082/3a (Item 1), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>857</sup> 'Complimentary dinner to R.O'H Burke, Esq., Leader of the exploring expedition', *Mount Alexander Mail*, 9 July 1860: 2.

<sup>858</sup> See Chapter 3.4, page 165.

<sup>859</sup> William Brahe, 'With Burke & Wills: A survivor's memories', *Argus*, 27 August 1910.

<sup>860</sup> William Brahe 'Survivor's memories'; 'Field Book, 22 November 1860-14 February 1861', ex2008-020, Box 2083/2c, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>861</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 267 to Brahe; Burke, 'Dispatch, dated Cooper's Creek, 13 December 1860', ex2002-013, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>862</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 318 to Brahe and Question 726 to King.

<sup>863</sup> Burke, 'Dispatch, dated Cooper's Creek, 13 December 1860', ex2002-013, State Library of Victoria.



scientific instruments.<sup>864</sup> Construction took a week and then the men settled into a routine: one man watching the camp and others watching the twelve horses and six camels while they grazed. The Yandruwandha-Yawarrawarrka people visited the camp regularly and conflict ensued (see Chapter 6.4.4).

Wright and the Supply Party did not arrive from the Darling. After Burke had been away for ten weeks, Brahe began to anticipate his return: on 26 February Brahe “rode up a conical hill ... distant about nine miles” and then a few days later he rode up to the top of a stony rise about six miles upstream.<sup>865</sup> At the beginning of March, Brahe was still “looking out anxiously for Mr Burke’s return”.<sup>866</sup> Unfortunately Burke was still over 1,000 kilometres away on the Cloncurry River. A month later there was still no sign of Burke. Patten was suffering from scurvy, was in a “deplorable condition” and pleading with Brahe to take him back to Menindee. Burke had only taken provisions sufficient for twelve weeks and had now been away for nearly four months, so Brahe began to wonder whether he had met a ship at the Gulf or had gone to outlying stations in Queensland.

In mid-April Brahe made preparations to leave the Depot Camp and return to Menindee. He buried provisions and a note in a camel-box, blazed a tree with the camp number and date, blazed another tree with instructions to ‘Dig’, and, on 21 April 1861, the four men headed upstream along the Cooper towards Menindee. They travelled slowly because Patten was ill, and made 14 miles before camping beside the creek. That evening Burke, Wills and King arrived back at Depot Camp 65.

Brahe followed their old course along the Cooper and Wilson as far as Camp 60, before heading south-east across the Grey Range on a more direct route to Bulloo, which reduced their return journey by 60 kilometres. On 27 April 1861 they reached the Bulloo River near Camp 52 and met up with Wright’s Supply Party the following day.

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<sup>864</sup> Phoenix, 'Brahe's meteorological observations'.

<sup>865</sup> Brahe, 'Report', ex2004-009, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>866</sup> *Ibid.*

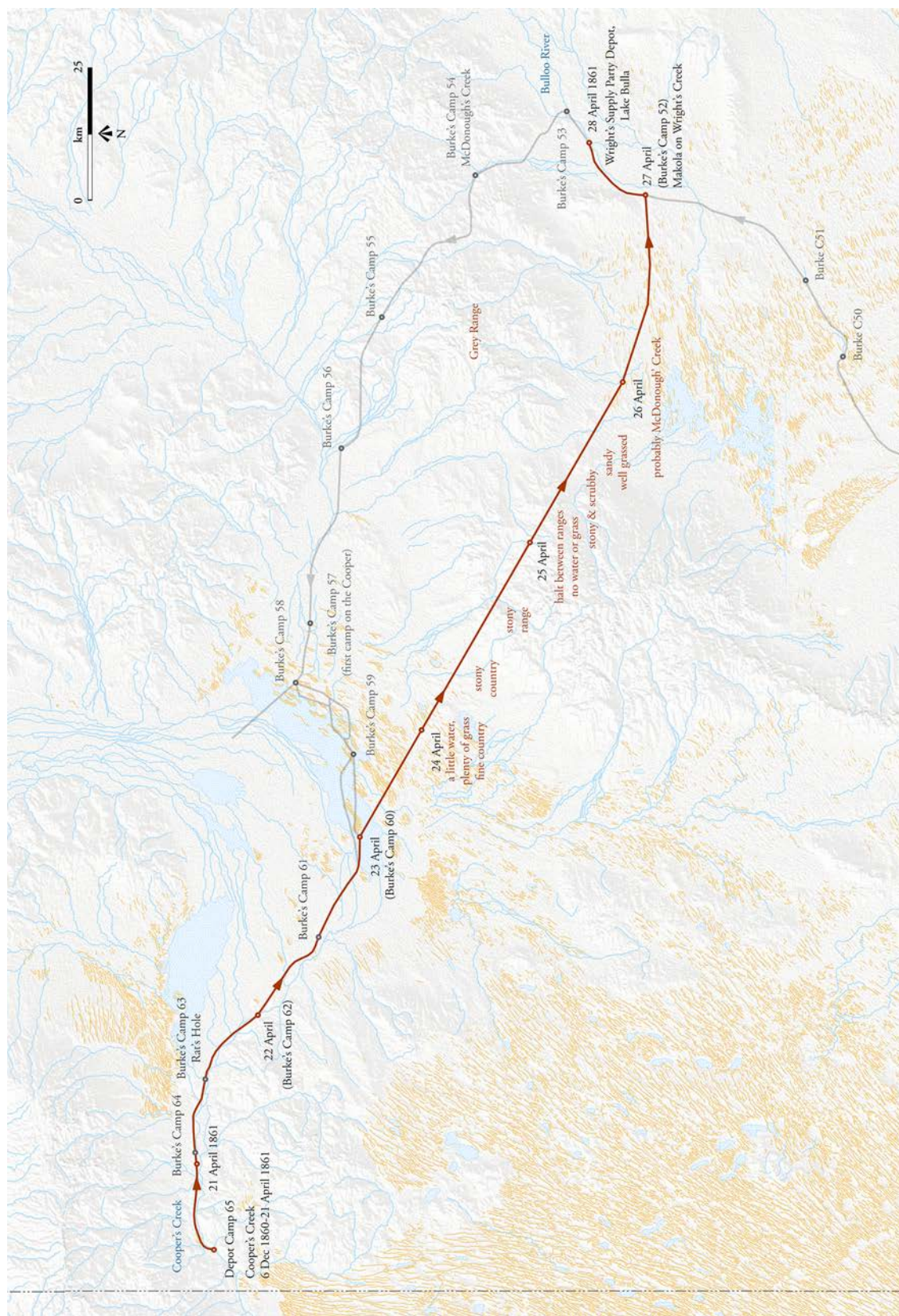


Figure 92: Brahe's Depot Party. Return journey from Depot Camp 65 on Cooper Creek to the Bulloo River.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.

## 4.8 Wright's Supply Party

When Burke departed from Menindee, he left the 52-year-old German artist, a saddler, a journalist and a sepoy on the river bank in the township with nearly ten tons of stores, nine of the weaker camels and three horses.<sup>867</sup> Beckler had resigned from the VEE, but agreed to wait until a replacement arrived. The five men moved the stores twelve kilometres upstream to the junction of the Darling and the Pamamaroo Creek and established a depot. Although many accounts suggest this party did not have much to do and that the Supply Party “lingered” and “malingered”<sup>868</sup> during the summer of 1860-1861, this was not an accurate representation of events at the Pamamaroo Depot Camp between October 1860 and the end of January 1861.

While they waited for further instructions, Becker and Beckler sketched, collected plant specimens, recorded meteorological observations and finished their reports.<sup>869</sup> Beckler headed off to the Scropes Range north of Menindee to collect botanical specimens.<sup>870</sup> When he returned to Pamamaroo on 5 November 1860, he found that Wright had arrived back from Torowoto with the news that he had been appointed third-in-command, and a messenger had arrived from Melbourne with dispatches for Burke. The messenger was police trooper Myles Lyons, who was carrying dispatches from the EC informing Burke of Stuart's return.<sup>871</sup>

Lyons, accompanied by Macpherson and the Aboriginal guide, Dick, left Pamamaroo on 10 November 1860 and followed Burke's track for over 600 kilometres past Torowoto and Bulloo into the Grey Range, where they lost the tracks on the stony ground. Three of their four horses died of thirst and the men struggled back to Torowoto where Lyons and Macpherson halted while Dick walked back to Pamamaroo to raise the alarm. He arrived back at the Darling on 19 December 1860 (for additional details on their journey, see Chapter 4.8).<sup>872</sup>

<sup>867</sup> The men left behind were Ludwig Becker, Alexander Macpherson, William Oswald Hodgkinson and Baluch Khan.

<sup>868</sup> Clune, *Dig*, 55-56.

<sup>869</sup> Becker, 'Third Report', ex2004-006; 'Fourth Report', ex2004-007; 'Fifth Report', ex2004-008; 'Meteorological observations made eight miles east of Menindie, River Darling junction with Pamamaroo Creek, 6 November 1860-13 January 1861', ex2008-006, Box 2083/2d; Hermann Beckler, 'Report, Pamamaroo Creek, 10 November 1860', ex2004-001, Box 2082/2e (Item 5); 'Report, Pamamaroo Creek, 13 November 1860', ex2004-002, Box 2082/4a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>870</sup> 'The Exploring Expedition', *Argus*, 4 December 1860: 6; Beverley Wood and Thomas A. Darragh, 'In His Own Words: Dr Hermann Beckler's Writings about His Journeys between the Darling River and Bulloo, 1860-1', *Historical Records of Australian Science*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (2016): 28-40.

<sup>871</sup> 'The Exploration Committee', *Age*, 15 October 1860: 6; Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes of the EC meeting, 13 October 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>872</sup> William Oswald Hodgkinson, 'Report on Lyons & Macpherson's mission to overtake Burke', ex2004-010, Box 2082/4i, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.



Figure 93: Ludwig Becker, 'River Darling and the mouth of the Bamamero Creek, at sunset with the anti two-light. Decb. 19 1860. Darling Depot', 1860. Image b36081, H16486/F.50, State Library of Victoria.

Becker sketched the Pamamaroo Camp at the junction of the Darling River and Pamamaroo Creek. The site was chosen at a bend in the river which was "convenient to keep the camels safe through the night".

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Beckler, Baluch and the Aboriginal guide, Peter, travelled to Torowoto to save the two men, once again following Burke's tracks. They reached Torowoto on 27 December 1860, much to the relief of Lyons and Macpherson, and arrived back at Pamamaroo on 5 January 1861.<sup>873</sup>

Burke had intimated he would send Brahe back from Cooper Creek with some of the camels to assist Wright in moving the stores to Cooper Creek.<sup>874</sup> Wright thought it would only take Lyons a couple of weeks to reach Burke and hoped he might return with Brahe and some pack-animals. When Dick arrived in Pamamaroo with the news that Lyons and Macpherson were trapped and their horses were dead, Wright's position was untenable: Brahe had not returned with the camels, nothing more had been heard from Burke, the EC had not confirmed Wright's appointment or sent any money, and the weather had been hot and dry and much of the water that had aided Burke's trip north had now vanished. In addition, Wright was down to three horses and ten camels and because Macpherson was at Torowoto, he only had three men. No doctor had arrived to replace Beckler and there was no sign of a second surveyor, so if Wright wanted to follow Burke to Cooper Creek he would either have to find Aboriginal guides who knew where Burke had gone or follow Burke's footprints all the way, something Lyons and Macpherson had been unable to do. Wright also had suspicions that by now Burke would have left Cooper Creek for the Gulf and would be expecting to find Wright and the stores waiting at the Cooper when he returned.

Most likely acting on advice from Beckler and Hodgkinson, Wright sent Hodgkinson to Melbourne to get additional funds from the EC to purchase the pack-animals the Supply Party

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<sup>873</sup> Hermann Beckler, 'Diary of his journey to relieve Trooper Lyons and Alexander Macpherson, Darling River, 22 January 1861', ex2009-008, Box 2083/3a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>874</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 1251 to Wright.



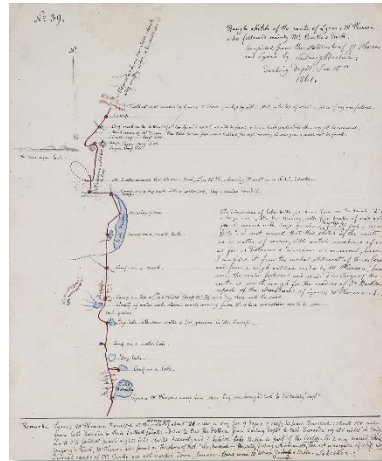


Figure 94: Ludwig Becker, 'Rough sketch of the route of Lyons & M'Pherson who followed mainly Mr. Burke's track. Darling Depot. Jan. 15th, 1861.  
Image b36066, H16486/F.35, State Library of Victoria.

Becker talked to Lyons and Macpherson upon their return and sketched a map of their route from Torowoto to Lake Bulla (Bulloo) and on to the Grey Range. Wright had been to Torowoto, but had not been to Bulloo and he suspected that it was Cooper Creek. Consequently, Becker thought Lyons and Macpherson's description of the rough, rocky Grey Range was Sturt Stony Desert. Given that Wright's Supply Party did not have a surveyor, and they were about to try and follow Burke's tracks to the Cooper, their lack of knowledge of the geography of the area they were heading into was a concern.

needed.<sup>875</sup> Hodgkinson took nine days to ride 800 kilometres to Melbourne, and was back at Pamamaroo by 14 January 1861 with the authority to draw £400.<sup>876</sup> Wright purchased pack-saddles and horses, broke the animals in, killed bullocks and dried the beef, hired three additional men and packed the stores in preparation for their trip north. Wright's Supply Party left Pamamaroo on 26 January 1861.

From the outset their journey was difficult and it soon degenerated into a "very hell".<sup>877</sup> The animals proved difficult to handle and wandered off regularly, causing delays. Temperatures reached 44°C and the ample surface water that had assisted Burke's journey had evaporated. Within five days, the horses were in such poor condition that the Supply Party had to halt and rest for an additional five days. Plague rats harassed the men and the party was wracked with dissent, caused mainly by Hodgkinson who insulted everyone in the party, particularly Smith and Baluch.<sup>878</sup>

<sup>875</sup> William Wright, 'Dispatch, dated Ptomarmora Creek, 19 December 1860', ex2002-022, Box 2082/1f (Item 1), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>876</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes of the EC special meeting, 31 December 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 99; John Macadam, 'Letter #46 to William Wright, dated Melbourne 31 December 1860', ex2005-046, Box 2083/5, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria; 'The Exploration Expedition', *Argus*, 1 January 1861: 5.

<sup>877</sup> Ludwig Becker, 'Meteorological observations made between Pamamaroo Lake to Koorliatto Creek, 27 January-1 April 1861', ex2008-004, Box 2082/5f, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>878</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 91; Bonyhady, *Melbourne to Myth*, 150.



Figure 95: William Oswald Hodgkinson, 'Koorliatto, New South Wales', 1861.  
Album of Miss Eliza Younghusband.  
vn4189024-s42, PIC/11535/42 LOC MS SR Cab 3/9, National Library of Australia

Hodgkinson's sketch of 'The Doctor's Camp' at Koorliatto. The tent in the centre foreground is where Beckler nursed Becker and Purcell from 30 March-24 April 1861, before moving upstream to Bulloo.

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Burke's Advance Party had taken 20 days to get to Bulloo from Menindee. It took Wright's Supply Party 52 days to make the same journey.<sup>879</sup> Two horses died from exhaustion along the way and the men's health deteriorated to the extent that two were unable to walk. The party halted, first at Koorliatto and then at Bulloo, partly in deference to the sick men, but also because Wright was unsure which direction Burke had travelled after he left Bulloo. Beckler spent his time tending to the invalids, who were suffering dysentery and diarrhoea from the putrid water supplies.<sup>880</sup> At the end of April, three men died.<sup>881</sup>

Aboriginal people objected to the Supply Party making an extended stay at this important water source and responded aggressively (see Chapter 6.4.5). Wright erected a makeshift stockade, but after a serious confrontation on 27 April 1861, he decided the party would have to return to Pamamaroo.<sup>882</sup> The following morning, Brahe and the Depot Party arrived at Bulloo on their way back to Menindee, having left Depot Camp 65 a week earlier.<sup>883</sup> Brahe's news that Burke had left the Cooper in December and had not returned meant that there was less reason for the Supply Party to continue their journey.

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<sup>879</sup> William Wright, 'Diary of the Depot Camp, Darling River, 26 January-21 June 1861', ex2009-009, Box 2083/3b, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>880</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 149-154.

<sup>881</sup> Charles Stone died on 22 April 1861, William Purcell died on 25 April 1861 and Ludwig Becker died on 29 April 1861. All three men were buried at Bulloo, S28°19'18" E143°07'28" (GDA2020).

<sup>882</sup> William Wright, 'Diary of the Depot Camp, Darling River, 26 January-21 June 1861', ex2009-009, Box 2083/3b, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>883</sup> Brahe, 'Report', ex2004-009, State Library of Victoria; Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Questions 291-300 to Brahe.

On 1 May 1861, the surviving nine men of Wright's Supply Party and Brahe's Depot Party, their 21 horses and 16 camels, left Bulloo on their way to Pamamaroo. Several of the men, Patten in particular, were very ill, so the party halted at Koorliatto while Wright and Brahe rode to Depot Camp 65.<sup>884</sup> Wright did not expect that Burke would have returned,<sup>885</sup> but Brahe, no doubt, wanted to make sure before he faced the EC in Melbourne. They left Koorliatto on 3 May and arrived at Depot Camp 65 five days later. With the camel-box reburied and no change to the blaze, Wright concluded he "found no sign of Mr Burke having visited the creek, or the natives having disturbed the stores".<sup>886</sup> The two men only spent around 15 minutes at the Depot,<sup>887</sup> before heading back to Koorliatto, arriving on 13 May 1861.

The return journey to Pamamaroo was just as difficult and harrowing as the northbound trip. Patten, Baluch, Mahomet and McDonough were ill, with McDonough and Patten too incapacitated to walk or ride.<sup>888</sup> They travelled under the most painful circumstances, with constant stoppages as the invalids cried and moaned. However, the lack of water meant that Wright and Brahe were forced to push on regardless. Two camels collapsed and died and, at Rat Point on 6 June 1861, Patten died.<sup>889</sup>

The eight survivors arrived in Pamamaroo on 19 June 1861. Wright headed to Adelaide to re-join his family, while Brahe rode on to Melbourne. On 28 June 1861 at Durham Ox coaching inn on the Loddon he met Howitt who had been dispatched by the EC to search for Burke. Howitt, realising he needed a bigger search party, went with Brahe to Bendigo where they sent a telegram to the EC.<sup>890</sup> On 1 July 1861, around the time that Burke and Wills died at the Cooper, the Melbourne press announced Brahe's news:

The unexpected news of Mr Burke's expedition of discovery ... is positively disastrous. The entire company of explorers has been dissipated out of being, like dew-drops before the sun.<sup>891</sup>

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<sup>884</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 178-179.

<sup>885</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 1380 to Wright.

<sup>886</sup> William Wright, 'Diary of the Depot Camp, Darling River, 26 January-21 June 1861', ex2009-009, Box 2083/3b, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>887</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Questions 324 and 329 to Brahe and Questions 1393-1399 to Wright; *Argus*, 27 November 1861: 8.

<sup>888</sup> Hermann Beckler, 'Medical reports, 9 & 22 July 1861', ex2004-003, Box 2082/4b, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>889</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 182; 'The Burke and Wills Exploration: Royal Commission of Inquiry', *Age*, 29 November 1861: 5.

<sup>890</sup> Alfred William Howitt, 'Telegram to Macadam, dated Sandhurst, 29 June 1861', Box 2085/5a (Item 3), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>891</sup> *Age*, 1 July 1861: 4.



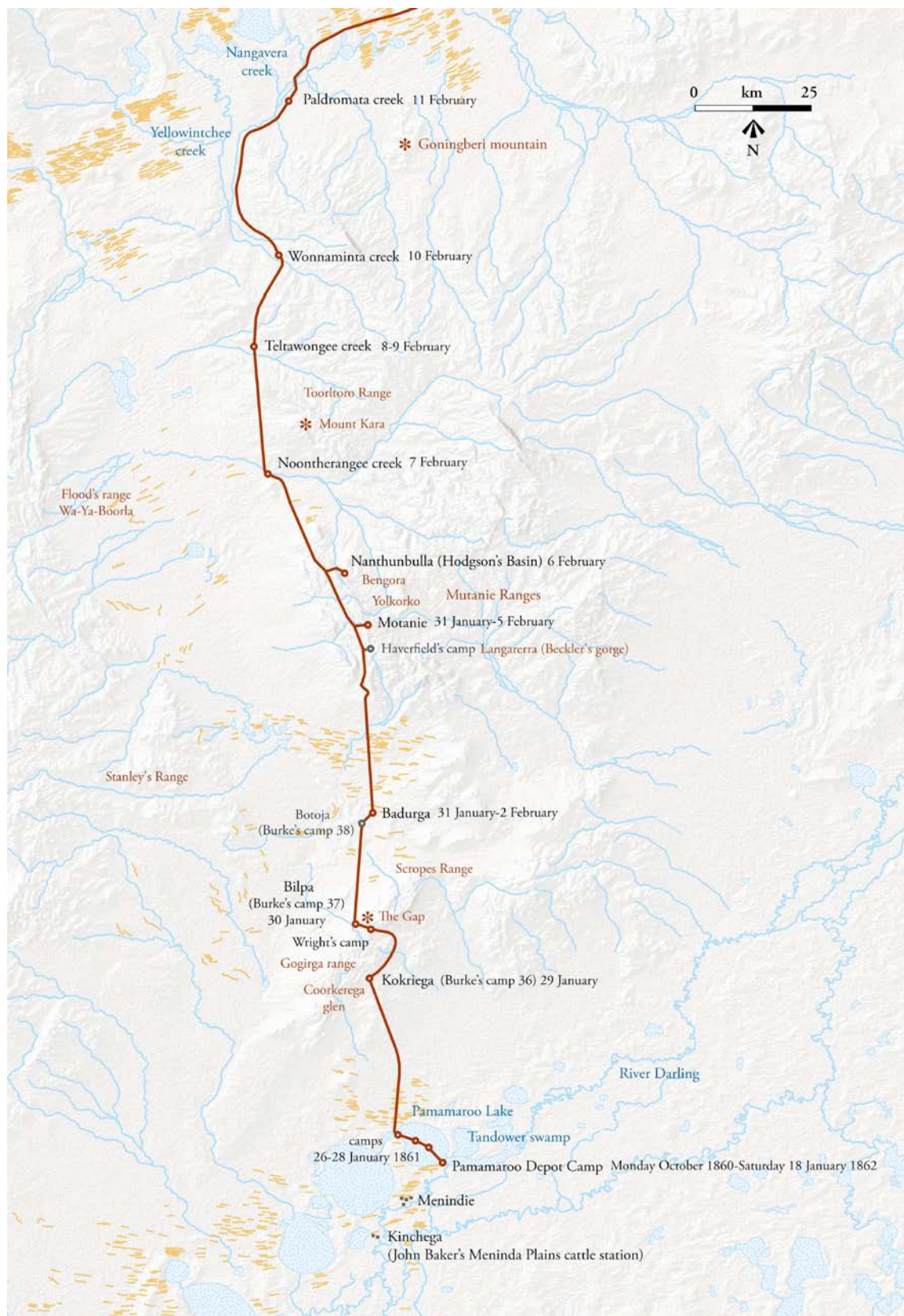


Figure 96: Wright's Supply Party. Journey from Menindee to Paldromata.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.



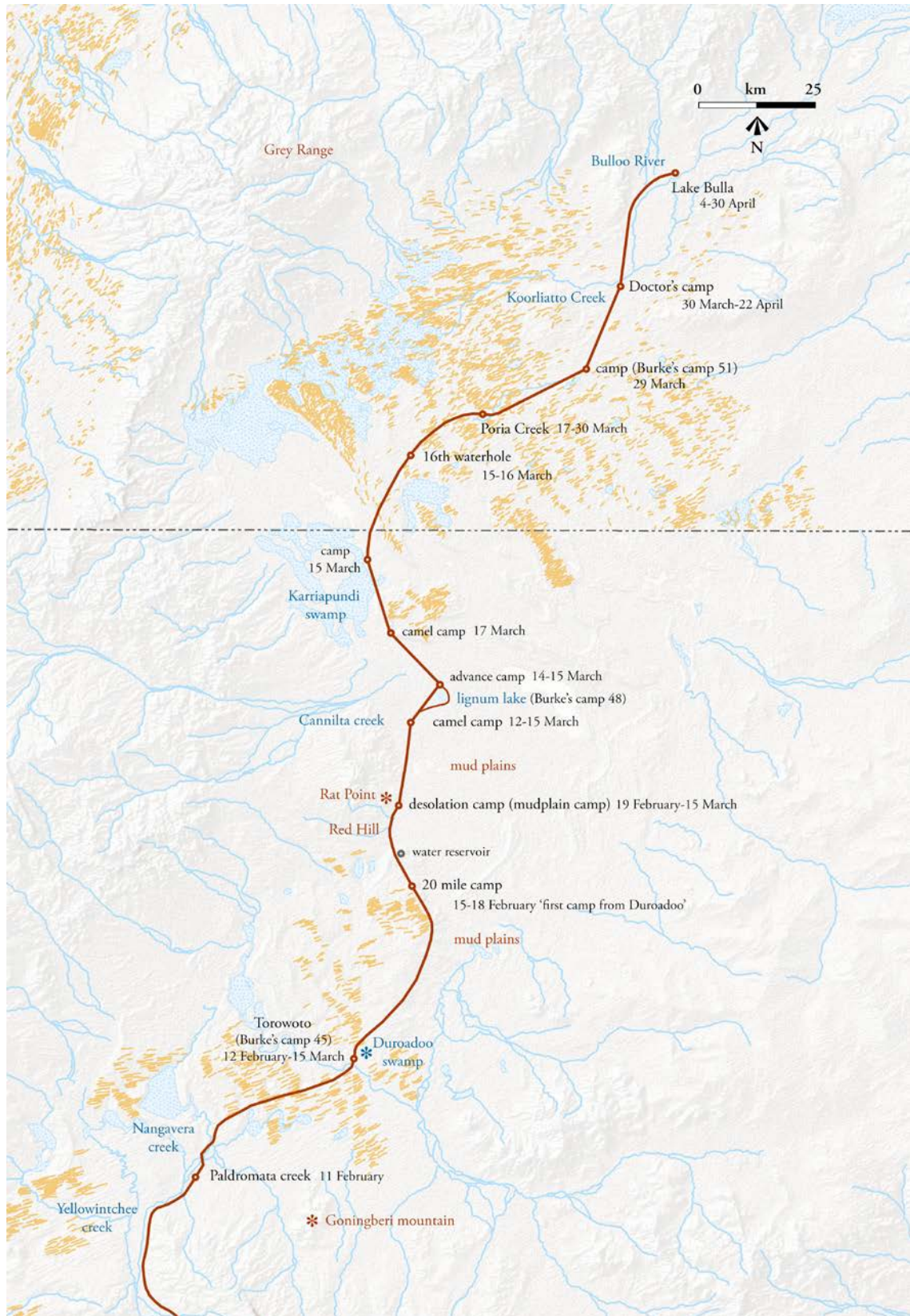


Figure 97: Wright's Supply Party. Journey from Paldromata to Bulloo.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.

## 4.9 Conclusion

In developing this Expedition chronology, it became apparent that the VEE was not a single entity, but an expedition made up of many constituent parts. The slow-moving, cumbersome, military-style expedition that travelled slowly through Victoria resembled Sturt's or Mitchell's earlier cavalcades, but by the time it reached Queensland it was a swift, light party not unlike Gregory's or Stuart's exploratory parties. The enormous caravan of men, camels, horses and wagons that left Melbourne divested itself of encumbrances as it travelled north until it was reduced to just two men floundering along on foot through the salt flats near the Gulf shore. The Expedition divided, reformed and divided again a number of times, with livestock and equipment discarded, and personnel appointed and dismissed along the way (see Appendix). At one stage the Expedition was split into five parties, with men and animals at Torowoto, Rat Point, Poria Creek, Cooper Creek and the Gulf.

The primary reason the Expedition divided into separate parties was that it was overloaded with provisions and equipment. While it was not unreasonable to expect that a large scientific expedition that planned to be in the field for two years would have a substantial amount of gear, because the equipment had been ordered by members of a sub-committee, there was no control over what was acquired. This was exacerbated by Burke's inexperience in exploration and the absence of a dedicated store-keeper. Although Burke did not burden himself with six tonnes of firewood or a bath-tub, as suggested by some authors, he did leave Royal Park with an excessive amount of equipment.

Furthermore, Burke did not know what provisions and equipment he had and he did not make an inventory until Swan Hill, whereupon he began abandoning equipment, leaving items at Swan Hill, Balranald, Tarcoola and Menindee. The unwanted equipment was not disposed of by means of impromptu auctions as has been suggested by some authors, but deposited with merchants for the EC to recover or resell.

The EC, with Burke's approval, planned on using a combination of pack-horses, camels and wagons to get the provisions and equipment to Cooper Creek, and from there the camels would presumably take precedence. The decision to take wagons was ill-advised. Wheeled vehicles had not generally been used for exploration since Sturt's and Mitchell's expeditions in the mid-1840s. Babbage took a cart and drays on his 1858 expedition, and they were immediately abandoned by Warburton when he went out to recall Babbage for his slow progress. The EC ordered three custom built vehicles: two 'American waggons' and one 'punt waggon', all of which were heavy and cumbersome and not at all like the light spring cart that Sturt had taken to the Stony Desert. Given that roads and formed tracks ended near Balranald, Burke was always going to have problems getting the wagons to Cooper Creek.

Prior to departure, the men did not attempt to pack the equipment to see if it would fit, but when they laid it out on display for inspection by the EC and Governor Barkly<sup>892</sup> it soon became clear that they would need more than three wagons, so Burke hired an additional two vehicles. Landells' refusal on the day of departure to allow the camels to be loaded only added to Burke's woes, and resulted in a third hired wagon.

These hired conveyances were expensive and placed a severe financial burden on the EC's funds. Burke's initial expectation of only using the hired wagons as far as Swan Hill was thwarted by Landells' continued resistance to loading the camels. The EC's insistence on economy placed Burke in a difficult position, which was not aided by his decision to follow soft sandy tracks across the mallee north of Balranald which slowed progress even further. By the time Burke reached the Darling the transport situation was untenable and he abandoned the wagons altogether.

Unfortunately Burke's woes did not end when he abandoned the wagons. Without wagons he was dependant on the camels and, up to this point, Burke had left them entirely under Landells' care. He therefore had little empathy for this new form of transport and little understanding of their abilities. When the female camels went missing at Bilbarka, Burke was so infuriated he considered leaving them behind, although how he proposed carrying the stores to the Cooper using just horses was not clear (this incident and the use of camels will be examined in greater detail in the next Chapter). Instead of dealing with the problem, Burke rode off to Menindee with a hand-picked crew, leaving Landells to deal with the camels.

This was not the first time Burke had addressed problems by abdicating responsibility to a subordinate and riding on ahead, and it would not be the last. At Prungle he became frustrated at the slow pace of the wagons and had left them behind and ridden on to the Darling, leaving the botanist, Beckler, in charge. Although Burke had a military background, having trained at the Woolwich Academy and served seven years in Prince Regent's 7<sup>th</sup> Reuss Regiment Hungarian Hussars where he reached the rank of 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant, he abdicated responsibility rather than delegating authority. Instead of formulating a plan and assigning responsibility for its execution to a subordinate, he became impatient and rode away, leaving the subordinates to sort out the problem for themselves.

At Menindee, he left the Supply Party behind without any clear indication of how the two parties would re-join. When Wright was appointed third-in-command at Torowoto, Burke sent him back to Menindee with vague instructions to bring the remainder of the party to the Cooper. Wright did not have the manpower, transport or finances to carry out Burke's orders, and it was left to Beckler and Hodgkinson to develop strategies to carry out Burke's wishes. By this stage of the Expedition, Burke seems to have been content just to make good progress for the first time and he was happy to be

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<sup>892</sup> *Argus*, 18 August 1860: 4.

beyond Menindee where he could fulfil the role of explorer. Much of the previous month had been dominated by conflict between himself and Landells, and, as the incident at Balranald when he decided to dismiss Ferguson shows, Burke's managerial and interpersonal skills were lacking.

Wright was censured at the Commission of Inquiry and apportioned much of the blame for Burke's death. However, even a brief summary of the Supply Party chronology shows that Wright made considerable efforts to get the Supply Party to the Cooper. In addition, Burke and Beckler considered him a good bushman with excellent navigational skills and good knowledge of the country north of Menindee. The difficulties encountered in travelling between Bulloo and the Wilson River were attested to by Brahe, who made four trips over the Grey Range, and Burke, who chose to head for Mount Hopeless rather than face the waterless Grey Range again.

The previous chapter highlighted how the EC's poor organisational skills resulted in the Expedition's aims being ambiguous and not well communicated. This chronology attests to their incompetence by showing that the VEE departed without official instructions, which did not reach the officers until they had been on the road for two weeks. In addition, Wills departed Melbourne without copies of Sturt's, Gregory's and Leichhardt's maps and journals. The maps had to be supplied from the private collection of a medical man in a provincial town in country Victoria.

The high turn-over of personnel added a degree of inefficiency and instability to the Expedition. Although most of the Expedition assistants had been appointed by Burke, almost a dozen men, two officers and the foreman resigned or were dismissed between Melbourne and Menindee. Any training they had received in Royal Park, and the experience they had gained handling camels, was lost. The importance of stability is attested to by the fact that six of the seven men Burke took to the Cooper had been with him since Melbourne. The sepoys' experience in handling camels was not exploited either, with two sepoys leaving the VEE before it departed Victoria, and only one sepoy being taken to the Cooper. The interactions between Burke and the sepoys is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Burke's attitude towards the scientific officers is also revealed in the chronology. In Victoria, Burke was content to let the three scientists undertake their investigations and they did not have additional camp duties to attend to. Once their progress slowed, Burke placed additional demands on them, particularly on Beckler who was placed in charge of the wagon party between Prungle and the Darling. However, Burke was kept in check by Neumayer who was accompanying the Expedition. Once Neumayer departed, Burke was no longer restrained. In fact, the same day that Neumayer departed, Burke told Becker and Beckler that they had to limit their scientific investigations, reduce the amount of baggage they had, work like the ordinary men and walk all the way to the Gulf. There may have been some merit for Burke to use Beckler in this way, as Beckler clearly had organisational

and management skills which would benefit the VEE. Becker, however, was a 52-year-old artist whom Burke pressured into working as a camel handler. Becker was on £300 a year, which was more than five times the amount the sepoy were paid. Burke was trying to keep costs to a minimum. Using Becker as an elderly, overpaid, unskilled camel wrangler made no sense and Burke's treatment of him was unnecessarily spiteful. Wills was not subject to the same constraints as Becker and Beckler. Burke realised that he could not get to the Gulf without Wills, and so Burke left him alone to carry out his duties as he saw fit. He did not assign any additional responsibilities or duties to Wills and did not interfere in any way with the manner in which he navigated or carried out his observations, even when those observations were superfluous to the Expedition's aims. These issues are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. Some authors have claimed that Burke was opposed to science, when in fact it appears he was only opposed to undertaking scientific observations that did not directly contribute to his primary aim of getting to the Gulf.

The suggestion that the Expedition was an inter-colonial race has also been shown to be a fallacy. Burke did not set out with the expectation that he would beat Stuart to the north coast. However, when he received news that Stuart had been unsuccessful in his latest attempt, Burke realised he had a chance of being first. Burke had always planned a rapid trip from the Cooper to the Gulf, as evidenced by Wills' letter from Balranald. Now he had additional incentive. In addition, the chronology shows that Burke did not reach the Cooper on 11 November 1860, and when he did arrive at the Cooper, he immediately set out on reconnaissance missions to find a path to the north. When these missions failed to find water, Burke set out for Eyre Creek. The decision to dash to the Gulf was not made on the spur of the moment, nor was it a result of impatience from lingering on the Cooper.

The next three chapters will look in more detail at aspects of the Expedition's journeys, in particular the way the VEE used their camels, interacted with Aboriginal people, and how they were influenced by the landscape.



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# 5

## BURKE & WILLS AND CAMELS



### CONTENTS

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5.1	Introduction	245
5.2	The introduction of camels into Australia	248
5.3	The arrival of the first camels into Australia	252
5.4	Camels for Victoria	255
5.5	Purchasing Victoria's camels	261
5.6	Camels in Melbourne	270
5.7	Putting the camels to work	275
5.8	The fate of the camels that survived the Expedition	300
5.9	Sepoy Camel Handlers	306
5.10	Conclusion	310

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*Burke and Wills and Camels,  
Initials in the Tree.*

Australian Crawl, 'Reckless' [song lyrics] from the EP *Semantics*.  
© James Reyne, EMI Records, Sydney, 1983.

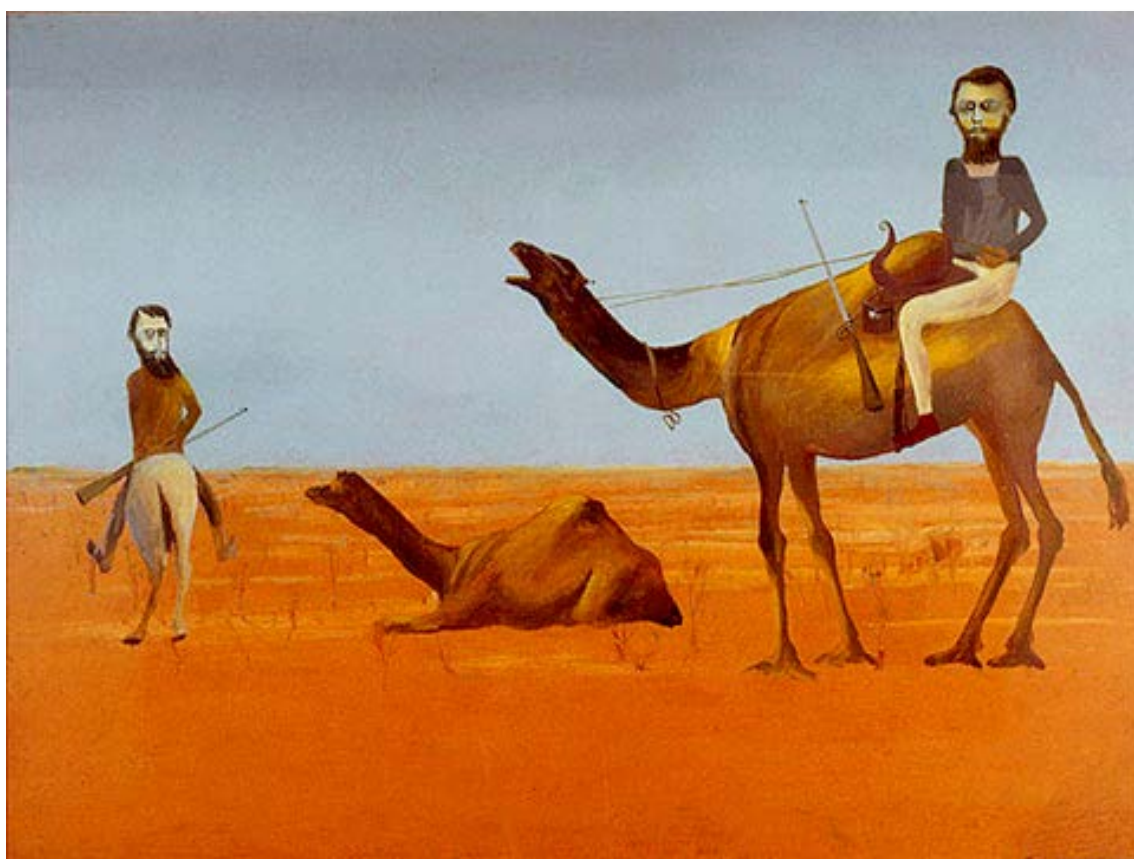


Figure 98: Sidney Nolan, 'Burke and Wills expedition', 1948.  
Object 75-A-21, © The Nolan Collection, Canberra Museum and Gallery.

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## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the acquisition of camels for the Expedition and the role they played. It is well-known that the VEE was the first-time camels had been used extensively on an Australian expedition, but most interest and criticism has focussed on the personality clashes between Burke and Landells, and Burke's subsequent decision to take the camels into the Tropics during the wet season. Although Bergin investigated the time of year and the speed at which Burke travelled,<sup>893</sup> the manner in which Burke used the animals, and the route he took have not been analysed. Consequently, this chapter analyses the use of camels on the VEE and argues that the method Burke adopted in deploying the animals was the single biggest influence on the way the latter part of the Expedition progressed.

The Expedition was innovative, because camels allowed Burke to explore in a unique manner. By using them as pack-animals to carry a large supply of water, Burke was able to divest himself of the need to find water each day and this gave him the opportunity to travel fast and be independent of water courses. In addition, because he did not need Aboriginal guides to find water, he could take the most direct route to the Gulf. Burke based his assessment of the camels' stamina on popular but inaccurate accounts of their capabilities, and this meant most of the animals he took to the Gulf would not survive the return journey. Consequently, once back at the Cooper Burke was left without any pack-animals with which to reach safety. If Burke had relied solely on horses for the trip, he could not have contemplated trying to make the journey from the Cooper Creek in summer in just six weeks and would not have placed himself in the perilous position he found himself in.

Prior to 1860, only twelve camels had been imported into Australia, and only one camel had been taken into the arid interior, so the Expedition's use of camels was experimental and unique in the methodology of Australian exploration. While there are many paintings showing Burke proudly mounted atop a dromedary, Burke rarely rode camels – he was an accomplished horseman<sup>894</sup> and, almost to the last, he preferred his traditional form of travel to the new imports.<sup>895</sup> Initially Burke had a difficult relationship with the camels and an even more troubled relationship with their importer, Landells. It was only after Landells' departure that the camels proved their superiority over the horses, and Burke started to realise their potential. Subsequently, he relied on camels almost exclusively for his swift journey from Cooper Creek to the Gulf. Nevertheless, even though camels

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<sup>893</sup> Bergin, *In the steps*.

<sup>894</sup> "Mr. Burke is ... a perfect centaur as to horsemanship" 'The Leader of the Exploring Expedition', *Mount Alexander Mail*, 22 June 1860: 5; "I have seen him for no explicable purpose, ride full gallop through a forest, jumping every obstacle and fallen tree in his path ... with the same *sangfroid* as he would canter on the main roads" 'The Contributor: Personal Reminiscences and Adventures, by an Ex-Official: No. XII. O'Hara Burke, The Explorer, Eccentricities, Burke's brother, Burke's death', *Leader*, 18 June 1887: 6S.

<sup>895</sup> *Leader*, 18 June 1887: 6S; Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 1006 to King.

represented a technological advance, they were only used as pack-animals and the men were rarely permitted to ride. Bonyhady noted this and remarked of Burke, "No other Australian explorer so lightly dismissed his animals or was so willing to walk".<sup>896</sup>

Analysis of the level of experience and understanding of camels as expeditionary transport at the time of the Expedition's departure shows there is confusion about the arrival and use of the first camels in Australia. Despite several authors having written about early importations, their accounts are incomplete and contradictory. McCarthy acknowledges that "some of the facts associated with each shipment have become distorted and intermingled over the years".<sup>897</sup> Therefore this chapter begins by looking at the debate about importing camels and identifies the first three shipments of camels into Australia in the early 1840s. It also shows that the first feral camels were roaming around Australia in the late 1840s, predating the arrival of Burke's camels by more than a decade.

The chapter then examines the debate about bringing camels to Victoria. Again there is confusion in published literature about why the colony acquired camels from India. It has been claimed that the camels were imported specifically for the Expedition<sup>898</sup> and that they were imported by, variously, the Victorian Government,<sup>899</sup> the EC,<sup>900</sup> the RSV,<sup>901</sup> or the RGS.<sup>902</sup> There is even Manning Clark's curious claim that Burke sent Landells to India to purchase camels.<sup>903</sup> This chapter shows the debate about camels ran concurrently, but separately, to the EC's debates about establishing a Victorian expedition and camels did not play a part in the EC's original plans.

The manner in which the camels were purchased is also examined. While there is widespread agreement among historians that Landells went to India to purchase camels, there is no consensus on how many camels he purchased or what he purchased. The camels, supposedly numbering from 20 to 27, are said to have been "Arabian camels from India",<sup>904</sup> or to have come from Pakistan,<sup>905</sup>

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<sup>896</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 124.

<sup>897</sup> Patrick H McCarthy, 'The importation of the one-humped camel into Australia during 1840-1', in *Australian Veterinary Journal*, Vol. 56, November (1980): 547-551.

<sup>898</sup> John Bailey, *Mr. Stuart's track: the forgotten life of Australia's greatest explorer* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2006), 173.

<sup>899</sup> Ian M. Parsonson, *Australian Ark: A History of Domesticated Animals in Australia* (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2000), 139.

<sup>900</sup> Stevens, *Tin mosques*, 14.

<sup>901</sup> Jones and Kenny, *Muslim cameleers*, 35.

<sup>902</sup> Stevens, *Tin mosques*, 30.

<sup>903</sup> Charles Manning Hope Clark, *Manning Clark's History of Australia* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1997), 285.

<sup>904</sup> Jennifer Speake, *Literature of Travel and Exploration: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2003), Vol. 1, A-F: 171.

<sup>905</sup> Michael J. Cigler, *The Afghans in Australia* (Melbourne: A.E. Press, 1986), 7.

“Pakistan and India”,<sup>906</sup> Lahore,<sup>907</sup> Peshawar,<sup>908</sup> “Peshawar and Karachi”,<sup>909</sup> or “Peshawar and tribal Afghanistan”.<sup>910</sup> This uncertainty makes it difficult to identify the camels’ breeds in order to determine their suitability for travel in Australia’s deserts. Examination of government records shows the remarkable effort undertaken by Landells to secure suitable animals and identifies Rajasthan and Baluchistan as the places where the camels were purchased. There is also a discussion about a shipment of Egyptian camels that arrived in Melbourne in 1859 with two Arab handlers, which shows that Melburnians paid these animals little attention until they were selected to be part of the Expedition.

The main focus of the chapter, as mentioned above, is the role of the camels on the Expedition and Burke’s relationship with them. It also looks at the conflict between Burke and Landells over the best way to handle the animals and how Burke managed them after Landells’ resignation. The chapter continues with an investigation into the fate of the camels after the Expedition, and suggests how they may have become part of today’s feral camel herd. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion about the sepoy camel handlers and how Burke marginalised their role on the Expedition.

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<sup>906</sup> James Jupp, *The Australian people: an encyclopedia of the nation, its people and their origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 164

<sup>907</sup> Diedre G. Hawkins, *In search of Hannah* (Whittlesea: D. Hawkins, 2012), Chapter 68.

<sup>908</sup> Favenc, *Australian exploration*, Chapter 9; Rajkowski, *In the tracks of the camel men*, 8; Dane Kennedy, *The Last Blank Spaces: Exploring Africa and Australia* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 143.

<sup>909</sup> Jones and Kenny, *Muslim cameleers*, 35.

<sup>910</sup> Stevens, *Tin mosques*, 14-15.



## 5.2 The introduction of camels into Australia

*Why then, attempt to find our way across  
a desert except on a desert-ship – the gift  
of Heaven for that undertaking?*

Dr. Thomas Embling, M.L.A. for Collingwood.  
'The Camel', Letter to the Editor, *Argus*, 31 August 1858: 5.

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Before the introduction of camels into Australia, colonists used horses, donkeys, bullocks, oxen and goats for transport and burden, animals with which they had experience and were familiar with. By the 1830s a combination of factors resulted in camels being considered as a new form of transport: inland exploration was entering increasingly arid country which was less suitable for horses and cattle; men who had experience of working with camels, either with the British army in India or with the East India Company, were arriving in Australia; and from 1833 a regular livestock trade with India was established when horses were sent to the sub-continent. Camels were proposed as a way of exploring the deserts, and also as a means of transporting the wool clip. These proposals were given greater prominence with the increasing popularity of zoological societies and the acclimatisation movement. Colonists' attitudes towards camels were influenced by previous importation and use of camels in other countries, particularly France, Mauritius and the American west.

The first suggestions for the use of camels in Australia originated overseas. The proposals were elaborately conceived and presented in great detail, but as the proponents had never been to Australia, their ideas were hopelessly impractical.<sup>911</sup> Lieutenant Thomas J. Maslen of the East India Company thought if camels could be shipped to Fort Wellington,<sup>912</sup> they could then travel overland to King George Sound.<sup>913</sup> Even though Maslen had not visited Australia and had no idea of the nature of the terrain the camels would have to face, he asserted if they travelled for 15 hours a day, with no rest days, it would only take 90 days to make the arduous journey. His proposal, he assured his readers,

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<sup>911</sup> Thomas J. Maslen, *A Friend of Australia (or A plan for exploring the interior and for carrying on a survey of the whole continent of Australia by a retired officer of the Honorable East India Company's service)* (London: Hurst, Chance & Co., 1830), Chapter XII: On the introduction of camels and elephants into Australia: 214.

<sup>912</sup> Fort Wellington was a British Settlement at Raffles Bay on the Coburg Peninsula, Northern Territory, occupied from 1827 to 1829.

<sup>913</sup> Fort Wellington to King George's Sound (today's Albany in Western Australia) is a straight line distance of just over 3,000 kilometres. According to Maslen, camels could cover this distance in three months, averaging 35 kilometres a day with no days off.



Figure 99: Charles Joseph Hullmandel, 'The expedition in a desert in Australia', 1830.  
Thomas J. Maslen, *A Friend of Australia; or a plan for exploring the interior and for carrying on a survey of the whole continent of Australia* (London: Hurst, Chance & Co., 1830), Plate 3.  
PIC Drawer 5041 #U4675 NK484, National Library of Australia.

"A train of camels passes through a defile of rocky hills. Each camel is laden with a pair of Persian chairs similar in shape to a sedan, but made of bamboo and rattan for lightness. Such were the vehicles in which the Monarchs of Persia used to convey their female beauties when marching with the army; and providing an exploring party could be supplied with camels, I do not see why the same kind of machines would not serve the gentlemen to ride in."

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was "a practical scheme, and not a vain theory".<sup>914</sup> At the same time, James Ballantine approached the Colonial Office<sup>915</sup> with an even bolder scheme, offering to cross the continent from the west coast to New South Wales with just two camels.<sup>916</sup> Governor Darling condemned the scheme as impossibly hazardous.<sup>917</sup>

The first time the importation of camels was debated within Australia was in 1835 when reports reached Hobart that the French were proposing to import dromedaries from Algiers into the mountainous country around Toulouse.<sup>918</sup> It was suggested the camels would also be suitable for introduction into Australia, but rather than proposing they be used for the exploration of deserts, it was suggested they be used as pack-animals in the hilly country of Van Diemen's Land.<sup>919</sup> This initial suggestion was followed by a protracted debate in Australia on the advantages of the camel. Although

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<sup>914</sup> Maslen, *Friend of Australia*, ix.

<sup>915</sup> Ballantine made his proposal early in 1827 according to Langley and in May 1828 according to Cumpston: Langley, *Sturt of the Murray*, 67; John Howard Lidgett Cumpston, *Charles Sturt: His life and journeys of exploration* (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1951), 24.

<sup>916</sup> Ballantine's journey, from the coast of Western Australia at a latitude of 20°S to Bathurst would have been a journey of 3,500 kilometres.

<sup>917</sup> Alan Edwin Day, *Historical dictionary of the discovery and exploration of Australia* (Lanham, MD.: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 10.

<sup>918</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 16 January 1835: 2; *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 31 March 1835: 2, reporting an article in Ross's *Hobart Town Almanack and Van Diemen's Land Annual*.

<sup>919</sup> *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 31 March 1835: 2.

colonists quickly came to realise that camels would be suitable for exploration and transport in arid areas, it was a long time before any positive action was taken towards acquiring any animals. The following year, the New South Wales government held an inquiry into the practicability of obtaining camels from India along with 'Afghan' handlers.<sup>920</sup> Although Governor Bourke was interested in the recommendation and asked for further details, the report was never presented to the Legislative Council.<sup>921</sup> In 1840 South Australia also considered importing camels, with Governor Gawler proposing four camels be purchased from the Canary Isles<sup>922</sup> to assist Eyre on his second expedition into the arid north of South Australia.<sup>923</sup>

Experienced explorers also believed camels would be beneficial for exploration. Maritime explorer Captain Stokes recommended getting camels from the Gulf of Kutch in Gujarat Province in India, where they could be purchased for just £5 each, and he also thought it would be easier to get Indian camel handlers to come to Australia rather than Arabs.<sup>924</sup> While investigating the Plains of Promise at the head of the Albert River in 1841, he wrote:

What an admirable point of departure for exploring the interior! A few camels, with skins for conveying water, would be the means of effecting this great end in a very short time. In one month these ships of the desert ... might accomplish ... that which has been attempted in vain.<sup>925</sup>

Later, when compiling his journal, he added "In the whole continent there exists no point of departure to be compared with the head of the Albert", a point which the EC noted when directing the VEE to the Gulf.<sup>926</sup> Veteran South Australian explorer, Sturt, writing about his 1844-1845 expedition also spoke favourably of the potential use of camels in the arid interior:

That it was altogether impracticable for wheeled carriages of any kind, may readily be conceived from my description; and in the state in which I found it, horses were evidently unequal to the task. I cannot help thinking that camels might have done better; not only for their indurance, but because they carry more than a horse. I should, undoubtedly, have been led to try those animals if I could have procured them; but that was impossible.<sup>927</sup>

Although all three eastern colonies agreed that importing camels would be an advantageous move, no positive action was taken towards acquiring any beasts.

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<sup>920</sup> The term 'Afghan' became the generic term used by Europeans from the late-1860s to describe Asian camel handlers. In the 1840s and 1850s, 'Afghan' referred to a person from the Middle East who was not an Arab. When camel-handlers arrived with Landells in 1860 they were called a number of different names, but were rarely called Afghans, see Chapter 5.9, pages 308 to 308.

<sup>921</sup> McKnight, *The camel in Australia*, 16-17, referring to a memorandum presented to Governor Bourke., 2 February 1837, NSW Archive 37/1255.

<sup>922</sup> McKnight, *The camel in Australia*, 17.

<sup>923</sup> South Australian Company, 'Despatches from Governor Gawler to the Colonization Commissioners, 1839-1840', GRG 48/4, Appendix A, 13 August 1840: 244-245, South Australian Company records, 1835-1949, BRG 42, State Library of South Australia; Stevens, *Tin mosques*: 14.

<sup>924</sup> Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia*, Vol. 2: 416.

<sup>925</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>926</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>927</sup> Sturt, *Narrative of an expedition*, Vol. 2: 123.

### 5.3 The arrival of the first camels into Australia

Despite the various discussions by colonial Governments, but possibly encouraged by them, the first acquisitions of camels were by private individuals. In September 1839 the *Sydney Herald* reported on an “enterprising colonist who had sent for camels by way of experiment”.<sup>928</sup> Subsequently, three shipments of camels arrived in Australia in close succession. The Phillips brothers<sup>929</sup> bought a number of camels<sup>930</sup> at Tenerife in the Canary Islands and the sole survivor, a beast named ‘Harry’, became the first camel in Australia when he landed at Port Adelaide on 12 October 1840.<sup>931</sup> The second importation occurred two months later when John Thomas arranged for a male and a female camel to be landed in Hobart.<sup>932</sup> Six months later, a third shipment arrived when Captain John Martin Ardlie landed two female camels in Sydney.<sup>933</sup> Ardlie’s camels, along with an additional male camel who was imported shortly afterwards, were eventually purchased by the New South Wales government. In 1846, Leichhardt contemplated using these camels for his proposed expedition across Australia.<sup>934</sup>

These early importations were organised and financed by speculators who hoped to profit by selling the camels to explorers or colonial governments. However, there was little interest in the animals beyond their novelty value and these camels faded into obscurity and spent the rest of their days founding a feral herd at Twofold Bay in the New South Wales south coast.<sup>935</sup>

<sup>928</sup> *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 3 October 1839: 2.

<sup>929</sup> Henry Weston Phillips (1818-1898), George Phillips (1820-1900) and G.M. Phillips.

<sup>930</sup> There are conflicting reports about the number of camels the Phillips brothers purchased in Tenerife and loaded aboard the S.S. *Apolline*: “three camels” *Advertiser*, 1 January 1932: 10; “four camels” Cigler, *The Afghans in Australia*: 6; “six camels” *Adelaide Chronicle and South Australian Literary Record*, 14 October 1840: 4; “nine camels” McKnight, *The camel in Australia*: 136.

<sup>931</sup> George Henry Pitt, ‘First importation of camels’, Research note No. 202 (1939), GRG 56/79, State Library of South Australia; Stevens, *Tin mosques*, 344; *Adelaide Chronicle and South Australian Literary Record*, 14 October 1840: 4; *South Australian Register*, 24 October 1840: 2, 19 February 1845: 3.

<sup>932</sup> Two camels were landed in Hobart on 10 or 15 December 1840 from the S.S. *Calcutta*, Patrick H. McCarthy, ‘The importation of the one-humped camel into Australia during 1840-1’, *Australian Veterinary Journal*, Vol. 56 November (1980): 547-551; *Colonial Times*, 15 December 1840; *Hobart Town Advertiser*, 11 December 1840; *Port Phillip Gazette*, 23 December 1840; *Sydney Herald*, 8 May 1841.

<sup>933</sup> Captain John Martin Ardlie acquired three camels from the Imam of Muscat, His Highness Sultan Said Saeed bin Sultan. The camels were taken from Oman to Mauritius and then shipped to Australia on the brig *Eleanor*. *Argus*, 7 September 1858: 6; *Port Phillip Gazette*, 18 August 1841; *Sydney Herald*, 11 May 1841; *Sydney Monitor and Commercial Advertiser*, 7 May 1841, 10 May 1841.

<sup>934</sup> Catherine Drummond Cotton, *Ludwig Leichhardt and the great south land* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1938), 250-254; *Argus*, 7 September 1858: 6.

<sup>935</sup> *Melbourne Argus*, 24 July 1846: 2, 19 August 1858: 2, 14 February 1862: 5, 20 February 1862: 5, 27 February 1862: 4, 18 January 1876: 5; *Port Phillip Gazette*, 7 September 1841; *South Australian Advertiser*, 25 August 1858: 2, 17 September 1858: 3; *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 25 August 1842; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 August 1842.



Figure 100: George Edwards Peacock, 'View of old Government House, Sydney, N.S.W.; as it appeared when vacated by Sir George Gipps in 1845', 1845. a128029, ML 658, State Library of New South Wales.

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Harry, meanwhile, went on to fame and infamy. John Ainsworth Horrocks was planning to search for agricultural land around Lake Torrens and thought Harry would be ideally suited to travel in this arid environment and so, on 29 July 1846, Harry became the first camel to be used on an exploring expedition in Australia.<sup>936</sup> Unfortunately Harry was not the best example of his breed and caused problems with the men and livestock. However, he is remembered mainly for his involvement in the firearms incident which ultimately cost Horrocks his life. The camel lurched while Horrocks was loading his fowling-piece and the subsequent discharge removed two of Horrocks' fingers and a row of teeth and he died of complications three weeks later.<sup>937</sup> The story of the explorer who was 'shot by his camel' is today related as a quirky anecdote. At the time, however, the press considered Harry's contribution to have been useful. The route north to Lake Torrens was said to have been tested "by the best of all means of traversing the inland steppes of Australia - by a camel"<sup>938</sup> and, more importantly, it was noted camels could carry:

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<sup>936</sup> John Ainsworth Horrocks (1818-1846) was born in England and arrived in South Australia in 1839. In March 1841 Phillips advertised the camel for sale, noting it was "a fine young camel (with saddle, etc.) in excellent condition, recently imported from Teneriffe". Horrocks exchanged six cows worth £15 each for Harry. Geoffrey H. Manning, *Manning Index of South Australian History* (Adelaide: State Library of South Australia, 2005) reporting the *Southern Australian*, 2 March 1841: 2; *South Australian Register*, 19 February 1845: 3. Day is wrong when he claims that Horrocks imported the camel and that Harry came from Karachi, Day, *Historical dictionary of the discovery and exploration of Australia*, 106.

<sup>937</sup> Sasha Grishin, *S.T. Gill & his audiences* (Canberra: National Library of Australia Publishing in Association with the State Library of Victoria, 2015), 48-57; Celia Temple, 'Biography and diary of John Ainsworth Horrocks.', PRG 966/5, State Library of South Australia; John Ainsworth Horrocks, 'Letter dated Depot Creek, 8 September 1846', PRG 966/6, Horrocks (family) records 1840-1873, State Library of South Australia; J. A. Horrocks *Northern expedition 1846* [map] (Adelaide: A. Vaughan, Government Photolithographer, 1920), zmp 354446, State Library of South Australia.

<sup>938</sup> *Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser*, 11 July 1846: 3.



Figure 101: Samuel Thomas Gill, 'Travelling through the brush and sandridges, August 30', 1846.  
Watercolour 0.1126, Art Gallery of South Australia.

Colonial artist S.T. Gill, who later painted and sketched the VEE, went with Horrocks as the expedition's (unpaid) draftsman. He made many pencil sketches and watercolours, several of which are significant as they show a camel being used on an inland expedition for the first time.

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from seven to eight hundred pounds weight ... they last out several generations of mules ... the price paid for them does not exceed one half of that paid for mules ... and it is proved that these 'ships of the deserts' of Arabia are equally adaptable to our climate.<sup>939</sup>

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<sup>939</sup> *Melbourne Argus*, 24 January 1846: 2; *South Australian Register*, 15 July 1846: 3.

## 5.4 Camels for Victoria

In the 1840s the debate on the introduction of camels was dominated by New South Wales and Tasmania. In the 1850s the focus of the debate shifted and it was colonial rivals Victoria and South Australia that led the discussion. In Adelaide, the founders of the 'Camel Troop Carrying Company' petitioned the House of Assembly for £1,200 to purchase 60 camels.<sup>940</sup> Meanwhile in Melbourne, Embling<sup>941</sup> was badgering the Legislative Assembly to embrace acclimatisation and establish a Zoological Society to import the finest "tosay heirie" camels,<sup>942</sup> and alpacas.<sup>943</sup> While the *Argus* supported Embling's "worthy efforts" with regards to the economic benefits alpacas would bring to wool production in the colony, they were not as generous towards the importation of camels, claiming Embling did not "limit his views by the circumscribed policy of the practical school" and they suggested he:

indulges in comprehensive suggestions, and sets before us an enchanting picture of that 'glorious future' which patriots delight to contemplate according to the enthusiasm of their respective temperaments within their reach. By the importation of camels, we are to traverse the Australian deserts in a few days, and thus connect the gulf of Carpentaria with the Victoria River, North Australia, and the older colonies of the south. Such is the delightful picture presented to our imagination by Dr Embling.<sup>944</sup>

The PIV also discussed the subject in 1856 when Becker proposed:

that this Institute takes into consideration the utility and practicability of the introduction of the camel and other useful animals to the Australian colonies.<sup>945</sup>

At this stage, Wilkie had not made his exploration proposal, so the discussions were about importing animals for acclimatisation purposes rather than for use in desert exploration. The PIV appointed a sub-committee to investigate the practicability of introducing the camel,<sup>946</sup> but interest was limited,

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<sup>940</sup> Camel Troop Carrying Company, *Petition of Camel Troop Carrying Company*, South Australia. Parliament, Parliamentary Paper No. 86/1858 (Adelaide: W.C. Cox, Government Printer, 1858); *South Australian Advertiser*, 13 October 1858: 2.

<sup>941</sup> Embling was M.L.C. for North Bourke from September 1855 to March 1856 and M.L.A. for Collingwood from November 1856 to July 1861 and from February 1866 to December 1867.

<sup>942</sup> Embling's "tosay heirie" is "Tōsāy Mehari" (Arabic = توشى مهاري) meaning 'desert' or 'dune' riding-camel of the 'El Heiri' breed (or Maherry, Mahri, Mahari). Thomas Embling, 'The Contemplated Zoological Society for Australia', *Argus*, 28 March 1856 (original missing, see: *Moreton Bay Courier*, 12 April 1856: 4).

<sup>943</sup> Thomas Embling, 'The Contemplated Zoological Society for Australia'. See also: *Argus*, 18 March 1856: 4, 20 March 1856: 5, 1 April 1856: 4, 25 April 1856: 5; Victoria. Parliament, *Victorian Hansard* (1856-1857) Vol. 1: 137, (1856-1857) Vol. 2: 747-748, (1857-1858) Vol. 3: 481.

<sup>944</sup> *Argus*, 1 April 1856: 4.

<sup>945</sup> Philosophical Institute of Victoria, *Transactions of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria: From August 1855 to December 1856 Inclusive. Edited for the Council of the Institute by John Macadam MD, Hon Sec.*, Vol. 1 (Melbourne: The Institute, 1857): xxv; *Age*, 16 April 1856: 3; *Argus*, 16 April 1856: 5.

<sup>946</sup> Philosophical Institute of Victoria, *Transactions*, Vol. 1: xxv; Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes 14 April 1856', Philosophical Institute of Victoria meetings, 28 June 1855-16 February 1888, Minute Books, Vol. 1c, MS 11663, State Library of Victoria; *Argus*, 16 April 1856: 5. The sub-committee comprised of McCoy, William Parkinson Wilson, Iffla, Becker, Clement Hodgkinson and Robert Brough Smyth.





Figure 102: 'Dr Embling in Arcadia', 1856.  
*Melbourne Punch*, 27 March 1856: 2.

*Melbourne Punch*'s satirical representation of Thomas Embling, with a flock of alpacas, in the mythical pastoral paradise of Arcadia, home of Pan, the Greek god of shepherds, flocks and rustic music.

the sub-committee failed to report back on the matter, and Embling and Becker's enthusiastic promotion of the camel ended.<sup>947</sup>

When the PIV began discussing Wilkie's exploration proposal at the end of the following year, camels were not mentioned. Mueller even advised against their use, claiming that as most of the interior was stony rather than sandy, horses were a better option.<sup>948</sup> Mueller was not against the idea of importing camels into Victoria – he supported acclimatisation and wanted camels for the new Botanical Gardens – but his recent experience using pack-horses on A.C. Gregory's 'NAE' meant he preferred horses as the tried and trusted transport option for inland exploration.<sup>949</sup>

When Gregory's 'LSE' arrived in Adelaide in July 1858, the expedition's susceptibility to drought and their inability to penetrate the desert was raised in a letter widely believed to have been written by Embling. The writer questioned why Gregory had been "a-pleasuring down a water-course ... in South Australia, where he had no business" and then stated that had the explorer found traces of Leichhardt, he would have "turned aside because he feared to perish in the lone desert beyond him".<sup>950</sup> Whereas:

had Mr Gregory been fitted out with dromedaries in lieu of horses, he would have laughed at 500 miles of desert sand.<sup>951</sup>

<sup>947</sup> Linden Gillbank, 'A tale of two animals: alpaca and camel: zoological shaping of Mueller's Botanic Gardens', *Victorian Historical Journal*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (1996): 83-102. Gillbank describes this sub-committee as "apparently comatose". There is no record that the sub-committee ever reported back and it appears that they considered such a wide range of animals for acclimatisation that when they finally managed to concentrate on one species, the alpaca, it had already been imported into South Australia.

<sup>948</sup> Mueller, 'Review of exploration'; Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports*, 'First Progress Report, 22 December 1857'; Philosophical Institute of Victoria, *Transactions*, Vol. 2: xxii.

<sup>949</sup> *Age*, 26 November 1857: 5.

<sup>950</sup> Letter to the editor signed 'HOMO', 'Leichhardt, Mr Gregory and the dromedary', *Argus*, 27 July 1858: 5.

<sup>951</sup> *Ibid.*

At the formal reception in Adelaide, Governor MacDonnell complimented Gregory on the rapid pace at which he had made the 2,000-mile journey from Moreton Bay, but he feared "without the ship of the desert ... they would not be able to penetrate [further in] to that desert" which had repelled Sturt.<sup>952</sup> Subsequent letters and newspaper editorials reinforced the idea that the interior was inaccessible using current methods:

It is now quite evident that no expedition can be properly constituted without being supplied with a number of camels or dromedaries.<sup>953</sup>

The exploration of the interior seems a hopeless chimera so long as we place our dependence on the horse and the bullock, [but] a practicable, and probably an easy achievement, if we employ the dromedary or camel.<sup>954</sup>

The speed and ease with which Gregory crossed from Moreton Bay to Adelaide added to the frustration felt in South Australia at the ponderous progress of their own expedition to the western side of Lake Torrens under Babbage,<sup>955</sup> who had been out since February<sup>956</sup> and was still only 250 miles north of Adelaide. Gregory's arrival precipitated the South Australian legislature to recall Babbage<sup>957</sup> and it was suggested that, rather than continue the expedition under Warburton's leadership, it would be better to wait and send a camel expedition instead.<sup>958</sup> Even Gregory had a slight change of heart and suggested to the PIV:

If a few camels could be procured, they would, I think, prove invaluable, though the public seems to put too much confidence in the results, over-rating their powers of endurance, &c. They should not be overworked by carrying heavy loads, but reserved for reconnoitring the country before bringing up the main party.<sup>959</sup>

By August 1858, camels were "exciting great attention in Victoria" after the O'Shanassy Ministry announced they were considering placing money on the estimates to import camels into Melbourne.<sup>960</sup> Embling had ignored the ridicule of his peers and continued to vigorously defend the virtues of the camel in Parliament and the press. Although his earlier plans stressed the economic benefits of alpaca fleeces, now that Kyte's £1,000 offer had roused interest in desert exploration,

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<sup>952</sup> *South Australian Advertiser*, 11 August 1858: 4-5. MacDonnell wrote to Sturt on 10 August 1858 expressing the need to equip explorers with camels, see: Mrs. Napier George Sturt, *Life of Charles Sturt sometime Capt. 39th Regt and Australian explorer* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1899), 325.

<sup>953</sup> *Argus*, 5 August 1858: 4-5. See similar statements in the *South Australian Advertiser*, 13 August 1858: 2.

<sup>954</sup> *Argus*, 19 August 1858: 4.

<sup>955</sup> 'The Northern Expedition', *South Australian Advertiser*, 29 July 1858: 3.

<sup>956</sup> 'Exploration of the Interior', *South Australian Register*, 10 February 1858: 3; 'The Northern Exploration', *South Australian Register*, 13 February 1858: 2; 'Farewell Breakfast to Mr. Babbage', *South Australian Register*, 18 February 1858: 2.

<sup>957</sup> 'Exploration', *South Australian Weekly Chronicle*, 14 August 1858: 5; 'X.—Progress of Exploration', *South Australian Advertiser*, 11 September 1858: 5; South Australia: Parliament, *Northern Explorations: Reports from Messrs. Babbage and Warburton and police-trooper Burtt, on exploration into the north and north-western interior of South Australia*. Parliamentary Paper 151 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1858).

<sup>958</sup> 'The Camel Question', *South Australian Register*, 30 August 1858: 3; *South Australian Advertiser*, 4 September 1858: 2.

<sup>959</sup> Philosophical Institute of Victoria, *Transactions*, Vol. 4: vi-ix. 'Letter from A.C. Gregory to Mueller, dated Sydney, 31 December 1858'.

<sup>960</sup> *South Australian Advertiser*, 4 September 1858: 2.

Embling changed his focus and used the EFC's public meetings to highlight the importance of the camel for exploration. He reminded colonists of the recent successful importation of camels into Texas<sup>961</sup> and chastised them for their refusal to adopt new ideas and new technology, claiming:

all we need to do is leave in Europe that curse of our race - namely, doing only as our fathers have done, from wearing a black hat and black woollen garments, to trying to travel a desert with a horse.<sup>962</sup>

It is worthwhile noting that the government expected the imported camels would form a breeding stud for acclimatisation purposes, and they listed the animals as stock for the Botanic and Zoological Gardens.<sup>963</sup> There was no intention at this stage that the camels would be given to the PIV for exclusive use on their Expedition. The two debates – one on the importation of camels and the other on organising an expedition – ran separately and concurrently and the EFC considered their primary duty was raising funds, with the chairman, Stawell, noting:

it was quite apart from the object of that meeting to discuss the details of the expedition – whether camels should be used or not.<sup>964</sup>

Although Mueller retracted his earlier objection to the use of camels and hinted that “perhaps the plans for the exploration and for the introduction of the camels might to a certain extent be combined”,<sup>965</sup> Stawell reminded them:

As yet they only knew that Government had determined to obtain the camels. It might, or might not, be their intention to place some of them at the disposal of the Exploration Committee on their arrival.<sup>966</sup>

This is contrary to many later interpretations which claim the government sent for the camels specifically for the Expedition.<sup>967</sup> Murgatroyd even claims it was the RSV themselves who sent for the camels.<sup>968</sup> It was much later towards the end of 1859, before the two debates became intertwined and camels became an integral part of the PIV's Expedition plans.

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<sup>961</sup> In 1855 the United States Congress appropriated \$30,000 for the formation of the 'United States Camel Corps'. The U.S.S. *Supply* purchased 33 camels from Tunis, Cairo and Smyrna, and the animals were landed at Indianola, Texas in 1856 along with five camel drivers (three Arabs and two Turks). A further 41 camels arrived the following year.

<sup>962</sup> Thomas Embling, 'The alpaca and the camel', *Argus*, 30 March 1858: 6.

<sup>963</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 21.

<sup>964</sup> *Argus*, 1 September 1858: 5.

<sup>965</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>966</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>967</sup> For examples of claims the camels were imported specifically for the Burke and Wills expedition, see: James Jupp, *The Australian people: an encyclopedia of the nation, its people and their origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 164; John Clark and Margaret Dent, *Bridging the distance* [exhibition catalogue], (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2008): 32; Ian M. Parsonson, *The Australian ark: a history of domesticated animals in Australia* (Collingwood: CSIRO, 1998), 139; Charles Wooley, 'A Glorious Disaster' *60 Minutes* (Sydney: Channel 9, 2 September 2010). Transcript at [sixtyminutes.ninemsn.com.au/stories/7955115/burke-wills](http://sixtyminutes.ninemsn.com.au/stories/7955115/burke-wills)

<sup>968</sup> Murgatroyd, *Dig Tree* (2012), 82.



Figure 103: Grouzelle & Co., 'Dr. Embling', 1856.  
*Pioneers of the Eight Hours Movement*, H27998, State Library of Victoria.

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Embling, nevertheless, continued to push his agenda.<sup>969</sup> Nine camels, he said, would be sufficient to outfit a party of seven men who could cross the interior desert in a month. Embling's enthusiasm to demonstrate how easily camels could cross the desert led him to make various claims about the speed and distance which they would travel.<sup>970</sup> He stated that in Arabia and North Africa camels could "easily travel fifty miles a day" and he boasted that animals of the Heiri herd<sup>971</sup> would cover 700 miles in eight days.<sup>972</sup> He was sure there could be no more than 500 miles of desert in the interior and therefore with camels "our desert could be crossed in ten days, north to south",<sup>973</sup> or even less, as "such a distance an ordinary Arab would traverse alone on his dromedary in a week".<sup>974</sup>

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<sup>969</sup> Thomas Embling, 'The alpaca and the camel', *Argus*, 30 March 1858: 6.

<sup>970</sup> Thomas Embling, 'Camels in Australia, Singapore and the East', *Argus*, 5 August 1858: 1S; 'Introduction of the camel', *Argus*, 19 August 1858: 5; 'The Camel', *Argus*, 31 August 1858: 5; 'The camel and Sir R. MacDonnell', *Argus*, 1 September 1858: 6; 'The camel', *Argus*, 7 September 1851: 6.

<sup>971</sup> The 'Heiri herd' that Embling referred to was the breed of *Camelus dromedarius* known as 'El Heiri'. It is a small, but swift, riding-camel which is able to trot at nine miles an hour (14 km/h) for many hours at a time. African explorer, Captain G.F. Lyon, presented one of these "Maherry courier camels" to King George IV in 1820 and it was inspected and reported upon by the Royal Institute of Great Britain. Tales of the huge distances these camels were able to travel carrying messages for the King of Timbuktu were included in Lyon's journals and many other travel publications and encyclopaedias, including: George Long, *Penny cyclopædia of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* (London: Charles Knight, 1836), Vol. 6: 191; Josiah Conder, *The modern traveller* (London: James Duncan, 1829), 163; William Parkin, *A genealogical, chronological, historical and topographical exposition of the Tenth Chapter of Genesis* (Sheffield: Saxton & Chaloner, 1837), 297; Captain George Francis Lyon R.N., *A Narrative of Travels in Northern Africa, in the Years 1818, 19, and 20; Accompanied by Geographical Notices of Soudan, and of the Course of the Niger with a Chart of the Routes and a Variety of Coloured Plates Illustrative of the Costumes of the Several Natives of Northern Africa* (London: John Murray, 1821); George Perkins Marsh, *The camel: his organization, habits and uses* (Boston: Gould & Lincoln, 1856): 33.

<sup>972</sup> Thomas Embling, 'The alpaca and the camel', *Argus*, 30 March 1858: 6. Seven hundred miles in eight days is an average of 140 kilometres a day.

<sup>973</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>974</sup> *Argus*, 5 August 1858: 1S.



Figure 104: Captain George Francis Lyon R.N., 'A Tuarick on his Maherrie', 1821.  
*A Narrative of Travels in Northern Africa, in the Years 1818, 19, and 20*, (London: John Murray, 1821), 292.

Exotic images like this and traveler's tales of the enormous distances these camels achieved were the basis for Embling's misleading claims that the Australian desert could be crossed in little over a week.

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Middle Eastern traveller and adventurer Johann Ludwig Burckhardt was cautious about incredible tales of endurance, believing many to be greatly exaggerated.<sup>975</sup> Certainly Embling's claims represented the absolute limits of endurance for riding-camels and did not take into account the more modest performances of loaded baggage camels. Camels with a load of 150 to 200 kilograms would travel at three miles an hour for seven or eight hours a day.<sup>976</sup> These caravan camels could travel up to 30 miles a day on short journeys, but 18 miles a day was a more usual Saharan distance.<sup>977</sup> Larger and stronger animals could be loaded with up to 600 kilograms, but would only travel between two and two and a half miles an hour for short periods.<sup>978</sup> The excessive claims of endurance and ability made by camel advocates suggesting the animals could cover distances in excess of five times what was achievable on protracted expeditions, meant the public, and most likely members of the expedition and EC, formed unrealistic expectations of the abilities of the exotic imports.

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<sup>975</sup> John Lewis Burckhardt, *Notes on the Bedouins and Wahábys* (London: Henry Colburn & Richard Bentley, 1831), Vol. 2: 77-81; *The British critic, quarterly theological review, and ecclesiastical record* (London, C.J.G. & F. Rivington, 1831), 109.

<sup>976</sup> Peter Parley, *Parley's Educational Magazine* (London, 1837), Vol. 5: 151.

<sup>977</sup> Alexander Jamieson, *A dictionary of mechanical science, arts, manufactures, and miscellaneous knowledge* (London: Henry Fisher, Son & Co., 1829), Vol. 1: 326.

<sup>978</sup> C.J.G. & F. Rivington, *The British critic, quarterly theological review, and ecclesiastical record* (London: C.J.G. & F. Rivington, 1831), 109.

## 5.5 Purchasing Victoria's camels

In May 1858 George Landells<sup>979</sup> wrote to Embling with a proposal that he be contracted to import the camels from India.<sup>980</sup> Landells was about to leave Melbourne for Kolkata with a shipment of heavy artillery horses for the East India Company, and was looking for a shipment of stock for his passage back to Melbourne. Embling had already suggested the Victorian Legislature expend £3,000 acquiring 18 camels and one Arab handler,<sup>981</sup> but Landells estimated he could get 24 camels and "two native attendants" for just £1,692.<sup>982</sup> This would be a large enough shipment of camels to outfit an exploring expedition and leave enough animals behind to start a breeding program.<sup>983</sup>

Although Embling and Landells convinced the newly formed Zoological Gardens Committee that it was "highly desirable that the camel should be introduced without delay",<sup>984</sup> the Board of Science were reluctant to employ Landells as an animal trader and suggested the government either offer a bonus for each camel privately imported or ask the Governor General of India<sup>985</sup> to select the camels on their behalf.<sup>986</sup> Other old India hands suggested a detachment of the Chittagong Lancers be conscripted to explore the interior.<sup>987</sup> O'Shanassy decided against these recommendations, placed £3,000 on the estimates and appointed Landells as 'Camel Agent of the Government of Victoria'.<sup>988</sup> Embling announced this scoop at the public meeting held to announce Kyte's offer and form the EFC.<sup>989</sup>

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<sup>979</sup> George James Landells (1825 -1871) was born in Barbados and lived in Barbados, Jamaica, Gambia and England before moving to India around 1842. He migrated to Melbourne in 1856.

<sup>980</sup> George James Landells, 'Letter N5948, Mr Landells statement of circumstances relating to the purchase of camels, 10 July 1860', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria

<sup>981</sup> Thomas Embling, 'The alpaca and the camel', *Argus*, 30 March 1858: 6.

<sup>982</sup> George James Landells, 'Letter A1, 21 June 1858', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria. Landells thought he could purchase camels for £30 each. As a comparison, the cavalry horses he was taking to India were valued at around £60 to £65 each. His estimate of costs was 24 camels at £30 each, rations for 24 camels at £8 each, freight at £30 each and "expenses of two native attendants on the voyage" £60.

<sup>983</sup> At the time Landells made his offer, the Indian Mutiny (a.k.a. India's First War of Independence, the Sepoy Rebellion etc.) was underway. This war lasted from May 1857 to July 1859 and was a time of great turmoil in the rebellious states. Landells, however, was not proposing to visit any of these areas.

<sup>984</sup> Committee for the Zoological Gardens, 'Minutes, 6 August 1858', Minute books 1858-1861, Unit 2, VPRS 2223/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria; Gillbank, 'Tale of two animals'.

<sup>985</sup> The Governor General of India was Lord Viscount Charles John Canning (1812-1862).

<sup>986</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *Board of Science: First Annual Report*, Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1858-1859, Vol. 2: 4; *Argus*, 13 May 1859: 7.

<sup>987</sup> Francis J. Marsh, 'Letter to the Exploration Committee, dated 4 December 1858', Correspondence received by the RSV EC, ex1007-006, Box 2077/5, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>988</sup> George James Landells, 'Draft letter A1, dated Melbourne, 1 September 1858'; 'Letter B5, dated Lahore, 19 May 1859', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000; John Moore, Under-Secretary to the Chief Secretary, 'Letter A2, No. 1880, 27 August 1859', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>989</sup> *Argus*, 1 September 1858: 4-5.



Figure 105: William Strutt, 'George Landells' 1860  
WSS 4, The Exploring Expedition Sketchbook, Parliamentary Library of Victoria.

Landells departed for India at the end of October 1858.<sup>990</sup> Some hoped, rather optimistically, that he would return with camels in time for the Expedition to depart in March 1859. Most thought he would be back in twelve months. In fact, Landells was away for 18 months. Chapter 3 examined how the delayed arrival of the camels gave the EC time to procrastinate over the selection of a leader and a route. Bonyhady suggests the delay was because Landells was doing as he pleased and he went to the Murree Hills on his own account to buy goats for export.<sup>991</sup> However, when Landells left Melbourne, the Legislative Assembly had not yet voted to approve the expenditure and he sailed with only a verbal assurance from O'Shanassy that the Victorian government would fund the purchase of camels, pay £100 towards his travelling expenses, and pay a £460 bonus if the camels were delivered to Melbourne within twelve months of receiving his instructions.<sup>992</sup> Parliament did not seem to be in a hurry to procure the camels, and it was the end of December 1858 before Governor Barkly wrote to Governor-General Canning<sup>993</sup> and another month before O'Shanassy sent written confirmation.<sup>994</sup> Landells, meanwhile, having heard nothing from the Victorian government and having no written commission and no authority, assumed the plan had been abandoned. He left Kolkata and travelled 2,000 kilometres to Lahore in the Punjab and applied for a position as barrack-master at a sanatorium

<sup>990</sup> Landells left Melbourne on either 23 or 28 October 1858 aboard the White Star Clipper S.S. *Gertrude* with a shipment of 150 heavy cavalry horses bound for Kolkata.

<sup>991</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 23.

<sup>992</sup> *Argus*, 28 October 1858: 6; *South Australian Register*, 28 December 1859: 3.

<sup>993</sup> Governor Barkly wrote to Lord Viscount Charles John Canning (1812-1862), Governor-General of India, on 27 December 1858 asking him to appoint an officer on Landells' behalf to control and countersign funds not exceeding £3,039 to purchase and ship 24 camels. However the letter had obviously not arrived by the end of February when Canning responded to Landells' earlier enquiry about the availability of Victorian government funds. Henry Barkly, 'Letter No. 14, dated Melbourne, 27 December 1858', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria; *Argus*, 17 December 1859: 5.

<sup>994</sup> John Moore, 'Letter A3 No. 233, 18 January 1859' (copy at G10621), Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.



in Shimla.<sup>995</sup> The written instructions did not reach him until 19 May 1859.<sup>996</sup> Upon receipt of the communication, Landells withdrew his application for employment, replied promptly to Barkly stating he would buy the camels in October and ship them in December, "that being the most suitable time of year for their exportation",<sup>997</sup> and then went to Murree for the summer.<sup>998</sup>

Landells had moved to India when he was 17 years old and spent the next 14 years there. He claimed to have extensive experience working with camels, having:

led an active life, involving numerous journeys over districts passable only to camels, I have made many trips, in distance exceeding 1,000 miles, and in these various journeys I have used the camel, on both mountainous and level districts, on stony and in sandy tracks, and through all seasons of the year-through temperature, varying from excessive heat to extreme cold.<sup>999</sup>

Based on this experience he persuaded the Victorian government to purchase a mix of Dromedary riding-camels and Bactrian pack-animals.<sup>1000</sup> He also intended getting a mix of bulls and cows as he assumed he was supplying animals for an acclimatisation breeding program as well as an exploratory party.<sup>1001</sup> Bactrian camels had not fared well when kept in the hot climate around Kabul, so they would have been ill-suited to travelling the Australian desert in summer.<sup>1002</sup> Landells planned to get the Dromedaries from the Sindh Division, but the Bactrians would have to be obtained from the dominion of Dost Muhammad Khan, which was out of bounds to European travellers.<sup>1003</sup> Despite asking assistance from a number of British and Afghan officials,<sup>1004</sup> by the end of October 1859

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<sup>995</sup> Landells applied to Quarter-Master-General Colonel McPherson for the post of barrack-master at a sanatorium in Shimla, the 'summer capital' of the British Raj. George James Landells, 'Letter B2, dated Lahore, 19 May 1859', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>996</sup> Indian Government, 'Letter B1, 26 February 1859', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>997</sup> George James Landells, 'Letter E1, dated Lahore, 23 May 1859', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>998</sup> George James Landells, 'Letter B5, dated Lahore, 19 May 1859'; 'Letter C1, dated Murree, 25 July 1859', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>999</sup> George James Landells, 'Draft letter A1, dated Melbourne, 1 September 1858', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria; *Argus*, 19 August 1858: 5.

<sup>1000</sup> Dromedary is the one-humped desert or Arabian camel, *Camelus dromedarius*. Bactrian is the two-humped camel of the central Asian steppes, *Camelus bactrianus*.

<sup>1001</sup> Landells initially suggested purchasing 18 Dromedaries (six males and twelve females) from Scinde (now Sindh, one of four provinces of Pakistan, which had been occupied by British and Bengal Presidency forces since 1843) and six Bactrians (two males and four females) from Cabool or Herat in Afghanistan or Bokhara in the Emirate of Bukhara (now Uzbekistan). George James Landells, 'Letter A1, 21 June 1858', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>1002</sup> Hugh R. James, 'Letter, dated Murree, 27 September 1859', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>1003</sup> George James Landells, 'Letter C5 No. 1, 8 August 1859', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>1004</sup> In addition to writing to Canning, Landells also asked advice from: Richard James Holwell Birch, Government Secretary for Military and Foreign Department in Kolkata; Robert Montgomery,



Figure 106: William Theodore De Bary, 'Nineteenth Century camel market, Peshawar'.  
*Sources of Indian Tradition: Modern India and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958).

Landells realised he would be unable to obtain any Bactrians.<sup>1005</sup> He adjusted his plans accordingly and went to the Bikaner camel markets in Rajasthan where he purchased 15 Bikaneri<sup>1006</sup> riding-camels.<sup>1007</sup> Landells then marched his new charges, and the nine camel handlers he had employed to

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Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab; Hugh R. James, Commissioner of Peshawar; Dost Muhammad Khan, Emir of Cabul and Gholam Hussum Khan Alizie, Envoy to the Court of Cabul. George James Landells, 'Letter B5, dated Lahore, 19 May 1859'; 'Letter C1, dated Murree, 25 July 1859'; 'Letter C3, dated Murree, 1 August 1859'; 'Letter C4 No. 1809, 4 August 1859', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria. See also Victoria: Parliament, *Board of Science: Second Annual Report*, Victorian Parliamentary Papers (1859-1860), Vol. 4: 25.

<sup>1005</sup> Hugh R. James, 'Letter C7, dated Murree, 27 September 1859'; British vakeel at Cabul, 'Letter C8, dated Murree, 27 September 1859', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>1006</sup> The Bikaneri breed of camel is a popular, multi-purpose animal which is docile and easy to train. The home tract of this breed is arid and sandy with extreme hot and cold temperatures. Bikaneri camels walk at 5.9 km/h, trot at 11.8 km/h and gallop at 24 km/h. Although the Jaisalmeri and Kachchhi breeds have a higher top speed and are more efficient in terms of stride/speed, the Bikaneri is the superior breed when walking. N.D. Khanna, A.K. Rai and S.N. Tandon, 'Camel Breeds of India', *Journal of Camel Science* (Syria: Camel Applied Research and Development Network), March (2004): 8-15; S.C. Mehta, B.P. Mishra & M.S. Sahani, 'Genetic differentiation of Indian camel breeds using random oligonucleotide primers', *Animal Genetic Resources Information* (Bikaner, Rajasthan: National Research Center on Camel), Vol. 39, No. 2 (2006): 77-88; A.K. Rai, A.K. Roy and N.D. Khanna, 'A note on speed and strides of different breeds of camel', *Indian Journal of Animal Science*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (1992): 91-92.

<sup>1007</sup> Landells bought the Bikaneri camels on 9/10 December 1859 and paid between £7.10s. and £25 per beast, Jonathan Duncan Inverarity, 'Letter No. 24, dated Kurachee, 27 January 1860', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria. The Public Record Office of Victoria holds twelve receipts for the purchase of camels, apparently written in Dari (see Figure 107). Anthropologist Dr Anna Kenny and South Australian Museum Curator Dr Phillip Jones were unsuccessful in their attempts to have these receipts translated into English when they were shown at the 'Australia's Muslim Cameleers' exhibition, 2007-2010, Phillip Jones, pers. comm., 2009. Subsequent attempts at translating the receipts have been equally unsuccessful as it appears the writing style is too casual and cursive to be read.

supervise them<sup>1008</sup>, over 1,000 kilometres to the Bolan Pass in Baluchistan.<sup>1009</sup> There "at a time when Northern India was still under the influence of the expiring flames of rebellion"<sup>1010</sup> he bought ten male Khorasan<sup>1011</sup> "hill Dromedaries",<sup>1012</sup> as these were "peculiarly adapted for carrying burdens on stony or hilly roads".<sup>1013</sup> Landells later prided himself that:

the business executed by [him] was principally transacted among barbarous and illiterate tribes, not even subject to British rule and with whom he is confident no European ever before had dealings of the same kind.<sup>1014</sup>

With 25 camels secured, Landells marched 750 kilometres to Karachi at "the rate of 50 and 60 miles a day" (80 to 95 kilometres a day).<sup>1015</sup> These distances were widely reported in the Australian press, along with Landells' assertion that the male Bikaneri sowaree (riding-camels) possessed even "greater speed than the others" and could "travel long distances ... at a high speed if necessary"<sup>1016</sup> As none of the members of the VEE or EC had any experience with camels, Landells' appraisal of the animals' speed, stamina and endurance was accepted without question.

Landells felt justifiably proud of his camels, stating they "were almost as great a curiosity at Kurrachee [to both Europeans and natives] as in Melbourne".<sup>1017</sup> The *Sindian*<sup>1018</sup> reported:

The camels which have been procured by Mr Landells for the Victorian Government are of the finest description and the most hardy constitutions. Most of them have been procured from the Bickneer territory. This caste camel is well known as of large size and better constitution than those so easily

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<sup>1008</sup> George James Landells, 'The Camels', *Argus*, 29 March 1862: 5.

<sup>1009</sup> The Bolan Pass was in the Khanate of Kalat, which was under Afghan control until the British seized Kalat in 1839 during the First Anglo-Afghan War. Landells believed the Bolan Pass was in 'Affghanistan' *Argus*, 11 June 1860: 5; M.J.M. Landells-Keating, 'Mr Landells', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 15 November 1860: 2.

<sup>1010</sup> *Argus*, 11 June 1860: 5.

<sup>1011</sup> Khorasan (Persian = خراسان) was the eastern and north-eastern region of the Persian Empire, covering parts of what is now Afghanistan, Iran, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In 1857 the British and Persian Empires signed the Treaty of Paris to end the hostilities of the Anglo-Persian War.

<sup>1012</sup> These camels were possibly 'Bukht' (or *bokt*) camels, an F1 hybrid cross-breed of dromedary and Bactrian, which were noted for their size and strength as a pack-animal. While Persian camels were said to have been able to carry a load of 320 lbs., and Indian camels 400 lbs., the Khorasan camel could carry "600 and even 700 lbs.". Landells paid between £8 and £11 per beast. *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (London, 1990), Vol. 4, Fascicle 7: 730-739; Marquess George Nathaniel Curzon, *Persia and the Persian question* (London, Longmans, Green, 1892), 120; Colonel C.E. Stewart, 'The Country of the Tekke Turkomans, and the Tejend and Murghab Rivers', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography* Vol. 3, No. 9, September (1881): 526.

<sup>1013</sup> George James Landells, 'Letter N5948, Mr Landells statement of circumstances relating to the purchase of camels, 10 July 1860', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>1014</sup> George James Landells, 'Letter N5948, Mr Landells statement of circumstances relating to the purchase of camels, 10 July 1860', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>1015</sup> *Argus*, 11 June 1860: 5.

<sup>1016</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1017</sup> *Argus*, 29 March 1862: 5.

<sup>1018</sup> The *Sindian* was a bi-weekly English language magazine published in Karachi from 1852. Abdus Salam Khurshid, *Journalism in Pakistan: first phase, 1845 to 1857* (Lahore: Publishers United, 1964).



Figure 107: Receipts for the purchase of camels from the Bikaner markets, 9-10 December 1859.  
'Chief Secretary's Office, Inwards Correspondence I', 1859-1863,  
Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

procurable in Scinde, and Mr Landells must have experienced many difficulties in obtaining them. They are certainly magnificent animals. This officer deserves great praise for his perseverance.<sup>1019</sup>

Landells' efforts to secure the most suitable breeds of riding-camels and pack-animals for the dual purposes of exploration and a stud seems to have been overlooked and, after these initial reports, surprisingly little attention was paid to the breeds of camel that had been brought to Australia.<sup>1020</sup> In 1865, just five years after the camels arrived, 'Tenison-Woods' publication on the history of exploration erroneously claimed all the camels were acquired from Peshawar.<sup>1021</sup> This claim has been perpetuated regularly ever since, while the true origin of camels and their breeds has been forgotten.<sup>1022</sup>

<sup>1019</sup> *Sindian*, 31 March 1860 reported in the *Argus*, 15 June 1860: 4.

<sup>1020</sup> Landells brought camels of the Bikanari, Mekrani, and Khorasan breeds to Australia. The camels which arrived in Melbourne in 1859 from Aden were of the Sudani, Maghrabi, Fellahi and/or Mowalled breed. Arthur Glyn Leonard, *The Camel: Its Uses and Management* (London: Longman's Green & Co., 1894), 95-108; Arnold Spencer Leese, *A Treatise on the One-Humped Camel in Health and in Disease* (Stamford, U.K.: Haynes & Son, 1927); C.P. Blanc and Y. Ennesser, 'A zoogeographical approach to subspecies differentiation of *Camelus dromedarius* Linnaeus, 1766 (Mammalia: Camelidae)', *Revue d'Elevage et de Medecine Veterinaire des pays tropicaux*, No. 42 (1988): 573-587; Ilse Köhler-Rollefson, 'The camel breeds of India in social and historical perspective', *Animal Genetic Resources Information* (Bikaner, Rajasthan: National Research Center on Camel), No. 10 (1992): 53-64; 'About camel breeds: A re-evaluation of current classification systems', *Journal of Animal Breeding and Genetics*, Vol. 110 (1993): 66-73; Muhammad Nawaz Baloch, 'Documentation and Characterization of Camel Breeds in Pakistan' (PhD thesis, Sindh Agricultural University, 2002); N.D. Khanna, A.K. Rai and S.N. Tandon, 'Camel Breeds of India', *Journal of Camel Science*, Syria: Camel Applied Research and Development Network, March (2004): 8-15; S.C. Mehta, B.P. Mishra & M.S. Sahani, 'Genetic differentiation of Indian camel breeds using random oligonucleotide primers', *Animal Genetic Resources Information*, Bikaner, Rajasthan: National Research Center on Camel, Vol. 39, No. 2 (2006): 77-88.

<sup>1021</sup> Tenison-Woods, *Discovery and exploration*, Vol. 2: 329.

<sup>1022</sup> Examples of authors repeating claims the camels came from Peshawar include: Jones and Kenny, *Muslim cameleers*, 43; Charles Manning Hope Clark, *A history of Australia* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1973), 285; Moorehead, *Cooper's Creek*, 35; Rajkowski, *In the tracks of the camel men*, 9; Stevens, *Tin mosques*, 14.

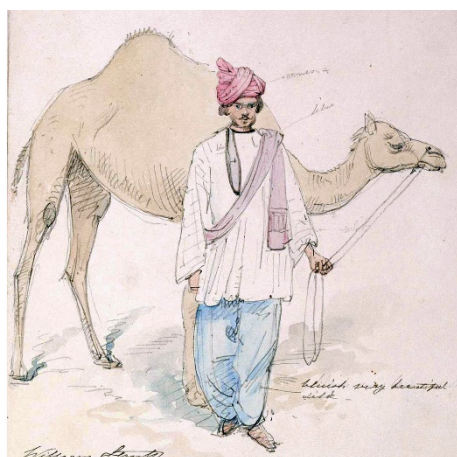


Figure 108: William Strutt, 'Camel driver of Burke & Wills Exploring Expedition', 1860.  
A collection of drawings ... illustrating the Burke and Wills exploring expedition.  
a1485039, 2ff.15b, DL PXX4, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.



Figure 109: S.C. Mehta, B.P. Mishra & M.S. Sahani, 'Adult male Bikaneri camel', 2006.  
*Animal Genetic Resources Information* (India: Indian Council of Agricultural Research,  
National Research Center on Camel, 2006), Vol. 39, No. 2: 79.

Strutt's sketch (top) of Esau Khan holding a young Bikaneri camel compared to an older Bikaneri camel.

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Landells' arrival at Karachi at the end of January 1860 was a month later than he had planned, but his anticipated 40-day voyage to Australia would still have got him to Melbourne in March, which was within the allotted time.<sup>1023</sup> However he faced a lengthy delay at the port because there were no suitable vessels available for charter: 12,000 British troops were in the process of returning home after the Indian Mutiny and any vessels not chartered by the Imperial forces were moving troops and freight for the Chinese War. Landells eventually found the S.S. *Chinsurah*<sup>1024</sup> which he chartered with some misgivings as to its suitability for livestock transportation and seaworthiness.<sup>1025</sup> Nevertheless,

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<sup>1023</sup> George James Landells, 'Letter N5948, Mr Landells statement of circumstances relating to the purchase of camels', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria; *Argus*, 17 December 1859: 5.

<sup>1024</sup> S.S. *Chinsurah*, barque, 506 tons owned by Dunolly & Co. James Logan Dunolly was a British businessman living in Karachi, founding member of the Kurrachee Chamber of Commerce and Consul for the King of Hannover.

<sup>1025</sup> Captain George Gibson agreed to ship the camels to Melbourne for £2,600. Victoria: Government, 'Letter P5948 Expenses connected with the procuring of camels for the government of Victoria', Chief

all 25 camels<sup>1026</sup> survived the voyage and arrived “in fine health and wonderful condition”,<sup>1027</sup> a notable success compared to the death rate for previous attempts at landing camels in Australia.

Bringing the camels to Australia proved an expensive exercise. Landells spent £3,757.8s.10d. getting the camels to Melbourne,<sup>1028</sup> which was considerably higher than the £1,692 he originally estimated and well above the £3,000 that O’Shanassy allocated.<sup>1029</sup> Each camel had cost £156.11s. to land in Melbourne and by the time the camels had been stabled in Melbourne and the sepoy’s wages had been paid, the total cost came to £5,497.11s.4d.<sup>1030</sup>

The arrival of the camels in Hobson’s Bay caused great public excitement, which prompted the EC to address the issues they had been procrastinating over for the last nine months, and they finally selected a leader and determined a route.

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Secretary’s Office, ‘Inwards Registered Correspondence’, Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>1026</sup> Twenty-five camels landed in Melbourne: 14 of the 15 Bikanari camels purchased in December 1859, nine of the ten Khorasan camels purchased in the Khanate of Kalat, plus an additional Mekrani camel purchased at Multan in the Punjab in January 1860 and Landells’ own pet camel which was approximately nine months old. One of the female Bikanari camels died on road to Karachi in January 1860 and one of the male Khorasan camels died at the Karachi compound in March 1860.

<sup>1027</sup> W.P. Robbins, ‘Memo F3, dated 12 June 1860’, Chief Secretary’s Office, ‘Inwards Registered Correspondence’, Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>1028</sup> *Argus*, 17 January 1861: 7.

<sup>1029</sup> George James Landells, ‘Letter P7034, dated Melbourne, 10 July 1860’; ‘Letter P5984, Expenses connected with the procuring of camels for the government of Victoria, 18 July 1860’, Chief Secretary’s Office, ‘Inwards Registered Correspondence’, Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>1030</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports*, ‘Supplemental Final Report, 19 November 1872’.



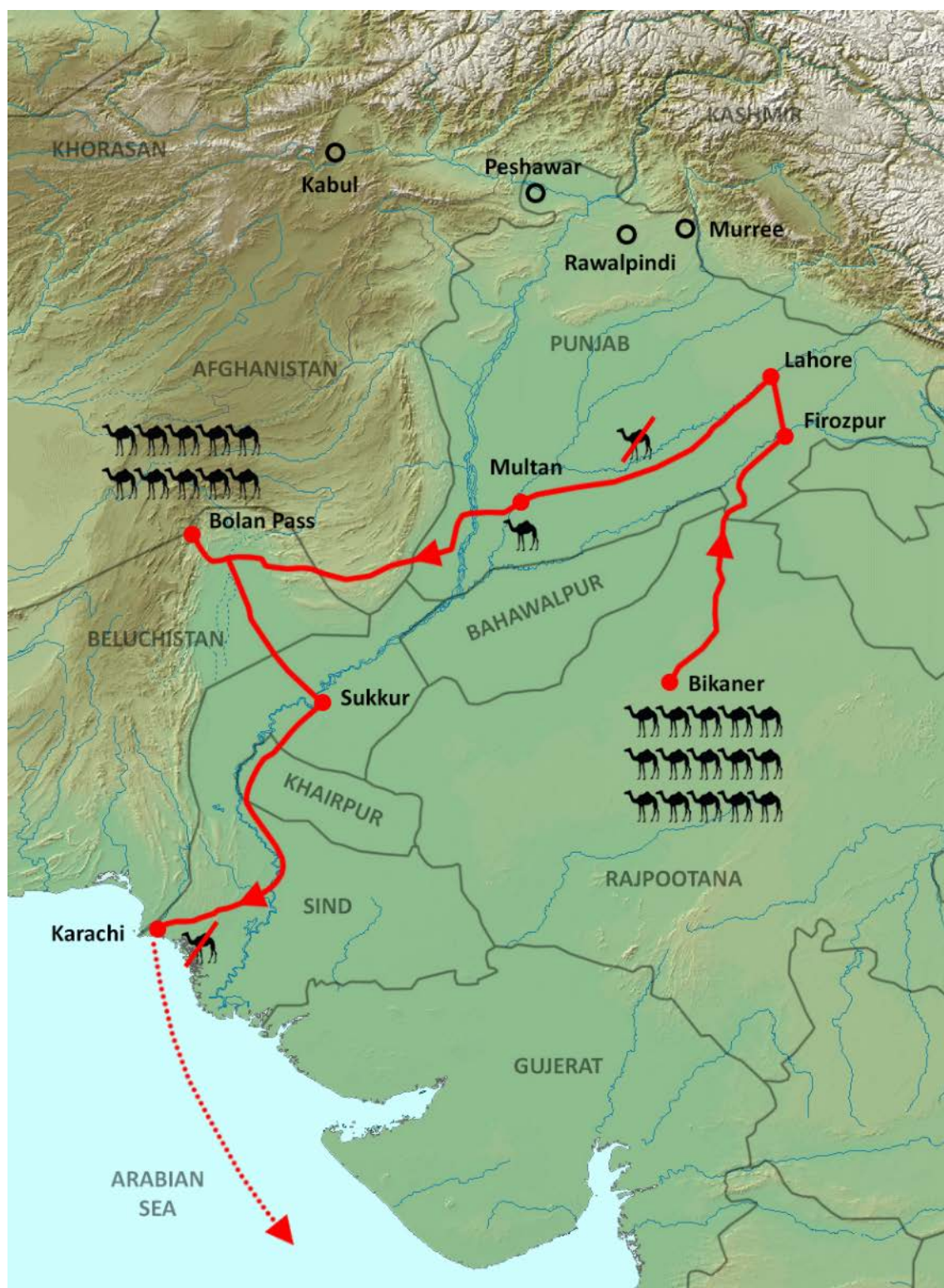


Figure 110: Map showing Landells' 2,500 kilometre journey with the camels, India, 1859-1860. He travelled from the camel markets in Bikaner in early December 1859 to Firozpur to purchase two years' supply of gram (chick peas: *Cicer arietinum*) as camel food, before heading to the Bolan Pass in the Khanate of Kalat, where the caravan road from Multan to Kandahar went through the Toba Kakar Range.

He arrived at the port of Karachi at the end of January 1860.

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## 5.6 Camels in Melbourne

By the time the camels arrived in Melbourne in early June 1860, the idea of a breeding stud of camels for acclimatisation was overshadowed by excitement about the impending Expedition and the camels were taken to the stables at Parliament House before being housed in specially constructed stables at Royal Park.<sup>1031</sup> Almost without exception the press announced the new arrivals were “for the exploring expedition”<sup>1032</sup> and the EC considered the camels were at their disposal and they could select as many as needed, if not all, of the camels to go on the Expedition.<sup>1033</sup> The press noted:

Dr Embling has obtained his desire; and his ugly, but useful protégés are fairly in Victoria. And now the question comes — what is to be done with them? ... the camels have been obtained at a cost of a good deal of money and a great deal of talk, and have already raised considerable public expectation, and been, in fact, looked upon as the great ... expounders of the centre of Australian mystery, the public generally, and the Exploration Committee particularly, are not likely to allow the animals to have an easy show-life time of it now.<sup>1034</sup>

The arrival of the camels caused great excitement and:

It seemed as though all Melbourne had turned out to gaze upon them, the Sandridge road, Princes bridge, Swanston street and Bourke street, were literally thronged with people, and it was with difficulty that the police were enabled to keep a clear passage for the cavalcade.<sup>1035</sup>

Despite Melburnians’ fascination with their exotic imports, they should not have been such a remarkable spectacle, as camels had been seen regularly on the city’s streets for seven months prior to the arrival of the S.S. *Chinsurah*. In November 1859, while Victoria was waiting for Landells to arrive, the P&O mail-steamer RMSS *Malta* arrived with six camels aboard. The press initially assumed they were the first instalment of Landells’ camels from India, but soon realized the four males and two females had been imported from Yemen as a private speculation on behalf of “Parsee<sup>1036</sup> importers” who hoped the Victorian Government would purchase them for the expedition.<sup>1037</sup> They

<sup>1031</sup> *Age*, 15 June 1860: 4; *Argus*, 17 October 1859: 7, 18 October 1859: 7, 12 June 1860: 4, 13 June 1860: 4, 15 June 1860: 4; Ferdinand Mueller, ‘Letter N4911, dated 9 June 1860’, Chief Secretary’s Office, ‘Inwards Registered Correspondence’, Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria; Victoria. Parliament, *Victorian Government Gazette*, No. 87, 17 July (1860): 1315; Victoria. Parliament, *Victorian Hansard* (1859-1860), Vol. 6: 1355 & 1367.

<sup>1032</sup> *Argus*, 11 June 1860: 4; *Bendigo Advertiser*, 11 June 1860: 2; *The Star*, 12 June 1860: 3; *Mount Alexander Mail*, 13 June 1860: 2; *Geelong Advertiser*, 16 June 1860: 3.

<sup>1033</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, ‘Minutes, 18 August 1860’, EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1034</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 12 June 1860: 2.

<sup>1035</sup> *Age*, 15 June 1860: 4.

<sup>1036</sup> ‘Parsee’ (Parsi) usually referring to the Zoroastrian communities of India and Iran, but in this historical context it means a person from Persia, i.e. a speaker of the Western Iranian Farsi language (فارسی). In Iran and Afghanistan Farsi is now referred to as Dari, while in Tajikistan it is called Tajiki.

<sup>1037</sup> *Argus*, 15 November 1859: 5, 17 November 1859: 2S. The R.M.S. *Malta* sailed from Aden, Yemen, on the 17 October 1859 with the September mails from England and six camels for Melbourne shipping agents Messrs W.P. White & Co., arriving in Hobson’s Bay on 13 November 1859.



Figure 111: 'A Moment of Rapture / Dr Embling hears of the arrival of the camels / Gymnastic expression of his ecstasy', *Melbourne Punch*, 17 November 1859: 7.

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arrived “under the care of two Arabs” and while there are no further details about these two men, they would have been the first Arab camel-handlers in Australia.<sup>1038</sup>

The camels, valued at £100 each,<sup>1039</sup> were referred to as ‘Egyptians’, although their specific breed was not recorded.<sup>1040</sup> Mueller and Embling petitioned the Chief Secretary Nicholson to purchase the animals and took them to the Zoological Gardens.<sup>1041</sup> However, the Nicholson Ministry declined the offer and the camels were bought by theatrical impresario George Selth Coppin.<sup>1042</sup>

Although Coppin advocated the introduction of camels for exploration, even going so far as to suggest that explorers should be legally obligated to use camels,<sup>1043</sup> he had different plans for the six ‘Egyptians’ and placed them on display in his Cremorne Gardens Menagerie at Richmond.<sup>1044</sup> During

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<sup>1038</sup> *Argus*, 15 November 1859: 5.

<sup>1039</sup> *Argus*, 2 January 1860: 7.

<sup>1040</sup> There are four breeds of dromedary in Egypt: Sudani; Maghrabi (pack-camel); Fellahi (pack-camel); and Mowalled (cross between Mahgrabi and Fellahi used for farm and desert work and the most common camel in Egypt). In Yemen there are four breeds of dromedary: Addha/Aarad (desert camel); Arak/Areka; Hora/Hurrah/Omani (racing camel); and Khoara/Khuwara (Horra-Arak or Horra-Addha cross). F.M. Tleimat and A.R. Al Masoudi, *Camels in Hadramout, The Republic of Yemen* (Damascus: Camel Applied Research and Development Network), (2002); R.T. Wilson, 'Biodiversity of Domestic Livestock in the Republic of Yemen', *Tropical Animal Health and Production*, Vol. 35, Issue 1, February (2003): 27-46.

<sup>1041</sup> *Argus*, 15 November 1859: 5; Ferdinand Mueller, 'Letter, 30 November 1859', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>1042</sup> *Age*, 21 November 1859: 4. George Selth Coppin (1819-1906) was born in England and arrived in Australia in 1843.

<sup>1043</sup> In October 1858 Coppin was elected MLC for South-western Province. In one of his campaign speeches he said he believed recent fatalities among explorers could have been avoided if camels had been used and he proposed making it illegal to set out on an expedition without a camel. The recent fatalities probably referred to Babbage's discovery of Coulthard's mummified remains in June 1858, *Argus*, 17 September 1858: 5.

<sup>1044</sup> *Argus*, 14 November 1859: 8.

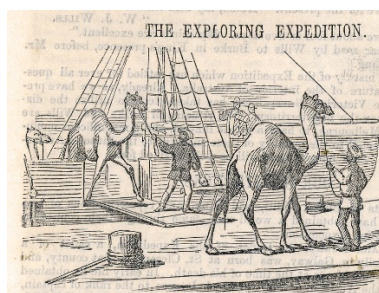


Figure 112: George Slater, 'The Exploring Expedition', 1860.  
*The news letter of Australasia* (Herald Office: East Melbourne, 1861) No. 63: 1.  
 NLA00/12/61/1, (another copy at H5117), State Library of Victoria

An engraving of the camels being unloaded from the S.S. *Chinsurah* onto the Railway Pier at Sandridge, Hobsons's Bay on 14 June 1860. A European man [Landells?] is on board the vessel supervising, and two of the nine sepoy camel assistants are leading camels ashore.

the Christmas break, up to 2,000 people a day paid a shilling to see “the ships of the desert”.<sup>1045</sup> The camels also appeared as extras in Coppin's theatrical productions,<sup>1046</sup> making the trip into the city so regularly that they were “becoming quite an institution amongst us”.<sup>1047</sup> Clearly Melburnians were no strangers to seeing camels, so their “whirl of excitement” at the arrival of the S.S. *Chinsurah* demonstrates the extent to which expedition fervour had gripped the city by June 1860.<sup>1048</sup>

The EC eventually convinced Nicholson to secure them for the Victorian expedition.<sup>1049</sup> When the Cremorne camels were brought into the Parliamentary stables they presented:

a very diminutive and miserable appearance alongside the majestic dromedaries that Mr. Landells has collected and brought from India.<sup>1050</sup>

It was hoped that the “bad habits they must have acquired during their short theatrical career” would not interfere with their now respectable destiny.<sup>1051</sup>

One might have expected Mueller to continue pushing for some of the camels to be left behind to form the nucleus of a breeding stud. However, following Burke's appointment he absented himself from the EC's meetings, claiming illness. Privately he told Beckler he was:

ganz mißgestimmt über die Arrangements und prophezeit mir jeden Tag einen unheilvollen Ausgang, was gerne sein kann.<sup>1052</sup>

<sup>1045</sup> *Argus*, 2 January 1860: 8.

<sup>1046</sup> *Argus*, 21 November 1859: 5, 24 November 1859: 5.

<sup>1047</sup> *Argus*, 29 November 1859: 5.

<sup>1048</sup> *Age*, 15 June 1860: 4.

<sup>1049</sup> The six Cremorne camels were purchased on 3 July 1860 for £50 each. *Argus*, 18 January 1860: 6; Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes, 14 June 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 49.

<sup>1050</sup> *Herald*, 31 August 1860: 5.

<sup>1051</sup> *Argus*, 25 July 1860: 4.

<sup>1052</sup> Hermann Beckler, *Entdeckungen in Australien: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen eines Deutschen 1855-1862. Hermann Beckler; eingeleitet und erläutert von Johannes H. Voigt* (Stuttgart: Thorbecke, 2000), 289-292.



Figure 113: William Strutt, 'Camels of the Victorian Exploring Expedition / in Royal Park - Melbourne, Victoria', 1860.

A collection of drawings ... illustrating the Burke and Wills exploring expedition.  
a1485042, 2ff.18a, DL PXX4, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

A photograph of some of the camels and Expedition members outside the sheds in Royal Park, which were erected in June 1860 to serve as stables for the camels and accommodation for their European and Asian handlers.

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(completely out of sorts about the arrangements and daily prophesied a disastrous outcome [for the Expedition].)

Just two days before the Expedition was due to depart, EC member the Reverend Dr John Ignatius Bleasdale proposed that four camels should be left behind at Royal Park with a sepoy in charge, with all costs payable by the government.<sup>1053</sup> The motion was seconded by Embling who was still keen to see the breeding program commence, as it had never been his intention that all the camels should disappear for two years.<sup>1054</sup> Burke left the choice of camels to Landells, who had only confirmed he would accept the position of second-in-command a week earlier.<sup>1055</sup>

At this late stage in the Expedition's preparation Landells realised there was a large amount of stores and provisions to be moved, and he considered "Eighty camels ... would not be too many for

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<sup>1053</sup> Bleasdale suggested one male and three female camels be left behind, but did not specify any particular breed. This demonstrates that Landells' efforts to choose different breeds to suit different tasks and terrains was lost on the laymen at the EC. Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes 18 August 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c; 'Minutes, 18 August 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-037, Box 2075/2c (Item 10b); 'Minutes, 18 August 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1054</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1055</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes, 10 August 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c; 'Minutes (incomplete) 10 August 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-034, Box 2075/2c (Item 8); 'Minutes 10 August 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 69.

the purposes of the expedition”.<sup>1056</sup> Therefore, when it came to selecting animals to be left behind he favoured the Expedition’s needs over those of the breeding program. He took the biggest and strongest animals and left behind those that were least useful. Of the 32 camels at Royal Park, Landells chose to leave six behind: a young female Bikaneri; two older Egyptian females who had both recently given birth to calves fathered in Aden; the two calves, which at one month and six months of age would have been no use on the expedition;<sup>1057</sup> and one young male Khorasan as the stud bull.<sup>1058</sup> If Embling, Mueller and the Acclimatisation Society were pinning their hopes on the safe return of the Expedition’s camels they would be disappointed, as two-thirds would not survive to return to Melbourne. In addition, the mix of male and female camels, a necessary requirement of a breeding program but not necessarily the best combination for working animals, especially those managed by inexperienced handlers, would cause problems on the Expedition.

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<sup>1056</sup> *Age*, 21 August 1860: 5.

<sup>1057</sup> *Argus*, 31 January 1860: 5, 20 February 1860: 5, 29 February 1860: 8.

<sup>1058</sup> *Age*, 21 August 1860: 5.

## 5.7 Putting the camels to work

*"The ship of the desert" has weighed anchor.*

*Age*, 21 August 1860: 4.

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The large amount of equipment that had been gathered at Royal Park in preparation for the expedition's departure, estimated at 21 tons in total,<sup>1059</sup> was originally intended to be transported to the Darling River by boat.<sup>1060</sup> Forty-eight hours before departure Burke opted against using river transport, deciding instead to load the equipment on the Expedition's wagons, horses and camels.<sup>1061</sup> On the day of departure Landells refused to allow the Expedition's 26 camels to carry heavy loads, arguing that the animals should remain fresh and in good condition for the desert stages later on.<sup>1062</sup> Burke had intended to place three hundredweight of chick-peas on each of the twelve camels for which pack-saddles were available.<sup>1063</sup> Landells' objection meant there were at least 1800 kilograms of equipment for which there was no means of transport.<sup>1064</sup> Burke solved this problem by hiring additional wagons to go as far as Swan Hill, but the division in authority between Burke and Landells over the management of the camels would intensify over the following weeks and Burke would question the value of camels for exploration. Only five camels were saddled and ridden out of Royal Park, while the remaining 21 were lightly loaded and led by their nose-strings.<sup>1065</sup>

Once away from Melbourne, Burke did not overly concern himself with the daily management of the camels. The expedition was following bush roads that winter rains had turned to mud, which made it slippery and difficult for the camels to negotiate. Although Wills reported their slow progress in the first week was due to the pace of the camels,<sup>1066</sup> it was the heavily laden wagons that were most detrimental to the expedition's progress. Because the camels were not loaded it gave more of the men an opportunity of riding, and Wills had been pleasantly surprised how easy camels were to ride. He

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<sup>1059</sup> At the time of departure, it was estimated that the VEE carried 21 tons of stores and provisions. William Lockhart Morton, *Yeoman & Australian Acclimatiser*, 1 February 1862: 8-9; *Argus*, *An account of the crossing*: v. Bergin attempted to verify the weight of stores and provisions, but was unsuccessful. He wrote: "attempts ... to derive an approximate figure have failed, but tend to confirm the order of magnitude stated" Bergin, 'Courage and corruption', 7.

<sup>1060</sup> *Age*, 9 June 1859: 4; *Argus*, 29 June 1860: 4; Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes 6 June 1859', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 28.

<sup>1061</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 9.

<sup>1062</sup> *Age*, 21 August 1860: 5.

<sup>1063</sup> 3 cwt = 152 kilograms. Royal Society of Victoria, 'List of articles and services supplied by the Government Storekeeper', EC Accounts, ex1003-001, Box 2088B/2, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 1-12.

<sup>1064</sup> *Herald*, 21 August 1860: 5.

<sup>1065</sup> Landells, 'Report', ex2004-011, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1066</sup> Wills, 'Letter dated 26 August 1860', *Successful exploration*, 102.



Figure 114: William Strutt, 'The Start of the Burke and Wills Exploring Expedition from Royal Park, Melbourne, August 20, 1860', 1861.

Image a928762, ML 373, William Strutt Collection, State Library of New South Wales.

Strutt made several sketches of the Expedition's departure in preparation for the execution of a large oil painting depicting the event. These sketches show Landells, Becker, one sepoy and two Expedition assistants (possibly John King and John Drakeford) mounted on camels, with the other animals loaded as pack-animals and being led by two sepoys on foot. One camel carries a palanquin to be used to carry patients in need of medical attention.

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enjoyed their gentle gait, found them less fatiguing to ride, and considered them quieter and more easily managed than the horses. They had the added benefit of allowing him to pack his instruments on the front part of the saddle enabling him to take observations and scientific measurements as he rode along.<sup>1067</sup>

The lack of interest in the camels shown by Burke, and the fact that Landells' wishes were being respected in regards their loads, strengthened Landells' belief that he would have total control of the camels' management. Consequently, when they were nine days out of Melbourne, Landells announced to a gathering of businessmen and councillors from Bendigo that he had "the utmost confidence in Mr Burke".<sup>1068</sup> At Swan Hill, Burke intended dispensing with the hired wagons and placing their loads on the camels, but Landells continued to object to loading the camels and so Burke initially agreed to take the hired wagons on as far as Balranald.<sup>1069</sup> Two days later, after conferring with the Expedition's officers, he agreed to take the wagons all the way to the Darling.<sup>1070</sup> This entailed an additional cost of £288, a considerable sum equivalent to more than a month's wages for the entire Expedition.

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<sup>1067</sup> Wills, 'Letter dated 31 August 1860', *Successful exploration*, 102.

<sup>1068</sup> *Bendigo Advertiser*, 30 August 1860: 2.

<sup>1069</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Dispatch to Macadam, dated Swan Hill, 8 September 1860', ex2002-005, Box 2082/1a (Item 5), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1070</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Dispatch to Macadam, dated Swan Hill, 10 September 1860', ex2002-006, Box 2082/1a (Item 6), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.





Figure 115: Ludwig Becker, 'Crossing the Terrick-Terrick Plains, Aug. 29', 1860.  
Image b36032, H16486/F.2, State Library of Victoria.

Becker's painting shows one of the rare occasions when the whole Expedition was mounted or riding on wagons. Three expedition wagons and one hired wagon are with the party (the other two hired wagons have taken a different route). These six wagons carry the bulk of the stores meaning the camels are not laden, and so on the flat, grassy Terrick Terrick Plains north of Bendigo they were used as riding-animals.

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Soon after leaving Swan Hill, however, Landells' relationship with Burke and Wills began to deteriorate. At the Wakool punt Wills interfered with disembarking the camels, which caused an accident with one beast which Landells claimed "nearly led to its total loss".<sup>1071</sup> At the Murrumbidgee, Burke rejected Landells' advice and "crowded the punt as to imperil a large number [of camels]".<sup>1072</sup> The roads continued to deteriorate and at Balranald the wagon drivers pressed Burke to lighten their loads further. Increasingly frustrated at his inability to load the camels, and under pressure from the EC to "insure the greatest economy",<sup>1073</sup> Burke deposited some of the heavier items with the merchants Sparks, Cramsie & Co.<sup>1074</sup> This did not solve the problem and the soft sandy conditions north of Balranald, combined with Burke's ill-advised choice of route to the Darling over sandhills

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<sup>1071</sup> Landells, 'Report', ex2004-011, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1072</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1073</sup> EC, 'Letter to Burke, 20 September 1860', Correspondence sent by the RSV EC, ex1008-001, Box 2088B/5, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 21-22.

<sup>1074</sup> At Balranald Burke left some tents, spare wagon wheels, heavy metal farrier's tools, anvils, bellows, iron for horseshoes and weapons at Thomas Harrison Sparks and John Cramsie's store in Balranald and forwarded an inventory to the EC who authorised the sale of the items in September 1861. Royal Society of Victoria, 'List of stores to be sold at Balranald', EC Accounts, ex1003-001, Box 2088B/2, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 47-49; Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Questions 123 & 124 to Brahe; Becker, 'Second Report', ex2004-005; Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Dispatch, dated Darling River, 26 September 1860', ex2002-009, Box 2082/1a (Item 9), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.



Figure 116: William Strutt, 'Camel with saddle cloth', 1860.  
WSS 11, The Exploring Expedition Sketchbook, Parliamentary Library of Victoria.

Strutt's sketch showing the custom made 'camel tarpaulins' that were designed to protect the animals from the rain and cold. They were manufactured specifically for the Expedition and cost £1.8s. each.

and through the thickest mallee scrub, meant the wagons' average speed reduced even further. At Camp 25 at Prungle, five days and 100 kilometres from Balranald, Burke became impatient with the wagons' progress and decided to divide the expedition and take all the camels and the saddle-horses on ahead with him to the Darling.

The journey to the Darling was relatively easy for the lightly loaded animals, the 115 kilometre trip taking just four days. Once established at Camp 30 at Bilbarka on the Darling it became apparent that the wagons were not going to be able to follow their tracks over the dunes through what Becker described as the "most wretched country".<sup>1075</sup> It was most probably Wills who convinced Burke to return with the camels and horses in order to assist the wagons by lightening their loads. The camels' health had deteriorated during the first few weeks of the expedition due to the cold, wet weather – their suffering exacerbated as a result of them having been shorn to ease the heat while in the hold of the S.S. *Chinsurah*.<sup>1076</sup> They were no longer stabled at night and had to endure rain, hail and sub-zero temperatures overnight. Some of the campsites offered poor feed and on occasions the camels only had wattle branches to eat.<sup>1077</sup> The sudden increase in the amount of exercise they were required to undertake after seven sedentary months resulted in their developing catarrhs and diarrhea and Becker noted "their faeces contained their hitherto customary feed, gram in an undigested state".<sup>1078</sup> Burke had allowed Landells to pamper his animals: the female camels had been stabled overnight at the Mia Mia Hotel,<sup>1079</sup> the camels were rugged in the evenings with their custom-made blankets "to shelter them from the cold piercing wind that blew from the south",<sup>1080</sup> and Landells gave the camels "tidy doses of rum to warm them" after a particularly hard day's travel.<sup>1081</sup> Burke had even

<sup>1075</sup> Becker, 'Fifth Report', ex2004-008, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1076</sup> *Bendigo Advertiser*, 30 August 1860: 2; *Herald*, 31 August 1860: 5; Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 16.

<sup>1077</sup> Becker, 'First Report', ex2004-004, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1078</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 16.

<sup>1079</sup> *Bendigo Advertiser*, 28 August 1860: 3.

<sup>1080</sup> *Bendigo Advertiser*, 30 August 1860: 2.

<sup>1081</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 23.

complimented Landells on his "care and vigilance".<sup>1082</sup> Now, however, Burke decided it was time for the camels to start working. He wrote:

The horses and camels are all well, the camels, owing to their not having been loaded, have greatly improved in condition. They are now upon a soil and in a climate where their capabilities can be fairly tested and notwithstanding the expense attending the movement of the stores by hired conveyance, I believe and hope the Committee will have no reason to regret it, as we are now in a position to try the experiment fairly which might not have been the case otherwise.<sup>1083</sup>

To start 'the experiment' Burke retreated 45 kilometres to Gambana with the camels where they were loaded for the first time since leaving Melbourne 43 days earlier. Despite the fact they were in sand dune country which the wagons struggled with, Landells was still keen to keep the heavy loads off the camels as long as possible. He told Wills:

that Mr B.[urke] had no right to interfere about the camels; ...everything was mismanaged; and, in fact, that if Mr Burke had his way everything would go to the devil.<sup>1084</sup>

Despite Landells' objections, Burke was in an unenviable position. The hire of the additional wagons was a heavy financial burden, and in the arid mallee country the wagon horses had become exhausted and scarcely able to continue with their existing loads. The expedition was divided into three separate parties spread over 50 kilometres and their progress had slowed to a crawl. Had Burke followed the existing mail road and station tracks from Swan Hill along the Murray and Darling he would not have been forced to travel over such rough ground, but he had chosen the shortest, most direct, and ultimately, most difficult route. If he was to continue on to Menindee with all his equipment he needed to place some of the load on the camels. There are variations in reports of the estimated weight that was loaded onto the animals at Gambana. Becker, who was now obliged to load and unload the camels each day along with the sepoy and assistants, estimated the camels carried five tonnes, which would equate to around 180 kilograms for each camel.<sup>1085</sup> Wills, who was not caught up in the manual labour to the same extent, reported that the larger camels carried well over 200 kilograms.<sup>1086</sup> Landells believed the total amount carried by all the camels was between three and a half and four tonnes, which would be between 135 and 155 kilograms per beast.<sup>1087</sup> Although these loads were comparatively light compared to those carried by baggage camels in India, which often carried loads two or three times as great,<sup>1088</sup> the route Burke had chosen was not easy for the camels to negotiate. It crossed the maximum number of sandhills at right angles, and the camels were forced

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<sup>1082</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Dispatch, dated Mia Mia, 26 September 1860', ex2002-002, Box 2082/1a (Item 2), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1083</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Dispatch, dated Darling River, 26 September 1860', ex2002-009, Box 2082/1a (Item 9), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1084</sup> William John Wills, 'Letter #11, dated Bilbarker, 16 October 1860', ex2005-011, Box 2083/4, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1085</sup> Becker, 'Fifth Report', ex2004-008, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1086</sup> Wills, 'Letter #11, dated Bilbarker, 16 October 1860', ex2005-011, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1087</sup> Landells, 'Report', ex2004-011, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1088</sup> Alexander Jamieson, *A dictionary of mechanical science, arts, manufactures, and miscellaneous knowledge* (London: Henry Fisher, Son & Co., 1832), 326.

to trek over rolling soft sandhills covered in dense mallee and spinifex. Becker described the terrain as:

sandhills over hundred feet high, with a heated soil, consisting of loose sand in which porcupine grass abounds lay before us – one behind the other, like gigantic sand ripples.<sup>1089</sup>

This topography has changed little since 1860 and no roads or tracks follow the Expedition's route across this challenging terrain. Indeed it is surprising that Burke ever thought the wagons would be able to traverse this type of sand dune country. Eventually he realised the wagons would have to travel parallel to the dunes which would mean heading west from Gambana to reach the Darling 20 miles downstream, even though this route was almost twice the distance.<sup>1090</sup> In order to speed progress, Burke asked Landells to take the saddle-horses with him on the shorter route, but Landells claimed the horses were still frightened of the camels and refused to take charge of them. Burke did not press the issue, and as a result he struggled on the longer route with both the wagons and saddle-horses, which Wills thought was "greatly to their disadvantage".<sup>1091</sup>

During the journey across these dunes one of the large male camels, an Egyptian called Janglee who was one of the oldest and probably one of the most heavily laden camels, fell and injured itself. Wills reported that it was carrying a load well over 200 kilograms<sup>1092</sup> and because Landells thought it had dislocated its shoulder, the camel was abandoned. Wills did not agree with Landells' diagnosis, stating:

I myself do not believe it to be a dislocation, but only a strain; but that's merely my idea; Mr. L. ought to know best.<sup>1093</sup>

The South Australian press gave yet another diagnosis, reporting the camel as "foot-sore".<sup>1094</sup> Despite their lack of expertise, it appears Wills or the *Advertiser* were correct in their assumptions, as the camel was recovered three months later and continued on with Wright's Supply Party.

By 4 October 1860, Burke finally managed to assemble his party together for the first time in over a week. He then set about re-organising the stores, abandoning more unnecessary items at John Leckie Phelp's Tarcoola station, along with the Expedition's wagons.<sup>1095</sup> He also dispensed with the hired wagons, allowing their exhausted horse-teams to return slowly to Melbourne. On the wagons were sixty gallons of rum, which Landells had brought as a medication for the camels to protect them against scurvy, a method he had picked up in India when he saw officers of the East India Company successfully using arrack to medicate their dromedaries. When the shearers at Tarcoola got drunk,

<sup>1089</sup> Becker, 'Fifth Report', ex2004-008, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1090</sup> Wills, 'Surveyor's Field Notes: Linklinkwho to Bilbarka', ex2008-010, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1091</sup> Wills, 'Letter #11, dated Bilbarka, 16 October 1860', ex2005-011, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1092</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1093</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1094</sup> *South Australian Advertiser*, 6 November 1860: 2.

<sup>1095</sup> 'Memoirs of the Late Leaders of the Exploring Expedition', *Age*, 13 November 1861: 5.

the station superintendent claimed Landells' rum was the culprit.<sup>1096</sup> Landells argued that the shearers had purchased the alcohol from "a hawker's cart that was camped near our wagons",<sup>1097</sup> but Burke did not believe him and "hereupon expressed his determination ... that he would leave the rum behind".<sup>1098</sup> Landells was under the impression that the EC had given him absolute charge of the camels, over and above any authority Burke may have and "insisted on the necessity" of keeping the rum.<sup>1099</sup> He argued he could not be held responsible for the health of the camels if he was unable to manage them without interference. Burke however "was firm in his resolve" and Landells threatened to resign.<sup>1100</sup>

To add to the tension between the two men, nine camels went missing.<sup>1101</sup> This was not the first time they had strayed. Indeed Beckler thought the camels "had really seemed very unreliable up till now".<sup>1102</sup> When the animals had not been found after two days of searching, Burke's patience ran out. Unwilling to accept any further delays he split the party and sent the loaded pack-horses on towards Menindee. Two days later the camels were still eluding detection and Burke was now contemplating "setting out at once to Cooper's Creek ... without waiting any longer for the lost camels".<sup>1103</sup> He had lost confidence in the camels and was becoming increasingly frustrated with what he perceived to be their unreliability, and also the way Landells managed the animals. Although he still had 16 healthy camels, they would not be able to carry sufficient stores to the Cooper for the expedition to continue in its current form. Burke, however, did not make a fresh plan of action to address the reduced carrying capacity, but decided he would push on regardless. As noted earlier, Burke dealt with the problem in the way he had previously dealt with difficult issues: he left it for a subordinate to sort out. Burke took the pack-horses, whose management he was familiar with, and headed towards Menindee, leaving Landells to follow with the camels at his own pace. Beckler commented that "Burke's impatience was clearly visible ... in his seemingly unwarranted departure from Bilbarka with the horses".<sup>1104</sup>

The missing camels were finally found after five days. Captain Johnston allegedly told pastoralists on the Murray that:

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<sup>1096</sup> William John Wills, 'Dispatch, dated Bilbarka, 7 October 1860', ex2002-016, Box 2082/1b (Item 3), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1097</sup> Landells, 'Report', ex2004-011, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1098</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Dispatch, 16 October 1860', ex2002-011, Box 2082/1a (Item 11), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1099</sup> Wills, 'Letter #11, dated Bilbarker, 16 October 1860', ex2005-011, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1100</sup> *Ibid.*; William Oswald Hodgkinson, 'Hodgkinson's statement, date Menindie, 16 October 1860', ex2003-008, Box 2082/2g, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1101</sup> Becker, 'Fifth Report', ex2004-008, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1102</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 40.

<sup>1103</sup> Robert Cay, 'The Exploring Expedition', *Argus*, 26 October 1860: 5.

<sup>1104</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 41.

The lost camels were found about half a mile from the camp. Mr. Burke gave £5 to a blackfellow to find them, and Mr. Darkey sat down on the bank of the river to wait for the steamer *Albury*, and when she came near enough sung out 'you make a light, that fellow long neck yarrowman', and they said 'yes', and pointed to the second bend above, and the camels were in a few minutes found.<sup>1105</sup>

King, however, refuted these claims<sup>1106</sup> and Becker's account describes in detail the extended search they made for the camels, which were located 20 miles to the north-east of the Bilbarka camp.<sup>1107</sup>

On the journey from Bilbarka to Menindee, Landells made every effort to keep pace with Burke and the horses. However the men's inexperience loading the camels meant it took over four hours to prepare the animals each day. On the first day of the journey, four men were allocated to saddle and load 23 horses, and six men were allocated to load 25 camels.<sup>1108</sup> The horses were packed and departed camp more than five hours ahead of the camels, which were not ready to leave until after 2.00 pm. This meant that the camels had to travel until after midnight if they were to match the 22 miles the horses had covered that day. Although Landells had given camel handling instruction to ten Europeans in Royal Park, only five now remained with the party, and of these five only two were allocated to the care of the camels. With Wills pre-occupied taking barometrical observations during the busy time of loading the camels,<sup>1109</sup> Landells was left with two German scientists, two of the nine sepoy who originally came to Australia with the camels, and four men, two of whom had only been with the party a short while. Nevertheless, despite Landells' fears that too great an exertion could harm the camels,<sup>1110</sup> he was keen to show Burke the camels were equal to the horses and pushed the men and animals hard each day, so they arrived at Kinchega just half a day after Burke and the horses.<sup>1111</sup> Thinking their efforts "must have greatly satisfied Mr Burke",<sup>1112</sup> Landells was surprised to find that Burke was still angry with him over the incident with the rum. By splitting the party and going on ahead, Burke had only postponed the inevitable "collision" between himself and Landells.<sup>1113</sup> The two men argued. Burke thought Landells' conduct was insolent and improper and he gave his second-in-command:

an overhauling, and told him that if his officers misconducted themselves, he was the person to blow them up.<sup>1114</sup>

<sup>1105</sup> Mr [John] Kershaw, James Maiden's Station, Moama, 'The Exploring Expedition' (quoting Captain George Johnston of the P.S. *Moolgewanke*), *Bendigo Advertiser*, 6 November 1860: 2.

<sup>1106</sup> Age, 14 February 1862: 7. In addition to King disputing Kershaw's claim, the P.S. *Albury* was not on the Darling River in October 1860, but was at Lang's Crossing (Hay) on the Murrumbidgee River.

<sup>1107</sup> Becker, 'Fifth Report', ex2004-008, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1108</sup> Wills, 'Field Book No. 1: Bilbarka to Torowoto', ex2008-011, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1110</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 40-42.

<sup>1111</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>1112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1113</sup> William John Wills, 'Letter to Neumayer, dated Menindie, 16 October 1860', ex2005-011, Box 2083/4, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1114</sup> *Ibid.*



Figure 117: 'Love at first sight / And doth not a meeting like this make amends?'  
*Melbourne Punch*, 21 June 1860: 173.

Using the title of one of Thomas Moore's Irish melodies, the *Melbourne Punch* depicted Burke, on the day after his appointment as leader, embracing a camel. Initially Burke was ambivalent about the camels but by the time they had reached the Darling he had lost confidence in their abilities and was far from in love with the beasts.

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Landells alleged Burke called him "a scoundrel" and challenged him to a fight.<sup>1115</sup> This time his decision to resign was final. Even after resigning, the two men managed one final disagreement. Wills recalled:

Landells demanded that the camels be brought across the river [Darling] with the aid of a punt, since they were very clumsy in water and very sensitive to remaining in it for long periods. There was, however, no suitable punt at hand in Menindee. Mr. Burke maintained that the camels could be brought over the river just as easily by swimming them over on long ropes. Naturally, as a resigned officer, Landells could no longer assert his authority, and the camels were brought across the river following Mr. Burke's direction. Through the use of long ropes that reached across the river and were held on the other side, and through the use of similar leads which were attached to plugs in their noses, all the camels were swum across the Darling without accident or any subsequent illness.<sup>1116</sup>

Landells returned to Melbourne where the press published lengthy details of the conflict.<sup>1117</sup> Bonyhady details the political implications of the resignation for the EC and the interest it caused in Melbourne, with subsequent questions over Burke's ability as leader and how well the camels would be cared for.<sup>1118</sup>

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<sup>1115</sup> Landells, 'Report', ex2004-011, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1116</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 41-42.

<sup>1117</sup> *Age*, 7 November 1860: 4 & 7, 12 November 1860: 5, 15 November 1860: 4; *Argus*, 7 November 1860: 4; Elizabeth R. Landells, 'Mr. Landells', *Argus*, 8 November 1860: 2, 15 November 1860: 5, 16 November 1860: 4; M.J.M. Landells-Keating, 'Mr. Landells', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 15 November 1860: 2; *Herald*, 8 November 1860: 6, 15 November 1860: 4.

<sup>1118</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 99-112.



Burke did not stay long in Menindee after Landells' resignation. Bonyhady posits that his speedy departure was due to concern about the EC's reaction to Landells' resignation and any reflection that this may have had on Burke's fitness to lead the expedition.<sup>1119</sup> By heading to Cooper Creek, Burke was out of reach of recall to Melbourne.<sup>1120</sup> Although Burke had minimized his interaction with the camels up until this time, he was still able to select the best animals to take with him to Cooper Creek.<sup>1121</sup> Most likely assisted in his choice by Dost Mahomet and/or King, Burke selected 16 of the 25 available animals. He chose 15 males and only one female. The males included all six Bikaneri riding-camels, the three largest Egyptian males and six male Khorasan camels, but did not include the largest of the male Khorasan camels, Nero and Mutwala, who were the two most aggressive and difficult to handle. The only male riding-camel left behind, Mochrani, did not join the advance party due to a severe wound on his back.<sup>1122</sup>

Burke made good progress north of Menindee, averaging 33 kilometres a day and occasionally exceeding 50 kilometres a day. The party reached the Wilson River in 24 days with just one day off along the way. Burke did not load the animals equally; instead he favoured the six Bikaneri riding-camels that he would take to the Gulf, only placing very light loads on them.<sup>1123</sup> The horses and Khorasan camels carried the bulk of the load, with at least one Khorasan camel, Beer, carrying an extremely large load weighing nearly 300 kilograms. Brahe reported these camels never recovered from their exertions during this journey and two of them, Beer and Burra, died on the return trip to Menindee, while Wright considered a third, Mustana, was unlikely ever to recover.<sup>1124</sup> When informed of the camels' demise, King was not surprised that they had not recovered from the overloading even after five months' rest<sup>1125</sup> and Beckler ascribed the loss of Beer, "this once so excellent camel" to the ill-treatment it suffered at Burke's hands.<sup>1126</sup>

The camels were certainly in poor condition when they arrived at the Cooper, and although some of them showed signs of recovery once allowed to rest and graze, Beer and Burra did not improve and their condition deteriorated once the cold weather set in around the 24 March 1861.<sup>1127</sup> The

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<sup>1119</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-114.

<sup>1120</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-116.

<sup>1121</sup> *Argus*, 1 January 1861: 5; Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes, 31 December 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 99.

<sup>1122</sup> Alexander Macpherson, 'The Camels and the Expedition', *Argus*, 10 July 1861: 5.

<sup>1123</sup> *Age*, 14 February 1862: 7.

<sup>1124</sup> William Wright, 'Dispatch, dated Ptomarmora Creek, 20 June 1861', ex2002-024, Box 2082/1f (Item 3), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1125</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 278 and 283 to Brahe.

<sup>1126</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 181.

<sup>1127</sup> Brahe, 'Report', ex2004-009, State Library of Victoria; *Age*, 1 July 1861: 6; Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 278 to Brahe; Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes, 30 June 1861', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 111.

camels were reported to have died of 'scab',<sup>1128</sup> a highly infectious parasitic skin disease to which the animals become particularly susceptible in colder weather, when their coats are normally thicker and they huddle together for warmth. Brahe did not understand the disease and thought the camels were suffering as a result of being overworked.<sup>1129</sup> When he questioned Dost Mahomet about the camels' condition, he was told there was nothing wrong with them.<sup>1130</sup> After witnessing the devastating effects of the disease, Brahe soon learnt to cure it with an application of brimstone and grease, and later in the year Howitt placed him in charge of the sick camels which had survived long enough to return to Menindee. Although Howitt had no experience of handling camels, he quickly established that the sepoys Dost Mahomet and Baluch Khan were unable to cure the disease, or were at least indifferent to it. Howitt wrote:

The camels...may be pronounced cured of the scab, which I cannot help attributing in a great measure to the bad management of the sepoys.<sup>1131</sup>

Brahe took "great pains" with the sick animals and Howitt spoke highly of his care and attention, which saw the camels almost totally cured of scab during the journey between Menindee and Poria Creek in August 1861.<sup>1132</sup>

Burke's decision to keep the Bikaneri riding-camels lightly loaded on the journey from Menindee to the Cooper so they would arrive fresh for the crossing to the Gulf indicates that even before leaving Menindee he was planning the logistics of the journey north from the Cooper with a small party and six camels. It is unlikely he was keeping the camels fresh merely to send them back to Menindee with Brahe to bring up the remainder of the stores, indicating his intention to depart from the Cooper after only a short break. He certainly was not intending staying at the Cooper long enough to allow tired camels to recover from their 850-kilometre journey from Menindee. His decision to leave the Cooper as soon as possible and make the continental crossing may have been influenced by the news that Stuart had returned to Adelaide without having reached the north coast. However, probably as a result of his uncertainty regarding the viability of the route north of the Cooper, he kept his intentions to himself and did not give any indication of his plans to the EC.

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<sup>1128</sup> The camel disease 'scab', also called scabies, refers to sarcoptic mange (*Sarcoptes scabiei*) which is a highly contagious skin infection, often fatal particularly in young camels, spread by the mite *Sarcoptes scabiei* var. *cameli*.

<sup>1129</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Questions 281 and 306 to Brahe.

<sup>1130</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 278 to Brahe.

<sup>1131</sup> Alfred William Howitt, 'Dispatch, dated Poria Creek, 10 October 1861', ex3002-013, Box 2085/5a (Item 14), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1132</sup> Alfred William Howitt, 'Dispatch, dated Poria Creek, 2 September 1861', ex3002-012, Box 2085/5a (Item 13), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

By the time the expedition reached the Wilson River, the animals were leg-weary and needed a rest.<sup>1133</sup> Burke reduced their daily rate to an average of 23 kilometres.<sup>1134</sup> The party also had three days off and then travelled slowly downstream to their first Depot Camp “in order to recruit the strength of the animals”.<sup>1135</sup> However the three rest days were used for reconnaissance trips and the slow progress was as much a result of Wills’ inability to identify the main channel of the Cooper.<sup>1136</sup> While the majority of the animals rested on these three days, the horses and camels taken on the reconnaissance trips were afforded no such luxury.

The heavy cracking clay vertosols (black-soils) of the Wilson River flood-plain proved extremely difficult terrain to traverse. Although the expedition had crossed black-soil plains previously, the anastomosing<sup>1137</sup> flood channels and deeply cracked soils of the wide flood plain between Camp 60 and Camp 61 proved the most troublesome. Wills considered this the worst country they had travelled over since leaving Melbourne and he noted, “the cracks and chasms in the soil are so large that horses can scarcely avoid getting their feet jammed”.<sup>1138</sup> A large male pack-camel was left behind on this day, and although none of the expedition mentioned why the animal was abandoned, it is reasonable to suppose that a heavily loaded animal fell and injured itself while crossing the deeply cracked black-soil plains.<sup>1139</sup> Burke’s attitude to losing this animal is in stark contrast to that of Howitt. When a camel died at Menindee under James Knowles’ care, Howitt wrote to the EC explaining the circumstances and ordered Dr Wheeler conduct a post-mortem examination to establish the cause of death.<sup>1140</sup> Burke, on the other hand, failed to make any mention of the abandoned camel in his dispatches to the EC. He clearly saw the animals as an expendable resource and did not consider he would be censured by the EC for their loss, providing the animals were used to cross the continent successfully.

<sup>1133</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 146 to Brahe.

<sup>1134</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Questions 144-151 to Brahe.

<sup>1135</sup> Burke, 'Diary', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1136</sup> The VEE’s arrival at the Wilson River and Wills’ attempts to find the Cooper are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.4.2, pages 475 to 477.

<sup>1137</sup> Anastomosing rivers consist of multiple channels that divide and reconnect and are separated by semi-permanent banks. Schumm notes “the term ‘anastomosing’ should not be used as a synonym for braiding; the terms braiding and anastomosing have been used synonymously for braided river channels in many countries, but elsewhere, particularly in Australia, anastomosing is a common term applied to multiple-channel systems on alluvial plains” S.A. Schumm, 'Speculations concerning paleohydraulic controls on terrestrial sedimentation', *Geological Society of America Bulletin*, Vol. 79 (1968): 1573-1588.

<sup>1138</sup> William John Wills, 'Field Notes No. 3: Torowoto to Cooper’s Creek (10-15 November 1860)', ex2008-015, Box 2082/6g, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1139</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 663 to King.

<sup>1140</sup> Alfred William Howitt, 'Dispatch, Pamamaroo Creek, 11 November 1861', ex3002-015, Box 2085/5a (Item 16), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria; *Argus*, 29 November 1861: 4.



Figure 118: Satellite image of the anastomosing channels of the Wilson River flood plain – impassable when wet and dusty, cracked black-soil plains when dry. The VEE travelled across here on 18 November 1860.

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By the time Burke reached the Cooper he had first-hand experience managing the camels and a better understanding of their ability to travel when loaded, but he still chose horses as the mode of transport for the first reconnaissance trip north of Cooper Creek. The day after arriving at Depot Camp 63, their first depot camp on the Cooper, Burke and Brahe set out to survey the country to the north. Unfortunately for Burke, stony ground, a lack of water and daytime temperatures up to 43°C, meant the horses soon knocked up and they were forced to return after making only 40 kilometres around the base of the St Anne Range.<sup>1141</sup> With this experience in mind, the following day Burke departed Depot Camp 63 on a second reconnaissance trip, this time mounted on three male camels. The camels were able to make much better progress than the horses, and according to Wills' dead-reckoning they covered almost 110 miles in three days, although from plotting Wills' field notes it would seem more likely they covered 110 kilometres rather than 110 miles. Nevertheless the camels performed much better than the horses did under the same conditions.<sup>1142</sup> In addition, two of these camels were Coppin's Egyptians and therefore not considered as capable as the Bikaneri riding-camels that Burke was still resting.<sup>1143</sup>

After three arduous days marching, Wills thought the camels appeared exhausted and, after unsaddling them, he allowed them to graze.<sup>1144</sup> Unfortunately for Wills the camels made off, "shewing

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<sup>1141</sup> William John Wills, 'Third Surveyor's Report (Torowoto to Cooper's Creek, Camp LXV depot, Cooper's Creek, 15 December 1860)', ex2004-013, Box 2082/4b, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1143</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Questions 498-508 to McDonough; Questions 667-686 to King.

<sup>1144</sup> Wills, 'Third Surveyor's Report', ex2004-013, State Library of Victoria.

that they were not quite so much done up as they appeared to be”.<sup>1145</sup> Had Dost Mahomet been with the reconnaissance party, he may have reminded them of the wisdom of the Prophet Muhammad, “Tie your camel first, then put your trust in Allah”.<sup>1146</sup> Wills and McDonough were stranded some 100 kilometres north of Depot Camp 63 with just nine litres of water between them. They were obliged to walk back to the Cooper through the November heat and came perilously close to dying in the Strzelecki Desert. Wills recovered from these exertions remarkably quickly, whereas McDonough struggled to regain his health and, as a consequence, Burke chose not to take McDonough on to the Gulf despite having favoured him earlier. Burke never recovered the three camels, but two of them, Mr Cassim and Nano, were seen seven months later on Mount Victor station in northern South Australia, well over 600 kilometres from where they were lost.<sup>1147</sup> Because Burke did not leave a description of the camels he took with him from Menindee, or a list of their brands, the re-appearance of these two camels caused confusion and raised concerns over Burke’s fate as it was believed they may have been two of the animals Burke took to the Gulf.<sup>1148</sup>

During the trip from the Cooper to the Gulf, Burke made sure the camels did not have the opportunity to escape by hobbling them whenever they were feeding and tying them to their swags at night.<sup>1149</sup> Apart from ensuring his safety and preventing a repeat of the situation Wills and McDonough had found themselves in, there was the added advantage that the camels were not able to wander at night. This meant the animals did not have to be found each morning, allowing a speedy departure from camp each morning and thereby maximising their travel time. The disadvantage was that the camels did not have sufficient time to feed adequately before being tied up each night. While insufficient nutrition may be perceived as a fundamental cause of the failure of the camels during the trip back from the Gulf, Bergin showed that it was the combination of poor nutrition, excessive distance travelled each day and heavy loads that caused the camels to become exhausted and develop ‘founder’.<sup>1150</sup> Bergin’s 1,800 kilometre trip from the Cooper to the Gulf with camels in 1977 was initially meant to show that had Burke travelled in winter, rather than summer, the journey could be made in three months without the loss of a single animal and that, in fact, “it shouldn’t be all that bad a trip”.<sup>1151</sup> However, Bergin’s experience mirrored that of Burke and reinforced the lessons

<sup>1145</sup> Wills, 'Field Notes No. 5: Cooper’s Creek', ex2008-017, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1146</sup> Kutub al-Sittah (Fourth Hadith Collection): Jami' at-Tirmidhi 2517.

<sup>1147</sup> Adelaide Correspondent, 'Telegraphic Despatches', *Argus*, 20 July 1861: 5.

<sup>1148</sup> *Argus*, 30 July 1861: 4; *South Australian Advertiser*, 30 July 1861: 2.

<sup>1149</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 753 to King; James Smith, 'John King's story, Part I', *The Australasian*, 7 May 1870: 582.

<sup>1150</sup> Bergin, *In the steps*, 117.

<sup>1151</sup> Bergin, *In the steps*, 117; Lawrence George Green, *Strange Africa* (London: Stanley Paul, 1938), Chapter 5: Grim Desert Cavalcade; Arthur Glyn Leonard, *The Camel: Its Uses and Management* (London: Longman’s Green & Co., 1894), 234. The camel disease 'founder' was also called 'zaharbahd'. Founder often referred to footsore camels, while zaharbahd often referred to 'dropsy' (oedema) or any other disease of the blood. There was very little understanding of camel diseases in Australia in 1860.

learned by British officers in India in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: that it is better to travel slower and finish the journey with a healthy camel, than to rush on and have the camel become "a total and irrecoverable wreck".<sup>1152</sup> While the difference between failure and success on long journeys with camels was a complex relationship of distance, terrain, nutrition and loading, maintaining the health of the camels was primarily dependant on the distance travelled each day. Camels could accomplish long journeys relying solely on grazing and foraging, but the distance travelled (and, as a result, the amount of time they spent walking compared to the amount of time they spent resting, grazing and chewing the cud) was the critical factor. Leese considered distances of more than 24 kilometres a day on an extended march to be "an abuse of the camel" which could not be maintained for long.<sup>1153</sup> Cross agreed and emphasized the difference between a fresh camel and a fatigued camel at the end of a 20 kilometre march to be as little as a quarter of a mile an hour.<sup>1154</sup> The British Army in India came to realise that a camel with a load of 180 kilograms could only travel an average of 18 kilometres a day,<sup>1155</sup> while the Bedouin, with much greater experience and understanding of the animals, considered loads of 70 to 90 kilograms the limits for swift travelling.<sup>1156</sup> Leonard thought that "the marching and carrying powers of the camels had been grossly exaggerated and misrepresented" and argued that:

It is a popular error to imagine that the baggage camel can travel the long distances and work the long hours – i.e. sixteen hours daily – that people who are ignorant of him say he can.<sup>1157</sup>

He went on to point out that camels working 16 hours a day would need to be rested for a week to ten days after travelling 400-500 kilometres.<sup>1158</sup>

Burke knew none of this when he set off from the Cooper, and as the camel proponents in Australia had told so many exaggerated tales of the loads baggage camels could carry, tales often told in conjunction with stories of the phenomenal distances riding-camels could accomplish, it would have been difficult for the inexperienced party to establish precisely what the camels could achieve. Landells had boasted of travelling at a rate of 80-95 kilometres a day from the Bolan Pass to Karachi with these camels<sup>1159</sup> and he had told Burke he could expect them to travel between 33-50 kilometres a day, with trips up to 130 kilometres a day a possibility.<sup>1160</sup> After the reconnaissance trips north of the Cooper Depot Camp showed there was no surface water, Burke decided to head to Eyre's Creek

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<sup>1152</sup> Leonard, *The Camel*, 201.

<sup>1153</sup> Leese, *A treatise on the one-humped camel*, 117.

<sup>1154</sup> H.E. Cross, *The camel and its diseases, being notes for veterinary surgeons and commandants of camel corps* (London: Bailliere, Tindall & Cox, 1917), quoted in Bergin, *In the steps*, 117.

<sup>1155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1156</sup> Wilfred Thesiger, *Arabian sands* (London: Longmans & Green, 1959), 44 quoted in Bergin, *In the steps*, 118.

<sup>1157</sup> Leonard, *The Camel*, 186.

<sup>1158</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>1159</sup> *Argus*, 11 June 1860: 5.

<sup>1160</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes, 17 July 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c; 'Minutes, 17 July 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 58.

and then make for the Albert River, a return trip Wills would have estimated to be at least 2,400 kilometres. Burke calculated he could make the trip in twelve weeks, which would have required an average daily journey of 30 kilometres; well within Landells' earlier achievements and comparable to the averages they had made between Menindee and the Wilson River. As Burke proposed walking most of the way to save the camels' strength, the initial concerns may have been that the men, not the animals would be the first to fail.

Burke took the six male Bikaneri riding-camels and his horse, Billy, loaded with three months provisions which weighed around 340 kilograms.<sup>1161</sup> In addition to the food, Burke took firearms, cooking utensils and navigational instruments, but in order to keep the weight down he did not take tents, bedding or swags.<sup>1162</sup> The whole outfit, including the provisions would have weighed well over 400 kilograms, with most of it loaded onto the two camels which were outfitted with the pack-saddles. For the first three days the men rode as they followed the Cooper downstream (Wills, King and Gray on camels and Burke most likely on the horse). After three days Wills believed they had reached the end of the creek and Burke decided it was time to fill the water bags in preparation for crossing Sturt Stony Desert, which they knew was ahead. A total of 360 kilograms of water was loaded onto the camels, and the men walked the rest of the way to the Gulf.<sup>1163</sup>

The load on each camel would have averaged at least 130 kilograms, yet King suggested the camels had only been lightly loaded.<sup>1164</sup> When questioned, he stated Burke could have taken additional provisions if he wished, and he thought the camels were carrying considerably less than 115 kilograms, an amount he believed to be an average load for the animals. Clearly there is some discrepancy between the amount of provisions, stores and water that Burke reported taking from the Cooper compared to the weight King believed each camel was carrying. King admitted he had no prior experience of handling camels during his eight years in India.<sup>1165</sup> Certainly the camels were

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<sup>1161</sup> *Argus*, 1 July 1861: 6.

<sup>1162</sup> Burke took the following equipment to Carpentaria: Two Terry & Calisher Type I carbines (.568" calibre), two fowling pieces (guns) and ramrods, four revolvers, ammunition for all weapons, cooking and eating utensils including plates, tin pots, pannikins and a camp oven, two camel pack saddles and camel pads, four(?) camel riding-saddles, hobbles and tack for camels, several sets of leather camel shoes, one horse saddle and tack, several large water bags, a bucket, spare clothing including trousers, oilcloths for sleeping under, instruments for navigation and mapping including a seven-inch sextant by Julius Lohmeir of Hamburg in a wooden box, a pocket sextant in a wooden box with a canvas cover, a Troughton & Simms plane glass ordnance pattern artificial horizon with glass spirit level in a wooden box, a mercury artificial horizon made of cast iron with glass shades and mercury bottle with stopper, two gold watches by James Murray of London, numbers #5243 and #5094, an aneroid barometer number #21548 in a wooden box, two Fahrenheit thermometers numbers VII and VIII in a wooden box, a Fraunhofer telescope in a leather case, a pair of field glasses, a Negretti & Zambra prismatic compass, a pocket compass, an 1860 Nautical almanac, an 1861-1862 Nautical almanac, field books, writing instruments, maps and charts, matches, beads.

<sup>1163</sup> Burke, 'Diary', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1164</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Questions 716-724 to King.

<sup>1165</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 639 to King.



lightly loaded, compared to the 300+ kilogram loads that Burke had placed on the Khorasan camels during the journey from Menindee. However these camels had only been expected to travel 800 kilometres over 24 days before being rested, and now Burke was proposing to travel at least 3,000 kilometres over 84 days. King also failed to mention that the camels they took to the Gulf were Bikaneri riding-camels, bred for their speed rather than their carrying ability.

The camels travelled well for the first four weeks. Any fears they would become lame when crossing Sturt Stony Desert proved unfounded as the terrain was not as difficult as they had expected. Sturt's harrowing description of this area had been cause for concern, but once on the gibber desert, Wills wrote:

We found the ground not nearly as bad for travelling on as that between Bulloo and Cooper's Creek. In fact, I do not know whether it arose from our exaggerated anticipation of horrors or not, but we thought it far from bad travelling ground, and as to pasture it is only the actually stony ground that is bare, and many a sheep run is in fact worse grazing ground than that.<sup>1166</sup>

Burke did not even feel the need to use the specially made camel shoes which had been fabricated, after much debate by the EC, from eight prototype designs.<sup>1167</sup> After crossing the stony desert, one camel injured a leg while descending into a creek near the Diamantina River and his load was transferred to the other camels, allowing him to travel unburdened.<sup>1168</sup> The camel recovered from the injury and the incident, which could have been a serious setback had the camel been seriously injured, was not considered significant enough to rate a mention in either Burke's or Wills' journals.

When Burke decided to leave the Diamantina, he loaded up the camels with ten days supply of water and headed north into the desert (the implications of this decision are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.4.4). Without camels, Burke could not have carried sufficient water to make this daring move.

King was responsible for leading the camels each day and when they were travelling through good vegetation he attached long cords to the camels' nose pegs to allow them to graze as they walked along.<sup>1169</sup> On several occasions, including Christmas Day and New Year's Day, a halt was called early

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<sup>1166</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 2: December 1860', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1167</sup> Richard D. Ford of Ford Brothers, machine sewers and bag makers of King.-street, Melbourne made 15 sets of camel shoes and leather merchants, Patrick & Robert Macfarland, made an additional 100 sets. The shoes cost 30s. per set for a total cost of £181.10s., *Argus*, 22 August 1860: 5. The shoes were made "of leather, with straps bound round the legs. Next [to] the foot are several layers of felt, and the large circular piece of thick leather forming the sole, is shod with flat and broad-headed nails" *Bendigo Advertiser*, 30 August 1860: 2. Each shoe was "11 inches by 9, and is made of one piece of solid sole leather, having an internal sole of triple felt. The sole extends into five flanges, of about 3 ft. 5 inches in width, which enclose the foot, and attached to which are straps that go round the fetlock and ankle. The sole of the shoe is firmly studded with no less than 24 circular iron plates of one and a quarter inch in diameter" *Argus*, 27 August 1860: 5. Burke took about six dozen sets of shoes with him from Menindee, *Argus*, 3 October 1860: 5.

<sup>1168</sup> Smith, 'John King's story, Part III'.

<sup>1169</sup> *Ibid.*

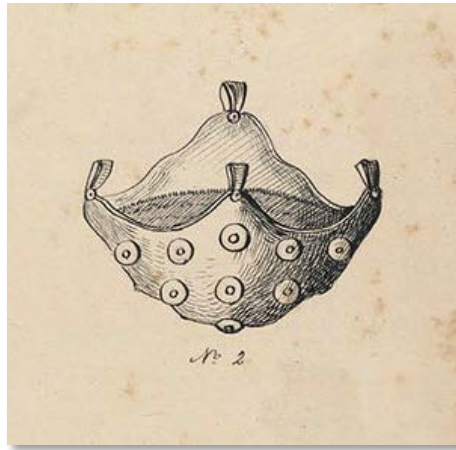


Figure 119: Helena Forde, 'No. 2. Camel's shoe, from a heap of some hundreds thrown away by Burke to lighten the loads – Camp 1', 1865-1866. Image a948011, Sketches of Murray and Darling Rivers Taken in Camp, PXA 551, State Library of New South Wales.

in the day to allow the camels to rest and feed, and when the camels found “but scanty feed”, the men sacrificed their limited rations and “regaled them [the camels] with a little oatmeal and sugar”.<sup>1170</sup> The camels did not appear to suffer from a lack of water, despite the intense summer temperatures. At Camp 81 the horse drank a greater quantity of water than the camels and then strayed back to the small waterhole on Umpadiboo Creek which they had passed late in the afternoon, which Burke remarked to King, “demonstrated the superiority of camels over horses for travelling through an arid country”.<sup>1171</sup> If King's recollection is correct, it shows Burke was starting to warm to the camels and appreciate their potential. Wills was a little more circumspect when a thermometer and barometer were broken after a camel rolled while the instruments were packed on its back.<sup>1172</sup>

The first problems arose when the Bikaneri camels from the flat sandy plains of the Thar Desert of Rajasthan had to cross a series of rugged ranges in north-west Queensland. While the sturdier Khorasan camels from the mountainous country of the Toba Kakar Range may have fared better carrying loads over the sharp quartz and schistose rocks, the Bikaneri camels spent their time in the mountains “sweating profusely from fear”.<sup>1173</sup> At the De Littles Range, Burke decided to put the shoes on the camels. Although they had practiced fitting the shoes to the camels in Royal Park under the watchful eye of Governor Barkly,<sup>1174</sup> Wills reported they were now “eminently unsuccessful” in their attempts.<sup>1175</sup> After some delay they gave up trying <sup>1176</sup> and a week later at the top of the range,

<sup>1170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1172</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 4: January 1860', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1173</sup> Burke, 'Diary', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1174</sup> *Argus*, 18 August 1860: 4.

<sup>1175</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 5: January 1860', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1176</sup> *Argus*, *An account of the crossing*.

the camels' shoes were discarded.<sup>1177</sup> As the men travelled northwards from the De Littles Range into the Standish Range and then the Selwyn Range, the mountains became steeper and more rugged, and on 17 January 1861 at Camp 96 on Fosters Creek, a halt was called to allow the camels to rest for a day and for the men to repair the equipment. Wills conducted a reconnaissance trip around Mount Barry and Mount Birnie, but he did not discover an easy passage through the ranges.<sup>1178</sup> With 36 of the allocated 42 days already gone and 450 kilometres still remaining to the mouth of the Albert River, Burke "determined ... to go straight at the mountains".<sup>1179</sup> With a month's supply of provisions already consumed, the camels' loads had been lightened by around 140 kilograms, but the animals suffered greatly – "bleeding, sweating and groaning"<sup>1180</sup> – particularly between Camps 98 and 99. Burke noted somewhat triumphantly "at last through", indicating this perilous part of the journey was over.<sup>1181</sup>

Bergin did not face the same difficulties on his trip in 1977. He was unsure exactly where Burke had travelled through the Selwyn Range and as a result he followed the road through Devoncourt to Cloncurry and avoided the most arduous part of Burke's journey. Nevertheless, he still felt compelled to state this was "the cruellest ground I have ever dragged an animal over".<sup>1182</sup> Today feral camels have adapted well to the mountainous environment of the Selwyn Range and large herds are common, with evidence of camels throughout the ridges and gullies.

The January heat and humidity would have increased noticeably as Burke's party descended 300 metres from the Selwyn Range onto the Gulf plains. Eight days after crossing the ranges the camels began to show the signs of extreme fatigue. Near Camp 109, Golah Singh became too weak to climb out of the Corella River and had to be abandoned.<sup>1183</sup> The banks of the creek here are particularly steep and it would have been no easy matter to have extricated the animal. There are a number of tributaries which can be followed up as a means of egress, but the party was attracting the attention of the Mayi-Thakurti people and so, fearing for his safety, Burke ordered the camel be left.<sup>1184</sup> The first camel had succumbed to fatigue, having carried a load of 130+ kilograms for 1,300 kilometres over the previous 46 days with only two rest days.

Burke was averaging 30 kilometres a day, which was in accordance with his original estimate, but as a result of following the Diamantina River rather than Eyre Creek, as well as being forced to the east by the Selwyn Range and then deciding to follow Corella Creek with its bends and meanders, the

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<sup>1177</sup> Smith, 'John King's story, Part III'.

<sup>1178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1179</sup> Burke, 'Diary', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1182</sup> Bergin, *In the steps*, 87-88; 'Big Country: The Bergin-McHugh Expedition', (ABC TV, 17 May 1978).

<sup>1183</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 7: Middle part of Cloncurry', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1184</sup> Burke, 'Diary', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia.



Figure 120: Feral camels in the Selwyn Range, Queensland.  
© 2008 Dave Phoenix.

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distance they would have to travel from the Cooper to the Gulf was 400 to 500 kilometres longer than Wills originally estimated. The party continued to make good progress across the Gulf plains until 6 February when the first heavy rains of the wet season turned the black-soil plains to mud and the camels began to struggle.<sup>1185</sup> Three days later, when the camels reached their most northerly point at Camp 119, they had travelled on 54 of the last 56 days, averaging a little over 30 kilometres a day, but the additional distance meant they had taken two weeks longer than Burke had originally planned. According to King, the five camels arrived at the Gulf in good condition, but “leg-weary”.<sup>1186</sup>

The monsoonal rains began in earnest during the second week of February 1861.<sup>1187</sup> The mean monthly rainfall for February in this part of the Gulf is 250 mm, although as much as 770 mm has been recorded for the month, and in 1949, 282 mm fell in a single day.<sup>1188</sup> Bergin questioned how “anyone in their right mind could take camels in to the tropics in the wet season?”<sup>1189</sup> and he described how:

Camels have feet like soup plates, perfect for walking on sand, but almost impossible to pull out of mud. Once the ‘soup plate’ is covered with a foot or two of mud, the camel is virtually immobilized.<sup>1190</sup>

Certainly the camels were the first to be affected by the mud and by the time they reached the Little Bynoe River they “could scarcely be got along”.<sup>1191</sup> Burke left the five camels at Camp 119 and

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<sup>1185</sup> James Smith, ‘John King’s story, Part II’, *The Australasian*, 14 May 1870: 614.

<sup>1186</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Questions 851 and 872 to King.

<sup>1187</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Questions 858 and 876 to King.

<sup>1188</sup> Meteorological data from the Australian Bureau of Meteorology.

bom.gov.au

<sup>1189</sup> Bergin, *In the steps*, 24.

<sup>1190</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1191</sup> Wills, ‘Journey from Carpentaria’, ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

continued on with just the horse, but after leading him only a few hundred metres he became bogged as well.<sup>1192</sup> Wills wrote:

A great deal of the land was so soft and rotten that the horse, with only a saddle and about 25 lbs. on his back, could scarcely walk over it.<sup>1193</sup>

On the return trip from the Gulf, the camels "were up to their knees in mud".<sup>1194</sup> Wills' journal entries are sparse and fragmented for this period of the journey, indicating that conditions were difficult, but he does not single out the camels as being more susceptible to the conditions than the men or the horse. On 21 February he noted that the rain had made the ground "so boggy that the animals could scarcely walk over it" and the following day the ground was "so boggy as to be almost impassable", which would indicate even the men themselves were having difficulty moving.<sup>1195</sup> Certainly he expressed relief when the clouds cleared for a short while, allowing them respite "from the dread of additional mud".<sup>1196</sup>

Despite Wills having noted their southbound progress was slow and difficult, an examination of the map of the route raises questions over just how far they actually travelled during the first few weeks of February 1861 and indicates there was more to the delay than the inability of the camels to walk through the mud. The map of the northern part of the journey is confusing and shows several traverses. By isolating the northbound leg from the return traverse, it is clear the party travelled much further during the southbound return route. The northbound journey from Camp 115 to Camp 119 was 90 kilometres and took four days to complete when the ground was relatively dry, an average of 22 kilometres a day. The return journey for this section took nine days and it has been assumed that their slow progress was due to the camels struggling due to boggy ground.<sup>1197</sup> There are no diary entries, so the weather conditions cannot be determined, but scaling the distance travelled from the tracing of Wills' map shows the men travelled at least 135 kilometres, and there appears to be an additional reconnaissance trip of 100 kilometres from Camp 1R. Their return journey took the party west of their northbound route, to the higher ground around the Bang Bang Jump Up.<sup>1198</sup> It is possible that they were searching for drier ground along the Jump Up near Donors Hill, or they might have been searching for a way around the flooded junction of the Saxby and Flinders River. Camp 4R was called 'Boocha's camp', which may indicate that the camel, Boocha, got bogged or experienced problems crossing the flooded Saxby. Regardless of the reason for the detour and delay, the camels travelled 135 kilometres in nine days, with Wills covering 235 kilometres in the same time.

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<sup>1192</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 9: Returning from Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1193</sup> *Ibid.*

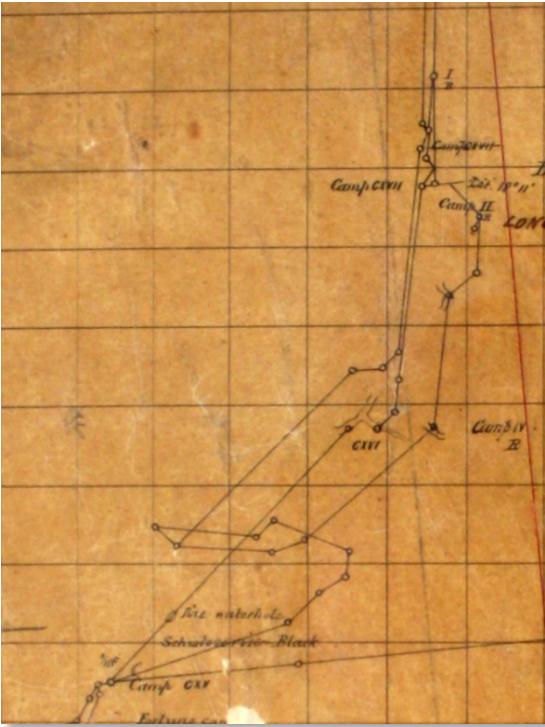
<sup>1194</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 875 to King.

<sup>1195</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 7: Middle part of Cloncurry', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1196</sup> Wills, 'Journey from Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1197</sup> "They had struck the wet season; day after day the warm rain poured down and the camels hated it" Moorehead, *Cooper's Creek*, 78.

<sup>1198</sup> The Bang Bang Jump Up is 40 metres above the Flinders River at S18°34'43" E140°40'49" (GDA2020).



EXP22A, Historic Plan Collection, Unit 871, VPRS 8168/P0002, Public Record Office of Victoria.



EXP22A, Historic Plan Collection, Unit 871, VPRS 8168/P0002, Public Record Office of Victoria.





Figure 123: Modified version showing only the southbound rain and flood affected route.  
EXP22A, Historic Plan Collection, Unit 871, VPRS 8168/P0002, Public Record Office of Victoria.

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While this still represents a reduction in the average daily progress compared to the northbound journey, their progress was not as slow as has been suggested.

On 2 March 1861, Golah Singh was found again, close to where he had been abandoned on the northbound journey. Wills noted:

He looks thin and miserable; seems to have fretted a great deal, probably at finding himself left behind, and he has been walking up and down our tracks till he has made a regular pathway; could find no sign of his having been far off, although there is a splendid feed to which he could have gone. He began to eat as soon as he saw the other camels.<sup>1199</sup>

However, he was unable to keep up “even when the pack and saddle were taken off” and after just three days “he seemed to be completely done up and could not come on”.<sup>1200</sup> Wills realised “that it was a hopeless matter about Golah” and they “were obliged to leave him behind”.<sup>1201</sup> Some commentators questioned why the animal was abandoned when he could have been shot and eaten. Cathcart supposes:

perhaps, however, their reunion ... had unnerved them. It was though the camel symbolised their own mortal peril – and to kill him was to kill all hope for themselves.<sup>1202</sup>

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<sup>1199</sup> Wills, 'Journey from Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1200</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1202</sup> Cathcart, *Land of plenty*, 92.





Figure 124: Artefacts found in 1994 by Chris Tangey, Gary Cooper, Annie Thorp and Adam Macfie.  
© 2003 Dave Phoenix.

If the men had shot Golah Singh, the rain and humidity would have made it impossible to jerk any of the meat, so at best they would have turned the 450 kilogram beast<sup>1203</sup> into a couple of meals which their shrunken stomachs would have struggled to digest. Instead they shot a pheasant and killed a python, which gave them dysentery.

The fate of the next camel is unknown, but on 20 March at the Burke River they halted at “Camp 32R, Feasting Camp” where “The packs we overhauled and left nearly 60 lbs. weight of things behind”.<sup>1204</sup> It may have been that a camel was abandoned, or that one collapsed or was shot. Wills does not record whether they were feasting on the supplies that the camel had been carrying or whether they feasted on the camel itself. Each time a camel died, its load had to be redistributed or abandoned. In 1994 artefacts believed to be part of the 60 lbs. of abandoned equipment were found on Kolar Creek (see Figure 124).<sup>1205</sup>

‘Boocha’ was eaten at Camp 41R or 42R ‘Boocha’s Rest’ on 30 March 1861 and a fourth camel was abandoned between Camp 45R and Camp 46R, the Plant Camp, on 3 April 1861 after it collapsed. The four men were still 500 kilometres from Depot Camp 65. Wills wrote of their desperate situation:

Another of the camels having given up today and been left on the road or rather the plain, order has been given for leaving behind everything but the grub and just what we carry on our backs.<sup>1206</sup>

<sup>1203</sup> Mature bull camels can weigh over 750 kilograms. However, Golah Singh was probably a younger male and therefore would have weighed closer to 500 kilograms when in good condition. The weights of mature camels processed at the Wamboden Abattoir, Alice Springs, range from 514 to 635 kilograms for bulls, while animals of an estimated five years of age had a live weight of approximately 340 to 430 kilograms. Camel Industry Steering Committee for the Northern Territory Government, ‘Strategies for Development’ (Darwin: Northern Territory Government, 1993), Appendix 2: 57.

<sup>1204</sup> Wills, ‘Journey from Carpentaria’, ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1205</sup> Chris Tangey, ‘Years of Investigation’, Burke and Wills Outback Conference 2003, *Burke and Wills Conference Proceedings* 2003, 13-20. Tangey’s finds were at S21°59’52” E140°07’23” (GDA2020).

<sup>1206</sup> Wills, ‘Astronomical observations 1861’, ex2008-022, State Library of Victoria.

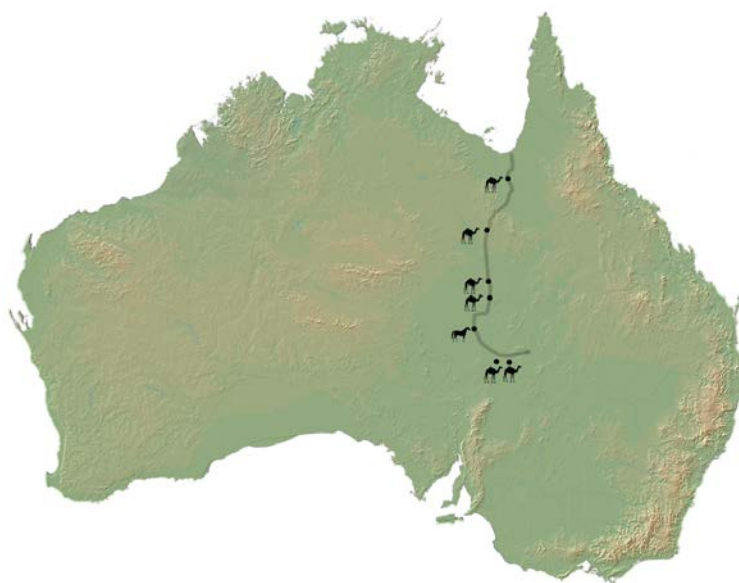


Figure 125: Map showing where Burke's animals died, or were abandoned, on the return journey from the Gulf.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.

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The men began taking turns riding the remaining two camels, Landa and Rajah, both of which managed to survive the arduous march across Sturt Stony Desert to the Cooper.<sup>1207</sup> Burke expected the exhausted and emaciated animals would rest and recuperate for several weeks at Depot Camp 65 with the Supply Party's ten camels, before eventually returning to Melbourne. However, when they found the Depot abandoned, the last two camels were faced with an additional desperate march across the Strzelecki Desert to Mount Hopeless. Landa only managed 45 kilometres before getting hopelessly bogged and Rajah, the last of the camels, only survived another ten days before collapsing with exhaustion.<sup>1208</sup> King shot him and the men jerked as much of his flesh as possible. Without camels, Burke, Wills and King could not carry sufficient water to cross the Strzelecki Desert to Mount Hopeless, and were therefore stranded at the Cooper.

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<sup>1207</sup> Smith, 'John King's story, Part II'.

<sup>1208</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

## 5.8 The fate of the camels that survived the Expedition

It has been suggested that:

the first feral camels in Australia were probably two animals abandoned from the Burke and Wills Expedition shortly after the first imports.<sup>1209</sup>

Although Gauthier-Pilters and Dagg do not explain which two camels these were, the discussion earlier in this chapter (see Chapter 5.3) has already shown that the first feral camels in Australia were at Twofold Bay on the New South Wales south coast in the late 1840s, predating Burke's camels by 15 years. Others think "It is more than likely that the descendants of Landells' camels are among those that now roam the Australian continent".<sup>1210</sup> This claim may in fact be true, although the process by which Landells' camels' DNA entered the Australian feral camel population is more complicated than might be expected.

An investigation into the fate of the camels taken on the Expedition shows that it is highly unlikely that any of the animals that escaped or were abandoned contributed to Australia's feral herds. Of the six camels Burke took to the Gulf, one was abandoned and the other five died from exhaustion or were shot. Of the six camels that were left at Depot Camp 65 with Brahe, one died of scab,<sup>1211</sup> one went missing<sup>1212</sup> and the other four survived to return to Menindee. Of the ten camels with Wright's Supply Party, one was shot<sup>1213</sup> and the other nine survived to return to Melbourne.

The relief expeditions also used camels. McKinlay had four camels on his expedition: two of which were killed and eaten,<sup>1214</sup> and two turned loose.<sup>1215</sup> Howitt used seven camels in 1861, all of whom survived to return to Menindee and he quickly realised "that any man who was good with

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<sup>1209</sup> John L. Long, *Introduced mammals of the world: their history, distribution, and influence* (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2003), 391, quoting Hilde Gauthier-Pilters and Anne Innis Dagg, *Camel biology. A review of The Camel, Its Evolution, Ecology, Behavior, and Relationship to Man* (University of Chicago Press, 1981).

<sup>1210</sup> Victorian Government: Culture Victoria, Stories: Land and Ecology: *Burke and Wills: Have Camels Will Travel*,  
[cv.vic.gov.au/stories/land-and-ecology/burke-and-wills-have-camels-will-travel/](http://cv.vic.gov.au/stories/land-and-ecology/burke-and-wills-have-camels-will-travel/)

<sup>1211</sup> 'Beer', a male Khorasan camel, died of scab on 1 June 1861.

<sup>1212</sup> 'Bell Singh', a large male Khorasan camel, went missing at Koorliatto on the 16 May 1861 and was not found again.

<sup>1213</sup> 'Burra', a male Khorasan camel, was suffering from scab and was shot by Hodgkinson just north of Rat Point on 4 June 1861.

<sup>1214</sup> 'Siva', a female Egyptian camel who McKinlay considered the most vicious camel, was killed and eaten at Camp 46 on the Bowen River on 30 July 1862. 'Nano'/'Naroo', a male Egyptian camel, one of the three that escaped from Wills and McDonough in November 1860, was recaptured in South Australia and McKinlay's party killed and ate him at Camp 19 on 16 June 1862. McKinlay, *McKinlay's diary of his journey*; *Argus*, 15 July 1861: 5, 20 July 1862: 5; *South Australian Advertiser*, 5 August 1861: 3, 6 August 1861: 3, 8 August 1861: 3.

<sup>1215</sup> 'Mr Coppin'/'Cassim', a male Egyptian camel, one of the three that escaped from Wills and McDonough in November 1860, was recaptured in South Australia and McKinlay turned him loose on the Burdekin River on 10 July 1862. 'Krishna', a female Egyptian camel which McKinlay referred to as 'The Old Woman', was turned loose at Camp 9 on the Gilbert River on 4 June 1862.

horses could manage camels".<sup>1216</sup> The following year, Howitt took nine camels back to the Cooper, one of which escaped and was not found again.<sup>1217</sup> One of the five female Bikaneri camels gave birth during the expedition and, because she refused to be caught or allow the calf to be handled, Howitt shot the calf, exclaiming "camel-breeding and exploring are not easily combined".<sup>1218</sup> Landsborough did not take any camels on his expedition, but he did recover one of the escapees during his journey back to Melbourne.<sup>1219</sup>

Although ten camels were abandoned or escaped between October 1860 and September 1862, five subsequently reappeared at outlying pastoral properties and were recaptured. As mentioned earlier, because Burke did not record the brands and descriptions of his camels, pastoralists did not know which of the various parties the strays belonged to.<sup>1220</sup> Consequently the appearance of these camels caused great excitement, as stockmen speculated on the implications for the welfare of Burke's Gulf Party. As none of the squatters had seen a camel before, further confusion was caused because they found it difficult to identify the animal's gender.<sup>1221</sup>

By the end of 1862, five camels were unaccounted for. Figure 126 shows the gender of these animals and the locations where they were abandoned or escaped. Only one female camel was unaccounted for, old Krishna, having been abandoned on the Gilbert River in Queensland by McKinlay in June 1862. The nearest male camel to Krishna was Golah Singh, who had been abandoned in an exhausted state 16 months earlier, 300 kilometres to the south-west. It seems unlikely that these two would have met and begun Australia's feral camel population. Consequently,

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<sup>1216</sup> Howitt, 'Personal reminiscences'.

<sup>1217</sup> 'Mustana', a male Khorasan camel, ran away from Howitt's Depot Camp at Kulyu-marru in early July 1862.

<sup>1218</sup> Alfred William Howitt, 'Dispatch, dated Blanchewater, 22 October 1862', ex3002-028, Box 2085/5a (Item 30), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1219</sup> The camel recovered by Landsborough was either 'Bell Singh', who escaped from Brahe at Koorliato in May 1861, the male Egyptian camel that was abandoned by the VEE on the Wilson River in November 1860, or the third Egyptian camel that escaped from Wills and McDonough in November 1860. Landsborough found the camel at Thomas Dangar's Bunnawanna Station on the Barwon River. William Landsborough, *Journal of Landsborough's expedition from Carpentaria in search of Burke and Wills: With a map showing his route* (Melbourne: Wilson & Mackinnon, 1862); *Argus*, 27 July 1861: 4, 2 August 1861: 5, 23 August 1861: 5, 6 September 1861: 7, 10 October 1861: 6, 22 October 1861: 7, 1 June 1865: 5, 17 April 1865: 5, 30 May 1865: 5; *The Star*, 6 July 1865: 3, 10 July 1865: 2; *Courier*, 28 September 1861: 2; *South Australian Advertiser*, 11 September 1861: 2.

<sup>1220</sup> Reports of Burke leaving a camel at Murray Downs station near Swan Hill are incorrect and relate to a later expedition. *Argus*, 17 August 1865: 5, 8 July 1874: 4, 27 July 1874: 4, 29 February 1876: 7.

<sup>1221</sup> John Musson wrote to the Exploration Committee informing them that a female camel had been caught on the Ballonne River. As Burke had taken only male camels, Musson was not too concerned. A month later he realised the camel in his paddock was male and he hurried to send another letter to the Committee. John Musson, 'Letter re: camel found on the Ballonne, 26 September 1861', ex1007-222; 'Letter re: camel on the Ballonne, 20 October 1861', ex1007-229, Box 2078/2, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria; *Geelong Advertiser*, 9 October 1861: 2.

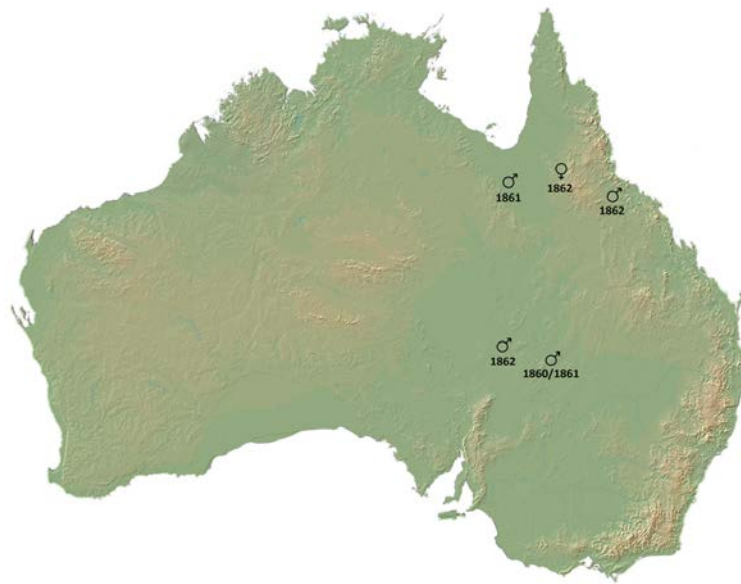


Figure 126: Map showing locations, dates and gender of the five camels who escaped from, or were abandoned by, Burke, Brahe, Howitt and McKinlay between 1860-1862 and who were not subsequently recaptured.  
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the camels lost or abandoned by the VEE and relief expeditions were not the ancestors of today's feral camel herds.

The camels that survived the Expedition, however, might possibly have played a role in founding Australia's herds of feral camels. When the Expedition departed Melbourne, six camels were left behind in Royal Park. These animals were joined in March 1862 by three of Wright's surviving camels and two calves that had been born at the Pamamaroo Depot.<sup>1222</sup> There were still hopes that the animals would form a breeding stud and ownership of the herd was transferred from Mueller's Zoological Gardens Management Committee to Edward Wilson's newly formed Acclimatisation Society of Victoria.<sup>1223</sup> The camels struggled in the cold, wet Melbourne winter and so, in September 1862, they were moved to Walmer Station in the Wimmera,<sup>1224</sup> where they were joined in January 1863 by the eight camels that had just returned from the Cooper with Howitt.<sup>1225</sup> Over the next couple of years, under the care and supervision of two of the VEE's sepoy, Baluch Khan and Esau Khan, several calves were born and, by the end of 1863 the herd had increased in size to 25

<sup>1222</sup> *Argus*, 27 February 1862: 4, 6 March 1862: 5, 13 March 1862: 2.

<sup>1223</sup> Linden Gillbank, 'The origins of the Acclimatisation Society of Victoria: Practical science in the wake of the gold rush', *Historical Records of Australian Science*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1986).

<sup>1224</sup> Donna Bourke, 'What Happened to the Camels of the Burke and Wills Expedition?', *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, No. 9 (2010); Royal Zoological and Acclimatisation Society, 'Minute Book 1, 1861-1863', VPRS 2223/P0000, Unit 1, Public Record Office of Victoria; *Argus*, 13 September 1862: 5. The camels were later moved from Charles Wilson's Walmer Station to his brother Samuel's neighbouring property, Longerenong Station.

<sup>1225</sup> Alexander Aitken, 'Papers, 1860-1910', ML MSS 1263, State Library of New South Wales.

animals.<sup>1226</sup> The breeding stud looked promising, but by the end of 1864 the Wimmera was experiencing drought, the camels' fodder bill was increasing and pasture was at a premium.<sup>1227</sup> The McCulloch Ministry eventually gave 14 camels to Duncan McIntyre's 'Ladies' Leichhardt Search Expedition' which had been organised by Mueller.<sup>1228</sup>

McIntyre's expedition was Victoria's second attempt at exploration, and while it did not depart with the same fanfare and expectation as the VEE,<sup>1229</sup> it too ended incongruously.<sup>1230</sup> After overcoming many problems,<sup>1231</sup> the expedition reached Dalgona Waterhole on the Gilliat River in the Gulf of Carpentaria.<sup>1232</sup> Of the 14 camels on McIntyre's expedition, five were young animals which had been born in the Wimmera, but nine of the animals were those that had been with the VEE.<sup>1233</sup> Most of these older animals were female Bikaneri camels, along with a male Khorasan and the male Mokrani camel. Some of these camels had travelled remarkable distances – Simla and Rowa had done at least 12,000 kilometres during the six years they had been in Australia. Both camels set out from Melbourne with the VEE in 1860 and reached the Cooper before returning to Menindee with Brahe. In 1861 they made the round trip from Menindee to the Cooper with Howitt, and the following year they made a third trip to the Cooper, returning via South Australia carrying Burke and Wills' remains, before retiring to stud at the Wimmera. Now, with McIntyre, they made a fourth visit to the Cooper and then continued on to the Gulf.

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<sup>1226</sup> Royal Zoological and Acclimatisation Society, 'Minute Book 1, 1861-1863', Unit 1, VPRS 2223/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>1227</sup> *Argus*, 26 August 1864: 5; Bourke, 'What Happened to the Camels?'.

<sup>1228</sup> Ferdinand Mueller, 'The Fate of Leichhardt', *Brisbane Courier*, 17 March 1865: 5; *Argus*, 20 January 1865: 5, 6 April 1865: 4; *Mount Alexander Mail*, 4 July 1865; *Argus*, 22 December 1864: 5, 6 April 1865: 4.

<sup>1229</sup> *Empire*, 8 July 1865: 4.

<sup>1230</sup> Duncan McIntyre, 'The Leichhardt Search Expedition', *South Australian Advertiser*, 10 April 1866: 3.

<sup>1231</sup> At the end of November 1865, McIntyre's expedition arrived at the Cooper to find it dry. While McIntyre went on to search for water, the party's surgeon, Dr James Patrick Murray, declared the expedition was over, broke open the medicinal brandy and he and the men fell into a drunken stupor while 66 of their 71 horses ran off into the bush and died of thirst. Murray was the surgeon on Howitt's 1862 Victorian Exploring Party. He was later involved in the controversial Carl blackbirding massacre in 1871 when he shot around 60 Solomon Islanders on the brig *Carl*. 'Mr. D. McIntyre's Journey across Australia, from Victoria to the Gulf of Carpentaria, and Discovery of Supposed Traces of Leichhardt', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol. 9, No. 6 (1864-1865): 300-305; 'Leichhardt Search Expedition', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1865-1866): 58-61; James Connal Howard Gill, 'Duncan McIntyre and the Search for Leichhardt', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland* Vol. 11, No. 4 (1981): 51-73; R.G. Elmslie, 'The Colonial Career of James Patrick Murray', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Surgery*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (1979): 154-162; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 November 1872, 1 March 1873; *Herald*, 23 May 1873.

<sup>1232</sup> Dalgona Waterhole on the Gilliat River is at S20°04 52 E141°11 29 (GDA2020).

<sup>1233</sup> 'Starting of the Leichhardt Search Party', *Mount Alexander Mail*, 4 July 1865: 2.



Figure 127: Samuel Calvert, 'The departure of the Leichhardt Search Expedition from Glengower', c.1865. From a sketch by Francis H. Nixon, pic-an9025865, PIC Drawer 5042 #S4561, National Library of Australia.

This sketch shows the camels accompanying McIntyre's expedition. One of the camels is being ridden, another seven are loaded as pack-animals and there are three young calves alongside.

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Eleven camels survived to reach the Gulf and when the Ladies' Leichhardt Search Expedition terminated in May 1867, the animals were left with Donald McIntyre<sup>1234</sup> at Dalgionally Station near Julia Creek.<sup>1235</sup> The climate suited the camels<sup>1236</sup> and they "increased to quite a herd".<sup>1237</sup> In the 1880s, McIntyre employed the VEE sepoy, Baluch Khan, and another 'Afghan' called 'Sitberland', to break the camels in and use them to cart goods from Normanton to the surrounding stations.<sup>1238</sup> Unfortunately, several camels died from eating poisonous herbs<sup>1239</sup> and by the turn of the century the remaining camels had been sold,<sup>1240</sup> probably to one of the hundreds of 'Afghan' cameleers at

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<sup>1234</sup> Duncan McIntyre contracted Gulf Fever in Burketown and died at Grave Hole, Dalgionally, on 4 June 1866. The camels became the property of Duncan's brother, Donald McIntyre.

<sup>1235</sup> 'In Search of a Second Mount Morgan: And what befell', *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), 30 October 1909: 9; *Brisbane Courier*, 14 February 1881: 3.

<sup>1236</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, 11 July 1867: 2.

<sup>1237</sup> Edward Palmer, *Early Days in North Queensland* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1903), 80. Palmer, MLA for Burke, Carpentaria and then Flinders 1883-1896, took up Canobie Station, a neighbouring property to Dalgionally, in 1864 and held the station until his death in 1899. Donald McIntyre took up Dalgionally in 1864 and stayed there until his death in 1907. Dalgionally was then bought by Australian Estates Co. Ltd.

<sup>1238</sup> *Warwick Argus*, 18 November 1882: 2. Cloncurry became a major depot for Afghan cameleers, with as many as 200 'Afghans' living in the town in the 1900s. Strings of up to 50 camels would carry 15 tons of ore at a time.

<sup>1239</sup> 'Country News', *The Queenslander*, 16 June 1883: 927.

<sup>1240</sup> 'Bush Notes', *North Queensland Register*, 20 June 1904: 43.



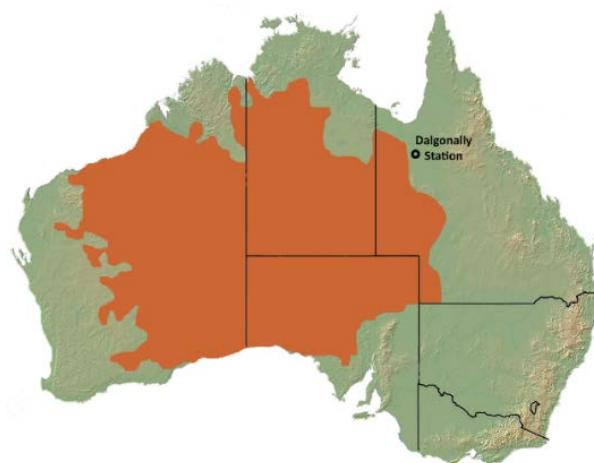


Figure 128: Dalgonally Station and current feral camel distribution.

Adapted from: Australian Government, 'Camel Fact Sheet',  
(Canberra: Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, 2010).  
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the Cloncurry Ghantown.<sup>1241</sup> It is therefore possible that the progeny of Landells' camels roamed around north-west Queensland at the time of Federation. If any of these camels were subsequently released, escaped or abandoned,<sup>1242</sup> then hybrids of the Bikaneri, Khorasan and Mekrani breeds (although probably not Coppin's Egyptian breed) may still exist in the DNA of the 20,000-50,000 feral camels currently found in western and north-western Queensland.<sup>1243</sup>

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<sup>1241</sup> Kett Howard Kennedy, 'The Profits of boom: a short history of the Cloncurry Copper Field', *Lectures on North Queensland History: Third series* (Townsville: James Cook University, History Department, 1978), 1-34.

<sup>1242</sup> Up to the 1920s, Cloncurry had a large and thriving Ghantown, but by 1933 there was "just one Afghan cameleer working out of Cloncurry" Stevens, *Tin mosques*, 278.

<sup>1243</sup> Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (Biosecurity Queensland), *Invasive animal risk assessment: Camel Camelus dromedaries* (Brisbane: Queensland Government, 2016).

## 5.9 Sepoy camel handlers

Proponents of the importation of camels into Australia often recommended that the animals should be accompanied by 'native camel drivers' who knew their habits.<sup>1244</sup> Initially, Arabs were nominated as the most suitable camel handlers, and then Gujaratis,<sup>1245</sup> Indians, Malays and 'Hindustanis' were proposed.<sup>1246</sup> Some understood the nuances of these ethnicities, but, to many, these were interchangeable terms which loosely described people from the Middle East and Asian sub-continent. The terms 'sepoys'<sup>1247</sup>, 'sowars'<sup>1248</sup>, 'lascars'<sup>1249</sup>, 'Asiatics', 'East Indians', 'Hindoos', 'Parsees' and 'Scindians' and 'coolies' were also used to describe camel handlers in the early 1860s, with the generic term 'Afghan' being a later development.

The three consignments of camels which arrived in Australia in the 1840s were unaccompanied, but, as already mentioned above (see Chapter 5.6 pages 269 to 271), the Egyptian camels that arrived in 1859 were under the care of the first Arab camel-handlers to arrive in Australia.<sup>1250</sup> Landells planned to bring "two native attendants" back to Australia,<sup>1251</sup> although he was warned that it might be difficult to find camel-handlers in the Punjab who were willing to go to Melbourne.<sup>1252</sup> Landells employed nine camel-handlers at Bikaner to assist on the long journey to Karachi.<sup>1253</sup> At the port he

<sup>1244</sup> 'The camel in Australia', *Australian*, 11 December 1841: 3; *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 20 April 1839: 3; 11 December 1841: 4.

<sup>1245</sup> Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia*, Vol. 2: 416.

<sup>1246</sup> Thomas Embling, 'The alpaca and the camel', *Argus*, 30 March 1858: 6; *Argus*, 18 May 1859: 4; George James Landells, 'Letter A1 to Embling dated 21 June 1858', Chief Secretary's Office, Inwards Registered Correspondence I, 1851-1863, Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>1247</sup> 'Sepoy' (Persian = 'Sipâhi') meaning 'soldier'. A native of India employed as a soldier in the service of a European power, specifically the rank of infantry private in the British Indian Army.

<sup>1248</sup> 'Sowar' (Persian = 'sowar', Hindustani = 'suwar') meaning 'the one who rides'. A military rank during the Mughal period, later used during the British Raj for a horse-soldier belonging to the cavalry troops of the native armies of British India and the feudal states.

<sup>1249</sup> 'Lascar' (Persian = 'lashkar') meaning military camp, and (Omani = 'al-askar') meaning guard or soldier. The Portuguese used the term 'lascarim' to refer to an Asian militiaman or seaman. Lascars served on British ships under 'lascar agreements'. The name lascar was also used to refer to Indian servants, typically engaged by British military officers.

<sup>1250</sup> *Argus*, 15 November 1859: 5.

<sup>1251</sup> George James Landells, 'Letter A1 to Embling dated 21 June 1858', Chief Secretary's Office, 'Inwards Registered Correspondence', Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>1252</sup> Captain Hugh R. James of the Bengal Infantry and Commissioner of Peshawar told Landells he would be unlikely to find anyone willing to go to Victoria and that he might be better employing men at Karachi. James thought men who did not have experience at sea might become alarmed at the prospect and leave Landells while on the road. More likely was the fact there was considerable anti-British sentiment in Punjab in the aftermath of the sepoy mutiny (Indian Rebellion of 1857). Robert Henry Davies, Secretary to the Government of the Punjab, 'Letter C4 No. 1809, Davies to Landells dated 4 August 1859', Chief Secretary's Office: Inwards Registered Correspondence I, 1851-1863, Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>1253</sup> Landells employed nine men at Bikaner on 9 December 1859 and paid them 10 Rupees a month (c. £1) until he sailed from Karachi on 31 March 1860. *Argus*, 29 March 1862: 5.

selected five of them to come to Australia and then employed four additional men.<sup>1254</sup> As none of the camel-handlers had any maritime experience, he offered free passage to three European men, including John King,<sup>1255</sup> provided they "assist to the utmost on the requisite care of the camels".<sup>1256</sup>

A common fallacy in many accounts is that Landells offered the men employment on the VEE.<sup>1257</sup> At this stage, Landells had not had any dealings with the RSV or EC, had not been offered a position on the VEE, and was contracted by the Government of Victoria simply to purchase camels and land them in Melbourne. No doubt he realised that if the camels were used on an expedition that some of the men might be required as camel-handlers, but there is no suggestion that King or any of the sepoys signed their agreements in Karachi on the understanding that they would be part of the VEE.

Burke was impressed with Landells, who flamboyantly paraded around Melbourne on the largest camel "picturesquely attired" in his "Scinde costume",<sup>1258</sup> and four weeks after disembarking the camels he was appointed second-in-command of the VEE. Although Landells claimed the sepoys were "treacherous"<sup>1259</sup> and he often resorted to violence to control his "swarthy natives",<sup>1260</sup> Burke ignored employment applications from experienced camel hands and left it to Landells to decide who to take on the Expedition. Landells chose two of the three Europeans that had accompanied him on the S.S. *Chinsurah*, King and Drakeford, and three of the nine sepoys, later increasing this to four.

Although John King had been in India for six years, he had not worked with camels prior to meeting Landells at Karachi,<sup>1261</sup> and was offered a position on the Expedition because "he could communicate with the Indians in their own language".<sup>1262</sup> The sepoys "own language" was not recorded, and because the nine sepoys came from different places and had diverse ethnic backgrounds, they would have spoken different languages. Villiers speculates that King overcame this difficulty because he spoke several Indian dialects, but there is no evidence to substantiate this

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<sup>1254</sup> George James Landells, 'Contract of employment D2, 27 March 1860, Kurachi', Chief Secretary's Office, Inwards Registered Correspondence I, 1851-1863, Unit 757, VPRS 1189/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria. The contract was drafted in English and translated into Dari. It stipulated the rate of pay at 15 Rp a month plus rations of rice, flour, dhal, ghee and salt for a one year period. At the end of one year, employees had the option of staying on under the same terms or returning to India at the expense of the Victorian government.

<sup>1255</sup> For a detailed analysis of the role of John King as a camel handler on the Expedition, see Dave Phoenix, 'John King: an Ulster explorer who became the first person to cross Australia', *Queensland History Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 8, February (2012): 510-521.

<sup>1256</sup> The three Europeans were John King, John Drakeford and John Dickson. King and Drakeford were subsequently employed on the VEE.

<sup>1257</sup> See: Stevens, *Tin mosques*, 31.

<sup>1258</sup> *Argus*, 15 June 1860: 4.

<sup>1259</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 45.

<sup>1260</sup> Tuttie Khan (Tuta Khan) "a swarthy native of Ind[ia]" was charged by Landells with disorderly conduct. *Age*, 25 June 1860: 6. Khan (1829-?) was from Lahore in the Punjab.

<sup>1261</sup> Moorehead, *Cooper's Creek*, Plate 5; Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 639 to King.

<sup>1262</sup> *Age*, 27 November 1861: 5.



Figure 129: William Strutt, 'Indian Camel drivers at the Camp / Exploring Expedition - Royal Park', 1860. A collection of drawings ... illustrating the Burke and Wills Exploring expedition. a1485022, 1ff.21a, DL PXX3, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

A photograph of John King (standing) and eight of the nine sepoys that came to Australia with Landells, taken shortly before the Expedition departed. The men are in Royal Park by the wooden camel stables which also served as their accommodation.

claim.<sup>1263</sup> At least one of the sepoys had served in the British Army in India, so may have been able to speak a little English,<sup>1264</sup> but Brahe commented on the difficulty he had communicating with Dost Mahomet, as he spoke only "Hindostanee" and did not understand English.<sup>1265</sup> Wright and Becker referred to Baluch as a "native from Hindostan"<sup>1266</sup> and called Dost Mahomet a "Hindoo", so it is likely that Hindustani was the *lingua franca*. Nevertheless, to add to the uncertainty, the men's contract was written in Dari, and Baluch referred to the female camels as 'dachi'<sup>1267</sup>, which is a Balochi word,

<sup>1263</sup> Villiers, *John King*: 29.

<sup>1264</sup> Strutt sketched several of the sepoys at Royal Park prior to the Expedition's departure. He noted that one of them was an "ex-soldier", see: William Strutt, 'East Indian Camel driver & ex Soldier', a1485039, 2ff.15a, *A collection of drawings ... illustrating the Burke and Wills Exploring expedition*, DL PXX4, State Library of New South Wales. Strutt did not record the ex-soldier's name, but he appears to be one of the older men, either 50 year old Kiltu, or 40 year old Bal Singh, see: S.S. *Chinsurah*, immigration arrival record, Melbourne, 8 June 1860 in Victoria. Government: Department of Trade and Customs, 'Inwards overseas unassisted passenger lists from foreign ports to Victoria, 1852-1879', Unit 11, Item Apr-Jun 1860, VPRS 947/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria. Jones and Kenny claim Strutt's sketch is of Dost Mahomet, and "at 45 years he was the oldest cameleer in the Burke and Wills exploration party", Jones and Kenny, *Muslim cameleers*, 41. However, Dost Mahomet was a young man when he arrived in Australia in 1860. Immigration records show he was 18 years old on arrival, and in 1862 he told Governor Barkly he was 23 years old, see: Dost Mahomet, 'Letter to the John Macadam, dated 4 February 1862', ex1007-310, Box 2078/3; 'Letter to the Secretary of the Governor of Victoria, dated 8 July 1862', ex2011-011, Box 2084/3 (Item 1); 'Letter to John Macadam, dated 14 July 1862', ex1007-384, Box 2078/4, MS13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1265</sup> *Argus*, 23 November 1861: 6.

<sup>1266</sup> Ludwig Becker, 'Letter to the EC, dated Darling Depot, 25 December 1860', ex2005-008, Box 2083/4 (Item 8); William Wright, 'Dispatch, dated Ptomarmora Creek, 23 January 1861', ex2002-023, 2082/1f (Item 3), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1267</sup> Becker, 'Fifth Report', ex2004-008, State Library of Victoria.

not Hindustani. Of the four sepoys who went on the Expedition, all were young men in their early twenties: Samla was Hindu but his language was not recorded, Baluch Khan was a Parsi who was born in Uttar Pradesh but who lived in the Punjab, and two were Muslims: Dost Mahomet was a Pashtun from Ghazni and Esau Khan was a Baloch from Qalat. The lack of information recorded about the sepoys is not surprising as they were not considered equal to the other 'Expedition Assistants': they were not subject to a medical examination, were not required to sign the 'Memorandum of Agreement' and initially were only paid one shilling a day, which was a mere 15% of the wages paid to the other men.

Samla left the Expedition on the third day as his religion forbade him to eat the meat provisions supplied.<sup>1268</sup> Esau Khan became ill and left the Expedition at Swan Hill.<sup>1269</sup> Baluch Khan was dismissed at Balranald, but reinstated.<sup>1270</sup> When Landells resigned at Menindee, Burke had a choice of three men who could have taken charge of the camels: Drakeford was a "good camel attendant" and the best bushman in the party;<sup>1271</sup> Dost Mahomet, who presumably had experience with the animals; and Baluch Khan was "without doubt the best of us all at handling the camels".<sup>1272</sup> Burke dismissed Drakeford and promoted 22 year old King, even though he only had seven months' experience working with camels. Baluch Khan was left at Menindee and Dost Mahomet was left at the Cooper with Brahe.

When the sepoys complained that they did not have the right medicaments to treat the camels,<sup>1273</sup> they were ignored and later accused of being "of no earthly use in doctoring those animals".<sup>1274</sup> When Dost Mahomet complained he could not walk due to a sore foot, Brahe hit him in the mouth, breaking a tooth.<sup>1275</sup> It is clear the sepoys were marginalised and their expertise was ignored or summarily dismissed.

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<sup>1268</sup> Becker, 'First Report', ex2004-004, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1269</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Dispatch, dated Swan Hill, 10 September 1860', ex2002-006, Box 2082/1a (Item 6), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1270</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Dispatch, dated Balranald, 16 September 1860', ex2002-008, Box 2082/1a (Item 8), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1271</sup> *Argus*, 15 November 1860: 5; Landells, 'Report', ex2004-011, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1272</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 29.

<sup>1273</sup> In addition to the 60 gallons of rum that Landells took for the camels, he also carried 192 lbs of veterinary medicines, six gallons of wood vinegar and a quantity of sulphur and alum for the animals.

<sup>1274</sup> Alexander Macpherson, 'The Camels and the Expedition', *Argus*, 10 July 1861: 5.

<sup>1275</sup> Dost Mahomet, 'Transcript of letter to the EC, dated Menindie, 4 February 1862', ex1007-310, Box 2078/3, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

## 5.10 Conclusion

Discussions about the benefits of introducing camels into Australia went on for almost 20 years before the first beast arrived. Most of these early proposals were fanciful and hopelessly impractical and, as exploration had not yet entered arid desert areas, there was no urgency to import camels. When the first animals arrived in the early 1840s, they were imported in small numbers by private speculators in the hope that governments or explorers would purchase them. Although Leichhardt showed passing interest in using camels, experienced explorers like Sturt, Mitchell and Eyre were happy with their tried and tested exploration methodologies. Therefore the imports were considered novelties rather than manifestations of a new desert exploration technology. Horrocks reinforced this notion when he took Harry into the arid interior, because the obstinate beast proved troublesome and ultimately resulted in the expedition's early termination.

Sturt's harrowing descriptions of crossing the Stony Desert and entering the Simpson in 1845 only highlighted the unsuitability of horses and wheeled vehicles in the arid centre. The successful use of camels in arid and semi-arid environments in other parts of the world meant it was just a matter of time before camels were brought to Australia for use in desert exploration. Nevertheless, another 15 years elapsed before the camel experiment was attempted.

Surprisingly, it was Victoria that first used camels for desert expedition. Victoria was the only colony without arid or semi-arid territory, but it was the wealthiest colony and willing to invest in new technologies. Contrary to popular belief however, Victoria's camels were not imported especially for the VEE. Equally unfounded is the suggestion that the EC or RSV were the agents that imported the camels. The EC's deliberations and expedition fund-raising efforts ran separately, but concurrently, with discussions about importing camels. The EC's original plans did not include camels: the proposed leader, Gregory, was not enthusiastic about them, and consequently Mueller's draft plan relied exclusively on horses. Later on, Mueller became a proponent for the importation of camels, but for the purpose of a breeding stud based in his Botanical Gardens.

When the Victorian Legislature agreed to import camels, they were reluctant to appoint an agent, preferring to encourage importation by private enterprise by offering a bounty or by getting India's Governor-General to select animals on their behalf. Embling, the most enthusiastic and vocal advocate, convinced the O'Shanassy Ministry to appoint Landells as their agent. Embling was resolute in his desire to see camels in Victoria, and unashamedly used his position as a Member of the Legislative Assembly to promote his cause, while being shrewd enough to realise that he could gain additional support from the EC. Embling began attending EC and RSV meetings, where he spoke at length about the advantages of using camels for desert exploration.

Landells did not have any dealings with the RSV and EC and he had no involvement with the proposed Expedition. He went to India with the task of acquiring camels for a breeding stud and for exploration, and he planned to get a mix of male and female Bactrians and Dromedaries. Procuring the camels took longer than expected: partly because O'Shanassy was slow in sending the commission to Landells, partly because travel in India was difficult because of the rebellion, partly because Landells unsuccessfully attempted to purchase Bactrians from Kabul, and partly because Landells went to great lengths to purchase the finest dromedaries. Analysis in this thesis shows that Landells did not get the camels from Peshawar, as is often supposed, but purchased them in Rajasthan, the Khanate of Kalat and the Sindh. This thesis has also identified the breeds he brought to Australia were Bikaneri, Khorasan and Mekrani. Landells also employed ten sepoy assistants, nine of whom came to Australia, along with three European assistants.

While Landells was marching his new acquisitions to Karachi, in Melbourne the EC had raised sufficient funds and expected their Expedition would depart in March 1860. They were still not relying upon camels as their main form of transport, declaring that the Expedition would start without Landells' animals, with the option of sending them on later to the Expedition's depot camp. The EC then became preoccupied with their unsuccessful search for a leader, using the late arrival of the camels as an excuse for the delay in selecting a suitable candidate. The public and press became frustrated at the EC's lack of urgency, and so the camels were eagerly anticipated. Even though Melburnians had seen Coppin's Egyptian camels regularly paraded through the streets, the arrival of Landells' camels in June 1860 caused great excitement. However this was not simply interest in exotic animals and their handlers; it signalled an end to the protracted deliberations of the EC and meant Victoria's first expedition would soon be underway. Under pressure from the public, the EC hurriedly chose a leader.

There was very little camel expertise in Australia and exaggerated claims circulated about how fast the camels could travel, how far they could go each day and how much they could carry. Burke and the EC were impressed by Landells and went to great lengths to acquire his services. As an employee of the EC, Landells favoured the Expedition at the expense of the breeding program, which had been forgotten about by everyone except Mueller and Embling. Despite Landells' claims about how much the Khorasan camels could carry, his refusal to allow any of the camels to be loaded caused financial difficulties and transportation problems which slowed the Expedition and frustrated Burke. Personal differences between Burke and Landells meant Burke had little to do with the camels during their journey between Melbourne and the Darling. Consequently he formed an unfavourable view of them: he had not seen them in action in the desert, they had not carried any loads, they strayed constantly and their husbandry required greater time and attention than horses. When the camels went missing at Bilbarka, Burke considered leaving them behind.



When Landells resigned at Kinchega, it allowed Burke the opportunity to manage the camels according to his wishes. They were loaded, some with immense packs of almost 300 kilograms, and they were hobbled or tied up at night to prevent them straying which interfered with their ability to graze. King was placed in charge, as he was young, inexperienced and used to military servitude, and as such was unlikely to oppose Burke or argue with him about the camels' welfare. The rum that Landells insisted would ward off scurvy in the animals was left behind in Menindee.<sup>1276</sup> Again, the popularly held belief that Landells resigned over the rum is inaccurate: Landells threatened to resign over the rum incident at Tarcoola, but then withdrew his resignation. It was the manner in which Burke proposed the camels should cross the Darling at Kinchega that caused the rift.

Even though Burke's Advance Party made good progress to the Cooper, Burke was still not convinced by the camels' abilities and took horses on a reconnaissance trip north of the Cooper in late November. The horses managed just 25 miles before Burke was forced to return. On the next trip, he swapped the horses for camels and they made 110 miles in three days in temperatures reaching 43°C. Now they were in the desert in the summer, the value of camels was realised.

When Burke set off for the Gulf, he took the largest and swiftest of all the camels Landells had acquired: six male Bikaneri riding-camels. Instead of riding, Burke loaded the camels with 360 litres of water, and set off to walk across Sturt Stony Desert independent of water supplies. Sturt and Mitchell needed several tons of water each day for their enormous flocks and herds and were therefore forced to tentatively scout ahead before moving on to the next camp. Stuart lamented that, even though his party was small and light, "I must go where the water leads me", even if that was taking him in the wrong direction.<sup>1277</sup> Burke, however, filled up their waterbags at the Diamantina and instructed Wills to head to the Gulf. They walked nearly due north for more than 300 kilometres (see Figure 130). (The particulars of Burke's decision to leave the Diamantina and the implications are discussed in detail in Chapter 7.4.4). When Landsborough was questioned over his choice of route from the Gulf to Melbourne while searching for Burke, he justified his decision to follow the Flinders, Landsborough, Warrego and Darling Rivers, saying:

I never imagined that Burke and Wills would have been able to walk straight from Cooper's Creek across what I thought was in a great measure a desert to Carpentaria.<sup>1278</sup>

Camels allowed Burke to dash to the Gulf. He was able to walk almost in a straight line from the Diamantina to the Cloncurry River, independent of watercourses. He drought-proofed himself by

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<sup>1276</sup> Landells brought 60 gallons (270 litres) of rum as medication for the camels. When the VEE arrived in Menindee, there was only 20 gallons (90 litres) left, which Burke sold to Thomas Pain for 16s. a gallon (total £16).

<sup>1277</sup> Stuart, *Explorations in Australia*.

<sup>1278</sup> Landsborough, 'Letter to Macadam, dated Tintinalagy, Darling River, 22 July 1862', *Journal of Landsborough's expedition*, 118-119.

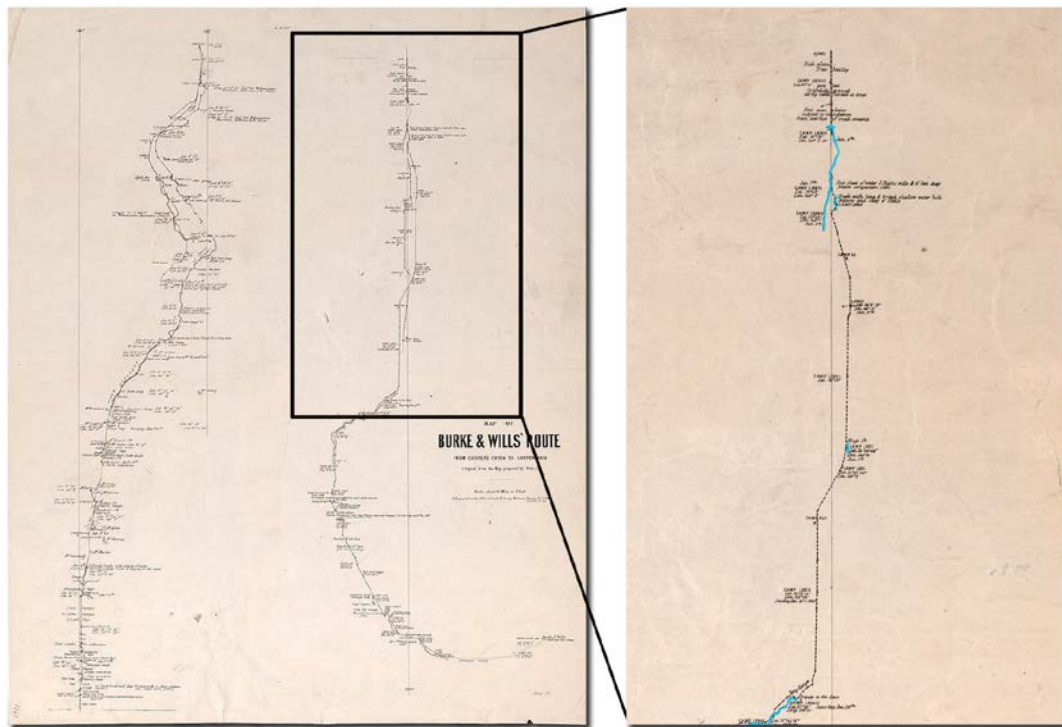


Figure 130: Victoria: Department of Crown Lands and Survey, 'Map of Burke & Wills route from Cooper's Creek to Carpentaria', 1861. L1089, MAP RM 2464, National Library of Australia.

The enlargement on the right shows Burke's route from the Diamantina (bottom of extract) to the Tropic of Capricorn (top of the extract). This shows how, once they left the Diamantina, Wills navigated in a straight line due north for 300 kilometres over ten days, with a slight detour to the east when they met Mithaka people on New Year's Day.

carrying water, relying on the camels' ability to carry greater loads and last longer between drinks. Without camels, he would not have been able to travel as swiftly, as he would have had to search for water more regularly. Camels allowed Burke to explore in a way that no other explorer had attempted before.

Although the camels survived the rapid journey north from Cooper Creek to the Gulf, their return journey was not as benign: four camels died, collapsed or were abandoned due to exhaustion and the remaining two camels that returned to the Cooper only survived for a short while longer. The destruction of the camels was as a result of them having travelled too quickly: the animals could have travelled the distance safely if they had travelled more slowly, or taken more days off. Burke's lack of expertise in camel husbandry and a lack of knowledge of their capabilities, meant he pushed the camels beyond the limits of their endurance. Although he did not overload the animals, he only gave them two days off during the northbound journey and did not allow them to graze freely at night. Dost Mahomet may have been the only person in Burke's Advance Party who had sufficient experience to identify the camels' declining condition, but even if Burke had taken him to the Gulf he is unlikely to have heeded the sepoy's advice. Because the Gulf Party had such limited provisions,

the return journey was a race for survival, and, as evidenced by the death of Charley Gray and Billy the horse, it was not only the camels that suffered due to the swift pace. Of the four men and seven animals that set off on the journey to the Gulf, only three men and two animals survived to return to the Cooper.

The camels that were abandoned or who escaped from the various Expedition parties were unlikely to have been in a position to breed, so would not have contributed to today's feral herds. The camels that survived their journeys with Brahe and Wright have been forgotten about, but they led interesting lives after the Expedition. Four went on McKinlay's expedition and others returned to the Cooper with Howitt's expeditions. McKinlay found himself in a race for survival on the journey from the Gulf to the coast at Bowen and his camels fared little better than Burke's under similar circumstances: dying from exhaustion or abandoned because they could not keep up. Howitt, meanwhile, thought camels were as easy to manage as horses, and he had few problems with them. Eleven of the 26 camels taken on the Expedition survived to form a breeding stud in the Wimmera in 1863, before being sent to the Gulf with McIntyre, where they were used to cart goods around north-west Queensland. It is possible that their descendants are part of today's feral herds.

Although McKnight claimed "Burke and Wills proved nothing directly about the use of camels",<sup>1279</sup> Jones and Kenny thought "the Expedition demonstrated that camels provided the mobility and endurance needed for inland exploration".<sup>1280</sup> McKinlay's camels impressed South Australian pastoralists Thomas Elder and Samuel Stuckey, who travelled with McKinlay as far as Lake Hope on the Cooper.<sup>1281</sup> Upon his return to Adelaide, Elder sent Stuckey to Karachi to get 100 camels.<sup>1282</sup> Elder subsequently imported camels and 'Afghan' handlers and supplied camels for Warburton's 1873 expedition and Giles' 1875 expedition. The Overland Telegraph Line was constructed using camels as the primary means of transport, and expeditions under Gosse (1873), David Lindsay (1885-1886), Lindsay and Elder (1891-1892), Larry Wells and Albert Frederick Calvert (1896-1897), Edgar Waite (1916) and Cecil Madigan (1939) all relied on camels. The VEE had proved the worth of camels in Australia's arid interior.

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<sup>1279</sup> McKnight, *The camel in Australia*, 21.

<sup>1280</sup> Jones and Kenny, *Muslim cameleers*, 49.

<sup>1281</sup> McKinlay, *McKinlay's journal of exploration in the interior of Australia*; 'Northern Exploration', *South Australian Weekly Chronicle*, 19 October 1861: 2.

<sup>1282</sup> Stuckey arrived in Mumbai on 22 January 1862, reached Karachi on 1 February 1862, and was taken to the camel breeding stations in the hills by Morad Khan, who claimed to have supplied camels to Landells. Landells denied any association with Khan. Stuckey was unable to find a vessel that could bring the camels to Australia for a suitable price, so returned empty handed. 'Importation of Camels', *South Australian Register* 13 March 1862: 2; George James Landells, 'The Camels', *Argus*, 29 March 1862: 5; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 March 1862: 5; *Adelaide Observer*, 19 April 1862: 4; 'Obituary: Sir Thomas Elder, G.C.M.G.', *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 4, April (1897): 453-454.

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# 6

## ABORIGINAL INTERACTIONS

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### CONTENTS

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6.1	Introduction	319
6.2	Aboriginal people and exploration prior to 1860	322
6.3	Aboriginal encounters prior to the arrival of the VEE	328
6.4	The VEE and Aboriginal interactions	343
6.5	Aboriginal recollections	379
6.6	Ngardu and other indigenous foodstuffs	390
6.7	The 'Land of Plenty'	404
6.8	Conclusion	407

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*Oh Mr Burke, where did all the blackfellas go?  
Mr Burke, how we gonna make it on our own?*

Neil Murray, 'Menindee' [song lyrics], from the CD *Dust*.  
© Neil Murray, ABC Music, Sydney, 1996.

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Figure 131: Ludwig Becker, 'Arrival of the party at Duroadoo', 21 February 1861.  
Image b36084, LT75, H16486/F.53, State Library of Victoria.

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This chapter contains names and images of Aboriginal people who have died.  
This may cause sadness and distress to Aboriginal people.  
Discretion should be used when reading this chapter.

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## 6.1 Introduction

When Jonathan King, leader of the 2010 'Burke and Wills Environmental Expedition' set off from Melbourne to follow the Expedition's track to the Gulf, he explained that Burke and Wills "were conditioned by the shared cultural perception of the day that Aborigines were 'ignorant and godless savages'"<sup>1283</sup> and he lamented:

One of the greatest ironies of the epic 1860 Burke and Wills expedition ... was the utter contempt with which the explorers regarded the Aborigines.<sup>1284</sup>

He added:

Nor did they engage Aboriginal guides as had Matthew Flinders and Phillip Parker King, who both hired Bungaree to take them around the Australian coast in the earlier part of the same century.<sup>1285</sup>

Dale Kerwin stated that "Burke and Wills had no Aboriginal people to guide them and are better known for their failure".<sup>1286</sup> Neil Murray agrees, stating the most successful explorers "always had Aboriginal guides", whereas "Burke and Wills did not".<sup>1287</sup> Henry Reynolds thought it was unusual that Burke and Wills did not benefit from Aboriginal expertise,<sup>1288</sup> while Van Driesum claimed Burke "ignored the advice from earlier explorers to enlist the help of Aboriginal guides".<sup>1289</sup> Banting goes one step further and claims Burke "refused to take an Aboriginal guide".<sup>1290</sup>

This is indeed damning testimony. Did Burke ignore advice from experienced explorers, reject best practice and refuse to take Aboriginal guides with him? The statements above represent two separate arguments: a) The Expedition did not use Aboriginal guides, which was a rejection of mid-nineteenth century exploration methodology; and b) the Expedition distanced themselves from the Aboriginal people they encountered and treated them as ignorant and godless savages.

Clark argues against the first point and goes some way towards disputing the second point, stating there is a considerable amount of material associated with the Expedition "from which Indigenous perspectives can be gleaned",<sup>1291</sup> and that there were plenty of Aboriginal interactions with the Expedition, but they have been ignored because:

<sup>1283</sup> Jonathan King, 'An epic journey into history', *Age*, 16 January 2010: 3. The 2010 'Burke and Wills Environmental Expedition' started from Melbourne with great fanfare, but degenerated into farce.

<sup>1284</sup> *Ibid.* The analogy between Bungaree assisting maritime exploration between 1798-1803 and Aboriginal guides assisting inland exploration in the 1860s is questionable.

<sup>1285</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1286</sup> Dale Kerwin, *Aboriginal dreaming paths and trading routes: the colonisation of the Australian economic landscape* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), xviii; 'Aboriginal Dreaming Tracks or Trading Paths: the common ways' (PhD thesis, Griffith University, 2006): xiii.

<sup>1287</sup> Neil Murray, 'Was True Blue a Blackfella?', *Age*, 6 July 2002.

<sup>1288</sup> Reynolds, *With the white people*, 33.

<sup>1289</sup> Rob Van Driesum in Andrew Bain (ed.), *Great journeys: travel the world's most spectacular routes* (Footscray: Lonely Planet, 2011), 98.

<sup>1290</sup> Erinn Banting, *Australia: the people* (New York: Crabtree, 2003), 9.

<sup>1291</sup> Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 2.

the barriers that have for so long kept Indigenous perspectives out of the Burke and Wills story were based not on lack of material but rather on perception and choice".<sup>1292</sup>

McLaren also argues that the use of Aboriginal guides was not standard practice, stating that, with a few minor exceptions, "explorers rarely enlisted the help of Aborigines after the 1840s".<sup>1293</sup> In addition, the State Library of Victoria's educational website informs Victorian Curriculum F-10<sup>1294</sup> students that "Indigenous guides played an important role in Burke and Wills' 1860 expedition to explore the Gulf of Carpentaria."<sup>1295</sup>

Clearly there is confusion about the degree to which the Expedition utilised Aboriginal knowledge and the manner in which the explorers interacted with Aboriginal people. Analyses of interactions between Aboriginal people and members of the VEE are scarce. In 1983 a paper was presented to the Anthropological Society of South Australia summarising Wills' experiences on the journey from the Cooper to the Gulf and during their time back at the Cooper. The paper relied heavily on Wills' journals and did not offer any real insights.<sup>1296</sup> In 2011 Harry Allen examined Expedition journals to establish how the explorers described meetings and clashes with Aboriginal people and their diet, culture, language, appearance and customs.<sup>1297</sup> He thought "The body of knowledge concerning Aboriginal people assembled ... was considerable", but had been overshadowed by the deaths of Burke and Wills.<sup>1298</sup> A more thorough investigation followed in 2013 with Clark and Cahir's *Aboriginal Story: forgotten narratives* which teased out the multi-faceted, complex and interconnected threads.<sup>1299</sup> However, as Hilary Howes points out, "The quality of this volume is somewhat uneven".<sup>1300</sup>

This chapter examines interactions between the members of the VEE and Aboriginal people and places them in the context of general practices adopted by inland explorers of the Victorian era. It begins by studying the contributions made by Aboriginal people to inland exploration and shows Aboriginal guides played a significant role in the 1830s and 1840s, with Mitchell, Sturt, Eyre and Leichhardt using guides, whereas in the 1850s, the smaller, faster-moving expeditions under Gregory and Stuart did not. Explorers realised the reception they could expect upon meeting Aboriginal people was determined by the manner in which those people had been treated in earlier encounters

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<sup>1292</sup> Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 2.

<sup>1293</sup> McLaren, *Beyond Leichhardt*, 247.

<sup>1294</sup> [victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/)

<sup>1295</sup> 'Burke, Wills & Aboriginal. guides', ergo, State Library of Victoria educational website for Victorian students and their teachers.

[ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/explore-history/land-exploration/exploration/burke-wills-aboriginal-guides](http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/explore-history/land-exploration/exploration/burke-wills-aboriginal-guides)

<sup>1296</sup> Andrew Taylor, 'Burke and Wills and the Aborigines', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1983): 5-10.

<sup>1297</sup> Harry Allen, 'The space between: Aboriginal people, the Victorian Exploring Expedition and the relief parties' in McCann and Joyce, *The scientific legacy*, 245-274.

<sup>1298</sup> McCann and Joyce, *The scientific legacy*, 271.

<sup>1299</sup> Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*.

<sup>1300</sup> Hilary Howes, [Book Review], *Historical Records of Australian Science*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2013): 350-351.

with Europeans. Consequently, there is an examination of Aboriginal encounters with European explorers along the Expedition's track from Melbourne to the Gulf prior to 1860.

The main body of the chapter looks at the VEE and Aboriginal interactions and offers a revised interpretation of the Expedition's use of Aboriginal guides. Rather than ignoring the input of Aboriginal guides, the VEE employed a number of guides between Balranald and the Darling, which is consistent with the manner in which large slow-moving parties under Sturt and Mitchell operated. Water requirements were high, progress was slow, and guides were used to lead the Expedition to water each night. From the Darling to the Grey Range, additional Aboriginal guides were used, again primarily to find water, but they also interacted with Wills, telling him the names of geographical features, and pointing out additional places of interest as well as edible flora and fauna. Between the Grey Range and the Cooper, the VEE was unable to acquire Aboriginal guides, and they struggled to find water. From the Cooper to the Gulf, the Expedition was a small, light party that travelled quickly. In addition, the use of camels meant that Burke did not need to find water each night (as discussed in the previous chapter). Although the men made a few attempts to secure Aboriginal guides they were not successful, and they travelled to the Gulf unassisted, which is compatible with the contemporary small, light parties of Stuart and Gregory. Interactions with Brahe's Depot Party and Wright's Supply are also considered and compared to the manner in which Burke's party dealt with Aboriginal people.

Interactions between Burke, Wills and King and the Yandruwandha people at Cooper Creek between April and September 1861 are analysed and the different approaches taken by Wills and Burke to the prospect of living an Aboriginal lifestyle are investigated. This is the section of the journey which is most often discussed by authors and historians, but is also the least well understood.

The impact of the VEE on the Aboriginal people they met is considered by investigating oral histories given to later travellers. The chapter then looks at the VEE's consumption of indigenous flora and fauna followed by a critical look at whether Burke and Wills poisoned themselves by the incorrect preparation of ngardu. The research rejects the idea that Burke was unfamiliar with Aboriginal foodstuffs and shows that the two hypotheses which have been proposed about the use of ngardu are contradictory and neither hypothesis holds up to scrutiny.

The chapter finishes with a comment on more recent interpretations of the Strzelecki Desert as a post-colonial 'Garden of Eden' and rejects the idea that Burke and Wills died in a land of plenty.

## 6.2 Aboriginal people and the exploration of Australia prior to 1860

Reynolds notes that Aboriginal people played two contradictory roles in the saga of exploration. On the one hand they personified the untamed nature of the continent – they were ‘wild savages’ who attacked and occasionally killed European explorers. Conversely, some Aboriginal people became the explorers’ loyal and faithful guides, fulfilling many useful roles within the expedition party.<sup>1301</sup> Reynolds believes Aboriginal guides to have been accomplished bushmen and women: finding water and food, guiding the explorers, scouting the best route and acting as ambassadors to ensure harmonious relations with the local Aboriginal people.<sup>1302</sup> McLaren and Cooper disagree, suggesting Aboriginal guides attached to exploring parties had only a peripheral involvement in the European exploration of Australia.<sup>1303</sup> They argue that:

although local tribal people were frequently of value to explorers such as Sturt, Leichhardt and Eyre ... the evidence suggests that the contributions of Aboriginal expedition members were often peripheral at best.<sup>1304</sup>

They believe that bushcraft skills improved among explorers as expeditions covered longer distances and ventured into more arid environments, thereby marginalising any contributions Aboriginal guides may have had.<sup>1305</sup>

The use of Aboriginal guides in exploration dated from the earliest stage of European settlement, when Governor Arthur Phillip and Watkin Tench used them around Sydney in 1791.<sup>1306</sup> The early explorers soon realised that once the Aboriginal guides were away from their traditional country, their knowledge of the land and waterholes was limited. Nevertheless, guides like Bundle and Broughton, who accompanied George Evans and Charles Throsby to the Illawarra in 1812 and 1818, still acted as trackers, interpreters and negotiators among neighbouring groups, ensuring easier passage for Europeans. Conflict over land and water resources caused by Sydney’s pastoral expansion and drought conditions, meant Aboriginal people were increasingly perceived as a threat<sup>1307</sup> and so semi-aculturated Aboriginal guides attached to an expedition party could act as diplomats and couriers,

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<sup>1301</sup> Reynolds, 'The land, the explorers and the Aborigines', 213-226.

<sup>1302</sup> Reynolds, *With the white people*.

<sup>1303</sup> Glen McLaren and William Cooper, 'Aboriginal involvement in Australian exploration: the enduring myth', *Northern Perspective*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (1996): 32-40.

<sup>1304</sup> McLaren and Cooper, 'The enduring myth', 33.

<sup>1305</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1306</sup> Watkin Tench, *A complete account of the settlement at Port Jackson in New South Wales: Including an accurate description of the situation of the colony, of the natives and of its natural productions* (London: G Nichol & J Sewell, 1793); Robert Michael Clarke, 'Vanguards of Empire: the lives of William Dawes, Watkin Tench and George Worgan' (PhD thesis, Australian National University, 2015): 45.

<sup>1307</sup> Significant conflicts in the Hawkesbury-Nepean War (1795-1816), a frontier war in the Sydney area, include Pemulwuy's War (1795-1802), Tedbury's War (1808-1809) and the Nepean War (1814-1816) as well as interwar violence in the 1804-1805 conflict.

sending messages ahead thereby ensuring safe passage for the explorers.<sup>1308</sup> In addition, these early ventures did not travel over such great distances that the environment, flora and fauna changed sufficiently for Aboriginal guides to be unable to find resources familiar to them.

The exploration of the drier western plains meant Aboriginal guides became useful for locating water. McLaren believes this was the most important period for Aboriginal guides,<sup>1309</sup> particularly the four expeditions led by Mitchell,<sup>1310</sup> whose military style of operation resulted in a large and cumbersome expedition.<sup>1311</sup> McLaren argues Mitchell took the concept of the large-scale, slow-moving expedition beyond workable limits and the style subsequently became obsolete. Nevertheless, 15 years after Mitchell's last expedition, the Expedition that departed Melbourne under Burke was also a large-scale, slow-moving, military style expedition. Mitchell relied upon Aboriginal guides to find water and suitable routes for his cumbersome outfit far more than any other explorer<sup>1312</sup> and Reynolds quotes Mitchell at length, noting the favourable accounts of the abilities of the Aboriginal guides. McLaren does not consider Mitchell to have had much ability as a bushman, and considers his bushcraft skills superior only to those of Burke and George Grey.<sup>1313</sup>

European explorers' attitudes towards Aboriginal people generally were based on several different perceptions: the noble savage, the romantic savage and the ignoble savage.<sup>1314</sup> While some explorers treated Aborigines with kindness, there was always an underlying suspicion of their motives:

[Mitchell] We met frequently with instances of natives receiving from us all they could want on one day, yet approaching us on the next with the most unequivocal demonstrations of enmity and hostility...we wanted nothing, asked for nothing...yet they beset us as keenly and with as little remorse as wild beasts seek their prey.<sup>1315</sup>

and

<sup>1308</sup> Reynolds, *Black pioneers*, 30.

<sup>1309</sup> McLaren and Cooper, 'The enduring myth', 36.

<sup>1310</sup> Donald William Archdall Baker, *The Civilised Surveyor: Thomas Mitchell and Australian Aborigines* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997); 'John Piper, Conqueror of the Interior', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 17 (1993): 17-37; 'Wanderers in Eden: Thomas Mitchell compared with Lewis and Clark', *Aboriginal History* Vol. 19 (1995): 3-20; 'Exploring with Aborigines: Thomas Mitchell and his Aboriginal guides', *Aboriginal History* Vol. 22 (1998): 36-50; Jack Brook, 'The Widow and the Child', *Aboriginal History* Vol. 12 (1998): 63-78.

<sup>1311</sup> As noted in Chapter 2.8, page 115, Mitchell's fourth and final expedition party comprised of 29 men, eight drays drawn by 80 bullocks, three light carts, two boats, 13 horses and 250 sheep. Mitchell, *Journal of an expedition*, 28.

<sup>1312</sup> For a description of Turandurey's involvement with Mitchell's expeditions (see: Figure 132), see: Allison Cadzow, 'Guided by her: Aboriginal women's participation in Australian expeditions' in Shellam, Nugent, Konishi and Cadzow (eds.), *Brokers and boundaries: colonial exploration in indigenous territory* (Canberra: ANU Press and Aboriginal History Inc., 2016): 99-118.

<sup>1313</sup> McLaren and Cooper, 'The enduring myth', 36.

<sup>1314</sup> B.F. deVries, 'Children of the wild: The attitudes of the explorers of the Australian interior to the Aboriginal people they encountered in south, central and northern Australia, 1830-1870', *Institute of Australian Geographers. 17th Conference, 1981: Bathurst, NSW. Proceedings*, Vol. 2 (1981): 357.

<sup>1315</sup> Mitchell, *Three expeditions*, Vol. 1: 273-274.



Figure 132: Mitchell, Foggo, Barnard & Graf, 'Portraits of Turandurey (the female guide) and her child, Ballandella, with the scenery on the Lachlan (10<sup>th</sup> of May 1836)'.  
Thomas Livingstone Mitchell, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia*  
(London: T & W Boone, 1838), Vol. 2: Plate 24.

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[Gregory] 'They did not make any hostile demonstration ... and a person unacquainted with the treacherous character of the Australian [Aborigine] might have thought them friendly.'<sup>1316</sup>

Explorers invariably commented on their perceptions of Aboriginal people's appearance and often deduced the availability of resources from the condition of the people they saw. Aboriginal people did not match European aesthetic standards and this led to an unfavourable perception, although of course Ryan points out "the association of black skin with evil, treachery and barbarism" was pre-existing and not something invented by Australian explorers.<sup>1317</sup> deVries notes explorers' impressions hardened into a negative attitude and later explorers departed with unfavourable notions of Aboriginal people.<sup>1318</sup> Ryan also points out that explorers' expectations were shaped by their own ideologies and that many descriptions of Aboriginal people, their customs and ceremonies were stereotypical and reflected the explorers' own religious and pseudo-scientific views.

As the nineteenth century progressed, the Age of Enlightenment saw attitudes to exploration change. The explorers' approach became more anthropological. Eyre, Sturt and Leichhardt typified this new approach, with Eyre devoting the entire second volume of his journal to 'Manners and Customs of the Aborigines of Australia'.<sup>1319</sup> All three explorers relied on Aboriginal guides during their expeditions in the 1830s and 1840s. McLaren states:

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<sup>1316</sup> Augustus Charles Gregory, *Journal of the North Australian exploring expedition, under command of Augustus C Gregory: with report by Mr Elsey on the health of the party* (London: Royal Geographical Society, 1857), 173.

<sup>1317</sup> Ryan, *Cartographic eye*, 137.

<sup>1318</sup> deVries, 'Children of the wild', 356.

<sup>1319</sup> Eyre, *Journal of expeditions*.





Figure 133: Edward John Eyre, 'Wylie [Aboriginal guide] (drawn by J. Neil)'.  
*Journals of Expeditions of Discovery into Central Australia* (London: T & W Boone, 1845), 405.

Eyre arranged a lifetime pension for his Aboriginal companion,  
Wylie, after their crossing from Adelaide to Albany in 1841.

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The contribution by Aborigines to Australian exploration probably reached its zenith during the early 1840s, when white men's bush skills were at times, still inadequate for the task.<sup>1320</sup>

Raddatz developed a chronology of Leichhardt's encounters with Aboriginal people during his 1845 expedition.<sup>1321</sup> Initial encounters were limited to superficial observations of signs of occupation; accidental encounters followed which were characterised by expressions of fear by Aboriginal people; further meetings saw this fear replaced by curiosity and non-verbal dialogue was established.<sup>1322</sup> Initial meetings between other Europeans and Aboriginal people were characterised by a wider range of emotions than simply fear; curiosity and anger were common reactions too, although it is difficult to establish the true reaction of Aborigines upon meeting Europeans as the only written records are those made by the explorers themselves. Consequently, reactions were observed and recorded from a Eurocentric viewpoint. Nevertheless, the explorers rarely arrived unexpectedly. Established trade routes allowed Aboriginal groups to pass on information about the approach of exploration parties long before their actual arrival. Reynolds suggests that once away from the coastal margins, Europeans did not arrive unannounced.<sup>1323</sup> Certainly many explorers reflected upon this remarkable degree of communication, though there are also examples of explorers encountering groups of

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<sup>1320</sup> McLaren, *Beyond Leichhardt*, 172.

<sup>1321</sup> For a description of Harry Brown's involvement with Leichhardt's expedition (see: Figure 134), see Greg Blyton, 'Harry Brown (c. 1819-1854): Contribution of an Aboriginal guide in Australian exploration', *Aboriginal History* Vol. 39 (2015): 63-82.

<sup>1322</sup> Volker Raddatz, 'Intercultural encounters: Aborigines and white explorers in fiction and non-fiction', in *From Berlin to the Burdekin: The German contribution to the development of Australian science, exploration and the arts*, ed. David Walker and Jurgen Tampke (Kensington, NSW: New South Wales University Press, 1991).

<sup>1323</sup> Henry Reynolds, ed. *The other side of the frontier: An interpretation of the Aboriginal response to the invasion and settlement of Australia* (Townsville: History Department, James Cook University, 1981), 6.

Aboriginal people who appeared unprepared at the sudden arrival of pale-skinned intruders accompanied by large draught animals.

As early as 1802, Francis Barrallier realised that the potential for violent conflict depended upon prior contact with Europeans. On his trips over the Blue Mountains he made every effort to keep good relations with Aboriginal people as he understood that there was no advantage gained by upsetting them.<sup>1324</sup> Any conflict would result in the next unarmed European being the target of a revenge attack:

It is very dangerous to offer insult to the natives. They avenge themselves of it sooner or later and the first white man they meet without means of defence becomes their victim.<sup>1325</sup>

Sturt also went to great lengths to maintain good relations with Aboriginal people,<sup>1326</sup> but still found it difficult to predict how they would react upon first meeting. Some of the groups were friendly, while others were openly hostile.<sup>1327</sup> During his journey along the Murray in 1830, Sturt realised that the entire tribe was either welcoming or unfriendly.

We found that the individuals of a tribe partook of one general character, and that the whole of the tribe were either decidedly quiet, or as decidedly disorderly.<sup>1328</sup>

Sturt also recognised that Aboriginal people who had prior contact with Europeans were more likely to display hostility and violence towards him.<sup>1329</sup> Furthermore, the welcome he received from these people depended upon how they had been treated in former encounters. Although Sturt diffused a potential conflict while travelling down the Murray in 1830,<sup>1330</sup> Mitchell's men were not so restrained. When they visited the area in 1835, there were several violent encounters between Mitchell's party and the Wiradjuri<sup>1331</sup> and Ngemba/Ngiyampaa.<sup>1332</sup> McLaren believes these incidents arose due to

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<sup>1324</sup> Francis Barrallier, *Journal of the expedition into the interior of New South Wales 1802* (Melbourne: Marsh Walsh, 1975).

<sup>1325</sup> Frank Murcott Bladen, *Historical Records of New South Wales* (Mona Vale: Lansdown Slattery & Co., 1979), Vol. 5: 815; Thomas Whitley, *Barrallier and his travel in N.S.Wales 1802: read before the Australian Historical Society, Sydney, August 1905* (Blackheath: Thomas Whitley, 1905).

<sup>1326</sup> Michael Canon and Readers Digest, *The exploration of Australia* (Surrey Hills: Readers Digest, 1987), 144.

<sup>1327</sup> deVries, 'Children of the wild', 363.

<sup>1328</sup> Sturt, *Two expeditions*, Vol. 2: 183.

<sup>1329</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1: 88.

<sup>1330</sup> Sturt, *Two expeditions*; Cumpston, *Charles Sturt: His life and journeys of exploration*.

<sup>1331</sup> The names of Aboriginal language groups in this chapter have predominantly been spelt in accordance with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies AUSTLANG database, [austlang.aiatsis.gov.au](http://austlang.aiatsis.gov.au) Additional information has been incorporated from: David Horton, *The Encyclopedia of Aboriginal Australia: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, society and culture* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1994); Laurent Dousset, *AusAnthrop*, University of Western Australia, [ausanthrop.net](http://ausanthrop.net); *Indigenous languages map of Queensland*, State Library of Queensland, [slq.qld.gov.au/resources/atsi/languages/indigenous-languages-map](http://slq.qld.gov.au/resources/atsi/languages/indigenous-languages-map) and Norman Barnett Tindale, *Tribal boundaries in Aboriginal Australia* [map], (Berkeley, CA.: The Regents of the University of California, c.1974).

<sup>1332</sup> Bruce Elder, *Blood on the wattle: massacres and maltreatment of Australian Aborigines since 1788* (Frenchs Forest, NSW: Child & Associates, 1988), 56.



Figure 134: Ludwig Leichhardt 'Portraits of Charley Fisher and Harry Brown, guides on Leichhardt's expedition, 1844–45'.  
*Journal of an Overland Expedition in Australia* (London: T. & W. Boone, 1847).

Mitchell's careless management which allowed the party to become strung out over considerable distances.<sup>1333</sup> A later incident where several Paakantyi people were shot and killed reinforces the claim that Mitchell lacked control of his men.<sup>1334</sup> Seven years later when Sturt passed through the area again, he was apprehensive about how he would be received:

It was clear that the natives still remembered the first visit the Europeans had made to them, and its consequences, and that they were very well disposed to retaliate. Mr. Poole was short and stout like Sir Thomas Mitchell, and personally very much resembled him ... they took Mr. Poole for that officer ... and Nadbuck informed us that they would certainly spear him.<sup>1335</sup>

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<sup>1333</sup> McLaren, *Beyond Leichhardt*, 111.

<sup>1334</sup> William Charles Foster, *Sir Thomas Livingston Mitchell and his world, 1792-1855: surveyor general of New South Wales, 1828-1855* (Sydney: Institution of Surveyors N.S.W., 1985), 258-276.

<sup>1335</sup> Sturt, *Narrative of an expedition*, Vol. 1: 137-138.

## **6.3 Aboriginal encounters on the track of the VEE prior to their arrival**

### **6.3.1 Introduction**

If the cordiality of previous meetings between Aboriginal people and European intruders set the tone for subsequent meetings, as earlier explorers suspected, then it is worth examining the interactions between Europeans and Aboriginal people along the route of the VEE. Earlier interactions would not only indicate possible outcomes of any meetings Burke may have during the Expedition, but reports from earlier explorers would also have influenced Burke's attitude and approach towards Aboriginal people.

The VEE spent much of its time in areas that had already been visited by Europeans and less than half the distance traversed between Melbourne and the Gulf was through the "ghastly blank"<sup>1336</sup> of land unknown to Europeans.<sup>1337</sup> Therefore, for much of the VEE's journey, prior contact between Europeans and Aboriginal people would have influenced Aboriginal peoples' attitudes towards the Expedition.

### **6.3.2 Prior encounters: Melbourne to Menindee**

Between Melbourne and Menindee, much of the land had been forcibly occupied by European graziers and miners. Aboriginal people had been systematically dispossessed and marginalised, particularly in Victoria as a result of gold rushes and steam-boat navigation, which had resulted in a dramatic increase in the white population during the 1850s. In rural New South Wales, the first sheep stations were established on the Darling in the late 1840s, with the township of Menindee established in 1852 and the first paddle-steamers reaching the town in 1859.<sup>1338</sup>

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<sup>1336</sup> *Argus*, 1 September 1858: 4.

<sup>1337</sup> The land unknown to Europeans was between Sturt's furthest of 1845 at Eyre's Creek in the Simpson Desert to Leichhardt's 1845 track and Gregory's 1856 track in the Gulf of Carpentaria, a north-south distance of approximately 1,000 kilometres.

<sup>1338</sup> Thomas Paine arrived in Menindee in 1852 and opened a store and hotel. Captain Francis Cadell opened a store in 1856 and was the first to navigate a paddle-steamer to Menindee when he brought the P.S. *Albury* from the Murray to Mount Murchison in February 1859. Captain William Richard Randell followed him up in the P.S. *Gemini* a month later.

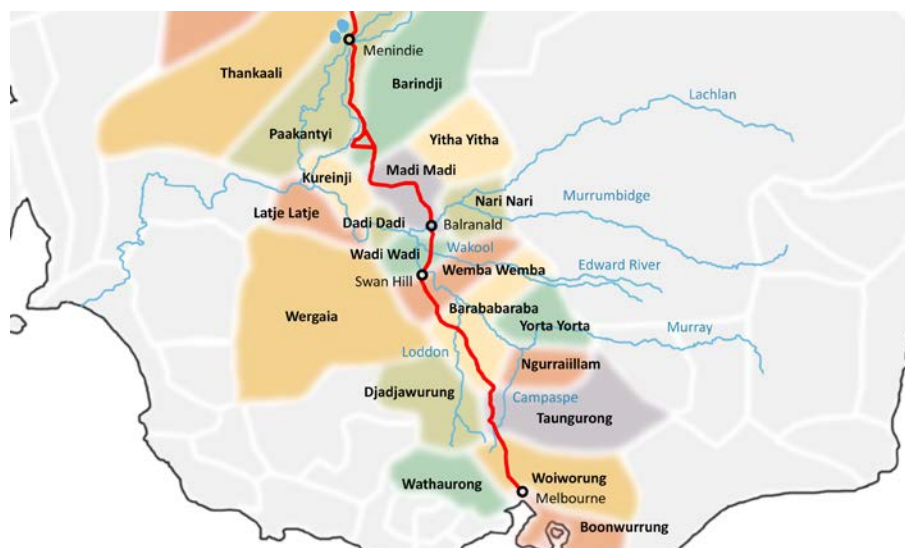


Figure 135: Aboriginal language groups between Melbourne and Menindee. Burke and Wills' track in red. Adapted from David Horton, 'Aboriginal Australia' [map], (Canberra: Aboriginal Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2006). © 2017 Dave Phoenix.

### 6.3.3 Prior encounters: Menindee to the Cooper

Beyond Menindee, pastoralists had made excursions to the north of up to 200 miles and while none of the land had been occupied or stocked with sheep, Pantyikali and Thankaali people had met various groups of Europeans.<sup>1339</sup> There are no records of Europeans entering Galali, Wangkumara and Karenggapa country around the Bulloo River, although M.S. de Rinzy's five-man party may have camped at the Bulloo during the winter of 1859 while on a six-month exploring journey from Fort Bourke to St. George's bridge.<sup>1340</sup> They had frequent contact with Aboriginal people "who proved very troublesome", attacking de Rinzy's camp and spearing him in the thigh.<sup>1341</sup> The men opened fire on two occasions, shooting Aboriginal people at least once, and the party also held an old Aboriginal man hostage for three days in an attempt to get information about the country and water.<sup>1342</sup> If these encounters were with the Galali and Budgari people of the Paroo and Bulloo Rivers, then the VEE might expect a less than hospitable greeting.

<sup>1339</sup> William Wright, W.E.P. Giles, W. G. Conn, George Edward Curlew, R.R. Haverfield, had all made trips north of Menindee.

<sup>1340</sup> M.S. de Rinzy, 'Australian Exploration: Discovery of valuable and well-watered country beyond the Darling', *Empire*, 29 June 1860: 2, 30 June 1860: 2, 2 July 1860: 5, 14 July 1860: 5, 9 December 1861: 4; *Courier*, 17 December 1861: 4.

<sup>1341</sup> 'Australian Exploration', *Moreton Bay Courier*, 14 July 1860: 5.

<sup>1342</sup> *Empire*, 29 June 1860: 2, 30 June 1860: 2, 2 July 1860: 5, 14 July 1860: 5.



Figure 136: Aboriginal language groups between Menindee and the Cooper. Burke and Wills' track in red. Adapted from David Horton, 'Aboriginal Australia' [map], (Canberra: Aboriginal Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2006). © 2017 Dave Phoenix.

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### 6.3.4 Prior encounters: Cooper Creek and Sturt Stony Desert

Three expeditions had visited Cooper Creek prior to 1860. Sturt was the first European to see the Cooper and he made two trips to the river and spent five weeks in the area in 1845. His amicable interactions with the Yandruwandha, Yawarrawarrka and Wangkumara people set the tone for future encounters. Kennedy explored the upper reaches of the Cooper as well as the Thompson and Barcoo in 1847. Gregory passed through the area briefly in 1858 and private expeditions under Stuckey, Rowe and Hack visited Lake Hope on the lower Cooper.

Sturt had used Aboriginal guides extensively during his exploration of the Murrumbidgee, Murray and Darling Rivers.<sup>1343</sup> When approaching Aboriginal people he made efforts not to cause alarm and insisted his men did not interfere with the women.<sup>1344</sup> Sturt remained calm when faced with large groups of Aborigines and attributed his safe passage to along the Murray to the fact that each group sent envoys ahead to prepare the neighbouring tribe for the arrival of the Europeans.

They sent ambassadors forward regularly from one tribe to another, in order to prepare for our approach, a custom that not only saved us an infinity of time, but also great personal risk. Indeed, I doubt very much whether we should ever have pushed so far down the river, had we not been assisted

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<sup>1343</sup> Sturt, *Two expeditions*.

<sup>1344</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2: 71-73. See also Peter J. Dowling, 'A Great Deal of Sickness: Introduced diseases among the Aboriginal people of colonial Southeast Australia 1788-1900' (PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1997): 104-117; *European and Aboriginal contact in the Riverland* (Adelaide: 12th State History Conference, 2003).



Figure 137: Samuel Thomas Gill, 'Native village in the northern interior of S. Australia', 1845.  
PIC Solander Box A47, #R345, obj-134371311-1, National Library of Australia.  
Charles Sturt, *Narrative of an Expedition into Central Australia* (London: T. & W. Boone, 1849).

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by the natives themselves. I was particularly careful not to do anything that would alarm them, or to permit any liberty to be taken with their women.<sup>1345</sup>

When Sturt ventured into the arid desert areas of inland South Australia in 1844-5, he took two Aboriginal guides, Camboli and Nadbuck, who were “two of the most influential natives” on the Murray River and who had been procured by Eyre, who was then Protector of Aborigines.<sup>1346</sup> He also acquired the services of guides like Toonda, Munducki and Topar along the way. Sturt maintained his conciliatory approach towards the Aborigines he encountered, noting:

There is no doubt the Australian Aboriginal is strongly susceptible to kindness ... if I had treated the natives harshly ... they would have most assuredly slain me.<sup>1347</sup>

In October and November 1845, Sturt's party of four followed well-trodden, broad native paths along the banks of Cooper Creek and Wilson River for over 150 kilometres, regularly meeting Yandruwandha, Yawarrawarrka and Wangkumara people. Sturt gained information regarding the character of the river and availability of water (see also: Chapter 7.4.2, pages 475 to 477), and in return, handed out presents of knives, tomahawks and hooks, as well as the occasional gift of a blanket, great coat, powder canister and trinket box.<sup>1348</sup> He commented that the Wangkumara men were:

the finest of any I had seen on the Australian Continent. Their bodies were not disfigured by any scars, neither were their countenances by the loss of any teeth, nor were they circumcised. They were a well-made race, with a sufficiency of muscular development, and stood as erect as it was possible to do.<sup>1349</sup>

At one camp on the Wilson River, Sturt was guided to a camp containing 300-400 Wangkumara people who greeted him “with a deafening shout”. Sturt wrote:

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<sup>1345</sup> Sturt, *Two expeditions*, Vol. 2: 71-73.

<sup>1346</sup> Sturt, *Narrative of an expedition*, Vol. 2: 44.

<sup>1347</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1: 116.

<sup>1348</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2: 61-85.

<sup>1349</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2: 77.



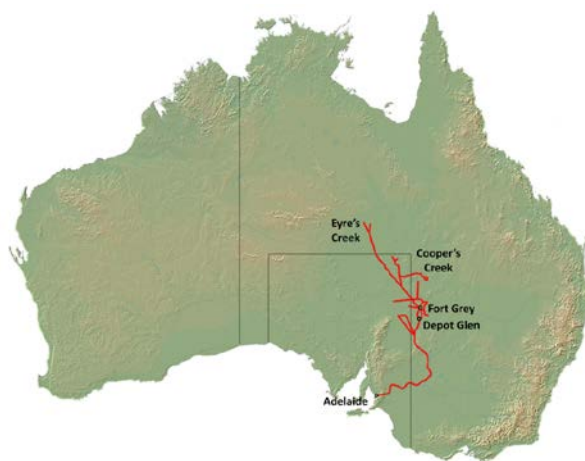


Figure 138: Sturt's 'Central Australian Expedition' route from Adelaide to Eyre's Creek.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.

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I do not know, that my desire to see the savage in his wild state, was ever more gratified than on this occasion, for I had never before come so suddenly upon so large a party. The scene was one of the most animated description, and was rendered still more striking from the circumstance of the native huts, at which there were a number of women and children, occupying the whole crest of a long piece of rising ground at the opposite side of the flat.<sup>1350</sup>

Burke and Wills would pass close to this spot 15 years later.

Mitchell's second-in-command, Kennedy, was a much better bushman than his irascible leader. Kennedy broke away from Mitchell's cumbersome style of expedition when he led his first expedition down the Barcoo and Cooper in 1847. On leaving Sydney, Kennedy did not take an Aboriginal guide as he was initially re-tracing Mitchell's steps. He did later acquire the services of a young Gamilaraay man, Henry, who acted as his guide. Kennedy travelled down the Cooper into Kungkari and Pirriya territory, where his encounters were amicable.<sup>1351</sup> When Kennedy felt threatened by the presence of Aboriginal people, he refrained from opening fire, preferring to gallop his horse towards them as a means of moving them on. Kennedy's guide on his next expedition,<sup>1352</sup> Jackey Jackey,<sup>1353</sup> became famous for his "brave faithful, and sagacious conduct"<sup>1354</sup> and in 1851 Governor Fitzroy presented

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<sup>1350</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2: 75; Beale, *The Barcoo and beyond*, 30-31.

<sup>1351</sup> Edmund Besley Court Kennedy, 'Dispatch, Bogan River, 12 January 1848' published in the supplement to the *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 21 January 1848 and *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 January 1848: 2.

<sup>1352</sup> Edgar Beale, *Kennedy of Cape York* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1970); Carron, *Narrative of an expedition*.

<sup>1353</sup> Jackey Jackey was a Wonnarua man called Galmahra/Galmarra. Greg Blyton, Deirdre Heitmeyer and John Maynard, *Wannin thanbarran: a history of Aboriginal and European contact in Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter Valley* (Muswellbrook: Muswellbrook Shire Council Aboriginal Reconciliation Committee, 2004); *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 March 1849, 7 March 1849.

<sup>1354</sup> *Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser*, 4 January 1851: 2.



Figure 139: 'Silver breastplate presented to Jackey Jackey [Galmarra] by His Excellency Sir Charles Augustus FitzRoy KB, Governor of New South Wales', c.1851. R 453, State Library of New South Wales.

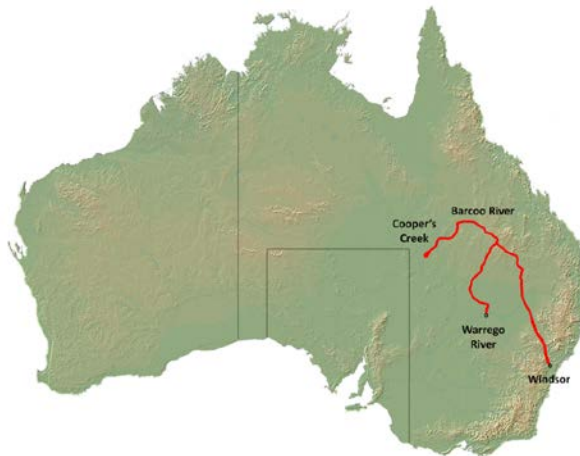


Figure 140: Kennedy's 1847 route from Sydney to the upper reaches of Cooper Creek. © 2017 Dave Phoenix.

him with an elaborate silver breast-plate.<sup>1355</sup> Ten years later, the EC also decided to recognise Aboriginal bravery with the presentation of a breast plate by the Governor.

The four Gregory brothers had taken a relaxed approach to their early meetings with Aboriginal people during their expeditions in Western Australia. This had not always resulted in amicable encounters and the brothers believed their circumspect approach was interpreted as weakness.<sup>1356</sup> During the 1856 'NAE', A.C. Gregory thought the Aboriginal people they met were treacherous characters (see Figure 141), though they recorded very few encounters as they travelled across the Gulf of Carpentaria.

On the 1858 'LSE', A.C. and C.F. Gregory recorded just two encounters with Aboriginal people. Their second interaction was with the Kungkari people near the point where the Barcoo and Thompson Rivers join to become the Cooper. Gregory's party "surprised a party of natives, who

<sup>1355</sup> Jakelin Troy, *King plates: a history of Aboriginal Gorgets* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1993), 30-34.

<sup>1356</sup> Gregory and Gregory, *Journals*, 57.

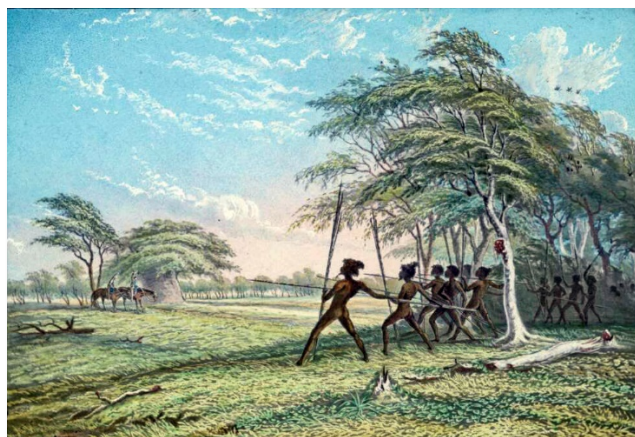


Figure 141: Thomas Baines, 'Bowman the horse keeper and the artist threatened with spears while searching for stray horses near the Baines River', c.1856.  
PIC Row 45/1/3, #T1152, NK6954/D, obj-153487060, National Library of Australia.

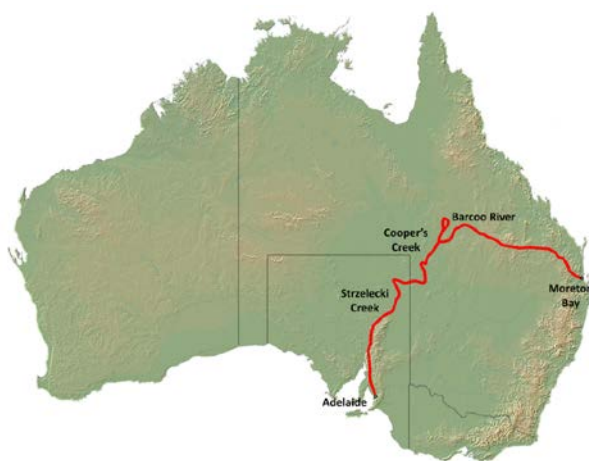


Figure 142: Gregory's 1858 'Leichhardt Search Expedition' route.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.

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decamped on our approach, leaving a net, fish, etc., which we of course left untouched”.<sup>1357</sup> The next day Gregory met the party of around a dozen men, women and children again and:

By signs they expressed that they had observed we had not taken away any of their property the evening before, when they ran away and left their nets, and were therefore satisfied our intentions were friendly.<sup>1358</sup>

However, that evening “the natives were detected attempting to crawl into the camp through the bushes” and, after firing a pistol into the air with no effect, Gregory fired “small shot directed into the scrub, after which we were not further molested”.<sup>1359</sup> Further downstream on the Cooper, Wilson River and Strzelecki Creek, Gregory only saw “small scattered parties” and therefore “could collect little information”. He estimated seeing about 100 Aboriginal men, plus a few women and children,

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<sup>1357</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>1358</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1359</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

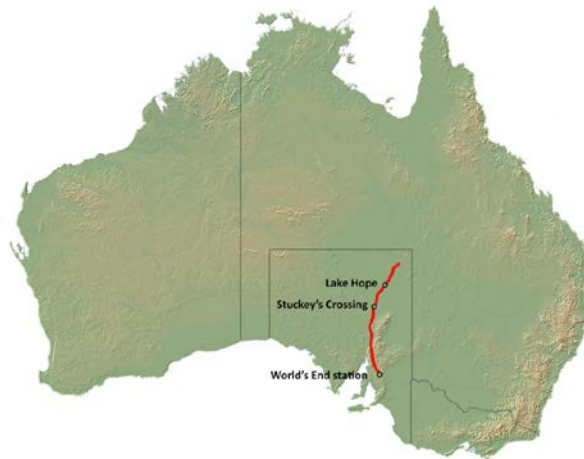


Figure 143: Possible route of Hack's 1859-1860 journey to the lake country north-east of Lake Hope.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.

but, judging from the number of campsites he saw, he estimated that more than 1,000 Aboriginal people lived along the Cooper.<sup>1360</sup>

Several South Australian squatters made journeys north towards the Cooper and possibly as far north as Malkumba-Coongie. In September 1859, Samuel and Robert Stuckey reached Lake Hope on the lower Cooper in Diyari country.<sup>1361</sup> The following month, F.H. Randall and Edwin Rowe also visited Lake Hope, and, with two Aboriginal guides, they followed the Cooper upstream for 40 miles.<sup>1362</sup> During the summer of 1859-1860, Stephen Hack, Don McDonald and an associate camped at Lake Hope<sup>1363</sup> and then continued to the north-east into Yandruwandha-Yawarrawarrka country and the lakes area around Malkumba-Coongie. They spent three weeks in this area and had regular interactions with Aboriginal people, who supplied them with fish and who were reported to be of a friendly disposition. McDonald presented them with pannikins and tin cases as gifts.<sup>1364</sup>

There may have been additional European visitors to the Cooper prior to the arrival of the VEE at the end of 1860. When McKinlay visited Kadhibaerri in 1861 while searching for Burke and Wills (see Chapter 6.5, pages 379 to 381), he encountered an Aboriginal man who had:

the marks of ball and shot wounds ... One ball inside of left knee ... the mark of a pistol bullet on right collarbone; and on his breast a number of shot--some now in the flesh but healed.<sup>1365</sup>

<sup>1360</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1361</sup> 'The Far North', *South Australian Register*, 2 March 1860: 2.

<sup>1362</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1363</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1364</sup> 'McKinlay's discovery', *South Australian Register*, 14 December 1861: 2.

<sup>1365</sup> McKinlay, Diary entry 22 October 1861, 'Diary, 16 August-6 December 1861', PRG 834/1/1, State Library of South Australia.



Figure 144: Aboriginal language groups in the Bulloo, Wilson, Cooper, Strzelecki and Diamantina catchments. Burke and Wills' track in red.

Adapted from David Horton, 'Aboriginal Australia' [map], (Canberra: Aboriginal Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2006). © 2017 Dave Phoenix.

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There had obviously been a violent conflict at Kadhibærri, but there is no indication of who opened fire.<sup>1366</sup> This incident appears to have been too far to the west to have been the result of de Rinzy's party in 1860, but there were other accounts of stockmen having visited the Cooper region.<sup>1367</sup>

For the Diyari, Yandruwandha, Yawarrawarrka and Wangkumara on Cooper Creek and the Wilson River, their first contact with Europeans was with Sturt in 1845. His conciliatory approach towards Aboriginal people had developed over many years. Gregory arrived on the Cooper 13 years later, and although he took a more detached approach, he moved rapidly through the area and did not see many Aboriginal people. South Australian squatters made several trips to the lower reaches of the Cooper the following year and reported having friendly interactions with the Diyari, Yandruwandha and Yawarrawarrka. Other than the one, mysterious incident at Kadhibærri, the

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<sup>1366</sup> McKinlay found a fragment of a page of an 1858 Nautical Almanac, which may give a possible clue to the date of the incident.

<sup>1367</sup> Other parties that may have visited the Cooper prior to 1860 included Bleasley's party and John Dowse. Bleasley: see Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Questions 1190 & 1191 to Howitt. Dowse: see 'The Exploration Mystery', *Argus*, 13 December 1861: 5, reprinted from the *Ovens Constitution*.



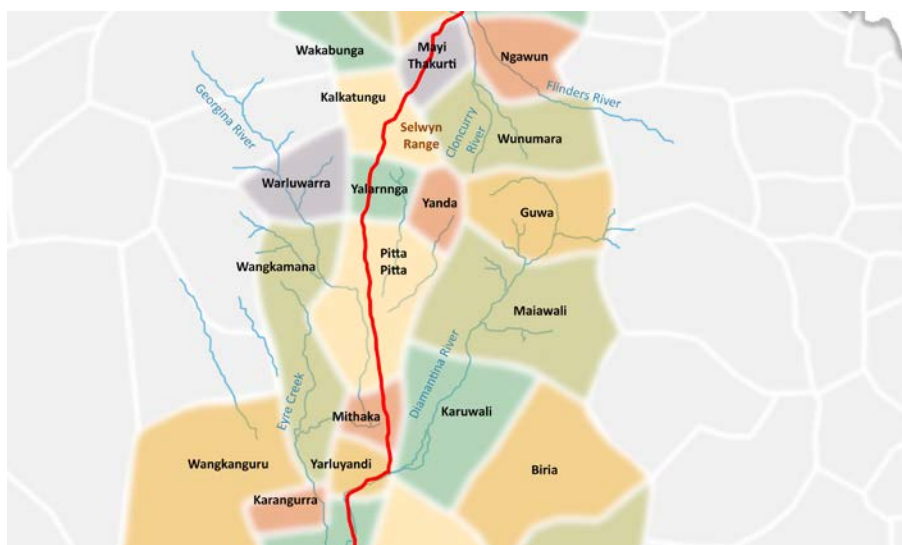


Figure 145: Aboriginal language groups in the Diamantina, Georgina and Eyre Creek catchments. Burke and Wills' track in red.

Adapted from David Horton, 'Aboriginal Australia' [map], (Canberra: Aboriginal Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2006). © 2017 Dave Phoenix.

passage of European exploring parties along the Cooper, Strzelecki and Barcoo had not yet resulted in dispossession or displacement and later explorers would not expect Aboriginal people to have been pre-disposed towards violence.

### 6.3.5 Prior encounters: Cooper Creek to the Gulf of Carpentaria

Between the Cooper and the Gulf of Carpentaria, Europeans had not entered Mithaka, Pitta-Pitta, Yalarnga and Kalkatungu country, but no doubt these people would have been aware of European incursions into neighbouring territories. Sturt had entered Ngamini country when he crossed the Stony Desert into what is now the Simpson Desert in 1845. Sturt thought the Stony Desert was cheerless and barren and was surprised to see “two moving specks, in the shape of native women ... their presence indicated that even these gloomy and forbidding regions were not altogether uninhabited”.<sup>1368</sup> Sturt encountered a family who pointed out where a stray horse had wandered, for which the old man was rewarded with a striped handkerchief, “with which he was much pleased”.<sup>1369</sup> Further north, in either Karenguru or Wangkamana country, they encountered 20 people “who exhibited some unfriendly symptoms” and would not allow the explorers to approach.<sup>1370</sup>

<sup>1368</sup> Sturt, *Narrative of an expedition*, Vol. 1: 380.

<sup>1369</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2: 7.

<sup>1370</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1: 407.

### 6.3.6 Prior encounters: Gulf of Carpentaria

In the Gulf of Carpentaria there had been European contact as far back at 1606 with the maritime visits of Janszoon, Carstenszoon, van Colster and Tasman. British Navy expeditions under Flinders and Stokes followed around 200 years later. From the early 1700s, or possibly earlier, Makassan praus<sup>1371</sup> also visited the north coast to fish for trepang.<sup>1372</sup> One of the first recorded encounters between Aboriginal people and Europeans was in 1623 when Carstenszoon arrived aboard the Dutch ship *Pera*. He went ashore at the Mitchell River but was unable to establish dialogue with the Yir Yoront. His offers of scraps of iron and strings of beads did not interest them, so he resorted to abduction. The sailors shot and killed another man whilst repulsing an attack.<sup>1373</sup>

The first land based expeditions were those of Leichhardt in 1845 and Gregory's 'NAE' in 1856, with the VEE as the third party of European explorers to reach the northern coast travelling overland. Leichhardt had two Aboriginal guides on his 1845 journey (as mentioned earlier, see Figure 134) and the party attempted to maintain good relations with all Aboriginal people they encountered.<sup>1374</sup> He did not feel the need to mount guard at night in areas where Aboriginal people had not been in contact with Europeans. Even in coastal areas on the Cape and Gulf, where he knew there had been regular visits from 'Malays' (Makassans),<sup>1375</sup> he did not mount guard, as he thought Aboriginal people only became 'guileful' after associating with Europeans.<sup>1376</sup> This changed after Gilbert was killed by Kok-Kaper people on Cape York and Leichhardt began camping in the open, protected by lines of pack-saddles, with a guard on watch all night.<sup>1377</sup> Around the Flinders and Bynoe Rivers Leichhardt had regular contact with the Kurtjar, Kuthant and Kukatj people. Their meetings were typically hesitant encounters which rarely resulted in information being exchanged. Leichhardt supposed the timidity shown by Aboriginal people was because "the natives considered our animals [horses] to be large dogs, and had frequently asked whether they would bite".<sup>1378</sup>

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<sup>1371</sup> Makassan trepangers were from Sulawesi in Indonesia, but other boats also came from other islands in the Indonesian Archipelago, including Timor, Rote and Aru.

<sup>1372</sup> Campbell Macknight, 'Chapter 2: Studying trepangers', in Marshall Clark. and Sally K. May (eds.), *Macassan History and Heritage: Journeys, Encounters and Influences* (Canberra: Australian National University, 2013); Judith Shelley, Daniel Summerfield and Linda Ogonowski (eds.), 'Fishing the Sea-cucumber', *Inspirasi: The Journal of Australia Indonesia Arts Alliance*, Vol. 15, Autumn (2003).

<sup>1373</sup> Flannery, *The explorers*, 18-20.

<sup>1374</sup> Leichhardt, *Overland Expedition*.

<sup>1375</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>1376</sup> McLaren, *Beyond Leichhardt*, 249.

<sup>1377</sup> John Gilbert was killed and James Calvert and John Roper seriously injured on 28 June 1845 at the Mitchell River. John Gilbert, 'Diary of the Port Essington Expedition, 18 September 1844-28 June 1845', A2586 filed in Safe 1/237, State Library of New South Wales; Brian James Dalton, 'The Death of John Gilbert', *Lectures on North Queensland History* (Townsville: James Cook University, 1996) No. 5: 21-35.

<sup>1378</sup> Leichhardt, *Overland Expedition*, 222.



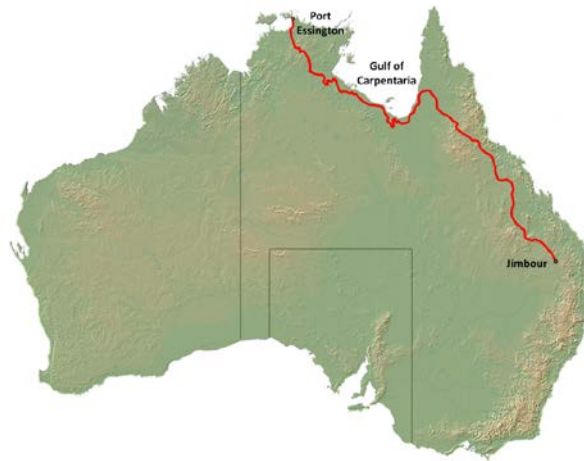


Figure 146: Leichhardt's 1844-1845 route from Jimbour to Port Essington.  
Leichhardt's party had interactions with Aboriginal people in the Gulf of Carpentaria.  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.

Leichhardt took two Aboriginal guides, Wommai and Billy Bombat, on his 1848 expedition,<sup>1379</sup> when the entire party disappeared while attempting to cross Australia from near today's town of Roma to the Swan River settlement in Western Australia.<sup>1380</sup> While mystery surrounds Leichhardt's movements, current thinking suggests he followed the Barcoo (a tributary of the Cooper visited by Kennedy the previous year), reached the Gulf country at the Flinders River, and "made his way to the headwaters of one of the Gulf rivers further to the west".<sup>1381</sup> Four men are believed to have died on the Barkly Tableland and the remainder of the party perished in the Great Sandy Desert in Western Australia.<sup>1382</sup> If this hypothesis is correct, then Leichhardt had further interactions with Aboriginal people in the Gulf in 1848.

When the VEE was assembling in Melbourne in 1860, there were calls for the Expedition to search for Leichhardt, and while there was discussion about the route he might have taken, the press did not speculate on his cause of death.<sup>1383</sup> There were, however, suggestions that Leichhardt might still be alive, "thrown upon the clemency of the aborigines" and "in a helpless condition amongst a

<sup>1379</sup> Ruth Smout, 'Leichhardt: The Secrets of the Sandhills: a legend and an enigma', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1966): 55-80.

<sup>1380</sup> David Hallam, 'The Leichhardt nameplate: a report on authenticity testing [report]', (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2006). I.D. MacLeod, 'The surface analysis of a brass plate 'Ludwig Leichhardt 1848' and assessment of authenticity [report]', (Perth: Collections Management and Conservation, Western Australian Museum, 2006).

<sup>1381</sup> Darrell Lewis, 'The fate of Leichhardt', *Historical Records of Australian Science*, Vol. 17 (2006): 1-30.

<sup>1382</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1383</sup> *Argus*, 9 July 1860: 4.



Figure 147: Thomas Baines, 'The artist, G. Phibbs & W. Graham in the long boat of the *Messenger*, tender to the North Australian Expedition, treacherously attacked by natives pretending to sell turtle near the Wessel Islands, Gulf of Carpentaria', 1856.  
PIC Row 45/1/3, #T1149-T1156, NK6954, obj-153487363, National Library of Australia.

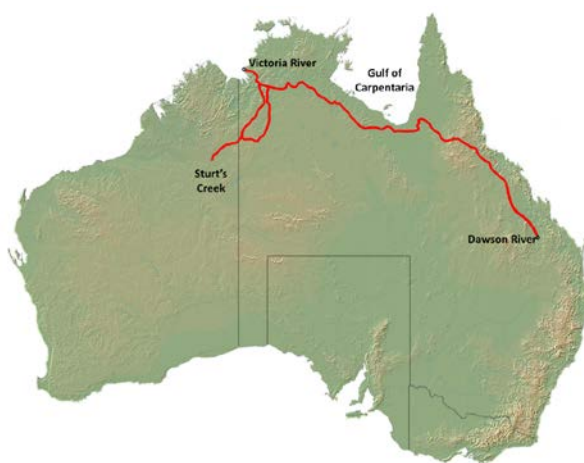


Figure 148: Gregory's 1855-1856 'North Australian Exploration' route from the Victoria River to Moreton Bay. © 2017 Dave Phoenix.

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tribe".<sup>1384</sup> Burke was aware of these discussions on Leichhardt's fate and expectations that he would make attempts to ask Aboriginal people for any news.<sup>1385</sup>

The Gregory brothers' approach towards Aboriginal people has already been discussed (see Chapter 6.3.4, pages 333 to 334). During their trip from the Victoria River depot to Brisbane in 1856, Gregory opened fire on Aboriginal people several times. In September 1856 at the Leichhardt River in Kukatj country:

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<sup>1384</sup> 'New Holland bisected by the sea', *Argus*, 18 May 1860: 7.

<sup>1385</sup> On the back of a letter, Burke scribbled some notes, most likely at the EC meeting of 17 July 1860 when the route to Blunder Bay was being discussed (see: Chapter 3.7, pages 162 to 166). Burke wrote "Leicherd party of nine" and then wrote the explorer's name eleven more times, misspelling it each time as 'Leicherd' or 'Leichard'. Lieutenant Webster, 'Letter to Robert O'Hara Burke, dated Kerang, 11 July 1860', Item 7, D179 (Safe 1/405), State Library of New South Wales.

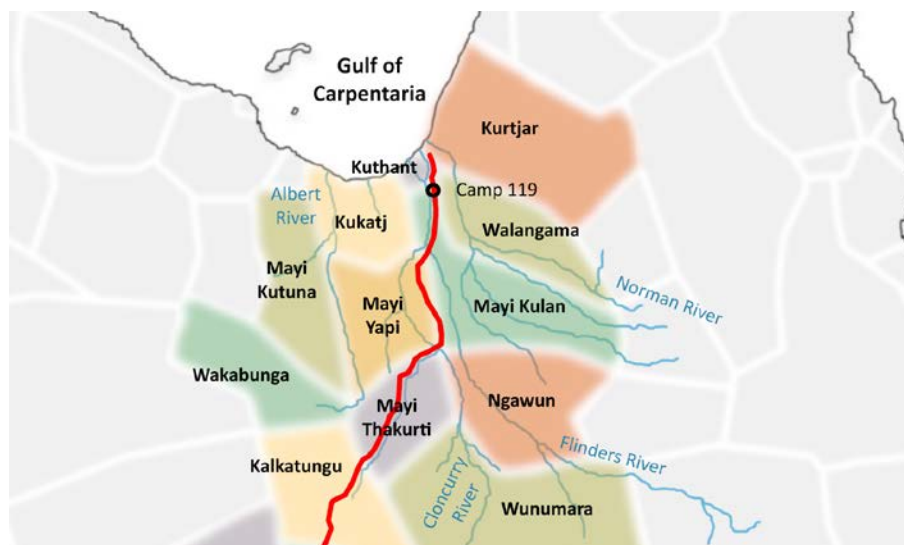


Figure 149: Aboriginal language groups in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Burke and Wills' track in red. Adapted from David Horton, 'Aboriginal Australia' [map], (Canberra: Aboriginal Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2006). © 2017 Dave Phoenix.

Nineteen blacks came to the camp, all armed with clubs and spears ... when we were crossing a deep ravine [they] made a rush on us with their spears poised ready to throw them at us ... but just as their leader was in the act of throwing his spear he received a charge of small shot. This checked them, and we charged them on horseback, and with a few shots from our revolvers put them to flight ... our object was only to procure our own safety, and that with as little injury to the blacks as possible.<sup>1386</sup>

This incident occurred just four years before and 100 kilometres to the west of Burke and Wills' track. Gregory's boat party also had several hostile encounters with Aboriginal people along the coast at the Gulf of Carpentaria (see Figure 147).

In summary, there had been only two overland expeditions in the Gulf region prior to 1860. One of these had been attacked by Aboriginal people with one European death resulting and the other had opened fire on Aboriginal people, resulting in Kukatj injuries and possibly death. Further expeditions into the Gulf might therefore anticipate either wariness of aggression.

### 6.3.7 Developments in exploration in the 1850s

By the 1850s, expedition parties were smaller and more lightly equipped, which allowed them to cover ground faster and meant their water requirements were kept to a minimum.<sup>1387</sup> McLaren believes expedition leaders were now more competent as bushmen and therefore relied less on Aboriginal guides.<sup>1388</sup>

<sup>1386</sup> Gregory and Gregory, *Journals*, 173.

<sup>1387</sup> Cooper and McLaren, 'Development of mobility', 34-38.

<sup>1388</sup> McLaren and Cooper, 'The enduring myth'.



Figure 150: George French Angas, 'Elizabeth Springs', 1859.

John McDouall Stuart, *Explorations in Australia: The Journals of John McDouall Stuart during the years 1858, 1859, 1860, 1861 & 1862* (London: Saunders, Otley & Co., 1865), facing page 61.

Several of the illustrations accompanying Stuart's journals showed Stuart interacting with Aboriginal people, or showed Aboriginal people watching the expedition pass by from a concealed vantage point.

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The South Australian explorer, Stuart, did not rely on Aboriginal guides. Stuart had been the draughtsman on the 1845 'Central Australian Expedition' and had experienced Stuart's affable interactions with Aboriginal people.<sup>1389</sup> In 1858, when leading his first expedition (to Lake Torrens), Stuart had taken an (un-named) young Aboriginal man as a guide.<sup>1390</sup> However, Stuart soon questioned the guide's knowledge, stating "I am very doubtful of his knowing anything of the country"<sup>1391</sup> and within a fortnight of departing he considered sending him back. Stuart wrote:

My doubt of the black fellow's knowledge of the country is now confirmed; he seems to be quite lost, and knows nothing of the country, except what he has heard other blacks relate; he is quite bewildered and points all round when I ask him the direction of Wingilpin.<sup>1392</sup>

One night, eight weeks into the expedition, the guide left. Stuart thought "he was of very little use to us" and regretted not sending him back sooner.<sup>1393</sup> Stuart had hoped that, besides finding water, the guide "might be useful in conversing with the other natives when we should meet them", but considered "he was of no other use than for tracking and assisting in getting the horses in the morning".<sup>1394</sup> Stuart's next five expeditions, conducted between 1859 and 1862 and culminating in the crossing of Australia from south to north, epitomised the trend towards small, light parties. After his experience on the first expedition, Stuart did not use Aboriginal guides again.

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<sup>1389</sup> Ian Mudie, *The Heroic Journey of John McDouall Stuart* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1968).

<sup>1390</sup> Philip D. Gee and Ifeta Gee, 'John McDouall Stuart, South Australian Explorer: The Search for Wingilpin: Tracking part of his 1858 expedition', *South Australian Geographical Journal*, Vol. 94 (1995): 18-35.

<sup>1391</sup> Stuart, *Explorations in Australia*, 4.

<sup>1392</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>1393</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>1394</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

## 6.4 The VEE and Aboriginal interactions

Initial discussions about establishing a Victorian expedition looked at forming a small, lightly equipped party of five men, similar in size to Stuart's early expeditions.<sup>1395</sup> Correspondingly, the use of Aboriginal guides was not mentioned.<sup>1396</sup> The public trusted the EC would give instructions "to the exploring party in contemplation, to deal with the natives in a spirit of humanity"<sup>1397</sup> and impress upon them "the necessity of kindly treating the natives".<sup>1398</sup> The press expected the Expedition leader:

should possess the art, or more properly the instinct, of winning the affections of those with whom he may come in contact ... and the same faculty ... would enable him to cultivate, with native tribes which might otherwise prove hostile, those friendly relations; whose value can never be overestimated.<sup>1399</sup>

Others thought Aboriginal guides should be one of Burke's "most essential requirements", as every old colonist knew:<sup>1400</sup>

the inestimable value of the blacks - their intuitive instinct in finding water, food, in tracking, and their knowledge of the habits of other tribes, and their facility of obtaining information from them, which is perfectly out of the power of the whites to do.<sup>1401</sup>

The PIV, however, had not shown a great deal of interest in the emerging disciplines of anthropology or ethnology, and Aboriginal topics were seldom the subject of lectures at their monthly meetings.<sup>1402</sup> In addition, Mueller's negative experiences of Aboriginal people with Gregory in the Gulf influenced the EC's deliberations. Mueller found the Aboriginal people "were almost invariably ... of a hostile disposition towards Europeans".<sup>1403</sup> He warned the EC "that it was necessary to keep a constant watch, not to allow any of them to approach the camp, and also continually to carry loaded revolvers".<sup>1404</sup> Although this warning was given many months before Burke was selected as leader, Mueller was part of the sub-committee that drafted his instructions in the weeks before the

<sup>1395</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports*, 'First Progress Report, 22 December 1857'.

<sup>1396</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1397</sup> *Age*, 5 January 1858: 5.

<sup>1398</sup> 'Australian Exploration', *Argus*, 5 January 1858: 5.

<sup>1399</sup> *Age*, 1 February 1860: 4.

<sup>1400</sup> SOHOBEN, 'Blacks and Exploration', *Argus*, 10 July 1861: 5.

<sup>1401</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1402</sup> In 1857 W.E. Stanbridge presented a paper to the Royal Society of Victoria about Aboriginal astronomy. William Edward Stanbridge, 'On the Astronomy and Mythology of the Aborigines of Victoria' in Philosophical Institute of Victoria, *Transactions*, Vol. 2: 137-140. The following year, Ludwig Becker's presentation of some natural history specimens was "illustrated by several aboriginal skulls, shell necklaces, tomahawks and other native weapons, belonging to the true Australian race" Philosophical Institute of Victoria, *Transactions*, Vol. 3: xxi. See also: Duane Willis Hamacher, 'On the astronomical knowledge and traditions of Aboriginal Australians' (PhD thesis, Department of Indigenous Studies, Macquarie University, 2012); 'An Aboriginal Australian record of the Great Eruption of Eta Carinae', *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2010): 220-234.

<sup>1403</sup> Ferdinand Mueller, 'The Explorations of Australia', *Argus*, 26 November 1857: 5.

<sup>1404</sup> 'Philosophical Institute', *Age*, 26 November 1857: 5.

Expedition departed.<sup>1405</sup> Even when the EC's preliminary plan for a small, light party was forgotten and the Expedition expanded into a large, slow-moving, cumbersome caravan that resembled one of Sturt's or Mitchell's earlier outfits, the EC did not reconsider using Aboriginal guides.

When the EC drafted their instructions to the Expedition's officers, Aboriginal people were hardly mentioned. Becker proposed he be appointed "in the capacity of Artist, Ethnographer and Naturalist"<sup>1406</sup>, but was employed simply as "Artist and Naturalist" and requested to make sketches "of all objects of Natural History and Natives (Aborigines)",<sup>1407</sup> while the only relevant request of the botanist, Beckler, was to gather information on plants "which are drawn into use by the natives"<sup>1408</sup>

Upon their arrival in Australia in 1851 and 1856 respectively, Becker and Beckler had developed an interest in Aboriginal culture and, as Humboldtian scientists, they were more than capable of collecting data about Aboriginal people, their customs and culture. Beckler had studied Aboriginal people in New South Wales, including areas that are now in Queensland<sup>1409</sup> and Becker had studied Aboriginal people in Tasmania<sup>1410</sup> and Victoria.<sup>1411</sup>

Tipping thought Becker's paintings showed he did not consider "the natives inferior to Europeans ... [or] romanticise the image of the noble savage"<sup>1412</sup> and she considered Becker's "observations and

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<sup>1405</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes of the EC meeting, 10 August 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria. For a copy of the instructions issued to Burke, see: Royal Society of Victoria, 'Instructions issued to Robert O'Hara Burke, Leader of the Victorian Exploration Expedition. Signed John Macadam, Secretary, Exploration Committee and dated, 18 August 1860', ex2001-001, Box 2082/3a (Item 1), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1406</sup> Ludwig Becker, 'Employment Application, Melbourne April 1860', Applications to join the VEE (Abbott-Blundell), ex1004-027, Box 2076/1, MS 30171, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1407</sup> Exploration Committee, 'Instructions issued to Scientific Observers attached to the Victorian Exploration Expedition; surveyor, astronomer, meteorologist, geologist, mineralogist, zoologist, and botanist', ex2001-008, Box 2082/3d, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1408</sup> Exploration Committee, 'Leader's copy of Instructions to geologist, zoologist and botanist attached to the VEE', ex2001-006, Box 2082/3b, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1409</sup> Beckler, *Entdeckungen in Australien*, 144-146; 'Corroberri ein Beitrag zur Kenntniss der Musik bei den Australian Ureinwohnern', *Globus*, Nr. 13 (1867): 82-84; 'Die Ureinwohner Australiens', *Jahresbericht des Vereins für Erdkunde zu Dresden*, Nr. 8 (1872): 195.

<sup>1410</sup> Ludwig Becker, 'Aborigines of Tasmania' [six art works], H24661/1, H24661/2, H24661/3, H24662/1, H24662/2, H24662/3, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1411</sup> Eva Meidl, *A Donation to the Colony: The epic voyage on the Hannah of German and British free settlers and their contribution to Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart: Forty Degrees South, 2004), 91; Marjorie Tipping, 'Becker's Portraits of Billy and Jemmy (Tilki)', *La Trobe Library Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 21, April (1978): 1-7.

<sup>1412</sup> Marjorie Tipping, 'Ludwig Becker and Eugene von Geurard: German artists and the Aboriginal habit', in *From Berlin to the Burdekin: The German contribution to the development of Australian science, exploration and the arts*, ed. David Walker and Jurgen Tampke (Kensington, NSW: New South Wales University Press, 1991), 82.



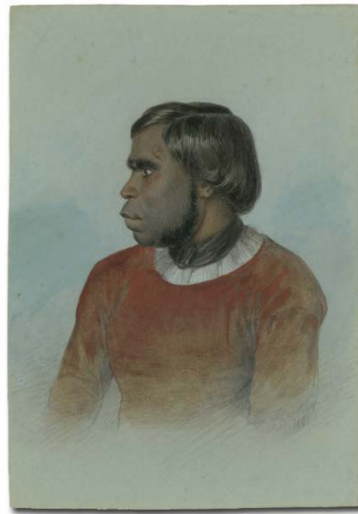


Figure 151: Ludwig Becker, 'Billy', 1854.  
H6154, State Library of Victoria.



Figure 152: Ludwig Becker, 'Jemmy (Tilki)', 1854.  
H6153, State Library of Victoria.

sketches of Aboriginals” made during the Expedition were of great interest “to those working in anthropology and prehistory”.<sup>1413</sup> She also noted Becker “was one European who never underestimated the intelligence of the Aboriginal people”.<sup>1414</sup> Clark’s study of the Expedition members and their prior experience with Aboriginal people identified Beckler as being particularly observant of Aboriginal languages, manners and customs, and Clark noted Beckler formed a close relationship with Aboriginal people during the Expedition.<sup>1415</sup>

By December 1860, the Expedition was split into three separate parties, the Gulf Party, the Depot Party and the Supply Party, and each of these entities had different experiences with Aboriginal people. The following sections analyse the experiences that the Expedition as a whole had whilst making the slow journey from Melbourne to Menindee, before examining the experiences of the three separate parties.

#### 6.4.1 The Expedition together: Victoria & New South Wales

In Victoria, the Expedition travelled through areas occupied by pastoralists and miners. The frontier conflict in Victoria was over by 1860 and the Aboriginal people in the colony had had frequent contact with Europeans. The Expedition’s first recorded meeting with Aboriginal people in Victoria was twelve days and 200 kilometres out from Melbourne, when four members of the Jaara

<sup>1413</sup> Tipping, *Becker*, vii.

<sup>1414</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1415</sup> Ian D. Clark, 'The members of the Victorian Exploring Expedition and their prior experience of Aboriginal peoples', in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 15-46.



clan,<sup>1416</sup> possibly Barababaraba people, came into the camp and encountered camels for the first time.

Becker noted:

In the afternoon 4 natives, among them a lubra, went their Steps slowly towards the camp. With eyes and mouths wide open, speechless they stared at the Bunjibs<sup>1417</sup>, our camels, but refused to go nearer than a spears-throw. Although no strangers at Dr Rowe's station, and notwithstanding our assurance that the camels were only harmless 'big sheep', they turned their back towards them and squatted soon round a far off camp fire of their own, conversing in their native tongue; probably about the character of these illustrious strangers. If this first interview between natives and camels might be used as a criterion when coming in contact with the blacks in the course of our future journeys, then, surely, we might spare the gunpowder as long as the mesmeric power of our Bunjlbs remain with them.<sup>1418</sup>

Burke had not considered it necessary to mount guard in camp overnight, but the following evening, at Camp 11 at Mount Hope, a guard was mounted for the first time.<sup>1419</sup> However, this was more likely to have been to stop the animals straying, rather than as a protective measure.

In Swan Hill the Expedition was made welcome by the townspeople, who noted:

Even the blacks, by the aid of their bush telegraphs, made known to the several tribes along the river that something phenomenal was happening at Swan Hill, and summoned their immediate attendance. Accordingly, within three days nearly 400 blacks had mustered and camped on the spot where the wharf is now built.<sup>1420</sup>

Harriet Gummow recalled the Wemba Wemba "seemed intoxicated with joy & excitement ... & came hurrying in to witness the wonderful cavalcade".<sup>1421</sup> Swan Hill residents recalled "During the explorers' stay ... a big blacks corroboree was arranged one night in honor of the visitors".<sup>1422</sup> Surprisingly, none of the Expedition members mentioned this spectacle in their journals. The main source of interest for the Wemba Wemba, Wadi Wadi and Weki Weki people was the camels. Squatters amused themselves with a tale of an Aboriginal stockman who, while dozing in the shade of a gum tree, awoke to find himself being licked on the face by a camel:

The rasp-like tongue on the naked skin awoke Jimmy Baboon with a start, and when he saw what he saw his eyes bulged as they never bulged before. Whether it was a 'Bunyip' or 'Debil, Debil' he couldn't say, but with a piercing yell he fled in the direction of the homestead four miles distant.<sup>1423</sup>

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<sup>1416</sup> Tipping, *Becker*, 209.

<sup>1417</sup> Becker's "bunjib" (Wemba Wemba or Wergaia = 'bunyip') meaning 'devil' or 'evil-spirit'. A bunyip is a large creature of Aboriginal mythology, said to lurk in swamps, billabongs and creeks. By the 1850s, a bunyip had become a synonym for impostor, pretender or humbug, with the term 'bunyip aristocracy' first coined in 1853 to describe Australians aspiring to be aristocrats. Joan Hughes (ed.), *Australian Words and Their Origins* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>1418</sup> Becker, 'First Report', ex2004-004, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1419</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 21.

<sup>1420</sup> H.G., 'Old Swan Hill Memories', *Swan Hill Guardian and Lake Boga Advocate*, 20 June 1918: 4.

<sup>1421</sup> Harriett Garlick, Printed transcript of a letter from Mrs Garlick (formerly Mrs Benjamin Gummow), written to Swan Hill Councillor Neil Brown, 'Reminiscences of Mrs Garlick (nee Gummow)', LH MONUMENTS 1860 BURKE & WILLS EXP, Local history collection, Swan Hill Library.

<sup>1422</sup> H.G., 'Old Swan Hill Memories', *Swan Hill Guardian and Lake Boga Advocate*, 20 June 1918: 4.

<sup>1423</sup> *Ibid.*



Figure 153: Ludwig Becker, 'Near our camp at Spewah, Sep. 12. 60', 1860.  
Image b36035, H16486/F.5, State Library of Victoria.

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Not everyone was frightened of the camels, with many approaching the animals with “the delight of school children at their first circus”.<sup>1424</sup> However, one man regretted his bravado:

One fellow, more daring than the rest, got too close to a very bad tempered and vicious beast ... which bit him on the arm, causing an ugly and painful wound necessitating immediate surgical treatment.<sup>1425</sup>

Although much of New South Wales had also been taken up by squatters, it was a more remote area than Victoria and the Expedition had more regular contact with Aboriginal people. On their second night in New South Wales the Expedition camped near a group of Wadi Wadi people. As the men pitched their tents, Becker noted:

the natives did not deem it prudent to remain so close to us and notwithstanding our assuring them that they had nothing to fear, they removed their children and chattels a hundred yards away and, contrary to their custom, here they lay silent and concealed during the calm night, not even attracted by the produce of our cook's skill.<sup>1426</sup>

Becker sketched the scene, the first of twelve sketches of Aboriginal people he would make on the Expedition.

At Balranald, Burke was reputed to have engaged an interpreter, Albert World, “a local farmer, who was a student of aboriginal languages”.<sup>1427</sup> If this was the case, then Burke was to be disappointed as ‘Mallee Bert’ only stayed with the Expedition for a few miles before returning to town. North of Balranald, the Expedition left the formed roads behind and followed indistinct station tracks and Aboriginal paths. Six Aboriginal men were employed to guide the wagons through the mallee; each

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<sup>1424</sup> Garlick, 'Reminiscences', LH MONUMENTS 1860 BURKE & WILLS EXP, Swan Hill Library.

<sup>1425</sup> H.G., 'Old Swan Hill Memories', *Swan Hill Guardian and Lake Boga Advocate*, 20 June 1918: 4.

<sup>1426</sup> Becker, 'Second Report, ex2004-005, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1427</sup> Reverend Alan Dougan, 'Reveries of Old Balranald: Links with early explorers', *Riverina Recorder*, 1 September 1934: 3.



Figure 154: Ludwig Becker, 'Watpipa the 'Old Man', our guide on Sep. 24. 60', 1860.  
Image b36037, H16486/F.7, State Library of Victoria.

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of these men were working at sheep stations the Expedition passed and Burke paid the men 10s. a day.<sup>1428</sup> Dick guided the Expedition on the two-day journey from Camp 21 at Lake Paika to Camp 23 at Terekencom and Martin guided them across the Prungle Hills to Camp 25, even though Becker thought "the old track was visible enough even for a white fellow's eye".<sup>1429</sup> Simon led Burke, the camels and saddle-horses on to Arumpo, from where Benson (or Mr. Benton) guided the men for three days across the steep sand dunes to the Darling River.<sup>1430</sup> Following along behind, Becker, Beckler and the wagon party had two Aboriginal guides: a young Yitha Yitha man and his uncle 'Watpipa.' Becker observed the old man closely and made him the subject of one of his more striking sketches.

A young native, acting as a guide, sat on one of the waggons, while his uncle Whitepeeper or the 'old man' as he was called by all the natives of the district, walked in front of us with a fire-stick in one hand and a yam-stick in the other, as I have shown in Sketch No 9. This 'old man' appeared to be of the age of 70; his hair is not white but has a peculiar pale greenish-yellow tint, and is beautifully curled by the hand of nature. I made a profile-drawing of the head of this man who seemed to me to be a fair specimen of an old, but still hardy Aboriginal of this district.<sup>1431</sup>

Hercus believes the orthography of Becker's 'whitepeeper' or 'watpipa' is war-pik-war, which means 'old, old man, old', i.e. a really old man.<sup>1432</sup>

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<sup>1428</sup> As a comparison, Aboriginal guides were paid 10s. a day, the sepoy camel handlers were paid 3s. a day and the Expedition assistants were paid around 6s. 6d. a day.

<sup>1429</sup> Becker, 'Third Report', ex2004-006, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1430</sup> Exploration Committee, 'Various cheques, National Bank deposit slips and receipts, c.1858-1860', ex1011-975, Box 2075/4d; 'Miscellaneous EC cheque counterfoils', ex1003-004, FB 33, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1431</sup> Becker, 'Fourth Report', ex2004-007, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1432</sup> Luise Hercus, 'Language notes connected to the journey of the Expedition as far as the Cooper', in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 119.



Figure 155: Ludwig Becker, 'Women in mourning, Sep. 20th', 1860.  
Image b36038, H16486/F.8, State Library of Victoria.

At Terekencom, Wills noticed “several places where the Blacks appear to have been digging for crystals of selenite which they use for making their white paint”<sup>1433</sup> and Becker noticed body decorations on two Yitha Yitha women in mourning (see Figure 155):

Behind some bushes and looking at our doings several natives sat on the ground, among them was a couple of women whose faces were painted in such a manner as to give the head the appearance of a skull when seen from the distance: round the eyes was drawn with white paint, a circle, an inch broad, and the hair of one woman tied up closely and covered with a piece of cloth, while the other lubra had her hair painted or rather smeared over with the same white colour giving the head a still more skull-like appearance. I found that this mode of painting the faces is a habit met with as far as the Darling; it is a sign of mourning for relations and that women as well as Men show in the same way their respect for the departed friends.<sup>1434</sup>

Tipping believed these women were Muthimuthi, but Hercus rejects this and, based on the orthography of the place names recorded by Wills, Becker and Neumayer, believes the women to have been Yitha Yitha.<sup>1435</sup>

Interactions with Aboriginal people continued on the way to the Darling: Neumayer recorded 20 Yitha Yitha words and “was very much pleased by some of the Blacks showing considerable intelligence while explaining to me their way of living and giving me an idea of their language”.<sup>1436</sup> Becker was shown a more direct route to Arumpo by yet another Aboriginal guide.<sup>1437</sup> At the Darling, two Aboriginal guides were employed to help search for missing camels, with one of the men riding

<sup>1433</sup> Wills, 'Surveyor's Field Notes: Balranald to Linklinkwho', ex2008-009, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1434</sup> Becker, 'Third Report', ex2004-006, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1435</sup> Tipping, *Becker*, 58; Luise Hercus, 'Language notes connected to the journey of the Expedition as far as the Cooper', in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 117.

<sup>1436</sup> Neumayer, *Results of the Magnetic Survey of the Colony of Victoria*.

<sup>1437</sup> Becker, 'Fourth Report', ex2004-007, State Library of Victoria.

with Landells. Becker thought "this was the first time that an Australian aboriginal rode on a camel".<sup>1438</sup>

## 6.4.2 Burke's Advance Party from Menindee to the Cooper

After Menindee, the Expedition was beyond the bounds of Anglo-Australian occupation and most of the land was unknown to Europeans.<sup>1439</sup> Burke was guided from Menindee to Torowoto by Wright and two Paakantyi guides who the Europeans called Dick and Mountain.<sup>1440</sup> Wills spent much of this part of the journey talking to the two guides, questioning them about Aboriginal place names and their meanings. Wills realised Paakantyi people knew this landscape and its features intimately and he included much of this information in his diaries and maps.<sup>1441</sup> In fact, of the 28 place names Wills recorded between Menindee and Torowoto, only two were of non-Indigenous origin<sup>1442</sup> and 90% of the placenames in New South Wales recorded by Wills were of Aboriginal origin. Some of these names survive today and are still attached to the features that the Expedition observed, while others have subsequently been forgotten or replaced with names of European origin.<sup>1443</sup> Despite recognising that Dick and Mountain were familiar with the country they were travelling through, Wills did not entirely trust their judgement and often suspected he was being humbugged".<sup>1444</sup> When

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<sup>1438</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1439</sup> In addition to Sturt's 1845 expedition, by 1860 William Wright, Robert Ross Haverfield, James Field Crawford and Ernest Giles had ventured up to 200 miles north of Menindee. Frederick David McCarthy and N.W.G. Macintosh, 'The Archaeology of Mootwingee, Western New South Wales', *Records of the Australian Museum*, Vol. 25, No. 13 (1962): 249-298; Jeremy Beckett, Luise Hercus and Sarah Martin with Claire Colyer (ed.), *Mutawintji: Aboriginal Cultural Association with Mutawintji National Park* (Glebe: Office of the Registrar, Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 (NSW), 2008).

<sup>1440</sup> Some confusion has arisen over the Aboriginal guides' names: Wills noted their guides were 'Dick' and 'Mountain', but Beckler confused matters by conflating the two names to 'Dick Mountain'. Later researchers have incorrectly concluded that Burke was "guided by ... two local Aboriginal boys, Dick (Mountain) and an unnamed boy", David Dodd, 'The Aboriginal contribution to the expedition, observed through Germanic eyes' in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*. Haverfield mentions a well-known Aboriginal man living at Menindee named 'Old Mountain' who was "a worthy of considerable influence" Robert Ross Haverfield, 'Jottings in the North. No. 5', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 28 October 1861: 2.

<sup>1441</sup> William John Wills, 'Field Book No. 1: Bilbarka to Torowoto', ex2008-011; 'Field Book No. 2: Bilbarka to Torowoto (20-26 October 1860)', ex2008-012, Box 2082/6d; 'Field Book No. 3: Bilbarka to Torowoto; Field Book No. 1: Torowoto to Cooper's Creek (27 October-2 November 1860)', ex2008-013, Box 2082/6e, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria; 'Tracing showing routes taken by the VEE party from Menindie on the Darling to the Torowoto Swamp', ex2012-004, Box MCFB2, Item d, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1442</sup> The two non-indigenous names Wills recorded were 'Snake Gap', S31°13'34" E142°16'31" (GDA2020), and 'The Castle', S31°12'18" E142°16'43" (GDA2020). Both of these names are in what is now Mutawintji National Park and both names have been forgotten and are not included in the 2012 Australian Gazetteer.

<sup>1443</sup> A proposal by Dave Phoenix to the Geographic Naming Board of New South Wales in 2010 re-established the names of two mountains recorded by Wills. Mount Euranya (Hercus suggests Eurannia as the correct orthography) and Mount Yerralany were officially named with their Paakantyi orthography under Section 8 of the *Geographic Names Act 1966*, see: *New South Wales Government Gazette*, Week No. 22/2011, 3 June (2011): 3476.

<sup>1444</sup> 'humbug' to be deceived or misled.

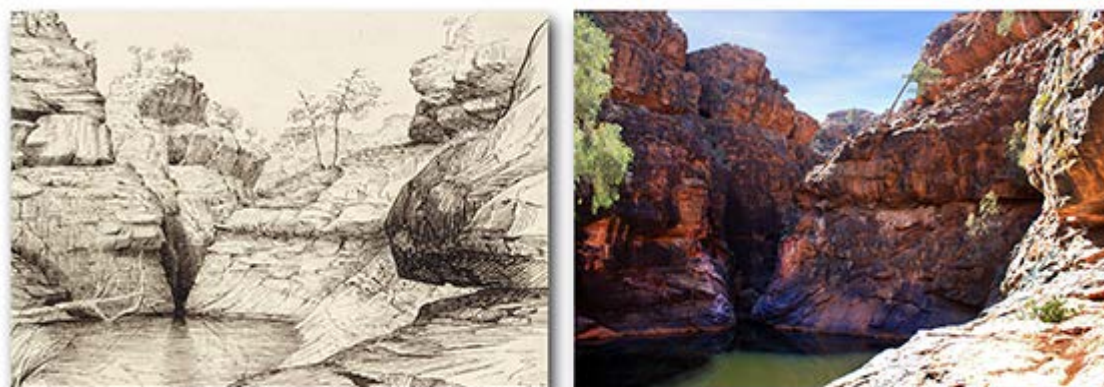


Figure 156: Left: Ludwig Becker, 'Reservoir in Mootwanji Ranges', 1861.

Image b36085, LT60, H16486/F.54, State Library of Victoria.

Right: Mutawintji Gorge, © 2008 Dave Phoenix.

Mountain attempted to take them towards the Wonnogin Swamp instead of their intended route towards Torowoto Swamp, Wills complained that Mountain had taken them “considerably to the westward of our proper course”.<sup>1445</sup> When local people told them that the Wonnogin Swamp contained no water, Wills insisted on going there to see for himself. Upon discovering Wonnogin was in fact dry, as he had been informed, Wills wrote curtly “one cannot rely on what any of these blacks say”.<sup>1446</sup>

Wright took the Expedition to several important Aboriginal sites where there was permanent water. They made Camp 36 at Kukirrkā<sup>1447</sup> where Wills inspected the Aboriginal paintings in the cave. He noted there were “some good representations of native hands” and the guides explained how the hand stencils were made.<sup>1448</sup> Three days later they made Camp 39 at “the mouth of the gully” at Langawirra<sup>1449</sup> where there was plenty of water.<sup>1450</sup> The next day, after traveling just four kilometres, they passed another “romantic gorge” at Mutwongee<sup>1451</sup> and the party made a short detour into the rocky ravine. Wills noted:

there is a large deep waterhole the whole breadth between the rocks which are perpendicular all around, beyond this there is a narrow chasm just broad enough for a man to pass through. This chasm

<sup>1445</sup> Wills, 'Field Book No. 3: Bilbarka to Torowoto', ex2008-013, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1446</sup> *Ibid.* Wills' navigational methodology and his use of Aboriginal and Anglo-Australian place names is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.4.3.

<sup>1447</sup> Wills' "Kokriega", Beckler's "Gogirga" (Paakantyi = 'Kukirrkā'), Camp 36, S31°56'57" E142°20'26" (GDA2020), 20 October 1860.

<sup>1448</sup> Wills, 'Field Book No. 2: Bilbarka to Torowoto', ex2008-012, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1449</sup> Wills' "Langawirra", Beckler's "Lāngārêrrā" (Wiimpatja Parlku = 'Langawirra'), Camp 39, S31°21'18" E142°20'22" (GDA2020), 23 October 1860. Allen incorrectly attributes Beckler's name 'Nanagaverra' for Langawirra. Nanagaverra was Morden Creek, more than 120 kilometres further north. Harry Allen, 'The space between: Aboriginal people, the Victorian Exploring Expedition and the relief parties' in McCann and Joyce, *The scientific legacy*, 245-274.

<sup>1450</sup> Wills, 'Field Book No. 2: Bilbarka to Torowoto', ex2008-012, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1451</sup> (Wiimpatja Parlku = 'Mutawintji') Mootwingee Gorge and waterhole, S31°18'52" E142°20'08" (GDA2020). Expedition members used various spellings for the gorge, waterhole and mountain range, including Mootwingee, Mutwongee, Mutwanji, Motwinji, Mootwanji, Motuānje and Mutanié.





Figure 157: Left: Thaaklatjika/Wright's Cave, Mutawintji National Park. © 2014 Dave Phoenix. Right: Wright's mark 'W.W.LIX' (William Wright 1859) painted in blue over a Wiimpatja-Parlku groonki mark in Thaaklatjika. © 2014 Dave Phoenix.

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can only be approached by swimming across the waterhole an exploit which I am sorry to say we could not spare time.<sup>1452</sup>

At Bengora gorge,<sup>1453</sup> five kilometres further north, the Expedition halted and made Camp 40, which Wills described as a “delightful camping place” with plenty of feed and water.<sup>1454</sup> Wright had been here the previous year and painted his mark in the rock shelter at Thaaklatjika.<sup>1455</sup> Langawirra, Mutwongee and Bengora are three of five gorges<sup>1456</sup> that make up today's Mutawintji National Park.<sup>1457</sup> Remarkably, Moorehead claimed:

Burke and his party appear to have gone by Mootwingee almost with a shudder. Wills in his field-books speaks of 'gloomy gullies', and despite the abundant water they did not camp.<sup>1458</sup>

Clark repeated this error, asserting “Burke decided to press on ... They did not pause to look at the carvings on the rocks ... They shuddered and went on”,<sup>1459</sup> and he speculated that Burke reminded Brahe “to take care that their camping-place at night was fortified against any surprise attacks by the natives”. This falsehood has been accepted almost without question and perpetuated by many: Clifford's movie conflated Wiimpatja Parlku, Yolngu and Kunwinjku cultures, bringing rarrk and yidaki to precontact western New South Wales; even Murgatroyd claims the explorers “filled their

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<sup>1452</sup> Wills, 'Field Book No. 2: Bilbarka to Torowoto', ex2008-012, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1453</sup> Wills' "Bengora Gorge", Beckler's "Bengōra", now Homestead Creek, Camp 40, S31°16'40" E142°18'07" (GDA2020), 24 October 1860.

<sup>1454</sup> Wills, 'Field Book No. 2: Bilbarka to Torowoto', ex2008-012, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1455</sup> Wright's Cave (Wiimpatja Parlku = 'Thaaklatjika'), Mutawintji National Park. S31°16'28" E142°18'13" (GDA2020).

<sup>1456</sup> Beckler wrote "The natives' names for these five gorges, from south to north, were: Lāngārêrrā, Motuānje (Mutanié), Yolkōrko, Bengōra, Nōthāngbūllā. (Careful note was taken and detailed observations were made of their pronunciation.)" Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*: 108.

<sup>1457</sup> 'Mutawintji' (Wiimpatja Parlku), earlier Anglo-Australian spelling 'Mootwingee'. 'muthu' = 'grass' and 'wintyi' = 'green' or 'fresh'. Luise Hercus, 'Language notes connected to the journey of the expedition as far as the Cooper' in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 123.

<sup>1458</sup> Moorehead, *Cooper's Creek*, 61.

<sup>1459</sup> Charles Manning Hope Clark, *A history of Australia: Volume 4 - The earth abideth for ever 1851-1888* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1982), 151.



waterbags and left, describing the area as ‘dark and gloomy’.”<sup>1460</sup> These claims are not supported by the primary source material, but have reinforced tropes of the Expedition having been dismissive of Aboriginal knowledge by taking Wills’ ‘romantic gorge’ and transforming it into a post-colonial ‘gloomy gully’.

Eleven days north of Menindee, at Torowoto Swamp, the Expedition met with Malyangapa and Wanyiwalku-Pantiykali people. Burke expressed an innate distrust:

A party of natives who never before saw white men encamped close to us ... they appear to be very friendly but require a sharp look out to be kept on them.<sup>1461</sup>

Dick and Mountain “strongly objected”<sup>1462</sup> to continuing on beyond Torowoto into Karenggapa country, so Wright got them to negotiate with three local men who agreed to lead Burke’s party north to Bulloo.<sup>1463</sup> As Bulloo was unknown to Europeans, Burke was forced to trust the three new guides to navigate the party there. From the outset, the Aboriginal guides were in charge of where the party went and when they halted to make camp. On the first day out from Torowoto, they met an Aboriginal man, who “through the medium of our own guide” invited them “to go down and camp down by the waterhole where he was living”.<sup>1464</sup> It was still too early in the day to call a halt and the diversion would take them out of their way, so one might expect Burke to have refused, given the rapid pace and good progress he was making. Despite his lack of trust, Burke realised the value of the Aboriginal guides and Wills noted:

Mr. Burke wished to humour the latter [their new guide] who was very anxious to accept the invitation we went down.<sup>1465</sup>

A few days later they met a group of around 60 Karenggapa people, who Wills thought were “mostly fine well-formed men”.<sup>1466</sup> Even though they had only travelled a short stage that day, their guides decided to stop and camp with this group, as “two of the natives agreed to go on with us the next day”.<sup>1467</sup> The following morning, in addition to their two new guides, the party was “accompanied by about a dozen other blacks who amused themselves as we went on by catching rats, mice, snakes &

<sup>1460</sup> Murgatroyd, *Dig Tree* (2012), 135-136.

<sup>1461</sup> Robert O’Hara Burke, ‘Letter to uncle John Burke in Dublin, dated Torowoto, 30 October 1860’, MS 30/3, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1462</sup> Wills, ‘Field Book No. 3: Bilbarka to Torowoto’, ex2008-013, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1463</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*: Question 134 to Brahe and Question 1226 to Wright. There is no evidence to suggest that Burke split the party at Menindee after he received warnings that Aboriginal people would be opposed “to the arrival of settlers and animals in their homelands” as suggested by Woods and Darragh. Beverley Wood and Thomas A. Darragh, ‘In His Own Words: Dr Hermann Beckler’s Writings about His Journeys between the Darling River and Bulloo, 1860-1’, *Historical Records of Australian Science*, Vol. 27 (2016): 28-40.

<sup>1464</sup> Wills, ‘Field Book No. 3: Bilbarka to Torowoto’, ex2008-013, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1465</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1466</sup> Wills, ‘Field Notes No. 2: Torowoto to Cooper’s Creek’, ex2008-014, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1467</sup> *Ibid.*

guanos and by digging for roots".<sup>1468</sup> That afternoon they "met a lot of blacks, about 50, and at their earnest request camped for the night".<sup>1469</sup>

Wills continued to enquire about Aboriginal place names, which he dutifully recorded in his field books, even though he found he could "scarcely understand" their new guides.<sup>1470</sup> He also remained sceptical that their guides were taking them on the most suitable route. Although the party was never short of water and they camped by water most nights, Wills complained:

It was very heavy travelling over the mud plain and when we had gone about a mile it was so soft that the Camels did not like to face it. We got them through, however, to the other side after some difficulty, all of which would, I believe, have been avoided had our guides only taken us straight through instead of bearing away so far to the westward.<sup>1471</sup>

A few days later he found their route to be "a very zigzag course sometimes going NE and at others N + NNW".<sup>1472</sup>

At Bulloo they acquired another guide to take them on to Cooper Creek, still more than 200 kilometres away over the Grey Range. Unfortunately, the language barrier became too great and Burke and Wills were unable to explain where they wanted to go. The name 'Cooper's Creek' would have been meaningless to their Kalali or Karenggapa guide, and 'Kini-papa' would have meant nothing to Wills, who recognised their guide "did not exactly understand to what place we wanted to go".<sup>1473</sup> Upon entering the ranges they "met with very little water" and Wills noted "the blacks object to going into them [the ranges], a pretty sure sign that there is not much water".<sup>1474</sup> After leading the party to a small waterhole and with midday temperatures over 40°C, their guide decided to return to Bulloo. Wills wrote:

the black after trying to humbug us and bring us back to Bulloo departed leaving us to our own fate.<sup>1475</sup>

For the first time since leaving Menindee 600 kilometres to the south, the Expedition was without Aboriginal guides. They continued on into the ranges, but without Aboriginal guidance they struggled to find water and spent the next two nights at dry camps having travelled "over the worst ground that we had yet met with".<sup>1476</sup> Once at the Wilson River, which the Expedition believed was the Cooper, Wills struggled to follow the anastomosing channels and spent several frustrating days on reconnaissance trips, before finally reaching the main channel of the Cooper where they made their first Depot Camp. Wills did not mention meeting any Aboriginal people during this part of the

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<sup>1468</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1469</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1470</sup> Wills, 'Field Book No. 3: Bilbarka to Torowoto', ex2008-013, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1471</sup> Wills, 'Field Book No. 3: Bilbarka to Torowoto', ex2008-013, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1472</sup> Wills, 'Field Notes No. 2: Torowoto to Cooper's Creek', ex2008-014, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1473</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1474</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1475</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1476</sup> Wills, 'Third Surveyor's Report', ex2004-013, State Library of Victoria.

journey. Although there were numerous waterholes along the Wilson and Cooper, Wills thought the cracking black-soil flood plains of the Channel Country “were the worst we have yet met with”<sup>1477</sup> and concluded:

I expect this is the reason why we saw no blacks about here, for it must be worse for them to walk over than the stony ground.<sup>1478</sup>

### 6.4.3 Burke’s Gulf Party

When the four-man Gulf Party left Depot Camp 65 and began following Cooper Creek downstream, they soon met a large group of Yandruwandha-Yawarrawarrka people. Wills considered them a nuisance and he did not enquire about the route ahead or ask if any of the men would guide them over the next part of their journey. He described the group in unfavourable terms:

A large tribe of blacks came pestering us to go to their camp and have a dance, which we declined. They were very troublesome, and nothing but the threat to shoot them will keep them away. They are, however, easily frightened; and, although fine-looking men, decidedly not of a warlike disposition. They show the greatest inclination to take whatever they can, but will run no unnecessary risk in so doing ... They are undoubtedly a finer and better-looking race of men than the blacks on the Murray and Darling, and more peaceful; but in other respects I believe they will not compare favourably with them, for from the little we have seen of them, they appear to be mean-spirited and contemptible in every respect.<sup>1479</sup>

Four days and 120 kilometres later, while following “a native path”<sup>1480</sup> they saw another group of around 50 people camped by a lagoon.<sup>1481</sup> Burke detoured towards the group, but stopped just short of their camp as he “was always extremely cautious in his intercourse with them [the natives]”.<sup>1482</sup> The Yandruwandha were very friendly however and conducted the men to the site of one of their best camps before bringing gifts of fish, which they went to great lengths to divide equally between the four men.<sup>1483</sup> Burke reciprocated with presents of beads and matches and offered the Yandruwandha jerked horse meat, which they smelled and threw to the ground.<sup>1484</sup> Wills thought the fish were a valuable addition to their rations and remarked that “these were the first blacks who have offered us any fish since we reached Cooper’s Creek”.<sup>1485</sup> The Yandruwandha men also offered their women, which Burke noted in his diary, but Wills omitted to mention.<sup>1486</sup> King recalled they “courteously declined” the offer.<sup>1487</sup> Now that the Gulf Party were about to cross Sturt Stony Desert,

<sup>1477</sup> Wills, 'Field Notes No. 3: Torowoto to Cooper’s Creek', ex2008-015, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1478</sup> Wills, 'Third Surveyor's Report', ex2004-013, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1479</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 1: Cooper’s Creek to Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1480</sup> Smith, 'John King's story, Part I'.

<sup>1481</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 1: Cooper’s Creek to Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria; Burke, 'Diary', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1482</sup> Smith, 'John King's story, Part I'.

<sup>1483</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1484</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1485</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 1: Cooper’s Creek to Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1486</sup> Burke, 'Diary', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1487</sup> Smith, 'John King's story, Part I'.

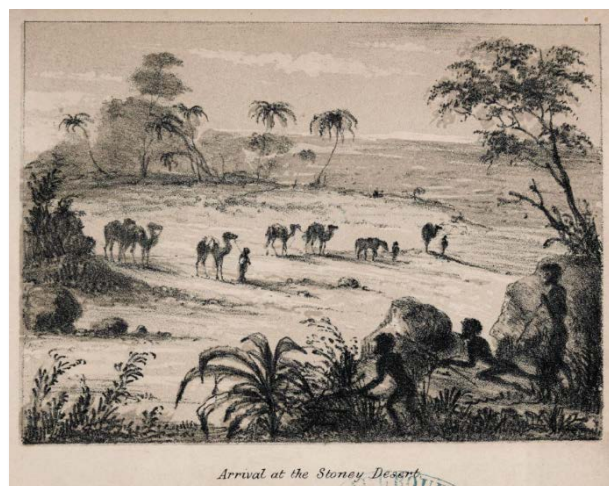


Figure 158: Cuthbert Clarke, 'Plate 2: Arrival at the Stoney Desert', 1861.

*Illustrations to the diaries of Burke & Wills expedition to Carpentaria* (Melbourne: De Gruchy & Leigh, 1861).

Image 30328102131801/3, State Library of Victoria.

Artist's impression of the VEE passing through Sturt Stony Desert.  
Aboriginal people watch the Expedition from a concealed vantage point.

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they "tried to induce one or two of the blacks to go with us" to conduct the party to water, even offering a camel pad as payment, which was an item the Yandruwandha had shown great interest in the previous night.<sup>1488</sup> The Yandruwandha assured the men they would find water to the north but refused to act as guides.<sup>1489</sup>

At the Diamantina River, the Ngamini were just as numerous, but appeared much less friendly. The Gulf Party passed several empty campsites with fires still burning, indicating they had been hastily abandoned, and then they were followed for a considerable distance by several groups of well-armed men who were "beckoning us not to approach ... crying out 'kou, kou!'"<sup>1490</sup> The Gulf Party interpreted the gesticulations and shouts as hostile and threatening. The following year, Alfred Howitt also believed the Diyari and Ngamini to be equally unwelcoming to his rescue party, and it was only later that Howitt found out "the word 'gow' means goodwill, very much as we might say 'All right'."<sup>1491</sup> Had the Gulf Party secured the services of a Yandruwandha guide, they could have acted as a mediator and interpreter and such misunderstandings may have been averted.

Burke did make efforts to communicate with the Ngamini, offering them handkerchiefs as gifts, but, unsurprisingly, his gestures were unsuccessful. As Les Hiddins points out, rather sardonically,

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<sup>1488</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 1: Cooper's Creek to Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria; Smith, 'John King's story, Part I'.

<sup>1489</sup> Smith, 'John King's story, Part I'. King recalled the Aboriginal word for water was 'appa' (Yandruwandha = 'ngapa') meaning 'water'.

<sup>1490</sup> Smith, 'John King's story, Part I'. 'kou' or 'gow' (Yandruwandha = 'kabow') meaning 'look out'.

<sup>1491</sup> Alfred William Howitt, 'Explorations in Central Australia', *Gippsland Times*, 15 March 1870: 1S.

“just what they expected Aboriginals to do with one of these [a Union Jack handkerchief] I really don’t know – they didn’t even have pockets to put them in!”.<sup>1492</sup> As well as handkerchiefs, the Expedition carried other equally useless gifts “for natives”: 4 lbs of coloured beads and 4 dozen looking glasses.<sup>1493</sup> The items most coveted by Aboriginal people, tomahawks and camel pads, were rarely given away by the VEE. Clothing was occasionally exchanged, but often discarded and food was sometimes gifted: damper, sugar and flour was eaten, but, as noted earlier, dried meat was discarded. Striking ‘lucifer matches’ resulted in Mithaka people ‘clapping their hands, stamping their feet and looking towards heaven, crying out ‘Moko!’<sup>1494</sup>, but they were not interested in owning them.<sup>1495</sup>

Burke’s desire to converse with the Ngamini may have been an attempt to gain intelligence about the nature of the watercourse they were following. The Diamantina was unknown to Europeans and, as the river began to turn towards the east, Burke had to decide whether to continue following the river or head off into the dry country to the north. Finding out from the Ngamini where the next water was to the north would have helped Burke decide.

When Burke’s party did leave the Diamantina to head north into Mithaka country, they travelled for three days and more than 100 kilometres before their next encounter. A group of around 50 Mithaka, digging for rats on a sandhill, called out to the explorers.<sup>1496</sup> They “seemed very shy & would not come near us” but “did not seem the least alarmed” when Burke rode up to them on the horse and offered handkerchiefs as gifts.<sup>1497</sup> Their next encounter the following morning degenerated into violence.<sup>1498</sup> The incident was sufficiently memorable to cause King to write an unusually long entry in his diary, one of the few records of how this 21-year old, who had recently arrived in Australia and who had no prior experience with Aboriginal people, interpreted the Expedition’s interactions with Aborigines:

15 strong able looking Blacks came within 30 yards of our camp led by an calderly man they all had spear & Bomerangs ... then once they made signs to us to leave the place, Mr. Burke went up to them & gave some beads & other presents to them thinking they would go when they receive them: but they beg[an] worse than before the leader advancing in front sticking his long spear in the earth then taking a handful sand first rubbing it his hands with it it & then the spe[ar] the others following up closely, until then we took but little notice of them. Mr. Burke ordered us to get ready ou[r] revolvers

<sup>1492</sup> Les Hiddins, 'The Great Misadventure', *Stories of Exploration and Survival* (Sydney: ABC TV): Episode 3, 22 June 1996.

<sup>1493</sup> Exploration Committee, 'List of articles and services supplied by the Government Storekeeper: 3. Stores', Account Book, ex1003-001, Box 2088B/2, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1494</sup> King's "moko" (Mithaka = 'maka') meaning 'fire'.

<sup>1495</sup> Smith, 'John King's story, Part II'; Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1496</sup> Smith, 'John King's story, Part II'.

<sup>1497</sup> King, 'Restrospective account', MS 30/11, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1498</sup> The meeting with the Mithaka people occurred at a feature Wills called 'King's Creek', S24°41'13" E140°05'06" (GDA2020). This watercourse is now called Whitulania Creek and is more than 100 kilometres from the point at which the Expedition crossed the watercourse which is currently called King Creek.

& amuniti[on] well got them together. when a shot was fired in over their heads they ran of a few hundred yards the leader encouraging the remainder to follow. up they came again with 40 yards of us when Mr. Burke ordered us all to fire over their hea[ds]; off they ran<sup>1499</sup>

The incident also prompted Burke to write one of his rare diary entries:

at King's Creek on New Year's Day ... the natives tried to bully or bounce us and were repulsed, although the leaders appeared to be in earnest, the followers and particularly the young ones, laughed heartily and seemed to be amused at their leaders' repulse. The old fellow at King's Creek who stuck his spear into the ground and threw dust into the air, when I fired my pistol, ran off in a most undignified manner.<sup>1500</sup>

That evening, the Mithaka warriors returned to Burke's camp, unarmed this time, and presented gifts of nets and slings, before indicating that water could be found to the north-west and that they were going east.<sup>1501</sup>

As they travelled north, the Gulf Party continued to see evidence of Aboriginal occupation: smoke from several campfires, shell middens, well-worn paths, numerous gunyahs and even a fish trap,<sup>1502</sup> but they did not meet any people, which led Wills to remark:

We found here numerous indications of blacks having been here, but saw nothing of them. It seems remarkable that where their tracks are so plentiful, we should have seen none since we left King's Creek.<sup>1503</sup>

After travelling for nearly three weeks and more than 420 kilometres without seeing another person, the Gulf Party were crossing a creek in the Selwyn Range when they saw some Kalkatungu people in the distance.<sup>1504</sup> The explorers passed by unnoticed, but a short time later they surprised a Kalkatungu family who were "dreadfully frightened" at the sight of Europeans and camels and they ran off in terror.<sup>1505</sup> The Gulf Party did not report seeing Aboriginal people again for another ten days, but the Kalkatungu were well aware of the Expedition passing through their territory.<sup>1506</sup> Around 1900, Queensland historian, S.E. Pearson, spoke to "a number of elderly Kalkadoons who had been eye-witnesses of the passing of Burke and Wills' Expedition through their country".<sup>1507</sup> One of these

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<sup>1499</sup> King, 'Restrospective account', MS 30/11, National Library of Australia. Allen's assessment of Aboriginal interactions with the VEE claims "little information is available for clashes that involved Burke, who noted only that Aborigines were 'repulsed' ... on King's Creek" Harry Allen, 'Chapter 8: The space between: Aboriginal people, the Victorian Exploring Expedition and the relief parties' in McCann and Joyce, *The scientific legacy*, 255.

<sup>1500</sup> Burke, 'Diary', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1501</sup> King, 'Restrospective account', MS 30/11, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1502</sup> The fish trap was on what is now called Pigeongah Creek, c.S23°46'18" E139°55'43" (GDA2020). King, 'Restrospective account', MS 30/11, National Library of Australia; Wills, 'Field Book 4: January 1860', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1503</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 5: January 1860', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1504</sup> Wills, 'Field Book No. 6: Cooper's Creek', ex2008-018, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1505</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1506</sup> Robert E.M. Armstrong, *The Kalkadoons: a study of an Aboriginal tribe on the Queensland frontier* (Brisbane: William Brooks & Co., 1980), 68-70.

<sup>1507</sup> Sidney Evan Pearson, 'In the Kalkadoon country: the habitat and habits of a Queensland Aboriginal tribe', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, Vol. 4, Issue 2 (1949): 190-205.



Figure 159: Memorial plaque, Corella Creek.

A memorial cairn was erected c.1956 on the Barkly Highway at Corella Creek after Kalkatungu oral history challenged the popularly held belief that Burke and Wills had passed through the site of the town of Cloncurry. Item now held at Cloncurry Unearthed Museum, Cloncurry.

© 2013 Dave Phoenix.

men, an elder called Frank, told Pearson he had been one of the “young bloods of the tribe” who “were primed with kangaroo meat and spoiling for adventure, who had warmly advocated an attack on the Victoria Expedition”.<sup>1508</sup> Pearson was told:

The tribesmen would have attacked the expedition, but were deterred from doing so only by fear of Burke’s camels; not knowing that those animals were strict vegetarians, and therefore harmless.<sup>1509</sup>

Lowe presumes the Kalkatungu did not engage the party “because it was obvious the invaders were travelling through”.<sup>1510</sup>

The Kalkatungu elders also challenged the accepted narrative that Burke had followed the Cloncurry River through the Selwyn Range and past the site of the present town of Cloncurry,<sup>1511</sup> claiming (correctly) that the Gulf Party had been 40 miles further west and had followed Corella Creek instead.<sup>1512</sup> A more detailed analysis of the oral traditions and memories of Aboriginal people with regard to Burke’s incursion onto their traditional lands is in Chapter 6.5.

The Gulf Party passed through the Selwyn Range without seeing any more Aboriginal people and seemingly unaware of the danger of attack. There were still plenty of indications of occupation: empty campsites, well-worn native paths and volumes of smoke which Burke assumed were campfires, but could just as well have been signal fires. Certainly the Expedition was still under surveillance – when one of the camels became bogged, Mayi-Thakurti people immediately appeared. King wrote:

Natives appeared in all directions, cooeing to us from the tops of the trees so that Mr Burke was apprehensive of an attack from them, but they refrained from any overt acts of hostility.<sup>1513</sup>

<sup>1508</sup> Sidney Evan Pearson, 'The Prospector of Argylla: Biography of Ernest Henry', c.1930, OM75-39, Box 8938, State Library of Queensland, 156-157.

<sup>1509</sup> Pearson, 'Kalkadoon country', 198.

<sup>1510</sup> David Lowe, *Forgotten Rebels: Black Australians Who Fought Back* (Sydney: ICS & Associates, 1994), 32-37.

<sup>1511</sup> Sidney Evan Pearson, 'A Gateway in the Hills', *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 6 January 1940: 11; Bartle Frere, 'Burke and Wills', *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 19 June 1946: 4.

<sup>1512</sup> Sundowner, 'Around the Campfire', *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 8 February 1952: 7, 15 April 1952: 7, 5 July 1952: 7; Sidney Evan Pearson, 'Cloncurry street names are little pieces of history', *Cloncurry Advocate*, 13 October 1953: 2.

<sup>1513</sup> Smith, 'John King's story, Part II'.



Nevertheless, Burke's concern at being attacked meant they decided to abandon the camel.<sup>1514</sup>

Once again, there was a break of around a fortnight before their next Aboriginal encounter. As Burke and Wills were floundering through the flooded salt-marshes at the coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria, they came upon a Kukatj family. Wills noted he halted "before we were so near as to frighten them", but they also took the precaution of arming themselves with the pistols which were packed in the saddle-bags.<sup>1515</sup> They need not have bothered as the Kukatj family "dropped on their haunches, and shuffled off in the quietest manner possible".<sup>1516</sup> A short distance further they:

passed three blacks, who, as is universally their custom, pointed out to us, unasked, the best part down. This assisted us greatly, for the ground we were taking was very boggy.<sup>1517</sup>

This was their final encounter with Aboriginal people on the northbound journey. No Aboriginal encounters were recorded on the return journey until they got back to Yandruwandha-Yawarrawarrka country near the Cooper.<sup>1518</sup>

#### 6.4.4 Brahe's Depot Party

Burke placed 25-year-old German, William Brahe, in charge of the four men at Depot Camp 65 on Cooper Creek. Brahe's task was very different to that of the Gulf Party; the Depot Party were unable to shift camp and were required to stay at the same waterhole for four months and would therefore have regular contact with Yandruwandha-Yawarrawarrka people. Brahe's prior experience with Aboriginal people was limited to the Port Fairy district where the Gunditjmarra were accustomed to dealing with Europeans.<sup>1519</sup> The other men in the depot party, Thomas McDonough and William Patten, had no previous experience dealing with Aboriginal people, and the sepoy, Dost Mahomet, feared he would be killed by the Yandruwandha.<sup>1520</sup>

Upon arriving at Cooper Creek, Burke considered there was "no danger to be apprehended from the natives, if they are properly managed",<sup>1521</sup> but shortly after setting up camp, Dost Mahomet ran into camp in a very excited manner, trembling in fear and announcing "that the blackfellows were outside".<sup>1522</sup> McDonough confronted "about fifty of them", one of whom approached McDonough and pressed against him "to feel my ribs to see if I was afraid".<sup>1523</sup> McDonough grabbed the man,

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<sup>1514</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 7: Middle part of Cloncurry', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1515</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 9: Returning from Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1516</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1517</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1518</sup> Wills, 'Journey from Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1519</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 272 to Brahe.

<sup>1520</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 442 to McDonough.

<sup>1521</sup> Burke, 'Dispatch, dated Cooper's Creek, 13 December 1860', ex2002-013, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1522</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 443 to McDonough.

<sup>1523</sup> *Ibid.*

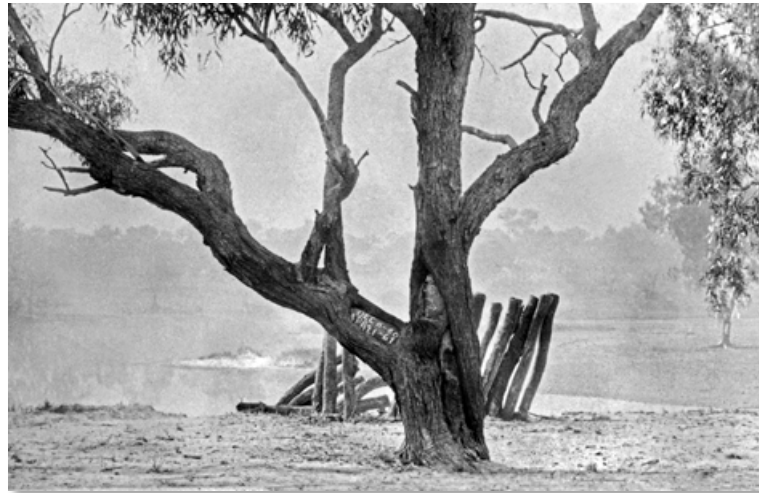


Figure 160: John Dick, 'Depot Camp 65 showing the remains of Brahe's stockade', 1898.  
Conrick Collection, State Library of South Australia.

"heaved him down", fired his revolver over their heads "and they ran away about one hundred yards distance".<sup>1524</sup> Although McDonough thought the Yandruwandha "were cowardly" and easily dispersed with a few shots,<sup>1525</sup> Burke now thought they might be "very troublesome" to the Depot Party.<sup>1526</sup> He instructed Brahe to build a stockade and if the Yandruwandha annoyed him, he was "to shoot them at once".<sup>1527</sup>

The Yandruwandha were undeterred by this initial violent encounter and around 200 people camped at Pula pula ngapakurna (Bullah Bullah Waterhole) within 400 metres of Depot Camp 65, which they visited almost daily.<sup>1528</sup> Brahe was not apprehensive and considered their presence an annoyance rather than a threat.<sup>1529</sup> His main concern was for the welfare of the animals, and when he found "a tribe of natives" surrounding one of the horses he fired his revolver in the air then rode through their camp to retrieve the horse.<sup>1530</sup> Although Brahe attempted to keep the Yandruwandha away from their tents, items of equipment went missing regardless.<sup>1531</sup> Brahe did not chase after the Yandruwandha, merely resorting to shouting warnings at anyone who came too close to the camp.<sup>1532</sup>

<sup>1524</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1525</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 444 to McDonough.

<sup>1526</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 218 to Brahe.

<sup>1527</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1528</sup> Brahe, 'Report', ex2004-009, State Library of Victoria; 'The Exploration Expedition: Return of a portion of the party: Death of Dr Becker and three others', *Age*, 1 July 1861: 5.

<sup>1529</sup> Brahe, 'Report', ex2004-009, State Library of Victoria; Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 213 to Brahe.

<sup>1530</sup> 'The Exploration Expedition: Return of a portion of the party: Death of Dr Becker and three others', *Age*, 1 July 1861: 5.

<sup>1531</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 213 to Brahe.

<sup>1532</sup> Brahe, 'Report', ex2004-009, State Library of Victoria.

By the end of December, after the Depot Party had been camped at Pula pula for four weeks, Brahe increased tension between the two sides when he resorted to firearms as a deterrent:

Observed some blacks stealing stealthily along the bank of the creek towards the camp, while one of them directed them from behind a big tree. I allowed them to come to within twenty paces of the camp, when suddenly I called out to them, we at the same time firing off our guns over their heads. They seemed much frightened and hardly able to run away. Great numbers of blacks camped near us.<sup>1533</sup>

Brahe drew a line in the sand 100 yards from the camp "and gave them to understand that if they came over it I would fire upon them".<sup>1534</sup> Although Brahe considered the Yandruwandha "understood that perfectly well", the situation became increasingly tense and a week later several Yandruwandha crossed Brahe's line, upon which he "got hold of a young native and shoved him off, when he fell down".<sup>1535</sup> Later that day "the whole tribe returned, the men armed, some with spears and some with boomerangs; most of them had painted their faces and bodies".<sup>1536</sup> Brahe recalled:

I met them at a short distance from the camp, and marking a circle round it, I gave them to understand that they would be fired at if they entered it. On some of them crossing the line I fired off my gun into the branches of a tree, when they retired, and did not molest us anymore.<sup>1537</sup>

An uneasy peace ensued, and the Yandruwandha only made sporadic visits to the camp, occasionally offering gifts of nets and fish which Brahe steadfastly refused to accept. The Depot Party gave gifts of their "left-off clothes".

In March the Yandruwandha advised Brahe that a large flood was coming down the Cooper and Brahe subsequently reported seeing far fewer Yandruwandha people.<sup>1538</sup> As the Depot Party were about to leave the Cooper for Menindee, they were "visited by about seventy or eighty natives", some of whom Brahe considered "old acquaintances".<sup>1539</sup>

#### 6.4.5 Wright's Supply Party

Wright's Supply Party had the greatest amount of contact and most diverse interactions with Aboriginal people. Wright had been at Menindee for three years, had regular contact with Paakantyi people and knew the country to the north better "than any other man on the Darling at that time".<sup>1540</sup> When Wright volunteered to lead Burke's Advance Party from Menindee to Torowoto in October 1860, he took the two Paakantyi guides, Dick and Mountain, with him (as already discussed earlier in

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<sup>1533</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1534</sup> 'The Exploration Expedition: Return of a portion of the party: Death of Dr Becker and three others', *Age*, 1 July 1861: 5.

<sup>1535</sup> Brahe, 'Report', ex2004-009, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1536</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1537</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1538</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1539</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1540</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Questions 1221, 1222, 1225 & 1226 to Wright.



Figure 161: Ludwig Becker, 'Australian native song, Lower Murray, 27 November', 1860.  
Ludwig Becker, 'Appendix C: Fourth report, Darling River, 26 November 1860',  
ex2004-007, Box 2082/4f, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

Becker spoke to Walwallim, “a young Murray Black” from the Lower Murray, who sang the 'Yaam' and 'Anaruka' songs and then provided English translations. Becker noted the man repeated the song “several times so as to enable me to note correctly words and melody”. After discussions with ethnomusicologist, Alice Moyle, Tipping suggest the song is from the Wadi Wadi language of the Swan Hill area, Tipping (ed.), *Ludwig Becker*, (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1979), 207.

this Chapter at 6.4.2). He also appointed an additional guide, Peter, to stay at the Pamamaroo Depot Camp in his absence.<sup>1541</sup> Peter guided Beckler through the Scropes Range on a trip to collect botanical specimens, and showed him the rock art at Kukirrka. While he was away, the VEE provided rations to his 'loubra'.<sup>1542</sup>

While at Pamamaroo, Becker recorded Paakantyi culture and sent the EC “some specimens of aboriginal poetry & music”<sup>1543</sup> with a note stating:

I have nearly finished half a dozen sketches of life in an aboriginal camp, of festivities and of fighting among the Blacks.<sup>1544</sup>

Becker also collected a number of Aboriginal artefacts.<sup>1545</sup>

Dick took a second trip north in November 1860 to guide police trooper Myles Lyons and saddler Alexander Macpherson on their quest to take dispatches to Burke.<sup>1546</sup> The three men were unable to

<sup>1541</sup> Hermann Beckler, 'Report of a Trip to the Scropes Ranges, 5-13 November 1860', *Argus*, 4 December 1860: 6.

<sup>1542</sup> Peter's 'loubra' received rations to the value of 8s. 6d.

<sup>1543</sup> Becker, 'Fourth Report', ex2004-007, State Library of Victoria. Becker recorded 'Yaam' (corroboree song) and 'Anaruka' (creek song).

<sup>1544</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1545</sup> Becker collected a boomerang, hafted adze and hafted axe at the Bulloo River in 1861. The items were returned to Melbourne, where they were purchased by the Italian ethnologist Enrico Giglioli in 1867. Item 125/G, Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico 'Luigi Pigorini', Rome.

<sup>1546</sup> Herman Beckler, 'Diary of a journey to relieve Trooper Lyons and Alexander Macpherson (21 December 1860-5 January 1861), dated Darling River, 22 January 1861', ex2009-008, Box 2083/3a, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria; *Argus*, 6 February 1861: 6.



Figure 162: Ludwig Becker, 'Portrait of Dick, the brave and gallant native guide, 21 December', 1860. Image b36062, H16486/F.31, State Library of Victoria.

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catch Burke, their horses died, and the men's food ran out.<sup>1547</sup> Dick caught snakes, rats, mussels, crayfish and small birds for the men to eat, then guided them back to Torowoto and arranged for the Malyangapa and Wanyiwalku-Pantyikali to provide them with ngardu, pigface and waterhens, while he returned to Menindee to raise the alarm. Dick took eight days to walk 300 kilometres, surviving on two small goannas he caught along the way. Beckler, Peter and Baluch Khan rescued Lyons and Macpherson at the end of December 1860. Dick's compassion and feat of endurance was considered to be one of the more remarkable episodes in the history of European-Aboriginal relations and prompted Governor Barkly to bring Dick to Melbourne<sup>1548</sup> where he was feted at the RSV hall and presented with a brass medal and five guineas.<sup>1549</sup> As Dodd has pointed out, this was "the only bravery award made as a result of the expedition".<sup>1550</sup>

Wright's Supply Party did not leave Menindee to follow Burke to the Cooper until 26 January 1861. Wright employed John Smith, a part-Aboriginal bushman, who had just arrived at Menindee

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<sup>1547</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*. See also David Dodd, 'The Aboriginal contribution to the expedition, observed through Germanic eyes' in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 92-96.

<sup>1548</sup> *The Star*, 25 September 1861: 2.

<sup>1549</sup> When Hodgkinson first informed the EC in December 1860 about Dick's feat of endurance, Captain Francis Cadell made a brass breastplate with a chain (a.k.a. kingplate or gorget). It was engraved "Presented to Dick by the Exploration Committee for being instrumental in succouring trooper Lyons and saddler Macpherson, 1860". The breastplate was given to Hodgkinson to take to Dick in Menindee, but Hodgkinson left it in Bendigo with Goldfields Commissioner Joseph Anderson Panton. Dick was taken to Melbourne in September 1861 and presented with a breastplate inscribed "Presented to Dick by the Exploration Expedition for assisting Trooper Lyons and Saddler McPherson, December, 1860". This may have been Cadell's original breastplate or a replacement. The fate of this/these breastplates is unknown. The EC made three additional breastplates that Howitt presented to Yandruwandha people at Cooper Creek in September 1862. *Argus*, 1 January 1861: 5; *Bendigo Advertiser*, 4 January 1861: 2, 26 September 1861: 3; *Yeoman and Australian Acclimatiser*, 25 January 1862: 2. See also: T. Cleary, *Poignant Regalia: 19<sup>th</sup> Century Aboriginal Breastplates and Images* (Sydney: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, 1993) and Jakelin Troy, *King Plates: A History of Aboriginal Gorgets* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1993).

<sup>1550</sup> David Dodd, 'The Aboriginal contribution to the expedition, observed through Germanic eyes' in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 93.

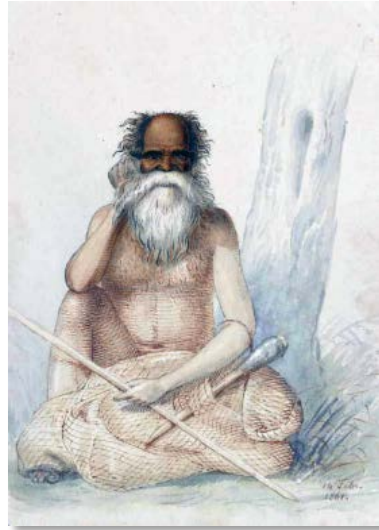


Figure 163: Ludwig Becker, 'Native from the Darling, 14 February', 1861.  
Image b36114, LT73, H16486/F.82, State Library of Victoria.

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and whom Wright relied on to ride ahead and find water.<sup>1551</sup> Mountain and Peter decided not to go with the party, and, on the third day, Dick:

borrowed a clean shirt and then bolted. His unwillingness to accompany the party arose from his fear of the natives, and was to be regretted, as his absence deprived us of our only interpreter.<sup>1552</sup>

When the Supply Party reached Torowoto, it was the middle of summer. The men were affected by extreme heat,<sup>1553</sup> lack of water and a lack of feed for the animals.<sup>1554</sup> The men became sick from the poor food and water and the Malyangapa and Wanyiwalku-Pantiyikali people, who had shown such generosity caring for Lyons and Macpherson four months earlier, became angry at Hodgkinson's persistent shooting which was scaring the game away.<sup>1555</sup> Wright had difficulty procuring guides as the Aboriginal people at Torowoto refused to follow Burke's original tracks, insisting there was no water in that direction.<sup>1556</sup> Becker started a painting of one of the older men he encountered at Torowoto.

The Supply Party struggled to reach the Bulloo River and they split into two camps, one at Koorliatto and the other at Bulloo Lake, where a small stockade was built. Several men were seriously

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<sup>1551</sup> Clark suggests "On the basis of his association with the Murray and Murrumbidgee, he [John Smith] may have been Madi Madi, Wadi Wadi or Wiradjuri" Ian D. Clark, 'The members of the Victorian Exploring Expedition and their prior experience of Aboriginal peoples', in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 38-39.

<sup>1552</sup> William Wright, 'Diary of the Depot Camp, Darling River, 26 January-21 June 1861', ex2009-009, Box 2083/3b, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1553</sup> The temperature reached 44.5°C.

<sup>1554</sup> Becker, 'Meteorological observations, 27 January-1 April 1861', ex2008-004, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1555</sup> Hodgkinson was "a passionate hunter" which upset people at Torowoto. Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 126.

<sup>1556</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 115.



Figure 164: William Oswald Hodgkinson, 'Bulla, Queensland', 1861.  
Album of Miss Eliza Younghusband.  
vn4189024-s46, PIC/11535/46 LOC MS SR Cab 3/9, National Library of Australia.

Hodgkinson's sketch of the stockade and attack at Bulloo, 27 April 1861.

ill which meant Wright camped at the lake for a month.<sup>1557</sup> The Karengapa became frustrated with the intruders and interactions between the parties became increasingly tense. Aboriginal people set fire to the grass around the camp and howled like dingos at night, and armed young warriors "smeared with fat and paint" entered the camp, threw equipment around and removed food and stores.<sup>1558</sup> A large group of Aboriginal people gathered at Wright's Bulloo camp and Beckler recalled:

Quite some time was now spent with each side attempting to drive the other away by threats. It was clear that they had not the slightest wish to leave the soil which they with all justice called their own.<sup>1559</sup>

One man "conducted himself in an especially friendly and courteous manner" and was given a cap and a garibaldi shirt.<sup>1560</sup> Using sign language and "quiet, but flowing speech" he explained this area "belonged to his tribe" who were coming soon to celebrate a feast.<sup>1561</sup> 'Mr Shirt' was "a born diplomat" and:

There was an unshakeable calm in his features and in his movements. Ignoring our orders and threats, he came closer and, as though to calm us or to dispel any impression that he wished to listen to our demands, he seated himself close to us on the bare ground. He was serious, friendly, extremely calm, with no trace of passion, and definite and stubborn in his demands.<sup>1562</sup>

However, despite these negotiations, a few days later a violent confrontation occurred between the five-man Supply Party and 95 Aboriginal warriors. The warriors advanced on the stockade and, at 20 paces, Wright's party opened fire. The Expedition was supplied with the latest firearms

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<sup>1557</sup> The Supply Party arrived at Koorliatto Creek on 30 March 1861 and camped there until 23 April 1861. The main party under Wright moved on to Bulloo Lake on 2 April 1861 and they stayed there until 30 April 1861. The Supply Party retreated back to Koorliatto, arriving on 1 May and staying until 22 May 1861.

<sup>1558</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 166-167.

<sup>1559</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>1560</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>1561</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>1562</sup> *Ibid.*





Figure 165: .568" calibre rifle bullet found at Wright's Bulloo Lake Camp in 2013 during an archaeological dig by the Burke and Wills Historical Society. This was the calibre of round that was fired from Wright's Terry & Calisher's carbines during the attack on the Aboriginal people on 27 April 1861.

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technology.<sup>1563</sup> A few attackers fell, "several apparently from fright".<sup>1564</sup> Mr Shirt was the only one severely wounded. He was shot at eight paces and although he managed to stagger away, there was the "loud, distant lament of a native" heard during the night, followed by silence the next morning.<sup>1565</sup> Although Beckler does not speculate on Mr Shirt's fate, it is reasonable to expect the wound was fatal.

Beckler also noted the difficult position that Smith found himself in. Having a European father and an Aboriginal mother meant:

that the Australian natives are much more ill-disposed to members of other tribes of their own race than they are to aliens. It is the native guide whose life is first endangered.<sup>1566</sup>

Three days later, Wright pulled down the stockade at Bulloo Lake and retreated to Koorliatto. Even though they only moved 25 kilometres downstream, this reduced the tension between the two sides. Beckler noted:

The natives praised the happy day of our departure in their own manner. They did not let themselves be seen, but two rows of smoke columns rising proudly upwards from the chain of hills and along the course of the creek indicated the importance they attached to the final departure of these alien intruders. Further new pillars of smoke rose upwards far ahead of our march, first on one side then on the other.<sup>1567</sup>

#### 6.4.6 Burke, Wills and King at Cooper Creek

The interactions between Burke, Wills and King and the Yandruwandha people at the Cooper between May and September 1861 have been the subject of most attention. Bonyhady observed:

<sup>1563</sup> The VEE was supplied with a range of firearms, including eight Terry & Calisher Type I carbines which were 26-bore (.568" calibre) which fired a 530-grain (34.4 gram) Metford-Pritchett lead bullet. The carbines were imported by Frederick Gonnerman Dalgetty of Bourke-street west at a cost of £15 each.

<sup>1564</sup> Beckler, *Journey to Cooper's Creek*, 172-173.

<sup>1565</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>1566</sup> *Ibid.*, 165-166.

<sup>1567</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

More than any other event in nineteenth-century Australia, the deaths of Burke and Wills at Cooper's Creek have come to represent both the unwillingness of Europeans to learn from the Aborigines and their more general inability to understand the land.<sup>1568</sup>

While Bonyhady's assessment is correct, it makes no distinction between Burke's attitude to Aboriginal people and Wills' attitude. Burke's approach to Aboriginal people was ambivalent at best, and, even when facing the prospect of death by starvation, his attitude hardened into anger and rejection. Wills' attitude mellowed as his circumstances changed.

Burke, Wills and King did not report seeing any Aboriginal people on their 1,800-kilometre return journey from the Gulf. Upon reaching Cooper Creek, they encountered a large group of Aboriginal people (either Yawarrawarrka or the Thayipilthirringuda clan of the Yandruwandha) who, Wills recorded, "were desirous of our company".<sup>1569</sup> Burke was not interested in socialising and "preferred camping alone", so the three men "were compelled to move on until rather late, in order to get away from them".<sup>1570</sup> Burke explained to Wills and King that they were to be "very cautious in our dealings with them as we knew not what they might have done to the depot party".<sup>1571</sup>

At Depot Camp 65 on 21 April 1861, they found the 100 kilograms of food Brahe had buried, and, as they considered it sufficient to get them to Mount Hopeless, they were not concerned with supplementing their diet with Aboriginal foodstuffs.

When they had a chance encounter with members of the Yandruwandha Nhirrpi clan a few days later at Ngapa-wirni (see Figure 170), their meeting was brief and limited to exchanging matches for some fish.<sup>1572</sup> The following morning the Nhirrpi Yandruwandha reappeared and presented more fish. The explorers reciprocated with some sugar, "with which they [the Yandruwandha] were greatly pleased" and Wills noted his new 'friends' were "by far the most well behaved blacks we have seen on Cooper Creek".<sup>1573</sup> Nevertheless, Burke "did not care to try and make friends with them; he said there were too many of them, and it was no good wasting time".<sup>1574</sup> A week later there was another chance encounter, this time with the Thayipilthirringuda Yandruwandha at Walkani, with fish hooks and sugar being exchanged for liberal "presentations of fish and [ngardu] cake".<sup>1575</sup> Wills thought

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<sup>1568</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 311.

<sup>1569</sup> Wills, 'Journey from Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1570</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1571</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 1037 to King.

<sup>1572</sup> When Burke, Wills, King and Gray left the Gulf they had 83 kilograms of food remaining to support them on their 1,800 kilometre, 62-day trip back to the Cooper. Brahe buried 99 kilograms of food at Depot Camp 65, which meant that Burke, Wills and King had 99 kilograms of food to support them on their 240 kilometre journey to Mount Hopeless.

<sup>1573</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1574</sup> The Chatterer, 'Early Australian History, Part III: The Story of the Blacks. The Aborigines of Australia. Chapter XII, Expedition Of Burke And Wills', *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*, 29 January 1890: 4.

<sup>1575</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

their gifts to the Yandruwandha might not have been sufficient to repay the compliment shown to them, demonstrating that he understood 'kupara',<sup>1576</sup> the reciprocity of exchange.<sup>1577</sup>

After a fortnight of travelling down the Cooper, the men's situation was deteriorating. Both their camels were dead and they had been unable to identify the watercourse that would take them through the Strzelecki Desert to Mount Hopeless. Another chance meeting while on a reconnaissance trip saw Burke and Wills<sup>1578</sup> presented with "half a dozen fish each for luncheon".<sup>1579</sup> The two explorers were invited back to the Yandruwandha camp at Maramilya, and, still respecting reciprocity, they tore a piece of oilcloth in two, with Burke presenting one half and Wills presenting the other. That evening they stayed at the Yandruwandha camp, eating fish and ngardu until they were "positively unable to eat any more" before being introduced to the intoxicating effects of pituri.<sup>1580</sup> During the night the Yandruwandha "were very attentive in bringing us fire wood and keeping the fire up during the night".<sup>1581</sup> The following day Wills returned alone to the Maramilya camp where he "was even more hospitably entertained than before",<sup>1582</sup> and given fish, rats and ngardu, before being "offered a share of a gunnya" for the night.<sup>1583</sup> It is interesting to speculate whether Wills attempted to gain information about Gregory's 1858 expedition or ask whether the Yandruwandha could show him the creek that ran south towards Mount Hopeless.

The next morning, 9 May 1861, Wills "Parted from my friends the Blacks"<sup>1584</sup> and returned to Burke and King. The explorers' grim situation was looking slightly better. They had established a relationship with the Yandruwandha at Maramilya, had been fed, accommodated and entertained

<sup>1576</sup> 'kupara' (Diyari = 'kopara'), meaning reciprocity, see: Adolphus Peter Elkin, 'The Kopara. The Settlement of Grievances', *Oceania*, Vol. 2, No. 2, December (1931): 191-198. See also: Fred Cahir, 'Devil been walk about tonight - not devil belonging to blackfellow, but white man devil. Methink Burke and Wills cry out tonight "What for whitefellow not send horses and grub?" An examination of Aboriginal oral traditions of colonial explorers' in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 165.

<sup>1577</sup> Reynolds, *Other side of the frontier*, 74-75; Ronald Murray Berndt and Catherine Helen Berndt, *The world of the first Australians* (Sydney: Ure, 1964), 121; Isabel McBryde, 'Exchange in South Eastern Australia: An Ethnohistorical Perspective', *Aboriginal History* Vol. 8 (1984): 132-153.

<sup>1578</sup> King had been left behind at Camp 9 at 'The Junction' on Cooper Creek, S27°44'47" E140°27'18" (GDA2020).

<sup>1579</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1580</sup> *Ibid.* For a description of the use of pituri/pitchery (Yandruwandha = 'pitjidi') by Aboriginal people at Cooper Creek, see: James P. Murray, 'Pituri', *Pharmaceutical Journal and Transactions*, February (1879). See also: Edward B. Sanger, 'Notes on the Aborigines of Cooper's Creek, Australia', *The American Naturalist*, Vol. 17, No. 12 (1883): 1220-1225; Angela Ratsch, Kathryn J. Steadman and Fiona Bogossian, 'The pituri story: a review of the historical literature surrounding traditional Australian Aboriginal use of nicotine in Central Australia', *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* Vol. 6, No. 26 (2010): 26-38; Luke Keogh, 'Duboisia Pituri: A Natural History', *Historical Records of Australian Science* Vol. 22, No. 2 (2011): 199-214.

<sup>1581</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia. Wills recorded that night was "Clear & calm but unusually warm". Later that week overnight temperatures fell to 5°C.

<sup>1582</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1583</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1584</sup> *Ibid.*

with pituri. Wills had learnt a few Yandruwandha names for food items and the explorers understood the mutual responsibility of social and kinship reciprocity and had exchanged possessions for the gifts of food. Burke and Wills now felt they could survive at the Cooper if they trapped birds and rats, made ngardu bread and visited the Yandruwandha at Maramilya whenever they needed fish. Wills was quite excited about this new twist to their unexpected adventure. He thought:

what a pleasant prospect after our dashing trip to Carpentaria, having to hang about Cooper Creek living like the Blacks.<sup>1585</sup>

Unfortunately, their optimism was short-lived. Wills was unsuccessful in his search for ngardu and when Burke and King went to Maramilya "to ascertain all particulars about the Nardu",<sup>1586</sup> they found the Yandruwandha had moved camp and could not be found.<sup>1587</sup> It took more than a week before they discovered ngardu for themselves, and it was the end of the month before they found the Yandruwandha again, by which time they had made an abortive attempt to reach Mount Hopeless and had consumed almost all their supplies.

Wills stumbled upon the Yandruwandha people by accident at the end of May.<sup>1588</sup> Realising their prospects were grim, Wills had decided to return to Depot Camp 65 to bury his field books "for fear of accidents".<sup>1589</sup> Leaving Burke and King in camp at Marru-thale, he set off upstream, and at Breerily met a group of Yandruwandha people who insisted he went with them to their camp. Once again Wills was treated hospitably and fed an abundance of fish and ngardu. Wills wrote down several dozen Yandruwandha words as well as the names of his hosts, noting that one of the old men, 'Pokoro Thinnamarru', allowed Wills to share his gunyah and campfire.<sup>1590</sup> On the way back from Depot Camp 65, Wills met the Yandruwandha again, this time a little further downstream at Marrpu, where Wills' new friend, 'Pitchery' fed him fish and ngardu "until I was so full as to be unable to eat any more".<sup>1591</sup>

Because the Yandruwandha had been so kind, Wills "seemed to consider that he should have very little difficulty in living with them".<sup>1592</sup> He returned to Burke and King with the intention of moving up to Marrpu. However, during the eight days he had been away, Burke and King also met Yandruwandha people and their encounter had ended badly. The Yandruwandha came to Marru-thale where Burke and King were camping. "They were very civil to us at first and offered us some

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<sup>1585</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1586</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1587</sup> John King, 'Transcription of 'Narrative of John King', ex2009-007, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1588</sup> Although Burke, Wills and King could not find the Yandruwandha among the myriad of channels on the Cooper around Thurra and Kunaburu, no doubt the Yandruwandha would have been aware that the explorers were living at one of their deserted camps at Marru-thale.

<sup>1589</sup> William John Wills, 'Last notes, dated 30 May 1861', SAFE 1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1590</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1591</sup> Wills, 'Memorandum book', ex2009-006, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1592</sup> John King, 'Transcription of 'Narrative of John King', ex2009-007, State Library of Victoria.

fish” King recalled.<sup>1593</sup> The following day, the Yandruwandha visited Marru-thale again, and this time Burke presented them with two empty bags which the Yandruwandha graciously filled with fish.<sup>1594</sup> Clearly Burke expected to be fed. King did not record whether they offered gifts in exchange. On the third day, the Yandruwandha gave Burke one bag of fish and one man took an oilcloth from Burke’s gunyah. Burke gave chase, fired his revolver over the man’s head and recovered the oilcloth, while still holding on to the fish. King, still at the gunyah, was surrounded by Yandruwandha men, one of whom, King recalled, “took his boomerang and laid it over my shoulder, and then told me by signs that if I called out for Mr Burke (as I was doing) that he would strike me”.<sup>1595</sup> King fired his revolver over their heads and the Yandruwandha ran off. They returned that evening carrying fish and calling out to the “white fellows”:

Mr Burke went to meet them, and they wished to surround him; but he knocked as many of the nets of fish out of their hands as he could, and shouted out to me to fire. I did so, and they ran off.<sup>1596</sup>

They did not see the Yandruwandha again.

King explained the reason that Burke acted in such an aggressive and irrational manner towards the Yandruwandha was “that he was afraid of being too friendly lest they should be always at our camp”.<sup>1597</sup> King only made brief reference to the incident and the Commissioners did not question him further on the matter.<sup>1598</sup> When the EC asked why the explorers had not obtained fishing nets from the Yandruwandha, King replied they had no need of nets, as “When we found they [the Yandruwandha] were fishing, we compelled them to give us some”.<sup>1599</sup> Nodding in approbation the EC noted that the explorers had nothing with which they could bribe the Yandruwandha, to which King replied they took the fish by force because the Yandruwandha “were always inclined to steal, and by taking from them on friendly terms, we only encouraged them to come about us”.<sup>1600</sup> Later interpretations suggest Burke acted irrationally in discharging his weapon as “it were only an old

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<sup>1593</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1594</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1595</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1596</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1597</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1598</sup> Burke’s actions were criticised by William Lockhart Morton in the *Yeoman and Australian Acclimatiser*, 1 February 1862: 8-9. During a visit to Castlemaine for a formal banquet in his honour, King gave an interview defending Burke, in which he stated “From the first, Mr Burke was most anxious to join the blacks, and made repeated attempts to do so ... Mr Burke always trusted the blacks as far as was wise; they were continually trying to steal from us”. King then claimed that 240 Yandruwandha men had surrounded the gunyah after the oilcloth incident “forty of them approached, each two of them carrying a small piece of bark holding a little fish; fully two hundred others were behind and closing in on us in a semi-circle. Mr Burke thought, though it was well to keep them at a distance, it was a pity to lose the fish, he consequently made a sweep round the whole of them and thus secured the fish without the objectionable company” John King, ‘Traducers of Burke’, *Age*, 14 February 1862: 7.

<sup>1599</sup> ‘Exploration Committee: Vote of thanks to Mr King’, *Age*, 30 November 1861: 5.

<sup>1600</sup> *Ibid.*



Figure 166: Samuel Calvert, 'Cooper's Creek', c.1873.

obj-136151056, PIC S5089 LOC NL shelves 1022\*, National Library of Australia.

See also: Alfred William Howitt, 'Diary, 13 August-7 October 1861', ex3007-005, State Library of Victoria.

This woodcut is based on a sketch in Howitt's 1861 field book of the two gunyahs at Breerily. Burke, Wills and King lived here between 8 June and 29 June 1861. Wills died here in early July 1861.

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oilcloth",<sup>1601</sup> but Cathcart contextualises the incident by explaining "the oilcloth was not a trivial item":<sup>1602</sup>

it was one of two waterproof cloths the explorers used to keep dry and warm when they were sleeping.<sup>1603</sup> In the absence of a tent, and given their otherwise meagre bedding, the oilcloths could save their lives, especially on those freezing winter nights.

He also points out that "Burke's act of shooting above the heads of 'natives' sounds like one more act of colonial arrogance and brutality, but Burke was a country policeman. For him, firing a warning shot to stop a runaway thief was not such an extreme response—especially when the stolen item was so valuable".<sup>1604</sup> However:

In his moment of anger, and in his reflex to protect his equipment, Burke had failed to appreciate that the situation had changed. He was not in the streets of Castlemaine; he was in the land of the Yandruwandha.<sup>1605</sup>

Burke did not make any notes during this time, at least none that have survived,<sup>1606</sup> so it is difficult to establish his motivation, but clearly his frustration at their situation was expressed with anger. Wills did not comment on the matter, but he must have been infuriated at Burke's actions. Wills was in a pitiful state; the 120-kilometre journey to Depot Camp 65 had been exhausting and he was weak and suffering painful constipation from the ngardu. Death was imminent and, unlike Burke, he realised they were not 'in the streets of Castlemaine' and the Yandruwandha were their only chance.

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<sup>1601</sup> Graeme Clifford, 'Burke and Wills [film]', (Hoyts Edgley, 1985).

<sup>1602</sup> Cathcart, *Land of plenty*, 152.

<sup>1603</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 1054 to King.

<sup>1604</sup> Cathcart, *Land of plenty*: 152.

<sup>1605</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>1606</sup> Burke made notes in a pocketbook which he gave it to King, with instructions that it be handed to Sir William Stawell. The notebook is now at the National Library of Australia, but 13 pages have been torn out. Burke, 'Diary', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia; Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Questions 1070-1072 to King.

Bonyhady notes that Burke and Wills “no longer aspired to live like the blacks. Instead, they simply wanted to live off them”.<sup>1607</sup> A more accurate assessment would be that Wills initially thought he could “live like the blacks”, but realised how difficult this was and now wanted to live with them, whereas Burke just wanted to live off them, but on his own terms and without any consideration for reciprocity. Wills knew the Yandruwandha were their only chance of survival and he had made considerable efforts to engage with them. Burke, who had shown compassion and tolerance towards Aboriginal guides earlier on the Expedition, was now acting irrationally and, even facing death by starvation, violently rejected offers of help.

Wills most likely lost his patience and chastised Burke for his actions. Burke responded by assaulting him. When drover George McIver visited the Cooper in the early 1880s,<sup>1608</sup> the Yandruwandha informed him:

that a quarrel took place between Burke and Wills; that Burke assaulted the latter, striking him several times with his hands and in the end knocked him down.<sup>1609</sup>

The location of this assault was “about fifteen miles below where Strzelecki Creek emerges from the great lagoon, near Innamincka, and not far from where Wills died soon afterwards”<sup>1610</sup> which corresponds to Burke’s camp at Marru-thale. McIver “questioned a number of blacks about this incident, and each told me the same story”<sup>1611</sup> After the violent altercation, Wills was faced with a choice between his friendship with Burke or survival. While many consider Wills “put loyalty to his leader ahead of life itself”,<sup>1612</sup> this is not the case. Wills left Burke and King at Marru-thale and returned to his friend Pitchery at Marrpu, intending “to test the practicability of living with them”.<sup>1613</sup>

The Yandruwandha were hospitable to their guest once again and gave him breakfast, but were not prepared to feed the explorers indefinitely and indicated to Wills “that they were going up the creek, and that he had better go down”.<sup>1614</sup> Wills pretended he did not understand, but after three days acquiesced and reluctantly returned to Burke and King. He found the two explorers in a sorry state. Their gunyah had burnt down and they had lost everything except their firearms and “a few patches of the camel rug”.<sup>1615</sup> They were malnourished and exhausted, and without warm clothes, bedding or shelter, the cold nights, strong winds and rain placed them in a perilous position. Wills convinced Burke they should move upstream to Marrpu and camp on the opposite bank of the river

<sup>1607</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 140.

<sup>1608</sup> McIver does not reveal what year he was at the Cooper, but based on his biography and the names of station owners he met in the Channel Country, it appears he was at the Cooper sometime between 1881-1883.

<sup>1609</sup> George McIver, *A drover’s odyssey* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1935), 150-151.

<sup>1610</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>1611</sup> *Ibid.* See also *Sunday Times*, 25 April 1937: 11.

<sup>1612</sup> Robert Wilson, 'Tribute to an astute observer', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 November 2013.

<sup>1613</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1614</sup> John King, 'Transcription of 'Narrative of John King', ex2009-007, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1615</sup> *Ibid.*





Figure 167: Eugene Montagu Scott, 'Natives discovering the body of William John Wills, the explorer, at Cooper's Creek, June 1861', c.1862-1864.  
H6694, State Library of Victoria.

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to the Yandruwandha, but when they got there on 7 June 1861, they found the Yandruwandha were gone. Burke and Wills died four weeks later without seeing the Yandruwandha again.

King was 23 years old and had been in Australia for only one year, so he had few bush skills and only a limited understanding of the Australian environment. Now he found himself alone on the Cooper. Two days after Burke's death, while searching for the Yandruwandha upstream from Kulyumarru, he found a large bag of ngardu in some deserted gunyahs.<sup>1616</sup> King now feared the Yandruwandha would take the ngardu from him. A week later he was back at Breerily where he found the Yandruwandha had pulled down the gunyah on top of Wills' corpse and had taken his hat and some of his clothes.<sup>1617</sup>

By the middle of July 1861, King "started off again [from Breerily] to look for blacks",<sup>1618</sup> but it was a "good many" days, probably the end of July 1861, before they found him.<sup>1619</sup> The Thayipilthirringuda Yandruwandha were hospitable, giving him a meal and pointing out a gunyah with the single men in the centre of the camp where he could sleep.<sup>1620</sup> Using sign language the Yandruwandha indicated they were aware of Wills' death, and King explained that Burke was also dead, at which, King recalled, "They appeared to feel great compassion for me when they understood

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<sup>1616</sup> King "found some gunyahs where the natives had deposited a bag of nardoo, sufficient to last me a fortnight". Burke, Wills and King had been eating 600-750 grams of ngardu a day, so a bag of ngardu sufficient to last King for a fortnight would have weighed at least nine kilograms. King did not indicate whether the ngardu he found had already been pounded into flour or whether it was merely a bag of sporocarps.

<sup>1617</sup> John King, 'Transcription of 'Narrative of John King', ex2009-007, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1618</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1619</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1620</sup> Smith, 'John King's story, Part III'.



Figure 168: William Strutt, 'King with the Cooper's Creek blacks, who are covering Burke's remains with bushes'.  
A collection of drawings ... illustrating the Burke and Wills Exploring expedition.  
a1485016, 1ff.15b, DL PXX 3, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

that I was alone on the creek, and gave me plenty to eat".<sup>1621</sup> However, after four days they instructed King to leave. He "pretended not to understand them",<sup>1622</sup> thinking "it was as well for him to be killed by the Yandruwandha than to starve".<sup>1623</sup> When the Yandruwandha moved camp, which they did every four or five days, they encouraged King to leave, but he refused and stayed with them.<sup>1624</sup> Oral history from Yandruwandha descendants shows King's fears may have been realised, as Aaron Paterson recalls:

another party of natives arrived at their camp and, having seen King in their midst, argued that he should not be allowed to live and should be clubbed or speared. My old people told this other party of natives to leave and to say no more about the walypala (whitefella) who had come into their care.<sup>1625</sup>

King tended to an old woman, Karrawa,<sup>1626</sup> sterilising her infected arm with 'nitrate of silver', after which she accepted him as the spirit of her deceased third son and supplied him with fish and ngardu.<sup>1627</sup> After he lived with the Yandruwandha for around three weeks, they considered King "as one of themselves" and treated him "with uniform kindness".<sup>1628</sup> Yandruwandha oral tradition asserts that King had a sexual liaison with Karrawa's daughter Turinyi. Unbeknown to King, Turinyi gave birth to a daughter, Annie King.<sup>1629</sup>

<sup>1621</sup> John King, 'Transcription of 'Narrative of John King', ex2009-007, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1622</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1623</sup> *Age*, 30 November 1861: 5.

<sup>1624</sup> Welch, 'Journal, 8 August-23 September, 1861', ex3006-005, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1625</sup> Aaron Paterson, 'Introduction: a Yandruwandha perspective', in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, xiv.

<sup>1626</sup> Howitt wrote this name as 'Carrawaw' and 'Carawi'. Yandruwandha oral tradition suggests this was actually the woman's totem, eaglehawk (Yandruwandha = 'karrawa').

<sup>1627</sup> John King, 'Transcription of 'Narrative of John King', ex2009-007, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1628</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1629</sup> According to Yandruwandha oral tradition, Annie King (born c.May-June 1862?) was 'parlaka pirtipirti' (Yandruwandha = half caste, literally 'red body') (note: in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, Paterson uses 'padlaka' not Breen's 'parlaka' for 'body' and he also uses 'pubili' to mean half-caste, which is not in Breen's Yandruwandha vocabulary). Annie had two children, King Peter of Nappamerri and Nanpika 'Cora' King (1874-1932), whose descendants are around today. Aaron Paterson, 'Introduction: a



Figure 169: Two of the three brass medallions or breastplates presented to the Yandruwandha by Howitt at Kulyu-marru on Cooper Creek in September 1862.

The whereabouts of the third breastplate is unknown.

Left: 2009.0027.0001, James de Pury Collection, National Museum of Australia.

Right: 'Yandruwandha breastplate', South Australian Museum.

The breastplates are engraved:

Presented to  
\_\_\_\_\_  
by the Exploration Committee of Victoria for the  
Humanity shewn to the Explorers  
Burke, Wills & King  
1861

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One incident in particular resonated with Victorian colonists: when the Yandruwandha were fishing at Yinimingka in the middle of August 1861, King pointed out where Burke had died.<sup>1630</sup> "On seeing his remains, the whole party wept bitterly, and covered them with bushes".<sup>1631</sup> Several artists reproduced this scene and Summers made it the subject of one of the bas-reliefs when he cast the Burke and Wills statue in 1865. A Bendigo correspondent asked:

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Yandruwandha perspective', in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, xiii-xvi; Mary-Lou Considine, 'Secrets of the Dig Tree', *CSIRO ECOS Magazine*, 14 October 2013. These two accounts contain different genealogies, with *ECOS* reporting Turinyi's daughter was Annie King, who had a daughter called Cora, whereas *Aboriginal Story* has Turinya's daughter as Yellow Alice, whose daughter was Annie King. Cora Nanpika Parker (1905-1932) had a son, Punbili Bob Parker (Yellow Bob or Barioolah Bob) whose father was a white station hand called Robert Parker, and daughter, Timpika Manngidrikani Nelly Parker (a.k.a. Tim Guttie), whose father was probably Nappa Merrie station owner John Conrick. Tim Guttie was one of the last two surviving Yandruwandha speakers and one of Gavan Breen's main interviewees. "Cora the mother of Bob Parker and Nellie Parker" is recognised in the Yandruwandha-Yawarrawarrka National Native Title Tribunal Determination as an apical elder, but the NNTT genealogy does not extend back to specify Cora's mother or father. National Native Title Tribunal, 'Determination' (Yandruwandha-Yawarrawarrka, NNTT No. SCD2015/003, 16 December 2015). See also: 'Miss King', *The Queenslander*, 21 March 1896: 549; *Northern Miner*, 19 February 1909: 3; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 4 March 1925: 11; E.H., 'Human Curios', *The West Australian*, 3 February 1934: 4. Reports from James Arnold (or James Harnell, a.k.a. Narran Jim) about a girl called 'Yellow Alice' seen near the Cooper in 1867-1868 appear to relate to a different woman, although the stories are often conflated, i.e.: Murgatroyd, *Dig Tree* (2012): 361. See also: 'Hume's Search for Classen', *Brisbane Courier*, 15 January 1876: 6; 'The Story of the Leichhardt Expedition', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 February 1881: 3. John Campbell Warren and Sister Hilda Foster have alternate recollections of Annie King, see Chapter 6.5.

<sup>1630</sup> Burke's grave is at Yinimingka ngapakurna (Burke's waterhole), S27°43'16" E140°46'50" (GDA2020).

<sup>1631</sup> John King, 'Transcription of 'Narrative of John King'', ex2009-007, State Library of Victoria.

Could Christians have done more? Let conscience tell us how many professing Christians would have done as much. In the whole range of literature, I do not think that any passages can be found illustrative of the practical piety and virtue which may be found amongst even the most despised races of heathendom.<sup>1632</sup>

After living with the Yandruwandha for about eight weeks, King was found by Howitt's 'Victorian Contingent Party' between Minkayi and Kuyapidri waterholes.<sup>1633</sup> King was "wasted to a shadow ... exceedingly weak", confused and disoriented<sup>1634</sup> and Howitt's medical officer, Dr William Wheeler, thought King "could not last more than a few days longer had he not been found".<sup>1635</sup> King, however, told Welch he thought he "could have lived for a long time with them, for I was all the while getting a little bit stronger".<sup>1636</sup> Before returning to Melbourne, Howitt distributed gifts to a group of between 30 to 40 Yandruwandha people, ensuring "that they understood that these things were given to them for having fed King".<sup>1637</sup> He also noted "An old woman, Carrawaw, who had been particularly kind to King, was loaded with things".<sup>1638</sup> King departed:

amidst the general lamentations of the tribe, punctuated by the piercing howls of Carrawi when she saw her lost son moving away perched on the back of a camel. She was also bleeding freely from wounds in the breast made by herself with the razor-like edge of a mussel shell.<sup>1639</sup>

Colonists attempting to rationalise King's survival in the light of the deaths of the two Expedition leaders downplayed the role of the Yandruwandha. They considered:

it is not improbable that the death of Burke and Wills was accelerated by the activity of their minds, by the incessant play of their emotions, by disappointment, depression, and despair.<sup>1640</sup>

The press, meanwhile, claimed King owed his preservation, not to his ready acceptance of an Aboriginal lifestyle, but because of a physical accident of robustness in his constitution.<sup>1641</sup> His triumphant return to Melbourne did not therefore deserve extravagant praise. Morton was somewhat more realistic in his assessment, claiming that Burke and Wills would also have been treated kindly by the Yandruwandha "if they had not frightened the blacks by firing over their heads when they came up with an offering of cooked fish".<sup>1642</sup>

<sup>1632</sup> R., 'A Plea for the Blacks', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 9 November 1861: 2.

<sup>1633</sup> King was found by Edwin James Welch at S27°46'30" E140°40'42" (GDA2020).

<sup>1634</sup> Howitt, 'Diary, 13 August-7 October, 1861', ex3007-005, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1635</sup> Helen Mary Tolcher, *Drought or deluge* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1986): 36.

<sup>1636</sup> *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*, 29 January 1890: 4; Frank J. Leahy, 'Remembering Edwin J. Welch: surveyor to Howitt's Contingent Exploration Party' in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*: 241-260.

<sup>1637</sup> Howitt, 'Diary, 13 August-7 October, 1861', ex3007-005, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1638</sup> Welch, 'The tragedy of Cooper's Creek', ML MSS 314, State Library of New South Wales.

<sup>1639</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1640</sup> *Argus*, 26 November 1861: 4.

<sup>1641</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1642</sup> John Ormond Randell (ed.), *Adventures of a Pioneer: William Lockhart Morton* (Melbourne: Queensberry Hill Press, 1978), 154-155, (originally published in 20 parts in *Once a month: a magazine for Australasia*, 1884-1886).



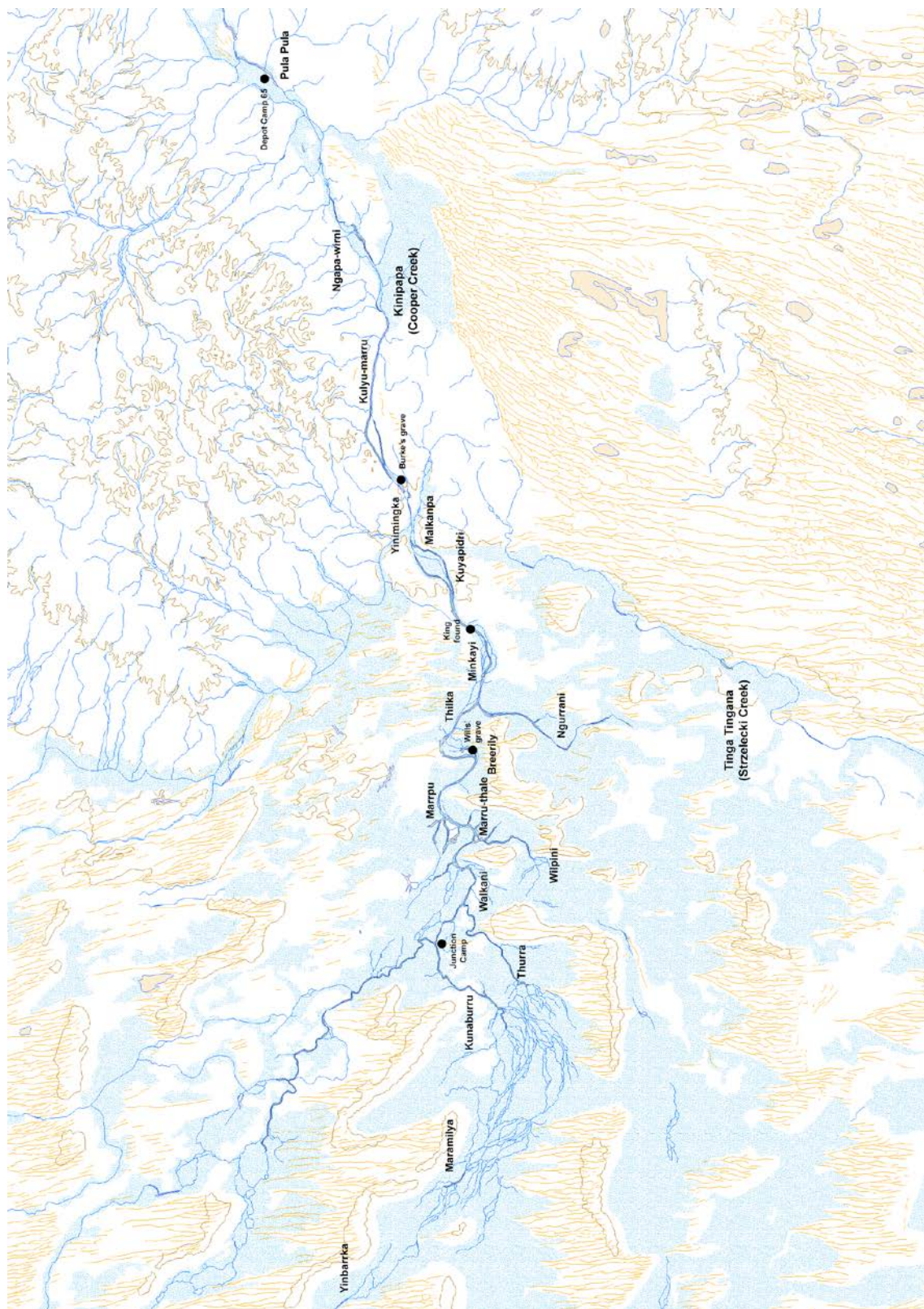


Figure 170: Map of locations visited by Burke, Wills and King during their stay at Cooper Creek, April–September 1861.  
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## 6.5 Aboriginal recollections

In the 1860s Anglo-Australian interest focussed on ngardu, breastplates and establishing mission stations on the Cooper. However, it was not long before the Aboriginal contribution was marginalised or forgotten entirely. Nevertheless, Aboriginal people maintained their own memories, stories and oral traditions about their encounters with the VEE.

The first Aboriginal memories were recorded in 1861 by the relief parties under Howitt and McKinlay, with Walker recording additional material in 1862. All four relief parties employed Aboriginal guides<sup>1643</sup> and they questioned Aboriginal people to ascertain the whereabouts of Burke and Wills. Initially communication was limited – when Howitt’s guide, Sandy, spoke to the Wangkumara he could only understand the “narangy<sup>1644</sup> words”.<sup>1645</sup> On his next visit to the Cooper, Howitt acquired a Ngarrindjeri man who understood Diyari, Yandruwandha and Yawarrawarrka, which meant Howitt “was able to obtain a guide to any place within their ken, which extended for a radius of over a hundred miles”.<sup>1646</sup> While at the Cooper, Howitt “fostered the good feeling between the native tribe there and ourselves”, regularly conversed with “King’s old friends”<sup>1647</sup> and was “remembered by the people of the Cooper for a generation or more as Kulumarru Pinnaru”.<sup>1648</sup>

In South Australia, an Aboriginal informant claimed there were white men living on a raft in a lake beyond the Cooper. The white men were “naked, have no firearms or horses, but animals which from his description are evidently camels.”<sup>1649</sup> Wills’ father thought the naked men on a raft “were unquestionably, Burke, my son, and King”.<sup>1650</sup> Although sceptical of the veracity of this information, McKinlay acquired the services of a Diyari guide called ‘Bullingani’ who led the party to a grave containing human remains.<sup>1651</sup> McKinlay questioned several Aboriginal people about the grave,

<sup>1643</sup> Howitt used two Aboriginal guides, Sandy and Frank, on the 'Victorian Contingent Party' expedition to the Cooper in 1861. McKinlay used four guides, Frank, Jack, Peter and Sambo, on the 'South Australian Burke Relief Expedition'. Walker used seven Aboriginal guides, Jemmy Cargara and six Native Mounted Troopers, Patrick (Paddy), Harry, Walter, Jingle, Rodney and Coreen Jemmy on the 'Victorian Relief Expedition'. Landsborough used two Aboriginal guides, Fisherman and Jacky, and two Native Mounted Troopers, Jemmy and Charlie on the 'Queensland Relief Expedition'.

<sup>1644</sup> Sandy’s “narangy word” means ‘Ngarrindjeri’, the Aboriginal language of the lower Murray River.

<sup>1645</sup> Howitt, 'Diary, 1 September-9 October 1861', ex3007-001, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1646</sup> Howitt, 'An episode in the history of Australian exploration'; 'Personal reminiscences'. Howitt’s Ngarrindjeri guide was called 'Frank'.

<sup>1647</sup> Howitt, 'Diary, 1 September-9 October 1861', ex3007-001; 'Diary, 3 July-21 August 1862', ex3007-004, State Library of Victoria; *Argus*, 20 September 1862: 5-6. Howitt noted the Yandruwandha men who had looked after King were Toquarter, Pruriekow, Borokow, two brothers called Tohukurow (or Tchukulow), three men from the Mungallee family and three men from the Pitchery family.

<sup>1648</sup> 'Kulumarru Pinnaru' Yandruwandha = 'head man of the camp at Callyamurra Waterhole', Howitt’s 1862 Depot Camp. Tolcher, *Drought or deluge*, 41.

<sup>1649</sup> 'Mr Burke’s Party', *South Australian Register*, 20 September 1861: 2.

<sup>1650</sup> Wills, *Successful exploration*.

<sup>1651</sup> The grave was at Kadhibaerri, at (or close to) S27°18'58" E140°05'48" (GDA2020).

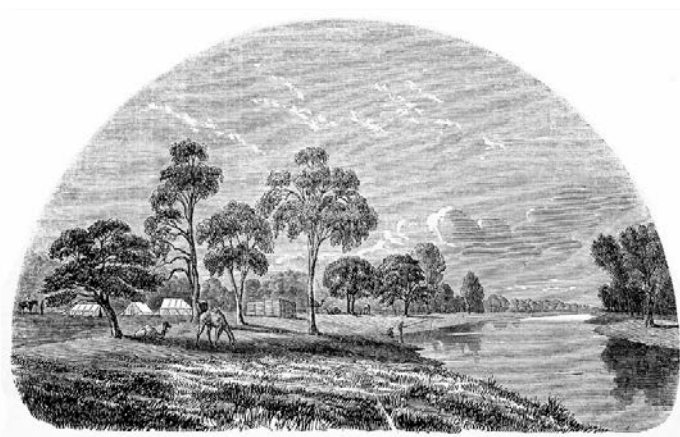


Figure 171: Alfred William Howitt, 'Cooper's Creek. From a sketch by Howitt'.  
*The Australian News for Home Readers*, 24 January 1863. IAN24/01/63/9, State Library of Victoria.

Sketch showing Howitt's 'Camp 25, Depot Waterhole' at Cullyamurra Waterhole/Kulyu-marru, which Howitt's 'VEP' occupied from 24 February to early October 1862.  
The Yandruwandha people called Howitt 'Kulumarru Pinnaru'.

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erroneously concluding all four men of Burke's Gulf Party had been killed by Aboriginal people.<sup>1652</sup> Other members of McKinlay's party interpreted the information differently.<sup>1653</sup> Later McKinlay had a "long yarn" with an Aboriginal man who had detailed knowledge of Burke's stay at Cooper Creek,<sup>1654</sup> prompting McKinlay to write:

So minutely does this native know all their movements [Burke and Wills'] that he has described to me all the waters they passed and others at which they camped, and waters that they remained at for some time, subsisting on a sort of vetch seed that the natives principally use here for food [ngardu].<sup>1655</sup>

When McKinlay found out that King had survived and been rescued, rather than acknowledging he had misinterpreted the information offered to him, he felt he had "been deceived" by the Aboriginal informants.<sup>1656</sup> Cahir's analysis of the role of Aboriginal messengers in McKinlay's expedition examines in greater detail McKinlay's reliance on knowledge acquired from Aboriginal sources.<sup>1657</sup>

The following year Howitt also met Bullingini, after which he thought:

none of the circumstantial account of the killing, of a white man, or a party of them, could have been given by Bullingani or Keri Keri by word of mouth, and, if given at all, must have been by signs or gestures.<sup>1658</sup>

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<sup>1652</sup> McKinlay, *McKinlay's diary of his journey*.

<sup>1653</sup> Davis and Westgarth, *Tracks of McKinlay*.

<sup>1654</sup> Davis and Westgarth, *Tracks of McKinlay*, 116-117; *South Australian Advertiser*, 23 November 1861: 2, 15 October 1862: 3, 25 October 1862: 4; *South Australian Register*, 15 October 1862: 2, 25 October 1862: 3.

<sup>1655</sup> McKinlay, *McKinlay's journal of exploration in the interior of Australia (Burke Relief Expedition)*. With three maps.

<sup>1656</sup> McKinlay, *McKinlay's diary of his journey*, 7.

<sup>1657</sup> Fred Cahir, 'We have received news from the blacks': Aboriginal messengers and their reports of the Burke relief expedition (1861-62) led by John McKinlay' in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 261-277.

<sup>1658</sup> Howitt, 'An episode in the history of Australian exploration'.





Figure 172: John Davis, 'Keri Keri, A Native of Kadhibaerri, Central Australia'.  
*Tracks of McKinlay and Party across Australia* (London: Sampson, Low & Son & Co., 1863), 154.

Bullingani accused Keri Keri of killing the man found by McKinlay in the grave at Kadhibaerri.

Howitt later explained the various hand signs he had observed and used when travelling through Yandruwandha tribal lands,<sup>1659</sup> and concluded:

The Lake Eyre tribes are able to communicate freely with each other by sign language but, from my knowledge of the practice, I have no hesitation in saying that it would be impossible for anyone unacquainted with the system of gesture language to have understood such an account as that attributed to these blacks ... One is therefore necessarily driven to the conclusion that McKinlay entirely misunderstood such signs and gestures as they may have used ...<sup>1660</sup>

The identity of the remains that McKinlay exhumed have never been positively identified, thereby supporting Howitt's observations.<sup>1661</sup> This incident also reinforces Clark's point that "historical records produced by non-Aboriginal people in search of accounts by Aboriginal people about non-Aboriginal people is particularly problematic".<sup>1662</sup>

<sup>1659</sup> Howitt, 'Notes on the Aborigines of Cooper's Creek', 308.

<sup>1660</sup> Howitt, 'An episode in the history of Australian exploration'.

<sup>1661</sup> There were a number of claims that Gray's remains had been found and dug up and sent to either Coongy station or Melbourne: T. Brown, 'Relics of the Burke and Wills Expedition', *Argus*, 24 July 1883: 10; 'An Explorer's Remains: The Late Mr. Charles Gray', *Barrier Miner*, 23 February 1917: 4; Lionel C.E. Gee, 'The Burke and Wills Story', *The Register*, 9 May 1928: 8. John Maddern, formerly of Swan Hill, claimed that Burke had killed Gray with a sword, John Maddern, 'Burke and Wills Expedition', *Advertiser*, 4 January 1916: 9. A number of groups visited Kadhibaerri (which McKinlay renamed Lake Massacre) to look for evidence, but it has never been satisfactorily demonstrated that the remains that McKinlay found in October 1861 were those of Gray: George Gordon McCrae, 'Where Gray Died: Burke & Wills' party', *The Telegraph*, 8 January 1916: 11; Morphet, 'Gray's grave at Lake Massacre'; Hambridge, 'McKinlay's Lake Massacre'; Wheeler, *Walk the timeless land*; Murdoch and Collier, 'The quest for Gray's Grave'; Collier, 'The Lake Massacre expedition'; Roger Collier, 'Cache, not carry' *Australian Geographic*, 1989; Collier, 'Gray's grave at Lake Massacre revisited'. It has more recently been suggested that the Expedition never visited Lake Massacre and that Gray is buried elsewhere: Corke, 'Riddles in the sand'; 'Where did they bury Charlie Gray?'

<sup>1662</sup> Ian D. Clark., *Sharing History: A Sense for all Australians of a Shared Ownership of their History* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1994), 31.



Figure 173: Batchelder & O'Neill, 'William Landsborough with two of his Aboriginal explorers, Jemmy and Jack Fisherman', 1862. H29452, State Library of Victoria.

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Landsborough took four Aboriginal guides to the Gulf, three of whom travelled with him on the return journey to Melbourne.<sup>1663</sup> Although they “took many opportunities of asking the blacks respecting the explorers they had seen”,<sup>1664</sup> Landsborough’s journal makes few references to meeting Aboriginal people and the party did not receive any intelligence on Burke’s whereabouts.<sup>1665</sup>

Walker also had Aboriginal guides, most of whom had served with him for many years, and they had more success getting information on Burke’s movements.<sup>1666</sup> Even though Walker found a VEE campsite near the Gulf, he struggled to follow Burke’s tracks through the long grass and across flooded plains. Nevertheless, he obtained accurate information on Burke’s movements after Trooper Rodney met a group of Gkuthaarn and Kukatj people at the Flinders River. Rodney:

made them understand we were tracking four men and one horse and that the men wore hats like him. They immediately pointed east-by-south then west-by-south-east.<sup>1667</sup>

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<sup>1663</sup> Landsborough’s guides were Jimmy Fisherman from the Brisbane region and Jackey Brown from the Wide Bay district, both of whom had just been released from jail, and Charlie from the Brisbane region and Jemmy from Deniliquin in NSW, both of whom were troopers in the Queensland Native Police. ‘Queensland Exploration Expedition’, *Courier*, 24 August 1861: 2.

<sup>1664</sup> William Landsborough, ‘Extracts of Dispatch from Mr. Landsborough to the Hon. the Colonial Secretary, Queensland, Bunnawannah, Darling River, 1 June 1862’, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1862-1863): 40-42.

<sup>1665</sup> See also: George Bourne, *Bourne’s journal of Landsborough’s expedition from Carpentaria in search of Burke and Wills* (Melbourne: Wilson & McKinnon, 1861). Peta Jeffries, ‘William Landsborough’s expedition of 1862 from Carpentaria to Victoria in search of Burke and Wills: exploration with native police troopers and Aboriginal guides’, in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 279-300.

<sup>1666</sup> Walker took seven Aboriginal guides. Six were from NSW, had served with Walker since 1849 and were troopers in the Queensland Native Police: Patrick (Paddy), Harry, Walter and Jingle from the Edward River, Rodney from the Murray River, and Coreen Jemmy from Billibung (near Holbrook, NSW). The seventh, Jemmy Cargara, was a Yagalingu man from the Comet River who went on the expedition as a supernumerary.

<sup>1667</sup> Walker, ‘Journal of the return journey, 16 December 1861-25 January 1862’, ex4001-037, Box 2088A/3c (Item 3), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria; *Argus*, 6 June 1862: 7, 11 November 1862: 7.



Figure 174: 'Aboriginal Warriors wearing body art for a ceremonial occasion at Innamincka', c.1920. B 32222/74, State Library of South Australia.

Two of the men in this photograph are Yandruwandha men, Danpidli and King Peter of Nappamerrie. Long Ted Tunmili is the Yawarrawarka man on the right of the photograph. One of these men was awarded a brass breastplate by Howitt in 1862 to recognise their efforts in caring for John King.

Later on, when Mayi-Kulan people were shown a picture of a camel, a young man tried to give information "relative to the four white men" they were enquiring about. However, he was stopped by the older, "sinister-looking men", much to the indignation of Walker's Aboriginal guides.<sup>1668</sup> A few days later, while on the Saxby River, an Aboriginal woman told Jemmy Cargara that "Burke had gone down the plains on the left bank", which was an accurate description of Burke's track down Sandy Creek to the Cloncurry River.<sup>1669</sup>

Other than the above accounts, interest in Aboriginal involvement in the fate of Burke and Wills was short lived. There was a brief discussion in 1875, initiated by the publication of a report from an Aboriginal woman that King had murdered Burke,<sup>1670</sup> after which interest dwindled.<sup>1671</sup> Boucher

<sup>1668</sup> Walker, 'Journal of the return journey', ex4001-037, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1669</sup> Walker, 'Journal of Mr Walker from the day he left Macintosh's Station on the Nogoia to that of his arrival at the Albert River, Gulf of Carpentaria'; 'Journal', MS 9996, State Library of Victoria; 'Journal 1861-1862', MS 23, National Library of Australia; 'Journal of the return journey', ex4001-037; 'Conclusion of Frederick Walker's journal, 25 January-29 April, 1862', ex4001-038, Box 2088A/3c (Item 4), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1670</sup> 'To Cooper's Creek and back', *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 3 April 1875: 19, 17 April 1875: 22 reported that "An old gin ... affirmed that Burke had not died from starvation, but had been shot by 'nother one white fellow". Responses to the above articles include replies from Howitt and party who knew King well, see: *Bendigo Advertiser*, 26 April 1875: 2; Weston Phillips, 'Letter to the editor', *Daily Telegraph*, 29 April 1875; *Gippsland Times*, 29 April 1875: 2; J.G., 'Burke and King', *Brisbane Courier*, 4 May 1875: 3; Alfred William Howitt, 'King and the Death of O'Hara Burke', *Daily Telegraph*, 22 May 1875; *Gippsland Times*, 25 May 1875: 2. Edwin James Welch, 'The charge against King', *Brisbane Courier*, 29 May 1875: 3.

<sup>1671</sup> Lewis argues strongly for the validity of the claim that King shot Burke, see: Darrell Lewis, 'Death on the Cooper: King's Secret?', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 31 (2007); 'How did Burke die?' in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 169-178. Those who oppose Lewis' hypothesis are sometimes accused of Euro-centric systemic racism in their attempts to cling to the accepted mainstream establishment narrative. To dismiss Lewis' argument is claimed to be a rejection of Aboriginal witness. However, although Lewis' argument has become more sophisticated with each telling, I still reject his claim – not as a result of the rejection of



Figure 175: 'Memento of the Burke and Wills expedition: William Brahe's tree, Cooper's Creek, ... The aboriginal crouching at the foot of the tree was a young tribesman at the time of the expedition, which he remembers clearly'.  
*Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser*, 11 October 1911: 33.

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argues that although Aboriginal involvement in the Expedition was readily acknowledged in the 1860s, Aboriginal people were subsequently erased from the story. He traces Howitt's development as an anthropologist, and shows that although Howitt became an expert on Aboriginal customs and manners,<sup>1672</sup> his regular lectures "about Burke and Wills began to marginalise the Aboriginal importance to the mission".<sup>1673</sup>

The fiftieth anniversary of the return of Burke and Wills to Depot Camp 65 was commemorated with the publication of a picture of an Aboriginal man crouching by the Dig Tree.<sup>1674</sup> The man, believed to be Baltie, a Yandruwandha man born in the 1840s, was said to clearly remember the Expedition.<sup>1675</sup> Although the newspaper carried a lengthy description of Depot Camp 65 and

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'other histories', be they oral traditions, women's history, or Aboriginal memory, nor do I reject the claim from the desire to maintain the established narrative. Lewis' argument is interesting, but an outlier, and is based on a single anonymous unverified source, and, much of his argument is affirmation of the consequent. Unless further supporting evidence is presented, the argument will remain an outlier.

<sup>1672</sup> Howitt, 'Notes on the Aborigines of Cooper's Creek'; *Anthropology in Australia* (Melbourne: Stilwell & Co., 1890); 'The Dieri and other kindred tribes of Central Australia', 30-104; *The native tribes of south-east Australia*.

<sup>1673</sup> Leigh Boucher, 'Alfred Howitt and the erasure of Aboriginal history' in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 223-239. See also: Leigh Boucher, 'Alfred Howitt: Anthropology, Governance and the Settler Colonial Order of Things' in Alison Holland and Barbara Brookes (eds.), *Rethinking the Racial Moment: Essays on the Colonial Encounter* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 97-123. For Howitt's lectures on Burke and Wills, see: Howitt, 'Explorations in Central Australia and the Burke and Wills Expedition'; 'Australia and the Burke and Wills Expedition', *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 11 July 1874: 1-3; 'Exploration in Central Australia', *Gippsland Times*, 13 May 1876: 3; 'The Burke and Wills Expedition: Reminiscences of the Rescuer', *Argus*, 15 April 1890: 7-8; 'An episode in the history of Australian exploration'; 'Personal reminiscences'.

<sup>1674</sup> *The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser*, 11 October 1911: 33

<sup>1675</sup> John Ware Conrick, 'An Interesting Old Aborigine', *Advertiser*, 19 July 1921: 6; 'A Link With the Past', *Chronicle*, 23 July 1921: 27 & 40; Tolcher, *Drought or deluge*, 155; *Seed of the coolibah*, 44-45; Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 7.

acknowledged the Yandruwandha had their own memories of the events of 1860-1861, there was no further information about Baltie's experiences.

In 1915, adventurer and traveller Francis Birtles restated Aboriginal involvement in the Burke and Wills story when he drove from Melbourne to the Gulf while making a documentary movie.<sup>1676</sup> His interviews with Aboriginal people revealed "new points of interest"<sup>1677</sup> about the Expedition, which "differed materially from the accepted versions"<sup>1678</sup> and would therefore rewrite history.<sup>1679</sup> Birtles claimed that:

by living among the blacks and conversing with them, he was able to follow the exact route taken by the explorers. Some of the blacks who saw Burke and Wills are alive to-day and have an undimmed recollection of the notable event.<sup>1680</sup>

He met "Several old aboriginals who rescued and lived with King" that were "still living amongst the Innamincka tribe".<sup>1681</sup> Birtles interviewed and photographed "the Rescuer of King", who was now an "old man, quite blind"<sup>1682</sup> and "King's old hut companion" who had supplied him with food for three months and who told him that "King was a 'good feller'".<sup>1683</sup> The "old chief of the Innamincka tribe", probably Danpidli Jimmy Marana, also told Birtles "a great deal about King"<sup>1684</sup> and Birtles was shown the "Grave of an aboriginal who gathered Nardoo for King".<sup>1685</sup> Later that year he made a second trip to Innamincka, this time accompanied by his brother Clive, who was also surprised at the information they unearthed. He wrote "We got a lot of strange history about the Burke and Wills expedition, from the old blacks, one old fellow named 'Wompie' having lived with King during his stay with the blacks here".<sup>1686</sup>

Although Birtles was not afraid of grabbing headlines in order to promote his movie, he said he was "convinced of the accuracy of my narrative, because the blacks all along the [Burke and Wills] track were questioned, and the same tale was told each time".<sup>1687</sup> The Yandruwandha-Yawarrawarrka people clearly (and correctly) remembered where Landa the camel became bogged, telling a surprised

<sup>1676</sup> Ben Goldsmith and Geoff Lealand, *Directory of world cinema* (Bristol: Intellect, 2010), 211.

<sup>1677</sup> *Argus*, 31 August 1915: 8.

<sup>1678</sup> *Australian Worker*, 23 September 1915: 5.

<sup>1679</sup> *The Queenslander*, 4 September 1915: 3.

<sup>1680</sup> *The Star*, 30 September 1915: 4.

<sup>1681</sup> Francis Birtles, 'Across Australia in the tracks of Burke and Wills', *The Mirror of Australia*, 30 October 1915: 7.

<sup>1682</sup> Francis Birtles, 'Historic Relics on Cooper's Creek', *Sydney Mail*, 27 February 1918: 17.

<sup>1683</sup> Francis Birtles, 'Across Australia in the track of the Burke and Wills Expedition', *The Australasian*, 18 December 1915: 30-31; 'Burke and Wills's Tracks', *Argus*, 30 September 1915: 6.

<sup>1684</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1685</sup> Francis Birtles, 'Burke and Wills Expedition', *The Queenslander*, 4 September 1915: 22.

<sup>1686</sup> Warren Brown, *Francis Birtles: Australian Adventurer*, (Sydney: Hachette Australia, 2011), 100.

<sup>1687</sup> *Barrier Miner*, 6 October 1915: 3.

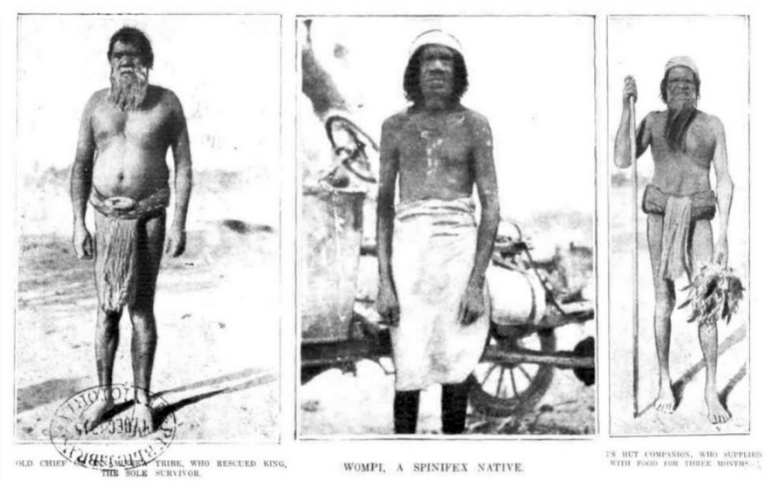


Figure 176: 'Across Australia in the track of the Burke and Wills Expedition by Francis Birtles', 1915.

Left: 'Old Chief of Innamincka tribe, who rescued King, sole survivor'.

Centre: 'Wompi, a spinifex native'.

Right: 'King's hut companion, who supplied him with food for three months'.

*The Australasian*, 18 December 1915: 30-31.

Birtles that the camel died on the Cooper and not on Strzelecki Creek as he had assumed.<sup>1688</sup> At Innamincka, Birtles witnessed a large corroboree and noted:

The blacks are fond of telling how they adopted King and waited on him most carefully. His old hut is still there and I saw the old chief on the Innamincka tribe, who remembers King well.<sup>1689</sup>

Birtles was told King "did not want to go" back to Melbourne with Howitt and that "On parting from them [the Yandruwandha], King cried, and the blacks were crying too".<sup>1690</sup>

Birtles' revisionist claims were challenged: some argued that his reports conflicted with Wills' journal or their own personal memories,<sup>1691</sup> others suggested the Aboriginal people in the Gulf were referring to A.C. Gregory's expedition rather than Burke's.<sup>1692</sup> Even though this was not Birtles' first travelogue featuring Aboriginal people in prominent roles,<sup>1693</sup> some people questioned the genre and

<sup>1688</sup> 'Burke and Wills: Tracking the explorers: Birtles unravels mystery', *Weekly Times*, 1 January 1916: 23. Landa the camel became bogged on the north bank of Minkayi Waterhole.

<sup>1689</sup> *Ballarat Star*, 30 September 1915: 4.

<sup>1690</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 August 1915: 6; *The Queenslander*, 4 September 1915: 3. Birtles journey was serialised in 25 weekly parts in *The Mirror of Australia* between 12 September 1915 and 26 February 1916. Birtles photograph (Figure 176) shows the Chief of the Innamincka tribe, Danpidli, Jim Marana. See also Figure 177 for a later photograph of Danpidli.

<sup>1691</sup> John Maddern, 'Burke and Wills: Mr Maddern's memories', *Advertiser*, 29 November 1915: 10.

<sup>1692</sup> Francis Birtles, 'Australia's Unknown: 8,000 miles through the never-never: The Hurley-Birtles Expedition', *The World's News*, 20 February 1915: 21; Edwin James Welch, 'A link with the past: North Queensland Black's memories: The First Overland Explorers', *The World's News*, 6 March 1915: 10; 'The Victorian Explorers: A new version of an old story: Told by the Blacks', *The World's News*, 25 December 1915: 10.

<sup>1693</sup> Ian Aitken, *Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), Vol. 1: 119.



Figure 177: Herbert Basedow, 'Interviewing Danbidlelli, Innamincka, South Australia', 1919. 1985.0060.3108, Dr Herbert Basedow collection, National Museum of Australia.

asked why Birtles believed “the decrepit old blacks on the Cooper”, suggesting that the whole thing was “a pure fiction” because “fallacious stories had been foisted upon him by the old aborigines”.<sup>1694</sup>

Four years later, while visiting the Cooper on an Aboriginal medical mission in 1919, Herbert Basedow also interviewed Danpidli Jimmy Marana,<sup>1695</sup> an old blind Yandruwandha man who was “an intelligent narrator [with] an attractive personality”.<sup>1696</sup> Danpidli told Basedow in 1861 he:

witnessed the arrival of the Burke & Wills expedition at the Cooper River and subsequently helped to succour the unfortunate men when they were dying from starvation.<sup>1697</sup>

Basedow noted the Yandruwandha had been sadly abused by white people and he “mourned the catastrophe which had overtaken them”, sadly acknowledging only a few remained to “repeat the proud legends” of their past.<sup>1698</sup>

A few years after Basedow’s visit, Baltie and Wompi died (see Figures 175 and 176). Wompi’s death was reported to have broken the “last link with the famous Burke and Wills expedition”.<sup>1699</sup>

Womby, an aborigine ... died at Nockatunga Station (S-W Q) in 1923. Right to the last he remembered events that took place on that disastrous journey. Womby joined the expedition at Menindie and reached the famous depot on Cooper’s Creek with Brahe, who left before Burke and Wills arrived.<sup>1700</sup>

<sup>1694</sup> T.F. Gill, 'Notes and Queries: The Burke and Wills Expedition', *The Register*, 30 November 1915: 7.

<sup>1695</sup> Danpidli was called Jimmy Marana by Anglo-Australians. Basedow recorded the Yandruwandha man’s name as Jim Mariner/Danbidleli. He belonged to the pitchery/pitjidi clan of Yinimingka waterhole, his dialect was Thayipilthirringuda, kamiri (sub-class) was Tiniwa. His grandson 'Mangili' Benny Kerwin was born at Innamincka and said that Danpidli, and another old fellow, Broлга 'Purralku', were the last two Yandruwandha tribal men left (both dying around 1921-1923). His people kept John King alive after Burke and Wills died. See also: *Chronicle*, 4 August 1923: 33.

<sup>1696</sup> Herbert Basedow, 'Papers, 1856-1932, 1941', ML MSS 161, State Library of New South Wales.

<sup>1697</sup> *Ibid.* See also: S. Martin, 'Stranded in Central Australia', *Observer*, 15 July 1916: 26.

<sup>1698</sup> Tolcher, *Drought or deluge*, 154. Tolcher also mentions 'Peter', a station Aborigine who had seen Burke and Wills pass by as a young man. Peter died in 1896, Tolcher, *Drought or Deluge*, 151.

<sup>1699</sup> 'Australiana: Abo champion', *The World's News*, 4 January 1947: 23.

<sup>1700</sup> *Ibid.*



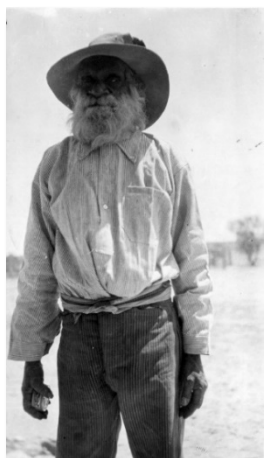


Figure 178: Left: 'Portrait of Billy Williams 'who remembers Burke, Wills, Grat & King whitefellas''. c.1925. B 69174, State Library of South Australia.

Figure 179: Right: 'Murtee Johhny'. Mike Steel, *Red Rover* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1973), 7.

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Others, however, claimed Danpidli, Brolga Purralku, Billy Williams and Merty George "could remember the Burke and Wills expedition that camped in the land of the Yantruwuntas".<sup>1701</sup>

John Campbell Warren later recalled when he was at Tinga Tingana station on Strzelecki Creek in the early 1890s,<sup>1702</sup> one of the Aboriginal women receiving Government rations, "old blind Maggie" had "nursed back to health King, the survivor of the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition".<sup>1703</sup> Yandruwandha oral tradition recalls that Maggie was known as 'Flourbag' as a result of her attachment to the gifts presented to her by Howitt in 1861. Maggie's daughter, Annie King<sup>1704</sup> (see Figure 180), "a full-blooded lubra"<sup>1705</sup> remembered:

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<sup>1701</sup> John Ware Conrick, 'An Interesting Old Aborigine', *Advertiser*, 19 July 1921: 6. Mike Steel, *Red Rover* (Adelaide: IPPS, 1973), 6-7.

<sup>1702</sup> John Campbell Warren, 'Chiefly on the Tinga Tingana Station', *Chronicle*, 31 December 1936: 42. See also: 'Warren Family papers, 1885-1949', MN1614; ACC 344A, 1135A, 5021A, 6435A, 8356A, Batty Library, State Library of Western Australia, particularly '1892 diary: Farm work', 6435A/7 and 'Draft of *The Four John Warrens: Recollections of Pioneering in Australia*', 344A.

<sup>1703</sup> When Tinga Tingana station was abandoned in 1895 due to the Federation drought, government rations stopped and Maggie starved to death, see: John Campbell Warren, 'The Four John Warrens: Rough Times in the Outback', *Chronicle*, 7 January 1937: 47. See also: Tolcher, *Drought or deluge*, 151; *Seed of the coolibah*, 83. The National Native Title Tribunal 'Registration Test' (Yandruwandha-Yawarrawarrka NNTT No. SC98/1, SG6024/98, 8 January 1998) listed "Maggie, who is the mother of Annie King" as an apical Yandruwandha-Yawarrawarrka ancestor, but she was not included as an apical ancestor in the 2015 final Determination.

<sup>1704</sup> Warren claimed that Maggie's daughter, Annie of Innamincka was Annie King, "a full-blooded Aboriginal woman" who was married to Juno. John Campbell Warren, 'How Maggie succored an early explorer', *Chronicle*, 28 January 1943: 23. Frank Clune also photographed Queen Ann of Innamincka in 1936, Frank Clune, 'The Moving Camera Clicks Along the Route from Sydney to the Darling: Fifth Series: In the Burke and Wills Country', *Sydney Mail*, 12 August 1936: 39.

<sup>1705</sup> John Campbell Warren, 'The Four John Warrens: Chiefly on the Tinga Tingana Station', *Chronicle*, 31 December 1936: 42.



Figure 180: 'Lunch break at Innamincka for Jack ... and his lubra, also de Pury's International car', 1925. B 69166, State Library of South Australia.

Mara Mundu Jack Parker (known locally as Jack the Ripper) and his wife Annie King.

as a young child the explorers coming to the district. She tells of the man who came along all empty in his 'tummy,' whom the natives fed on fish and damper made from their ground nardoo (seed), and taught to live in their native fashion.<sup>1706</sup>

George Farwell, when talking about Annie's husband, Mara Mundu,<sup>1707</sup> also mentioned:

There was also an old woman, somewhere in the neighbourhood, who claimed to remember seeing John King, last survivor of Burke's expedition, when he stumbled into an aboriginal camp after the others had died. It seemed a great feat either of recollection or of age. But, after all, the expedition had come to its tragic climax only eighty-four years before. It was just possible.<sup>1708</sup>

<sup>1706</sup> Reminiscences of Sister Hilda Foster, AIM nurse at the Elizabeth Symon Nursing Home at Innamincka 1940-1942, in Eleanor Barbour, 'Pages for Country Women', *Chronicle*, 27 August 1942: 40.

Patrick 'Patsy' Durack and John Costello met Aboriginal people in August-September 1863, and were astonished to find that "one spoke a few words of garbled English". The English speaker "was later found to have been in contact with King", Mary Durack, *Kings in Grass Castles* (London, Constable & Co. Ltd., 1959), 70. Durack did not mention how he came to the understanding that it was King who had passed on the few words of English, and neither Durack nor Costello travelled in Yandruwandha or Yawarrawarrka country. However, they did travel along the Bulloo River in Kulila country, and so may have met Aboriginal people who had had contact with Wright's Supply Party. See also Germaine Greer, 'Whitefella Jump Up: The Shortest Way to Nationhood', *Quarterly Essay*, Issue 11 (2003): 27; Tom Griffiths, 'Legend and Lament', *Southerly*, Vol. 64, No. 2, (2005): 118; 'Alice Duncan-Kemp (Pinningarra) and the history of the frontier' in Libby Robin, Chris Dickman and Mandy Martin (eds.), *Desert Channels: The Impulse to Conserve* (Melbourne: CSIRO Publishing, 2011), 26.

<sup>1707</sup> Basedow recorded Annie's tribal name as Mundurunganni. Her husband was Mara Mundu (Yandruwandha = 'one finger'), and was also known as Jack Parker and Jack the Ripper. National Native Title Tribunal, 'Determination' (Yandruwandha-Yawarrawarrka NNTT No. SCD2015/003, 16 December 2015). See also: 'Jack the Ripper, blacktracker at Innamincka with his wife, Annie', *Chronicle*, 27 August 1942: 42.

<sup>1708</sup> George Farwell, *Ghost towns of Australia* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1965), 77. See also: George Farwell, 'Innamincka: A drama of loneliness', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 July 1947: 8.

## 6.6 Ngardu and other Aboriginal foodstuffs

When newspapers published the Expedition's journals there were numerous references to ngardu, the "seed on which they [Burke and Wills] managed to exist so long".<sup>1709</sup> Colonists had already been introduced to ngardu as an Aboriginal foodstuff earlier that year when Lyons and Macpherson revealed they had survived at Torowoto on cakes made from the "manda seed".<sup>1710</sup> Ngardu excited great interest, with botanists puzzling over which plant the seed came from<sup>1711</sup> and colonists calling for samples of the seed to be exhibited to the public.<sup>1712</sup>

Despite this preoccupation with ngardu, it was not the only Aboriginal food or bush tucker that the Expedition ate. At Kukirrkra there was wild spinach<sup>1713</sup> which Wills thought "was very nice and Mr Burke and I both agreed that it was as good if not better than common spinach".<sup>1714</sup> In Sturt Stony Desert they found "heaps of grass lying about the plains ... with three inches of ear and resembles a wild oat"<sup>1715</sup> On the black soil plains north of the Diamantina they found "a bush bearing fruit somewhat resembling the gooseberry,"<sup>1716</sup> and further north as they crossed the Tropic they encountered a tree whose "leaf resembles that of a gooseberry"<sup>1717</sup> ... The pea which it bears we ate, and found it palatable".<sup>1718</sup> In the De Little Range were "native orange trees, bearing a fruit

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<sup>1709</sup> *Age*, 4 November 1861: 5-6. *Argus*, 4 November 1861: 5.

<sup>1710</sup> *Argus*, 14 March 1861: 5.

<sup>1711</sup> William Elliot, *The Star*, 15 November 1861: 1; Ferdinand Mueller, 'On the systematic position of the Nardoo plant and the physiological characteristics of its fruit', *Transactions and proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria: During the years 1861 to 1864*, Vol. 6 (1865): 137-147; Robert Brough Smyth, *The Aborigines of Victoria: with notes relating to the habits of the natives of other parts of Australia and Tasmania*, 2 vols. (Melbourne: John Ferres, 1878), Vol. 1: 216; Frederick Manson Bailey, 'Medicinal plants of Queensland', *Proceedings of the Linnaean Society of New South Wales*, Vol. 5, Part 1 (1880): 1-27; E.H. Lees, 'What is Nardoo?', *The Victorian Naturalist*, Vol. 31, Issue 1, No. 365, 7 May (1914): 133-135; Baldwin Spencer, 'What is Nardoo', *The Victorian Naturalist*, Vol. 35, Issue 1, No. 413, 9 May (1918): 8-15; Philip A. Clarke, *Aboriginal plant collectors: botanists and Australian aboriginal people in the nineteenth century* (Kenthurst, NSW: Rosenberg Publishing, 2008), 128-130.

<sup>1712</sup> ONE WHO WISHES TO SEE IT, 'Nardoo', *Argus*, 6 December 1861: 7. Nardoo sporocarps were exhibited in many places as a result of their connection with Burke and Wills, for some examples see: *Mount Alexander Mail*, 15 November 1861: 5; *South Australian Advertiser*, 11 December 1861: 2; *Empire*, 14 December 1861: 4; *Launceston Examiner*, 26 December 1861: 2. Nardoo flour was exhibited in the Victorian section of The International Exhibition of 1862 (The 'Great London Exposition', May-November 1862, South Kensington, London), *Argus*, 11 July 1862: 7.

<sup>1713</sup> Wills, 'Field Book No. 2: Bilbarka to Torowoto', ex2008-012, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1714</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1715</sup> Smith, 'John King's story, Part I'.

<sup>1716</sup> Smith, 'John King's story, Part II'.

<sup>1717</sup> King's "gooseberry" was either Conkerberry, *Carissa spinarum*, or Native gooseberry, *Physalis minima*.

<sup>1718</sup> Smith, 'John King's story, Part II'.

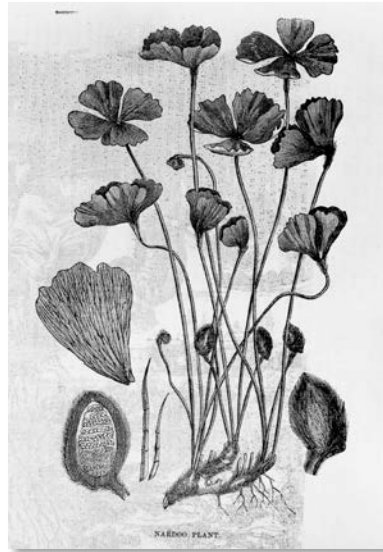


Figure 181: Edgar Ray, 'Nardoo plant', 1862.

*Illustrated Australian Mail*, 22 December 1862. IAM22/12/62/213, State Library of Victoria.

resembling the Indian mango".<sup>1719</sup> On the Corella River were ripening "date palms"<sup>1720</sup> and at the Gulf they enjoyed eating yams.<sup>1721</sup> On the return journey portulaca<sup>1722</sup> was abundant: King recalled they ate "as much portulac as we chose to gather"<sup>1723</sup> and Wills thought it was "an excellent vegetable" which secured their return to Depot Camp 65.<sup>1724</sup> Upon their return to the Cooper, Wills tried the narcotic herb 'bedgery' (pituri)<sup>1725</sup> as well as:

the large kind of bean which the blacks call padlu;<sup>1726</sup> they boil easily, and when shelled are very sweet, much resembling in taste the French chestnut. They are to be found in large quantities nearly everywhere.<sup>1727</sup>

<sup>1719</sup> *Ibid.* Clarke identifies these yams as long yam (a.k.a. pencil yam) *Dioscorea transversa*, Philip A. Clarke, *Discovering Aboriginal plant use: the journeys of an Australian anthropologist* (Kenthurst, NSW: Rosenberg Publishing, 2014), 115.

<sup>1720</sup> Wills, 'Journey from Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria. Mueller thought the date palms were "Livistonas". *Livistona benthamii*, *Livistona humilis* and *Livistona rigida* grow at the Gulf of Carpentaria.

<sup>1721</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 9: Returning from Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria; Smith, 'John King's story, Part II'.

<sup>1722</sup> Purslane = *Portulaca oleracea*.

<sup>1723</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 918 to King.

<sup>1724</sup> William John Wills, 'Letter to Dr Wills, dated Cooper's Creek, 27 June 1861', Correspondence and press cuttings: 1839-1861, MS 9504, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1725</sup> Wills' "bedgery" and "pedgery" is 'pitchery' / 'pituri' (Yandruwandha = 'pitjidi'), *Duboisia hopwoodii*.

<sup>1726</sup> Wills' "padlu" (Yandruwandha = 'mudlu'), bean tree, a Bauhinia, most likely *Lysiphyllum gilvum*, see: Gavan Breen, *Innaminka words: Yandruwandha dictionary and stories* (Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 2004). Clarke, however, claims "The identity of 'padlu' as a food plant is a mystery" and suggests Wills was referring to the Diyari word 'paldru' which means 'shrub, pods, burst open', i.e. pop saltbush (*Atriplex holocarpa*), Clarke, *Aboriginal plant collectors*, 125 and Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 73.

<sup>1727</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.



Figure 182: The author harvesting portulaca to eat near Burke and Wills' Camp 37R 'Native Dog Camp' in 2008. On 25 March 1861 Wills noted portulaca was "abundant in the vicinity".  
© 2008 Dave Phoenix.

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In addition to this array of seeds, fruits and vegetables, the men also ate a variety of animals. At Karriapundi<sup>1728</sup> they killed two snakes: the Aboriginal guides were wary of handling the venomous one, but a five-foot-long yellow snake Wills thought "was not bad eating".<sup>1729</sup> At Koonchera they found "plenty of grubs in the trees, which are choice eating when roasted".<sup>1730</sup> King enjoyed his Christmas lunch of roasted grubs "but Mr Burke refused to partake of them".<sup>1731</sup> They shot some ducks, crows and hawks,<sup>1732</sup> but were unsuccessful in hunting kangaroos, even though they saw plenty of them.<sup>1733</sup> At the Corella River they killed "a large snake and several goannas"<sup>1734</sup> and further north on the Flinders River they shot a pheasant coucal,<sup>1735</sup> which Wills was disappointed to find was "all feathers and claws".<sup>1736</sup> The five-kilogram black-headed python<sup>1737</sup> they killed on the Dugald River proved a more satisfying meal, but their satiety was short-lived as Burke suffered from severe dysentery which made him "giddy and unable to keep his seat".<sup>1738</sup> The men also ate fish on several occasions during their trip to the Gulf, and once back at the Cooper they received gifts of mussels,<sup>1739</sup> rats<sup>1740</sup> and three different species of fish from the Yandruwandha-Yawarrawarrka people.<sup>1741</sup> So

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<sup>1728</sup> Caryapundy Swamp, Camp 49, 3 November 1860, c.S29°06'56" E142°33' (GDA2020).

<sup>1729</sup> Wills, 'Field Notes No. 2: Torowoto to Cooper's Creek', ex2008-014, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1730</sup> Smith, 'John King's story, Part I'.

<sup>1731</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1732</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 798 to King.

<sup>1733</sup> Smith, 'John King's story, Part II'.

<sup>1734</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1735</sup> Pheasant coucal = *Centropus phasianinus*.

<sup>1736</sup> Wills, 'Journey from Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1737</sup> Black-headed python = *Aspidites melanocephalus*.

<sup>1738</sup> Wills, 'Journey from Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1739</sup> Freshwater mussels, Yandruwandha 'thuka' and 'kudi' = *Velesunio* spp.

<sup>1740</sup> Long-haired rats, a.k.a. plague rats, (Yandruwandha = 'mayikurru'), *Rattus villosissimus*.

<sup>1741</sup> Wills' "cupi" (Yandruwandha = 'kapi'), small catfish of the family *Plotosidae*.

Wills' "peru" (Yandruwandha = 'parru' or 'pitjanka'), bony-bream, *Flavialoas richardsoni*.

Wills' "cawitchi" (Yandruwandha = 'thawirritji' or 'thawurritji'), black bream, *Hephaestus fuliginosus*.

although ngardu became the centre of Anglo-Australian attention in 1861, it was just one of a range of Aboriginal foodstuffs consumed by the explorers, and they had dined with several Aboriginal groups before their ngardu meals with the Yandruwandha in May and June 1861.

Recently there has been renewed interest in ngardu as it has been suggested that Burke and Wills poisoned themselves by not preparing the sporocarps correctly. This implies that the explorers might have survived if they followed Aboriginal preparation methods.<sup>1742</sup> Did ngardu kill Burke and Wills?

Ngardu is an aquatic fern and there are 65 species in the *Marsileaceae* family, six of which are Australian natives. Burke and Wills ate *Marsilea drummondii*. The spores of the ngardu plant are contained in a small, hard sporocarp, which Aboriginal people pounded into flour and then mixed with water to form dough which was then cooked in the ashes to form a cake, or mixed with a larger quantity of water and drunk as a thin porridge or gruel.

Burke, Wills and King got their first taste of ngardu “cake” on 2 May 1861, ten days after leaving Depot Camp 65 for Mount Hopeless.<sup>1743</sup> Five days later they were given “lumps of bread, which they [the Yandruwandha] call nardu”.<sup>1744</sup> When the explorers asked “how the nardoo grew” they were generously presented with more lumps of ngardu bread, but they “could not explain that they wished to be shown how to find the seed themselves”.<sup>1745</sup> This is not surprising, as preparing nardoo was women’s work, and as neither Burke nor Wills were initiated, or had been assigned a totem group or skin name, the Yandruwandha would have treated them as guests and given them prepared ngardu to eat, but would not have shown them the intricacies of how the women harvested, winnowed, cleaned and prepared the sporocarps. The Yandruwandha then moved on, leaving the explorers alone, and when Wills “went out to look for the Nardu seed for making bread” he was unable “to find a single tree of it”.<sup>1746</sup> Wills must have seen ngardu sporocarps in the Yandruwandha camp because he knew what to look for, but was unsuccessful in his search because he did not know where to look. It was 17 May before the explorers realised how ngardu grew, and four days later they began to collect the sporocarps to supplement their dwindling provisions. The men found collecting ngardu “a slower and more troublesome process than could be desired”, presumably because they were picking individual sporocarps rather than sweeping them up with canegrass brooms as the Yandruwandha women did.<sup>1747</sup> Because they did not have a grinding stone they boiled the sporocarps

<sup>1742</sup> Kevin Handreck, 'If You Must Eat Nardoo Sporocarps, Prepare them in the Aboriginal Way!', *SGAP Journal: the newsletter of the South Australian Region of SGAP*, The Australian Native Plant Society, (February 1996); Peter Macinnis, *Australian Backyard Explorer* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2009), 35.

<sup>1743</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1744</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1745</sup> John King, 'Transcription of 'Narrative of John King', ex2009-007, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1746</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1747</sup> *Ibid.*

for a few days before finding "a pounding stone" at a deserted gunyah.<sup>1748</sup> Even then, they found pounding "was such slow work that we were compelled to use half flour and half nardoo".<sup>1749</sup> Once the flour ran out, ngardu became their primary food source – the "staff of life".<sup>1750</sup> Between 27 May and 6 June there were several interactions with Yandruwandha people, and Wills was given ngardu "cake" and ngardu "porridge", which he described as "raw Nardu flour mixed to a thin paste".<sup>1751</sup> The Yandruwandha moved camp on 6 June and Burke and Wills did not meet any more Aboriginal people before they died in early July.

Wills' final diary entries explained they were collecting and eating 600-750 grams<sup>1752</sup> of ngardu each a day and that from the middle of June it had been their only source of food.<sup>1753</sup> Although they craved fat and sugar Wills did not feel hungry, so "starvation on nardu is by no means very unpleasant".<sup>1754</sup> However, he was perplexed by his diet and wrote:

I cannot understand this Nardu at all it certainly will not agree with me in any form ... the stools it causes are enormous and seem greatly to exceed the quantity of bread consumed and is very slightly altered in appearance from what it was when eaten.<sup>1755</sup>

When it came to determining the cause of death, Wills' self-diagnosis of starvation "from the want of nutriment"<sup>1756</sup> was considered by the Commission. Beckler told the Commissioners that scurvy, dysentery and exhaustion had contributed to the deaths of four other members of the VEE,<sup>1757</sup> although he suspected the cause was some deficiency in their diet.<sup>1758</sup> After weighing up the evidence, the Commissioners simply reported Burke and Wills died from "fatigue and severe privation".<sup>1759</sup> The public assumed that the explorers had died of starvation, exhaustion, dysentery and/or scurvy caused by the privations consequent with their exertions.

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<sup>1748</sup> John King, 'Transcription of 'Narrative of John King'', ex2009-007, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1749</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1750</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1751</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1752</sup> In 1985, Carl Raynor, a chemist in the Melbourne Health Science Branch of the Victorian State Chemistry Laboratory analysed a small sample of ngardu. He found it had a very low energy value (128 Kcal per 100 gram), and therefore estimated that Burke and Wills would have needed to consume around 2.2 kilograms of nardoo each per day in order to satisfy their energy requirements. David G. Corke, pers. comm., 2010.

<sup>1753</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1754</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1755</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1756</sup> William John Wills, 'Letter to Dr Wills, dated Cooper's Creek, 27 June 1861', Correspondence and press cuttings: 1839-1861, MS 9504, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1757</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Questions 1907-1909 to Hermann Beckler

<sup>1758</sup> Beckler, 'Medical Report, 22 July 1861', ex2004-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1759</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*.



In 1982 Bergin posited that Burke and Wills died of beriberi,<sup>1760</sup> a disease caused by a lack of vitamin B<sub>1</sub> (thiamine).<sup>1761</sup> He demonstrated that the explorer's diet was deficient in vitamin B<sub>1</sub>, but he also suggested there were similarities between Burke and Wills' deaths and a 1974 mass-poisoning of sheep<sup>1762</sup> which had been caused by thiaminase I, an enzyme found in ngardu which breaks down vitamin B<sub>1</sub> in the body making it ineffective.<sup>1763</sup> Bergin stated the Yandruwandha avoided the effects of thiaminase I in ngardu by cooking ngardu dough to make bread, damper or cakes.<sup>1764</sup> However because "Burke's earlier attitude to the Aborigines had prevented him from observing their methods of collection or preparation [of ngardu]", Bergin concluded the explorers did not cook ngardu into bread, but ate it raw as porridge, which was effectively a toxic paste containing thiaminase I.<sup>1765</sup>

In 1994 Sydney biochemists, Earl and McCleary,<sup>1766</sup> also suggested that the explorers died of beriberi exacerbated by the unintentional consumption of thiaminase I from incorrectly prepared ngardu.<sup>1767</sup> Earl and McCleary were not aware of Bergin's thesis and arrived at the conclusion independently. McCleary had studied stock poisonings while at the NSW Department of Agriculture and Earl, a self-confessed 'history buff', stated they "first hit on a possible link between the nardoo diet and the Burke and Wills tragedy" around 1979.<sup>1768</sup> Regardless of the process by which they formulated their hypothesis, the biochemists argued from a very different standpoint to Bergin. Because ngardu is heat adapted,<sup>1769</sup> they reasoned that cooking ngardu bread in the coals would have little effect on thiaminase I.<sup>1770</sup> However "dilution with water rapidly diminishes the enzyme's activity" so the Yandruwandha method of grinding sporocarps with water into a thin paste (while

<sup>1760</sup> 'Beriberi' (Singhalese) meaning 'I can't, I can't', a reflection of the crippling effect the disease has on its victims. Jacqueline L. Longe and Diedre S. Blanchfield, *Gale Encyclopedia of Medicine* (Detroit MI.: Gale Group, 2006).

<sup>1761</sup> Bergin, 'Courage and corruption', Chapter 2: The Cause of Death.

<sup>1762</sup> The 1974 mass poisoning was ovine polio-encephalomalacia. H.J. Bakker, J. Dickson, P. Steele & M.C. Nottle, 'Experimental Induction of Ovine Polioencephalomalacia', *Veterinary Record* 107, No. 20 (1980): 464-466. See also: Selwyn Lawrence Everist, *Poisonous Plants of Australia* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1974), 546.

<sup>1763</sup> Bergin, 'Courage and corruption', 49.

<sup>1764</sup> *Ibid.*: 50.

<sup>1765</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1766</sup> Dr John W. Earl of the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children, Sydney and Dr Barry V. McCleary, CEO of Megazyme Pty Ltd, Sydney. Prior to 1988, McCleary worked for the NSW Department of Agriculture where he studied stock poisoning.

<sup>1767</sup> Earl and McCleary, 'Poisoned expedition', 683-684.

<sup>1768</sup> David Mussared, 'Scientists solve Burke and Wills mystery: they poisoned themselves', *Canberra Times*, 22 April 1994: 3.

<sup>1769</sup> "The nardoo fern is well adapted to the extreme temperatures of inland Australia and its thiaminase enzyme is very resistant to heat" Barry V. McCleary and Bruce F. Chick, 'The purification and properties of a thiaminase I enzyme from Nardoo (*Marsilea drummondii*)', *Phytochemistry*, Vol. 16 (1977): 207-213.

<sup>1770</sup> "Nardoo spores will still germinate from sporangia that have been boiled in water for 15 minutes" Mueller, 'Systematic poisoning of the Nardoo plant'.



Figure 183: Nardoo plants with sporocarps on a grinding stone, Cooper Creek.  
© 2007 Dave Phoenix.

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simultaneously preventing contamination by extraneous sources of endogenous co-substrates<sup>1771</sup>) would have reduced the enzyme's effectiveness.<sup>1772</sup> They thought that despite being shown ngardu porridge by the Yandruwandha, Burke and Wills prepared the sporocarps "in the traditional European way for grains by grinding and cooking".<sup>1773</sup> As they did not dilute the thiaminase I with sufficient water, it remained toxic. Earl and McCleary also concluded that Burke and Wills died of beriberi.

So while Bergin and Earl and McCleary argue that Burke and Wills died from beriberi caused by, or at least exacerbated by, the consumption of ngardu which had not been prepared in the manner adopted by the Yandruwandha people, they present a logical fallacy by arguing that the Yandruwandha used only one method to prepare ngardu, while Burke and Wills, as a consequence of their ignorance and cultural arrogance, prepared ngardu in a different manner, with each of the parties arguing from an opposing position. Bergin argues that the Yandruwandha cooked ngardu to make bread, while Burke and Wills drank raw ngardu porridge. Earl and McCleary argue that cooking ngardu does not reduce its toxicity and the Yandruwandha leached the toxins from ground ngardu flour using water. They suppose that Burke and Wills ate cooked ngardu bread and that:

Wills failed to appreciate the need for leaching of nardoo flour with water, even though the technique had been demonstrated to him by an Aborigine ... [who] fetched a large bowl of the raw nardoo flour mixed to a thin paste.<sup>1774</sup>

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<sup>1771</sup> "The thiaminase I of nardoo requires endogenous co-substrates such as proline, hydroxyproline or adenine. The Yandruwandha limited this action by ensuring ngardu paste did not come into contact with organic material like leaves or bark" Earl and McCleary, 'Poisoned expedition'.

<sup>1772</sup> Earl and McCleary, 'Poisoned expedition'.

<sup>1773</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1774</sup> *Ibid.*

Bergin overemphasises the toxicity of ngardu when he states ngardu has been found to contain up to 100 times the level of thiaminase I found in other toxic plants like bracken.<sup>1775</sup> He fails to mention that these high levels of toxicity occur in the leaves of the plant, which were not consumed by the explorers. In addition, Bergin argues that thiaminase I levels are highest in plants which have been the subject of intensive grazing, and as Brahe's Depot Party had been at Depot Camp 65 for six months, their camels and horses would have grazed the ngardu, thereby increasing its toxicity.<sup>1776</sup> However Burke and Wills collected their ngardu more than 50 kilometres downstream of Depot Camp 65 and did not collect any ngardu from the areas where Brahe's animals grazed. Bergin also states that ngardu is most toxic between February and May; but does not explain whether these dates are relevant to ngardu growth at Cooper Creek, or whether the reference was for the Gwydir Valley, where mass sheep poisonings occurred during these months.<sup>1777</sup> Bergin claims Burke and Wills ate the ngardu in April and May, during the times of highest toxicity, yet the explorer's diaries show they did not begin preparing ngardu until 20 May, and most of their consumption of the plant was in the supposedly less toxic month of June.

Clearly there is a disconnect here between the two hypotheses, which has led to further confusion. Murgatroyd conflated both arguments and thought "The Yandruwandha destroyed the thiaminase by washing *and* cooking their ngardu"<sup>1778</sup> whereas "Burke and Wills [performed neither of these processes and] ground it without sluicing it with water and ... consumed it raw".<sup>1779</sup> ABC Science differed from Murgatroyd and suggested Burke and Wills prepared ngardu by "grinding it up and mixing it with water to make a thin paste, as they had seen the local people do".<sup>1780</sup>

There are obviously different ideas about how Aboriginal people prepared ngardu for consumption. Ethnobotanical reports on the use of ngardu are confusing. Horne and Aiston noted how the sporocarps were "collected by sweeping them up into a pirrha or wooden bowl with a bunch of twigs".<sup>1781</sup> Aston noted the sporocarps were ground then mixed with water, although she did not mention whether cooking was involved.<sup>1782</sup> Cunningham *et al* noted the ground sporocarps were

<sup>1775</sup> Bergin, 'Courage and corruption', 49-50.

<sup>1776</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1777</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1778</sup> Murgatroyd, *Dig Tree* (2012), 262. Author's emphasis.

<sup>1779</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>1780</sup> Abbie Thomas, 'Nardoo, the desert fern', *ABC Science: In Depth Nature Features: Environment and Nature*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 8 March 2007.  
[abc.net.au/science/articles/2007/03/08/2041341.htm](http://abc.net.au/science/articles/2007/03/08/2041341.htm)

<sup>1781</sup> George Horne and George 'Poddy' Aiston, *Savage life in Central Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1924), 52-53.

<sup>1782</sup> Helen I. Aston, *Aquatic plants of Australia: a guide to the identification of the aquatic ferns and flowering plants of Australia, both native and naturalized* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1973), 37-39.

formed into an edible dough, but again did not mention whether cooking was involved.<sup>1783</sup> Johnston and Cleland noted the pounded sporocarps were "mixed with water to make a dough" before being "cooked and eaten".<sup>1784</sup> Bancroft commented on the efficiency with which the women pounded the sporocarps, and then noted "the flour is mixed with water, kneaded to a dough, and baked in the ashes."<sup>1785</sup> The Australian National Botanical Gardens noted "the spores swell when moistened and were made into damper" and added that after grinding "the spores were separated from the outer cases".<sup>1786</sup> Dunbar, however, did not think much effort was made "to winnow the Seed other than removing the large husks".<sup>1787</sup> Beveridge agreed, stating:

they do not possess any means whereby the husks can be separated from the meal, it is therefore used as it leaves the mill. They seldom convert the meal into bread, but when they do, it is formed into thin cakes and baked on the hot coals.<sup>1788</sup>

Phillip A. Clarke suggests Burke ate unripe green ngardu sporocarps,<sup>1789</sup> while author Tim Bowden believes "The Aborigines ... failed to get through [to Burke and Wills] that they must wait till the seeds turn reddish brown, otherwise the nardoo was poisonous".<sup>1790</sup> Both these suggestions are disproved by Wills' description of the ngardu flat at Breerily where they harvested their sporocarps. Wills noted he "Never saw such an abundance of the seed before ... The ground in some parts was quite black with it".<sup>1791</sup> Black sporocarps covering the ground indicate the ngardu plant was already long dead, the leaves having desiccated and blown away leaving just the dry, blackened sporocarps. Others have suggested the correct preparation "involves soaking".<sup>1792</sup> Immersion in water simply allows the sporocarps to swell up, split open, and release the jellied mass of sporangia inside.

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<sup>1783</sup> G.M. Cunningham, W.E. Mulham, P.E. Milthorpe and J.H. Leigh, *Plants of Western New South Wales* (Sydney: Soil Conservation Service of New South Wales, 1981), 32.

<sup>1784</sup> T.H. Johnston and John Burton Cleland, 'Native names and uses of plants in the northeastern corner of South Australia', *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (1943): 152.

<sup>1785</sup> Thomas Lane Bancroft, 'Food of the Aborigines of Central Australia', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Queensland*, Vol. 1 (1884): 104-106. See also: Thomas Lane Bancroft, 'On the habit and use of nardoo (*Marsilea drummondii* A.Br.) together with some observations on the influence of water plants in retarding evaporation', *Proceedings of the Linnaean Society of New South Wales*, Vol. 8 (1893): 215-217.

<sup>1786</sup> ANBG Education Services, *Aboriginal Plant Use in south-eastern Australia* (Canberra: Australian National Botanic Gardens, 2004).

<sup>1787</sup> G.K. Dunbar, 'Notes on the Ngemba Tribe, Western N.S.W.', *Mankind*, Vol. 3 (1948): 172-180.

<sup>1788</sup> Peter Beveridge, *The Aborigines of Victoria and the Riverina* (Melbourne: M.L. Hutchinson, 1889), 158-159.

<sup>1789</sup> Cameron Wilson, 'Burke and Wills' fatal error', *Bush Telegraph*, ABC Radio National, 7 August 2013.

<sup>1790</sup> Tim Bowden, 'In the Footsteps of Explorers', *Australian Caravan + RV Magazine*, October-November 2010.

<sup>1791</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1792</sup> Patricia Gardner, 'Nardoo, an Australian Icon', 15 May 2008.

[toowoombaplants2008.blogspot.com.au/2008/05/nardoo-australian-icon.html](http://toowoombaplants2008.blogspot.com.au/2008/05/nardoo-australian-icon.html)



Figure 184: 'Crushing nardoo with a koolkie [pounding stone] and a piddinie [grinding stone]'. George Horne and George Aiston, *Savage life in Central Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1924), Fig. 40.

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Frances McCrae Cobham observed Aboriginal people collecting ngardu near Swan Hill:

They take the fruits [sporocarps] ... and roast them in the ashes of their fires. When roasted, they are put into a shallow wooden vessel ... and the ashes are blown away by the breath; they are then pounded on a stone, and again placed in the wooden vessel, shaken, and the husks blown away, until only the flour remains, which is mixed with water, and made into rolls about eighteen inches in length. These rolls are baked and eaten.<sup>1793</sup>

Tolcher provided the most detailed description of how the Yandruwandha women collected and prepared ngardu, although this was not based on personal observation.

The women gathered the [ngardu] spore cases, moving in groups across the flats, sweeping the ground with canegrass brooms. They removed the rubbish by winnowing and yandying – rocking the seeds in a pitchi<sup>1794</sup> to bring the light larger material to the top for removal, then continuing the process with a very skilful rotating, shaking and tipping movement which left only the seeds in the pitchi. Back in camp the seeds were roasted in the ashes and again cleaned before being pounded with a small round stone<sup>1795</sup> on the flat lower grindstone,<sup>1796</sup> a few seeds being dropped at a time by the left hand while the right hand wielded the pounder. The pitchi was then rocked again to remove the husks, leaving a flour resembling curry powder in appearance ... This nardoo flour was made into a cake and baked or eaten as a thin paste using a mussel shell<sup>1797</sup> as a spoon.<sup>1798</sup>

These two accounts describe roasting the sporocarps in the ashes prior to pounding them into flour, something not alluded to by other ethnobotanical reports. Blainey and the ANBG repeat this claim, with Blainey noting that “aboriginals ... sometimes roasted the spore cases before they began the

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<sup>1793</sup> Smyth, *Aborigines of Victoria*, 216-217.

<sup>1794</sup> "pitchi" (Yandruwandha = 'pitjingumburu'), coolamon, a medium sized wooden dish.

<sup>1795</sup> Pounder or pounding stone (Yandruwandha = 'ngaduparndrini').

<sup>1796</sup> Grindstone (Yandruwandha = 'thayi', although a grindstone specifically for grinding ngardu is 'ngaduparndrini').

<sup>1797</sup> Tolcher's "kooi" ('kudi' in the Biraliba or Piladapa dialect (a.k.a. 'Strzelecki Yandruwandha')), meaning 'mussel', 'mussel shell', or 'mussel shell spoon'. Breen list the word for mussel shell spoon as 'thuka' in the Thayipilthirringuda Yandruwandha dialect. The phrase to eat with a mussel shell is 'kathi thukali'.

<sup>1798</sup> Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah*, 18.



Figure 185: 'Nardoo grinding stones used by Burke, Wills and King at Cooper's Creek', 1861.  
H 5103, LTRE 16, State Library of Victoria.

These two ngardu grinding stones were allegedly used by Burke and Wills and brought back from Cooper Creek by Howitt, c.1861-1862. The stones became part of the National Herbarium of Victoria collection and were exhibited at the 1934 Victorian Centenary Historical Exhibition at the Victorian Public Library.

They were accessioned into the library's collection after the exhibition, see: McCann and Joyce, *The scientific legacy*, 263; Tim Bonyhady and National Library of Australia, *Burke and Wills: From Melbourne to myth* [Exhibition], (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2002), 31; Carolyn Webb, 'Exploring the myth', *Age*, 26 August 2002. Coincidentally, in 1930 J.H. Kline of Young, NSW, acquired two nardoo grinding stones which had allegedly been used by Burke and Wills at Cooper Creek, see: 'Relics of Burke and Wills: In Young resident's possession: how he discovered them', *Glen Innes Examiner*, 16 September 1930: 2. The RSV did inspect two stones "similar to those used by the natives of the interior for grinding nardoo", which had been collected by Ludwig Becker and the grinding stones were exhibited at an ordinary meeting of the RSV on 11 November 1861, *Argus*, 12 November 1861: 5. RSV member, Bob Foster, recently presented a grinding stone to the RSV which he claimed to have found at Marrpu in the 1960s. If the location is correct this grinding stone would have been near Pitchery's camp, Kate Lahey, 'Grinding stones linked to Burke and Wills', *Age*, 20 August 2009.

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tedious process of milling the imprisoned seeds",<sup>1799</sup> while the ANBG mention that "Aboriginal people in northwest Victoria collected the spore cases ... [and] roasted them".<sup>1800</sup> Unfortunately, Blainey demonstrates that he is not familiar with ngardu sporocarps as he then states "Inside the spore case the seeds were grey and hard like watermelon seeds"<sup>1801</sup> and the ANBG also make an unusual comment that after roasting them, they "discarded the cases then ground the spores to make cakes".<sup>1802</sup> It is impossible to discard the cases, cooked or uncooked, before the sporocarps have been ground to release the sporangia. ABC Science also mentioned roasting the sporocarps and then made an additional claim, stating Burke and Wills:

failed to add the extra step in the preparation of nardoo that indigenous people followed. Aboriginal people would roast the spore cases (sporocarps), before grinding them. This simple step of adding heat to the process completely breaks down the thiaminase, making it harmless.<sup>1803</sup>

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<sup>1799</sup> Geoffrey Blainey, *Triumph of the nomads: a history of ancient Australia* (South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1975), 168.

<sup>1800</sup> ANBG Education Services, *Aboriginal Plant Use in south-eastern Australia* (Canberra: Australian National Botanic Gardens, 2004).

<sup>1801</sup> Blainey, *Triumph of the nomads*, 168.

<sup>1802</sup> ANBG Education Services, *Aboriginal Plant Use*.

<sup>1803</sup> Abbie Thomas, 'Nardoo, the desert fern', *ABC Science: In Depth Nature Features: Environment and Nature*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 8 March 2007.  
[abc.net.au/science/articles/2007/03/08/2041341.htm](http://abc.net.au/science/articles/2007/03/08/2041341.htm)

Adding to the uncertainty over the method of preparation was the fact that there was regional variation in the manner in which ngardu was prepared and not all Aboriginal groups relied on ngardu to the same extent as the Yandruwandha.<sup>1804</sup> There are, however, two eye witness account of how the Yandruwandha prepared ngardu. Howitt wrote:

in places where the plant has died down, these seeds quite cover the ground; they are gathered by the native women, and, after being cleaned from the sand are pounded between two stones and baked as cakes.<sup>1805</sup>

Mangili (Benny Kerwin), the last Yandruwandha speaker, gave an alternative description of how Yandruwandha people prepared ngardu:

Ngardu ngala, parndringa ngandra, nga pinakanga nhulu pitjili. Ngapala ngapa kurrari nga thayinga ngapali. Kathi thukali ngala thayi-rnangatji marna-ngadikinitji mandri-rnanga. Kathi thukali, walya kalpurru thalpalali or walya darlamurruli, ngarru kathi thukali mandri-rnanga.

Then there is the nardoo. They crush it and then rock it in a coolamon. Then they pour the water on it and eat it with the water ... They eat it by spooning it into their mouths with a mussel [shell], not with a coolibah leaf or with bark, only with a mussel.<sup>1806</sup>

These two accounts show the Yandruwandha ate ngardu both as a watery porridge and as cooked bread. Burke, Wills and King were given both forms of ngardu by the Yandruwandha.

Consumption of ngardu may have contributed to Burke and Wills' deaths, but there is not sufficient evidence to conclude it was the cause of death. The explorers were certainly suffering from beriberi caused by a lack of thiamine in their diet. The exclusive diet of ngardu that Burke and Wills lived on during June 1861 may have contained sufficient thiaminase I to exacerbate their thiamine deficiency resulting in death. The Yandruwandha people may not have suffered the effects of ingesting thiaminase I to the same extent because their diet was more varied.<sup>1807</sup> Some of the symptoms described by Wills suggest he was suffering from beriberi, but his low pulse and mental

<sup>1804</sup> "A water fern known as Nardoo ... contrary to general belief, was only used in times of drought, when seed was unobtainable" G.K. Dunbar, 'Notes on the Ngemba Tribe, Western N.S.W.', *Mankind*, Vol. 3 (1948): 172-180. "In the semi-arid Darling River district of western New South Wales, where the Barkindji used grass seed as a major food source, nardoo appears to have been ignored completely" S. Newland, 'The annual address of the president', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (S.A. Branch)*. Vol. 22 (1922): 1-64. "In spite of its dietary importance in the desert, nardoo was largely ignored by Aboriginal people living in the temperate and tropical zones" Philip A. Clarke, *Aboriginal People and their Plants* (Sydney: Rosenberg Publishing, 2011), 86.

<sup>1805</sup> Howitt, 'Diary, 1 September-9 October 1861', ex3007-001, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1806</sup> Benny Kerwin and Gavan Breen in Luise Hercus and Peter Sutton (eds.), *This is what happened: Historical narratives by Aborigines* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1986). c.f. with a slightly different translation in Benny Kerwin and Gavan Breen, 'The Land of Stone Chips', *Oceania*, Vol. 51, No. 4, June (1981): 286-311.

<sup>1807</sup> Stephanie Pain, 'The Healthiest Restaurant in Australia', *New Scientist*, 18 August (1988): 42-47.





Figure 186: Ngardu (*Marsilea drummondii*) growing at Cooper Creek near the site of Wills' grave. Burke and Wills collected ngardu here and the plant became the focus of great interest in the colony as a result.

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clarity are not consistent with this diagnosis. Malnutrition, effects of the cold weather and insufficient calorific intake also figured in their demise. Either way, the arguments put forward by Bergin and Earl and McCleary that Burke and Wills died because they did not prepare their ngardu the same way as the Yandruwandha do not stand up to scrutiny. Maybe Murgatroyd sums up the situation best:

although it is probable that beri-beri was partly responsible for his [Wills'] deterioration, exhaustion and malnutrition also played their part. One other detail rules out beri-beri as the sole culprit. Although starvation affects mood and memory, it does not usually produce an overall impairment of mental performance until just before death. Vitamin B deficiency, on the other hand, often results in paranoia and severe mental deterioration. It is clear from Wills' measured diary entries and letters that he remained lucid and articulate even as his body wasted away.<sup>1808</sup>

Nevertheless, the idea that Burke and Wills poisoned themselves has gained traction. These accounts emphasise the irony in the idea that "Burke, a racist oaf, and Wills, his timid follower, virtually committed suicide",<sup>1809</sup> because "Burke refused to consult with indigenous people who knew how to manage toxicity associated with eating nardoo".<sup>1810</sup> Burke "had little respect for indigenous people",<sup>1811</sup> "struggled with the idea of being dependent on 'inferiors'",<sup>1812</sup> and:

being typical explorers, and thus thinking that they were smarter than the indigenous people that had lived on the continent for thousands of years, they ate their nardoo raw.<sup>1813</sup>

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<sup>1808</sup> Murgatroyd, *Dig Tree* (2012), 264.

<sup>1809</sup> Robert Macklin, *100 Great Australians* (South Yarra: Currey O'Neil Ross, 1983), vii.

<sup>1810</sup> Hendtlass, *Mock coronial inquest*, 30-31.

<sup>1811</sup> Phillip A Clarke, 'Burke and Wills' fatal error', *Bush Telegraph*, ABC Radio National, 7 August 2013.

<sup>1812</sup> 'Burke, Wills & Aboriginal guides', State Library of Victoria: ergo, the educational website for Victorian students and their teachers.

[ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/explore-history/land-exploration/exploration/burke-wills-aboriginal-guides](http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/explore-history/land-exploration/exploration/burke-wills-aboriginal-guides)

<sup>1813</sup> Dan Brown, 'Plants Poisonous to Livestock: Thiaminases', Department of Animal Science, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Cornell University.  
[poisonousplants.ansci.cornell.edu/toxicagents/thiaminase.html#thia10](http://poisonousplants.ansci.cornell.edu/toxicagents/thiaminase.html#thia10)

It is a convenient sound-bite that fits well into a post-colonial narrative, but it does not stand up to examination. Nor does it differentiate between Wills and Burke: both men had the same diet, suffered the same fate and died about the same time; but their attitudes towards the Yandruwandha were very different. If the cause of Burke's death was as a result of his ignorant approach towards Yandruwandha ethnobotany, then Wills has every right to feel hard done by.

## 6.7 The 'Land of Plenty'

In the nineteenth century Burke's critics questioned why he starved in "a region which supports a considerable native population"<sup>1814</sup> However, rather than suggesting he should have made a greater effort to foster relations with the Yandruwandha in order to acquire local knowledge, they thought it was a lack of bush skills which led to Burke's death in a place where "untutored Aborigines were able to pick up a living with their spears and stone tomahawks".<sup>1815</sup> They argued "the white man ought [to be able] to live where a black man could"<sup>1816</sup> and "if Burke and Wills had had only a little experience in bush life, they would have found it very difficult to die".<sup>1817</sup> Howitt, who had bush skills and also developed a good rapport with the Yandruwandha, puzzled over the explorers' inability "to do more for their sustenance than collect nardoo" and he supposed "not one of them had bush experience or knowledge of the food which the natives procured".<sup>1818</sup>

Twentieth century accounts by Clune and Moorehead gave scant acknowledgement to the central role the Yandruwandha played in the narrative and it was not until Graeme Clifford's 1985 movie that Aboriginal people were included in any meaningful way. The 1990s discussion about the toxicity of ngardu reframed the argument beyond the idea that Burke and Wills might have survived with Aboriginal help and posited that rejecting assistance made their demise inevitable. This claim was part of wider discussion precipitated by the emergence of Aboriginal studies, which led to a reassessment of the role of exploration in the process of colonial expansion and the ability of Aboriginal people to live in areas the Europeans considered desolate and inhospitable. As Ascherson points out, the historical narrative is now used to support wider assumptions about moral worth and national identity.<sup>1819</sup> While Murgatroyd acknowledges the role played by the Yandruwandha, her comments on the amount and extent of Aboriginal assistance have been taken to extremes. Popular literature like Evan McHugh's account of his year-long stay in Birdsville describe how "Burke and Wills died among an abundance of bush foods"<sup>1820</sup> and Jonathon King also described the Cooper as an "Aboriginal land of plenty".<sup>1821</sup> When Jonathon King's 'Burke and Wills Environmental Expedition' visited Depot Camp 65 in 2010 they thought "it's just unbelievable that anyone would die in this Garden of Eden".<sup>1822</sup> In expressing further incredulity, Jonathon King repeats another

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<sup>1814</sup> William Lockhart Morton, *Yeoman and Australian Acclimatiser*, 25 January 1862: 9.

<sup>1815</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 218.

<sup>1816</sup> 'Burke Memorial Meeting at Chewton', *Mount Alexander Mail*, 15 November 1861: 5.

<sup>1817</sup> Edward Preiss, 'A Trapper's Experience of Australia', *Age*, 14 February 1862: 7.

<sup>1818</sup> Howitt, 'Personal reminiscences'.

<sup>1819</sup> Ascherson, *Stone voices: The search for Scotland*.

<sup>1820</sup> Evan McHugh, *Birdsville: My year in the back of beyond* (Camberwell: Penguin Books, 2010) [penguin.com.au/products/9780143203285/birdsville-my-year-back-beyond/extract](http://penguin.com.au/products/9780143203285/birdsville-my-year-back-beyond/extract)

<sup>1821</sup> Jonathon King, 'An epic journey into history', *Age*, 16 January 2010: 3.

<sup>1822</sup> Charles Wooley, 'A Glorious Disaster', *60 Minutes* (Sydney: Channel 9, 2 September 2010). Transcript at [sixtyminutes.ninemsn.com.au/stories/7955115/burke-wills](http://sixtyminutes.ninemsn.com.au/stories/7955115/burke-wills)

misconception regarding the amount and frequency of the gifts of food given to Burke, Wills and King by the Yandruwandha.

They [the Yandruwandha] could see these whitefellas were in trouble and they were coming forward with the fish. Burke would grab his pistol and shoot over their heads. I mean, what a nutter you'd have to be to do that when you're dying of starvation and the blackfellas are trying to help you.<sup>1823</sup>

Cathcart was not the first to coin the phrase 'Land of Plenty',<sup>1824</sup> but the title of his 2013 book, *Starvation in a land of plenty*<sup>1825</sup> led Peter Menkhorst to comment that:

One theme, laboured in the title, with which I do not concur, is that Burke, Wills, and King ought to have been able to survive their eleven-week ordeal at Cooper's Creek because the area was a 'land of plenty'.<sup>1826</sup>

Good seasons in the Channel Country certainly allowed the Diyari, Yandruwandha, Yawarrawarrka and Wangkumara to "live well and explore a rich culture",<sup>1827</sup> but extended droughts made survival difficult.<sup>1828</sup> Menkhorst continues:

The local Yandruwandha people lived reasonably comfortably, but they were experts, backed by thousands of years of experience, and were locally nomadic, their movements likely driven by food availability ... It is easy to underestimate the skill and knowledge required to live off the land in such country.<sup>1829</sup>

The effect of these descriptions of a 'land of plenty' is not only to misrepresent the European-Indigene interaction, but also to diminish the complexity of Yandruwandha knowledge which was acquired gradually and systematically over more than 28,000 years as the climatic conditions of central Australia became increasingly arid. Turning the Strzelecki Desert into a post-colonial Garden of Eden ignores the fact that Aboriginal subsistence in arid areas was at times extremely difficult, as evidenced by the fact that even during a good season, like the one experienced by Burke, the Yandruwandha relied on a labour intensive, nutrient poor food resource such as ngardu as a staple, which even

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<sup>1823</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1824</sup> "It has always been a matter of wonder to settlers about Koopa Creek, where Burke and Wills met their end, how the explorers came to perish there, since the place has always been, in the memory of the whites, a land of plenty so far as game and fish are concerned" *Freeman's Journal*, 5 October 1916: 15.

<sup>1825</sup> Cathcart, *Land of plenty*.

<sup>1826</sup> Peter Menkhorst, 'Three pale strangers: the compelling diary of William John Wills', [Book Review of Cathcart, *Starvation in a Land of Plenty*], *Australian Book Review*, Vol. 368, January-February (2015): 50-51.

<sup>1827</sup> Tolcher, *Seed of the coolibah*, 4.

<sup>1828</sup> M.A. Smith, Peter Marius Veth and Peter Hiscock, *Desert peoples: archaeological perspectives* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005): 34-57; Mike Smith, *The archaeology of Australia's deserts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 145; P.J. Hughes & R.J. Lampert, 'Pleistocene occupation of the arid zone in Southeast Australia: Research prospects for the Cooper Creek-Strzelecki Desert Region', *Australian Archaeology*, Vol. 10 (1980): 52-67; Alan N. Williams, Sean Ulm, Andrew R. Cook, Michelle C. Langley and Mark Collard, 'Human refugia in Australia during the Last Glacial Maximum and Terminal Pleistocene: a geospatial analysis of the 25-12ka Australian archaeological record', *Journal of Archaeological Science*, Vol. 40 (2013): 4612-4625; Michael I. Bird, Damien O'Grady and Sean Ulm, 'Humans, water, and the colonization of Australia', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 113, No. 41 (2016): 11477-11482.

<sup>1829</sup> Peter Menkhorst, 'Three pale strangers'.



Figure 187: 'Pitchery, Nardoo cake and Nardoo seed', 1861.  
'Descriptive letter by George Coppin and E.J. Welch', 1862.  
Ramsay Collection, X87891, Museum Victoria.

Published in: Tim Bonyhady, *Burke and Wills: From Melbourne to myth* [exhibition],  
(Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2002), 2.

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Murgatroyd admits is "unpalatable ... bitter [and] sticks in the back of the throat".<sup>1830</sup> When filming at Cooper Creek, bush food and survival expert, 'Bush Tucker Man' Les Hiddins "was at pains to show how the land in which the explorers perished was a 'supermarket' of good food to the educated (i.e. Aboriginal) eye",<sup>1831</sup> but Diedre Slattery points out:

His program, however, made its point about our relationship with the land more powerfully through its signature scenes of his huge 4WD rig rocking around bends in a cloud of soil, and in his remark that this country is best visited in a helicopter.<sup>1832</sup>

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<sup>1830</sup> Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree*, 261.

<sup>1831</sup> Deirdre Slattery, 'Telling and retelling national narratives' in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 179-190.

<sup>1832</sup> Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 187. See also: Les Hiddins, 'The Great Misadventure', in *Stories of Exploration and Survival* (Sydney: ABC TV, 1996); Hiddins, *Stories of Exploration and Survival*.

## 6.8 Conclusion

Although McLaren posits that “with the exception of Warburton and the Forrest brothers, explorers rarely enlisted the help of Aborigines after the 1840s”,<sup>1833</sup> between 1858 and 1889 expeditions under Babbage, Burke and Wills, McKinlay, Landsborough, Walker, Howitt, McIntyre, Giles, Gosse, Lewis, Favenc and Tietkins all utilised Aboriginal guides, meaning Aboriginal guides were still commonly used on expeditions long after the 1840s.

Prior to 1860, expeditions that placed greatest reliance on Aboriginal guides were the large, heavily laden, slow moving expeditions with their mobs of thirsty sheep, horses and bullocks. Their substantial water requirements meant the parties under Sturt, Mitchell, Kennedy and Babbage relied on Aboriginal guides to lead them to water. In addition, their lengthy halts at major waterholes meant they inevitably had contact with local Aboriginal people. McLaren suggests this type of expedition became obsolete once exploration entered the ‘harder country’ of the arid interior and by the 1860s expeditions travelled faster, spent less time at waterholes, and expedition leaders relied more on their own bush skills and less on Aboriginal guidance.

When the VEE left Melbourne, it was heavily laden and slow moving. This meant the Expedition was anomalous in terms of the contemporary trend towards smaller, fast moving exploring parties. The use of heavy wagons was a regressive step more reminiscent of Mitchell’s 1840s expeditions, which would suggest that Aboriginal guides would be of greater use to the VEE than to swifter expeditions of the time under A.C. Gregory and Stuart. In addition, Burke’s lack of bush skills and exploration experience would also lead one to expect Aboriginal guides would be of benefit finding water and negotiating with local people.

Burke’s divisions of the party at the Darling and Cooper meant that the Gulf Party that departed from Depot Camp 65 was vastly different from the Expedition that left Melbourne. Twenty-five men, 70 animals, six wagons and around 21 tonnes of stores rolled slowly out of Royal Park, whereas the Gulf Party consisted of just four men, seven animals and 330 kilograms of supplies. The Gulf Party was a small, fast, light party which covered 3,500 kilometres in 127 days, averaging nearly 30 kilometres a day with just two days off on the northbound trip. In addition, because this party was equipped with camels and carried 450 litres of water, they did not need to find water each night (see Chapter 5.7, pages 290 to 293). This meant that Burke did not need the assistance of Aboriginal guides to find water for this section of their journey. Their swift pace should also have minimised the potential for conflict as Aboriginal people were less likely to react to the strangers passing through their country if they did not monopolise water sources and moved on quickly each day.

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<sup>1833</sup> McLaren, *Beyond Leichhardt*, 247.

Having therefore established that Aboriginal guides were still commonly used on expeditions in the 1860s, and having demonstrated that the Expedition started out slowly and heavily laden and became faster and lighter as it progressed, the analysis of the Expedition's use of Aboriginal guides supports McLaren's hypothesis that Aboriginal guides were of greatest use when the Expedition was at its most cumbersome and had the greatest water requirements.

In Victoria, Burke had little need for guides as there were roads and tracks, local knowledge could be gained from squatters and landowners, and water was abundant. The Expedition used police troopers as guides from Tragowel to Swan Hill, but this seems to have been more of a courtesy than a necessity.

Between Swan Hill and the Wakool, the Expedition lost their way and the delay annoyed Burke. This was probably the first time the Expedition could have used a guide, Aboriginal, European or Australian. Once past Balranald, Aboriginal guides were used regularly. At least 15 different Aboriginal men guided the Expedition over 950 kilometres from Paika to Tarcoola and Menindee to Bulloo between 17 September and 9 November 1860. Beckler and Lyons and Macpherson also used three different Aboriginal guides on their journeys north of Pamamaroo in November and December 1860. The use of Aboriginal guides seems to have been Burke's idea, or carried out with his approval, as the EC did not discuss using Aboriginal guides, Mueller was opposed to the idea and the 'Leader's Instructions' did not mention them.

North of Bulloo, Burke was unable to convince their Kalali/Karengapa guide to continue on into the waterless Grey Range and so, for the first time in nearly eight weeks, the Expedition found themselves without an Aboriginal guide. Wills was required to take charge and navigate the party to the Cooper.<sup>1834</sup>

When the Gulf Party were preparing to leave the Cooper, Wills expressed his contempt at the Nhirrpi Yandruwandha and rejected their attempts to socialise. Nevertheless, a few days later, Burke detoured to visit a Yawarrawarrka camp in an unsuccessful bid to get guides to lead them across Sturt Stony Desert. Having crossed the stony desert unaided, the Gulf Party found ample water in the Diamantina River, so acquiring Aboriginal guides was not a priority. Once Burke left the Diamantina, water became an issue, but they were unable to obtain Aboriginal guides as their next encounter degenerated into violence. The Gulf Party saw no more Aboriginal people for the next 400 kilometres, by which time they were at the headwaters of Corella Creek with ample water all the way to the Gulf.

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<sup>1834</sup> Wills' navigational methods are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.4.2 and Chapter 7.4.3, pages 467 to 487.



Although the Gulf Party did not rely on Aboriginal guides, it was not Burke's bush skills that ensured the party's success. The reason they reached the Gulf was their use of camels and Wills' navigational ability: the former has been discussed in the previous chapter and the latter is discussed in the next chapter.

Having established that the Expedition used Aboriginal guides when it was slow-moving and needed large amounts of water, and that it did not use Aboriginal guides when it was fast-moving and had minimal water requirements, how did the Expedition interact with Aboriginal people they met during the Expedition?

Their first encounters were in Victoria with partly acculturated Barababaraba and Wemba Wemba people. The meetings were a novelty for the scientific officers Becker and Beckler, but offered little in the way of cultural exchange. The two Germans continued to record Aboriginal customs and culture as the Expedition progressed. Wills also showed an interest in Aboriginal people, but only when it related to his mapping and navigation. He carefully recorded Aboriginal placenames, but was afraid of being humbugged, was dismissive of the information he was given and condescending towards the Yandruwandha. Wills complained several times about the circuitous route their guides took, even though they camped at water most nights. Burke rarely mentioned Aboriginal people, but in the context of his lack of interest in the Expedition's scientific observations, that was not unusual. Despite firing his revolver in the air on two occasions when "the natives tried to bully or bounce" them, there were occasions when he went out of his way to accommodate the wishes of their Aboriginal guides and the people they met. Burke did not mount guard at night and did not carry firearms during the day. Whenever they encountered Aboriginal people, Burke would stop the party, dismount and advance ahead alone, offering trinkets as gifts. Burke did not do this out of respect for the people he met, but because he was always cautious in his dealings with Aboriginal people. Nevertheless, his careful approach was similar to the protocol Aboriginal people would have expected from visitors and so, despite Burke's inexperience and imperious approach towards Aboriginal people, conflict was avoided. Other than the incident in Mithaka country, the Gulf Party passed through as many as twenty separate Aboriginal nations with no conflict.

Brahe and the Depot Party faced a different situation to Burke's Gulf Party, as they were forced to remain in the one location for a long time. Water was not in short supply at Depot Camp 65 and the animals would have had minimal impact in terms of drinking or muddying the waterholes, but the Yandruwandha resented the continued presence of Europeans at Pula pula. Brahe had little experience in dealing with Aboriginal people and spent much of his time attempting to protect the camels, horses and equipment, with only Burke's uncompromising instructions as guidance. Despite this, Brahe resisted Burke's orders to shoot at Aboriginal people and he eventually established an uneasy truce.

Wright had considerably more experience dealing with Aboriginal people, having spent time managing sheep stations near Menindee. He seemed to have a good rapport with his guides, Dick and Mountain, when he escorted Burke from Menindee to Torowoto. On his next journey north with the Support Party, he had Becker and Beckler, who were sympathetic to Aboriginal people and Smith and Stone who had experience dealing with Aboriginal people. Nevertheless, the Supply Party struggled due to the much harsher conditions. Wright's outfit was large and slow moving and Aboriginal people objected to his extended stays at their dwindling waterholes, which became muddy and fouled. Hodgkinson's persistent sport shooting frightened birds away which further alienated Aboriginal people. The Kalali and Karenggapa gained confidence as the explorers' health deteriorated and the resulting confrontation ended in the death of one of the most charismatic Aboriginal men the party had met. Wright's response was to break camp and move to another area.

Being confined to one location or being hampered by a cumbersome, slow moving outfit meant the Expedition was more likely to encounter Aboriginal people. North of Menindee, Aboriginal people were unused to strangers who did not follow protocol when entering their country. Initial meetings with the VEE were generally not hostile, as Aboriginal people were curious about the presence of these strangers. Once it became apparent the explorers intended to stay for an extended period, conflict was inevitable. Inexperience dealing with Aboriginal people did not result in violent encounters for Burke who moved rapidly across the country. Brahe's inexperience also did not result in any fatalities. The only Aboriginal fatality was a result of the actions of Wright, the most experienced bushman attached to the Expedition.

The final interaction between the VEE and Aboriginal people occurred on Cooper Creek in the winter of 1861 when Burke, Wills and King found themselves isolated and awaiting rescue. Wills adapted to their new circumstances and was ready to adopt an Aboriginal lifestyle. Initially he wanted to live like the Yandruwandha, but then when he realised how difficult that was, he wanted to live with them. Burke, however, found his cultural biases difficult to overcome. Even when facing death, he refused to accept that he was no longer in charge and he continued to act as a superintendent of police. Wills kept Burke's outbursts in check during their interactions with the Yandruwandha in early May 1861 and their interactions were positive, but when Wills left Burke to his own devices in early June, Burke resorted to irrational outbursts of anger and violence. Mental confusion and paranoia are symptom of beriberi, so this may go some way towards explaining Burke's actions, but it is just as likely that he was unable to control his anger and frustration at the helpless situation he found himself in. When Wills expressed his objection to Burke's intolerance, Burke responded with violence. Forsaking any loyalty he may have felt for Burke, Wills went to live with the Yandruwandha. Unfortunately, the Yandruwandha moved camp after a few days and were unwilling to take Wills with them. Whether the move was because of Burke's violence and ungratefulness, or because Wills had overstayed his welcome, or because the Yandruwandha traditionally moved camp every four or

five days anyway, is difficult to determine. Regardless, Wills was forced to return to Burke and the three explorers attempted to survive as best they could.

Although they had eaten a range of indigenous flora and fauna during the Expedition, the three men were now too weak, cold, emaciated and inexperienced to hunt and fish and they slowly starved on a diet consisting exclusively of ngardu.

The Expedition was a significant event for the Aboriginal people who interacted with the strangers and Aboriginal people recalled their involvement for many years afterwards. Their contribution was acknowledged in the 1860s, with breastplates, trinkets and a small grant of land, but then Aboriginal people were steadily removed from the narrative. Although Birtles attempted to reintroduce them in the early twentieth century, his efforts were dismissed by the mainstream and Aboriginal involvement in the VEE became part of Stanner's 'Great Australian Silence'.

The physical cause of Burke and Wills' deaths was not subject to in-depth inquiry in 1861, but more recently two hypotheses have emerged which claim Burke and Wills poisoned themselves as a result of incorrectly preparing ngardu sporocarps. The two hypotheses are mutually exclusive and neither hypothesis is supported by the primary sources. Nevertheless, the idea has been widely accepted and has more recently evolved into the suggestion that the pre-contact desert landscape was an antipodean Garden of Eden. This myth emerged from debates centred around the 'History Wars' and is more about contemporary construction of national identity than a representation of events on the Cooper in the winter of 1861. Recent academic interest in Aboriginal interactions with the VEE has highlighted Aboriginal involvement and added new arguments and viewpoints, but still fails to add clarity. Allen rather confusingly states "the explorers became reliant on Aboriginal gifts",<sup>1835</sup> when in fact the explorers never managed to convince the Yandruwandha to supply them with food on a regular basis.<sup>1836</sup> Only King managed to achieve the luxury of routine meals from Yandruwandha. Clarke claims "Incredibly, given their dire circumstances, Burke was for a long while reluctant to accept help from Aboriginal people"<sup>1837</sup> when in fact Burke readily accepted gifts of food from the Yandruwandha on five occasions before angrily knocking nets of fish from the Yandruwandha men's hands and chasing them away.

A final point is to address the claim quoted at the start of this chapter that Burke and Wills considered Aboriginal people as "ignorant, godless savages". Burke was well aware that they were

<sup>1835</sup> Harry Allen, 'The space between: Aboriginal people, the Victorian Exploring Expedition and the relief parties' in McCann and Joyce, *The scientific legacy*, 256.

<sup>1836</sup> Burke was supplied with food by the Yandruwandha on seven days in the 71-day period from 21 April to 1 July 1861 (24 & 25 April, gifts of fish; 7 May, 1-3 June and 5 June 1861, fish and ngardu).

<sup>1837</sup> Phillip A. Clarke, 'The use and abuse of Aboriginal ecological knowledge' in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 72.

not ignorant, as numerous Aboriginal guides had provided valuable information and guidance while demonstrating an intimate knowledge of their country. The idea that Burke and Wills judged Aboriginal people on their lack of Christianity is a failure to understand the explorers' beliefs. Burke might have been raised Protestant, but he spent little time on his faith, planned to marry a Catholic, did not carry a Bible with him on the Expedition and, unlike many of his contemporary explorers, paid scant regard to the Sabbath. Wills was a scientist who rejected the incompatibility and contradictory nature of religious beliefs, and he considered Coombe's *Constitution of Man* to be a more rewarding read than the Gospels. He expressed his Enlightenment leanings in letters to his parents, explaining to his mother that he had been contemplating religion and had concluded "I entirely agree with what Pope says,<sup>1838</sup> & I hope you do ... I also think that it is sufficient guide to all our actions — to do as we would be done by".<sup>1839</sup> Of the three men on the Cooper, King, a Wesleyan, was by far the most religious.

It is difficult to determine whether the three men thought Aboriginal people were savages. Wills' friendship with Pitchery suggests otherwise and one imagines Wills considered the idea of "living like the blacks" to have been somewhat of an adventure had their survival not have depended upon it. Burke, on the other hand, most likely did consider Aboriginal people as savages to be treated with suspicion, and that ultimately cost him his life.



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<sup>1838</sup> Wills was referring to the following lines in Epistle III of Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Man* (London: J. Wilford, 1733) "For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight; His can't be wrong whose life is in the right".

<sup>1839</sup> William John Wills, 'Letter to Sarah Wills, dated Ballaarat, 22 April 1855', Correspondence and press cuttings: 1839-1861, MS 9504, State Library of Victoria.

# 7

## THE BURKE & WILLS CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

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### CONTENTS

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7.1	Problems and issues posed by the landscape in understanding the Expedition: An investigation of historical human ecology	417
7.2	Using the landscape as an historical document: Methodological issues	419
7.3	Using the landscape as an historical document: My approach to the investigation	439
7.4	Using the landscape as an historical document: A larger scale study and a walk across Australia	463
7.5	Perceptions of the Landscape	496
7.6	Conclusion	506

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*The breath of the sirocco, and the wail of the dingo,  
may be the requiem for many a gallant brave  
who tempts the terrors of an Australian desert.*

Letter to the Editor from 'An Englishman'.  
*Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 November 1861: 8.

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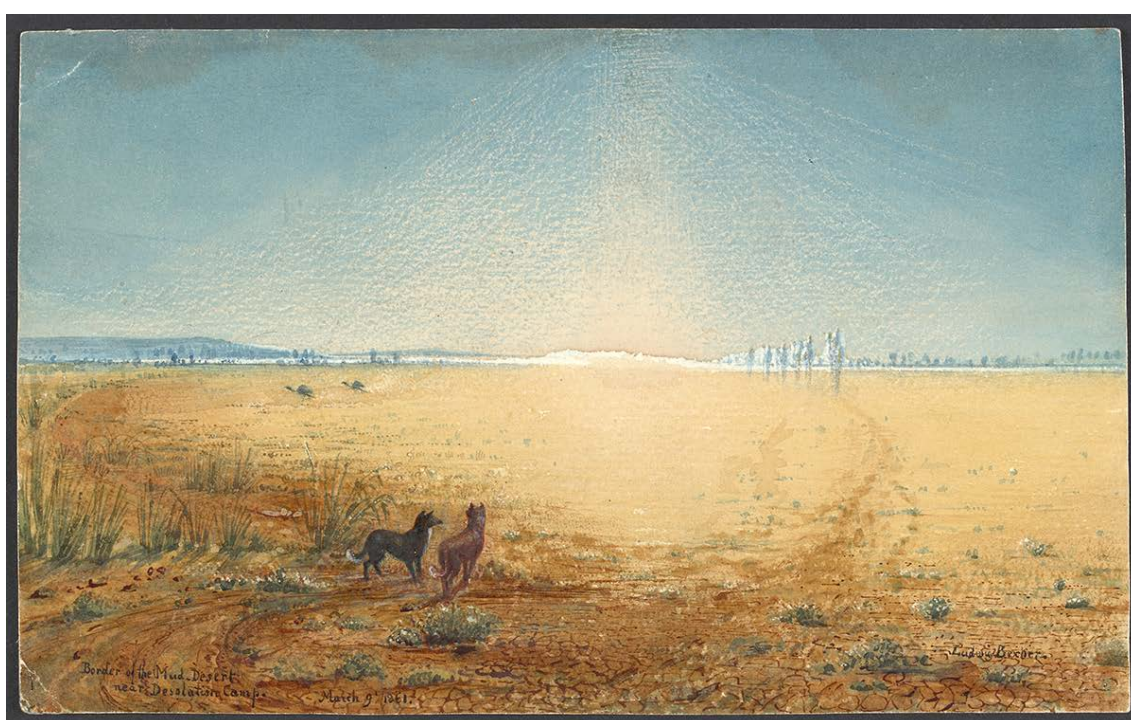


Figure 188: Ludwig Becker, 'Border of the Mud-Desert near Desolation Camp', 1861.  
Image b36074, LT52, H16486/F.40, State Library of Victoria.



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## 7.1 Problems and issues posed by the landscape in understanding the Expedition: An investigation of ‘historical human ecology’

The landscape traversed by the Expedition, and the Expedition itself, are intricately and inseparably linked. Whether shown through Nolan’s paintings, Clifford’s movie or Moorehead’s novel, the landscape is recognised as playing a significant role in the story. However, as Moorehead demonstrates, historians often relegate the landscape to the role of a colourful (and quirky) backdrop to the central human drama. Few people have attempted to analyse how the landscape affected the Expedition. Those who have, tend to become focused on the meteorological effects of summer heat and wet season monsoon. Even fewer people have attempted to identify where the Expedition travelled in order to analyse the impact those landscapes had on the way the Expedition operated. Much of the scholarly work on the Expedition looks at the motives and political ambitions of the main characters and does not enquire too deeply into “the trudge of the journey”.<sup>1840</sup>

There are several mysteries surrounding the Expedition, and theories explaining some of Burke’s decisions do not take into account the influence of the landscape. Burke’s decision to head to Mount Hopeless has been criticised, the inability to reach the open ocean at the Gulf has not been explained adequately, and there are other problems regarding the Expedition’s naming practices for landscape features. Solving these puzzles requires analysis of the landscape, which in turn requires accurate plotting of the Expedition’s route, itself something of a mystery. In addition, changes in our attitude towards the Australian landscape mean ideas about the relationship between landscape and the Expedition have also changed since 1860, as the discussion in the previous chapter about the ‘land of plenty’ has already alluded to.

Jared Diamond notes “Some human phenomena and characteristics are overwhelmingly influenced by geographic factors; others are significantly influenced by both geographic and non-geographic factors”.<sup>1841</sup> I suggest the landscape posed far greater issues for Burke and Wills than has previously been acknowledged. Indeed, the further away from Anglo-Australian settlement the Expedition ventured, the greater the effect the landscape had. My hypothesis is that the landscape should be examined using a methodology I call ‘historical human ecology’ to see how the landscape influenced the Expedition, and how the Expedition affected the landscape. While the impact of the Expedition on the landscape might seem minimal, what resulted from the Expedition’s passage

<sup>1840</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 9.

<sup>1841</sup> Jared Diamond, ‘Geographic Determinism’, [jarediamond.org](http://jarediamond.org).  
[jarediamond.org/Jared\\_Diamond/Geographic\\_determinism.html](http://jarediamond.org/Jared_Diamond/Geographic_determinism.html)

through it can be considered as a cultural artefact of the Expedition. How was the landscape changed once Europeans had named it, recorded and described it?

For the benefit of this analysis, the term landscape is used as a broad geographical concept which encompasses all the living, natural and abstract phenomena and environmental conditions experienced by the Expedition. It includes the various aspects of flora, fauna, topography, biogeography, hydrology and climatology as well as aesthetics, subjective observations and perceptions of landscape held by the Expedition members. In these terms landscape can be equated to the German concept 'landschaft' as defined by Alexander von Humboldt:

Landschaft ist der total charakter einer erdegend.<sup>1842</sup>  
(Landscape is the total character of a region of the Earth.)

The term 'historical human ecology' in this context describes the interaction of Expedition members, their Aboriginal guides and informants, and the Expedition's animals, with the various aspects of the landschaft/landscape. 'Human' indicates the focus is on the human aspects of the relationship between the landscape and the human actors; 'ecology' refers to the relationship between the Expedition members, their guides and animals with the landscape and with one another.

The assessment of the landscape raised methodological issues, not least the use of the landscape as an historical record, which is still unusual for historians to do outside of cultural heritage studies. Consideration had to be given to the accuracy of the examination of the original route as well as the timing of the Expedition's passage over that route. To avoid anachronisms, the historical environmental context also needed to be established to identify the extent of landscape change over the last 150 years, followed by an assessment of how useful interpretation of the current landscape is, considering the multitude of environmental changes. Previous attempts at identifying the Burke and Wills cultural landscape need to be considered as well as changing perceptions of the landscape, particularly how ideas about the 'ghastly blank' of the desert landscape changed as a result of the Expedition.

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<sup>1842</sup> I.S. Zonneveld, *Land ecology: an introduction to landscape ecology as a base for land evaluation, land management and conservation* (Amsterdam: SPB Academic Publishing, 1995).

## 7.2 Using the landscape as an historical document: Methodological issues

### 7.2.1 Using the landscape as an historical document.

When using the landscape as a document from which to assess the historical human ecology of the Expedition it is important to recognise the relationship between humans and landscapes in the past and how they influenced each other. While previous cultural landscape and historical ecology studies have focussed predominantly on the effect humans have had in modifying the environment, this study proposes that in terms of the VEE, the landscape had a far greater effect on, and modified human behaviour much more, than the human presence modified and affected the landscape. In these terms, the landscape is an associational cultural landscape rather than one constructed or brought into being by the explorers. While earlier discussions which stressed the dominant effects of landscape on human settlement have been dismissed as geographical determinism, the actions of explorers do represent a stimulus-response behaviour, particularly with regards climate and availability of water. Although the explorers tried to insulate themselves from the most severe effects they would encounter by taking supplies of food and water packed on specialist animals like camels, and by modifying their behaviour to suit the landscape they encountered, the landscape still had an enormous impact on them.

Although the passage of the Expedition through the landscape had minimal short-term effects on the environment,<sup>1843</sup> the landscape influenced the Expedition's progress and outcomes. The Expedition's route is a cultural artefact, because there was interaction between the Expedition and the landscape, as the explorers recorded, named and described it, and in turn the landscape offered obstacles and incentives which influenced decisions, determined the route, prevented access and affected the condition of the men and animals. Therefore an understanding of the Expedition's progress relies on an assessment of its historical human ecology and that requires the route to be identified and physically examined.

An example of the dominant effect the landscape had on the conduct and behaviour of the explorers was played out during May 1861 when Burke attempted to reach the settlements in South

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<sup>1843</sup> It has been suggested that various plant species were spread by the VEE, including Moreton Bay Fig, *Ficus macrophylla*, and the forb, Rosy Dock, *Acetosa vesicaria*. However, there is no evidence to show that Burke ordered the planting of Moreton Bay Figs in Swan Hill and Balranald, nor that the camel pads were stuffed with straw containing Rosy Dock seeds (they were stuffed with horse-hair). The issue of whether Burke's abandoned or escaped camels became the forerunners of Australia's feral camel population has already been addressed in Chapter 5.8, The fate of the camels that survived the Expedition.

Australia from Depot Camp 65. Despite having encountered problems when attempting to navigate the myriad of channels on the Wilson River in November 1860, Burke placed himself in a similar situation six months later when trying to follow A.C. Gregory's route to South Australia. The success of their attempts to rescue themselves depended upon Burke identifying the divergence of Strzelecki Creek from the Cooper. An investigation I conducted at Cooper Creek in 2005 showed that Burke missed the divergence altogether, then struggled for more than two weeks trying to locate it, only to unwittingly and unknowingly cross Strzelecki Creek further to the south some weeks later (this is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter). This event shows the dramatic effect the landscape had on the success or otherwise of the Expedition's progress. Furthermore, the details of this event have not been investigated before, as no one has attempted to identify exactly where Burke travelled between leaving Depot Camp 65 in April 1861 and his death two and a half months later.

The 2005 study showed that, when combined with archival sources, the landscape could be used as an historical document. Using this method meant it was possible to ascertain the role the landscape played in the Expedition's outcomes. Extrapolating this methodology to conduct a larger study meant Wills' navigation techniques had to be worked out to identify the route. It also necessitated an assessment of the validity of earlier attempts to find the route as well as clarifying confusion caused by later attempts at naming and re-naming landscape features. Once a more accurate route had been identified, following it provided new insights into some puzzling aspects of the Expedition's conduct, as well as disproving myths.

### **7.2.2 Using the landscape as an historical document: Earlier attempts.**

There have been a number of previous attempts at interpreting the Burke and Wills historical landscape and assessing its effect on the Expedition's progress. Although some of them have involved retracing the Expedition's route, none of them have established the route with sufficient accuracy to support a critical analysis of events. As noted earlier, this was because much of Wills' surveying data has been lost, and the surviving data is either not sufficiently detailed for the route to be established precisely, or has been overlooked.

In the immediate aftermath of the Expedition there were numerous queries relating to the Expedition's route, but there were no opportunities to physically examine the landscape to retrace the route. The most pressing question was which river the Expedition had reached in the Gulf and whether they had reached the ocean. Although Burke had written that they had not been able to see

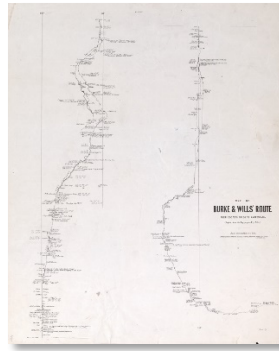


Figure 189: James B. Philp & William Collis, 'Map of Burke and Wills' route from Cooper's Creek to Carpentaria: Copied from the map prepared by Wills'.

EXP20, L1089, (Melbourne: Office of Crown Lands and Survey, 27 November 1861).

Wills' field books and sketch maps arrived in Melbourne on 3 November 1861, but it took the Surveyor-General more than three weeks to interpret the information they contained and construct a complete map of the Expedition's route. Even then the map was published in haste in order to make the monthly English mail. The map did not show the north coast, nor did it identify the river that Burke followed to the Gulf.

the open ocean, after questioning Howitt and Welch on the matter in early December 1861 the EC agreed that Burke had advanced far enough north to satisfy their requirements.<sup>1844</sup> The matter of which river the Expedition had reached was not as easily settled. Initially the press assumed Burke had reached the Albert River, as this was his intended route and he had discussed his plans at length with Neumayer.<sup>1845</sup> When questioned at the Commission of Inquiry, King and Mueller confirmed the Expedition had been on the Albert.<sup>1846</sup> However a map of the Expedition's route, published a week earlier by the Crown Lands Office, seemed to indicate that Burke had been to the east of the Albert, most likely on the Flinders, although confusingly, the map did not indicate which river they were on, nor did it show the northern coastline (see Figure 189).<sup>1847</sup> The Reverend James Gilbertson of Castlemaine, writing under the pseudonyms 'BEAGLE' and 'EXAMINER', published a series of letters in the Melbourne press in an attempt to clear up the confusion.<sup>1848</sup> He supposed, (correctly as it turned out after Walker's search expedition returned and reported finding evidence of Burke's track on the north coast), that Burke had been on the Bynoe River.

These geographical debates continued for several more months, well into 1862, when Walker returned with evidence of the Expedition's track on the north coast. The points being debated were

<sup>1844</sup> *Age*, 6 December 1861: 5.

<sup>1845</sup> Georg Balthasar Neumayer, 'Burke's Probable Route', *Argus*, 23 April 1861: 5.

<sup>1846</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Questions 812, 818 & 824 to King; Questions 1109 & 1118-1124 to Mueller.

<sup>1847</sup> Crown Lands Office, *Map of Burke and Wills route from Cooper's Creek to Carpentaria (Copied from the map prepared by Wills)*, L1089, (Office of Lands & Survey, Department of Crown Lands & Survey, Melbourne, 25 November 1861).

<sup>1848</sup> James Gilbertson, 'Did Burke Reach the Albert River', *Argus*, 10 December 1861: 7; *Leader*, 17 February 1872: 24.

important to the EC, who wanted to show the Expedition had been a success and had fulfilled its brief. However they were only of minor importance when viewed in the context of the entire Expedition, and the choice of route and the landscape encountered were not questioned and were not considered to have played a significant role in the Expedition's progress. Consequently when the Chief Secretary decided "that the mode of exploration will not form any part of the enquiry",<sup>1849</sup> the Commissioners spent little time discussing the choice of route. When questioned whether Burke "was unrestricted as to the course he should pursue when he reached the Darling", Macadam answered in the affirmative,<sup>1850</sup> and Stawell confirmed that Burke was "regarded as in the position of a general in the field" and therefore not to be interfered with once he had made a depot on Cooper Creek.<sup>1851</sup> The landscape itself was considered passive and was not discussed or debated.

Some of the earliest efforts at retracing the Expedition's route were not serious attempts to understand where Burke went; they were merely trans-continental journeys that have more recently been linked to Burke's route. In 1870-1 George McGillivray travelled from Eddington Station near Julia Creek in Queensland to Wilcannia on the Darling via the Diamantina River, Cooper and Strzelecki Creeks. Although McGillivray did not follow Burke's route and he did not mention Burke and Wills at any time in his journal, he is sometimes credited (particularly among his descendants) with having been the first to follow their tracks.<sup>1852</sup>

In 1882-3 George 'Peking' Morrison walked from Normanton to Melbourne, taking almost the same number of days to cross the continent as Burke.<sup>1853</sup> Again, Morrison did not set out to follow Burke and he made no mention of him in his journal. Morrison avoided the most arid areas of Queensland that Burke had travelled through and at times he was 400 kilometres to the east of Burke's route, following stock routes through outback towns. Morrison's feat was remarkable nevertheless, especially given that he was only 21 years old, travelled unarmed and was alone for most of the way, and he, like McGillivray, left the Gulf in December at the start of the wet season. When Morrison's journal was published in the press, several newspapers commented on the link between his journey and Burke's.

If the bronze Burke and Wills at the top of Collins street could have seen young Morrison trudging home with his swag upon his back would they not have been rather astonished? A solitary footman, with no help beyond a strong will and wonderful powers of endurance, had accomplished the task which brought such disaster on the grand cavalcade of horses and camels that left Royal Park on that memorable journey.<sup>1854</sup>

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<sup>1849</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. 9.

<sup>1850</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 38 to Macadam.

<sup>1851</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 1581 to Stawell.

<sup>1852</sup> George McGillivray's journey was reported in part in *The Australasian*, see: George McGillivray, 'The Traveller: From north to south', *The Australasian*, 13 May 1871: 7 and 20 May 1871: 6. McGillivray's journal was printed in full the *Barrier Miner*: Christmas Supplement, 18 December 1929: 1-4.

<sup>1853</sup> 'Across the Australian Continent on foot', *Age*, 19 May 1883: S2; *Leader*, 19 May 1883: 35-36.

<sup>1854</sup> *Inglewood Advertiser* reprinted in the *Nelson Evening Mail*, 2 June 1883: 5.



When preparing his *Reminiscences and Diaries* for publication, Morrison alluded to the connection with Burke and Wills, but only to show how the interior had changed since 1860.

My walk proved how great had been the progress of civilisation in the interior during the 21 years that had elapsed since the Burke and Wills party met with its disasters.<sup>1855</sup>

However when writing about Morrison, Clune had no problems blurring the line and linking the two events:

Geelong George ... waltzed his Matilda across Australia, 2,000 miles to Geelong, on the Geelong-long trail of Burke and Wills.<sup>1856</sup>

and Morrison's trip is now regularly reported as a solo retracing of Burke and Wills' footsteps.<sup>1857</sup>

In 1915 Birtles drove from Melbourne to Sydney and Adelaide and then to the Gulf in a Ford 'Flanders 20', visiting many of the Expedition's significant sites. Birtles was already well known, having had already crossed the continent several times, by both bicycle and car, and three years earlier he had announced he was going to follow Burke and Wills, but failed to do so.<sup>1858</sup> He generated interest in the 1915 trip by claiming that as well as having "read almost everything that had been published concerning the Burke and Wills party" he had heard "some things that had not been seen in print" and he therefore was going to take the next two years to "try and ascertain if any discoveries he could make would throw new light on the disputed points".<sup>1859</sup> In addition, he was confident he would find "Burke's missing diary".<sup>1860</sup> As on his earlier trips, Birtles took cinematographic equipment and made one of Australia's first documentary movies, which he titled *Across Australia on the tracks of Burke and Wills*.<sup>1861</sup> Upon returning from his four-month journey, Birtles promoted the movie with stories of his encounters with Aboriginal people who had met Burke and who told Birtles

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<sup>1855</sup> J.B. Capper, 'Reminiscences and diaries, 1899-1910 of George Ernest Morrison'. Capper's two volumes were never published and the manuscripts are at ML MSS 312/28-34, State Library of New South Wales. Parts of the manuscript are published in 'Chapter 4: Following Burke and Wills' in Peter Alexander Thompson and Robert Macklin, *The man who died twice: the life and adventures of Morrison of Peking* (Crows Nest: Thompson, 2004).

<sup>1856</sup> Frank Clune, *Prowling through Papua* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1943).

<sup>1857</sup> Recently Morrison's walk has been widely assumed to have followed the same route as Burke, see: Lo Hui-Min (ed.), *The Correspondence of G E Morrison: 1895-1912* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976): 2; Richard White, *On Holidays: a history of getting away in Australia* (North Melbourne: Pluto Press, 2005): 84; Linda Jaivin, ABC Radio Book Report, 5 January 2010, [abc.net.au/rn/bookshow/stories/2010/2785649.htm](http://abc.net.au/rn/bookshow/stories/2010/2785649.htm).

Australian National University: National Centre of Biography. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, [adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A100579b.htm](http://adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A100579b.htm)

<sup>1858</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 October 1912: 10.

<sup>1859</sup> *The Queenslander*, 4 September 1915: 3.

<sup>1860</sup> *Advertiser*, 26 February 1915: 6. There is no record of Burke having lost or misplaced a diary during the Expedition. Birtles later claimed Burke buried his diary in a camp-oven at Camp 119 at the Gulf, 'Burke and Wills Expedition', *The Daily Mail*, 20 May 1924: 8, 21 May 1924: 8. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 February 1915: 18. See also: 'Chapter 9: In the Track of Burke and Wills' in Warren Brown, *Francis Birtles: Australian adventurer* (Sydney: Hachette Australia, 2011).

<sup>1861</sup> Ben Goldsmith and Geoff Lealand, *Directory of world cinema* (Bristol: Intellect, 2010), 211.



Figure 190: 'Man (Francis Birtles?) trying to dig the car out of a bog on the Leichhardt River, North Queensland', n.d., c.1925, obj-149656914, PIC/8381/325 LOC Album 1054/D, Francis Birtles motor car tour collection, National Library of Australia.

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“new points of interest”.<sup>1862</sup> about the Expedition, “supplemented ... with a number of photographs of different places and incidents referred to in his narrative”.<sup>1863</sup>

Many of Birtles' statements were in conflict with the information in Wills' diary and the statements King made at the Commission of Inquiry. Birtles thought much of the evidence given at the Inquiry was contestable, but it was evident that he had not read Wills' journal and several people took issue with Birtles' claims, including John Maddern, who had been at Swan Hill when Burke passed through, and Arthur Esam. Maddern thought:

Mr. Birtles knows but very little of the Burke and Wills expedition, or their journeying to and from the Gulf of Carpentaria. He says he picked up all his information from the natives. Just fancy!<sup>1864</sup>

Although Birtles followed the Expedition's route more faithfully than Morrison, at times he still diverged from it quite considerably.

In August 1935 Clune drove from Sydney to the Depot Camp 65 and Burke's grave at Cooper Creek and, as a result, he decided his next book would be about the Expedition.<sup>1865</sup> After researching the Expedition's archives in Canberra and Sydney (but surprisingly not Melbourne where the majority of the records are kept) he felt it was necessary for him to visit the Gulf of Carpentaria. In December

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<sup>1862</sup> *Argus*, 31 August 1915: 8; *The Queenslander*, 4 September 1915: 3.

<sup>1863</sup> *The Queenslander*, 4 September 1915: 3.

<sup>1864</sup> *Advertiser*, 29 November 1915: 10.

<sup>1865</sup> Clune, *Roaming Around the Darling; Dig*, 250-251.



Figure 191: 'A group of people including children at Tibooburra, New South Wales', 1935. Frank Clune (standing centre) with his travelling partner, poet Bartlett Adamson (seated, left) during their trip to Cooper Creek in 1935.

One of Frank Clune's collection of lantern slides for his lecture series and publications about the Burke & Wills expedition 1860-1861, vn3506805, PIC/9090/49 LOC, National Library of Australia.

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1936, as a guest of the Queensland Tourist Bureau, Clune travelled by boat from Sydney to Brisbane, then flew to Cloncurry courtesy of QANTAS Empire Air Services, then to Normanton with the Flying Doctor Service, before taking the steamship from Normanton to Townsville and then the train back to Brisbane.<sup>1866</sup> After this considerable effort, Clune felt entitled to claim that with regards to Burke and Wills' route, he had "recently crossed most of the ground by car, by aeroplane, and otherwise".<sup>1867</sup> To promote his book he organised a lecture tour illustrated with lantern slides (some of which he deliberately manipulated to show false inscriptions on Burke and Wills trees), as well as writing for travel magazines and giving interviews to the press and ABC Radio. Clune reflected that "only historical students can appreciate the confusion that arises after three-quarters of a century regarding tracks taken by explorers,"<sup>1868</sup> but he thought his efforts, combined with the cooperation of others had ascertained the truth.<sup>1869</sup>

Clune continued to follow sections of Burke's route when he visited western New South Wales in August 1940. However despite his efforts, he only ever visited a selection of the better known locations and he only had the vaguest idea of where in Queensland Burke had travelled. Eager to add weight to his revelation that Burke was infatuated with Julia Matthews,<sup>1870</sup> Clune popularised the notion that Burke had named Julia Creek,<sup>1871</sup> despite it being 50 kilometres east of Burke's actual route.

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<sup>1866</sup> Clune, *Dig: A Drama of Central Australia* (Sixth Edition), Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1943), ix-xi.

<sup>1867</sup> Clune, 'With O'Hara Burke to the Gulf', 14.

<sup>1868</sup> Clune, *Dig*, (Sixth Edition), ix.

<sup>1869</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1870</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>1871</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.



Figure 192: 'Burke's trees at Burke's camp 119 at the junction of Billy Creek and the Bynoe River where in 1861 his expedition discovered the salt waters of the Gulf of Carpentaria, Queensland', 1936. Picture taken by Frank Clune during his trip to the Gulf of Carpentaria in December 1936.

One of Frank Clune's collection of lantern slides for his lecture series and publications about the Burke & Wills expedition 1860-1861, vn3506835, PIC/9090/78 LOC, National Library of Australia.

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The most comprehensive retracing of the route was by Towner, a grazier from Blackall. Starting in 1947 Towner began researching and following the Expedition's route, marking trees, building cairns and erecting rudimentary markers to indicate where he believed Burke had travelled. He erected a marker at Camp 119,<sup>1872</sup> the location of which had been established in 1909,<sup>1873</sup> and he correctly identified and marked King's Site on Cooper Creek.<sup>1874</sup> However the marker he erected at Wills' grave and the tree he blazed there were incorrectly sited,<sup>1875</sup> as was the tree he blazed at Birdsville.<sup>1876</sup> In 1952 and 1953 he drove a large part of the route in a Land Rover and between 1961 and 1963 he marked the centenary of the Expedition by placing plaques at five significant sites. The plaques at Camp 47 on Cannilta Creek<sup>1877</sup> and McKinlay's site at Lake Massacre<sup>1878</sup> accurately marked their intended locations, but the plaques he placed at King's Gap in the Selwyn Range<sup>1879</sup> and the cave he

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<sup>1872</sup> Towner erected a broken light pole salvaged from Normanton at Camp 119 at S17°52'43" E140°49'36" (GDA2020).

<sup>1873</sup> Thomson, 'Expedition to the Gulf of Carpentaria'.

<sup>1874</sup> Towner placed a bore casing pipe and pump ferrule in the ground near King's Site at S27°46'31" E140°40'49" (GDA2020).

<sup>1875</sup> Towner erected a bore casing pipe at Wills' grave at S27°45'15" E140°35'58" (GDA2020).

<sup>1876</sup> Towner blazed a tree at the spot he considered to be Camp 76 on the south bank of the Diamantina near Birdsville at S25°54'42" E139°22'16" (GDA2020). Some visitor information centres and some promotional material continue to claim the tree is a genuine artefact of the Burke and Wills Expedition.

<sup>1877</sup> Towner sent a plaque to Frank A. Nicholls of Pindera Downs station. On 9 October 1961 Frank, F.C. Phillips and D.L. Black built a cairn at Cannilta Creek at S29°25'51" E142°34'49" (GDA2020).

<sup>1878</sup> Towner erected a plaque on a pole at Gray's Grave at Lake Massacre S27°18'42" E140°05'44" (GDA2020).

<sup>1879</sup> Towner erected a brass plaque at King's Gap on Franks Creek in the Selwyn Range at S20°49'11" E140°50'49" (GDA2020).



Figure 193: Alfred Cory Towner, 'Doonmulla WH on Arrabury, Wills lost camels here', n.d.

The annotation is written on the back of the photograph. It is undated, but was taken c.1947-1948 and shows Towner's Land Rover behind a rock cairn at Doonmulla Waterhole on Arrabury Station in Queensland. Towner most likely erected the cairn to indicate the place where he thought Wills and McDonough lost three camels in November 1860.

considered marked a feature named by Wills as 'The House That Jack Built',<sup>1880</sup> and the rough cairn<sup>1881</sup> and a sign<sup>1882</sup> at Arrabury station marking the place where Wills and McDonough lost three camels in November 1860, were all incorrectly sited.

Towner died shortly afterwards without publishing his research and so there is some uncertainty as to how many trees he marked and exactly where he went.<sup>1883</sup> Although there are two maps which show roughly where Towner travelled, a map of Queensland lodged at the National Library of Australia<sup>1884</sup> and a map of New South Wales at the State Library of New South Wales,<sup>1885</sup> the scale of these two maps is not sufficiently large enough to be able to identify the route and campsites with any degree of certainty. In addition, the National Library of Australia is now unable to locate Towner's original map, and so only poor quality A4 photocopies survive. Because Towner left no

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<sup>1880</sup> Towner sent a brass plaque to A.J. 'Jim' McDonald of Brightlands station. On 19 January Jim and V.B. Campbell placed the plaque at the cave they supposed was 'The House That Jack Built' at O'Hara's Gap at S21°24'05" E140°08'11" (GDA2020).

<sup>1881</sup> Towner erected a rough cairn of stones at Doonmulla Waterhole on Arrabury Station to mark the place he thought Wills and McDonough lost three camels. The cairn is at S26°33'33" E141°03'28" (GDA2020).

<sup>1882</sup> Towner erected a plaque on a pole at Arrabury station airstrip detailing the story of Wills and McDonough losing three camels. The plaque is at S26°41'46" E141°03'00" (GDA2020).

<sup>1883</sup> Alfred Cory Towner, born Blackall, 1 January 1901, died Brisbane 9 September 1965.

<sup>1884</sup> Alfred Cory Towner, 'Map showing the route of Burke and Wills', MS 1391, National Library of Australia, 1961. The National Library of Australia adds a note to this record "Photocopy. Location of original unknown".

<sup>1885</sup> Alfred Cory Towner, 'Burke's route across New South Wales', ML:Z M2 810, State Library of New South Wales. (n.d., c.1933-1960?).



Figure 194: Alfred Towner's three interpretive signs erected between 1961 and 1963.  
Left: Cannilta Creek, NSW. Centre: Arrabury station, QLD. Right: Lake Massacre, SA.  
© 2005-2011, Dave Phoenix.

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record of where he travelled, many of the trees that he marked in good faith have been assumed to be trees genuinely marked by Burke and Wills, including the Birdsville Camp 76 tree and the tree that Dr Harvey Sutton cut down and displayed in Cloncurry as part of the town's centenary celebrations.<sup>1886</sup> This led Murgatroyd to write "The exact route ... has been much discussed over the years and has been confused by ... fake 'Burke and Wills' trees",<sup>1887</sup> echoing Bergin's earlier suggestion that the vast majority of carved trees are fakes and so to avoid confusion one should place no faith in any of them.<sup>1888</sup>

Continuing the tradition established by Clune that an author writing an authoritative account about the Expedition should follow in the steps of the explorers to get a better understanding of the conditions they faced, albeit in four-wheel drive cars rather than on foot or with camels, Moorehead, Manning Clark, Murgatroyd and Martin Edmond, all followed Burke's track with varying degrees of accuracy and enthusiasm.<sup>1889</sup>

Moorehead had already prepared the first draft of his manuscript before he travelled Burke's route in October 1962 in a Land Rover, supplied and accompanied by the South Australian Government

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<sup>1886</sup> The tree Towner marked at Camp 102 The Bath Camp was at S20°40'24" E140°12'10" (GDA2020). It was cut down in 1968 and placed on display outside the Cloncurry Shire Council offices. It is now displayed at Cloncurry Unearthed Visitor Information Centre and Museum. David Harvey Sutton, *Cloncurry 100: 1867-1967* (Cloncurry: Cloncurry Centenary Celebrations Committee. Historical and Literary Subcommittee, 1967).

<sup>1887</sup> Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree*, 358.

<sup>1888</sup> Bergin, *In the steps*, 49.

<sup>1889</sup> Moorehead, *Cooper's Creek*; Charles Manning Hope Clark, *A history of Australia: Volume 4 - The earth abideth for ever 1851-1888* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1982); Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree*; Edmond, *Supply party*.

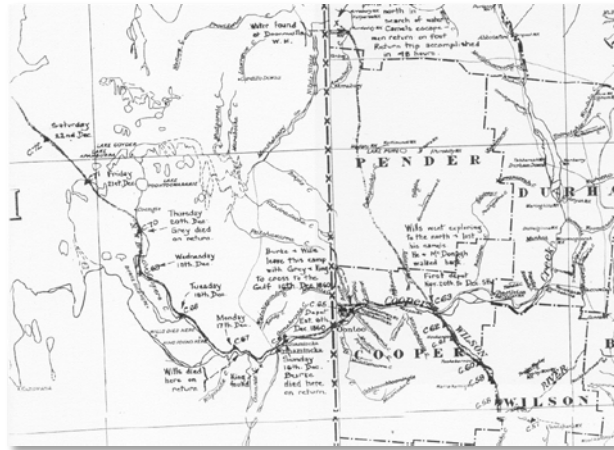


Figure 195: Extract of 'Maps showing route of Burke and Wills 1861 [in Queensland]', 1961.  
Alfred Cory Towner, MS 1391, National Library of Australia.

Towner drew Burke's route onto a Queensland Department of Public Lands map.  
The original is missing and the National Library of Australia only holds photocopies.

Tourist Bureau.<sup>1890</sup> Although Towner was still actively researching the Expedition at the time, the two men never met, and the route that Moorehead followed was little different to the one Clune had proposed almost 30 years earlier. Moorehead was unable to locate Torowoto on his map and so assumed it was the same location as Sturt's Depot Glen (which was 75 kilometres too far to the west),<sup>1891</sup> and he thought Burke had travelled via Dajarra (also too far to the west) and Cloncurry (too far to the east).<sup>1892</sup> Moorehead used the landscape as an aesthetic backdrop to the narrative but never seriously analysed the effect it had on the Expedition's progress. He portrayed the interior as an "uneventful space" which was endured during the "mechanical monotony of this tremendous walk".<sup>1893</sup>

While preparing volume four of his six volume epic, Clark made several trips to search for inspiration about the Expedition.<sup>1894</sup> He visited Menindee in 1967, Burke's birthplace in Co. Galway in 1973, and then, in 1975, he visited a number of Expedition sites, including Menindee, the Cooper, Birdsville and the Gulf.<sup>1895</sup> Notes made during the trips suggest Burke considered Mutawintji "a place of desolation" and at Camp 119 on the Bynoe River Clark asked "why didn't he make a boat and row

<sup>1890</sup> Moorehead, *Cooper's Creek*, 211-213; Ann Moyal, *Alan Moorehead: A Rediscovery* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2005), 81-94.

<sup>1891</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>1892</sup> *Ibid.*, Map on inside cover.

<sup>1893</sup> *Ibid.*, 58 & 71; Geoffrey Dutton, 'Burke and Wills' testament', *Australian Book Review*, March (1964): 96-97.

<sup>1894</sup> Charles Manning Hope Clark, *A history of Australia: Volume 4 - The earth abideth for ever 1851-1888* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1982).

<sup>1895</sup> Mark McKenna, *An eye for eternity: the life of Manning Clark* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2011), 481.



to the Gulf?".<sup>1896</sup> Clark was "famous for his journeys in search of place and atmosphere"<sup>1897</sup> and he made it clear to his readers that he had visited all the significant locations.<sup>1898</sup> His biographers claim that he was:

concerned to interrogate the importance of geography, topography and location, and as he noted in his 1976 Boyer lectures, the "influence of the spirit of place in the fashioning of Australians".<sup>1899</sup>

McKenna claimed Clark was "one of the first to understand the sense of strangeness, the sense of melancholy about the Australian landscape and to express that in his history" and suggested his account of the Expedition was "one of his most evocative set pieces".<sup>1900</sup> He added: "Read the passages on Burke and Wills. They're wonderful examples of writing about place".<sup>1901</sup> Despite the praise, Clark did not embellish his account of the VEE with details of the landscape.<sup>1902</sup> His account may conjure the politics and personalities of 1860 Melbourne, but there was little else to connect the Expedition and the landscape through which it passed. Clark relied on Moorehead for many of his ideas and Moorehead did a better job evoking images of men interacting with landscape.

The most comprehensive assessment of the effects of the landscape, albeit in a limited way, was in 1977 when Bergin investigated possible alternate scenarios the Expedition may have faced had it departed at a different time of year. Of all the environmental variables that might have contributed to the explorers' deaths, it was the time of year that they travelled that was first suggested as significant. Because A.C. Gregory had suggested that the VEE should be "at the out-stations not later than March, and, if practicable, return before the ensuing summer, and not remain out at the Depot during the hot season",<sup>1903</sup> the EC initially expected the Expedition would leave the Darling in April or May.<sup>1904</sup> Burke's critics subsequently questioned his decision to cross the deserts in summer. Morton thought travelling at the "incorrect time of year", combined with Burke's inexperience were "the two chief points which led to all the ultimate ruin".<sup>1905</sup> However it was not considered unusual for explorers to travel during summer. In fact, in 1844 Sturt had departed

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<sup>1896</sup> *Ibid.*, 483-484.

<sup>1897</sup> Tom Griffiths, *The art of time travel: historians and their craft* (Carlton: Black Inc., 2016), Prologue.

<sup>1898</sup> Thirteen of the 42 footnotes in Clark's chapter on the Expedition are "Personal visit to the site" and he mentions visiting Menindee, Mootwingee, Camp 76 at Birdsville, Corella River, Camp 119, the Dig Tree, Innamincka, Wills' grave, Burke's grave, King's site, the Melbourne Club, King's grave and Lake Massacre.

<sup>1899</sup> Max Quanchi, 'A few good quotes: Australia interpreted through the methodology of writing a general history', *Social Alternatives*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2002): 78-80.

<sup>1900</sup> McKenna, *Eye for eternity*, 484.

<sup>1901</sup> Mark McKenna, 'Clark's biographer speaks about historian's past', Mark Colvin's PM radio program, ABC Local Radio, 5 March 2007.

<sup>1902</sup> Charles Manning Hope Clark, *A history of Australia: Volume 4 - The earth abideth for ever 1851-1888* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1982), Chapter 8: Glory, Folly and Chance: 144-162.

<sup>1903</sup> Augustus Charles Gregory, 'Letter to Mueller, Sydney, 31 December 1858' in Philosophical Institute of Victoria, *Transactions*, Vol. 4: vi-ix.

<sup>1904</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, *Progress Reports*, 'Second Progress Report, 26 May 1858'.

<sup>1905</sup> William Lockhart Morton, 'Letter to the Editor', *Argus*, 30 January 1862: 7; 'Letter to the Editor', 3 February 1863: 5.

Adelaide for the interior in August, the same time of year that Burke departed Melbourne, and Sturt had been in the semi-arid areas of north-western New South Wales between November and January, as Burke was some 16 years later. Sturt's protégé, Stuart, who had been out with Sturt in the summer, later dismissed his own men for refusing to work in the desert in summer.<sup>1906</sup> Just a year before Burke set out from Melbourne, Warburton had been harshly criticised by the press for his "absurd dread of summering out".<sup>1907</sup> Even while the EC were considering Warburton as a candidate for the leadership of the Victorian Expedition, the South Australian press continued to denigrate him. They thought:

the gallant Major himself must now regret that absurd dread of 'summering out' that has robbed him of laurels as an explorer which were once within his grasp. A country ... lay before him; but alas for his fame he turned away from it in despair and sacrificed glory to comfort.<sup>1908</sup>

When Burke departed Menindee in October, he was aware of the criticism he would face should he not advance to the Cooper, and he was also aware that Stuart did not fear 'summering out' and so would press on to cross the continent whatever the season.

Bergin was the first person to test these assumptions by a physical examination of the landscape. As curator of mammals at Taronga Park Zoo, his interest was in the camels' abilities in the summer, particularly during the monsoon in the Gulf. Bergin focussed on the first use of camels in Australian exploration and wondered "how could anyone in their right mind take camels into the tropics in the wet season?"<sup>1909</sup> In 1977 he decided to test the hypothesis that winter travel would have been more successful by walking seven camels from Cooper Creek to the Gulf and back.<sup>1910</sup> Bergin completed the northbound journey three days quicker than Burke but eleven days slower than he anticipated. He found that by trying to match Burke's rate of progress, his rate of travel was so great that the camels' condition deteriorated, to the extent that they were unable to make the return journey. His conclusion that it was the pace of travel, rather than the time of year, that resulted in the deaths of Burke's pack-animals has already been discussed in Chapter 5.

Bergin spent some time deliberating over Burke's route and included maps in his book describing his journey with the camels.<sup>1911</sup> He claimed that Wills had no way of knowing that magnetic declination would result in a +6°E variation between true and magnetic north and therefore Wills arrived at the Gulf at least 50 miles east of his intended destination.<sup>1912</sup> This assertion, however, is at odds with the fact Wills and Neumayer had been conducting magnetic surveys at the Flagstaff

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<sup>1906</sup> Stuart, 'Journal of Mr Stuart's Third Expedition (in the vicinity of Lake Torrens), November 1859 to January 1860', *Explorations in Australia*, 89-130.

<sup>1907</sup> *South Australian Register*, 20 December 1858: 2.

<sup>1908</sup> *South Australian Register*, 19 July 1859: 2.

<sup>1909</sup> Bergin, *In the steps*, 24.

<sup>1910</sup> John Lapsley, 'In the track of Burke & Wills', *Australian*, 28 May 1977: 21; 'A killing journey explains Burke and Wills' failure', *Australian*, 17-18 September 1977: 4.

<sup>1911</sup> Bergin, *In the steps*, 24.

<sup>1912</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

Observatory prior to the Expedition's departure and that Neumayer had originally intended that Wills would conduct a magnetic survey of the Expedition's route.<sup>1913</sup> Wills demonstrated he was aware of declination and explained that he accounted for magnetic variation when working out his dead-reckoning calculations:

The accompanying plan has been roughly constructed in the following manner:- a plot of the field notes has been made estimating the rate of progress at three miles an hour and allowing six to seven degrees for east variation (all the bearings being magnetic).<sup>1914</sup>

Bergin also identified Digby Peaks<sup>1915</sup> as being the "three remarkable small hills" that Wills observed near Camp 32R and therefore claimed that:

This was a tremendous find as a number of historians have believed that the return journey was made a hundred or so miles east of here.<sup>1916</sup>

Although he correctly identified these hills, he was not the first to do so, as Towner had blazed a tree nearby on the banks of the Burke River at least 15 years earlier.<sup>1917</sup> Although Bergin spent a great deal of time deliberating where Burke had travelled, his primary aim was to cover similar distances to Burke to see how the camels fared and so an accurate retracing of the route was neither possible nor attempted. For much of the journey Bergin chose to follow roads, stock-routes and station tracks as close to Burke's route as possible, rather than attempting to retrace the exact route. Following Burke's route would have presented great difficulties in getting the camels through the innumerable fences that have been erected. As stock-routes tend to follow better watered routes than Burke took, and the modern Beef Roads tend to avoid the low-lying well-watered areas and therefore follow drier routes than Burke's, Bergin's methodology in the selection of route is questionable. However as Bergin's hypothesis focussed on the climate and time of year, rather than the exact route, it was the distance the camels had to travel rather than the route they took that he felt was important. Consequently there were significant differences between the two journeys, particularly the sections between the Cooper and Diamantina and between Boulia and Duchess. Between Duchess and Cloncurry Bergin was unsure where Burke had travelled and so he followed the road through Malbon, thereby avoiding the most rugged country in the Selwyn Range that had slowed Burke's camels

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<sup>1913</sup> Neumayer instructed Wills to record "Magnetical observations, in addition to the determination of the variations of the compass", Exploration Committee, 'Instructions to VEE officers', ex1008-001, Box 2088B/5, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 1-14.

<sup>1914</sup> William John Wills, 'Dispatch, dated Darling River, 28 September 1860', ex2002-014, Box 2082/1b (Item 1), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria. See also: Wills' dead-reckoning calculations in William John Wills, 'Astronomical Observations: Terrick Terrick to Bilbarka, 31 August 1860 to 4 October 1860', ex2008-021, Box 2083/1c, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria, and compare them to the daily traverse notes (Items ex2008-009, Box 2082/6a through ex2008-018, Box 2082/6j) to see how Wills converted his magnetic bearings to true bearings. Wills occasionally read bearings to the sun at sunrise and/or sunset and compared the azimuth with those printed in the Nautical Almanac to check compass error and/or magnetic declination.

<sup>1915</sup> Digby Peaks are on Chatsworth Station in Queensland, at S26°06'33" E140°07'42" (GDA2020).

<sup>1916</sup> Bergin, *In the steps*, 88.

<sup>1917</sup> Bergin realised this later when he saw a copy of Towner's map during a visit to Cloncurry, Bergin, *In the Steps*, 100-101. Towner's Camp 32R tree is on the Burke River at S22°05'21" E140°06'47" (GDA2020).

considerably. While Bergin's experience was valuable in showing Burke's inexperience in handling camels, he did not comment on the influence of the landscape on the camels' efficiency or welfare.

A visit to the Dig Tree in 1997 was the incentive for Murgatroyd to write *The Dig Tree*. Two years later while preparing her manuscript, she retraced sections of the Expedition's route and in 2000 she spent six weeks driving the Expedition's track from Melbourne to the Gulf.<sup>1918</sup> Much of the "new historical and scientific evidence" that Murgatroyd used was Bergin's unpublished work, and consequently the route she travelled was very similar to Bergin's.<sup>1919</sup> The few deviations from Bergin's route appear to have been determined through Murgatroyd's own research, but because Murgatroyd died in 2002 and her book does not contain references or citations, it is not possible to identify her sources. Murgatroyd used Burke's route to critically assess his management style, and she has written more about the Expedition's historical human ecology and the landscape they passed through than any previous author other than Bergin. Unfortunately she did not correctly identify Burke's route, despite claims from her publisher that her research was thorough, and therefore many of her assessments are of little value. In this respect, Murgatroyd is deserving of the greatest criticism, as it is only possible to make critical assessments about the use of resources and choice of route if one actually knows where Burke was at the time he made these decisions. With regards to Burke's arrival at the Cooper, Murgatroyd wrote:

On 11 November 1860, they entered an undulating area of stony rises, little realising that the desert was about to perform one of its most startling transformations. After an excess of space and light, the rich, green environment that suddenly confronted the party was a revelation. Ahead was Cooper Creek, winding its way through the wilderness like a fat orange snake. The tired and dusty convoy of men, horses and camels plunged down its banks and threw themselves into the water.<sup>1920</sup>

This fanciful description has little relationship to the Expedition's arrival at the small, winding tributary of the Wilson River to which Wills navigated the party on 11 November 1860. In addition, it implies that the landscape is full of surprises and suggests that Wills was unaware that they were about to arrive at the Cooper, despite having navigated the party there. Having visited the Cooper, Murgatroyd assumes that her arrival at the creek in 1997 somehow corresponded to the way that Burke arrived at the creek in 1860. Her discovery of the Cooper becomes Burke's discovery also. She continues, "the Yandruwandha watched in amazement as these new strangers charged straight towards the water and began paddling around in it".<sup>1921</sup> Apart from the fact that the Expedition arrived at the creek in Wangkumara country and not Yandruwandha country, Wills wrote "at the point at which we first struck Cooper's Creek it was rocky, sandy, and dry".<sup>1922</sup> When they followed

<sup>1918</sup> Tony Wright, 'Burke and Wills: an outback tragedy', *The Bulletin*, 30 January 2002.

<sup>1919</sup> Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree*, 363-363, Notes on rear cover.

<sup>1920</sup> Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree*, 141.

<sup>1921</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>1922</sup> Wills, 'Third Surveyor's Report', ex2004-013, State Library of Victoria.

it downstream and found water, the waterholes were not large, the banks were steep and the bed of the creek was very boggy.<sup>1923</sup> After he left the Cooper in December 1860, Murgatroyd claims Burke:

displayed an uncanny ability to discover the most fertile strips of land in areas where just a kilometre either way might make the difference between finding water or dying of thirst,<sup>1924</sup>

and while death by dehydration might be a possibility in the sand dunes of the Simpson or Strzelecki Desert, it is not a realistic proposition in Sturt Stony Desert where the coolibah lined course of the Diamantina and Cooper can be seen from a considerable distance. Murgatroyd fails to appreciate the methods Wills used to identify water sources and navigate to them. The Expedition frequently identified watercourses from many kilometres away by observing the crowns of *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*, Melaleucas and other emergent tree species which protrude above the canopy of coolibahs and Acacias; they asked Aboriginal people where to find water and they observed the flight path of birds towards water.

Murgatroyd suggested Burke's "first stroke of good fortune was to traverse an area 100 kilometres above the Cooper, known as Coongie Lakes".<sup>1925</sup> These lakes are now a RAMSAR Wetland, have recently been declared a National Park, and are indeed a significant wetland in the arid interior. No previous writer, however, has proposed that Burke went anywhere near Malkumba-Coongie, and the Expedition actually passed 25 kilometres to the west. It seems Murgatroyd determined that Burke was at Malkumba-Coongie Lakes as a result of Wills mentioning a "large lagoon" in his journal, when in fact this lagoon was Lake Amagooranie.<sup>1926</sup> Murgatroyd's strangest statement relates to Burke's travel along the Diamantina River at the end of December 1860. She felt that "luck was running in Burke's favour" and Burke was:

about to receive a geographical gift that would take them all the way to the Gulf of Carpentaria.<sup>1927</sup>

Murgatroyd then explains that the Diamantina River "was the key to reaching the Gulf of Carpentaria".<sup>1928</sup> Certainly finding the Diamantina meant Burke did not have to venture into the Simpson Desert to reach water at Eyre Creek, but once again Wills' description of their discovery of water differs markedly from Murgatroyd's perceptions of what happened. Murgatroyd believes Burke arrived at the Diamantina on 27 December just to the south of today's town of Birdsville, when Wills actually describes their arrival at the river on 25 December at a location some 75 kilometres south of Birdsville. Once at the Diamantina Burke decided that they would follow the river, but after travelling north for three days, rather than being a "geographic gift", the river turned to the east. After following

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<sup>1923</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1924</sup> Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree*, 186.

<sup>1925</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1926</sup> Gabriel White and Martin Meyer, *Beyond the Cooper: Burke and Wills, some missing links* (Kew: Preshil Camping Club, 1992). Lake Amagooranie is at S27°22'45" E140°00'40" (GDA2020).

<sup>1927</sup> Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree*, 191.

<sup>1928</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

the river to the east for two days, Burke felt the river's course was "rather too much to put up with"<sup>1929</sup> and so he decided to leave the water and head due north. This decision was one of the more important ones he made on the journey and one whose significance has been overlooked, as it resulted in Burke travelling through some of the driest country on the trip. The potential consequences of this decision are reviewed later in this chapter. Murgatroyd's book contains many other examples where she allows the narrative to be influenced by her own interaction with the landscape, rather than relying on detailed historical research. Often this is a result of her attempts to describe the scene through narrative, but, as can be seen in the case of Camp 119 in the Gulf of Carpentaria, this desire to paint a picture for the reader results in a false impression. Her description of the landscape which "seemed to close in around them" with "thickets of small trees [that] grew so dense it was difficult to force a way through" and the scrub which "clutches at your clothes and rips at your hair"<sup>1930</sup> more accurately describes the current infestations of imported weeds, which are being experienced in northern Australia, rather than any landscape Burke would have seen.<sup>1931</sup>

It is clear that Murgatroyd imagines Burke to have travelled through a very different environment to the one he actually did. With these preconceived notions it is difficult for Murgatroyd to make an accurate assessment of Burke's competence and actions when the landscape he encountered was so different to the one she imagined.

An additional proposal on Burke's route was made by Roger Collier, who argued that Burke and Wills did not "force their way across a trackless and almost empty continent".<sup>1932</sup> Because Wills "frequently mentions the presence of Aboriginal pathways during their journey"<sup>1933</sup>, Collier superimposed Burke's route onto Josephine Flood's map of Aboriginal trade routes.<sup>1934</sup> He noticed:

one trade route in particular shown on that map accords very closely with much of the route taken by Burke and Wills.<sup>1935</sup>

<sup>1929</sup> Burke, 'Diary', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1930</sup> Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree*, 208-209.

<sup>1931</sup> Two introduced Class 2 WONS (Weeds Of National Significance) in particular are affecting the site of Burke's Camp 119: Mesquite, *Prosopis* spp., and Rubber Vine, *Cryptostegia grandiflora*. Other Class 2 WONS affecting the Expedition's track in the Gulf of Carpentaria include Prickly Acacia, *Acacia nilotica*, Parkinsonia, *Parkinsonia aculeate*, Bellyache Bush, *Jatropha gossypifolia*, Chinese Apple, *Ziziphus mauritiana*, and Hymenachne, *Hymenachne amplexicaulis*. Gordon Grimwade (Maxim Consulting Services Pty. Ltd.), 'Conservation plan: Burke and Wills Camp 119, Walker's Camp, RGSA (Qld) Blazed tree, Little Bynoe River, Normanton', (Brisbane: Carpentaria Shire Council Ltd., 2011); Carpentaria Shire Council, *Pest Management Plan 2015-2019* (Brisbane, Carpentaria Shire, 2012); Queensland: Government. Department of Natural Resources and Mines, *Area Management Plan for the control of pest plants in the Dry Tropics region* (Brisbane: Department of Natural Resources and Mines, 2014). Camp 119 is at S17°52'43" E140°49'36" (GDA2020).

<sup>1932</sup> Roger Collier, 'Burke and Wills', *4x4 Australia*, No. 56, August-September (1988): 105.

<sup>1933</sup> Collier, *4x4 Australia*, 105.

<sup>1934</sup> Josephine Flood, *Archaeology of the dreamtime* (Sydney: Collins Australia, 1989), 269.

<sup>1935</sup> Collier, *4x4 Australia*, 102.

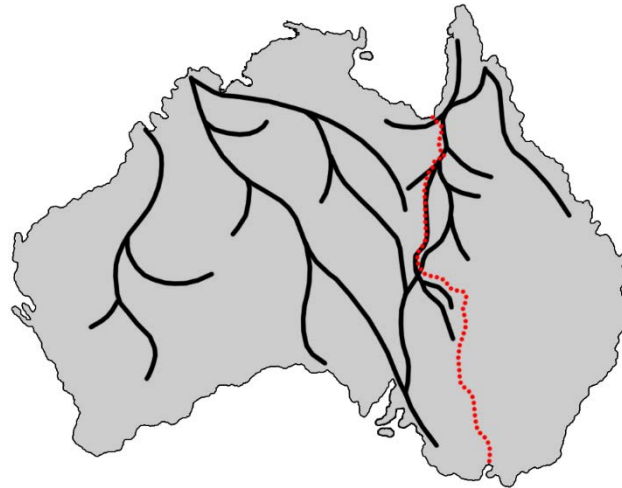


Figure 196: Josephine Flood's map showing Aboriginal trade routes as identified by Mulvaney, with Burke's route overlaid in red.

Adapted from: Roger Collier, 'Burke and Wills', *4x4 Magazine*, No. 56, August-September (1988): 99.

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Collier therefore concluded that Burke and Wills followed a well-established trade route claiming that "from the Stony Desert to the Gulf of Carpentaria, Burke and Wills rarely deviated from a major trade route".<sup>1936</sup>

Certainly Australia was criss-crossed with a myriad of Aboriginal pathways, which Reynolds explained "linked wells, springs and other water sources, led to fords, mountain passes, and circumvented forests and other natural obstacles".<sup>1937</sup> Reynolds also noted that explorers soon became accustomed to identifying Aboriginal foot tracks, which were often carefully maintained.<sup>1938</sup> Both Sturt and Gregory had mentioned them during their earlier travels to Cooper Creek, and as Wills had used Aboriginal guides from Balranald to Bulloo, he would have been well aware of the benefits of Aboriginal pathways. However, there is a considerable difference between an Aboriginal pathway and an Aboriginal trade route. A trade route was not a road or pathway in any European sense; rather it was a series of waterholes and features within a linear strip of land along which traders were allowed to pass. Although Mulvaney argues that the use of Aboriginal routes by "Australia's iconic explorers [is] a little acknowledged truth",<sup>1939</sup> he also noted that trade routes:

were not as Europeans would have understood the term when they began arriving and settling in 1788, nor as many today would even understand it.<sup>1940</sup>

Spooner further argues that to Europeans the term 'pathway' "evokes an image of a managed, signposted road of some kind", whereas an Aboriginal pathway was a "convergence of the human

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<sup>1936</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>1937</sup> Reynolds, *With the white people*, 10.

<sup>1938</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1939</sup> Derek John Mulvaney, 'These Aboriginal lines of travel', *Historic Environment*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2002): 4-7.

<sup>1940</sup> National Film and Sound Archive, 'Digital Learning Resources: Mulvaney 'Trade Routes''.  
[dl.nfsa.gov.au/module/1542/](http://dl.nfsa.gov.au/module/1542/)



form and the Dreamtime”,<sup>1941</sup> which traversed a landscape which consisted not only of “rocks, trees and waterholes, but places which the great ancestors had created and where they still lived”,<sup>1942</sup> and so:

for Indigenous peoples, a ‘pathway’ had both tangible and intangible qualities, and therefore references in the literature to such are often ambiguous, due to differences in their Indigenous use and meaning, and confusion in European descriptions of them.<sup>1943</sup>

In recognition of this ambiguity, Spooner suggests the term ‘traditional pathway’ which he defines as encompassing:

Dreaming tracks (McCarthy 1939; Memmott and Long 2002), Song Lines (Donovan and Wall 2004), Trade Routes, (Horton 1994; McBryde 1997; Mulvaney 2002), and Indigenous Pathways (Blair 2000).<sup>1944</sup>

Collier uses the term ‘Aboriginal pathway’ and ‘Aboriginal trade route’ interchangeably and fails to define either or to differentiate between the two. He also fails to recognise the difference in the way Burke selected his route between the occasions when he was being directed by Aboriginal guides, and the occasions when Wills was navigating without Aboriginal assistance. As Burke had been guided by Aboriginal people from Balranald to the Bulloo River, he was more likely to have used Aboriginal pathways during this time. After Camp 54 when they were no longer able to obtain assistance from Aboriginal people, Wills reverted to European navigation principles to identify Sturt’s 1845 position on the Cooper; and from the Diamantina to the headwaters of the Cloncurry River, Burke attempted exploration independent of watercourses, which is discussed in Chapter 5. Collier argues the reverse of this, and suggests that Burke started using Aboriginal trade routes after they had left their Aboriginal guides and were navigating by themselves. However, Aboriginal trade routes closely followed major waterways, whereas once Burke left the Diamantina, he avoided the major watercourses of the Georgina catchment, instead spending periods of several days at a time in waterless country. During this time Wills makes no mention of Aboriginal tracks but he did remark on the fact they had not seen any Aboriginal people for several days.<sup>1945</sup> Because Collier fails to identify Burke’s route correctly and misreads Wills’ diary, he consequently concludes Burke followed major river courses and their associated Aboriginal trade routes. While Flood and Mulvaney’s work is beyond question, their map is at a scale of 1:50M and as such is indicative only. Therefore it is difficult, if not impractical, to use a map of such small scale as this as the basis of an argument. The argument is not whether Burke and Wills benefited from Aboriginal assistance, used Aboriginal guides or followed Aboriginal pathways, for it is clear they did all of these; it is whether they followed

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<sup>1941</sup> Peter G. Spooner and Miranda Firman, ‘Origins of Travelling Stock Routes - 1: Connections to Indigenous traditional pathways’, *Rangeland Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (2010): 329-339.

<sup>1942</sup> Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Australians: black response to white dominance, 1788-1980* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1982).

<sup>1943</sup> Spooner and Firman, ‘Origins of Travelling Stock Routes’.

<sup>1944</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1945</sup> Wills, ‘Field Book 5: January 1860’, ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

a well-defined Aboriginal trade route from the Cooper to the Gulf. Collier argues they did, but has not identified Burke's route with sufficient accuracy to do anything other than plot it on a 1:50K scale map.

This theory of Aboriginal pathways was repeated by the Queensland Museum in their 2010 exhibition, *The last days of Burke and Wills*, which marked the sesquicentenary of the Expedition's departure.

Burke and Wills's ill-fated trip to the Gulf of Carpentaria and back to central Australia unknowingly followed well-established Aboriginal trade routes ... Dr Kate Quirk ... said this was a sad fact behind the Burke and Wills legend.<sup>1946</sup>

Quirk said while the Burke and Wills party saw inland Australia as a vast, desolate and empty place, the route they followed to the Gulf was well known to Aborigines.<sup>1947</sup>

"But of course this island was not empty. Aboriginal people had lived there for thousands of years" Dr Quirk said. "And it is quite marked that the entire route that Burke and Wills were trying to establish from Melbourne up to the Gulf was actually overlain by pre-existing Aboriginal trade routes that ran right from the Gulf down to the Flinders Ranges".<sup>1948</sup>

None of the above attempts clearly defined Burke's route. In fact each of these assessments assumed different routes for Burke's travel from Melbourne to the Gulf. While the exact route is an issue which has been debated, none of the re-tracing attempts has critically evaluated the landscape in terms of its likely effect on the Expedition. Similarly, of the people who have evaluated the Expedition – Clune, Murgatroyd, Moorehead, Bergin, Tipping, Fitzpatrick and Bonyhady – few have included the effects of the landscape. Moorehead and Murgatroyd used the landscape as part of the narrative as an aid to telling the story. Bonyhady, whose book is the most comprehensive and most well researched, did not travel the Expedition's route and made no attempt at geographical approximations. Fitzpatrick's critical analysis emphasised the organisation of the Expedition rather than the landscape as the main cause of expedition deaths. No one knows exactly where Burke went and so no one has been able to accurately evaluate the effect the landscape had on the Expedition and the effect the Expedition had on the landscape.

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<sup>1946</sup> *Brisbane Times*, 5 August 2010.

brisbanetimes.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/exhibition-unearths-legend-of-burke-and-wills-20100804-11fh6.html

<sup>1947</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1948</sup> *Ibid.*

### **7.3 Using the landscape as an historical document: My approach to the investigation**

*He who might wish to know this country must first walk over it.*

Translated quote attributed to Abel Janszoon Tasman,  
Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, Batavia, 1644.



#### **7.3.1 Using the landscape as an historical document: A preliminary assessment of the Expedition's route**

In order to be able to assess the interaction between landscape and Expedition, one needs to know where the Expedition went. More precisely, for the purpose of this investigation one needs to identify which landscapes the Expedition passed through and the time of year and weather conditions they experienced at the time. This presents difficulties as the route has never been clearly defined, Burke did not keep a detailed journal of their travel, Wills' journal is incomplete and many of his field observations and maps are missing. In addition, the Expedition travelled much of the time in discrete groups, not all the groups followed the same route, and many of the notable features were given different names by each of the separate groups, thereby adding to the confusion.

However there are many archives still extant from which the Expedition's route can be ascertained with varying degrees of accuracy. The Methodology section in the Introduction (see pages 17-23) has already discussed the provenance and reliability of these archives, and using this knowledge it is possible to piece together the Expedition's movements. The first stage of this process was to establish a chronology of events (see Chapter 4), and then using this timeline, begin to establish geographical locations for each of the parties on each of the dates. It soon became clear that the Expedition's route could be divided into five separate legs based upon the type and quality of archival data that defined the route and the preliminary accuracy that could be ascribed to each of these legs prior to field investigation.



Figure 197: Map of Leg 1, Melbourne to Balranald  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.

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### Leg 1: Melbourne to Balranald (August-September 1860)

The Expedition generated no specific navigational data during this section, and as Burke had six wagons he followed existing roads and bush tracks to the Murray River. The main sources used to geographically tie the chronology to the landscape were the extensive press reports, particularly the Melbourne and Bendigo papers. These accounts were plotted using nineteenth century maps, gazetteers, directories and almanacs.<sup>1949</sup> Once the route had been identified, it was cross checked using Wills' occasional scientific observations and notes, Becker and Beckler's diaries, Becker's sketches and the Expedition's financial accounts. Field inspections of this section were carried out in 2001, 2003, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2014.

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<sup>1949</sup> Resources consulted include: Thomas Ham & Co., *Hams' map of the routes to the Mt. Alexander & Ballarat gold diggings* (Melbourne: Thos. Ham, 1852) MAP RM 960, National Library of Australia; Smith & Elder, *Map of the Colony of Victoria* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1857), MAP RM 3848, National Library of Australia; George Slater, *Map of and Guide to Melbourne and Suburbs* (Melbourne: George Slater, 1857); Andrew Robertson, *Map of southern Victoria* (Melbourne: Public Lands Office, 1858) L790, Sheet No. 3, MAP RM 1015, National Library of Australia; Charles Edward Glass, *Road guide to the gold fields with distances* (Castlemaine: Chas. E. Glass, 1859), MAP NK 2456/139, National Library of Australia; E.L. Robinson, *Road Map of Victoria* (Melbourne: E.L. Robinson, 1859), MAP RM 966, National Library of Australia; Sparkes, *Sparkes' Road Map to Victoria* (Melbourne: Sparkes, 1859), MAP RM 995, National Library of Australia; R.M. Abbott, *Victorian Post Office Almanac and Book of Useful Information for 1860* (Melbourne: R.M. Abbott & Co., 1860); James J. Blundell, *The Squatters' Directory and Key to the Squatting Map of Victoria* (Melbourne: James J. Blundell & Co., 1862); Sands and Kenny's *Melbourne Directory for 1860* (Melbourne: Sands, Kenny & Co, 1860); Edward Stanford, *The Province of Victoria (Australia) showing all the roads, rivers, towns, counties, gold-diggings, sheep and cattle stations, &c. &c. &c.* (London: Edward Stanford, 1860), MAP RM 4434, National Library of Australia; F.F. Bailliere, *Bailliere's Victorian Atlas* (Melbourne: F.F. Bailliere, 1866), MAP RaA 16, National Library of Australia; Butler & Brooke, *Butler & Brooke's National Directory of Victoria for 1866-67* (Melbourne: Butler & Brooke, 1866); De Gruchy & Leigh, *Strangers Guide to Melbourne* (Melbourne: De Gruchy & Leigh, 1866); Victorian parish and township maps and plans in the 'Regional Land Office Parish and Township Plans Digitised Reference Set', VPRS 16171/P0001, Public Record Office of Victoria.

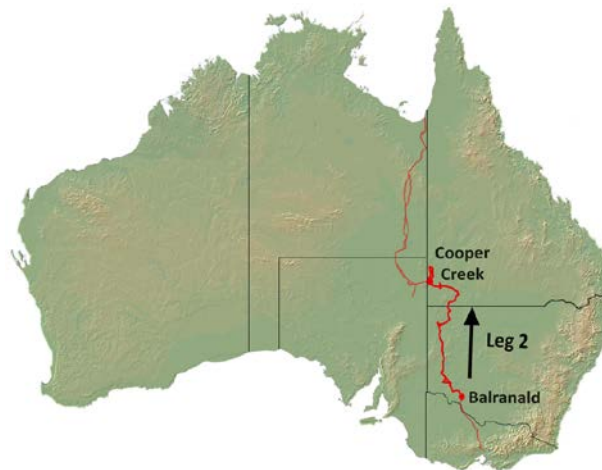


Figure 198: Map of Leg 2 Balranald to Cooper Creek  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.

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### **Leg 2: Balranald to Cooper Creek (September-December 1860)**

Once Neumayer joined the Expedition, he and Wills began recording the Expedition's traverse in field books. Wills used ten field books between Camp 20 at Balranald and Depot Camp 63 on the Cooper. These field books are still extant and the traverse data contained in them was transcribed and plotted and then cross-referenced with Wills' astronomical observations, dead-reckoning calculations and sketch maps. Wills' latitudes were used as controls where there were any significant anomalies in the rate of progress, with a greater weighting being placed on latitudes reduced from astronomical observations rather than latitudes estimated from dead-reckoning calculations. The traverse was further verified by comparing it with accounts from the diaries of Becker, Beckler, Wright, Brahe, Howitt, Welch and Aitken, the narrative of Lyons and Macpherson, sketches made by Becker and Beckler, and sketch maps made by Wills, Becker, Beckler, Howitt and Welch. This section of the route was the one that was most accurately defined. Field checks of parts of this section were carried out in 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2014.

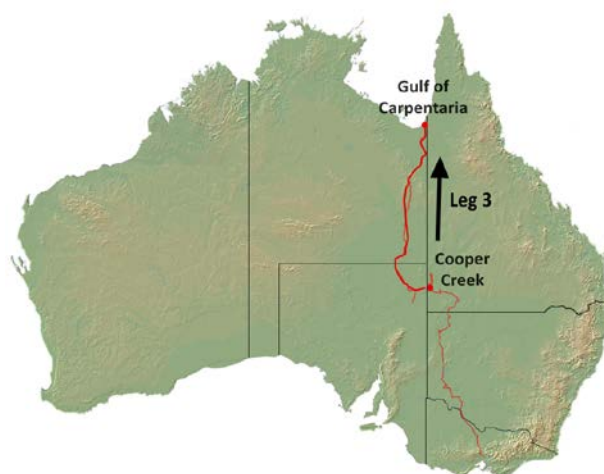


Figure 199: Map of Leg 3, Cooper Creek to the Gulf of Carpentaria  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.

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### **Leg 3: Cooper Creek to the Gulf (December 1860-February 1861)**

On this leg of the journey Wills recorded their traverse in nine field books, and he also made eight maps. However these books and maps were only partially transcribed and the originals went missing shortly after they were returned to Melbourne. In addition, none of Wills' astronomical observations for this section were returned to Melbourne. Therefore this section of the Expedition's track is the least well defined of the northbound trek. The main source of information was Mueller's transcription of Wills' diary and Ligar's tracings of his maps, cross referenced with the evidence King gave to the Commission and his various narratives to Howitt, Welch and Smith. Field inspections of this section were carried out in 2003, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2014.

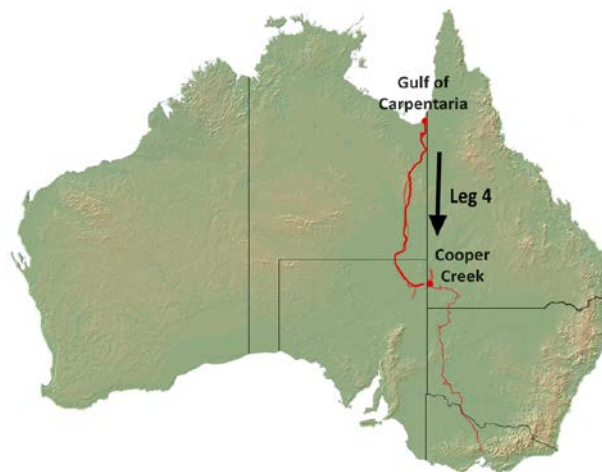


Figure 200: Map of Leg 4, Gulf of Carpentaria to Cooper Creek  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.

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#### **Leg 4: The Gulf back to Cooper Creek (February-April 1861)**

Wills continued mapping this section and made diary entries and astronomical observations, but again most of the originals went missing shortly after they were returned to Melbourne. It was possible to establish a detailed chronology for this section, but beyond the work of Cork *et al*<sup>1950</sup> and possibly Tangey *et al*,<sup>1951</sup> little work has been done to establish the route. Most research interest has been focussed around a very specific area believed to contain Wills' instruments which were buried at Camp 46R 'The Plant Camp'.

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<sup>1950</sup> Burke and Wills Outback Conference 2003, *Burke and Wills Conference Proceedings* 2003.

<sup>1951</sup> Daphne Sider and Chris Tangey, 'Searching for Burke and Wills', *Age: Travel Supplement*, 9 December 1995.



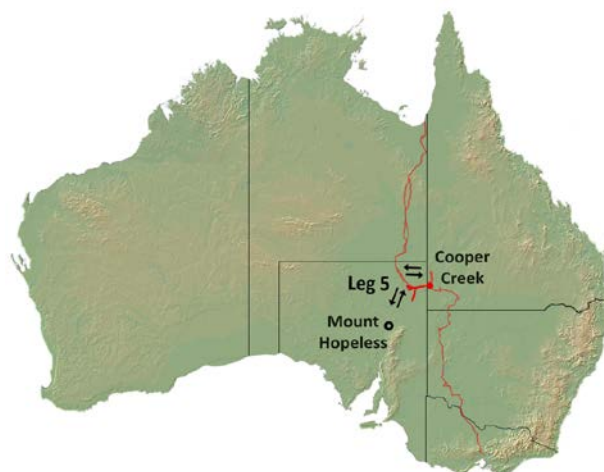


Figure 201: Map of Leg 5, Cooper Creek towards Mount Hopeless  
© 2017 Dave Phoenix.

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### Leg 5: Cooper Creek towards Mount Hopeless (April-September 1861)

The evidence for this section is the scarcest of all, and predominantly relies on Wills' diary (which is also incomplete but still extant) and King's evidence to the Commission and his various narratives and recollections. There were few physical signs of the Expedition's track and little corroborating evidence, other than the confirmed locations of the Depot Camp 65 and Burke's grave. Field trips to check this section were undertaken in 2005, 2007 and 2009.

Once these legs were established using archival data and field inspections, additional data, including earlier field research by Towner,<sup>1952</sup> Blanchen,<sup>1953</sup> Bergin,<sup>1954</sup> Corke,<sup>1955</sup> Cork *et al*,<sup>1956</sup> Tangey *et al*,<sup>1957</sup> Andrews,<sup>1958</sup> Wyeth,<sup>1959</sup> Leahy,<sup>1960</sup> and Hillan,<sup>1961</sup> was considered and integrated

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<sup>1952</sup> Alfred Cory Towner's maps:

- a) 'Burke's route across New South Wales', (n.d., c.1933-1960?), ML:Z/M2 810p/1860/1, Mitchell Map Collection, State Library of New South Wales.
- b) 'Maps showing route of Burke and Wills (on Queensland Dept. of Public Lands map of Queensland)', 1961, MS 1391, National Library of Australia. (Note: Photocopy. Location of original unknown).
- c) *The Explorers Burke and Wills and their searchers* (Brisbane: Queensland Department of Mapping and Surveying, 1999).

<sup>1953</sup> Bernard Joseph Blanchen, 'Melbourne to Menindie: A tourist's guide based on the diaries of Ludwig Becker', *La Trobe Library Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 22, October (1978): 25-38.

<sup>1954</sup> Bergin, *In the steps*.

<sup>1955</sup> David G. Corke, 'Searching for Burke and Wills' in Burke and Wills Outback Conference 2003, *Burke and Wills Conference Proceedings 2003*: 77-109.

<sup>1956</sup> White and Meyer, *Beyond the Cooper*.

<sup>1957</sup> Daphne Sider and Chris Tangey, 'Searching for Burke and Wills', *Age: Travel Supplement*, 9 December 1995.

<sup>1958</sup> Ian Andrews, pers. comm., 2008.

<sup>1959</sup> Noel R. Wyeth, *Burke & Wills' route from Camp 87 to Camp 100* (Manly, Qld.: N.R. Wyeth, 2002).

<sup>1960</sup> Leahy, 'Locating the 'Plant Camp'', 1-12.

<sup>1961</sup> Anthony Hoy, 'Burke and Wills: The Gulf Team', *The Bulletin*, Vol. 118, No. 6210 (2000): 50-53; David N. Hillan, pers. comm., 2008.

where appropriate. These examples of field research vary in terms of the level of detail and quality and depth of explanation, but were by far the most comprehensively researched in a body of work that predominantly concentrates on expedition campsites and their association with blazed trees.

### 7.3.2 Using the landscape as an historical document: A pilot study at Cooper Creek

The value of knowing the exact route covered by Burke and Wills is most obvious when explaining the last few weeks of Burke's life. Of the five legs detailed above, the final section, Burke's attempts to reach Mount Hopeless from Cooper Creek, is one that has been overlooked by historians. Little or no work has been done establishing Burke's motives and movements between 22 April and 1 July 1861 and there is an increasingly common perception that during this period Burke wandered aimlessly in a delirious state and died of thirst in the desert. In 1862 Dr Wills described King "wandering" about on the Cooper with the Yandruwandha people between July and September 1861,<sup>1962</sup> but more recently, and in keeping with the post-colonial 'Garden of Eden' ideal now being applied to the desert, the idea of aimless wandering has expanded to include Burke and Wills and their efforts to reach Mount Hopeless. With a total lack of understanding of where Burke had travelled in the region John Howard Lidgett Cumpston, who published extensively on Australian exploration, wrote:

after two months wandering aimlessly between Innamincka and the base camp, both Burke and Wills died,<sup>1963</sup>

and this idea was repeated in numerous encyclopaedias.<sup>1964</sup> By 1990 the wandering had degenerated even further

Burke, Wills and King staggered aimlessly around the Cooper for six weeks until the leader and his deputy succumbed.<sup>1965</sup>

Given this perception of aimless wandering, it is not surprising that Burke's decision to travel to Mount Hopeless rather than follow his original track back to Menindee has been almost universally criticised. Favenc considered the decision "foolish" and "incomprehensible".<sup>1966</sup> Murgatroyd thought it was "madness" and that the effects of "vitamin deficiency, malnutrition, stress and exhaustion" had impaired Burke's mental clarity and he subsequently abandoned what little vestige of logic he had left.<sup>1967</sup>

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<sup>1962</sup> Wills, *Successful exploration*: 304.

<sup>1963</sup> John Howard Lidgett Cumpston, *The inland sea and the great river: The story of Australian exploration* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1964), 167.

<sup>1964</sup> Feeken, Feeken, and Spate, *Discovery and exploration*, 26; Eric Newby, *World atlas of exploration* (South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1975), 232.

<sup>1965</sup> Phil Jarratt, *There's a track winding back* (South Melbourne: Pan Macmillan, 1990), 169.

<sup>1966</sup> Favenc, *Explorers of Australia*.

<sup>1967</sup> Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree*, 244-245.

When Burke returned to Depot Camp 65 at Cooper Creek to find Brahe had already left, he was faced with four options:

- try to catch up with Brahe,
- stay at Depot Camp 65 and await rescue,
- follow their old tracks back to Menindee,
- try to reach another outpost of Anglo-Australian settlement.

The first option was the most desirable, but when Burke asked Wills and King:

whether we were able to proceed up the creek in pursuit of the party; we said not, and he then said that he thought it his duty to ask us but that he himself was unable to do so<sup>1968</sup>

The second option was even less attractive. Burke was not to know that Brahe would meet Wright and return to Depot Camp 65 in 18 days' time, and so he would have expected Brahe to take at least 30 days to return to Menindee. Without the authority to organise a search expedition from Menindee and with the mail there only collected fortnightly, Brahe would have needed to make the ten-day ride to Melbourne to report to the EC before relief was sent. Burke would therefore have calculated that it would be at least three months before a Melbourne relief expedition could reach the Cooper, and he only had sufficient food to last 40 days.<sup>1969</sup> In fact it took Brahe 60 days to reach Menindee, and another ten to reach Melbourne. Burke and Wills were both dead, or certainly very close to death, by the time Brahe arrived in Melbourne to raise the alarm. Howitt's relief party did not arrive at Depot Camp 65 until 13 September 1861, nearly five months after Brahe had departed and eleven weeks after Burke and Wills died.

Wills and King favoured option three: try to return along their old track to Menindee. The main reason they gave for this was not as Murgatroyd argued, that they expected rescue to arrive from that direction, as it has been demonstrated above that the food would have run out long before the alarm was raised.<sup>1970</sup> Rather they believed Brahe would rest at Camp 60 before striking a new course south-east to the Bulloo River and they hoped to catch up with him there.<sup>1971</sup> Brahe had given no indication that he would halt at the camp, and in fact he covered the 90 kilometres to Camp 60 in just three days and halted there for only half a day. Given Burke's assessment that the camels could not make forced marches<sup>1972</sup> and that the men could only walk four or five miles a day,<sup>1973</sup> it would have taken

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<sup>1968</sup> John King, 'Transcription of 'Narrative of John King'', ex2009-007, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1969</sup> On the 59-day trip from the Cooper to the Gulf the four men ate an average of 900 grams of provisions per person per day. When departing the Gulf, there were 83 kilograms of provisions left, which gave each man an average of 300 grams of provisions per day for the 67-day return journey to Cooper Creek. Brahe left c.~99 kilograms of provisions buried at Depot Camp 65. If these provisions were to last 40 days, as Burke expected, that would allow each man 825 grams of provisions per day and the food would run out on 1 June 1861.

<sup>1970</sup> Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree*.

<sup>1971</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 1014 to King.

<sup>1972</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 1011 to King.

<sup>1973</sup> Burke, 'Last notes', ex2009-002, State Library of Victoria.

Burke ten days to a fortnight to reach Camp 60 and therefore Wills and King had no chance of catching Brahe.

Burke objected to returning down their old track because of the distance and lack of water along the route.<sup>1974</sup> Although it is 550 kilometres from Depot Camp 65 to Menindee in a straight line, it was around 850 kilometres back to Menindee along their outward track and it had taken them 31 days to cover this distance in October and November 1860, an average rate of more than 28 kilometres a day. They had experienced lengthy waterless sections along the way, particularly through the Grey Range, and conditions were now considerably more arid. Given their exhausted state and subsequent slower rate of progress, Burke thought “that the provisions left at the depot for them would scarcely take them to Menindie”.<sup>1975</sup>

After having made the trip himself, Howitt also expressed doubts whether Burke would have had sufficient provisions to return to the Darling. Even though Howitt under-estimated the time it took Burke to cover the distance from Menindee to the Depot by almost a week, he still thought that had Burke:

decided to proceed to Menindie, and allowing 10 days to rest and recuperate at the Depot, they would ... have had 30 days' provisions. Their journey up from Menindie to the Depot took 25 days, counting the camps; but it is more than doubtful whether they, in the state in which they and their two camels were, could have done the back journey in that time.<sup>1976</sup>

According to King:

Mr. Burke and Mr. Wills were in consultation together concerning what was best to be done, and they came to the conclusion we had better make for Mount Hopeless<sup>1977</sup>

His sanitised answers to the Commission hide the likely emotion that was involved during this discussion. While it was Burke who ultimately made the decision on which route they should take, he would have relied on Wills' advice over which was the preferable route, with Wills clearly favouring a return to Menindee. Burke was aware, however, that there was a practicable route down Strzelecki Creek to John Baker's Blanchewater Station near Mount Hopeless and then on to the police station at Mount Serle which had been established in 1857.<sup>1978</sup> A.C. Gregory had come this way in June 1858,

<sup>1974</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 1013 to King.

<sup>1975</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1976</sup> Howitt, 'Personal reminiscences'.

<sup>1977</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 1013 to King.

<sup>1978</sup> Many writers have incorrectly stated there was a police station or police outpost at Mount Hopeless, probably based on Dr Wills' assertion that Blanche Water was "the nearest police-station on the Adelaide line" Wills, *Successful exploration*, 269. For examples of writers who have repeated the inaccuracy, see: Kathleen Fitzpatrick, 'Burke, Robert O'Hara (1821-1861)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 3, (Canberra: Melbourne University Press, 1960); Moorehead, *Cooper's Creek*, 94; John Bailey, *Mr Stuart's track: the forgotten life of Australia's greatest explorer* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2006), 205; van der Kiste, *William John Wills*, 112; Phillip A. Clarke, 'The use and abuse of Aboriginal ecological knowledge' in Clark and Cahir, *Aboriginal Story*, 72. John Baker took up a lease of 518 km<sup>2</sup> at Mount Hopeless in 1857, which later Thomas Elder bought in 1872 and renamed Blanchewater Station. There was never a police

taking 13 days to travel from his Camp 68, which was near Burke's Depot Camp 65, to Baker's station,<sup>1979</sup> and Gregory thought this was "the best line of route into the interior which has yet been discovered".<sup>1980</sup> Gregory informed the EC, through Mueller, that an exploring party could easily travel that way:

as only 150 miles of desert intervene between the out-stations of South Australia and Cooper River, and, by following the channel of Strezlecki [sic] Creek, water would probably be found by deepening the native well in latitude [-?].<sup>1981</sup>

The EC held Gregory in great regard, having initially considered him as Expedition leader, and they included his suggestion in Burke's instructions:

Should you find that a better communication can be made by way of the South Australian Police Station, near Mount Serle, you will avail yourself of that means.<sup>1982</sup>

Consequently faced with a much shorter route to salvation, Burke chose not to return to Menindee but to head to Mount Hopeless instead. He thought this was the course which would be the most "comfortable", and "without risk".<sup>1983</sup> King recalled that Burke:

decided upon trying to make Mount Hopeless, as he had been assured by the committee in Melbourne, that there was a cattle station within 150 miles of Cooper's Creek.<sup>1984</sup>

However, we know that Burke failed to reach Baker's Station and his movements have since been perceived as "aimless wanderings". Why did Burke fail to reach Mount Hopeless?

Given the paucity of evidence associated with this section of the Expedition, it provides an ideal opportunity for evaluating the influence the landscape had on the Expedition's progress and testing the hypothesis that the landscape can be used in conjunction with manuscript archives as an historical

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station or police outpost here. Funds were allocated for a police outpost at Baker's Angepina Station near Mount Serle (125 kilometres to the south-west of Mount Hopeless) in November 1856, *South Australian Register*, 28 November 1856: 2, and Police Inspector Holroyd had troops stationed here by January 1857, *South Australian Register*, 23 January 1857: 3. In 1869 a more permanent station was opened at Mount Freeling, 50 kilometres south-west of Mount Hopeless.

<sup>1979</sup> Gregory's Camp 68 was close to Burke's Depot Camp 65, and Gregory reached Baker's Station at Mount Hopeless at his Camp 81 after 13 days' travel with two additional rest days.

<sup>1980</sup> Gregory, 'Expedition from Moreton Bay', 92.

<sup>1981</sup> Augustus Charles Gregory, 'Letter to Mueller, Sydney, 31 December 1858' in Philosophical Institute of Victoria, *Transactions*, Vol. 4: vi-ix.

<sup>1982</sup> Exploration Committee, 'Instructions issued to Robert O'Hara Burke, Leader of the Victorian Exploration Expedition', 18 August 1860, ex2001-001, Box 2082/3a (Item 1), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1983</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1984</sup> John King, 'Transcription of 'Narrative of John King', ex2009-007, State Library of Victoria.



Figure 202: Alexander Hutchinson Salmond, 'Burke's depot, Cooper's Creek', 1879. Photocard by Imperial Photo Co., Brisbane of an original sketch in Salmond's field book (owned by Mrs E. Nicholls), Reference 6404, Salmond, Box 10921, State Library of Queensland.

The first known sketches of Depot Camp 65 and Burke's grave were done in 1879, and photographs have been taken of these sites regularly since 1889. This means these two sites can accurately located.

document. In addition, as no one has previously attempted to identify the Expedition's track for this period, there is no prior work which can influence the outcomes of this study.

The main archival evidence for this section of the Expedition is Wills' journal.<sup>1985</sup> The only physical locations that were known to be accurate before commencing field-work were Depot Camp 65<sup>1986</sup> and Burke's grave.<sup>1987</sup> The provenance of both of these sites is excellent as they have been recorded, sketched and photographed regularly since the late 1870s (see Figure 202). There are three other locations associated with the Expedition on Cooper Creek which are identified with permanent markers: Wills' grave,<sup>1988</sup> Howitt's depot<sup>1989</sup> and the location where King was found, which is known as 'King's site' or 'King's marker'.<sup>1990</sup> However the authenticity of these locations is less certain, as they remained unmarked and unidentified for three-quarters of a century, and were only identified in the 1930s and 1940s. These locations were initially discounted until field research could establish their accuracy and reliability.

When Burke left Depot Camp 65 on 23 April 1861, he stated he would "proceed on slowly down the creek towards Adelaide by Mt. Hopeless, and shall endeavour to follow Gregory's track".<sup>1991</sup> The only place on the Cooper for which Wills had calculated latitude and longitude was Depot Camp 65,<sup>1992</sup> and because he had abandoned his sextant on the way back from the Gulf, he was unable to

<sup>1985</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1986</sup> Depot Camp 65 and the Dig Tree at Pula pula ngapakurna, S27°37'30" E141°04'29" (GDA2020).

<sup>1987</sup> Burke's grave at Yinimingka, S27°43'16" E140°46'50" (GDA2020).

<sup>1988</sup> Wills' grave cairn at Thilka, S27° 45' 13" E140° 35' 59" (GDA2020).

<sup>1989</sup> Howitt's depot cairn at Kulyu-marru, S27°41'56" E140°50'13" (GDA2020).

<sup>1990</sup> King's site cairn between Kuyapidri and Mingkayi, S27°46'30" E140°40'42" (GDA2020).

<sup>1991</sup> Burke, 'Last notes', ex2009-002, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1992</sup> Wills' astronomical observations taken at Depot Camp 65 on Cooper Creek and their subsequent reductions have not survived, so there is no possibility of recalculating his latitudes and longitudes for this camp. On the journey from Menindee to the Cooper Wills reduced his latitudes every few days, but



Figure 203: Emmanuel Spiller, 'Mr Herbert Kenny (on the right) and stockman at Burke's grave, Innamincka, Cooper's Creek', 1887.

*The Illustrated Australian News and Musical Times*, 1 January 1890. B351, State Library of South Australia.

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calculate any further geographic coordinates. Therefore locating physical evidence of Gregory's camps or tracks would appear to be a necessity in order to follow "Gregory's track". Gregory had been at the Cooper 30 months prior to Burke's arrival,<sup>1993</sup> and his campsites marked with blazed trees, and the tracks made by nine men and 40 horses were still noticeable in 1862 as Howitt commented on them several times and the Yandruwandha described to him "a large party of whites who had passed some years ago".<sup>1994</sup> However, there is no mention in any of the journals, diaries or oral testimony that Burke, Wills or King actually identified Gregory's tracks or located his route, even though previously they had passed four of Gregory's marked camps and followed his route along the northern bank of the Cooper for over 100 kilometres. Because Burke did not mention finding traces of Gregory's 1858 visit to the Cooper, it can be inferred that he did not intend to follow in Gregory's footsteps, but would take a similar route to the one Gregory used in 1858. King recalled "Mr. Burke said we could get back by Strzelecki's Creek to Mount Hopeless",<sup>1995</sup> indicating Burke was intending to follow the Cooper to Kuyapidri and then follow the Strzelecki towards Mount Hopeless. They had not crossed Strzelecki Creek previously, as it is on the south side of the Cooper and downstream of Depot Camp 65, and so far, Burke had only travelled on the northern bank. However, as soon as they left Depot Camp 65, Wills recorded they were "keeping down the southern bank of the

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rarely reduced his longitudes. His field books show a single reduced observation of S27°37'08" E141°09'03" on an otherwise undated blank page, presumably written sometime after the previous page which was dated 10 December 1860. This latitude and longitude observation appears to be taken at Depot Camp 65, as it plots 0°0'12"N and 0°4'39"E of the actual location (which equates to an error of 700 metres north and 7.66 kilometres east of Depot Camp 65). The latitude error is in line with the accuracy of Wills' other reduced latitudes, and the longitude error would be obtained if Wills' watch was 18.5 seconds fast. Wills, 'Field Book No. 6: Cooper's Creek', ex2008-018, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>1993</sup> Gregory, 'Expedition from Moreton Bay', 18-34.

<sup>1994</sup> Alfred William Howitt, 'Diary, 20 March-3 June 1862', ex3007-003, Box 2085/6a (Item 3), MS 13071, State Library of Victoria; 'Dispatch, Blanchewater, 18 March 1862' published in the *Argus*, 14 April 1862: 5; 'Diary entry for 2 April 1862' published in the *Argus*, 27 June 1862: 4-6.

<sup>1995</sup> Welch, 'Field Book and Diary: 1 August-8 October 1861', ex3006-006, Box 2087/7b, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.



creek”,<sup>1996</sup> clearly with the intention of finding a watercourse they could follow towards Mount Hopeless. They followed the Cooper downstream for four days, averaging eight kilometres a day, and their health and general outlook improved. Wills thought that:

in less than a week we shall be fit to undergo any fatigue whatever. The Camels are improving, and seem capable of doing all that we are likely to require of them.<sup>1997</sup>

After camping in the bed of the Cooper between Yinimingka and Malkanpa on the night of 26 April 1861, they started out the next morning at civil twilight and continued along the ‘native path’ they had followed the previous day.<sup>1998</sup> Keeping to the south of the Cooper they:

struck off from the [native] path ... in order that we might mess<sup>1999</sup> in a branch of it [the creek] that took a southerly direction.<sup>2000</sup>

This branch was Strzelecki Creek and was their intended route to Mount Hopeless. However, Wills did not recognise the creek as such and they failed to follow its course, choosing instead to continue westwards along the Cooper. Wills clearly recognised they were in a creek that ran to the south, so why did he not explore its potential further?

Strzelecki Creek has a complex flow path and water can move both ways in the upper four kilometres of its channel. During times of local rain the creek acts as a tributary to the main channel and water flows north into the Cooper at Kuyapidri, yet when the Cooper floods the Strzelecki acts as a distributary and drains considerable amounts of water south from the Cooper towards Lakes Blanche, Frome, Gregory and Callabonna.<sup>2001</sup> The distributary effect occurs during large flood events<sup>2002</sup> and when high flows continue for consecutive years,<sup>2003</sup> though sufficient water rarely flows the full length of the channel as Lake Blanche fills on average only six times every 100 years and Lake

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<sup>1996</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>1997</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1998</sup> Wills' watch was set to GMT +9h.20m, George Bennet, 'Navigational Astronomy' in Burke and Wills Outback Conference 2003, *Burke and Wills Conference Proceedings 2003*: 8. The watch that Wills was using was No. 2543, manufactured by James Murray of London in 1859. The provenance of this watch was assessed by Dave Phoenix on behalf of Bonhams & Goodman Auctioneers, Double Bay, Sydney. The National Museum of Australia purchased the watch at auction on 22 September 2008 for \$122,000.

<sup>1999</sup> The 2002 transcription of Wills' diary undertaken by Valerie Helson, Assistant Manuscripts Librarian at the National Library of Australia, interprets the word 'mess' as 'shift' but assigns little significance to this variation due to the similarity of meaning of both words as 'to camp'. A closer inspection of Wills' diary and a comparison of his writing style does not bear out Helson's view, but indicates that Archer's original transcription of the word as 'mess' is correct. Helson, pers. comm., 2006.

'The Diary of William John Wills', National Library of Australia digitisation project, 2002, [pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/36391/20030707-0000/www.nla.gov.au/epubs/wills/pages/intro.html](http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/36391/20030707-0000/www.nla.gov.au/epubs/wills/pages/intro.html)

<sup>2000</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>2001</sup> Stephen B. DeVogel, John W. Magee, William F. Manley, and Gifford H. Miller, 'A GIS-based reconstruction of late Quaternary paleohydrology: Lake Eyre, arid central Australia', *Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology*, Vol. 1-2 (2004): 1-13.

<sup>2002</sup> Large flood events occurred on the Cooper and Strzelecki Creeks in 1906, 1950 and 1974.

<sup>2003</sup> High flows over consecutive years occurred in the Cooper and Strzelecki Creeks in 1916±1918, 1955-1956, 1989-1990 and 2010-2011.

Callabonna fills only four times every 100 years.<sup>2004</sup> As neither Wills nor Brahe mentioned any major flooding in the Cooper as a result of the 1860-1861 wet season and they did not record any significant local rain events in the weeks prior, it can be assumed that Strzelecki Creek was dry in April 1861. Strzelecki Creek is 160 kilometres in length and although it has a relatively simple flood plain compared to the Cooper, a lack of historical flow data and few gauging stations mean the absolute and relative levels of the basins and the connecting channels and sills are still not well known.<sup>2005</sup> From the Cooper-Strzelecki bifurcation the bed of Strzelecki Creek rises approximately 5-6 metres over the first five kilometres (+0.1% gradient) with the creek varying between 10-20 metres in width. The creek then drops 50 metres in the next 155 kilometres (-0.03% gradient) with its course becoming increasingly wider and well defined as it approaches Lake Blanche.<sup>2006</sup>

Wills was not alone in passing the bifurcation without recognising its significance, as previously neither Sturt nor Gregory had identified this location. Sturt reached Strzelecki Creek at Mudlalee, but after following the creek north for ten kilometres to Nappacoongee, was unable to identify its course through the 'vast plain' which was 'evidently subject to flood'.<sup>2007</sup> He found that:

from one waterhole to another there was no perceptible channel but a broad Box tree flat bounded by Sand hills.<sup>2008</sup>

After travelling across this box tree flat for a short distance, Sturt crossed a small sandhill, leaving the Strzelecki catchment and entering Oorannie Creek catchment. Because the terrain is so flat and the course of Strzelecki Creek difficult to identify, Sturt did not recognise that he had left the Strzelecki catchment, instead believing that he had reached its head waters. Because he then arrived at the Cooper near its junction with Wilpinnie Creek, he never determined whether there was a connection between Strzelecki Creek and the Cooper.<sup>2009</sup> When drafting the expedition's map, Sturt's cartographer, John Arrowsmith depicted the two watercourses as having separate catchments (see Figure 205 and enlargement at Figure 206).

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<sup>2004</sup> R.T. Kingsford, A.L. Curtin, and J. Porter, 'Water flows on Cooper Creek in arid Australia determine 'boom' and 'bust' periods for waterbirds', *Biological Conservation*, Vol. 88, No. 2 (1999): 231-248.

<sup>2005</sup> DeVogel, Magee, Manley, and Miller, 'A GIS-based reconstruction'.

<sup>2006</sup> Creek heights determined by digital elevation mapping using data from NASA's Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (SRTM) of February 2000. Dataset used was Version 4.1 (2008) 3-arc second from the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research - Consortium for Spatial Research (CGIAR-CSI).

<sup>2007</sup> Sturt, *Narrative of an expedition*, Vol. 2: 26.

<sup>2008</sup> Charles Napier Sturt, Richard Clarke Davis, and Hakluyt Society, *The central Australian expedition, 1844-1846: the journals of Charles Sturt* (London: Hakluyt Society, 2002), 265.

<sup>2009</sup> Unpublished field research at Cooper Creek, carried out in 2006 in conjunction with registered Survey Associate (QLD) (retired) Kevin Ian Andrews, confirmed the location where Sturt reached Cooper Creek based on Sturt's descriptions of Coontie Hill, Wilpinnie Creek and most importantly, Sturt's 'Canadian Rapids' which is a flood overflow channel at Marra-thilla. This location is contradicted by Toby Piddocke's 2009 report, which places Sturt five kilometres further west. Piddocke's work, however, is speculative as it was based on his interpretation of Google Earth satellite imagery alone and was not substantiated by field investigation. Toby Piddocke, *Historical collation of waterbody information in the Lake Eyre Basin catchments for Qld and SA* (Adelaide: South Australian Arid Lands Natural Resources Management Board, 2009).



Figure 204: Map of Strzelecki Creek and the lower Cooper Creek, showing locations associated with Sturt's 1845 expedition and Gregory's 1858 expedition.

© 2017 Dave Phoenix.

Gregory did not identify the Strzelecki-Cooper bifurcation either. Although it was widely reported that he followed the Cooper and then Strzelecki Creek<sup>2010</sup> to Lake Torrens and Mount Hopeless,<sup>2011</sup> he did not leave the Cooper at the Strzelecki bifurcation at Kuyapidri, and therefore did not follow Strzelecki Creek for its entire length. Instead Gregory followed the Cooper west for a further 50 kilometres beyond Kuyapidri, before turning south at Pannandinnie and heading into the Strzelecki Desert. After five days in the desert, during which time he did not find any water fit to drink, he reached Strzelecki Creek between Thurratji and Tilparee. This is downstream of Mudlalee where Sturt first reached the Strzelecki, and consequently the course of the creek is more pronounced and easier to follow. Tilparee is more than 80 kilometres from Kuyapidri, so Gregory only followed the Strzelecki for the lower half of its course. Gregory's map shows he identified three creeks diverging south from the Cooper and he assumed these were the source of Strzelecki Creek. Although he did not identify which of these three creeks he believed was the Strzelecki, he did comment on the Cooper-Strzelecki bifurcation:

'Strzelecki Creek', which separates nearly at a right angle from the main channel, appears to convey about one-third of the waters of Cooper Creek nearly south, and as we afterwards ascertained, connects it with Lake Torrens.<sup>2012</sup>

This description does not equate to the Strzelecki bifurcation at Kuyapidri which is a small and insignificant channel. Gregory was on the northern bank of the Cooper when he passed Kuyapidri and did not mark any creeks on his map at this point, so he could not have seen Strzelecki Creek. His description and map more accurately describes the junction of the Cooper with Oorannie or Wilpinnie Creeks, 12 to 15 kilometres further west.

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<sup>2010</sup> Gregory referred to it as 'Streletzki's Creek'.

<sup>2011</sup> *South Australian Register*, 22 July 1858: 2.

<sup>2012</sup> Gregory, 'Expedition from Moreton Bay', 28.



Figure 205: John Arrowsmith, 'Sketch map of Captain Sturt's tracks and discoveries on his various expeditions into south eastern central Australia' (London: T. & W. Boone, 1849).

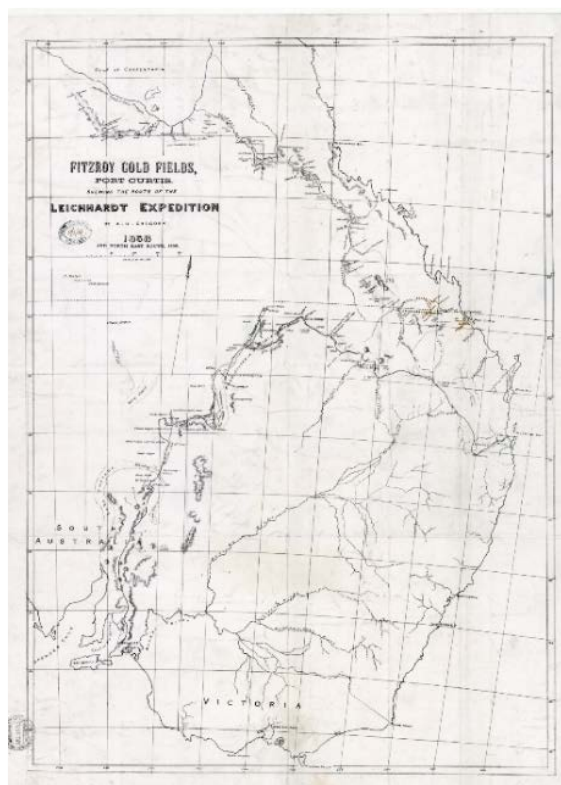


Figure 206: Augustus Charles Gregory, 'Fitzroy Gold Fields, Port Curtis showing the route of the Leichhardt Expedition', 1859, (Sydney: J. Eccles, 1859). BRG 42/119/85, State Library of South Australia.

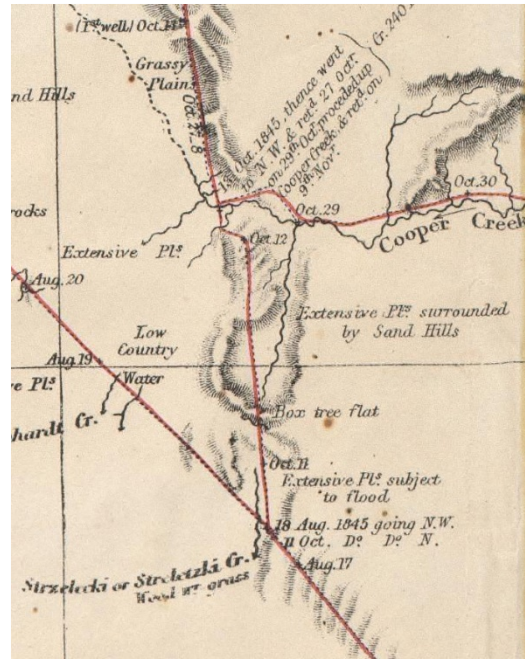


Figure 207: Extract of Arrowsmith's map showing Sturt's route along Strzelecki and Cooper Creeks.

Sturt only followed Strzelecki Creek a short distance upstream (on 11 October 1845) before heading across "Extensive Pl[ain]s. subject to flood". He did not think Strzelecki Creek joined Cooper Creek.

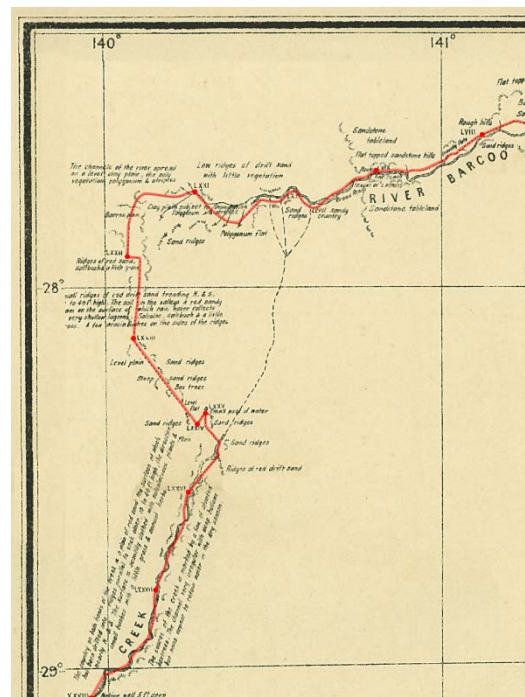


Figure 208: Extract of 'Gregory's map taken from tracing of the original in the Lands Department Archive', Bessie Threadgill, *South Australian Land Exploration 1856 to 1880* (Adelaide: Board of Governors of the Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery of South Australia, 1922), Vol. 2.

Gregory's map shows he did not identify the Cooper-Strzelecki bifurcation at Kuyapidri, but he did assume that three other tributaries/distributaries further to the west formed the headwaters of Strzelecki Creek. Gregory followed the Cooper a considerable distance to the west before he turned south and struck into Strzelecki Creek about 80 kilometres south of Kuyapidri





Figure 209: Strzelecki Creek's bifurcation/divergence from Cooper Creek. Cooper Creek flows from left (east) to right (west). Strzelecki Creek flows south from the Cooper. The town of Innamincka is on the hill in the background.  
© 2005 Dave Phoenix.



Figure 210: Strzelecki Creek looking south near the bifurcation with Cooper Creek. At this point, although the photograph is taken looking downstream towards Lake Blanche, the creek bed rises in altitude by several metres, so runoff from local rainfall would flow towards the viewer, while Cooper flood water would flow away from the viewer.  
© 2005 Dave Phoenix.





Figure 211: Nguranni / Oorannie Creek's divergence from Cooper Creek.  
Looking east, the main Cooper Channel is flowing towards the viewer. Oorannie Creek diverges to the right and the main channel of the Cooper continues to the left.

© 2005 Dave Phoenix

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It is clear that the Cooper-Strzelecki bifurcation was difficult to identify and the first three parties of Europeans to visit the Cooper, Sturt, Gregory and Burke, all failed to locate it. In the absence of a positive identification, Wills was left with little choice but to continue west along the Cooper looking for a more striking river junction. Despite a reduction in carrying capacity as a result of the death of their penultimate camel, Landa, at Mingkayi, they spent the next fortnight following various anastomosing channels as they split off to the south and west of Cooper Creek. On 1 May 1861 they crossed to the south bank of the Cooper at the point where Oorannie Creek diverges to the south. This junction matches Gregory's description of the Cooper-Strzelecki bifurcation, but surprisingly they chose not follow Oorannie Creek to the south. The following day they passed close to Wilpinnie Creek which also closely matches Gregory's description. Wills does not mention whether they actually saw this creek or not, but again they did not leave the Cooper. Five kilometres further downstream they came to a prominent river junction where the Cooper splits into two channels, the Turra off-channel and the Goonabru main-channel. Wills described this as a "seperation [sic] of the creek" and they followed the southernmost channel, not because they thought it might be Strzelecki Creek, but because it appeared to be the main Cooper channel.<sup>2013</sup> They found the channel soon divided into numerous sandy channels which became "lost in the earthy soil of a box forest".<sup>2014</sup> They

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<sup>2013</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>2014</sup> *Ibid.*

encountered similar features when following the Goonabru main channel and this confusing topography led Wills to write “the present state of things is not calculated to raise our spirits much”.<sup>2015</sup> King gave some indication of why they found themselves in this predicament:

We were then tracing down the branches of the creek running south, and found that they ran into earthy plains. We had understood that the creek along Gregory’s path was continuous, and finding that all these creeks ran out into plains, Mr Burke returned.<sup>2016</sup>

To suppose that the creek along Gregory’s track was continuous Burke and Wills must have been relying on their memory to recall details of Gregory’s route. They clearly did not have a copy of Gregory’s journal or they would have known that Gregory did not follow Strzelecki Creek for its entire course and once Gregory passed the place he supposed was the Cooper-Strzelecki bifurcation he found that:

large branches continually broke off [from Cooper Creek] to the south and west, and at length the whole was lost on the wide plains of dry mud between the sand ridges,<sup>2017</sup>

and after that point “there was no prospect of either water or grass to the west”.<sup>2018</sup> In addition, for Burke and Wills to trace the Cooper channels as far west as Yinbarrka at E140°12’ looking for a suitable creek heading to the south, demonstrates they could not have had copies of Sturt’s or Gregory’s maps either, as neither of these maps shows a continuous watercourse along Strzelecki Creek and neither map shows any creeks diverging to the south as far west as Yinbarrka. If they had copies of the maps or journals they would not have needed to travel as far west as they did, and the way the river channels divided and diminished should not have caused them as much confusion as it did. Wills did have a copy of Sturt’s map when he left the Depot Camp 65 in December 1860, as he identified features in Sturt Stony Desert which had been named by Sturt in 1845. However by the end of April 1861, Wills did not have the maps he needed to accurately identify Strzelecki Creek, so it is most likely he deposited his maps at the Plant Camp when he abandoned his sextant.

Because Wills did not have the necessary maps and journals required to accurately identify a suitable route from Cooper Creek to Mount Hopeless, his opposition to Burke’s decision to go this way is understandable. Having successfully navigated the party for over 5,000 kilometres, he was now expected to navigate to Mount Hopeless without maps, journals or any navigational equipment other than a pocket compass. Having been forced into the task against his better judgement, he was finding it increasingly difficult and frustrating. On 17 May, with both camels dead, their strength failing and food supplies almost exhausted, the three men decided they should make a final effort to reach Mount

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<sup>2015</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2016</sup> John King, 'Transcription of 'Narrative of John King', ex2009-007, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2017</sup> Gregory and Gregory, *Journals*.

<sup>2018</sup> *Ibid.*



Figure 212: William John Will's 'Seperation' [sic].  
© 2005 Dave Phoenix.

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Hopeless. Having abandoned any hope of identifying the Cooper-Strzelecki bifurcation they struck off from Cooper Creek with the:

intention being to keep a S[outh] E[aster]ly direction until we should cut some likely looking creek and then to follow it down.<sup>2019</sup>

After travelling this direction for nine kilometres they reached Oorannie Creek,<sup>2020</sup> which they followed south for eight kilometres to a large waterhole,<sup>2021</sup> “beyond which the watercourse runs out on extensive flats and earthy plainins [sic]”.<sup>2022</sup> At this point Oorannie Creek turns south-south-west, but the creek’s course is impossible to identify from the ground, as Sturt had experienced when he described it having “no perceptible channel”.<sup>2023</sup> Wills did not make any journal entries for the next week so their exact route is uncertain, but King recalled after losing the creek in the flat country “sandhills were in front of us, for which we made”.<sup>2024</sup> The only sandhills in this vicinity are the deep red sand dunes of the Tingana land system,<sup>2025</sup> but in order to reach these dunes the party would

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<sup>2019</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>2020</sup> S27°49'28" E140°36'6" (GDA2020)

<sup>2021</sup> Large waterhole on Oorannie Creek at S27°52'56" E140°36'42" (GDA2020)

<sup>2022</sup> Wills, 'Journal of a trip', MS 30/7, National Library of Australia.

<sup>2023</sup> Sturt, Davis, and Hakluyt Society, *The central Australian expedition, 1844-1846: the journals of Charles Sturt*, 265.

<sup>2024</sup> John King, 'Transcription of 'Narrative of John King', ex2009-007, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2025</sup> "The Tingana Land System (formerly the Della Land System) consists of red longitudinal sand dunes with sandy interdunal swales, cracking clay interdune flats and claypan swamps" South Australia. Government: Department of Environment and Heritage, *Innamincka Regional Reserve Management Plan* (Adelaide: DEH (SA), 1993).



Figure 213: Tingana dunes in the Strzelecki Desert near the most southerly point reached by Burke.  
© 2005 Dave Phoenix.

have had to leave the Oorannie catchment and cross Strzelecki Creek. If Wills had guided the three men on a magnetic bearing due south from the last waterhole on Oorannie Creek they would indeed have crossed over into the Strzelecki catchment and reached the Tingana dunes, and in doing so they would have crossed Strzelecki Creek where it has no perceptible channel as it passes over a large clay flat.<sup>2026</sup> This course is about eight kilometres to the east of Sturt's route, but it crosses very similar terrain, and therefore it is entirely plausible that Burke crossed Strzelecki Creek without realising it.

After they walked along the swales between the Tingana dunes for up to 35 kilometres, the lack of water forced the men to halt and return to Cooper Creek. At their most southerly point they were still 150 kilometres from Mount Hopeless, but were not more than ten kilometres east of Strzelecki Creek and at a similar latitude as Gregory when he reached Strzelecki Creek between Thurratji and Tilparree, where the creek's course was easily identifiable. When the three men stopped and sat down to look over the Tingana dunes at 2.00 pm on Sunday 19 May 1861, they realised they could not identify Gregory's route, could not find Strzelecki Creek, could not find water and therefore could not reach Mount Hopeless. Their morale must have been at its lowest for the whole Expedition. Although the return to the deserted Depot Camp on the Cooper on 21 April 1861 has traditionally been perceived as the most dramatic and significant point, with Longstaff's painting showing the three men in a desolate and dejected state, they still had reserves of food and hope of rescue. However just four weeks later amid the dunes of the Strzelecki Desert, the realisation that they were alone, exhausted, in a perilous situation and facing death by starvation must have been a crushing blow.

Although Burke's decision to head to Mount Hopeless can be justified in terms of the shorter distance and lack of provisions available to take them to Menindee, Burke made a serious error of judgement in trying to follow Gregory's route without any means of identifying it. By relying on his memory to recollect details of Gregory's route they expended their dwindling resources looking for,

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<sup>2026</sup> The clay flat is at S28°07' E140°34' (GDA2020), near the Beantree Waterhole.

but not finding, Strzelecki Creek. The capricious nature of the anastomosing channels of the creeks in the channel country, where river gradients are so negligible that water can flow either way along and watercourses disappear and reappear, meant that in fact they crossed Strzelecki Creek twice without realising.

## 7.4 Using the landscape as an historical document: A larger scale study and a walk across Australia.

*The good historian needs ... not more  
documents but stronger boots.*

Richard Henry Tawney.  
Ross Terrill, *R.H. Tawney and His Times: Socialism as Fellowship*,  
(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973): 7.

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The pilot study along Cooper and Strzelecki Creeks demonstrated the practicability of using the landscape as an historic archive which can be interpreted in conjunction with existing archives to shed new light on the conduct of the Expedition, and therefore I determined to use this methodology to assess the Expedition's route across Australia from Melbourne to the Gulf.

Establishing the Expedition's entire route was a lengthy process which involved revisiting the chronology of events and superimposing diary entries from all available sources along with spatial data obtained from Wills' maps and field books. Wills' traverse data for each day of travel from Balranald to Cooper Creek was transcribed and plotted and then referenced to his dead-reckoning calculations and astronomical observations. The spatial data was plotted using GIS software<sup>2027</sup> in conjunction with historic maps,<sup>2028</sup> satellite imagery<sup>2029</sup> and mapping software,<sup>2030</sup> along with digital elevation modelling.<sup>2031</sup> Wills' methodology for navigation and surveying was examined in detail, both to determine the route and pinpoint certain navigation and naming practices.

All camps and other significant locations were plotted, and the accuracy or degree of certainty of each of these locations was assigned an error ellipse, the magnitude of which depended upon the quality and quantity of data for each of the locations. Field surveys were carried out between 2005 and 2008 at several of the more uncertain locations. The information collected during these field

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<sup>2027</sup> ESRI® ArcGIS Desktop 10.3.1 with Geoscience Australia 1:250K vectored layersets.

<sup>2028</sup> Historic maps were sourced from the following archives: Public Record Office of Victoria, State Library of Victoria, State Library of New South Wales, State Library of Queensland, State Library of South Australia, National Library of Australia and the British Library.

<sup>2029</sup> Google Earth Pro® with USGS Landsat Level 1 satellite imagery from Landsat7 and Landsat8 OLI (Operational Land Imager) and TIRS (Thermal Infrared Sensor).

<sup>2030</sup> OziExplorer® with Geoscience Australia Natmap 1:250K raster maps.

<sup>2031</sup> SRTM (Shuttle Radar Topography Mission) CGIAR Consortium for Spatial Information 3 arc second (90 metre) digital elevation data v.4.1 re-sampled 2008, subsequently rechecked with SRTM NGA-DTED (National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency Digital Terrain Elevation Data) 1 arc second (30 metre) digital elevation data resampled 2014.



surveys meant by the time I departed Melbourne in August 2008 I had established the route to a suitably high degree of accuracy, such that on-ground investigation could be carried out during the walk.

During this mapping process, it became clear that the Expedition's track north of the Cooper, where there are few remaining archives, could be better understood by a closer analysis of Wills' navigation methodology from the sections of the track south of the Cooper, where more complete documentary evidence exists, and extrapolating those ideas to the incomplete parts. Plotting Wills' extant field books from Balranald to Cooper Creek, cross-referencing them with his maps and dead-reckoning calculations and then following the transcribed spatial data through the landscape in which it was originally created resulted in new insights into the manner in which Wills approached his responsibilities. A field survey undertaken in May 2008 to the Selwyn Range, in the company of two surveyors<sup>2032</sup> resulted in the identification of a possible site for Wills' Mount Moerlin, which subsequently led to a reappraisal of Wills' actions as those of a navigator rather than a surveyor.

The decision to walk rather than to use any other means of transport such as horses or camels arose from the desire to experience the landscape at a similar pace to the original Expedition. Although the Expedition departed with close to 70 animals,<sup>2033</sup> nearly all of these beasts were hitched to wagons or used as pack-animals and most of the men were forced to walk. Even on the first day, many of the men walked out of Royal Park.<sup>2034</sup> The Expedition was carried out at a walking pace, and walking was the predominant form of transport.

A decision was taken to walk through the landscape at a similar time of year as the Expedition, in order to gain a more complete understanding of the environmental factors associated with crossing the deserts in summer and being in the Gulf during the wet season. Consideration was given to the extent that the landscape has changed in the 148 years since Burke and Wills experienced it. An initial assessment of the more significant changes indicated substantial differences in Victoria: urbanisation has changed much of the Expedition's track between Melbourne and Lancefield; north of the Dividing Range, irrigation, pasture and cropping between Lake Eppalock and the Murray has replaced Eucalypt forest with open fields. Once across the Murray, however, the arid and semi-arid areas have seen much less human impact than in Victoria and have therefore undergone only less radical modification. Parts of western New South Wales Acacia shrubland has been replaced by open saltbush shrubland and introduced riparian weeds have affected Gulf waterways. Consideration was

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<sup>2032</sup> Richard Cork B.App.Sc. (Surv), Cadastral Surveyor (QLD), Registered Consulting Surveyor (QLD), owner-operator of Anywhere Surveys Pty Ltd, Lockyer Valley and Kenneth Ian Andrews, registered Survey Associate (QLD) (retired), company director of Andrews & Hansen Pty Ltd surveyors, Gold Coast.

<sup>2033</sup> 26 camels, between 39-41 pack, saddle and wagon-horses, four kangaroo dogs and one small watchdog.

<sup>2034</sup> 'The Exploring Expedition', *Herald*, 21 August 1860: 5.



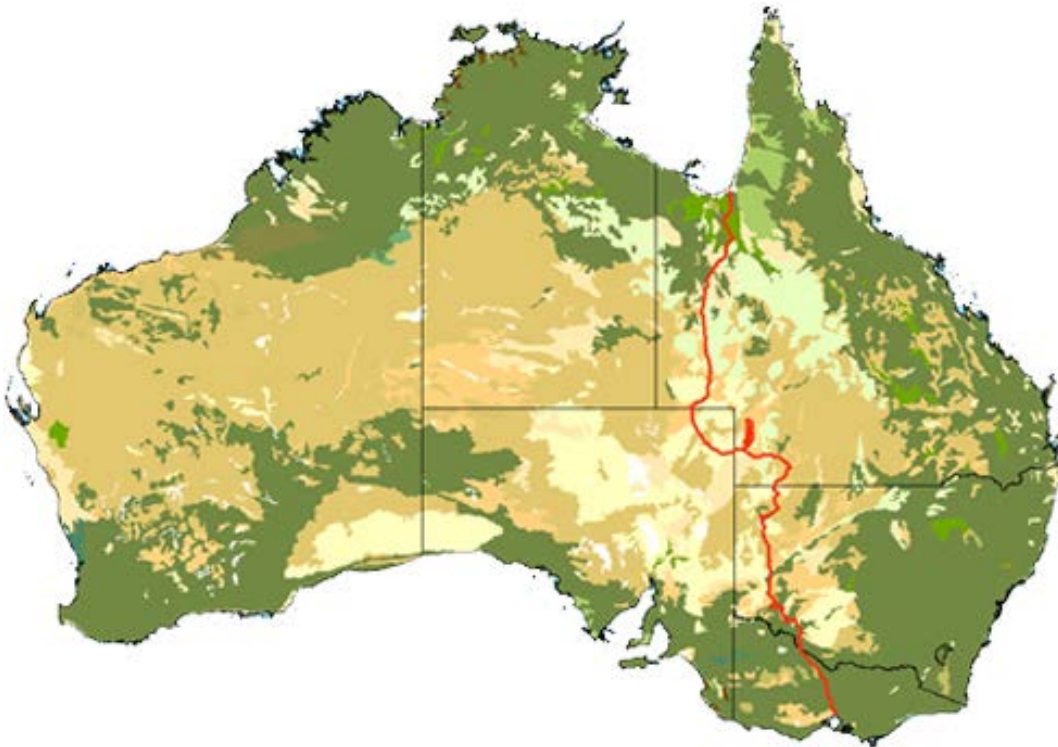


Figure 214: Vegetation: Pre-European Settlement (1788)  
ANZCW0703005425, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Geoscience Australia 2004.

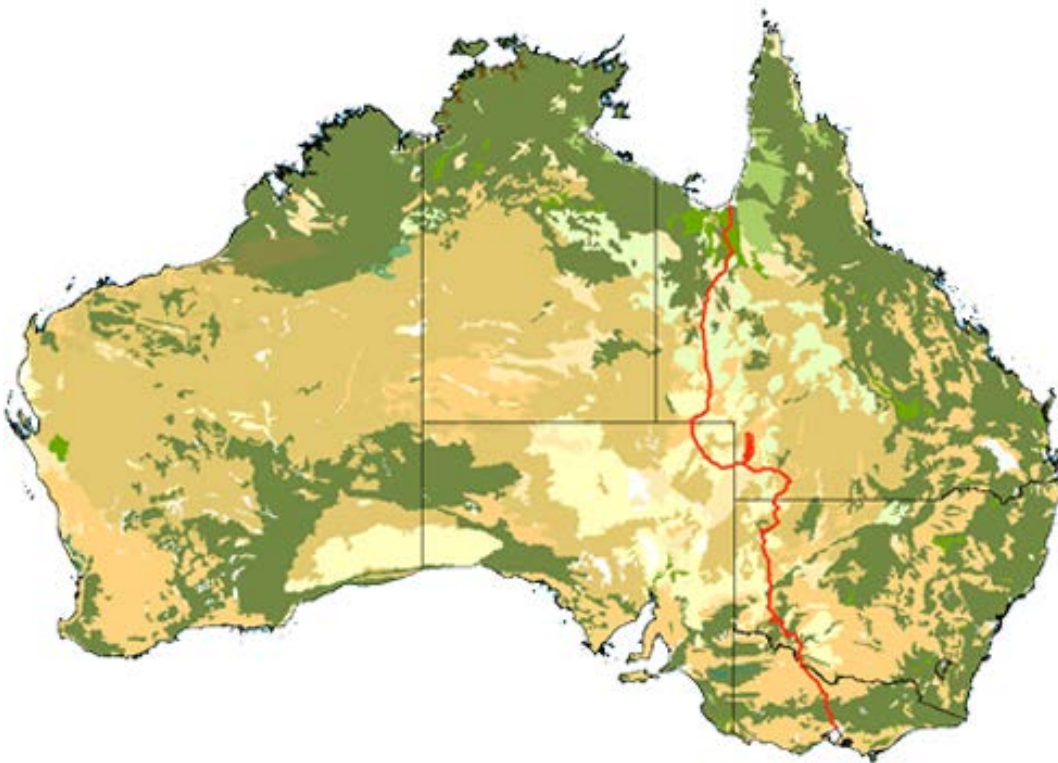


Figure 215: Vegetation: Post-European Settlement (1988)  
ANZCW0703005426, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Geoscience Australia 2004.

also given to the effects of erosion, small mammal extinctions, introduced pest and weed species, and other associated impacts of the pastoral, mineral extraction and petro-chemical industry. An examination of vegetation modelling studies supported this view.<sup>2035</sup> The major difference was Burke and Wills travelled in a slightly richer and more favourable environment than I experienced in 2008 at the end of a lengthy drought.

#### 7.4.1 Examining the track on the ground

The track I followed was as faithful to the original as possible, and was the most accurate plotting of the Expedition's route to date. The degree of accuracy varied along the track depending on the amount of archival data that was available for interpretation. Certain sections of the track in New South Wales and south-west Queensland, where Wills had taken bearings to prominent mountains were accurate to  $\leq 25$  metres.<sup>2036</sup> The corollary of this occurred on the featureless gibber flats and claypans of Cluny and Coorabulka Stations where extant data is sparse and the accuracy decreased to  $\pm 4,000$  metres. Nevertheless, even here the accuracy was sufficient to ensure I travelled through and experienced the same landscape as Burke, and therefore the route relocation was sufficiently accurate for me to make assessments of how the landscape affected the Expedition. Several key sites have been revisited since 2008 for a reassessment to improve accuracy, most notably the point at which Wills first reached Cooper Creek. This area was revisited in 2009 and 2010 and the first location for the site was revised northwards by 1,800 metres.

Although Wills' navigational data was the primary and most extensive source of data, it was cross-referenced with a host of other data, including the images sketched and painted on the Expedition by Becker and Beckler. These images were compared with today's landscape, not only to verify the

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<sup>2035</sup> Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia, v6.1, Parks Australia (2006); Vegetation Pre-European Settlement and Vegetation Post European Settlement mapping project, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Geoscience Australia (2004). Subsequently rechecked and verified with IBRA v7.0 (2012) datasets and the Commonwealth Government: Department of Environment and Energy, National Vegetation Information Systems NVIS v4.2 (2016) Major Vegetation Group (MVG) and Major Vegetation Subgroup (MVS) data.

<sup>2036</sup> Wills read bearings to prominent mountains and hilltops using a Negretti and Zambra prismatic compass and he recorded the values as numerical degrees read clockwise from magnetic north. Between Menindee and the Cooper, Wills adopted a magnetic declination of  $+7^\circ$ . Magnetic declination at Menindee in western New South Wales in 1860 was approximately  $+6^\circ 31' 48''$ . Currently magnetic declination at Menindee (2008) is  $+9^\circ 07' 36''$  and (2016)  $+8^\circ 55' 26'' \pm 0.32^\circ$ . The difference of c. $+2^\circ$  was taken into consideration when taking magnetic bearings in 2008. Dave Phoenix took bearings in 2008 with a Suunto KB-14/360 sighting compass accurate to  $0.33^\circ$  and graduated to  $0.5^\circ$ . Historical magnetic declination data was provided by the US NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information's historical magnetic declination data (1590-1890) v.2.3 August 2015 based on Andrew Jackson, Art R.T. Jonkers and Matthew R. Walker's *gufm1* model, see: Jackson, Jonkers & Walker, 'Four Centuries of Geomagnetic Secular Variation from Historical Records', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, Vol. 358 (2000): 957-999. Current magnetic declination data was provided by Geoscience Australia's Australian Geomagnetic Reference Field model, Epoch models 2005.0 and 2015.0.

geospatial integrity of my interpretation of Wills' data, but also to assess the accuracy of Becker as an artist. Although it is well known that even paintings done for record purposes can be falsified, Becker's and Beckler's were remarkably accurate. The least accurate of all of Becker's 33 landscape paintings and sketches was, surprisingly, his first one.<sup>2037</sup> Becker usually made brief preliminary sketches which he later used as reference to make more complete works, or sometimes he worked up the preliminary sketches into the final painting. However this does not appear to be the case with the first sketch, which bears little relationship to the feature portrayed. The sketch was done during the first rest day, one week after leaving Melbourne, and it would seem that after a week on the road Becker decided he should start fulfilling his artistic responsibilities. However the cold, wet conditions they experienced travelling out of Melbourne and over the Great Dividing Range probably meant he had not spent any time preparing preliminary sketches and therefore his first drawing was unique in that it was sketched from memory. All the other sketches and paintings are faithful reproductions of the landscape, although they do display a degree of vertical exaggeration which highlights distant hills. Two of the sketches initially proved difficult to locate until it became obvious that Becker's poor English and lack of understanding of navigational terms meant he used the term "north-by-west" when he meant "north-west", an error of  $-33^{\circ}45'$ .<sup>2038</sup> While several of the paintings depict places that are well-known today, several locations had not been previously identified. Combining Becker's imagery with the data in Wills' field books allowed three previously unidentified locations to be ascertained.<sup>2039</sup>

#### 7.4.2 Analysis of Wills' abilities as a surveyor and navigator

The data recorded by Wills was the most important archival evidence in locating the Expedition's track. Following Wills' handwritten pencil notes every day for five months as I traced the Expedition's track across Australia resulted in new insights into the methods Wills used on the Expedition. Although Wills was employed as the Expedition's surveyor, he never took the qualifying exams prior to departing on the Expedition. How competent was Wills in his role as surveyor and navigator?

Wills began studying surveying as a volunteer at the Ballarat survey office when he was 22, and then was employed as a labourer and assigned to a field-party under Assistant Surveyor Frederick

<sup>2037</sup> Ludwig Becker, 'Crossing an ancient crater from near Dr. Baynton's, 25 August 1860', b36031, H16486/F.1, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2038</sup> Ludwig Becker, 'Terrick-Terrick Hills, bearing N.b.W', b36033, H16486/F.3; 'Minindie Octb. 15. 60, bearing E. by S.', b36045, H16486/F.14, State Library of Victoria. North by west is  $348^{\circ}45'$ , while north-west is  $315^{\circ}$ .

<sup>2039</sup> The locations identified were; Ludwig Becker, 'A Darling bend close to our camp, Oct. 14. 60', b36049, H16486/F.22; Hermann Beckler, 'Dry Lake Bodurga', b36101, H16486/F.70; 'View of a distant range of mountains, seen from Gogirga hills', b36112, H16486/F.80, State Library of Victoria.

John Byerley.<sup>2040</sup> Wills had been advised that he would not learn much about the intricacies of the practice unless he was tutored by the surveyor to whom he was attached.<sup>2041</sup> Fortunately for Wills, the two men got along exceptionally well. Wills' "high estimation [for Byerley] never abated"<sup>2042</sup> and Byerley entrusted Wills with a far greater level of responsibility than would normally be expected of a labourer. In 1856 Wills was promoted to foreman of the field-party.<sup>2043</sup>

Wills clearly learnt a great deal during his time with Byerley, and even purchased his own surveying equipment to the value of £60 (three months' salary) in anticipation of leading his own survey party.<sup>2044</sup> Unfortunately for Wills, Byerley's dismissal in 1858 over an irregularity in one of his surveys resulted in Wills' employment being terminated.<sup>2045</sup> Because Charles Gavan Duffy, Head of the Board of Lands and Works, had just introduced competitive examinations for surveyors, Wills was not in a position to be promoted to replace Byerley as Assistant Surveyor, and although Wills expressed an interest in gaining the qualification, he did not attend the first exam held in July 1858.<sup>2046</sup>

By the time the second competitive examination was held in 1859, Wills was employed at the Flagstaff Observatory. Although Hardy<sup>2047</sup> later claimed Wills attended these examinations and achieved the highest marks in astronomy, Wills' name does not appear on the list of candidates who sat the test,<sup>2048</sup> and astronomy was not a part of the examination.<sup>2049</sup> There is no record of Wills having qualified as a surveyor or having worked as a surveyor before departing on the Expedition.

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<sup>2040</sup> Dr William Wills, 'Letter to James Hamlet Taylor, dated Ballaraat, 13 November 1855', Item 99/55, Unit 10, VPRS 44/P0001, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>2041</sup> James Hamlet Taylor, 'Letter to Dr Wills, dated Ballaraat, 20 November 1855', Item 99/55, Unit 10, VPRS 44/P0001, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>2042</sup> Wills, *Successful exploration*, 36.

<sup>2043</sup> Frederick Byerley, 'Correspondence to Surveyor-General, dated Melbourne, 15 August 1856', Item 56B/4117, Unit 13, VPRS 44/P0; Salaries register, Unit 1, VPRS 15031/P0001; James Hamlet Taylor, 'Memo No. 58/102, 1 February 1858', Outward Letter Book, District Survey Office Ballarat, 1856-8, VPRS 15602/P0001, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>2044</sup> Wills, *Successful exploration*, 33-36.

<sup>2045</sup> Byerley was suspended by Surveyor-General Charles Whybrow Ligar on 16 April 1858 on an accusation of unfairly favouring Henry Godfrey with additional water rights during a survey of Godfrey's property at Lake Boort in September 1857. It is not known whether Wills was part of Byerley's party that carried out this survey. Victoria: Parliament, *Report from the Select Committee upon Mr. Frederick Byerley's Case: Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence and Appendices*, Victorian Parliamentary Paper 1859/D/25, (Melbourne: John Ferres, Government Printer, 1859).

<sup>2046</sup> William John Wills, 'Letter to Charles Gavan Duffy, dated Dunolly, 13 July 1858', Item D58/3545, Unit 755, VPRS 44/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>2047</sup> Alfred Douglas Hardy, 'John Hardy An Early Victorian Surveyor', *The Victorian Historical Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 77, No.1 (1943): 1-14.

<sup>2048</sup> 'List of Candidates for Competence Examinations', 14 March 1859, Item 59/28, Unit 25, VPRS 44/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>2049</sup> Victoria: Parliament, 'Competitive Examination for Assistant Surveyors', *Victorian Government Gazette* (Melbourne: Victorian Government Printer, 1858), reprinted in the *Argus*, 7 September 1858: 6, shows the examination was divided into the following sections:

An examination of Wills' observations reveals a comprehensive data set recording many different types of information, as well as regular diary entries. Wills began making brief diary entries from the day he departed Melbourne, and he started making meteorological observations two days later.<sup>2050</sup> However the watches<sup>2051</sup> Wills would need to make astronomical observations did not reach the Expedition until it had arrived at Swan Hill.<sup>2052</sup> The following day, in preparation of the arrival of Neumayer, Wills began the standard practice of calculating the Index Correction<sup>2053</sup> of his sextant<sup>2054</sup> and then took timed altitudes<sup>2055</sup> to compare the rate of the watches.<sup>2056</sup> The following day he took circum-meridian altitudes<sup>2057</sup> to calculate his latitude and later made a series of lunar distance observations.<sup>2058</sup>

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- 1). Professional antecedents, value 20%. 2). Mathematics, value 40%. 3). Practical surveying, value 40%. Astronomy was not part of the examination and none of the questions in the examination referred to the use of a sextant, taking astronomical observations or determining latitude or longitude.

<sup>2050</sup> Wills, 'Memorandum book', ex2009-006, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2051</sup> Wills was provided with four watches:

- 1). 18ct gold watch with duplex movement made by James Murray of London, #5094, purchased from L. Burmeister, Watch & Chronometer Maker, Melbourne on 27 July 1860 at a cost of £42.
- 2). 18ct gold watch with duplex movement made by James Murray of London and hallmarked London 1859, #5243. Now in the collection of the National Museum of Australia.
- 3). Watch made by Russell's, #673 used for rough observations.
- 4). Watch (possibly made by James Murray of London), #5023.

<sup>2052</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Letter to Richard Nash, dated Swan Hill, 6 September 1860', D179 (Item 10), State Library of New South Wales.

<sup>2053</sup> The Index Error or Index Correction is the difference between the observed angle and the sextant's Vernier angle. The difference is added or subtracted to the observed angles to compensate for the displacement of the zero mark.

<sup>2054</sup> Neumayer supplied the expedition with a seven-inch sextant, divided in 10" and with reversible shades which had been made by Mechaniker Herr Julius Lohmeier, Nr. 17 Große Michaelisstraße, Hamburg.

<sup>2055</sup> Timed altitudes are astronomical observations and calculations which can determine time or longitude. As time and longitude are interdependent, if time is known, longitude can be calculated, and if longitude is known, time can be calculated. Wills used the observations to compare the rate of watches #5243 and #673.

<sup>2056</sup> The only surviving archival evidence detailing the purchase of time-keeping devices for use on the expedition is a receipt for £42 dated 27 July 1860 from L. Burmeister, Watch & Chronometer Maker, Melbourne for a James Murray duplex watch number #5243. Many surveyors and historians assumed the expedition had marine chronometers with them, but in 2008 the James Murray watch #5243 appeared at auction. I was asked by auctioneers, Bonham & Goodman, to verify its authenticity. The evidence indicates that the expedition relied on good quality watches to locate their position, rather than the more accurate, but heavier and more expensive marine chronometers.

<sup>2057</sup> Circum-meridian altitudes (also known as double-altitude, meridian altitude, noon-latitude or maximum altitude) are the simplest method of calculating latitude using observations of a heavenly body as it passes the observer's meridian.

<sup>2058</sup> Wills, 'Astronomical Observations: Terrick Terrick to Bilbarka', ex2008-021, State Library of Victoria. Lunar distance observations were a method of determining longitude without referring to a chronometer. Unlike conventional sextant readings which measured the vertical angle between the horizon and an astronomical body, 'taking lunars' required the measurement of the angle between the moon and an astronomical body. The observations were difficult to take and the reduction calculation was lengthy and complicated. Wills made 42 separate lunar distance observations to Venus, Jupiter,  $\alpha$  Arietis (Hamal) and the Sun, but there is no evidence to show he found time to reduce all his observations.

Neumayer arrived in Swan Hill on 10 September to begin "observations and the comparison of instruments"<sup>2059</sup> to ensure Wills commenced the regular observations and calculations necessary to record and map the Expedition's track. Although Wills recorded several time altitudes that afternoon, cloudy conditions made observations difficult, and if any further calibrations were made, they were not recorded in Wills' field books and are not contained in any of Neumayer's records still extant in Australia.<sup>2060</sup> The following morning the Expedition left Swan Hill and crossed the Murray, but Neumayer, characteristically preoccupied with his own magnetic observations, remained in Swan Hill. He did not re-join the Expedition until two days later when they were on the plains north of Kyalite. The following day the Expedition arrived in Balranald, and it was here that Wills began recording the Expedition's detailed traverse in the first of 19 field books. Wills recorded the Expedition's daily traverse for the next 47 days travel, from Balranald to the first depot camp on Cooper Creek.

Wills had been looking forward to Neumayer's arrival and clearly enjoyed pursuing his scientific interests with a like-minded colleague. The two weeks that Neumayer spent with the Expedition were a busy time as the two men made extensive astronomical observations, taking readings every night except for two, and occasionally observing until 2.30 a.m. in sub-zero temperatures. Although Burke had limited the opportunities for Becker and Beckler to carry out their scientific studies, he respected Neumayer and was happy for Wills to do whatever he needed in preparation for navigating the party to the Gulf. Wills drafted his first surveyor's report<sup>2061</sup> and a map of their route so far,<sup>2062</sup> which Neumayer took back to the EC as evidence of the Expedition's progress. The map was the most detailed of all the maps Wills would prepare on the Expedition, and it bears many similarities to GF12,<sup>2063</sup> the only extant map made by Wills before leaving on the Expedition. Wills' *Plan showing the route of the VEE from Balranald to the Darling* was quite detailed and contained various cartographic elements including a title, scale bar, north arrow, magnetic variation, descriptions of terrain and cross-hatching: elements that would be missing from his subsequent maps. The scale of eight miles to the

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<sup>2059</sup> Neumayer, *Results of the Magnetic Survey of the Colony of Victoria*.

<sup>2060</sup> The records relevant to Neumayer's time at the Melbourne Observatory are at the Public Record Office of Victoria at:

VPRS 775, Melbourne Observatory, 'Outward Letter Books'.

VPRS 776, Melbourne Observatory, 'R.L.J. Ellery's Letter Book, Director'.

VPRS 777, Flagstaff and Melbourne Observatory, 'Phenomena and Meteorological Reports'.

VPRS 779, Melbourne Observatory, 'Geodetic Survey: Outward Correspondence'.

VPRS 780, Melbourne Observatory, 'Inward Correspondence'.

VPRS 781, Melbourne Observatory, 'Board of Visitors: Annual Reports'.

VPRS 783, Melbourne Observatory, 'Board of Visitors: Minute Book'.

VPRS 869, Melbourne Observatory, 'Early Historical Inward Correspondence'.

<sup>2061</sup> Wills, 'Surveyor's Field Notes: Balranald to Linklinkwho', ex2008-009, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2062</sup> William John Wills, 'Plan showing the route of the Victorian Exploring Expedition from Balranald to the Darling. September 1860', H6196, MC1-D7, Map C, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2063</sup> William John Wills and Frederick Byerley, 'Plan of Goldfields in the Parish of Kingower', GF12 Kingower, Historic Plan Collection, Unit 1961, VPRS 8168/P0002, Public Record Office of Victoria.



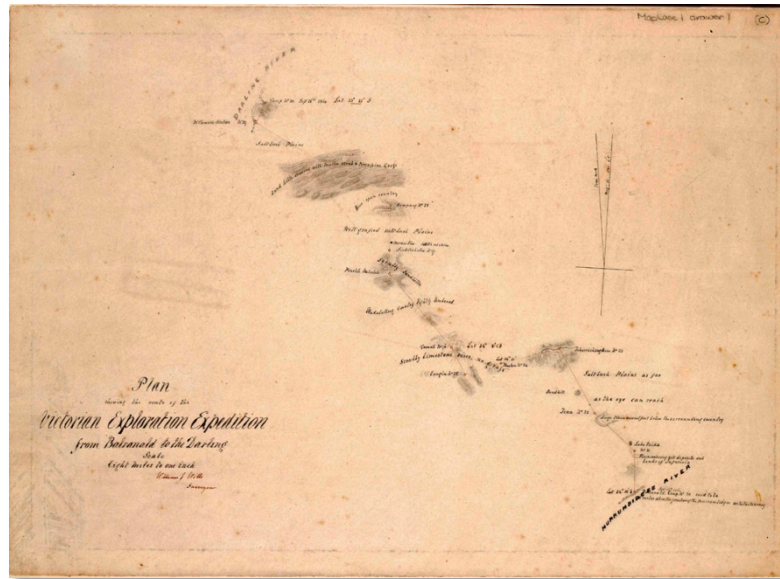


Figure 216: William John Wills, 'Plan showing the route of the VEE from Balranald to the Darling', Map Case 1, Drawer 7c, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

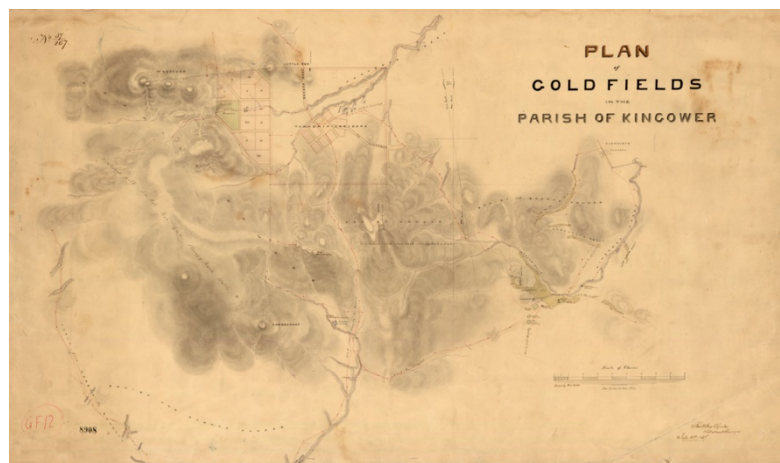


Figure 217: William John Wills and Frederick Byerley, 'Plan of the goldfields in the parish of Kingower, 21 July 1857', GF 12 Kingower, Historic Plan Collection, Unit 1961, VPRS 8168/P0002, Public Record Office of Victoria.

inch (c. 1:506,880) also made this the most detailed and largest scale map made on the Expedition (see Figure 216).

Neumayer was disappointed that Wills' extensive responsibilities, compounded by the EC's inability to procure a second surveyor, would prevent him from making magnetic observations during the Expedition. Neumayer reduced Wills' workload by returning the magnetic instruments to Melbourne, but if he was expecting Wills to keep producing detailed maps and regular surveyor's reports for the rest of the Expedition, he would be disappointed. To that point the pace of the Expedition had been steady, with the heavy wagons limiting their progress to an average of just 25 kilometres a day. The short winter days meant the Expedition stopped early and most days the



Expedition had set up camp by 5.00 p.m., which gave Wills adequate time to take observations. The Expedition had numerous rest days, with an average of one day's rest for every three days' travel, so there was ample opportunity to catch up on writing reports and, once over the ranges at Lancefield, the rain eased and the weather improved.<sup>2064</sup>

From Balranald to Menindee Wills was enthusiastic about his scientific responsibilities and clearly relished the opportunities his position offered him. However his promotion to second-in-command, combined with an increase in physical effort required as the pace increased, resulted in a decline in the scientific work he undertook. This reduction began as soon as Neumayer left the Expedition. Burke decided to leave the wagons behind which enabled him to increase the pace to 35 kilometres a day. The Expedition settled into some semblance of a routine; they departed at 6.00 a.m. and often travelled until after 7.00 p.m. Wills' work rate dropped off considerably. Although he made observations on 3 and 4 October and then wrote a short report before posting his observations to Melbourne,<sup>2065</sup> he did not make any further astronomical observations for more than two weeks. Wills relied on dead-reckoning calculations for his latitude and he did not bother calculating longitude at all. Most surprisingly he did not make any observations in Menindee, which as the last European settlement encountered, would have made a valuable reference point for map datum. Because he had less time to devote to observations, Wills eventually developed a more efficient style of navigation which dispensed with non-essential observations, and he concentrated solely on the party's progress.

After Menindee, Wills found himself in an unusual position as Wright was guiding the party using a combination of his personal knowledge gained from previous trips north, as well as the knowledge of two Aboriginal guides. Wills was not required to navigate the party and he was relegated to merely recording their travels. He became inconsistent with his observations and on several occasions displayed a lack of interest in recording their progress.<sup>2066</sup> On 26 October 1860 Wills recorded just a single bearing for their entire day's traverse and he mapped few features, despite crossing the Noonthorangee and Turkaro Ranges and crossing several watercourses.<sup>2067</sup> The following day he underestimated the distance they travelled by more than five arc minutes, the greatest dead-reckoning error of the whole Expedition.<sup>2068</sup> Wills then expressed dissatisfaction with the route chosen by their

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<sup>2064</sup> Neumayer even commented that one of the days was "very oppressive" even though the temperature only rose to a maximum of 21°C. While this comment may seem unusual given the expedition was intending to cross the deserts during summer, it is not as strange as it may appear. From personal experience of travelling for six weeks from Melbourne to the Darling during the winter, when temperatures were -3°C overnight and daily maximums rarely reached double figures, temperatures over 20°C do feel surprisingly warm.

<sup>2065</sup> Wills, 'Surveyor's Field Notes: Balranald to Linklinkwho', ex2008-009; 'Astronomical Observations: Terrick Terrick to Bilbarka', ex2008-021, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2066</sup> Wills, 'Field Book No. 2: Bilbarka to Torowoto', ex2008-012, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2067</sup> Wills, 'Field Book No. 3: Bilbarka to Torowoto', ex2008-013, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2068</sup> Five arc minutes equates to around eight kilometres at this latitude. Camp 43, Wonnaminta Creek, 27 October 1860.

Aboriginal guides and disputed information received from the Pantyikali about the availability of water ahead (this incident is mentioned in Chapter 6). Becoming bored with his current role as an observer rather than a navigator, he left the main party on 28 October 1860 and set out to investigate Wonnogin Swamp,<sup>2069</sup> 18 miles to the north-west of their course.<sup>2070</sup> This trip was unnecessary as it separated Wills from the main party of the Expedition, placed extra strain on the camels he used and could have potentially ended the Expedition had Wills been incapacitated or unable to re-join the main party.

The strain of the rapid pace also showed in the calibre of Wills' maps. Although his first map demonstrated how capable he was at cartography, the later maps were of a much poorer quality. Wills hoped the EC would make "due allowance" for the lack of time he spent on the work:

I have had the honour to place in the hands of our leader for transmission to the committee, my third report, and a tracing, showing the country traversed since my last was written. I regret that I have been unable to devote as much attention to either as I could have desired.<sup>2071</sup>

Wills probably expected Neumayer to assign one of the observatory staff to accurately reduce his astronomical observations and redraft the rough maps.<sup>2072</sup> However Wills made this task more difficult by drawing his maps at different scales. Although the first map was drawn at a scale of 1:506,880, and had the scale marked on the map, the next two maps (see Figures 218 and 219) had no scale defined and were drawn at the much smaller and less detailed scales of approximately 1:1.7M and 1:1.25M.<sup>2073</sup>

<sup>2069</sup> Wonnogin Swamp is a forgotten name and the area is now called Green Lake and Cobham Lakes, S30°09' E142°04' (GDA2020).

<sup>2070</sup> Wills, 'Field Book No. 3: Bilbarka to Torowoto', ex2008-013, State Library of Victoria. Subsequent discussions and a 2009 field trip to Wonnogin Swamp with registered Survey Associate (QLD) (retired) Kevin Ian Andrews raised questions about whether Wills was in fact hoping to find water at Wonnogin Swamp in order to allow a more direct northerly track towards Cooper Creek, rather than the north-easterly diversion which was being taken by Wright. This seems to be a possibility. However if Wills had felt strongly about heading to the north, he could have insisted that Burke head towards Sturt's Depot Glen, which was 60 kilometres to the north-north-west.

<sup>2071</sup> Wills, 'Third Surveyor's Report', ex2004-013, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2072</sup> Wills wrote to the EC explaining how to reduce his observations and redraft his map and Neumayer employed Edwin Welch to transcribe and reduce Wills' first set of observations. Wills could have reasonably expected Neumayer to do the same with all subsequent observations he sent back to Melbourne.

<sup>2073</sup> William John Wills, 'Tracing showing the Route taken by the VEE party from Menindie on the Darling to the Torowoto Swamp, latitude 31°1'30" south and longitude 142°27'E. William J Wills, Surveyor and Astr. Obs to the Expedition, October 1860', H3427, MCFB2, MS 9091, State Library of Victoria. The scale is not written on the map, but was measured as 66 mm per 1° latitude at 33° S and between 48 mm and 56 mm per 1° longitude at 141°E. This equates to approximately 1:1,700,000 or 27 miles to the inch; 'Map to accompany Wills' Third Surveyor's Report', December 1860, H3429, MC8/3, MS 9091, State Library of Victoria. The scale is not written on the map, but was measured as 89 mm per 1° latitude at 33° S and 77 mm per 1° longitude at 141°E. This equates to approximately 1: 1,250,000 or 20 miles to the inch.

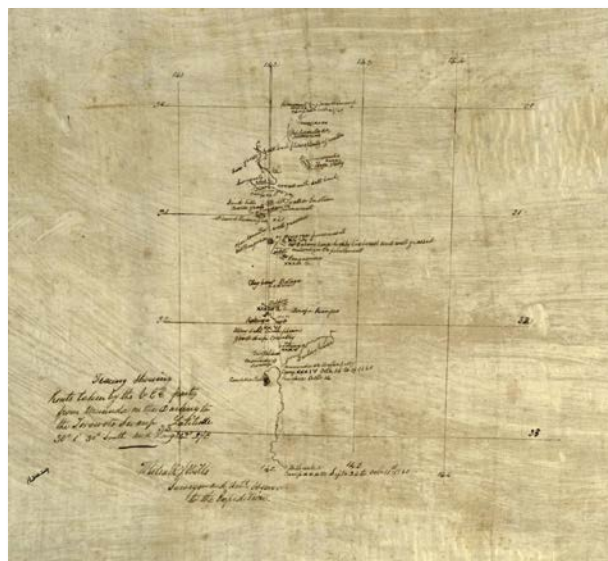


Figure 218: William John Wills, 'Tracing showing the Route taken by the VEE party from Menindie on the Darling to the Torowoto Swamp, latitude 31° 1' 30" south and longitude 142° 27" E. William J Wills, Surveyor and Astr. Obs to the Expedition. October 1860'.  
Maps relating to Burke and Wills, H 3427, MC FB2, MS 9091, State Library of Victoria.



Figure 219: William John Wills, 'Tracing to accompany Wills' Second Surveyor's Report', n.d., c. October 1860.  
Maps relating to Burke and Wills, H 3428, MC 8/3, MS 9091, State Library of Victoria.

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As discussed in the previous chapter, Wright arranged for new guides to lead the party from Torowoto to the Bulloo River.<sup>2074</sup> Bulloo was unknown to Europeans and information obtained from Aboriginal informants led Wright to suspect that 'Lake Bulla' might be on the Cooper itself. Faced with this uncertainty Burke could have dispensed with the Aboriginal guides and instructed Wills to

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<sup>2074</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 134 to Brahe and Question 1226 to Wright.

navigate them directly to the Cooper, but this would have meant a 300 kilometre journey with no guarantee of finding water. Burke decided to continue on with their Aboriginal guides and follow their longer, but better watered route. From the outset the Aboriginal guides were in charge – they decided where the party went and when they halted to make camp, and Wills continued recording the Expedition’s progress in his role as the party’s scribe.

Beyond Bulloo the Expedition entered the Grey Range, guided by a Kulila or Karenggapa man.<sup>2075</sup> With no clear indication of where the party wanted to go, their guide soon left them and, for the first time since leaving Lake Paika more than seven weeks ago, the Expedition was without an Aboriginal guide. Burke was almost half-way across Australia, having taken 81 days to travel 1,500 kilometres from Melbourne, and now for the first time Wills was required to act as navigator and lead the party to the Cooper. Both Sturt and Gregory had visited the Cooper, so by referring to Sturt’s journal (or Arrowsmith’s map of Sturt’s journey), Wills would have known that he was 1° east and slightly south of the furthest point Sturt reached on Cooper Creek (this position was actually on the Wilson River, but neither Sturt nor Wills realised the Cooper and Wilson were separate watercourses).<sup>2076</sup> Wills continued to head north despite the topographical constraints placed on him by the more rugged parts of the Grey Range, until he reached Sturt’s latitude, and then turned west, expecting that the Cooper would be a little over 1° to the west (c. ~100 kilometres). Wills reached water at the Wilson River three days later. He was just 8’ north of Sturt’s latitude and 13’ east of his longitude.

It was November and Burke would have been relieved at finding water, but any delight at reaching the creek was short lived as they soon lost its course on the black soil plains. Sturt had recorded a reasonably accurate description of the country and explained how the creek broke into numerous tributaries and spread out along the polygonum flats, whose “soft and blistered” soil was almost impossible to “flounder” over.<sup>2077</sup> Wills expected the small creek they had located to increase in size as they followed it downstream, and initially the signs were promising as the creek expanded into Nockaburrawarry Waterhole. However, after following the creek for just ten kilometres, it was lost on a polygonum flat and four of the next five days were spent on frustrating reconnaissance trips over the black soil plains looking for the elusive watercourse.<sup>2078</sup> When they did finally find the main channel of the Wilson River, Burke travelled 150 kilometres downstream over the next nine days before he felt confident enough in the permanence of the watercourse to establish a depot.

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<sup>2075</sup> Wills, 'Field Notes No. 2: Torowoto to Cooper's Creek', ex2008-014, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2076</sup> Sturt, *Narrative of an expedition*. Vol. 2: 87.

<sup>2077</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2: 80.

<sup>2078</sup> Wills, 'Field Notes No. 2: Torowoto to Cooper's Creek', ex2008-014; 'Field Notes No. 5: Cooper's Creek', ex2008-017, State Library of Victoria.



Figure 220: Charles Sturt, 'Cooper's Creek', 1845.  
*Narrative of an Expedition into Central Australia* (London: T. & W. Boone, 1849).

One of the few images available to Wills that would  
have shaped his expectations of Cooper Creek.

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Plotting and following the Expedition's track along the Wilson River to Cooper Creek reveals the difficulties the Expedition faced reconciling Sturt's description and maps with the realities of travel in the channel country. Before the author's own investigation, the only attempt to locate the Expedition's first camp on the Cooper was by Towner in 1947 when he identified Yetally Waterhole as the most likely site.<sup>2079</sup> Towner did not use Wills' field books to plot the route, relying on a liberal interpretation of the published maps instead, and as a consequence he was in error by more than 50 kilometres. Identifying the actual location of the first camp on the Cooper using transcribed plots from Wills' field books led to the somewhat surprising realisation that despite all the previous attempts at locating the Expedition's track, no one had plotted and followed Wills' field books from Balranald to the Cooper, and therefore all previous attempts had been speculative at best.<sup>2080</sup>

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<sup>2079</sup> Yetally Waterhole, S27°59' E141°45' (GDA2020), see: Alfred Cory Towner, 'Maps showing route of Burke and Wills (on Queensland Dept. of Public Lands map of Queensland)', 1961, MS 1391, National Library of Australia.

<sup>2080</sup> Brigadier Lawrence Fitzgerald corresponded with Towner and exchanged ideas about the Expedition's track. A closer reading of the Fitzgerald's papers during a visit to the National Library of Australia in 2013, shows Fitzgerald plotted his own interpretation of Burke's track from Swan Hill to the Gulf on Xerox copies of 1:250K Royal Australian Survey Corps Series R502 (1961-1968) map sheets. Fitzgerald's maps corresponded with Towner's in many ways, but he seems to have given Wills' dead-reckoning latitudes more emphasis and therefore his route varies in a few areas. One of these variations is at Burke's Camp 57 'First camp on the Cooper', which is surprisingly close to the author's position, which was calculated in 2007 while unaware of Fitzgerald's work. Although Fitzgerald visited the Cooper, there is nothing in the Fitzgerald papers to suggest he went to the Wilson River or checked the accuracy of his plotted position for Camp 57. See: Bill King, *King of the Outback: Tales from an Off-Road Adventurer* (Crows Nest, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 2011), 60-61. Brigadier Lawrence Fitzgerald, 'Papers of Lawrence

This new information, contrasting with Murgatroyd's fanciful ideas about the Expedition's arrival at the Cooper, inspired further investigation into Wills' navigational methodology and the degree to which he fulfilled the traditional role of a surveyor on an Expedition. Once the guides left the party Wills was called on for the first time to fulfil his role as surveyor and navigate the party to the Cooper. He did this competently and continued to survey accurately from the Cooper to the Diamantina. However, the increasing heat and rate of travel meant he had to modify the way he operated, and as they approached the Gulf, Wills' role was more that of a navigator than a surveyor.

### 7.4.3 Wills as a surveyor or navigator?

Carter posits that "explorers were not dispatched to traverse deserts, but to locate objects of cultural significance"<sup>2081</sup> and he suggests explorers' ambitions to bring distant things close in order to bring the country before the reader's eyes evolved from the logic of travelling rather than from contemporary geographical hypotheses.<sup>2082</sup> In this respect the VEE differed greatly from Flinders, Oxley, Eyre, Mitchell, Leichhardt and Sturt. These explorers departed with the assumption that they would be able to edit their journals in preparation for publication once they returned, which would, according to Carter, give them the opportunity to prepare an account of their route which would serve to bring the country into historical being.<sup>2083</sup> Burke however made no serious attempt to keep a diary. While the lack of a journal is not surprising given Burke's prior record and nonchalant attitude to police paperwork,<sup>2084</sup> Burke's personality and his yearning for fame would appear to make him an ideal candidate for what Ryan calls "explorer as hero".<sup>2085</sup> Ryan argues that the heroic explorers constructed themselves as authoritative and knowledgeable individuals through their travel narratives. Burke, however, departed with the sole aim of crossing the continent, the accomplishment of which would be sufficient to gain him the recognition he desired. He did not see the need to capture the monotonous trudge across the landscape in print to justify his achievement.

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Fitzgerald, 1860-1987', MS Acc11.186. Box 3, Items 1513-1644; Box 4, Items 1645-1761; Box 5, Items 1762-1778. Includes map of Burke and Wills' Route from Cooper's Creek to Carpentaria.

<sup>2081</sup> Carter, *Botany Bay*: 56.

<sup>2082</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>2083</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2084</sup> 'Robert O'Hara Burke', *Argus*, 11 December 1861: 5 (reproducing an article from *Bell's Life in Adelaide*, 7 December 1861; 'Personal Reminiscences of O'Hara Burke, The Explorer', *Educational Gazette, Literary Companion, and General Review*, Vol. 1, No. 5, 14 December (1861): 69-70; Sadlier, *Recollections*, 73-80; 'Old Time Memories: Robert O'Hara Burke', *The Australasian*, 28 May 1898: 27; 'With Sturt's Cadets. II', *Argus*, 20 June 1908: 8; Ex-Official, 'The Contributor: Personal Reminiscences and Adventures', *Leader*, 2 April 1887: 36; A.W. Greig, 'A Personal Sketch', *Age*, 20 August 1913: 11; Bendleby, 'Robert O'Hara Burke: Some Unrecorded Testimony', *The Australasian*, 20 December 1919: 1314; Manwaring, 'A contemporary's view of Robert O'Hara Burke', 51-56.

<sup>2085</sup> Ryan, *Cartographic eye*, 21.

Burke may have been forced into writing more had Wills not been so dedicated to recording the daily minutiae. Wills, along with Becker and Beckler, readily documented the spatial, topographical, botanical, meteorological, geological and environmental data, leaving anything that Burke could contribute somewhat superfluous. In the early stages of the Expedition Burke wrote letters and dispatches, one every two days on average. However when they got beyond the range of the telegraph and postal service, Burke wrote less and less, eventually admitting that Wills was far more capable at documenting "all the necessary details with regard to the state of the country through which we passed".<sup>2086</sup>

As well as abdicating responsibility for the Expedition's journal, even more surprisingly Burke showed little interest in naming features. Carter might argue that as Burke did not seek to bring country into historical being through literature, it follows that he saw no reason to bring country into historical being through the process of naming features. In addition, as Burke was not the party's surveyor, naming features may not have been a priority. However the process of naming is a simple one and takes much less effort and dedication than keeping a regular journal. Ascribing European names to places was raised early in the Expedition, when Lucy Holloway asked the explorers if they could propose an alternative name for their station.<sup>2087</sup> Although Burke was not involved in this discussion, three weeks later he seems to have participated in the naming process when the Expedition named their first feature – Branigan Hill honoured a fellow Irishman and colleague of Burke's in the Victoria Police.<sup>2088</sup> Burke certainly saw himself as the 'explorer-hero' and he demonstrates his early enthusiasm in a letter to his uncle:

We have passed through some fine well-watered country not before known ... What we have done up to this will cause a great sensation as we have passed some very fine sheep grazing country not before known for which when my report goes down immediate application will be made.<sup>2089</sup>

Burke conveniently fails to mention that this land in north-western New South Wales was well known to settlers on the Darling and he had been guided through it by Wright and two Aboriginal guides. However the letter demonstrates that Burke was aware of his role in 'discovering' new land. Naming features after his backers in Melbourne would have been a simple way of advancing his status upon return.

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<sup>2086</sup> Wills, 'Third Surveyor's Report', ex2004-013, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2087</sup> John Holloway and Abraham Booth's station was called 'Tragowel', which means 'sound of birds'. Becker suggested changing it to 'Point Welcome', but obviously the Barababaraba / Wemba Wemba name was favoured as the station is still called Tragowel today. Becker, 'First Report', ex2004-004, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2088</sup> Branigan Hill was named after Irishman St John Branigan, who had been a member of the Victoria Police since 1854 and in 1860 was serving as a Sub-Inspector in Melbourne. The name has been forgotten and the hill is currently unnamed. Branigan Hill is at S34°14'29" E143°02'09" (GDA2020).

<sup>2089</sup> Burke, 'Letter to uncle, John Burke', MS 30/3, National Library of Australia.



Although Burke was indifferent to the naming process, Wills needed a spatial framework of named places in order to navigate and consequently the responsibility for naming places devolved on him. He took several quite distinct approaches to naming throughout the course of the Expedition. In areas already occupied by Europeans, Wills recorded existing names, using a mix of European and Aboriginal names, and wherever possible he recorded the meanings of Aboriginal names.<sup>2090</sup> Beyond Menindee Wills recorded features which were already known to Europeans, but which had not yet been mapped. Wills retained Aboriginal names for 90% of the features he recorded, getting the existing names from the Paakantyi guides (as noted in the previous chapter). Mostly the named places were creeks or mountains. On one occasion Wills even left an underlined space in his journal, "Mount \_\_\_\_\_", for him to fill in the name later when he got a chance to question the Aboriginal guides. The few European names that Wills did use were predominantly for gaps.<sup>2091</sup> Wills realised it was more effective to use Aboriginal place names when explaining to Aboriginal guides where he wanted to go. So for the first twelve weeks of travel, Wills 'brought country into historical being' using Aboriginal names, lightly interspersed with occasional European place names. However Wills did not consider these European place names were replacing Aboriginal names, merely filling in the gaps, both metaphorically and topographically. More specifically, Wills brought aspects of an existing Aboriginal landscape into European consciousness.

Table 1: Place names recorded by Wills from Menindee, New South Wales, to the Bulloo River, Queensland. The list is dominated by Aboriginal place names.

Watnyala <sup>2092</sup>	Euranya <sup>2093</sup>	PalDRAMUTTA
Dorpulka <sup>2094</sup>	Bengora	Torowoto <sup>2095</sup>
Totoynya <sup>2096</sup>	Mutwongee <sup>2097</sup>	Altoka
Kokriega <sup>2098</sup>	Yerralany <sup>2099</sup>	Kalampay

<sup>2090</sup> Wills explains the meanings for Dorpulka and Totoynya among others.

<sup>2091</sup> 'Gap' is a topographic feature also known as a pass, notch, col, saddle, opening, hause, bwlch, brennig or bealach. Wills named 'The Gap', S31°51'23" E142°21'29" (GDA2020), 'The Gap', S31°23'24" E142°19'55" (GDA2020) and 'Snake Gap', S31°13'34" E142°16'31" (GDA2020).

<sup>2092</sup> 'Wontanella' is Menindee Lakes (Paakantyi = 'many waters').

<sup>2093</sup> "Mount Euranya as recorded by Wills: Yuranya or Yuraniya would be my tentative practical Paakantyi orthography for this name. In order to achieve the best English pronunciation for this name it would be best to keep Wills' anglicised spelling or anglicise it further to Eurannia. I can't give any meaning to this, but this does not stop it from being a perfectly genuine Paakantyi name: there are lots that end in -anya, -kanya or -aniya, -kaniya such as Wilcannia, Bancannia, Yancannia" Luise Hercus, pers. comm., 2010.

<sup>2094</sup> "Dorpulka means deep hole" Wills, 'Field Book No. 1: Bilbarka to Torowoto', ex2008-011, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2095</sup> 'Torowoto' (Malyangapa), thurru = 'snake' and katu = 'windbreak'.

<sup>2096</sup> "Totoynya is the name of a small bird whose name is the imitation of the noise it makes when it flies around" Wills, 'Field Book No. 1: Bilbarka to Torowoto', ex2008-011, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2097</sup> 'Mutawintji' (Wiimpatja Parlku) muthu = 'grass' and wintyi = 'fresh' or 'green'.

<sup>2098</sup> 'Kukirrka' (Paakantyi), a woman's birthing cave in the Scropes Range, now known as Burke's Cave.

<sup>2099</sup> 'Mount Yerralany' as recorded by Wills: "The first part of this name is 'yarra', meaning tree, a word found in all Paakantyi dialects. I think that it is Yarralani (with the final -i being pronounced 'i' as in 'bit' and

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Coonbaralba	Snake Gap	Cannilta
The Gap	The Castle	Tongowoko
Bilpa	Nandtherungee <sup>2100</sup>	Carryapundy
Botoga	Enntorn	Bulloo
Tunganoo	Teltawongee	Wright's Creek
The Gap	Wonnaminta <sup>2101</sup>	McDonough's Creek
Langawirra	Wonnogin <sup>2102</sup>	Grey Range

Wills may have been hoping he would obtain Aboriginal guidance all the way to the Gulf. Any map he could make which detailed Aboriginal place names from Menindee to the Gulf would greatly assist the return journey. Unfortunately for Wills, language difficulties meant they did not have Aboriginal guides beyond the Grey Range. The few attempts they made at securing guides came to nothing.<sup>2103</sup>

North of Cooper Creek Wills named 31 locations, all with European names. Initially the Expedition did not name any features at all, travelling nearly 300 kilometres from the Cooper depot before naming the first feature. Over the next 750 kilometres they named just five. Without Aboriginal input, Wills looked to other sources for his inspiration for place names. Rather uninspiringly, and definitely not in the style of explorer-hero, he memorialised minor members of the Expedition: Gray, King, Patten and Mahomet. More significantly, important features such as the Diamantina River were mapped, but not named. Although Wills originally thought the Diamantina might be Sturt's 'Eyre's Creek', after following the river for a short distance he realised it was not the same watercourse that Sturt had visited. Overlooking the opportunity to name such significant feature

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not 'i' as in Bondi). I think it would again be best to keep Wills's spelling so as not to lose any information. There might have been elision too, and the name could represent Yerralan(a)ly. There are plenty of placenames around beginning with the 'tree' word. To quote a few from the McCabe material near the Murray junction I have recently looked at:

- 1). Yarrera, just above the junction with Mullaroo Creek represents yarra-yarra, the reduplicated form of Paakantyi 'yarra' = tree or wood.
- 2). Only a couple of miles upstream from there McCabe's map shows Yerrawilpedee, and a note in the diary says 'Hut other side Crozier'. This word can be analysed as follows: Yarra-wilpi-thi.
- 3). Yerroo. It is possible that this name on McCabe's Morquong survey also represents the Paakantyi word 'yarra' = tree or wood" Luise Hercus, pers. comm., 2010.

<sup>2100</sup> 'Nhanthuru-ntyi'. Dutton-Beckett recorded 'nanduru' = 'yam', 'belonging to yams' or 'yam-place' (from the story of Kangaroo and Euro). Jeremy Beckett, Luise Hercus and Sarah Martin, Claire Colyer (ed.), *Mutawintji: Aboriginal Cultural Association with Mutawintji National Park* (Glebe: Office of the Registrar, Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 (NSW), 2008).

<sup>2101</sup> 'Wonnaminta' (Malyangapa) 'wana' = 'boomerang' and the suffix 'mintha' (which does not seem to change the meaning of the noun).

<sup>2102</sup> 'Wonnogin swamp' is now called Green Lake and Cobham Lake.

<sup>2103</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 1: Cooper's Creek to Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

after Barkly or Stawell shows Burke was clearly not interested in the naming process.<sup>2104</sup> His predecessors missed no such opportunities. When Sturt was at the Cooper he wrote:

I gave the name of Cooper's Creek to the fine watercourse we had so anxiously traced, as a proof of my great respect for Mr Cooper, the Judge of South Australia. I am not conversant in the language of praise, but thus much will I venture to say, that whether in his public or private capacity, Mr Cooper was equally entitled to this record of my feelings towards him.<sup>2105</sup>

Burke's successors did not miss an opportunity either. In 1862 McKinlay named the upper reaches of the Diamantina River the 'Mueller River'.<sup>2106</sup> Four years later Landsborough and George Phillips also named it, this time giving the river its current name which honoured the wife of the Governor of Queensland.<sup>2107</sup>

While Wills used descriptive terms to name ephemeral locations, for example naming camp sites as 'Humid Camp', 'Apple-tree Camp' and 'Bath Camp', more notable locations such as hills and creeks always followed the same nomenclature and included a person's surname. North of the Tropic of Capricorn the Expedition crossed a series of ranges. In contrast to the flat desert country they had been travelling through, they were now faced with more varied topography and Wills named 22 features over a distance of 200 kilometres. Wills may have asked Burke for assistance, or Burke may have decided to take an interest in naming features, because Burke wrote a list of 20 names as candidates for memorialisation. Although Burke included two former Chief Secretaries, the list was mainly made up of Burke's friends, acquaintances and colleagues and it contained only a couple of members of the EC and RSV:

Names for places - Thackeray, Barry, Bindon, Lyons, Forbes, Archer, Bennet, Colles, O.S. [O'Shanassy], Nicholson, Wood, Wrixon, Cope, Turner, Scratchley, Ligar, Griffith, Green, Roe, Hamilton, Archer, Colles.<sup>2108</sup>

Only ten of the 20 names were used.

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<sup>2104</sup> Other than memorialising Queen Victoria or Prince Albert, the two most influential people that Burke could have named features after were Sir Henry Barkly (1815-1898), Governor of Victoria, and Sir William Stawell, Chief Justice of Victoria, President of the Royal Society of Victoria and Chairman of the Exploration Committee.

<sup>2105</sup> Sturt, *Narrative of an expedition*, Vol. 2: 86.

<sup>2106</sup> McKinlay, 'Diary, 2 December 1861-10 July 1862', PRG 834/1/2, State Library of South Australia. McKinlay, *McKinlay's diary of his journey*.

<sup>2107</sup> "The one [branch of the river] from the west I named the Diamantina, the Christian name, I believe, of Lady Bowen, who is deservedly so popular in Queensland" William Landsborough, 'New from the North', *Brisbane Courier*, 19 May 1866: 6.

<sup>2108</sup> Burke, 'Diary', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia.

Table 2: Place names recorded by Wills from Cooper Creek, South Australia, to the Gulf of Carpentaria, Queensland. The list is composed entirely of European names.

Gray's Ck <sup>2109</sup>	Bindon's Ck <sup>2110</sup>	King's Gap <sup>2111</sup>
King's Ck <sup>2112</sup>	Foster's Ck <sup>2113</sup>	Mt. Ligar <sup>2114</sup>
River Burke	Mt. Birnie <sup>2115</sup>	Mt. McGowan <sup>2116</sup>
Patton's Ck <sup>2117</sup>	Mt. Barry <sup>2118</sup>	Pisa Hill
Mehemet Ck <sup>2119</sup>	Mt. Forbes <sup>2120</sup>	Mt. O'Shanassy <sup>2121</sup>
De Little's Range <sup>2122</sup>	Green's Ck <sup>2123</sup>	Mt. Nicholson <sup>2124</sup>
Mt. Standish <sup>2125</sup>	Selwyn's Reef <sup>2126</sup>	Mt. Corbett <sup>2127</sup>
Mt. Moerlin <sup>2128</sup>	O'Hara's Gap <sup>2129</sup>	Mt. Morrah

<sup>2109</sup> Charley Gray (?-1861), expedition member.

<sup>2110</sup> Samuel Henry Bindon (1812-1879), Castlemaine County Court Judge and Burke's colleague when he was stationed in Castlemaine.

<sup>2111</sup> John King (1838-1872), expedition member.

<sup>2112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2113</sup> Victoria Police Superintendent Henry Foster, stationed at Swan Hill.

<sup>2114</sup> Charles Whybrow Ligar (1811-1881), Victorian Surveyor-General and Wills' former employer.

<sup>2115</sup> Richard Birnie (1808-1888), barrister and journalist. Close friend of Wills with whom he shared lodgings in Gertrude Street in Carlton in Melbourne in 1860, *Star*, 24 May 1862: 1.

<sup>2116</sup> Samuel Walker McGowan (1829-1887), scientist and administrator, general superintendent of the Electric Telegraph Department of Victoria.

<sup>2117</sup> William Patten (?-1861), expedition blacksmith.

<sup>2118</sup> His Honour Justice Sir Redmond Barry (1813-1880).

<sup>2119</sup> Dost Mahomet, expedition sepoy.

<sup>2120</sup> Thomas John Forbes (?), manager of the Deeds Department, Crown Lands Office, Melbourne and member of the Royal Society of Victoria.

<sup>2121</sup> John O'Shanassy (1818-1883), Chief Secretary of Victoria.

<sup>2122</sup> Either an associate of Wills', Assistant-Surveyor Thomas de Little of the Survey Office, Melbourne (see: De Little, Assistant Surveyor, 11 August 1855, Inward Registered and Unregistered Correspondence, Unit 758, VPRS 44/P0000, Public Record Office of Victoria), or an associate of Burke's, Henry de Little, Magistrate for Belfast, Victoria in 1869.

<sup>2123</sup> This may have been William Henry Green, Victoria Government Railway Office and member of the Royal Society of Victoria.

<sup>2124</sup> William Nicholson (1816-1865), Chief Secretary of Victoria.

<sup>2125</sup> Frederick Charles Standish (1824-1883), Chief Commissioner of Police in Victoria and Burke's immediate superior.

<sup>2126</sup> Alfred Richard Cecil Selwyn (1824-1902), Government Geologist, member of the Royal Society of Victoria and member of the Exploration Committee.

<sup>2127</sup> This may have been Francis A. Corbett of the Melbourne Census Office and Registrar-General's office and member of the Royal Society of Victoria.

<sup>2128</sup> Carl (Charles) Moerlin (1829-1898). Moerlin was second-assistant to Neumayer at the Flagstaff Magnetic Observatory and was appointed to a permanent position on the death of Wills. His descendants donated Wills' pin fire revolver to the State Library of Victoria. 'Belgian 7mm pin-fire revolver [realia]', accessioned as H13681, now H15353, State Library of Victoria; *Age*, 5 July 1947: 5.

<sup>2129</sup> Robert O'Hara Burke. The O'Hara name came from Burke's mother, Anne O'Hara, daughter of Robert O'Hara and Frances (nee Taylor).

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Mt. Murray <sup>2130</sup>	Scratchley's Ck <sup>2131</sup>	Mt. Ellery <sup>2132</sup>
Mt. Bruce <sup>2133</sup>	Mt. Collis <sup>2134</sup>	Cloncurry River <sup>2135</sup>
Mt. Aplin <sup>2136</sup>	Turner's Ck <sup>2137</sup>	

So if Wills failed to name some of the most prominent landmarks they encountered, what criteria did he use to determine what should be named and what should not? It is not sufficient to simply state that Burke lacked interest in the naming process and therefore places were named on an impromptu and haphazard basis. Wills was too conscientious a scientist and navigator not to have had some criteria which determined what was and what was not named. An assessment of where the Expedition travelled provides an insight.

One of the more remarkable landmarks in the Standish Range is The Monument,<sup>2138</sup> an isolated pillar of gneiss. It is a striking landmark and similar to Idracowra, the sandstone feature in central Australia that John McDouall Stuart called Chamber's Pillar.<sup>2139</sup> It has been assumed that Wills named The Monument as the Expedition passed through the ranges. Wills' diary entry for 12 January 1861 describes the view from the high point of the range:<sup>2140</sup>

we had a pretty good view of the country towards the north. As far as we could see in the distance, and bearing due north, was a large range, having somewhat the outline of a granite mountain. The east end of this range just comes up to the magnetic north; on the left of this, and bearing N.N.W., is a single conical peak, the top of which only is visible.<sup>2141</sup>

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<sup>2130</sup> Ovens Goldfield Warden, Captain Virginius Murray (1817-1861), migrated to Australia in 1852 and an associate of Burke's when he was stationed at Beechworth.

<sup>2131</sup> Sir Peter Henry Scratchley (1835-1885), military engineer and colonial administrator and associate of Burke's.

<sup>2132</sup> Robert Lewis Ellery (1827-1908), astronomer and public servant, Director of the Williamstown Observatory and Wills' work colleague.

<sup>2133</sup> John Vans Agnew Bruce (1822-1863), road and railway construction contractor, friend of Burke when he was stationed in Castlemaine.

<sup>2134</sup> Richard Colles, Sheriff of Castlemaine and associate of Burke's when he was stationed in Castlemaine.

<sup>2135</sup> Burke's paternal cousin, Elizabeth Kirwan (1812-1895) married Edward Lawless (1816-1869), 3<sup>rd</sup> Baron of Cloncurry in 1839. Dr Wills wrote "The river or creek down which they passed is named in [my son's] journal the Cloncurry. The channel making a sudden turn, my son remarked that it might be a new river. 'If it should prove so,' said Mr. Burke, 'we will call it after my old friend Lord Cloncurry'," Wills, *Successful exploration*: 119; Burke, 'Diary', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia.

<sup>2136</sup> Christopher D'Oyley Hay Alpin, Member of the Royal Society of Victoria from 1854 to 1868. Assistant Geological Surveyor at the Crown Lands Office in Melbourne.

<sup>2137</sup> William Turner, Resident Warden of the Ovens Goldfield and close friend of Burke's. Robert O'Hara Burke, 'Letter to Turner, dated Terek Terek, 31 August 1860', Box 29/5(a) MS 7698, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2138</sup> The Monument, S21°45'26" E139°54'56" (GDA2020).

<sup>2139</sup> Stuart named the "remarkable pillar ... in honour of ... my great supporter" Stuart, 'Diary entry for Friday 6 April 1860', *Explorations in Australia*.

<sup>2140</sup> Wills' vantage point was in the De Little Range at S22°12'46" E139°44'55" (GDA2020).

<sup>2141</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 5: January 1860', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.



Figure 221: "Near the Selwyn Ranges, Wills noted 'a single conical peak' and a series of 'fine valleys'."  
Sarah Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2002), 222.

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Bergin assumed incorrectly that this "single conical peak" was The Monument and Murgatroyd perpetuates the error by including a picture of it next to Wills' quote (see Figure 221).<sup>2142</sup> In fact the single conical peak Wills referred to was 32 kilometres further to the west<sup>2143</sup> and Wills was 55 kilometres south of The Monument and could not see it from his vantage point on 12 January.

On 14 January 1861, however, Wills passed ten kilometres to the west of The Monument and there is no doubt he saw the landmark. Wills named a number of mountains in the immediate vicinity, but he did not make any comments about The Monument, nor did he assign it a name or mark it on his map. Instead he stood on top of Mount Moerlin and recorded bearings to hills nearby, which he called Mount Aplin and Mount Murray. Comparing Wills' map with current topographic maps shows confusion has arisen as Wills' original names have been transposed onto different mountains (see Figures 222, 223 and 224). This confusion began in 1876 when William Oswald Hodgkinson, leader of the 'North-Western Queensland Expedition' became the second person to map the area. Hodgkinson had a copy of the published version of Wills' map and he referred to the mountains Wills had named 15 years previously:

Crossed splendid rolling downs ... sighted the peaks named by Mr Robert O'Hara Burke, Mount Birnie, Mount Aplin, Mount Bruce, Mount Murray and Mount Merlin lying to the east of the course.<sup>2144</sup>

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<sup>2142</sup> Bergin, *In the steps*, 89; Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree*, 222.

<sup>2143</sup> Un-named peak in the Standish Range at S21°50'21" E139°36'53" (GDA2020).

<sup>2144</sup> William Oswald Hodgkinson, *North-West Explorations by W.O. Hodgkinson Esq.*, Queensland Parliamentary Paper, No. 3/1877 (Brisbane: Queensland: Parliament, 1877), 206.

Hodgkinson's map is vague. The mountains are not shown in the correct geographical relationship, the latitude and longitude is incorrect by a considerable amount and the mountains are plotted on the wrong side of the Burke River. The mountains that Hodgkinson saw were not the ones named by Wills. However, Hodgkinson's error has been reproduced on all subsequent maps and so even though Wills' names have been retained, they have been applied to different mountains to those Wills intended. In order to identify Wills' original mountains, I conducted field-work with two Queensland land surveyors in 2007.<sup>2145</sup> After climbing many of the prominent hills in the area with no success, including the hill currently named Mount Merlin,<sup>2146</sup> resection of Wills' bearings finally resulted in the surprising identification of Mount Moerlin as a small, rather inconsequential hill.<sup>2147</sup> Why would Wills go to the trouble of naming a small, insignificant hill and yet ignore the nearby striking rock pillar that was far more conspicuous?

The reason was that Wills was in survival mode. He was under pressure to navigate the party to the Gulf while walking at a rapid pace in the middle of summer. Unlike the earlier stages of the Expedition, when the weather had been cooler and the pace more relaxed, on the trip to the Gulf there was no time for the niceties of writing lengthy entries in his diary, naming features, surveying the country, reducing observations, sketching and mapping as they travelled. These things were now distractions and irrelevancies. Wills had to keep track of their progress in order to plot a dead-reckoning course, but he did this in the most efficient manner he could and only recorded the features that were significant to their progress. The physical toll on Wills was greater than on any other surveyor on any comparable expedition, simply because Burke chose to walk to the Gulf and he travelled at the hottest time of year. Wills found he was unable to fulfil the role of surveyor and instead assumed the role of navigator. He recorded just enough detail to ensure their safety. Mount Moerlin may have been insignificant topographically, but to Wills it was significant because he climbed it during a short halt in their march, and from the summit he took bearings to the largest mesas ahead, Mount Murray and Mount Aplin, landmarks that he would use over the next few days to plot his course. The significance in naming it after Charles Moerlin was that Moerlin was a fellow surveyor and a colleague at the Flagstaff Observatory. Even though The Monument was visible from Mount Moerlin, it was not a feature Wills would be able to use for navigation. Although it is striking when seen from the east and south-east, Wills' view was from the west, and The Monument soon becomes lost among the background of larger mesas. As a consequence, significant landmarks remained without European names, and were not "brought into being" as a cultural landscape by the Burke and Wills Expedition.

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<sup>2145</sup> Richard Cork B.App.Sc. (Surv), Cadastral Surveyor (QLD), Registered Consulting Surveyor (QLD) and Kenneth Ian Andrews, registered Survey Associate (QLD) (retired).

<sup>2146</sup> Mount Merlin, S21°52'39" E140°00'47" (GDA2020).

<sup>2147</sup> Little Red Bluff, S21°51'26" E139°48'01" (GDA2020).





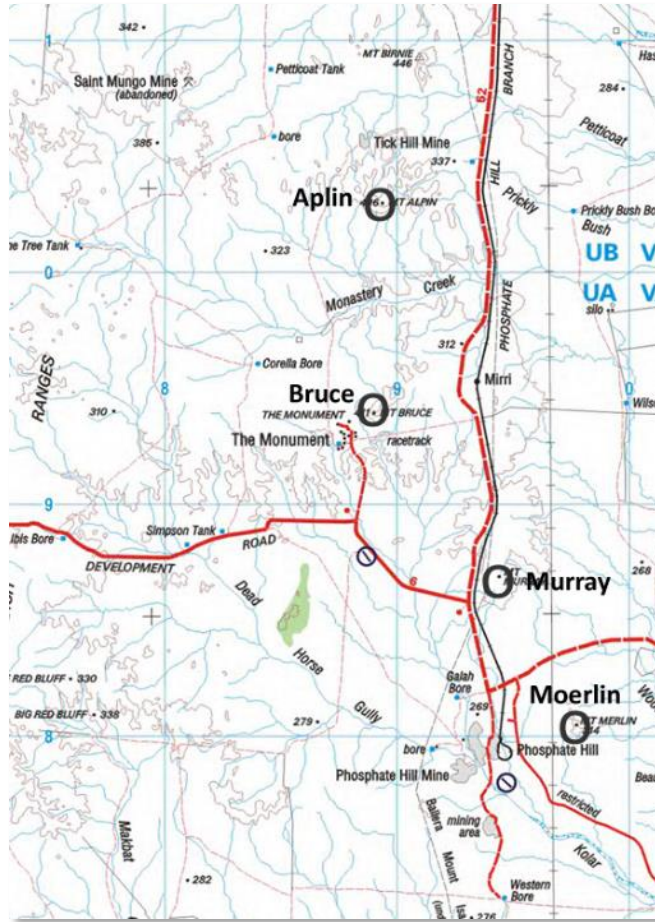


Figure 224: Map extract adapted from 'Duchess, 1:250K topographic map'.  
SF 5406, Edition 2, 2000, Map 98/100, Commonwealth of Australia: AUSLIG (now Geoscience Australia).

The way the mountains are currently named reflects Hodgkinson's incorrect 1876 interpretation rather than Wills original 1861 names. Note also that the current map has Aplin incorrectly spelt as Mount Alpin and Moerlin incorrectly spelt as Mount Merlin.



Figure 225: The Monument looking north, with Incitec Pivot Monument Mine Village in the foreground.  
© 2007 Dave Phoenix.

#### 7.4.4 Reaching the shore at the Gulf of Carpentaria

Another mystery solved by a physical inspection of the landscape concerns why Burke did not reach the shore of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Burke did manage to cross the continent, but he did not see the open ocean at the Gulf and consequently he was concerned the EC might censure him for this omission.<sup>2148</sup> During the 67-day return trip, Burke wrote only one entry in his notebook – 45 days after deciding to turn back without seeing the ocean he made the following entry:

it would be well to say that we reached the sea, but we could not obtain a view of the open ocean, although we made every endeavour to do so.<sup>2149</sup>

Clearly the inability to see the ocean weighed on Burke's mind. It has generally come to be accepted that it was impenetrable mangroves that prevented them travelling any further north, even though neither Burke nor Wills mention mangroves. Wills only described crossing:

an open plain, covered with water up to one's ankles ... an extensive marsh, which is at times flooded by the sea water.<sup>2150</sup>

Landsborough also experienced problems with the flooded salt water flats and told the RSV that:

He believed it was impossible for Burke and Wills to have gone within sight of the sea, because saltwater creeks spread all over the country for ten miles from the sea.<sup>2151</sup>

Walker followed Burke's tracks north from Camp 119 and he found Burke was pulled up and had to change direction due to a "salt water arm" of the Flinders River.<sup>2152</sup>

Some reports from the Gulf did mention mangroves. Norman, whose excursions were mainly by boat, reported:

The country on the banks of both rivers, for the first fifteen to twenty miles from the sea, is the same monotonous mangrove and mud, more or less flooded with the spring tides.<sup>2153</sup>

McKinlay told the RSV that "Like Burke and Wills, he could not obtain a view of the sea on account of the mangrove swamps"<sup>2154</sup> and King also mentioned being unable to "get through the mangroves", although of course he did not accompany Burke and Wills when they travelled north of Camp 119.<sup>2155</sup>

The discussions over flooded salt water flats were soon forgotten and by 1865 Tenison-Woods' history book informed readers that "such a forest of mangroves lay northward that they [Burke and Wills] could not get a view of the sea".<sup>2156</sup> This conclusion was repeated by subsequent writers, in

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<sup>2148</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Question 854 to John King.

<sup>2149</sup> Burke, 'Diary', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia.

<sup>2150</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 9: Returning from Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2151</sup> *Argus*, 19 August 1862: 5-6; Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes of meeting of the EC, 18 August 1862', EC Minutes', ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 211.

<sup>2152</sup> Walker, 'Journal 1861-1862', MS 23, National Library of Australia.

<sup>2153</sup> Norman, *Letter from Norman*.

<sup>2154</sup> *The Star*, 1 November 1862: 2.

<sup>2155</sup> *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*, 29 January 1890: 4.

<sup>2156</sup> Tenison-Woods, *Discovery and exploration*.





Figure 226: Salt flats at the northern end of the Stokes Range at low tide during the wet season This is Wills' "extensive marsh, which is at times flooded by the sea water".  
© 2008 Dave Phoenix.

spite of the fact that none of them had been to the Gulf. By the turn of the century "the mangrove scrub, which is thick along the coast, prevented their getting a glimpse of the open sea".<sup>2157</sup> Clune claimed Burke and Wills "cleaved a path through the mangroves".<sup>2158</sup> Moorehead decided that "mangrove swamps blocked the way".<sup>2159</sup> Bergin combined Wills' description with Moorehead's and thought Burke "found himself blocked by mangroves and flooded plains".<sup>2160</sup> Murgatroyd reproduced Wills' diary entry in full, but then decided:

the ground disintegrated into a tangle of impenetrable mangrove swamps and they had neither the energy nor the resources to look for another way through.<sup>2161</sup>

These interpretations give the impression that the only contact Burke had with salt-water was the six-inch tide they observed in the Little Bynoe River at Camp 119.<sup>2162</sup> However, a retracing of Burke's track presents a very different picture. South Australian surveyor David N. Hillan retraced Burke's movements north of Camp 119 based on Wills' diary description and it shows the men moved around

<sup>2157</sup> Goulburnian, 'In the footsteps of the explorers: Burke and Wills', *Argus*, 27 August 1904: 5.

<sup>2158</sup> Clune, *Dig*, 64.

<sup>2159</sup> Moorehead, *Cooper's Creek*, 80.

<sup>2160</sup> Bergin, *In the steps*, 122.

<sup>2161</sup> Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree*, 212. As mentioned earlier, Murgatroyd does not recognise that many of the weed species in the riparian areas of the Gulf were introduced after 1861. In addition, she refers to the tide rising twice a day, whereas the Gulf experiences a diurnal tide, with only one high tide and one low tide a day.

[bom.gov.au/australia/tides/#!/qld-karumba](http://bom.gov.au/australia/tides/#!/qld-karumba)

<sup>2162</sup> Victoria: Parliament, *The Commission*. Questions 812, 816, 831-834 to King.



Figure 227: "Camp 119 – Burke's dismal most northern camp".  
Sarah Murgatroyd, *Dig Tree*, 210.

Murgatroyd's impression of the landscape that Burke and Wills faced at the Gulf.

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the base of the Stokes Range, hugging the dry ground along the high tide line.<sup>2163</sup> Once they reached the northern end of the Stokes Range they were faced with an extensive salt-flat which is inundated by sea water when the tide is above ~3.9 metres AHD. Below this height, the rising tide is contained within the river channels. At 3.9 metres the sea water overflows the river banks and spills out to cover vast areas. Wet season flooding in the Flinders River to the west and the Norman River to the east exacerbates the situation. Wills described looking out onto "an extensive marsh, which is at times flooded by the sea water" and as there was a new moon the previous day, the tide would have been high enough to inundate the salt flats.<sup>2164</sup> The flats do not drain as rapidly as the tide falls, as there is a large area of perched water to drain and only relatively narrow channels allowing the water back into the rivers. Even after low tide the salt flats continue to drain. The rising tide does not inundate the flats again until the water reaches 3.9 metres AHD, and then the inundation occurs rapidly. Even though there is only one tide a day, the flats do not have sufficient time to dry out and so they are boggy even when not covered with water. Walking across the flats when they are in this state is an incredibly slow and exhausting process. It is difficult to maintain two kilometres an hour and in the heat and humidity of February the body sweats copious amounts.

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<sup>2163</sup> Hoy, 'Burke and Wills: The Gulf Team'; David N. Hillan, pers. comm., 2008.

<sup>2164</sup> The new moon was at 20:05 UTC 9 February 1861. Historical astronomical data sourced from: United States Navy. Naval Observatory, Astronomical Applications Department date services: historical astronomical data.  
aa.usno.navy.mil



Figure 228: Satellite image of the salt-flats at the northern end of the Stokes Range. Light coloured areas are salt flats, brown areas are scrub, saltbush (and rubber vine which was introduced after 1860). Mangroves are dark green and are limited to the river courses only.

© 2011 GoogleEarth.



Figure 229: Crossing the salt flats at the northern end of the Stokes Range. This was at low tide during the wet season.

© 2008 Dave Phoenix.

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It is debateable whether Burke and Wills attempted to cross the salt flats. Most likely they did not.<sup>2165</sup> Once they reached the northern end of the Stokes Range they would have faced a salt flat extending to the horizon, with no sign of the open ocean. If they did try to cross the salt flats, they would soon have run out of drinking water and in the enervating heat they would have been forced to turn back.

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<sup>2165</sup> If Burke and Wills did not venture onto the flooded salt flats, the furthest north they could have reached would have been the northern end of the Stokes Range at S17°35'39" E140°48'44" (GDA2020), which was 12½ kilometres from the ocean.

So although Burke did not get a view of the open ocean, he did flounder through the sea as it covered the salt flats. He would have been knee deep in salt water, smelling the ozone, watching the fish, stingrays and crabs and observing the tide rise and fall. His frustration was not that he was trapped by impenetrable mangroves with no view of the coast, but rather he was surrounded by the sea with no view of the open ocean. Consequently, in view of this new appraisal of Burke's actions at the Gulf, his frustrated comments make more sense - "It would be well to say that we reached the sea" - because he did reach the sea - "but we could not obtain a view of the open ocean".<sup>2166</sup>

#### 7.4.5 Water supplies in the desert

The Gulf shore was not the only place where Burke found himself short of water. Burke had been close to abandoning the Expedition and turning around much earlier in the journey.

Although Murgatroyd claims the Expedition only found themselves "short of water for just one day on their entire journey"<sup>2167</sup> and that once Burke reached the Diamantina River "finding water would not be a problem",<sup>2168</sup> this was not the case. Water was not plentiful for the entire journey. Burke mentioned going without water for three days while crossing Sturt Stony Desert in December 1860, and the driest part of the northbound journey was still ahead of them.<sup>2169</sup> The decision to leave the Diamantina on 30 December 1860 was an important point in the Expedition and one which has been overlooked by most historians. Burke was challenged by the landscape and the decision he made here had the potential to end the Expedition long before they reached the Gulf.

Burke set off across Sturt Stony Desert from Camp 72 with the intention of reaching water 175 kilometres away at Eyre Creek. Wills plotted a north-westerly course towards Sturt's reported position of 4 September 1845,<sup>2170</sup> but because they crossed the stony desert further north than Sturt, Burke reached water at Koonchera after just 40 kilometres. Although they did not realise this isolated waterhole was part of the Diamantina watershed, they were fortunate enough to strike the river again a day later where it formed a much larger and deeper channel. Burke decided to follow the river upstream and, as already noted earlier, Wills soon realised it was not Eyre Creek. After two days the river turned to the east and they had to make a decision either to continue following it in the hope it would turn back towards the north, or leave the river and resume their north-westerly course for Eyre Creek. Burke decided "that he should not make for ears cr. [sic: Eyre Creek] as he intended"<sup>2171</sup>,

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<sup>2166</sup> Burke, 'Diary', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia.

<sup>2167</sup> Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree*, 141.

<sup>2168</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>2169</sup> Burke, 'Diary', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia.

<sup>2170</sup> Sturt, *Narrative of an expedition*, Vol. 1: 373.

<sup>2171</sup> King, 'Restrospective account', MS 30/11, National Library of Australia.



but continued to follow the Diamantina instead.<sup>2172</sup> However after a further two day's travel, the river showed no signs of turning north and so Burke was forced to reconsider his new plan. The choices available to him were:

- continue following the Diamantina even though it was taking them too far to the east,
- retrace their steps for two days and then resume the original plan to reach Eyre Creek,
- strike off to the north and hope they find water.

Burke chose the third option. He loaded the camels with ten day's supply of water, Wills set a course to the north, and they headed off into the desert in the middle of summer.<sup>2173</sup> If Burke had not found water within five days, he would have been obliged to turn around and return to the Diamantina. Had he been forced to do this, he would not have had sufficient provisions to head across to Eyre Creek for a second attempt at the Gulf. Consequently, this was a significant decision and could have resulted in an early and unsuccessful termination of the Expedition. It is clear Burke realised the seriousness of the situation. After leaving the Diamantina, water was rationed and when it was found the water bags were leaking the men's ration was reduced further. King recalled "the last two days we were on 7 pints of water per day, today reduced to 5".<sup>2174</sup> Burke also increased the pace dramatically and the four men walked 100 kilometres in two days. Burke's sparse notes for this period are a record of how many hours they spent "on the road":

30th of December / 12.30 on the road / Started at 7 o'clock - / travelled 11 hours -  
 31st started at 2.20 / 16½ hours on the / road, travelled 13½ / hours --  
 1st January water  
 2nd January from / King's Creek / 11 hours on the road / started 7 travelled / 9½ hours -- encamped  
 desert  
 3rd Jan 5 started / travelled 12 hours / no minutes.  
 4th 12 hours on the / road.<sup>2175</sup>

Bonyhady comments that the diary entries suggest Burke was preoccupied with the time they spent walking "as if nothing else mattered".<sup>2176</sup> Clearly nothing else did matter on this part of the journey when the water supply was severely limited and Burke was gambling on finding a reliable supply that would enable them to continue. Burke had not felt compelled to time their exertions prior to this point, and such records were only made for the six-day period that water was strictly rationed.

<sup>2172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2173</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 3: December 1860', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2174</sup> King, 'Retrospective account', MS 30/11, National Library of Australia. Seven pints is four litres and five pints is 2.8 litres. Recommendations for daily water intake vary considerably, but the Institute of Medicine recommends an adult at rest in warm climates should consume a minimum of 2.8 litres daily. Sports Medicine Australia recommends an additional one litre of water an hour for people undertaking exercise. Burke, Wills, King and Gray were exercising for 12+ hours a day in an arid environment where the mean daily temperature was 38.8°C and maximum temperatures were 48.5°C (Bureau of Meteorology). Therefore between 30 December 1860 and 5 January 1861 they were consuming only 15-25% of the RDI, and had a potential fluid deficit of 12-15 litres a day.

<sup>2175</sup> Burke, 'Diary', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia.

<sup>2176</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 127.



Figure 230: The Coorabulka tussock grasslands in drought, December 2008.  
© 2008 Dave Phoenix.

King described these Mitchell and Flinders tussock grassland downs  
as "mud-plains ... nothing to be seen, not even a bush".

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When they found a "fine waterhole"<sup>2177</sup> on 1 January 1861, it appeared Burke's gamble was working.<sup>2178</sup> He told King "We are now sure of Carpentaria. One more waterhole and we are safe".<sup>2179</sup> Although the discovery of this water only postponed retreat by another five days, at their current rate of progress they would cross the Tropic in three days and so Burke was feeling confident. Even though King recalled the next few days were bleak and featureless:

mostly mud plains, nothing to be seen not even a bush ... we pushed that day making 51 miles & nothing to be seen but mud plains.<sup>2180</sup>

They reached water four days later and crossed the Tropic two days after that. From there they had no problems finding water.

Burke's decision to follow the Diamantina for four days and then take their chances in the desert to the north had paid off. However it is clear that current interpretations of Burke having easy access to water for the whole journey are not correct. Although Burke travelled in a good season it does not mean that there was ample water across the entire continent.

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<sup>2177</sup> King, 'Restrospective account', MS 30/11, National Library of Australia.

<sup>2178</sup> Burke called this waterhole 'King's Creek' but this is not the Kings Creek marked on today's maps.

<sup>2179</sup> Smith, 'John King's story, Part II'.

<sup>2180</sup> King, 'Restrospective account', MS 30/11, National Library of Australia.

As demonstrated by this example, perceptions and attitudes towards the landscape the Expedition encountered have changed over the last 150 years. Many of today's commonly held ideas about how the landscape affected the Expedition were made with only a rudimentary understanding of where the Expedition travelled, and therefore they do not hold up to detailed scrutiny and analysis. The way these perceptions changed is linked to the reports sent back from inland expeditions, and this is detailed in the following section.

## 7.5 Perceptions of the landscape

*landscape: an aggregate of landforms in a region; the collection of landforms particular to a region at a particular time.*

Merriam-Webster dictionary, Category: Earth Sciences.

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### 7.5.1. Perceptions of landscape prior to 1860

Very few members of the EC had any experience of exploration,<sup>2181</sup> and none had ventured into the arid interior, so it was the descriptive writings of earlier explorers that were primarily used to evaluate the landscape the Expedition would have to face. Sturt's "gloomy"<sup>2182</sup> reports of the Simpson and Sturt Stony Desert set the tone for Burke's upcoming expedition. Burke would have to be well prepared if he were to attempt to 'lift the veil' that Sturt supposed "hung over Central Australia that could neither be pierced or raised".<sup>2183</sup>

Gibson suggests that "Sturt's confession gives a clue to the way the landscape was now understood as inscrutable, aridly sublime, the impossible desert"<sup>2184</sup> and people could no longer hope to tame the Australian earth the way earlier explorers had through their energetic conquests.<sup>2185</sup> Haynes expands further by noting that Eyre and Sturt "taught their contemporaries to look beyond economics and to value the moral stature of endurance for its own sake".<sup>2186</sup> There was certainly a shift in attitude to the aims and outcomes of exploration during the 1840s as a result of reports from South Australian expeditions. Explorers were entering ever more arid country and conditions were becoming increasingly difficult. No longer could explorers expect to find rivers like the Murray and

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<sup>2181</sup> The only members of the EC who had experience exploring were:

- 1). Angus McMillan, who had explored in Gippsland in 1839.
- 2). Clement Hodgkinson, who surveyed and explored the north-eastern areas of New South Wales as far as Moreton Bay in 1841.
- 3). Ferdinand Mueller, who was the botanist with Gregory's 'North Australian Expedition' in 1856.
- 4). William Blandowski, who led a natural history expedition to the junction of the Murray and Darling in 1857-1858.
- 5). Captain Francis Cadell, who was a pioneer of river navigation on the Murray-Darling river system in the 1850s.

Not all of the above members sat on the EC at the same time.

<sup>2182</sup> Sturt, *Narrative of an expedition*. Vol. 2: 130.

<sup>2183</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2: 1.

<sup>2184</sup> Ross Gibson, *South of the West: postcolonialism and the narrative construction of Australia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 16.

<sup>2185</sup> Ross Gibson, *The diminishing paradise: changing literary perceptions of Australia* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1984), 126.

<sup>2186</sup> Roslynn D Haynes, *Seeking the centre: The Australian desert in literature, art and film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 113.

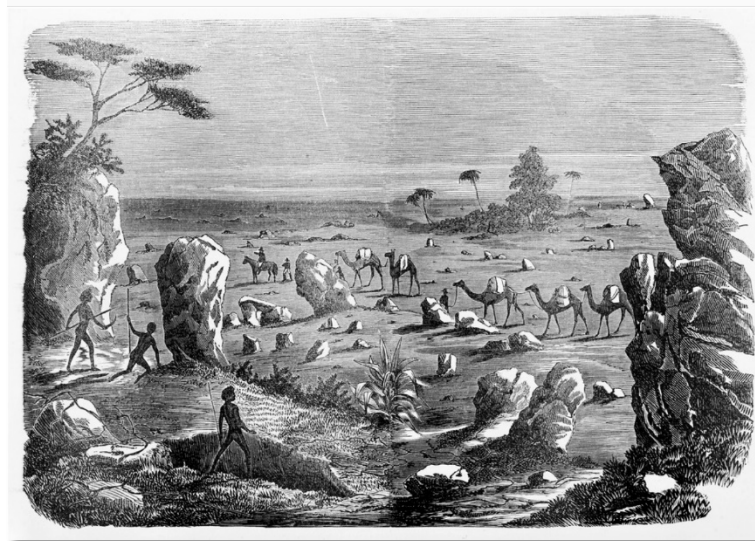


Figure 231: Edgar Ray, 'The Burke and Wills Expedition crossing the desert'.  
*The Illustrated Australian Mail*, 25 June 1862. IAM25/06/62/116, State Library of Victoria.

Colonial artists speculated on the nature of Sturt Stony Desert  
and what conditions Burke's Expedition would face when crossing it.

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Darling and, ever hopeful, follow them into the interior with the prospect of returning with reports of vast tracts of fertile land.

When Mueller presented a review of Australian exploration to the newly formed EC in 1857, he concluded that the interior desert, observed at various points by Eyre, Sturt, Mitchell, Kennedy and Gregory, would no doubt turn out to be contiguous.<sup>2187</sup> The arrival in Adelaide six months later of Gregory's 'LSE' added weight to Mueller's supposition, with Gregory describing the country around Cooper Creek as "increasingly barren"<sup>2188</sup> which he thought would render the country untenable for pastoral development.<sup>2189</sup> The press, frustrated by the lack of progress in inland exploration during the 1850s,<sup>2190</sup> speculated that the *terra incognita* the Victorian Expedition would have to cross – the 600 miles from Cooper Creek to Gregory's farthest south – was "as far as is known, over a desert of sand",<sup>2191</sup> or was "a desert with no grassy country or permanent streams intervening"<sup>2192</sup> or possibly:

that the unknown regions into which the Exploring Expedition is about to penetrate do not consist of an unbroken and uniform desert, but are diversified in character, and may present alternations of verdure and sterility quite as astonishing in their juxtaposition and contrast in so many of the natural phenomenon exhibited to us in this land of eccentricities, anomalies and inconsistencies.<sup>2193</sup>

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<sup>2187</sup> Mueller, 'Review of exploration'.

<sup>2188</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 October 1858: 9.

<sup>2189</sup> Gregory, 'Expedition from Moreton Bay'.

<sup>2190</sup> 'Explorers and speculators', *Empire*, 30 June 1860: 2.

<sup>2191</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 July 1860: 2.

<sup>2192</sup> *Mount Alexander Mail*, 30 July 1860: 3.

<sup>2193</sup> *Ibid.*

The EC's deliberations about the Expedition's route were marked by a distinct lack of knowledge about the geography of the centre.<sup>2194</sup> The "animated debate"<sup>2195</sup> over the selection of the Blunder Bay route (see Chapter 3.7, pages 162 to 166), revealed just how little they understood the climate, topography and fluviology of the arid interior.<sup>2196</sup> Neumayer recognised they were "In such a state of utter uncertainty as to the nature of the interior of a vast continent".<sup>2197</sup>

### 7.5.2. Perceptions of landscape after 1860

*The desert cross'd, the problem solved,  
And rent aside the veil,  
Which other daring hands essayed,  
To lift without avail.*

'Burke and Wills: In Memoriam', *Melbourne Punch*, 7 November 1861.

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Burke claimed to have:

commenced an active examination of the records of previous explorers, so as to become thoroughly acquainted with whatever had befallen them, as well as to acquire such knowledge of the interior, and remote coasts, as had already been placed on record.<sup>2198</sup>

In actuality, it was left to Wills to make the lengthier observations about the landscape. North of Cooper Creek Burke made just two brief observations: one at Camp 71 at Kernacoopinna Waterhole on Christmas Creek in the Strzelecki Desert where he noted the "splendid water" and "fine feed for the camels" and thought the location "would be a very good place for a station",<sup>2199</sup> and a final comment on returning to the Dig Tree:

There is some good country between this [Cooper Creek] and the stony desert. From there to the Tropic the country is dry and stony between the Tropic and Carpentaria a considerable portion is rangy but it is well watered and richly grassed.<sup>2200</sup>

Consequently, given Burke's poor attention to detail, it was Wills' journal that conveyed their assessment of the landscape back to Melbourne. His comments are not written in the constructed

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<sup>2194</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes of the EC meeting, 20 July 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-026, Box 2088B/1, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria: 61.

<sup>2195</sup> *Empire*, 2 August 1860: 4.

<sup>2196</sup> Royal Society of Victoria, 'Minutes of the EC meeting, 23 July 1860', EC Minutes, ex1001-025, Box 2075/1c, MS 13071, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2197</sup> Georg Neumayer, 'On a scientific exploration of Central Australia', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London*, Vol. 16 (1868): 347.

<sup>2198</sup> Jackson, *Australian Exploring Expedition*, 8-9.

<sup>2199</sup> Burke, 'Diary', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia.

<sup>2200</sup> Burke, 'Last notes', ex2009-002, State Library of Victoria.



Figure 232: William John Wills, “Pretty country, lightly timbered and well grassed”.  
© 2008 Dave Phoenix.

Photograph taken in the Strzelecki Desert in 2008 when drought conditions and cattle resulted in a more arid landscape than Wills would have experienced here on 20 December 1860.

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and considered style found in the heavily edited journals of Mitchell, Sturt and Eyre, but instead are observations of their immediate interaction with the landscape and the effects it had on their progress. Wills wrote up the descriptive prose in his field books in the evening, most probably not intending to have them published verbatim, but more as a record which he could consult later during the drafting of his maps and narrative. He admitted they had concerns about crossing Sturt Stony Desert, but actually found it to be “far from bad travelling ground”.<sup>2201</sup> His other comments are written in the socially constructed ‘picturesque’ manner rather than from the more scientific approach exhibited in his first three surveyor’s reports, and the language used here is simple, generally positive, and conveys a favourable impression.<sup>2202</sup> In the Strzelecki Desert there was “pretty country, lightly timbered and well grassed” and on occasions “the most pleasing woodland scenery” where “everything in the vicinity looks fresh and green”.<sup>2203</sup> After crossing Sturt Stony Desert, the waterhole at Koonchera was “a delightful oasis in the desert” that they “never, in our most sanguine moments, anticipated finding”.<sup>2204</sup> Following the Diamantina River resulted in a number of comments on the

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<sup>2201</sup> Wills, ‘Field Book 2: December 1860’, ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2202</sup> Ryan, *Cartographic eye*. In ‘Chapter 3: Picturesque Visions: Controlling the seen’, Ryan explores the various methodologies used to describe the landscape and the various techniques explorers used to describe landscape, which varies from objective and disembodied scientific analysis to picturesque and panoramic narratives.

<sup>2203</sup> Wills, ‘Field Book 1: Cooper’s Creek to Carpentaria’, ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2204</sup> Wills, ‘Field Book 2: December 1860’, ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.



permanence of the water, but after they left this watercourse there is a break in the diary entries as they faced a week of difficult travel over waterless country. Once at the Tropic of Capricorn Wills again begins more regular entries describing his "excitement of exploring fine well-watered country".<sup>2205</sup> As the EC believed they had provided everything the Expedition could possibly need to tackle these conditions, the arrival of Burke and Wills' skeletal remains wrapped in a Union flag was not how they envisaged the explorers would return to Melbourne. Initially the "grief excited by the tragical termination of the Exploring Expedition ... excluded from the public mind all thought of determining whether the Expedition was considered to have been successful. Bonyhady rightly points out, however, that determining success and failure was a difficult matter as the aims of the Expedition were never clearly enunciated."<sup>2206</sup> However, the few vocal critics who chose not to join in "a wild song of triumph" were soundly criticised for not having perceived the "greatness" of the Expedition's results.<sup>2207</sup>

When attention turned to the practical results of the Expedition's discoveries, it was the value of the land for pastoral occupation that interested the public. Wills' journals contained just two observations on pastoral potential, and these would have been made on the basis of his earlier experience as a shepherd at Deniliquin<sup>2208</sup> and foreman of a survey party in country Victoria. In the Strzelecki Desert he noted "up to this point the country through which we have passed has been of the finest description for pastoral purposes",<sup>2209</sup> and then in Sturt Stony Desert he observed "it is only the actually stony ground that is bare, and many a sheep run is in fact worse grazing ground than that".<sup>2210</sup> His favourable account of the country traversed from the Cooper to the Gulf appeared to show the centre of the continent was not one vast desert as had been supposed, but was apparently abundant in permanent water and plentiful herbage. The initial press reports released immediately after the news of the explorers' deaths were written hurriedly and were based on information gleaned from brief glimpses of Wills' field books and maps. They went some way to confirming Sturt's earlier assessment by describing the country as 'unfavourable'. However just two degrees of longitude east of where Sturt had turned back, Wills described a "well grassed and watered country" where travel was comparatively easy.<sup>2211</sup> The newspapers reported:

the most important result at present observable from Burke's exploration is that something like definite limits to the 'Interior Desert' appear to have been arrived at.<sup>2212</sup>

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<sup>2205</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 4: January 1860', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2206</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 197-198.

<sup>2207</sup> Morton, 'Exploration: History of the Victorian Exploring Expedition'.

<sup>2208</sup> Wills worked as a shepherd at Bulletiel Creek at the Royal Bank's Ram Station near Deniliquin for eight months between February and October 1853. He was 18 years old and it was his first job in Australia.

<sup>2209</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 1: Cooper's Creek to Carpentaria', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2210</sup> Wills, 'Field Book 2: December 1860', ex2009-003, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2211</sup> *Argus*, 5 November 1861: 4.

<sup>2212</sup> *South Australian Register*, 5 November 1861: 2.



Figure 233: Burke and Wills' Camp 71, 20 December 1860.  
© 2005 Dave Phoenix.

Wills described the scenery as “the most pleasing woodland scenery, and everything in the vicinity looks fresh and green” and Burke thought this “would be a good place for a station”.



Figure 234: Sturt Stony Desert.  
© 2008 Dave Phoenix.

Based on Sturt's description of the extent of the stony desert, Wills was expecting to take many days to cross this inhospitable area. However they found Koonchera Waterhole after only one day's travel, leading Wills to write such a glowing report of the “delightful oasis”.



Figure 235: Koonchera Waterhole, Diamantina River. Burke and Wills' Camp 73-A, 24 December 1860.  
© 2008 Dave Phoenix.

Wills wrote, "We took a day of rest on Gray's Creek to celebrate Christmas. This was doubly pleasant, as we had never, in our most sanguine moments, anticipated finding such a delightful oasis in the desert".

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Therefore "the supposed Great Desert of the Interior was reduced to very narrow limits".<sup>2213</sup> Governor Barkly, explaining the value of Victoria's efforts to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, stated:

the limits of the Stony Desert are proved to extend very little farther north than the point to which Sturt penetrated so many years ago, whilst the country beyond is even more adapted for settlement than that which M'Douall Stuart has discovered to the westward of it.<sup>2214</sup>

Barkly thought it was due to the:

liberality and enterprise of one of her youngest colonial off-shoots, backed by the heroic self-devotion of Burke and Wills that Great Britain owes the acquisition of millions of available acres, destined at no distant day to swell her imports and afford fresh markets for her manufactures.<sup>2215</sup>

The published version of Wills' map supported this view, with numerous annotations highlighting the availability of water and favourable grazing land.<sup>2216</sup> It is doubtful that Wills had written these annotations himself on his original map. It appears they were added afterwards by the Surveyor-

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<sup>2213</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 June 1862: 5.

<sup>2214</sup> Sir Henry Barkly, 'Extracts from a Dispatch from Governor Sir H. Barkly to the Duke of Newcastle, on Burke's Expedition', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1861-1862).

<sup>2215</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2216</sup> Victoria: Office of Crown Lands and Survey, *Map of Burke and Wills route from Cooper's Creek to Carpentaria (Copied from the map prepared by Wills)*, L1089 (Melbourne: Office of Lands & Survey, Department of Crown Lands & Survey, 25 November 1861).

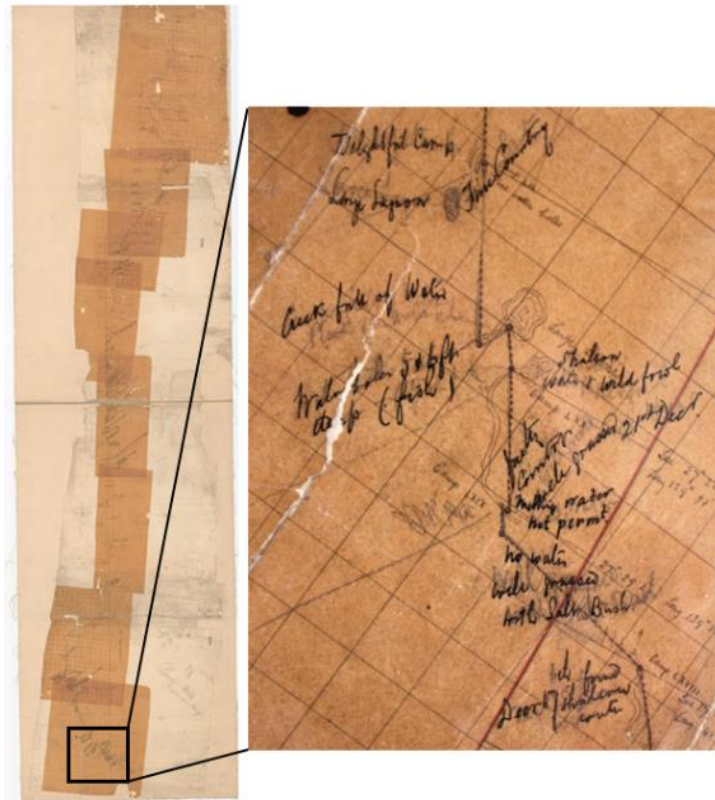


Figure 236: Section of the tracing of Wills' map showing the Expedition's route from Cooper Creek to the Diamantina, with annotations added by Surveyor-General Ligar in his heavy, scrawling writing. Even in Sturt Stony Desert Ligar managed to find favourable comments in Wills' field books with which to embellish the map.

From top: "Delightful camp / Large lagoon / Fine country / Creek full of water / Water holes 5 & 6 feet deep (fish) / Shallow water & water fowl / Pretty country, well grassed / milky water, not permitt. / No water, well grassed with salt bush".

Victoria: Office of Crown Lands and Survey, EXP22A & EXP22B, 5 November 1861.  
L9022, Historic Plan Collection, Unit 871, VPRS 8168/P0002, Public Record Office of Victoria.

General, who had been careful to only use favourable comments from Wills' journal.<sup>2217</sup> Wills had been cautious when describing the land as he realised that seasonal variations may give way to more barren conditions later, noting:

I very much doubt whether in many of these places the water is permanent and as we have no data from which to ascertain how or when the creeks are supplied with water it is impossible to form an idea as to how long they will last. The water in most of them is at present very low and if they depend for a supply on winter rains they will no doubt be soon dry, but If they are filled by summer rains it is possible that most of them are permanent.<sup>2218</sup>

Burke, however, considered he was travelling through "splendid grazing country" and was less concerned with climatic fluctuations:

<sup>2217</sup> Victoria: Office of Crown Lands and Survey, EXP22A & EXP22B, 5 November 1861, L9022, Historic Plan Collection, Unit 871, VPRS 8168/P0002, Public Record Office of Victoria.

<sup>2218</sup> Wills, 'Field Notes No. 4: Torowoto to Cooper's Creek', ex2008-016, State Library of Victoria.

Of course it is impossible for me to say what effect an unusually dry summer would produce throughout this country, or whether we are now travelling in an unusually favourable season or not.<sup>2219</sup>

Burke dismissed any possible future disagreement, stating simply "I describe things as I find them".<sup>2220</sup>

Wills' reports may have gone some way towards changing commonly held perceptions of the centre of the continent, but, as Neumayer pointed out to the RGS, there were many adherents to the old 'desert doctrine' who thought that:

Burke had merely hit upon a narrow strip of good country, which carried him across; had he but deviated to the one side or the other of his path he must have failed in his attempt.<sup>2221</sup>

Burke's critics, and there were ever increasing numbers of them, thought "the opinions of inexperienced men as to the value of the country for pastoral settlement, cannot be relied on"<sup>2222</sup> and they claimed he had "crept along the margin of a country already known" and so

it was perfectly absurd to talk of any great geographical problem having been solved by Burke and Wills, because there was no geographical problem in that part of Australia to be solved.<sup>2223</sup>

They believed that Burke had never really entered the desert at all and there was a vast area of desert in the centre still to be explored. When Landsborough delivered glowing reports of fine pastoral country not too far to the east of Burke's track, it precipitated a land rush in central Queensland which reinforced the perception that Burke had been in favourable country and had not entered the desert at all.

The attitude of many Victorians towards the arid interior remained unchanged and there was no immediate demand for land around Cooper Creek. Many still believed that the Expedition's seven deaths had been the result of the inhospitable conditions encountered in the desert, ideas that were reflected in poetry. Catherine Martin's epic tale describes Burke travelling:

Still on, through arid regions, gauntly bare,  
Shrivelled beneath the sun's remorseless glare:  
Tracts of drear desolation, where the grass  
Lay in bleached heaps, o'er which no creatures pass.<sup>2224</sup>

In the 1870s, when pastoralists occupied lands opened up in the wake of the Expedition, they soon realised the vagaries of the climate of inland Australia and it became apparent just how favourable a season the Expedition had encountered. The pastoralists had little idea of the fragility of arid and semi-arid landscapes and how quickly sheep and cattle could reduce good pasture to

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<sup>2219</sup> Burke, 'Dispatch, dated Torowoto, 29 October 1860', ex2002-012, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2220</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2221</sup> Neumayer, 'On a scientific exploration of Central Australia', 348.

<sup>2222</sup> William Lockhart Morton, *Yeoman and Australian Acclimatiser*, 1 February 1862: 9.

<sup>2223</sup> *Courier*, 30 September 1862: 3.

<sup>2224</sup> Catherine Martin, 'The Explorers: A Chronicle of the Burke and Wills Expedition (In Four Parts)', *The Explorers and Other Poems* (Melbourne: George Robertson, 1874).

wastelands. However, few pastoralists questioned Burke's choice of route or queried Wills' favourable description of the landscape. John Conrick, who established Nappa Merrie station at Depot Camp 65 in 1873 saw no irony in describing the horrors of the 1902 drought, which wiped out 75% of his stock, while referring to "the wonderful country through which they [Burke and Wills] passed".<sup>2225</sup> Others questioned why Billy the horse had to be shot when Wills described him licking his lips at the sight of fresh green grass they encountered.<sup>2226</sup> This dichotomy between the need to discover pastoral land to bolster the colony's assets while simultaneously facing and conquering the inhospitable desert was not unique to Burke and Wills. Haynes describes the battle between heroism and glad tidings as the "conjunction of opposites".<sup>2227</sup> Clearly there was some discrepancy between Wills' favourable reports of viable grazing country, and the harshness of the arid environment which saw the deaths of seven Expedition members.

Because Burke travelled in a relatively good year<sup>2228</sup> the conflicting stories surrounding the arid and semi-arid landscape – the hostile desert juxtaposed with good pastoral country; men dying of starvation in an Aboriginal 'Garden of Eden' – all have some basis in fact. These different landscapes did exist, but ephemerally and not in the predictable four season fashion of the northern hemisphere. A century and a half of experience shows these areas are arid and semi-arid with unpredictable and irregular rainfall and they can only be considered hospitable after good rainfall events.

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<sup>2225</sup> *Advertiser*, 25 April 1914: 7.

<sup>2226</sup> James Robertson Chisholm was a regular contributor to the *North Queensland Register* under the pseudonym 'Along the Line', e.g. *North Queensland Register*, 1 March 1909: 56.

<sup>2227</sup> Haynes, *Seeking the centre*, 44.

<sup>2228</sup> After a series of moderate El Niño years between 1856 and 1858, 1860 and 1861 were "very strong" La Niña. This suggests that after a period in the mid-1850 when rainfall was slightly below average, 1860 and 1861 were years with positive values for the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) with the possibility of enhanced Summer monsoonal activity in northern Australia. Joëlle L. Gergis and Anthony M. Fowler, 'A history of ENSO events since A.D. 1525: implications for future climate change', *Climatic Change*, Vol. 92, Nos. 3-4, February (2009): 343-387.



## 7.6 Conclusion

The perception of landscape before, during and after the Expedition was a complex cultural construction, influenced not just by the posthumous reports from Burke and Wills, but also reports from other explorers as well as stockmen, prospectors and speculators. The nature of the interior was the subject of much debate, both by the EC and the public, and there were many conflicting hypotheses and suggestions about the character of the desert. The termination of the Expedition did not resolve the debate nor stop the speculation about the nature or extent of the desert, despite the lengthy descriptions and extensive reports from Norman, Landsborough, Walker, McKinlay and Howitt, who between them experienced a far greater range of landscapes and environments than Burke and Wills.

An explorer's journal can only be a snapshot in time. The landscape is described as it was seen in the brief moment the Expedition passed by. Wills speculated on what the landscape might look like at other times of year and under other climatic conditions. Burke decided simply to "describe things as I find them".<sup>2229</sup> Haynes suggests that explorers set out to battle and conquer the inland, and therefore they depicted a stereotypical view of the desert. She comments that in the nineteenth century:

The expedition leaders were almost obliged to vilify the desert in order to account for their failures to deliver the hoped-for reports of fertile acres awaiting settlement.<sup>2230</sup>

Burke and Wills, however, did not vilify the land. Burke's lack of interest in bringing country into being by naming and memorialising meant his contribution to advancing the understanding of the landscape was minimal – restricted to a few isolated comments and occasional names attached to hills and creeks honouring minor members of the Expedition and junior public servants, many of these locations now long forgotten. Wills' journals were straightforward reports on geology, vegetation and drainage, and the few descriptive comments he used were generally positive. Even when struggling to navigate the intricacies of Channel Country creeks or when facing death as a result of being unable to find water in the Strzelecki Desert, Wills' comments were detached and matter of fact and he did not replicate the dramatic language used by Sturt to describe the same landscapes. Had Wills been fortunate enough to enjoy the luxury of editing his journal for publication, he probably would not have changed much anyway.

Since 1861, the Expedition's story has rarely been told without linking the explorer's fate to the landscape. While Fitzpatrick and Bonyhady managed to avoid the "trudge of the journey",<sup>2231</sup> other

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<sup>2229</sup> Burke, 'Dispatch, dated Torowoto, 29 October 1860', ex2002-012, State Library of Victoria.

<sup>2230</sup> Haynes, *Seeking the centre*, 33.

<sup>2231</sup> Bonyhady, *Melbourne to myth*, 9.



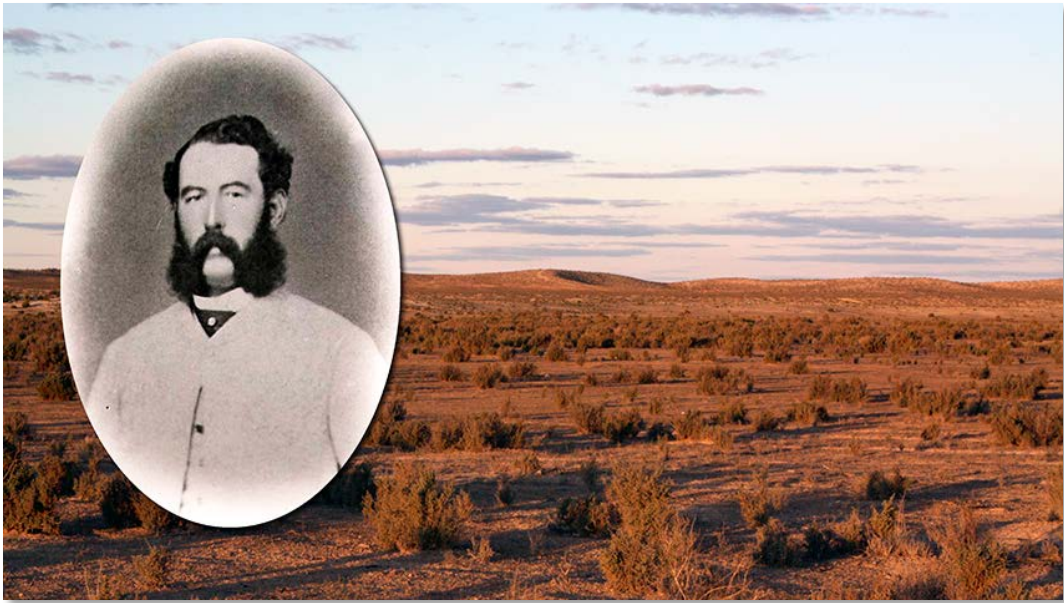


Figure 237: The first feature named by the Expedition. “Branigan Hill” honoured one of Burke’s fellow police officers, Sub-Inspector St John Branigan of Melbourne. Burke named several other features after police officers and magistrates, but, as a result of the deaths of Burke and Wills and the lack of a comprehensive leader’s journal and accurate map of the Expedition’s track, many of these names (Branigan Hill included) have been forgotten. Today this is an unnamed feature in the Prungle Hills.

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commentators have used the landscape as a supporting actor. Unfortunately, because the Expedition’s track was not well-known, this has led to errors in understanding how the Expedition interacted with the landscape. Myths have arisen about how the Expedition arrived at the Cooper, why Burke could not see the open ocean, why he chose to head to Mount Hopeless and why he failed to get there. Often the commonly held ideas of impenetrable mangroves or tired explorers plunging into the cooling waters of Cooper Creek are the imaginings of the journalist or film producer, rather than a close reading of the Expedition archives. Clearly a better understanding of how the Expedition interacted with the landscape and how the landscape influenced the explorers required a better understanding of the Expedition archives and a better understanding of which landscapes the Expedition encountered.

The preliminary study of the Expedition’s historical human ecology carried out at Cooper Creek demonstrated the validity of this method and resulted in new insights into Burke’s decision and subsequent attempts to reach Mount Hopeless. Rather than being the result of vitamin deficiency which caused a lack of mental clarity, as proposed by Favenc and Murgatroyd, Burke’s choice of route was their best option given the amount of food they had and the difficult and dry terrain that they had encountered on the journey between Bulloo and the Cooper. The error Burke made was deciding to follow Gregory’s route without fully understanding what Gregory had done during his journey in 1858. By assuming Gregory followed Strzelecki Creek from its divergence at the Cooper, Burke presumed he would find a continuous watercourse all the way to Mount Hopeless. The fact

that Burke did not make any effort to locate physical signs of Gregory's track supports the position that Burke was not attempting to follow Gregory's track *per se*; rather he was expecting to find and follow the watercourse Gregory followed. Wills was not in a position to enlighten Burke because he did not have a copy of Gregory's journal or map. This scenario also argues that Burke, Wills and King's morale would have been at its lowest, not on their return to Depot Camp 65 in on 21 April 1861, as depicted by Longstaff's iconic painting, but in the Tingana sand dunes on 19 May 1861 when the three men realised they could not reach Mount Hopeless and were facing death by starvation on Cooper Creek.

The larger historical human ecology of the VEE from Melbourne to the Gulf was achieved by placing the Expedition's archives into a comprehensive chronology, assigning geographical locations for each node on the timeline and then field checking these assumptions. Incorporating additional archival material, such as paintings, botanical collections, receipts etc. and reappraising some archives currently attributed to Wills but actually made by other Expedition members added further robustness to the timeline. The practical application of this methodology – walking 4,000 kilometres at a similar time of year and at a similar pace to the original Expedition – yielded results which would have been unavailable any other way, not least the realisation that Wills' field books had not been plotted and followed previously and that a better understanding of Wills' navigational methods for sections of the Expedition's route where there are extant archives could be extrapolated into the areas where archives are missing.

Assessing Wills' surveying and navigational techniques raises some interesting questions. Some have dismissed Wills as incompetent while others have tried to uncouple him from Burke and have his contribution acknowledged in its own right. This exercise in historical human ecology shows Wills occupied several roles during the Expedition: at some points of the journey he was free to undertake whatever scientific studies he wished; at other times he merely recorded the party's journey as they were escorted by Paakantyi guides through an Aboriginal landscape; sometimes Wills was called upon to navigate the party along landscapes already described by earlier explorers; and other times his role was to establish a spatial framework with which to guide the Gulf party as they hurried through landscapes unknown to Europeans.

The study also showed that while Burke might have been portrayed as the archetypal 'explorer-hero', his lack of interest in bringing country into being by naming topography after wealthy backers and influential politicians rejects that stereotype. Burke was not interested in being 'explorer-hero', as he was satisfied that he would become 'hero' simply by being the first to cross the continent. He did not think a well written leader's journal, mineral discoveries, the advance of scientific knowledge or new pastoral opportunities would have made him any more hero. Being first was enough for Burke.



Figure 238: Manipulating the Burke and Wills landscape:  
Burke and Wills and Billy the horse on the beach at the Gulf of Carpentaria.  
© *Burke and Wills* [movie], 1985 Hoyts Edgley Productions.

Movie producer Graeme Clifford thought cinema audiences needed to understand that Burke and Wills had reached their goal and the story of them being unable to see the open ocean was not sufficiently dramatic enough. As a result, he used “artistic license” to invent a beach scene on the north coast.

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Several other landscape myths were disproved during the study. One was the Expedition’s arrival at the Cooper/Wilson. Rather than arriving unexpectedly at the Cooper in Yandruwandha country and plunging down its banks into the water, Wills navigated the party to Sturt’s furthest point on the Wilson River in Wangkumara country where the creek was rocky, sandy and dry. A further point clarified was whether the Diamantina was a geographical gift which allowed the Expedition to travel through well-watered country. Once again, retracing the Expedition’s track shows that after leaving the Diamantina, the Gulf Party experienced long stretches of waterless country, which had the potential to bring about an early termination to their journey. When Burke wrote his journal entries noting how many hours they had been on the road, he was not, as some have suggested, focusing on beating Stuart to the Gulf; he was focussed on finding water before their supplies ran out and they were forced to turn back to the Diamantina.

The final issue raised was that mangroves did not block Burke’s access to the open ocean, but flooded salt water flats did. This allows for a reinterpretation of the only journal entry made by Burke on the return journey. When Burke wrote “it would be well to say that we reached the sea, but we could not obtain a view of the open ocean”<sup>2232</sup> he did not mean ‘I wish I could have said we reached the sea, but my view was blocked by impenetrable mangroves’. He meant he was standing knee deep in salt water and mud, surrounded by the sea at the northern end of the Stokes Range, unable to

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<sup>2232</sup> Burke, 'Diary', MS 30/1, National Library of Australia.

progress any further north, and therefore it was fair to say they had reached the sea, but they were unable to obtain a view of the open ocean.

Although a similar methodology has been attempted previously,<sup>2233</sup> it was roundly criticised as having been too focussed on the journey and not backed up by sufficient archival research.<sup>2234</sup> However, the combination of archival research and field research allowed a realistic appraisal of the Burke and Wills landscape. Historical human ecology was a successful methodology when applied to the VEE and has provided new ideas about the way the Expedition interacted with the landscape and the way the landscape affected the Expedition.



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<sup>2233</sup> Glen McLaren, 'Retracing Leichhardt (1844-45)', Darwin: Northern Territory Library: NT Collection.

<sup>2234</sup> "[McLaren's] work would be more telling had he spent more time in the library and less on horseback" Robert Stafford, [Book Review], *Historical Records of Australian Science*, Vol. 12, No. 2, December (1998): 270.

# CONCLUSION

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*Mr Burke evinced a far greater  
amount of zeal than prudence ...*

Victoria: Parliament. *Burke and Wills Commission. Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into and Report Upon the Circumstances Connected with the Sufferings and Death of Robert O'Hara Burke and William John Wills, the Victorian Explorers.* (Melbourne: John Ferres Government Printer, 1862).

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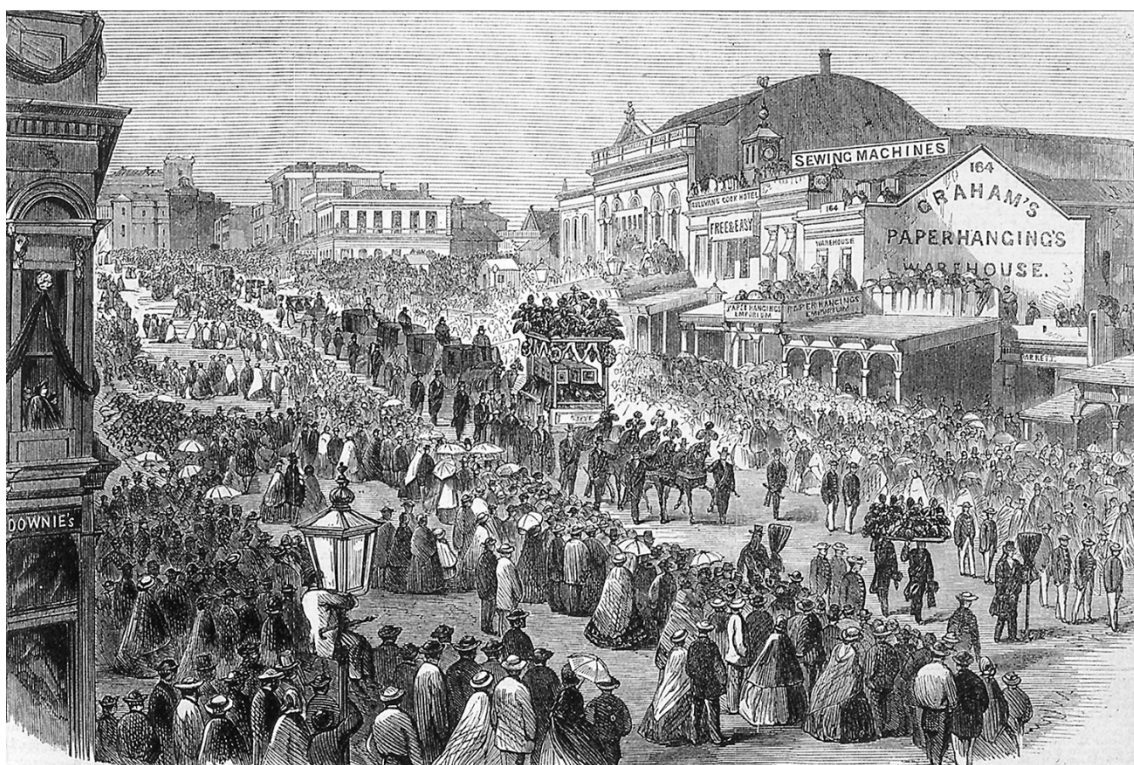


Figure 239: 'Public funeral of the Australian explorers Burke and Wills', 1863.  
*Illustrated Australasian News*, 25 April 1863. PIC Drawer 5042 #S4512, National Library of Australia.



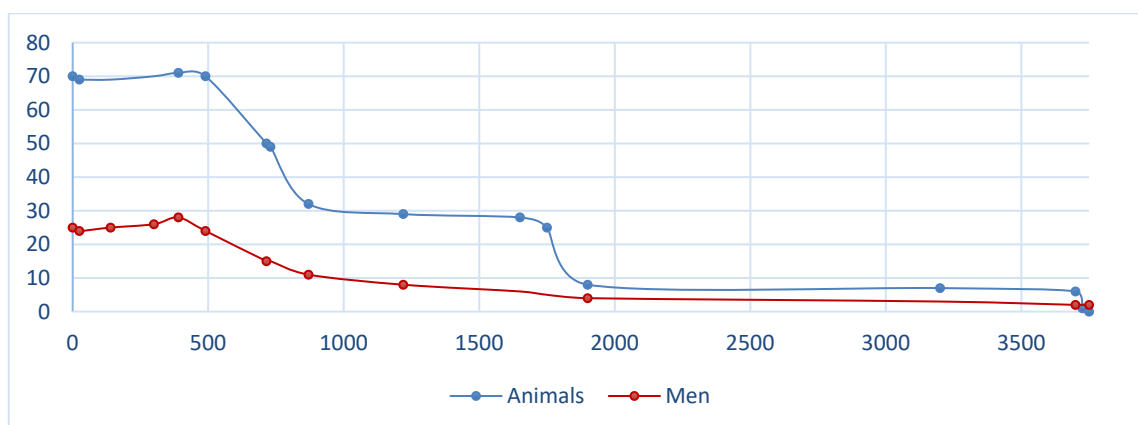
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## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to identify whether the VEE was anomalous in terms of developing trends in Australian inland exploration methodology. In addition, the thesis also revises aspects of the history of the expedition, sheds new light on certain events and dispels some myths. The study approached the task by breaking the Expedition into four separate areas of investigation: establishing the expedition; use of camels; interaction with Aboriginal people; and the effects and influence of landscape. Each of these areas was analysed in a separate chapter, with the chronological narrative running through these chapters as the connecting thread.

Summarising the conclusions from these four chapters shows that the Expedition was a complex entity. It took many forms, and no one aspect of the Expedition embodied the whole affair. The grand caravan that lumbered out of Royal Park was slow and cumbersome, but still nowhere near the behemoth that either Charles Sturt's or Thomas Mitchell's grandest expeditions had been. Even with a modest outfit, Burke was frustrated by the Expedition's slow progress and the VEE gradually shed layers as it advanced, and in doing so it became sleeker, swifter, and easier to manage. The 25 men and 70 animals that left Melbourne became eleven men and 30 animals that left Menindee, eight men and 27 animals that left Torowoto, four men and seven animals that left Cooper Creek, and, finally, after 3,700 kilometres and 175 days, the EC's treasured Expedition was reduced to just two men and one exhausted horse floundered through the mud at the Gulf of Carpentaria. By this measure, the Expedition was anomalous. No previous expedition had changed format, or abandoned men, animals, wagons and equipment quite so readily to reach its goal.<sup>2235</sup>

Table 3: Chart showing the relationship between the numbers of men and animals on the VEE compared to the distance travelled from Melbourne.



<sup>2235</sup> Sturt made excursions from his Fort Grey depot in 1845 in order to attempt to reach the centre of the continent, and Kennedy abandoned his wagons and left men behind in 1848 in order for him to reach Cape York, but no expedition divested itself of encumbrances to the same extent as the VEE.

What was more unusual about the VEE was that the Expedition's goal was never clearly defined. The EC and RSV never determined the aims and objectives of the Expedition. In fact they only just managed to agree where the Expedition should go. Chapter 2 demonstrates that expeditions in the 1830s and early 1840s had clearly defined aims. These expeditions set out to solve geographical problems, and, as a result of their findings, the puzzle of the inland rivers and frustration of the horse-shoe of salt lakes had been solved by the end of the 1850s, and hopes for an inland sea were all but dashed by the end of 1860. By the mid-1840s, most of the fertile land in the south-east of the continent had been identified, and the area unknown to Europeans was predominantly arid. Sturt's harrowing experiences in the interior in 1845, Leichhardt's disappearance and Kennedy's death in 1848, Gregory's inability to penetrate into the desert due to drought in 1858, and Babbage's recall the same year, meant that by 1860 exploration was primarily about enduring hardships and privations. The goal of an exploring party now was not to solve a geographical puzzle, but to cross the country from south to north or east to west. While the possibility of new grazing land was an ever-present bonus, the real economic benefits of establishing the geographical nature of the inland was to enable trade routes to be established to the north coast and then on to Asia and India.

Despite this prior body of knowledge and experience, Victoria's Expedition was established in a unique manner. The combination of separation from New South Wales, wealth from gold, an influx of educated people and the establishment of learned institutions resulted in a unique set of circumstances in the late 1850s that allowed Melbourne the luxury of establishing one of Australia's first scientific societies. While the RGS of London supported the cause of exploration, learned societies did not usually organise expeditions. Undaunted, the VIAS, PSV and its successors the PIV and RSV set their sights on exploration from the outset. Although Wilkie's original proposal was ridiculously ambitious, it was soon reduced to manageable levels by Mueller, and, had A.C. Gregory accepted the leadership, the EC could have relaxed and allowed an experienced explorer to organise and run their modest expedition. Undeterred by Gregory's rejection of the leadership position and his advice to proceed cautiously, the EC pressed on regardless.

Fund raising kept the Committee busy for almost two years, during which time the Committee members suggested the Expedition would accomplish many things. In the midst of the EC's efforts to match Kyte's donation, Embling shrewdly used the EC's efforts to advance his own ambition of acclimatisation. Embling did not need to convince Australians that camels would be a better form of transport for traversing the arid interior. That debate had been going on for almost 40 years and it was clear from the efforts of Sturt, Eyre, Gregory and Babbage that new transport technology would be required if the deserts were to be crossed. Embling just needed to convince Victorians that they should be the ones that put the experiment into practice.

The analysis of Landells' efforts in the sub-continent in 1859 show that he went to great lengths to acquire the finest animals for the colony. Originally planning to import male and female Bactrians and Dromedaries for a breeding stud and acclimatisation, he was unable to acquire Bactrians. Instead he went to Bikaner and the Khanate of Kalat and purchased a mix of male and female Bikaneri riding-camels, a male Mekrani camel, and ten male Khorasan pack-camels. This is the first time the breeds of the imported camels and place of purchase has been established.

The arrival of Landells' camels caused great excitement, but Melburnians were already used to seeing camels being led around the city, as six Egyptian camels had arrived the previous year. Clearly, the excitement was not just that exotic animals had arrived in the colony – this was excitement about the impending departure of the VEE. After two years of being petitioned and harassed for money, the public and Legislature were ready to see action from the EC. This public display of enthusiasm, initiated by the arrival of the camels, led the EC to hurriedly select a leader and attempt to agree on a route. The aims and objectives of Burke's Expedition were never settled, with each of the members of the EC believing that the promises they made while fund-raising would be realised by the VEE. This method of establishing an expedition – raise the funds first, then select a leader, then decide where the expedition will go, which is the manner in which the EC did things, is in stark opposition to the way that other colonies had established expeditions. Chapter 2 outlined the usual process followed by New South Wales and South Australia when dispatching expeditions under Sturt, Gregory, Mitchell and Kennedy, which was to define the expedition's aims and route first, then select a leader, then petition the Imperial government for funds.<sup>2236</sup>

After years of deliberation by the EC, the Expedition was assembled and dispatched in a hurried manner. From the outset, the EC recommended that the Expedition should depart in March, to make the most of the cooler months. However, six days after the camels were unloaded, Burke was appointed as leader, the route via Cooper Creek was decided 33 days after that, and the Expedition departed Melbourne four weeks later in August. Without an experienced explorer like Gregory or Warburton to supervise the provisioning and organisation, the EC became overly involved in the practical arrangements, exacerbating the problems caused by an inexperienced leader.

The selection of Landells as second-in-command allowed him to select the best camels for the Expedition, and Embling and Mueller's hopes for acclimatisation and a breeding program were forgotten in the excitement to explore.

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<sup>2236</sup> Defining a route for an expedition in advance did not always mean that the leader followed the guidelines. Mitchell was dismissive of his instructions to follow the Darling, Eyre did not travel into the centre of the continent, but went to Western Australia instead, and drought conditions meant that Gregory did not head into north-west Queensland on his 'Leichhardt Search Expedition' as planned. Nevertheless, stipulating a route in advance meant the expedition leader had to justify any decision to deviate from the recommended route.

As the Expedition travelled through Victoria and New South Wales it was slow moving and cumbersome. Burke chose not to carry water with them into the mallee, employing Aboriginal guides to lead them to water instead. This replicated the actions of earlier large, slow-moving expeditions that relied on wheeled-transport, and fits into the models suggested by Reynolds and McLaren.

Burke attempted to increase the slow pace of travel by splitting the party, and he did this at Swan Hill, Balranald, Bookoo, Prungle, Bilbarka and Menindee. This rarely had the desired effect, but it was a demonstration of Burke's management style and his approach to dealing with conflict. He found it difficult to confront people, and, rather than work out a solution, he would go on ahead and leave the problem behind for his subordinates to deal with. This may have worked during his time in the military and police force, but it did not work on the Expedition. Splitting the party at Prungle did not speed up their progress to the Darling, it hampered it. Splitting the party at Bilbarka did not resolve the tension with Landells, and the argument flared up again as soon as the men met again at Kinchega. Most importantly, splitting the party at Menindee and leaving Wright to deal with a mountain of stores, insufficient pack-animals, and no funds or authority to purchase more, was the biggest mistake Burke committed.

Burke continued to use Aboriginal guides north of Menindee, but when their guide refused to accompany them into the arid Grey Range, Wills was called on to navigate the party to the Cooper. Up until this point, Wills' role had primarily been to record their progress. In the early stages of the Expedition he had been accompanied by Neumayer and the two men had been left alone to calibrate the instruments, make observations and draft maps. After Neumayer's departure, Wills had been interested in the knowledge he could acquire from their Aboriginal guides and he recorded Aboriginal names for topographic features and the corresponding English meanings for these names. When the guides left them, Wills attempted to find the Cooper using data recorded by Sturt in 1845. This resulted in a frustrating week of reconnaissance trips in the black-soil flood plains of the Wilson River. Camp 57, their "first camp on the Cooper" was actually their first camp on the Wilson, and the first camp on the Cooper was Depot Camp 63.

Beyond the Cooper, Wills continued to navigate the party to the Gulf and back, but his field notes and maps became more rudimentary as the pace of travel took its toll. In the absence of Aboriginal guides and their pre-existing framework of topographic names, Burke and Wills began to name topography with Anglo-Australian toponymy. Wills named features for navigational purposes as a means of identifying his track on the ground. Burke showed a passing interest in naming features after his backers, but soon lost interest and failed to name significant features like the Diamantina River. This contradicts Paul Carter's model of the 'explorer-hero' bringing places in to being by overwriting Indigenous names with European names. It shows that Burke did not see himself as a heroic explorer: he wanted to reach the Gulf in order to become a hero. He did not think a well

written leader's journal, mineral discoveries, the advance of scientific knowledge or new pastoral opportunities would have made him any more hero.

During the early stages of the Expedition, Burke showed little interest in the camels, and became frustrated at delays caused when they strayed. At the Darling he even considered leaving the camels behind and continuing on without them. However, the horses struggled with the heat and aridity, and after the horses were unable to complete a reconnaissance trip, Burke began to appreciate the value of camels for desert travel. He had gained sufficient knowledge to select the six biggest male Bikaneri riding-camels to take to the Gulf, but he also marginalised the expertise of Dost Mahomet and Baluch Khan, preferring instead to appoint John King to be in charge of the animals. This meant that Burke could manage the animals as he saw fit, as King was unlikely to object. Burke overloaded some of the camels on the journey to the Cooper to the extent that they never recovered. Other camels were kept hobbled or tied to their pack-saddles at night to avoid them from straying, and as a consequence they rapidly lost condition.

Burke's Gulf Party was a swift, light, fast moving outfit, which was markedly different to the Expedition he led out of Melbourne four months earlier. By using camels as pack-animals to carry water, Burke was able to travel independent of water-courses, even though it was summer. He was able to take a direct course to the Gulf, with only minor detours for mountain ranges. Without camels, he would not have been able to travel as swiftly as he did. Camels allowed Burke to explore in a way that no other explorer had attempted before. They allowed him to make a dash for the Gulf that would have been impossible with horses. Unfortunately, the pace of travel resulted in the deaths of all six camels, and Burke, Wills and Gray died as a result of Burke's brazen attempt to cross from the Cooper to the Gulf and back in just three months.

Although Burke made several unsuccessful attempts to acquire Aboriginal guides north of the Cooper, he did not need guides to take him to water each evening. In addition, as he travelled fast and often out on the plains and away from rivers and waterholes, he rarely encountered Aboriginal people, so he did not need Aboriginal guides to act as intermediaries. Exploring without relying on Aboriginal guides was the methodology used by other similar contemporary small, fast moving parties led by Gregory and Stuart, and again fits into the framework proposed by Glen McLaren.

The landscape between Cooper Creek and the Gulf presented a few issues for the Gulf Party. While Burke was most concerned about Sturt Stony Desert, this proved less of an obstacle than expected as they crossed it further to the north and at a narrower point than Sturt had. This variation in course also meant that the Gulf Party encountered the Diamantina River. Although some have postulated that the Diamantina was a geographical gift, investigation using 'historical human ecology' shows the river presented Burke with a dilemma: should he continue on to Eyre Creek, or follow this

new river. By following the Diamantina, Burke travelled considerably to the east, so that when he left the river to head north, he knew he must find water within the next five days, as he did not have sufficient provisions to return to the Diamantina and still reach Eyre Creek.

This thesis also revises traditional schools of thought regarding Burke's inability to reach the open ocean, which claim impenetrable mangroves prevented Burke's northward progress. Following the Expedition's route north along the Bynoe River during the wet season showed that the mangroves lined the rivers to the east and west, while flooded salt flats blocked progress to the north.

The supposed irrationality of Burke's decision to attempt to reach Mount Hopeless after he returned to the Cooper is also refuted. The decision not to follow the Expedition's outward track over the Grey Range was a sensible move, as Burke was not to know that Brahe would return that way in early May and there was little chance of them meeting a relief expedition. The route via Strzelecki Creek was much shorter. Burke's error, other than the obvious one of not marking the Dig blaze to show he had returned from the Gulf, was he did not have a copy of Gregory's map or journal and he therefore erroneously assumed there was a continuous watercourse all the way to Mount Hopeless. With Gregory's map and journal, Wills would have been able to find one of Gregory's camps, and then have a better understanding the fluviology of the area which would increase his chances of reaching Mount Hopeless.

Finally, the explorer's interactions with the Yandruwandha people during their last few weeks shows that Wills and Burke had very different approaches towards their situation. Wills adapted more readily and was prepared to live like the Yandruwandha, and then, when he found that to be more difficult than he imagined, he wanted to live with them. During their early encounters with the Yandruwandha people, it seems that Wills understood 'kupara' and encouraged Burke to exchange gifts for presents of food. However, Burke never came to terms with their situation, and when Wills was away, he resorted to irrational, violent outbursts towards their hosts. Regardless of their different approaches, both men died about the same time. Survival on the Cooper was a skill, one that the Yandruwandha honed over more than 18,000 years. Some Europeans, like Howitt, adapted readily to this environment, but Burke and Wills, exhausted, malnourished and suffering vitamin deficiency, did not have the bush skills they needed to survive. Nevertheless, claims that the explorers poisoned themselves as a result of the incorrect preparation of ngardu, while living in a 'Garden of Eden' are rejected.





## CONCLUSION

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In summary, the VEE was the colony of Victoria's first attempt at exploration, and its establishment, operation, use of camels, use of Aboriginal guides and interaction with Aboriginal people, was anomalous in terms of developing trends in Australian inland exploration.

In certain aspects, however, the VEE was not anomalous. It was no larger than Sturt's and Mitchell's earlier expeditions, it relied on Aboriginal guides when it was a large, slow moving caravan, and it operated without Aboriginal guides when it was a light, fast moving party. It was not unusual for expeditions to operate during the summer months, and other explorers had been criticised for refusing to work in the summer. Equally, it was not unusual for larger expeditions to divide into separate parties or establish depot camps from which journeys of reconnaissance were made. In these regards, the VEE aligns with the models proposed by Glen McLaren, Paul Carter and Henry Reynolds.

The VEE was unique in the fact that it was established and operated by an Australian scientific society. The method in which it was established, funded, staffed and managed was equally remarkable in Australian exploring methodology. Its use of camels, and therefore the manner in which Burke was able to explore and the speed at which he was able to reach the Gulf, were also unique.

This thesis has shown that the methodology of 'historical human ecology', which combined careful archival research with an interrogation of the Burke and Wills Expedition landscape, resulted in original insights into the Expedition's actions. When these insights conflicted with existing narratives it was possible to formulate alternate hypotheses. This thesis was therefore able to present a revisionist history of the Expedition, for although the Burke and Wills story has been told many different times, in many different formats, these tellings have evolved to suit each generation's concerns without ever really being given the careful attention of trained historians that other, less iconic stories have enjoyed. Consequently, William Faulkner's oft quoted line that "the past is never dead. It's not even past" seems somewhat appropriate to the process of deconstructing and destroying Expedition myth and mythology.<sup>2237</sup>

Finally, a point of self-criticism. I originally planned to devote more attention to contrasting the VEE's experiences on Cooper Creek with those of Howitt and McKinlay, both of whom travelled extensively through the area in 1861 and 1862 without loss of life, both of whom utilised camels, and both of whom interacted regularly with Aboriginal people. Unfortunately, time and word count got the better of me. I suggest, however, that these expeditions are a potential area of valuable future research.



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<sup>2237</sup> William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Random House, 1951), 92.

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## CONTENTS

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Manuscripts	527
Published Primary Sources	533
Books and Book Chapters	542
Journal Articles	560
Unpublished Reports	574
Theses	575
Newspapers	576
Maps	580
Movies, Television and Radio	584
Dictionaries, Encyclopaedia and Databases	585

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*I may fail, but I promise you  
it will not be an ignoble failure.*

Robert O'Hara Burke to Mary Stawell  
Mary F.E. Stawell, *My Recollections* (London: Richard Clay & Sons, 1911), 144.

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Figure 240: Sidney Nolan, 'Burke', 1950.  
© Private collection.



Figure 241: Sidney Nolan, 'Wills', 1950.  
© Museum and Art Gallery of the  
Northern Territory, Darwin.

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## Manuscripts

The majority of the Expedition's archival records are held in three manuscript collections:

- MS 13071 at the State Library of Victoria,
- MS 30 at the National Library of Australia, and
- VPRS 1189 at the Public Record Office of Victoria.

For brevity, the contents of these three collections are listed briefly. Other manuscripts which have been consulted are listed in more detail below.

Records of the Burke and Wills Expedition, (1857-1875), MS 13071, Manuscripts Collection, La Trobe Library, State Library of Victoria. Finding Aid: [handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/32064](http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/32064)

This is the largest collection of Expedition archives, and much of the collection was digitised and made available online as part of the State Library of Victoria's 'Burke and Wills Digitisation Project' in 2010.<sup>2238</sup> As part of this project, I assisted in reviewing and expanding the collection's Finding Aid.<sup>2239</sup>

This collection contains the following significant items:

Series I, (ex1001-001 to ex1014-041): Royal Society of Victoria's Exploration Committee and Exploration Fund Committee records: EC and EFC minutes of meetings; accounts, vouchers and financial records; employment applications; inward correspondence; outward correspondence.

Series II, (ex2001-001 to ex2014-005): VEE records: Instructions to VEE officers; dispatches, reports, telegrams and correspondence sent from the VEE to the EC; scientific observations, reports, journals and diaries; maps; papers relating to the Commission of Inquiry. This Series includes Wills' field books, transcripts of Wills' missing field books, Becker's reports, Beckler's reports, Landells' resignation, Brahe's report and Becker's Expedition sketchbook (H16486).

Series III, (ex3001-001 to ex3009-010): Howitt's 'Victorian Contingent Expedition' (1861) and Victorian Exploring Party' (1862) records: Instructions to Howitt; dispatches and telegrams; observations, maps, diaries; Murray's medical reports, Welch's field books and diary. This Series includes King's Narrative.

Series IV, (ex4001-001 to ex4001-089): Walker's 'Victorian Relief Expedition', Landsborough's 'Queensland Relief Expedition' and Norman's H.M.C.S. *Victoria* records: Instructions to Walker;

<sup>2238</sup> The collection at MS 13071 in the State Library of Victoria has been catalogued in several different ways since it was accessioned into the Melbourne Public Library in 1875. Older texts which cite the collection, such as the works by I.F. McLaren and older articles in the *Victorian Historical Magazine*, use the outdated accession numbers. The original collection was placed in ten boxes and accession numbers were assigned in the range H.5113, H.16138-H.16486, Ms.6047-Ms.6063, 255102-255112 and M.743, M.5549, M.16483-M.16484. Becker's sketches are still numbered this way. Items were later assigned box numbers, from Box 2075-2085 and Box 2087-2088B, with Boxes 2086 and 2086/A being reassigned as folio-box FB33. Some of the items originally held at MS 9504 were also added to MS 13071 and renumbered. As part of the recent digitisation project, all manuscript items were allocated numbers in the range ex1001-001 to ex4001-089, and this thesis uses these numbers whenever possible.

<sup>2239</sup> Manuscript Finding Aid: 'A Guide to the records of the Burke and Wills Expedition. MS 13071', State Library of Victoria (20 December 2013). [handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/32064](http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/32064)



VRE dispatches, diaries, journals reports and correspondence; Mayne's correspondence; Landsborough's correspondence, Norman's correspondence.

Papers of Burke and Wills Expedition, (1837-1924), MS 30, National Library of Australia. Finding aid:<sup>2240</sup> [nla.gov.au/nla.ms-ms30](http://nla.gov.au/nla.ms-ms30)

This collection contains the following significant items:

MS 30/1: Robert O'Hara Burke, Portion of Diary kept by Robert O'Hara Burke on the Expedition. 16 December 1860 - 20 January 1861.

MS 30/7: William John Wills, Journal of Trip 'from Cooper Creek Towards Adelaide', 23 April-26 June 1861.

MS 30/11: John King, Part of the Retrospective Account by John King, Relating to the Journey to the Gulf, December 1860-January 1861.

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This collection contains the following items:

Letters A1-A3, B1-B5, C1-C8, E1-E2, F1-F3, G1-G10621, N4911-N5948, O5033, P5574-P11208, R835-R6948, being correspondence between the Victorian Government and the Indian Government regarding the purchase of camels, including letters to and from: Landells; Embling; Mueller; Governor Barkly; Governor-General Canning; Chief Secretary's Office; Government Secretary for Military and Foreign Department in Kolkata (Birch); Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab (Montgomery); Secretary to the Government of the Punjab (Davies); Commissioner of Peshawar (James); Dost Muhammad Khan; Emir of Cabul; Gholam Hussum Khan Alizie, Envoy to the Court of Cabul; Colonel W.P. Robbins of the Honorable East India Company.

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<sup>2240</sup> Manuscript Finding Aid: 'Guide to the Papers of Burke and Wills, MS 30', National Library of Australia (November 2002).

[nla.gov.au/nla.ms-ms30](http://nla.gov.au/nla.ms-ms30)

<sup>2241</sup> [prov.vic.gov.au](http://prov.vic.gov.au)

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# APPENDIX

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## CONTENTS

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Navigation	591
Brief Chronology of Australian inland exploration	592
People employed on the VEE and Relief Expeditions	594
Members of the Exploration Committee	599
Biographies of the Expedition's camels	600

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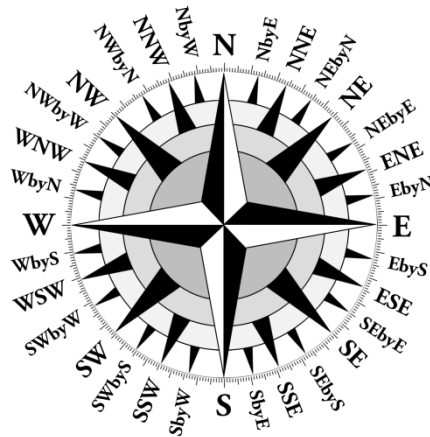
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## Navigation

Wills carried a number of compasses with him. They were graduated differently, and, depending upon which one he was using, he recorded the bearing as whole circle degrees (i.e.  $0^{\circ}$ - $359^{\circ}$ ), directional degrees (i.e.  $S45^{\circ}W$ ,  $N33^{\circ}E$  etc.) or, more usually, as cardinals (i.e. N, NbyE, NE etc.).

Wills' preferred compass was a Negretti and Zambra prismatic compass, divided into 32 direction points (or 32 winds, as they were referred to on a mariner's compass) with  $11^{\circ}15'$  separating each point. This meant that in addition to the cardinals (N, E, S and W), the ordinals (NE, SE, SW and NW), and the half winds (NNE, ENE, ESE, SSE, SSW, WSW, WNW and NNW), the compass also had the 16 quarter-winds marked (i.e. NbyE, NEbyN, NEbyE, EbyN etc.). When he required greater accuracy, Wills further divided the quarter-winds into quarter-points (i.e. NbyE $\frac{1}{4}$ N, NbyE $\frac{1}{2}$ N, etc.), giving 128 possible bearings, each direction separated from the last by  $2^{\circ}48'45''$ .



## Brief chronology of Australian inland exploration

1813-15	George Evans
1817-18	John Oxley <i>Journals of Two Expeditions into The Interior of New South Wales.</i>
1817-22	Phillip Parker King <i>Narrative of A Survey of the Intertropical and Western Coasts of Australia.</i>
1823	John Oxley <i>Geographical Memoirs on New South Wales (1825)</i>
1824	Hamilton Hume and William Hovell <i>Journey of Discovery to Port Phillip.</i>
1828	Charles Sturt (Macquarie and Darling Rivers) <i>Two Expeditions into The Interior of Southern Australia.</i>
1829-30	Charles Sturt (Murray River) <i>Two Expeditions into The Interior of Southern Australia.</i>
1831	Thomas Mitchell (Gwydir River) <i>Three Expeditions into The Interior of Eastern Australia.</i>
1835	Thomas Mitchell (Darling River) <i>Three Expeditions into The Interior of Eastern Australia.</i>
1836	Thomas Mitchell (Portland, Victoria) <i>Three Expeditions into The Interior of Eastern Australia.</i>
1838-42	John Lort Stokes <i>Discoveries in Australia, with an Account of the Coasts and Rivers Explored and Surveyed During the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle.</i>
1839	George Grey <i>Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery in North-West and Western Australia</i>
1841	Edward John Eyre <i>Journals of Expeditions of Discovery into Central Australia, And Overland from Adelaide to King George's Sound.</i>
1844-5	Ludwig Leichhardt <i>Journal of an Overland Expedition in Australia 1844-1845.</i>
1844-5	Charles Sturt 'Central Australian Expedition' <i>Narrative of an Expedition into Central Australia.</i>
1845-46	Thomas Mitchell (Victoria/Barcoo River) <i>Journal of an Expedition into The Interior of Tropical Australia.</i>
1846-7	Ludwig Leichhardt

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1846-48	Gregory brothers <i>Journals of Australian Exploration.</i>
1847	Edmund Kennedy (Victoria/Barcoo River) <i>Expedition to ascertain the course of the River Victoria</i>
1848	Edmund Kennedy (Cape York) <i>Narrative of an Expedition Undertaken Under the Direction of E.B. Kennedy.</i>
1848	Ludwig Leichhardt (expedition disappeared)
1855-56	Augustus Gregory 'North Australian Expedition' <i>Journals of Australian Exploration</i>
1858	John McDouall Stuart (first expedition) <i>Explorations in Australia.</i>
1858	Augustus Gregory 'Leichhardt Search Expedition' <i>Journals of Australian Exploration.</i>
1859-62	John McDouall Stuart (second expedition) <i>Explorations in Australia.</i>
1859	John McDouall Stuart (third expedition) <i>Explorations in Australia.</i>
1860	John McDouall Stuart (fourth expedition – reached Attack Creek) <i>Explorations in Australia.</i>
1860-1	Victorian Exploring Expedition (Burke and Wills)
1861	Alfred William Howitt (expedition to Lake Eyre)
1861	John McDouall Stuart (fifth expedition – reached Newcastle Waters) <i>Explorations in Australia.</i>
1861	Alfred William Howitt 'Victorian Contingent Party'
1861-2	William Landsborough 'Queensland Relief Expedition' <i>Journal of Landsborough's Expedition from Carpentaria, in Search of Burke and Wills.</i>
1861-2	Frederick Walker 'Victorian Relief Expedition' <i>Journal of Expedition in search of Burke and Wills.</i>
1861-3	John McKinlay 'South Australian Burke Relief Expedition' <i>McKinlay's Journal of Exploration in the Interior of Australia</i>
1861	Alfred William Howitt 'Victorian Exploration Party'
1862	John McDouall Stuart (sixth expedition – reached north coast) <i>Explorations in Australia.</i>

## People employed on the VEE and Relief Expeditions

List of people who participated in the Victorian Exploring Expedition:

### Officers

Robert O'Hara Burke	(6 May 1820–c.28 June 1861)	Irish/British	Leader
George James Landells	(5th February 1825-December 1871)	English	2-i-C
William John Wills	(5 January 1834–c.June/July 1861)	English	3-i-C, surveyor
Ludwig Becker	(5 September 1808-29 April 1861)	German	Artist & Naturalist
Hermann Beckler	(1828-10 December 1914)	German	Botanist and surgeon
Georg Balthasar Neumayer	(1826-1909)	German	
William Wright	(?-?)	English	3-i-C
Charles Darius Ferguson	(1832-1925)	Ohio, USA	Foreman
William Brahe	(16 January 1835-16 Sept 1912)	German	in charge Depot Camp 65

### Expedition Assistants

[Thomas Elliot]	(?-?)	?	
Owen Cowen	(1823-21 May 1885?)	Co. Armagh, Ireland	
Henry Creber	(1834-1874?)	Liverpool, England	
Robert Fletcher	(?-?)	England	
Thomas Francis McDonough	(c.1834-13 July 1904)	Ireland	
William Patten	(?-5 June 1861)	Co. Down, Ireland	blacksmith
Patrick Langan	(?-?)	Ireland	
John Drakeford	(?-?)	England	cook and camel handler
John King	(1838-15 January 1872)	Co. Tyrone, Ireland	camel handler
James McIlwaine	(?-?)	?	
James Robert Lane	(29 May 1822-18 December 1907)	?	
Thomas Brooks	(?-?)	?	
Jean Prolongeau	(1838-1915)	Bordeaux, France	
Robert Bowman	(?-?)	?	
Charley Gray	(?-17 April 1861)	Scotland	?
William Purcell	(?-23 April 1861)	?	
John Smith	(?-?)	Australian (part Aboriginal)	
Charles Stone	(?-22 April 1861)	?	
William Oswald Hodgkinson	(1835-1900)	Warwick, England	
Myles Archibald Lyons	(January 1825-19 August 1899)	?	Victoria Police constable
Alexander Macpherson	(1835-23 September 1896)	Newtonmore, Scotland	saddler

### Sepoys

Samla	(1841-?)	(India?)	Hindu sepoy
Dost Mahomet	(1842-?)	Ghazni	Muslim sepoy
Esau Khan	(1824-?)	Balochistan	Muslim sepoy
Baluch Khan	(1840-?)	Kanpur, India	Muslim sepoy
[Kiltu]	(1810-?)		(not employed on VEE)
[Bal Singh]	(1820-?)		(not employed on VEE)
[Tutta Khan]	(1829-?)		(not employed on VEE)
[Adgei (Khan)]	(1830-?)		(not employed on VEE)
[Son Brett]	(1830-?)		(not employed on VEE)

## APPENDIX

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### Hired Wagon Drivers

William Cole	(?-?)	?	Hired wagon driver
Alfred George Price	(1829-1904)	Wales	Hired wagon driver
M. O'Brien	(?-?)	?	Hired wagon driver
Frederick Morrison	(?-?)	?	Hired wagon driver

### Aboriginal guides

Benson (or Mr Benton)	(?-?)	?	Aboriginal guide
Dick (from Lake Paika)	(?-?)	?	Aboriginal guide
Martin	(?-?)	?	Aboriginal guide
Simon	(?-?)	?	Aboriginal guide
Watpipa	(?-?)	?	Aboriginal guide
Watpipa's nephew	(?-?)	?	Aboriginal guide
Dick (from the Darling)	(?-?)	Paaktanyi ?	Aboriginal guide
Mountain	(?-?)	Paaktanyi ?	Aboriginal guide
Peter	(?-?)	Paaktanyi ?	Aboriginal guide

plus several other un-named Aboriginal guides.

List of people who participated in relief expeditions:

#### **Howitt's Victorian Contingent Party, 1861**

Alfred William Howitt	(1830-1908)	Leader
William Brahe		2-i-C
Edwin James Welch	(1839-24 Sep 1916)	Surveyor
Alexander Aitkins	(c.1831-21 July 1921)	Storekeeper and in charge of camels
William Vining	(?-?)	
Dr. William F. [Massey] Wheeler	(c.1829-?)	Medical Officer
Weston Phillips	(?-?)	
N.H. Calcutt	(?-?)	
H.M. Sampson	(?-?)	
Sandy	(?-?)	Aboriginal guide
Frank	(?-?)	Aboriginal guide
(Pamamaroo Depot party)		
James Knowles	(?-?)	In charge of Pamamaroo Depot
William Williams	(1837-24 September 1888)	Wright's cook, Smith's replacement
John Smith		
Dost Mahomet		
Baluch Khan		

#### **Howitt's Victorian Exploration Party, 1862**

Alfred William Howitt		Leader
Edwin James Welch		
Weston Phillips		
Alexander Aitkins		
William Williams		
Dick		Aboriginal guide
Dr. James Patrick Murray	(?-?)	Surgeon
Charles Phillips	(?-?)	
Henry Burrell	(1841-11 April 1910)	
Henry Louis Galbraith	(?-28 January 1893)	
William O'Donnell	(?-?)	
George Tenniel	(?-?)	
Hugh McWilliams	(?-?)	Welch's replacement

#### **Walker's Victorian Relief Expedition**

Frederick Walker	(c.1820-1866)	Leader
Daniel McAllister	(?-?)	2-i-C
Richard Houghton	(?-?)	in charge of horses
John Flochfeldt (Horsfeldt)	(?-?)	in charge of stores
Arthur Moore	(?-?)	
Trooper Jemmy Coreau	(?-?)	Aboriginal guide
Trooper Jack	(?-?)	Aboriginal guide
Trooper Rodney	(?-?)	Aboriginal guide
Trooper Patrick (Paddy)	(?-?)	Aboriginal guide
Trooper Coreen Jemmy	(?-?)	Aboriginal guide
Trooper Jemmy Cargara	(?-?)	Aboriginal guide
Trooper Jingle	(?-?)	Aboriginal guide

**Landsborough's Queensland Relief Expedition**

(Expedition I: Albert River towards Central Mount Stuart):

William Landsborough	(1825-1886)	Commander
H.W.N. Campbell	(?-?)	Assistant Commander
Captain J.D. Allison	(?-?)	Assistant
Trooper Jemmy originally from Deniliquin, NSW.	(?-?)	Queensland Native Mounted Police trooper
Jimmy Fisherman	(?-?)	Aboriginal guide from the Brisbane region
Trooper Charlie	(?-?)	Queensland Native Mounted Police trooper

(Expedition II: Albert River to Melbourne):

William Landsborough		Leader
George Bourne	(c.1831-1891)	2-i-C
William Gleeson	(?-?)	groom, cook and former sailor
Trooper Jemmy Fisherman		
Jacky Brown	(?-?)	Aboriginal guide from the Wide Bay district
Wittin	(?-?)	Aboriginal guide

**McKinlay's South Australian Burke Relief Expedition**

John McKinlay	(1819-1872)	Leader
William Oswald Hodgkinson		2-i-C
Thomas Middleton	(?-?)	in charge of camels, promoted to 2-i-C
John Davis	(?-?)	in charge of camels
William Bell	(?-?)	in charge of horses
Paul Wylde	(?-?)	in charge of horses
Robert Poole	(?-?)	
Edward Palmer	(?-?)	bullock driver
James G. Kirby	(?-1893)	cook and shepherd
Peter	(?-?)	Aboriginal guide
Sambo	(?-?)	Aboriginal guide

**MARITIME PERSONEL*****S.S. Sir Charles Hotham***

Captain Ebenezer Wyse	(?-?)
Mr Ball	(?-?)
Engineer Joseph Milbourne Parry	(?-?)
Crew member	(?-?)
H.W.N. Campbell	

***S.S. Firefly***

Captain Thomas Kirby	(c.1829-10 March 1888)	
First Mate	(?-?)	
Second Mate	(?-?)	
Ship's Carpenter	(?-?)	
Cook	(?-?)	
Able seaman Muller	(?-?)	
William Gleeson		
Mr. Martin	(?-?)	supernumerary and son of the Firefly's owner
plus three or four Able-seamen		

***H.M.C.S. Victoria***

Commander William Henry Norman	(March 1812-12 December 1869)	
Lieutenant George Austin Woods	(?-c.1905)	
2nd Lieutenant Charles Cecil Gascoyne (sic: Gascoine?)	(?-?)	
Midshipman Mr Law	(?-?)	
Mate Mr. Hanfield	(?-?)	
Boatswain Mr Rowe	(?-?)	
Quarter Master Samuel Long	(?-?)	
Chief Petty Officer James Joseph Ovenden	(?-?)	Captain of the Foretop
Gunner James Frost	(?-1861)	accidental death at the Albert River
Dr. S. Patterson	(?-?)	Surgeon
Diedrich Henne	(1825-21 January 1913)	Botanist
Samuel Smith [?] Boy, 2nd class	(?-?)	
Bailey	(?-?)	
Desmore	(?-?)	
Frank Dunk	(?-?)	Able-bodied seaman
Griffiths	(?-?)	
Thomas Bungalene	(?-?)	Aboriginal sailor
Arthur Moore		
Mills	(?-?)	
Mason	(?-?)	
Secker	(?-?)	
Walters	(?-?)	
Wilson	(?-?)	
plus 19? other crew		

***S.S. Native Lass***

Captain Alexander Paton	(?-?)	
John Webster	(?-?)	Mate
Cook	(?-?)	
Philip George Pibert	(?-?)	Able-bodied seaman
plus 3? Able-bodied seamen		

***S.S. Gratia***

Captain John Paton	(?-?)	
Joseph S. Brown	(?-?)	Mate
2nd mate	(?-?)	carpenter
Cook	(?-?)	
plus six other Crew		



## Members of the Exploration Committee (1857-1875)

Acheson, Frederick CE.	
Bland, Rivett Henry.	(1811-1894)
Blandowski, William.	(1822-1878)
Bleasdale, Reverend Father Dr. John Ignatius.	(1822-1884)
Bonwick, James.	(1817-1906)
Cadell, Captain Francis.	(1822-1879)
Clarke, The Hon. Captain Andrew.	(1824-1902)
Dobree, Arthur.	
Eades, Dr. Richard.	(1809-1867)
Elliott, Sizar.	(1814-1901)
Embling, Dr. Thomas.	(1814-1893)
Farwell, Charles.	
Gillbee, Dr. William, MRCSE.	(1825-1885)
Haines, The Hon. Chief Secretary William Clark, MLA.	(1810-1866)
Hearn, Professor William Edward, MA, LL.D.	(1826-1888)
Higinbotham, George.	(1826-1892)
Hodgkinson, Clement.	(1818-1893)
Hodgson, The Hon. John Hodgson, MLC.	(1799-1860)
Hope, The Hon. Robert Culbertson, MLC.	(1812-1878)
Hough [G.S. or J.S.].	
Iffla, Dr. Solomon, JP, MD.	(1820-1887)
Irving, Professor Martin Howy, MA.	(1831-1912)
Knaggs, Dr. Robert, MRCSL.	
Knight, John George.	(1826-1892)
Ligar, Charles Whybrow.	(1811-1881)
Macadam, Dr. John, MD, FRSSA.	(1827-1865)
Mackenna, Dr. J William, MD.	
McCoy, Professor Frederick, FGS.	(1817-1899)
McGillivray, Dr. Paul Howard, AM.	(1834-1895)
McLean, Dr. David P, MRCSL.	
McMillan, Angus.	(1810-1865)
Morrison, Reverend Alexander.	(1829-1903)
Mueller, Baron Dr Ferdinand von, MD, PhD, FRGS.	(1825-1896)
Murphy, The Hon. Sir Francis, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.	(1809-1891)
Neumayer, Professor Georg Balthasar von.	1826-1909)
O'Shanassy, The Hon. Sir John, MLA.	1818-1883)
Pascoe, Lieutenant John Randall, JP.	
Rawlinson, Thomas E. Rawlinson, CE.	
Selwyn, Alfred Richard Cecil.	(1824-1902)
Shiel, The Very Reverend Louis St. Frances.	
Smith, Alexander Kennedy, CE. FRSSA.	(1824-1881)
Smith, James.	(1820-1910)
Stawell, Sir William Foster.	(1815-1889)
Turnbull, Dr. W M, MD.	
Watson, John.	
Wilkie, Dr. David Elliot, MD.	(1815-1885)
Wilson, Edward.	(1813-1878)
Wilson, Professor William Pakinson, MA.	(1826-1874)

## Biographies of the camels associated with the VEE

Camel #1: female, breed: Bikanari  
purchased: Bikaner December 1859  
died: on the road to Karachi, January 1860

Camel #2: male, breed: Khorasan  
purchased: Khanate of Kalat, January 1860  
died: Karachi compound, March 1860, possibly due to being ill-treated by the sepoy Herat Singh

Camel #3: young male, breed: Khorasan  
purchased: Khanate of Kalat, January 1860  
role: left behind at Royal Park, moved to Longerenong Station, Victorian Wimmera in September 1862.  
It may have gone on McIntyre's 1865 expedition, but its fate is unknown

Camel #4: 'Siva', female Egyptian  
purchased: Aden, October 1859  
role: purchased by Coppin in Melbourne November 1859, purchased by the RSV in July 1860, left behind at Royal Park, sent to Adelaide in August 1861 to be used by McKinlay's expedition. Was the most vicious camel on this expedition  
died: Siva was killed and eaten by McKinlay at Camp 46 on the Bowen River, Queensland on 30 July 1862

Camel #5: Siva's calf  
born: Royal Park 1860  
role: left behind at Royal Park, moved to Longerenong Station, Victorian Wimmera in September 1862.  
It may have gone on McIntyre's 1865 expedition, but its fate is unknown

Camel #6: 'Krishna', female Egyptian  
purchased: Aden, October 1859  
role: purchased by Coppin in Melbourne November 1859, purchased by the RSV in July 1860, left behind at Royal Park, sent to Adelaide in August 1861 to be used by McKinlay's expedition  
fate: Krishna was turned loose at McKinlay's Camp 9 on the Gilbert River, Queensland on 3 June 1862.  
Its fate from there is unknown

Camel #7: Krishna's calf  
born: Royal Park 1860  
role: left behind at Royal Park, moved to Longerenong Station, Victorian Wimmera in September 1862.  
It may have gone on McIntyre's 1865 expedition, but its fate is unknown

Camel #8: Landells' 'pet' camel (female Bikanari?)  
fate: left behind at Royal Park, then ?

Camel #9: 'Golah Singh', male, breed: Bikanari  
purchased: Bikaner December 1859  
role: taken on the VEE to the Gulf  
fate: abandoned on the morning of 30 January 1861 at Camp 108 on the Corella River, Queensland after getting down the steep river bank but unable to get up the other side. He was found again on the return journey at Camp 14R on 2 March 1861, but abandoned again on 6 March 1861 at Camp 18R when he was unable to keep up. His fate from there is unknown

## APPENDIX

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Camel #10: 'Landa', male, breed: Bikanari  
purchased: Bikaner December 1859  
role: taken on the VEE to the Gulf and returned to Cooper Creek  
fate: got bogged at Minkayi Waterhole, Cooper Creek, South Australia, 28 April 1861 and was shot the next day

Camel #11: 'Boocha', male, breed: Bikanari  
purchased: Bikaner December 1859  
role: taken on the VEE to the Gulf  
fate: killed and eaten at Camp 41R or 42R on 30 March 1861

Camel #12: 'Rajah', male, breed: Bikanari  
purchased: Bikaner December 1859  
role: taken by the VEE to the Gulf and returned to Cooper Creek where he was the last of Burke's camels to survive  
fate: shot by John King on 7 May 1861 at the Junction Camp on Cooper Creek

Camel #13: 'Gotch', male, breed: Bikanari  
purchased: Bikaner December 1859  
role: taken by the VEE to the Gulf and either abandoned at Camp 46R, the Plant Camp on 3 April 1861, or killed or abandoned at Camp 32R, Feasting Camp on 20 March 1861

Camel #14: male, breed: Bikanari  
purchased: Bikaner December 1859  
role: taken by the VEE to the Gulf  
fate: either abandoned at Camp 46R, the Plant Camp on 3 April 1861, or killed or abandoned at Camp 32R, Feasting Camp on 20 March 1861

Camel #15: 'Mr Coppin/Cassim', Egyptian  
purchased: Aden, October 1859  
role: purchased by Coppin in Melbourne November 1859, purchased by the RSV in July 1860, taken by the VEE to Cooper Creek where the camel escaped from Wills and McDonough in November 1860, recovered at Blanchetown, South Australia in July 1861 and used by McKinlay's expedition  
fate: turned loose by McKinlay on the Burdekin River, Queensland on 10 July 1862

Camel #16: 'Nano', male, breed: Khorasan  
purchased: Khanate of Kalat, January 1860  
role: taken by the VEE to Cooper Creek where the camel escaped from Wills and McDonough in November 1860, recovered at Blanchetown, South Australia in July 1861 and used by McKinlay's expedition  
fate: killed and eaten by McKinlay at Camp 19, Queensland on 16 June 1862

Camel #17: large grey male Egyptian camel, missing part of ear  
purchased: Aden, October 1859  
role: purchased by Coppin in Melbourne November 1859, purchased by the RSV in July 1860, taken by the VEE to Cooper Creek where the camel escaped from Wills and McDonough in November 1860  
fate: unknown, may have been one of the camels recovered in Queensland.

Camel #18: male, Egyptian  
purchased: Aden, October 1859  
role: purchased by Coppin in Melbourne November 1859, purchased by the RSV in July 1860, taken by the VEE north from Menindee  
fate: and abandoned on the Wilson River flood plain, Queensland between C60 and C61 on 18 November 1861

Camel #19: 'Beer', male, breed: Khorasan  
purchased: Khanate of Kalat, January 1860  
role: taken by the VEE to Cooper Creek and left with Brahe's Depot Party.  
fate: died of scab (at Poria Creek?, Queensland) on 1 June 1861 while returning to Menindee

Camel #20: 'Bell Sing', large, heavy, reddish-coloured, male pack-camel, breed: Khorasan  
purchased: Khanate of Kalat, January 1860  
role: taken by the VEE to Cooper Creek and left with Brahe's Depot Party  
fate: escaped/went missing at Koorliatto (Bulloo River, Queensland) 16 May 1861 while returning to Menindee.  
Bell Sing was not found by Brahe, but may have been the camel that was found at the Barwon River, New South Wales, August 1861

Camel #21: 'Burra', male, breed: Khorasan  
purchased: Khanate of Kalat, January 1860  
role: taken by the VEE to Cooper Creek and left with Brahe's Depot Party  
fate: got scab and was shot twelve miles north of Rat Point, Queensland on 4 June 1861 while returning to Menindee

Camel #22: 'Mustana', male, branded 'PV' off the cheek and 'VC' near the thigh, breed: Khorasan  
purchased: Khanate of Kalat, January 1860  
role: taken by the VEE to Cooper Creek and left with Brahe's Depot Party, returned to Menindee June 1861, then taken to the Cooper again in 1862 with Howitt  
fate: ran away to the north-east from Howitt's depot at Cullyamurra Waterhole, Cooper Creek, South Australia, 3 July 1862 and his fate is unknown

Camel #23: 'Simla', female, breed: Bikanari  
purchased: Bikaner December 1859  
role: taken by the VEE to Cooper Creek and left with Brahe's Depot Party, returned to Menindee June 1861, then taken back to the Cooper in 1861 with Howitt and returned to Menindee, then taken to the Cooper a third time with Howitt in 1862, then Clare, South Australia, then Longerenong Station, Victorian Wimmera, arriving January 1863, and then taken on McIntyre's 1865 expedition  
fate: unknown

Camel #24: 'Rowa', male, breed: Khorasan  
purchased: Khanate of Kalat, January 1860  
role: taken by the VEE to Cooper Creek and left with Brahe's Depot Party, returned to Menindee June 1861, taken to the Cooper again in 1862 by Howitt, then Clare, South Australia, then Longerenong Station, Victorian Wimmera, arriving January 1863, and then taken on McIntyre's 1865 expedition  
fate: unknown

Camel #25: 'Ridas', female, breed: Bikanari  
purchased: Bikaner December 1859  
role: taken by the VEE as far as Menindee, taken to the Bulloo River, Queensland with Wright's Supply Party in 1861, returned to Menindee, then taken to the Cooper in 1862 by Howitt, then Clare, South Australia, then Longerenong Station, Victorian Wimmera, arriving January 1863, and then taken on McIntyre's 1865 expedition  
fate: unknown

## APPENDIX

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Camel #26: 'Jambel', female, breed: Bikanari

purchased: Bikaner December 1859

role: taken by the VEE as far as Menindee, taken to Torowoto by Beckler to rescue Lyons and Macpherson, returned to Menindee, then taken to the Bulloo River, Queensland with Wright's Supply Party in 1861, returned to Menindee June 1861, then taken to the Cooper in 1861 with Howitt and returned to Menindee, then taken to the Cooper a second time with Howitt in 1862, then Clare, South Australia, then Longereng Station, Victorian Wimmera, arriving January 1863, and then taken on McIntyre's 1865 expedition

fate: unknown

Camel #27: 'Rangee' (Budjee/Budger), female, breed: Bikanari

purchased: Bikaner December 1859

role: taken by the VEE as far as Menindee, taken to the Bulloo River, Queensland with Wright's Supply Party in 1861, returned to Menindee, taken to the Cooper in 1861 with Howitt and returned to Menindee, then taken to the Cooper a second time with Howitt in 1862, then Clare, South Australia, then Longereng Station, Victorian Wimmera, arriving January 1863, and then taken on McIntyre's 1865 expedition

fate: unknown

Camel #28: 'Mochrani', male, breed: Mokrani

purchased: "above Multan", Punjab, January 1860

role: taken by the VEE as far as Menindee, taken to Torowoto by Beckler to rescue Lyons and Macpherson, returned to Menindee, then taken to the Bulloo River, Queensland with Wright's Supply Party in 1861, returned to Menindee June 1861, then taken to the Cooper in 1861 with Howitt and returned to Menindee, then taken to the Cooper a second time with Howitt in 1862, then Clare, South Australia, then Longereng Station, Victorian Wimmera, arriving January 1863, and then taken on McIntyre's 1865 expedition

fate: unknown

Camel #29: 'Carlo' (Karlos), female, breed: Bikanari

purchased: Bikaner December 1859

role: taken by the VEE as far as Menindee, taken to the Bulloo River, Queensland with Wright's Supply Party in 1861, returned to Menindee June 1861, then taken to Melbourne by Sampson in March 1862, then Longereng Station, Victorian Wimmera in September 1862

fate: unknown, may have died at Longereng in December 1864 or may have gone on McIntyre's 1865 expedition

Camel #30: 'Jibik' (Tschibik), (called Jube or Chubbe by Howitt) slender, pale coloured female,

breed: Bikanari

purchased: Bikaner December 1859

role: taken by the VEE as far as Menindee, taken to the Bulloo River, Queensland with Wright's Supply Party in 1861, returned to Menindee June 1861, then taken to the Cooper in 1861 with Howitt and returned to Menindee, then taken to the Cooper a second time with Howitt in 1862, then Clare, South Australia, then Longereng Station, Victorian Wimmera, arriving January 1863, and then taken on McIntyre's 1865 expedition

fate: unknown

Camel #31: 'Mutwala', male, breed: Khorasan

purchased: Khanate of Kalat, January 1860

role: taken by the VEE as far as Menindee, taken to Torowoto by Beckler to rescue Lyons and Macpherson, returned to Menindee, then taken to the Bulloo River, Queensland with Wright's Supply Party in 1861, returned to Menindee June 1861

fate: died at Menindee on 5 November 1861 under James Knowles care

Camel #32: 'Gobin', female, breed: Bikanari

purchased: Bikaner December 1859

role: taken by the VEE as far as Menindee, taken to the Bulloo River, Queensland with Wright's Supply Party in 1861, returned to Menindee June 1861, then taken to Melbourne by Sampson in March 1862, then Longerenong Station, Victorian Wimmera in September 1862

fate: unknown, may have died at Longerenong in December 1864 or may have gone on McIntyre's 1865 expedition

Camel #33: 'Nero', dominant male Khorasan, breed: Khorasan

purchased: Khanate of Kalat, January 1860

role: taken by the VEE as far as Menindee, taken to the Bulloo River, Queensland with Wright's Supply Party in 1861, returned to Menindee June 1861, mauled sepoy Dost Mahomet, then taken to Melbourne by Sampson in March 1862, then Longerenong Station, Victorian Wimmera in September 1862

fate: unknown, may have gone on McIntyre's 1865 expedition

Camel #34: 'Coppin 1' (Janglee), big male Egyptian

purchased: Aden, October 1859

role: taken by the VEE, but abandoned after he dislocated a shoulder at Bilbarka on the Darling in October 1860. The camel was repatriated with the expedition at Pamamaroo, taken to the Bulloo River, Queensland with Wright's Supply Party in 1861, returned to Menindee June 1861, then taken to the Cooper in 1861 with Howitt and returned to Menindee, then taken to the Cooper a second time with Howitt in 1862, then Clare, South Australia, then Longerenong Station, Victorian Wimmera, arriving January 1863

fate: Janglee arrived at Longerenong almost blind and died there on 10 February 1863

Camel #35: Carlo's calf, female

born: Carlo foaled at Pamamaroo at the end August/early September 1861

fate: the calf was taken to Melbourne by Sampson in March 1862, then Longerenong Station, Victorian Wimmera in September 1862

fate: unknown, may have gone on McIntyre's 1865 expedition

Camel #36: Gobin's calf, female

Gobin's female calf born at Pamamaroo, 14 October 1861

fate: the calf was taken to Melbourne by Sampson in March 1862, then Longerenong Station, Victorian Wimmera in September 1862

fate: unknown, may have gone on McIntyre's 1865 expedition

Camel #37: calf, female

A calf was born on Howitt's 1862 expedition at Strzelecki Creek in September 1862. Howitt shot the calf.

Camels #38 to #46: six calves were born at Longerenong between 1862-1865.

calf born 18 August 1863

calf born 15 September 1863

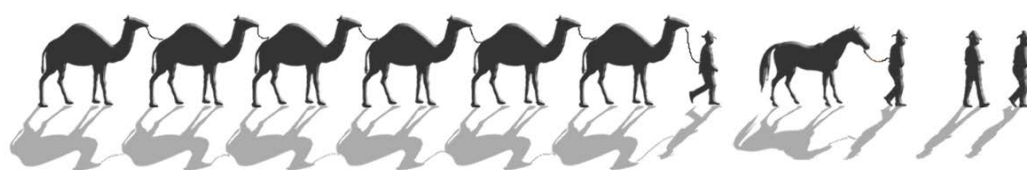
calf born 22 March 1864

4 young camels (two of which were named Carcoar and Taronga), were taken on McIntyre's 1865 expedition.



# INDEX

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## Index

The following terms are used frequently in this thesis and are therefore not included in the Index: 'Burke, Robert OHara'; 'Wills, William John'; 'Melbourne (city of)'; 'Victoria (colony of)'; 'camels'.

- Aboriginal people, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 26, 29, 30, 31, 38, 39, 42, 53, 55, 63, 67, 68, 72, 75, 82, 84, 87, 92, 93, 94, 99, 103, 108, 116, 197, 198, 229, 230, 232, 239, 245, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 328, 329, 330, 331, 333, 334, 335, 336, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 353, 354, 357, 358, 359, 360, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 373, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 390, 392, 393, 394, 396, 397, 400, 401, 404, 405, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 418, 423, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 472, 474, 475, 478, 479, 480, 505, 508, 515, 518, 519, 521
- Aboriginal guides, see: Benson; Billy Bombat; Brown, Harry; Boladree; Broughton; Bullingani; Bundle; Bungaree; Camboli; Colbee; Dick (#1 from Lake Paika); Dick (#2 from the Darling); Frank; Jackey Jackey; Jemmy Cagara; Keri Keri; Martin; Mountain; Munducki; Nadbuck; Peter; Piper; Sandy; Simon; Toonda; Topar; Trooper Rodney; Watpipa; Womma.
- Aboriginal languages:
- Barababaraba, 346, 409
- Diyari, 335, 336, 356, 379, 405
- Galali, 329
- Gkuthaarn, 382
- Gunditjmarra, 360
- Jaara clan, 346
- Kalali, 354, 408, 410
- Kalkatungu, 337, 358, 359
- Karenggapa, 329, 353, 354, 366, 408, 410, 475
- Karenguru, 337
- Kok-Kaper, 338
- Kukatj, 338, 340, 341, 360, 382
- Kulila, 475
- Kungkari, 332, 333
- Kunwinjku, 352
- Kurtjar, 338
- Kuthant, 338
- Malyangapa, 353, 364, 365
- Mayi-Kulan, 383
- Mayi-Thakurti, 292, 359
- Mithaka, 337, 357, 358, 409
- Muthimuthi, 349
- Ngamini, 337, 356, 357
- Ngarrindjeri, 379
- Ngemba, 326
- Ngiyampaa, 326
- Paakantyi, 327, 350, 362, 363, 479, 508
- Pantiykali, 329, 364, 365, 473
- Pirriya, 332
- Pitta-Pitta, 337
- Thankaali, 329
- Wadi Wadi, 346, 347
- Wangkamana, 337
- Wangkumara, 329, 330, 331, 336, 379, 405, 433, 509
- Wanyiwalku-Pantiykali, 353, 364, 365
- Weki Weki, 346
- Wemba Wemba, 346, 409
- Wiimpatja Parlku, 352
- Wiradjuri, 326, 327
- Yalarnnga, 337
- Yandruwandha, 17, 29, 53, 105, 223, 224, 227, 321, 330, 331, 335, 336, 355, 356, 360, 361, 362, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 379, 381, 384, 385, 386, 387, 392, 393, 395, 396, 397, 401, 403, 404, 405, 408, 409, 410, 411, 433, 445, 450, 509, 520
- Yawarrawarrka, 17, 29, 53, 205, 227, 330, 331, 335, 336, 355, 360, 379, 385, 392, 405, 408
- Yir Yoront, 338
- Yitha Yitha, 348, 349
- Yolngu, 352
- Aboriginal people, see: Baltie; Brolga 'Purralku'; Carrawaw (see also Karrawa); Danpidli Jim Marana; Frank; Karrawa (see also Carrawaw); Kerwin, Mangili Benny; King, Annie (see also Yellow Alice); King, Nanpika Cora; King, Peter of Nappamerri; Maggie of Tinga Tingana; Mara Mundu Jack Parker (known locally as Jack the Ripper); Marana, Jimmy (see Danpidli); Merty George; Mr Shirt; Murtee Johnny; Pitchery; Pokoro Thinnamarru; Turinyi; Walwallim, Williams, Billy; Wompi; Yellow Alice (see Annie King).
- Acclimatisation Society of Victoria, 273, 301
- Adelaide, 81, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 107, 112, 145, 148, 161, 162, 176, 187, 204, 216, 233, 251, 254, 255, 256, 284, 313, 423, 431, 449, 497
- Aitkens, Alexander, 27
- Albert River, 51, 146, 250, 289, 292, 421
- Alizie, Gholam Hussum Khan. Envoy to the Court of Cabul, 263
- Anaruka song, 363
- Andrews, Kevin Ian, 22, 27, 69, 444, 452, 464, 473, 485
- Anthropological Society of South Australia, 320
- Aplin, Christopher D'Oyly Hay, 483
- Ardlie, Captain John Martin, 251
- Arnold, Jim (see Narran Jim), 376
- Astronomical Society, London, 124
- Austin, Robert. Assistant Surveyor-General, 50
- Australian Association, London, 153
- Babbage, Benjamin Herschel, 12, 146, 161, 236, 256, 407, 516
- Baboon, Jimmy (Aboriginal stockman), 346
- Baines, Thomas, 110, 126
- Baker, John, 223, 447, 448
- Balranald, 26, 29, 182, 183, 184, 204, 236, 237, 238, 239, 275, 276, 308, 321, 347, 408, 436, 437, 441, 463, 464, 470, 472, 476, 518
- Baltie (Aboriginal elder), 384, 387
- Banks, Sir Joseph, 40, 85, 86, 124, 133
- Barcoo River, 99, 111, 141, 142, 143, 144, 148, 330, 332, 333, 337, 339
- Barkly, Sir Henry, Governor of Victoria, 47, 137, 148, 153, 154, 155, 237, 261, 291, 364, 481, 502
- Barrallier, Francis Louis, 326
- Barry, Justice Sir Redmond, 129, 481, 482

- 
- Basedow, Herbert, 387  
 Bathurst, Colonial Secretary Henry, 3rd Earl, 86, 87, 89  
 Batman, John, 95  
 Becker, Ludwig Phillip Heinrich, 26, 41, 46, 61, 62, 64, 65, 176, 184, 185, 197, 199, 218, 229, 232, 238, 254, 255, 277, 278, 281, 344, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 363, 365, 409, 410, 440, 441, 466, 470, 478  
 Beckler, Dr Hermann, 26, 41, 46, 47, 184, 185, 189, 197, 199, 218, 229, 230, 232, 237, 238, 271, 280, 283, 344, 345, 348, 349, 363, 364, 366, 367, 394, 408, 409, 410, 440, 441, 466, 470, 478  
 Belt, Anthony, 145  
 Belt, Thomas, 145  
 Bendigo, 179, 233, 275, 376, 440  
 Benson (Aboriginal guide), 348  
 Bergin, Thomas John, 9, 17, 30, 31, 48, 51, 61, 62, 65, 74, 75, 198, 287, 292, 293, 395, 396, 397, 402, 428, 430, 431, 432, 433, 438, 444, 484, 489  
 beriberi, 395, 396, 401, 402, 410  
 Bikaner, Rajasthan, 14, 263, 268, 305, 310, 517  
 Bilbarka, Camp 30, Darling River, 185, 186, 188, 237, 277, 280, 281, 310, 518  
 Billy Bombat (Aboriginal guide), 339  
 Bindon, Samuel Henry. Castlemaine County Court judge, 481, 482  
 Birch, Richard James Holwell. Government Secretary for Military and Foreign Department in Kolkata, 262  
 Birnie, Richard, 482  
 Birtles, Francis Edwin, 54, 55, 385, 386, 411, 423, 424  
 black-headed python (*Aspidites melanocephalus*), 297, 392  
 Blainey, Geoffrey Norman, 66, 399  
 Blanchen, Bernard Joseph, 444  
 Blandowski, William (Johann Wilhelm Theodor Ludwig von), 145  
 Bleasdale, Reverend Dr John Ignatius, 137, 151, 272  
 Bleasley, Mr, 336  
 Blunder Bay, 163, 164, 165, 170, 498  
 Bolan Pass, 264, 268, 288  
 Bonyhady, Tim, 9, 21, 30, 48, 63, 75, 132, 136, 144, 161, 246, 261, 282, 283, 367, 368, 373, 438, 493, 500, 506  
 Botanic and Zoological Gardens, Melbourne, 20, 255, 257, 270, 309, 468, 485  
 Bourke, Governor Sir Richard, 93, 94, 114, 250  
 Bowen, Contessa Diamantina Roma, 481  
 Bowman, Robert, 181, 186  
 Brahe, William, 12, 20, 21, 26, 29, 43, 46, 47, 49, 51, 56, 57, 59, 62, 75, 175, 204, 214, 216, 218, 223, 226, 227, 230, 232, 233, 238, 283, 284, 286, 299, 302, 307, 308, 313, 321, 352, 360, 361, 362, 368, 387, 397, 409, 410, 441, 446, 452, 520  
 Branigan, Sub-Inspector St John, 478  
 breast-plate, king-plate, gorget, 333, 364, 377, 379, 411  
 Breerily waterhole, Cooper Creek (site of Wills' death), 370, 374, 398  
 Brisbane, 97, 111, 340, 425  
 Brisbane, Governor Major-General Sir Thomas Makdougall, 89  
 British Archaeological Association, 124  
 British Association for the Advancement of Science, 129  
 Brolga 'Purralku' (Aboriginal elder), 387, 388  
 Brooks, Thomas, 181  
 Broughton (Aboriginal guide), 322  
 Brown, Harry (Aboriginal guide), 325  
 Browne, Surgeon John Harris, 106  
 Bruce, John Vans Agnew, 483, 484  
 Bullingani (Aboriginal guide), 379, 380  
 Bulloo River, 15, 29, 65, 175, 176, 198, 227, 229, 232, 233, 238, 290, 329, 353, 354, 365, 367, 408, 436, 437, 446, 474, 475, 479, 480, 507  
 Bundle (Aboriginal guide), 322  
 Bungaree (Aboriginal guide), 319  
 Burke River, 206, 213, 214, 297, 432, 485  
 Byerley, Frederick John, 468  
 Bynoe River, 293, 338, 421, 429, 489, 520  
 Cadell, Captain Francis, 153, 162, 181  
 Calvert, Albert Frederick, 49, 72  
 Camboli (Aboriginal guide), 331  
 camel:  
     Beer, 283, 299  
     Bell Singh, 299, 300  
     Boocha, 294, 297  
     Burra, 283, 299  
     disease 'founder', 61, 287  
     disease 'sarcoptic mange/scab', 284, 299  
     feral camels, 29, 246, 247, 251, 292, 299, 300, 301, 304, 313  
     Golah Singh, 213, 292, 296, 297, 300, 301  
     Harry, 251, 252, 309  
     Janglee, 279  
     Krishna, 300  
     Landa, 215, 218, 223, 298, 385, 458  
     Mochrani, 283  
     Mr Cassim, 287, 299  
     Mustana, 283, 300  
     Mutwala, 283  
     Nano, 287, 299  
     Nero, 283  
     Rajah, 215, 218, 223, 298  
     Rowa, 302  
     Simla, 302  
 camel breed, 14, 29, 30, 247, 252, 265, 270, 310  
     Bactrian (*Camelus bactrianus*), 262, 310, 517  
     Bikaneri, 14, 263, 264, 273, 283, 284, 286, 289, 290, 291, 300, 302, 304, 310, 311, 517, 519  
     Egyptian camel, 247, 270, 273, 279, 283, 286, 299, 304, 305, 310, 517  
     Khorasan, 264, 273, 283, 290, 291, 299, 300, 302, 304, 310, 517  
     Mekrani, 302, 304, 310, 517  
 camel handler, sepoy, see also: Khan, Baluch; Khan, Esau; Khan, Tuta; Mahomet, Dost; Samla; Singh, Herat; Sitberland.  
     Arab, 247, 250, 260, 270, 305  
     sepoy, 161, 238, 239, 247, 250, 263, 267, 272, 278, 281, 305, 306, 308, 310, 312  
 Camel Troop Carrying Company, 254  
 Camp 119, Bynoe River, 51, 69, 206, 207, 213, 293, 294, 296, 426, 429, 435, 488, 489  
 Canberra, 55, 424  
 Canning, Sir Charles. Governor-General of India, 260, 261, 262, 309  
 Caron, William, 126  
 Carrawaw (Aboriginal elder), see also Karrawa, 377  
 Carstenszoon, Jan, 84, 338  
 Carter, Paul, 10, 39, 40, 75, 477, 478, 518  
 Cassidy, James (newspaper reporter), 57  
 Castlemaine, 159, 162, 179, 372  
 Cathcart, Michael, 67, 296, 372, 405  
 Chambers, James, 159  
 Clark, Manning Charles Hope, 60, 91, 176, 246, 352, 428, 429, 430  
 Clarke, Captain Andrew, 129, 133, 134, 135, 136  
 Clarke, George 'The Barber', 92, 93

- 
- Clifford, Graeme, 352, 404, 417  
 Cloncurry River, 206, 213, 227, 311, 359, 383, 432, 437, 483  
 Clune, Francis (Frank) Patrick, 7, 55, 56, 57, 63, 75, 159, 204, 404, 423, 424, 425, 428, 429, 438, 489  
 Colles, Richard. Sheriff of Castlemaine, 481  
 Collier, Roger, 70, 435, 436, 437  
 Commission of Inquiry, 21, 43, 45, 46, 47, 49, 53, 59, 62, 75, 175, 214, 216, 238, 371, 394, 421, 422, 424, 442, 444, 447  
 Conn, W.G., 329  
 Conrick, Edward Gerald 'Ted', 58  
 Conrick, John Ware, 505  
 Cooper Creek, 5, 6, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 21, 22, 26, 29, 31, 41, 43, 54, 55, 57, 61, 64, 65, 67, 72, 99, 105, 112, 140, 145, 148, 155, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 170, 179, 187, 197, 198, 199, 204, 205, 207, 213, 214, 217, 218, 223, 224, 226, 227, 230, 232, 233, 236, 237, 238, 239, 245, 280, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 293, 298, 300, 301, 302, 308, 311, 312, 313, 320, 321, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 339, 354, 355, 360, 362, 364, 367, 368, 369, 370, 373, 374, 379, 386, 387, 391, 392, 397, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 410, 411, 412, 420, 422, 424, 426, 429, 431, 432, 433, 434, 436, 437, 441, 445, 446, 448, 449, 451, 452, 454, 458, 459, 461, 463, 464, 466, 470, 474, 475, 476, 477, 480, 481, 482, 497, 498, 500, 504, 507, 509, 515, 517, 518, 519, 520  
 Coppin, George Selth, 270, 286, 304, 310  
 Corella Creek, 292, 359, 391, 392, 408  
 Cork, Richard, 22, 175, 443, 444, 464, 485  
 Corke, David, 22, 70, 444  
 Cremorne Gardens Menagerie, Richmond, 270, 271  
 Cunningham, Allan, 90, 92, 96  
 Cunningham, Richard, 93, 126  
 Curlewis, G T, 329  
 Danpidli, Jim Marana, 387, 388  
 Darling River, 55, 91, 93, 102, 104, 112, 114, 140, 141, 143, 144, 153, 162, 181, 182, 184, 185, 187, 188, 189, 197, 214, 223, 227, 229, 237, 238, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 282, 310, 311, 321, 328, 330, 348, 349, 355, 362, 407, 422, 430, 447, 470, 478, 497, 518, 519  
 Darling, Governor Sir Charles Henry, 49  
 Darling, Governor Sir Ralph, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 104, 249  
 Davis, John, 74  
 De Little Range, 206, 291, 390, 482  
 de Rinzy, M.S., 329, 336  
 Denison, Governor William, 111, 125  
 Depot Camp 63, Cooper Creek, 199, 285, 286, 287, 288, 354, 441, 470, 518  
 Depot Camp 65, Cooper Creek, 26, 43, 46, 56, 57, 175, 199, 204, 207, 212, 213, 218, 223, 224, 226, 227, 232, 233, 297, 298, 299, 355, 360, 361, 368, 370, 372, 384, 391, 393, 397, 404, 407, 409, 420, 424, 444, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 459, 505, 508  
 Diamantina River, 15, 31, 205, 290, 292, 311, 356, 357, 390, 408, 422, 432, 434, 437, 477, 480, 481, 492, 493, 494, 499, 509, 518, 519  
 Dick (Aboriginal guide from Lake Paika), 348  
 Dick (Aboriginal guide), 229, 230, 350, 353, 362, 363, 365, 410  
 Dig Tree, see Depot Camp 65, Cooper Creek, 57, 58, 199, 218, 227, 384, 433, 498  
 Dost Muhammad Khan. Emir of Cabul, 262, 263  
 Dowse, John, 336  
 Drakeford, John, 306, 308  
 Duffy, Charles Gavan, 468  
 dysentery, 214, 232, 297, 392, 394  
 Earl, John W., 395, 396, 402  
 East India Company (Honourable British East India Co.), 248, 260, 279  
 Eden, Charles Henry, 48  
 Edmond, Martin, 65, 428  
 Elder, Sir Thomas, 313  
 Ellery, Robert Lewis. Victorian government astronomer, 483  
 Elsey, Joseph, 110, 126  
 Embling, Dr Thomas, 150, 151, 153, 165, 254, 255, 256, 258, 259, 260, 269, 270, 272, 273, 309, 310, 516, 517  
 Esam, Arthur, 424  
 Ethnological Society, London, 124  
 Evans, George William, 12, 85, 86, 87, 89, 322  
 Expedition hired wagon drivers, see: Cole, William, and Price, Alfred George.  
 Expedition members, see: Bowman, Robert; Brahe, William; Brooks, Thomas; Cowen, Owen; Creber, Henry; Drakeford, John; Ferguson, Charles Darius; Fletcher, Robert; Gray, Charley; Hodgkinson, William Oswald; King, John; Lane, James Robert; Langan, Patrick; Lyons, Mounted Police Trooper Myles A.; Macpherson, Alexander; McDonough, Thomas Francis; McIlwaine, James; Patten, William; Prolongeau, Jean; Purcell, William.  
 Expedition officers, see: Becker, Ludwig Phillip Heinrich; Beckler, Dr Hermann; Brahe, William; Landells, George James.  
 Expedition sepoy, see: Khan, Baluch; Khan, Esau; Khan, Tuta; Mahomet, Dost; Samla; Singh, Herat.  
 Exploration Committee of the Royal Society of Victoria, 5, 11, 14, 18, 20, 22, 28, 29, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 53, 56, 59, 62, 65, 75, 134, 136, 137, 138, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 153, 156, 157, 159, 160, 161, 162, 165, 166, 167, 168, 170, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 183, 184, 197, 216, 226, 229, 230, 233, 236, 237, 238, 246, 250, 257, 260, 261, 264, 267, 269, 271, 272, 276, 278, 280, 282, 283, 284, 285, 290, 301, 306, 309, 310, 333, 343, 344, 363, 371, 408, 421, 422, 430, 446, 448, 470, 471, 473, 481, 488, 496, 497, 498, 500, 506, 515, 516, 517  
 Exploration Fund Raising Committee, 14, 44, 147, 150, 157, 159, 160, 177, 257, 260  
 Eyre Creek, 105, 204, 239, 288, 292, 434, 480, 492, 493, 519  
 Eyre, Edward John, 12, 29, 96, 101, 102, 103, 104, 108, 110, 112, 116, 139, 309, 320, 322, 324, 331, 477, 496, 497, 499, 516  
 Favenc, Ernest, 50, 51, 87, 103, 204, 407, 445, 507  
 Fenner, Dr Charles Albert Edward, 58  
 Ferguson, Charles Darius, 61, 183, 184, 238  
 Finke, William, 159  
 Fitchett, Reverend William Henry, 53  
 Fitzpatrick, Kathleen Elizabeth, 9, 38, 59, 63, 438, 506  
 Fitzroy, Governor Charles, 99, 332  
 Fitzsimons, Peter, 68  
 Flagstaff Hill Magnetic Observatory, Melbourne, 20, 432  
 Flannery, Tim, 40  
 Flinders River, 51, 294, 311, 338, 339, 382, 392, 421, 488, 490  
 Flinders, Captain Matthew, 40, 86, 90, 92, 103, 319, 338, 477  
 Flood, Josephine, 435, 437  
 Flood, Robert, 110  
 Ford Brothers Co., Robert D. Ford, 290  
 Fort Wellington, 248  
 Foster, Police Superintendent Henry, 180, 482

- 
- Frank (Aboriginal elder), 359  
 Frank (Aboriginal guide), 379  
 Franklin, Lieutenant-Governor Sir John, 125, 139  
 Frome, Edward Charles, 103, 104  
 Furphy, Joseph (Tom Collins), 52, 61  
 Gawler, Governor George, 101, 102, 103, 250  
 Geological Society of London, 124  
 Geological Society of Victoria, 128  
 Gibbons, William Sydney, 129  
 Gilbert River, 299, 300  
 Gilbert, John, 125, 126, 338  
 Gilbertson, Reverend James, 421  
 Giles, William Ernest Powell, 51, 313, 329, 407  
 Gillbee, Dr. William, 137  
 Gipps, Governor George, 94, 95, 96, 114  
 Gosse, William Christie, 313, 407  
 Government:  
     New South Wales, 96, 147, 153  
     South Australia, 159, 254, 256  
     Victoria, 14, 43, 44, 147, 148, 150, 152, 160, 165, 166,  
     168, 177, 254, 256, 260, 261, 269, 270, 271, 302, 309,  
     517  
     Westminster, 89, 92, 93, 107, 114, 116, 126, 153, 249,  
     517  
 Gray, Charley, 9, 54, 69, 175, 205, 207, 212, 213, 214,  
 215, 216, 217, 226, 289, 313, 480, 482, 519  
 Gregory, Augustus Charles, 12, 14, 15, 29, 51, 105, 108,  
 110, 111, 112, 126, 136, 137, 139, 142, 143, 146, 147,  
 148, 149, 155, 156, 157, 161, 162, 165, 168, 180, 187,  
 236, 238, 255, 256, 309, 320, 321, 324, 330, 333, 334,  
 336, 338, 340, 343, 369, 386, 407, 420, 430, 436, 447,  
 448, 449, 452, 454, 458, 459, 461, 475, 497, 507, 516,  
 517, 519, 520  
 Grey Range, 15, 140, 198, 227, 229, 238, 321, 354, 408,  
 447, 475, 480, 518, 520  
 Grey, Earl Henry George. Under Secretary for the  
 Colonies, 107  
 Grey, Governor George, 10, 40, 101, 104, 116, 126, 133,  
 323  
 Grimm, Reverend George, 49  
 Gulf of Carpentaria, 5, 8, 14, 18, 21, 22, 26, 29, 41, 46,  
 49, 51, 53, 60, 61, 69, 73, 84, 91, 98, 99, 111, 113, 125,  
 145, 153, 154, 161, 162, 179, 185, 187, 204, 207, 212,  
 215, 226, 227, 230, 236, 238, 239, 245, 250, 254, 283,  
 284, 287, 289, 290, 292, 293, 294, 299, 300, 302, 303,  
 311, 312, 313, 319, 320, 321, 328, 333, 337, 338, 339,  
 341, 343, 345, 359, 360, 368, 382, 385, 386, 391, 392,  
 408, 409, 417, 420, 422, 423, 424, 429, 431, 433, 434,  
 436, 438, 449, 463, 464, 470, 477, 480, 482, 485, 488,  
 489, 492, 493, 500, 508, 509, 515, 518, 519, 520, 521  
 Gummow, Harriet, 346  
 Hack, Stephen, 330, 335  
 Haines, Chief Secretary William, 138, 147, 148  
 Harnell, Jim (see Narran Jim), 376  
 Hartog, Dirk, 84  
 Haverfield, Robert Ross, 329  
 Havers, Nigel, 62  
 Hayes, Gerard, 9  
 Heales, Chief Secretary Richard, 43  
 Hercus, Luise Anna, 348, 349  
 Hiddins, Les (Bush Tucker Man), 63, 356, 406  
 Hillan, David Norman, 22, 444, 489  
 Hobson's Bay, 161, 267  
 Hodgkinson, William Oswald, 27, 74, 180, 186, 229, 230,  
 231, 237, 365, 410, 484, 485, 486  
 Holloway, Lucy, 478  
 Horrocks, John Ainsworth, 252, 309  
 horse:  
     Billy, 205, 207, 215, 289, 294, 313, 505  
 Hotham, Lieutenant-Governor Sir Charles, 134  
 Hovell, William Hilton, 89, 96  
 Howitt, Alfred William, 12, 22, 27, 31, 57, 61, 72, 73, 105,  
 214, 217, 224, 233, 284, 285, 299, 301, 302, 313, 356,  
 377, 379, 380, 381, 384, 386, 401, 404, 407, 421, 441,  
 442, 446, 447, 449, 450, 506, 520  
 Hume, Hamilton, 89, 96  
 Hutchinson, Dr John, 179  
 inland sea, 28, 87, 90, 91, 92, 100, 103, 104, 105, 107,  
 108, 112, 113, 126, 139, 516  
 Jackey Jackey (Aboriginal guide), 332  
 Jackson, Andrew, 44, 45, 47  
 James, Hugh R. Commissioner of Peshawar, 263  
 Janszoon Willem, 84, 338  
 Jemmy Cargara (Aboriginal guide), 382, 383  
 Johnston, Captain George, 281  
 Kadhibaerri, see Lake Massacre, 69, 216, 335, 336, 379  
 Karachi, Sindh, 247, 264, 266, 268, 288, 305, 306, 310,  
 313  
 Karrawa (Aboriginal elder), see Carrawaw, 375  
 Kennedy, Edmund Besley Court, 12, 50, 99, 111, 112,  
 113, 116, 126, 139, 161, 330, 332, 339, 407, 497, 516,  
 517  
 Keri Keri (Aboriginal guide), 380  
 Kershaw, Mr [John], 281  
 Kerwin, Dale, 319  
 Kerwin, Mangili Benny, 387, 401  
 Khan, Baluch (sepoy), 229, 230, 233, 284, 301, 303, 308,  
 364, 519  
 Khan, Esau (sepoy), 181, 301, 308  
 Khan, Tuta (sepoy), 306  
 Khanate of Kalat, 14, 264, 268, 310, 517  
 Kidman, Sir Sidney, 57  
 Kinchega station, Darling River, 188, 189, 197, 281, 311  
 Kindur river, 92, 93, 96, 100  
 King George Sound, 102, 154, 248  
 King, Annie, 375, 388  
 King, John, 17, 22, 26, 29, 31, 49, 51, 55, 61, 64, 67, 69,  
 72, 73, 175, 176, 204, 205, 207, 212, 213, 214, 215,  
 216, 217, 218, 223, 224, 226, 227, 281, 283, 289, 293,  
 298, 306, 308, 311, 321, 355, 357, 358, 359, 367, 368,  
 369, 370, 371, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 379, 380, 383,  
 385, 386, 388, 389, 391, 392, 393, 401, 404, 405, 410,  
 411, 412, 421, 424, 426, 442, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448,  
 449, 450, 459, 460, 480, 482, 488, 493, 494, 508, 519  
 King, Nanpika (Cora), 375  
 King, Peter of Nappamerri, 375  
 Kini-papa, see Cooper Creek, 105, 354  
 Knowles, James, 285  
 Koorliatto Creek, 231, 232, 233, 299, 365, 367  
 Kukirrk cave, Scropes Range, 351, 363, 390, 479  
 kupara / reciprocity, 369, 520  
 Kyte, Ambrose, 56, 63, 149, 157, 159, 160, 256, 260, 516  
 La Trobe, Governor Charles Joseph, 128  
 Lake Blanche, 112, 451, 452  
 Lake Callabonna, 112, 452  
 Lake Eyre, 99, 105, 381  
 Lake Hope, 313, 330, 335  
 Lake Massacre, 70, 379, 426  
 Lake Paika, 183, 348, 408, 475  
 Lake Torrens, 107, 252, 256, 342, 454  
 Landells, Elizabeth R., 282  
 Landells, George James, 14, 29, 45, 46, 47, 53, 56, 61,  
 178, 183, 184, 185, 186, 188, 189, 197, 237, 238, 245,  
 246, 247, 260, 261, 262, 264, 265, 266, 267, 269, 271,

- 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 288, 304, 305, 306, 308, 309, 310, 311, 350, 517, 518
- Landells-Keating, Margaret Isabella Morris, 216
- Landsborough, William, 12, 31, 73, 300, 311, 382, 407, 481, 488, 504, 506
- Lane, James Robert, 181
- Lang, Reverend John Dunmore, 153
- Langan, Patrick, 184
- Lawless, Edward, Third Baron Cloncurry, 207, 483
- Leahy, Frank J., 66, 67, 444
- Leichhardt, Friedrich Wilhelm Ludwig, 10, 12, 41, 96, 97, 98, 100, 111, 112, 116, 125, 126, 134, 136, 139, 147, 150, 158, 161, 167, 169, 180, 238, 251, 255, 309, 320, 322, 324, 325, 338, 339, 340, 477, 516
- Lewis, Darrell, 10
- Ligar, Charles Whybrow. Victorian Surveyor-General, 133, 162, 442, 481, 482
- Lindesay, Sir Patrick. Acting Governor of New South Wales, 92, 93
- Linnean Society, London, 124
- Lohmeier, Julius (mechaniker, Hamburg), 469
- Longstaff, Sir John Campbell, 57, 461, 508
- Lyons, Mounted Police Trooper Myles A., 12, 229, 230, 363, 365, 390, 408, 441, 481
- Macadam, Dr John, 46, 137, 139, 161, 226, 422
- MacDonnell, Governor Sir Richard Graves, 112, 256
- Macfarland & Co, Patrick & Robert, 290
- Macintyre, Stuart, 81
- Macpherson, Alexander, 12, 229, 230, 363, 365, 390, 408, 441
- Macquarie, Governor Lachlan, 85, 86, 87, 89, 90
- Maddern, John, 381, 386, 424
- Maggie of Tinga Tingana (Aboriginal elder), 388
- Mahomet, Dost (sepoy), 226, 233, 283, 284, 287, 307, 308, 312, 360, 480, 519
- Mallee Bert, see World, Albert, 347
- Mara Mundu Jack Parker (known locally as Jack the Ripper), 389
- Marana, Jimmy, see Danpidli, 387
- Martin (Aboriginal guide), 348
- Matheson, Donald, 178
- Matthews, Julia, 425
- McCleary, Barry V., 395, 396, 402
- McCoy, Professor Sir Frederick. Government Palaeontologist, 131, 133, 162, 167
- McCulloch, James, Chief Secretary of Victoria, 44, 302
- McDonald, Don, 335
- McDonough, Thomas Francis, 46, 198, 218, 226, 233, 287, 360, 480
- McGillivray, George, 22, 422
- McGowan, Samuel Walker. Superintendent of Telegraphs, 482
- McGregor, Peter, 197
- McIlwaine, James, 184
- McIntyre, Donald, 303
- McIntyre, Duncan, 12, 302, 313, 407
- McIver, George, 373
- McKinlay, John, 12, 31, 69, 73, 216, 299, 300, 301, 313, 335, 379, 380, 381, 407, 481, 488, 506
- McLaren, Glen, 10, 30, 41, 42, 75, 81, 86, 87, 113, 320, 322, 323, 324, 326, 341, 407, 408, 518, 519
- McLaren, Ian Francis, 59
- McMillan, Angus, 162
- Meehan, James, 89
- Menindee, 8, 20, 26, 45, 46, 56, 61, 65, 181, 187, 188, 189, 197, 198, 199, 204, 218, 226, 227, 229, 232, 236, 237, 238, 278, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 287, 289, 290, 299, 302, 308, 311, 328, 329, 350, 353, 354, 362, 364, 387, 408, 410, 429, 431, 445, 446, 447, 448, 461, 472, 479, 480, 515, 518
- Merty George (Aboriginal elder), 388
- Mitchell, Major Thomas Livingstone, 10, 12, 29, 39, 40, 50, 92, 93, 94, 96, 98, 99, 100, 103, 104, 108, 112, 114, 116, 126, 161, 180, 236, 309, 311, 320, 321, 323, 326, 327, 332, 338, 344, 407, 477, 497, 499, 515, 517, 521
- Moerlin, Charles (Carl), 482
- Montgomery, Robert. Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, 263
- Moorehead, Alan McCrae, 6, 7, 59, 61, 65, 352, 404, 417, 428, 430, 438, 489
- Moreton Bay, 81, 88, 96, 97, 98, 142, 143, 148, 256
- Morrison, George Ernest 'Peking' (Chinese Morrison), 422, 423, 424
- Morton, William Lockhart, 50, 214, 377, 430
- Mount Hopeless, 8, 15, 22, 26, 29, 102, 187, 223, 238, 298, 368, 369, 370, 393, 417, 445, 447, 448, 449, 451, 454, 459, 461, 507, 520
- Mountain (Aboriginal guide), 350, 353, 362, 365, 410
- Mr Shirt (Aboriginal person), 366, 367
- Mueller, Ferdinand Jacob Heinrich. Victorian Government Botanist, 110, 126, 131, 133, 136, 137, 139, 140, 141, 143, 144, 146, 148, 151, 155, 156, 157, 161, 163, 165, 167, 168, 255, 257, 270, 271, 273, 301, 309, 310, 343, 408, 421, 442, 448, 481, 497, 516, 517
- Multan, Punjab, 14, 268
- Mulvaney, Derek John, 38, 436, 437
- Munducki (Aboriginal guide), 331
- Murchison, Roderick Impey, 125, 133
- Murgatroyd, Sarah, 7, 65, 66, 159, 257, 352, 397, 402, 404, 406, 428, 433, 434, 435, 438, 445, 446, 477, 484, 489, 492, 507
- Murphy, Sir Francis. Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, 138, 215
- Murray River, 93, 102, 143, 153, 162, 180, 181, 182, 278, 280, 326, 330, 331, 355, 440, 464, 470, 496
- Murray, Captain Virginus. Ovens District Goldfields Warden, 483
- Murray, Colonial Secretary Sir George, 91, 92
- Murray, Dr James Patrick, 302
- Murrumbidgee River, 90, 91, 182, 276, 330
- mussels, fresh-water (*Vesunio* spp.), 223, 364, 377, 392, 401
- Mutawintji, 351, 352, 429, 479
- Nadbuck (Aboriginal guide), 327, 331
- nardoo, see ngardu (*Marsilea drummondii*), 389, 390, 393, 395, 396, 398, 400, 402, 404
- Narran Jim, (also known as Jim Arnold and Jim Harnell), 376
- Neumayer, Georg. Government Meteorologist, 131, 164, 167, 181, 238, 349, 421, 431, 432, 441, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 498, 504, 518
- ngardu (*Marsilea drummondii*), 13, 15, 26, 29, 75, 223, 224, 321, 364, 368, 369, 370, 372, 374, 375, 379, 380, 390, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 401, 402, 404, 405, 411, 520
- Nicholson, William, Chief Secretary of Victoria, 158, 162, 166, 270, 271, 481, 482
- Nolan, Sir Sidney, 59, 60, 417
- Norman, Commander William Henry, 12, 31, 488, 490, 506
- Orkney, James, 31, 72
- O'Shanassy, Chief Secretary John, 138, 148, 150, 151, 160, 256, 260, 261, 267, 309, 310, 481

- 
- Oxley, John, 12, 87, 88, 89, 90, 92, 93, 124, 477  
 padlu, Bauhinia (*Lysiphyllum gilvum*), 391  
 Paine, Thomas, 328  
 Pamamaroo Depot Camp, 199, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 301, 363, 408  
 Parker, Ferdinand Lucas, 58  
 Paterson, Aaron, 375  
 Patten, William, 46, 218, 226, 227, 233, 360, 480  
 Peach, Bill, 10  
 Pearson, Sydney Evan, 358  
 Peshawar, Punjab, 61, 247, 265, 310  
 Peter (Aboriginal guide), 161, 230, 363, 364, 365, 387  
 pheasant coucal (*Centropus phasianinus*), 297, 392  
 Phelps, John Leckie, 279  
 Phillip, Governor Arthur, 81, 84, 322  
 Phillips brothers, Henry Weston, George and G.M., 251  
 Phillips, George, 51  
 Philosophical Institute of Victoria, 28, 47, 123, 130, 134, 135, 137, 138, 141, 143, 144, 145, 147, 150, 153, 154, 155, 157, 159, 160, 254, 255, 256, 257, 343, 516  
 Philosophical Society of Victoria, 123, 129, 130, 132, 133, 134, 167, 516  
 Pitchery (Aboriginal person), 370, 373, 412  
 pituri (*Duboisia hopwoodii*), 369, 370, 391  
 Plague rats (*Rattus villosissimus*), 199, 223, 231, 353, 357, 364, 369, 370, 392  
 Plains of Promise, 139, 250  
 Plant Camp C46R, 22, 61, 70, 175, 215, 218, 297, 443, 459  
 Pokoro Thinnamaru (Aboriginal person), 370  
 Poole, James, 105, 327  
 Poria Creek, 198, 236, 284  
 Port Augusta, 103, 162, 165, 170  
 Port Curtis, 103, 136, 140, 141, 143  
 Port Essington, 96, 97, 98, 99  
 Port Phillip, 89, 101, 123  
 Port Phillip Association, 95  
 portulac (*Portulaca oleracea*), 391  
 Prolongeau, Jean, 179, 181  
 Purcell, William, 232  
 Pyke, William Thomas, 48  
 Randall, F.H., 335  
 Randell, Captain William Richard, 153, 328  
 Relief expeditions members, see: Aitkens, Alexander; Davis, John; Hodgkinson, William Oswald; Howitt, Alfred William; Knowles, James; Landsborough, William; McKinlay, John; Middleton, Thomas; Murray, Dr James Patrick; Norman, Commander William Henry; Sampson, H M; Smith, John; Stone, Charles; Walker, Frederick; Welch, Edwin James; Wheeler, Dr William Massey; Wright, William. Reynolds, Henry, 10, 39, 319, 322, 323, 325, 436, 518  
 Rowe, Dr John Pearson, 346  
 Rowe, Edwin, 330, 335  
 Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (Queensland Branch), 51, 69  
 Royal Geographical Society of London, 94, 98, 103, 107, 110, 111, 115, 116, 124, 125, 133, 167, 246, 504, 516  
 Royal Geographical Society of Paris, 98  
 Royal Historical Society of Victoria, 59, 66  
 Royal Park, Melbourne, 162, 169, 178, 236, 238, 269, 272, 273, 274, 281, 291, 301, 407, 422, 464, 515  
 Royal Society of London, 124, 125, 129, 133, 167  
 Royal Society of Van Dieman's Land, 125  
 Royal Society of Victoria, 5, 6, 18, 21, 43, 44, 46, 47, 58, 59, 62, 63, 64, 66, 67, 75, 123, 130, 151, 153, 165, 166, 167, 177, 246, 257, 306, 309, 310, 364, 481, 488, 516  
 rum, 56, 186, 277, 279, 280, 281, 311  
 Ryan, Simon, 10, 40, 115, 324, 477  
 Samla (sepoy), 178, 308  
 Sandy (Aboriginal guide), 379, 383  
 Scott, Ernest, 53  
 Scratchley, Captain Peter Henry, 481, 483  
 Scropes Range, 197, 229, 363  
 scurvy, 56, 105, 107, 116, 183, 186, 227, 279, 311, 394  
 Selwyn Range, 206, 213, 292, 358, 359, 432, 464, 482  
 Selwyn, Alfred Richard Cecil. Government Geologist, 65, 128, 131, 133, 164, 167, 482  
 sepoy, see camel handler, 161, 238, 239, 247, 250, 263, 267, 272, 278, 281, 306, 308, 310, 312  
 Simon (Aboriginal guide), 348  
 Simpson Desert, 90, 106, 309, 337, 434, 496  
 Sitberland (sepoy), 303  
 Smith, James, 44, 442  
 Smith, John, 364, 367, 410  
 Smith-Stanley, Lord Edward Geoffrey. Colonial Secretary, 96, 104  
 Spencer Gulf, 101, 104, 112  
 Standish Range, 206, 292, 482, 483  
 Standish, Frederick. Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, 482  
 Stanley, Captain Owen, R.N., 99  
 Stawell, William Foster. Chief Justice of Victoria, 58, 139, 165, 226, 257, 422, 481  
 Stokes Range, 490, 491  
 Stokes, Commander John Lort, 110, 250, 338, 509  
 Stone, Charles, 232, 410  
 Strzelecki Creek, 15, 31, 105, 112, 155, 187, 223, 334, 337, 373, 386, 388, 405, 420, 422, 447, 450, 451, 452, 454, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 507, 520  
 Strzelecki Desert, 5, 26, 29, 31, 205, 223, 287, 298, 321, 369, 454, 461, 498, 499, 500, 506  
 Stuart, John McDouall, 12, 29, 31, 61, 113, 114, 159, 161, 165, 176, 187, 197, 204, 226, 229, 236, 239, 284, 311, 320, 321, 342, 343, 407, 431, 483, 502, 509, 519  
 Stuckey, Robert, 335  
 Stuckey, Samuel, 313, 330, 335  
 Sturt Stony Desert, 31, 106, 204, 205, 215, 216, 236, 289, 290, 298, 309, 311, 337, 355, 390, 408, 434, 436, 459, 492, 496, 498, 499, 500, 502, 519  
 Sturt, Captain Charles Napier, 10, 12, 15, 29, 40, 41, 50, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 96, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 112, 113, 114, 116, 126, 133, 139, 142, 145, 161, 180, 236, 238, 250, 256, 309, 311, 320, 321, 322, 324, 326, 330, 331, 336, 337, 342, 344, 407, 429, 430, 436, 437, 452, 454, 458, 459, 460, 475, 476, 477, 480, 496, 497, 499, 502, 506, 509, 515, 516, 517, 518, 521  
 Summers, Charles, 49, 376  
 Swan Hill, 176, 178, 180, 182, 216, 236, 237, 274, 275, 276, 278, 308, 346, 408, 424, 469, 470, 518  
 Sydney, 41, 55, 73, 81, 84, 86, 89, 91, 93, 94, 96, 97, 99, 101, 111, 147, 251, 332, 395, 423, 424  
 Talbott, Henry, 182  
 Tangey, Chris, 22, 71, 297, 443, 444  
 Tarcoola station, Darling River, 185, 186, 187, 236, 279, 311, 408  
 Tasmanian Society of Natural History, 125  
 Tenison-Woods, Reverend Julian Edmund, 47, 49, 72, 265, 488  
 Thaaklatjita cave, 352

- 
- thiaminase, 395, 397, 400, 401  
 thiamine, 215, 395, 401  
 Thompson River, 111, 141, 148, 330, 333  
 Thompson, Jack, 62  
 Thomson, James Park, 51  
 Throsby, Charles, 89, 322  
 Tipping, Marjorie, 62, 63, 176, 344, 349, 438  
 Toonda (Aboriginal guide), 331  
 Topar (Aboriginal guide), 331  
 Torowoto Swamp, 198, 229, 230, 236, 237, 350, 353, 362, 364, 365, 390, 410, 429, 474, 479, 515  
 Towner, Alfred Cory, 22, 58, 426, 427, 429, 432, 444, 476  
 Trooper Rodney, 382  
 Tropic of Capricorn, 99, 102, 107, 136, 142, 206, 390, 481, 494, 498, 500  
 Turinyi (Aboriginal woman), 375  
 Turner, Henry Gyles, 53  
 Turner, William. Ovens Goldfields Resident Warden, 481, 483  
 van Colster, Willem Joosten (or Coolsteerd), 338  
 Van Diemen's Land Scientific Society, 125  
 Varndell, Arthur, 214  
 Vessel:  
     H.M.C.S. *Victoria*, 12, 31  
     P.S. *Albury*, 281, 328  
     P.S. *Gemini*, 328  
     P.S. *Moolgevanke*, 187, 197, 281  
     R.M.S.S. *Madras*, 45  
     R.M.S.S. *Malta*, 269  
     R.M.S.S. *Northam*, 45  
     S.S. *Apoline*, 251  
     S.S. *Calcutta*, 251  
     S.S. *Chinsurah*, 161, 162, 266, 269, 271, 277  
     S.S. *Firefly*, 31, 72  
     S.S. *Gertrude*, 261  
     S.S. *Gratia*, 31  
     S.S. *Native Lass*, 31  
     S.S. *Sir Charles Hotham*, 31, 72  
 Victoria Police, 9, 159, 180, 229, 269, 363, 372, 408, 410, 477, 478, 518  
 Victoria River (Northern Territory), 152, 153, 154, 162, 254, 340  
 Victoria River, see Barcoo River, 99, 112, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144  
 Victorian Institute for the Advancement of Science, 123, 129, 130, 132, 134, 516  
 Wakool River, 182, 184, 276  
 Walwallim (Aboriginal man), 363  
 Walker, Frederick, 12, 31, 73, 379, 382, 383, 407, 421, 488, 506  
 Warburton, Major Peter Egerton, 12, 14, 161, 163, 168, 236, 256, 313, 407, 431, 517  
 Warren, John Campell, 388  
 Watpipa (Aboriginal guide), 348  
 Watpipa's nephew (Aboriginal guide), 348  
 Watson, John, 157, 162  
 Watson, Reverend Michael J., 53  
 Weatherston, Joseph Stewart, 58  
 Wekey, Sigismund, 133  
 Welch, Edwin James, 27, 73, 224, 377, 421, 441, 442  
 Wheeler, Dr William Massey, 285, 377  
 Wheeler, Graeme, 22, 69  
 Wilkie, Dr David Elliot, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 151, 167, 254, 255, 516  
 Williams, Billy (Aboriginal elder), 388  
 Wills, Dr William, 20, 44, 45, 46, 47, 64, 445  
 Wilson River, 15, 198, 204, 227, 238, 283, 285, 289, 331, 334, 336, 354, 420, 433, 475, 476, 509, 518  
 Wilson, Edward, 301  
 Wimmera, Victoria (Walmer and Longerenong stations), 301, 302, 313  
 Wommai (Aboriginal guide), 339  
 Wompi (Aboriginal elder), 55, 387  
 Wonnogin Swamp, 351, 473, 480  
 Wood, Isaac, 90, 481  
 World, Albert (Mallee Bert of Balranald), 347  
 Wright, William, 12, 26, 29, 43, 45, 46, 47, 49, 51, 53, 56, 59, 62, 75, 175, 176, 177, 197, 198, 199, 204, 216, 218, 226, 227, 229, 230, 232, 233, 237, 238, 279, 283, 299, 301, 313, 321, 350, 351, 352, 353, 362, 364, 365, 366, 367, 410, 441, 446, 472, 474, 478, 480, 518  
 Wyeth, Noel, 22, 444  
 Yaam song, 363  
 Yellow Alice, see Annie King, 376  
 Yinimingka (Burke's waterhole), Cooper Creek (Burke's grave), 217, 376, 451

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david.phoenix@my.jcu.edu.au

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