



The monument to the Burke & Wills Expedition in the Bendigo Cemetery

Rescue Expeditions

In all, six expeditions were sent to search for Burke and Wills, two commissioned by the Exploration Committee, three by the Royal Society of Victoria and one by the Government of South Australia. Two went by sea in order to search the Gulf of Carpentaria for the missing expedition while the others began their search from different directions.

The Victorian Relief Expedition left Melbourne on 26 June 1861 under the leadership of Alfred William Howitt. At the Loddon River Howitt met Brahe, who was returning from Cooper Creek. As Brahe did not have knowledge of Burke's whereabouts, Howitt decided a much larger expedition would be required to find the missing party. Leaving three of his men at the river, Howitt returned to Melbourne with Brahe to update the Exploration Committee. On 30 June the expanded expedition left to follow Burke's trail.

I think the man **Alfred William Howitt** must have been truly great explorer in the way he was able to travel this great trek, twice and return the bodies to Melbourne for a grand burial. Over his life in Victoria, he wrote many books as a naturalist and his understanding of the way of life of Aborigines.

The Age (Melbourne, Vic. : 1854 - 1954) Thu 14 Nov 1861 Page 5

BURKE AND WILLS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE AGE.

Sir, - As the Exploration Committee are making arrangements for removing the remains of Messrs Burke and Wills from Cooper's Creek, to Melbourne, I wish to draw attention to the fact that, at a short distance from Cooper's Creek, the remains of their lowly, but very necessary companion, Gray, lie, for aught we know

unburied, and to all appearances uncared for.

According to Wills' diary, Gray died on April 17th, (the remainder of the party reached Cooper's Creek in four days after); whether they buried him or not, he does not state. Surely his remains are worthy of a Christian burial in consecrated ground, apart from the pomp, and splendour that awaits the interment of his leaders? Instructions ought to be given to Mr Howitt to seek for his remains, that the respect due to a brave but unfortunate man should be shown by the people of this colony (no matter whether he was a subordinate or leader), who sacrifices his life in the cause of his country.

Trusting you will find a place for this in your valuable paper,

- I remain, Sir, respectfully,

yours,

ONE WHO RESPECTS THE BRAVE.

Chewton, 9th November, 1861.

Finding the bodies of the Expedition.

Burke and Wills died on or about 30 June 1861.

Howitt was sent back to Cooper Creek to recover their bodies and the explorers were given a state funeral in Melbourne on Wednesday, 21 January 1863.

The Age (Melbourne, Vic. : 1854 - 1954) Mon 4 Nov 1861 Page 5

Late on Saturday evening the intelligence of the melancholy fate of the Victorian Exploration Expedition, was received in town. The gallant Burke, and his no less brave companion Wills, together with their comrades, nobly performed the task allotted them. To them is due the honour of having been the first to cross the great Australian continent from sea to sea, and to make us acquainted with the mysteries of the interior; but alas! they have not lived to reap the reward of their labours or to enjoy the honours they so richly deserved. Of the little band of four who left Cooper's Creek upon their perilous enterprise, one - King - alone remains; Gray died upon the return trip, and Burke and Wills after their arrival at Cooper's Creek, when it might have been considered that they were tolerably safe, and that their difficulties were ended. The Gulf of Carpentaria was safely reached on the 11th of February, 1861, and the return journey immediately commenced.

The depot at Cooper's Creek was reached on the 21st of April, the very day that Brahe and his party left it. Indeed they had gone but a few hours. Fatigue and hunger had, however, now done their work upon Burke, Wills, and King. They were unable to travel more than four or five miles per day, and pursuit of Brahe's party was hopeless. They therefore resolved to recruit their exhausted strength with the provisions left at Cooper's Creek, and to endeavour to strike the settled districts of South Australia. Fatal mistake; they went and left all help and succour behind

them!

They neglected to leave any marks on the trees or on the surface, showing that they had revisited the cache left by Brahe, and had taken away the provisions, and on Brahe's return with Mr Wright, although seeing that some persons had been there, they never imagined that it was Burke and his party, but thought it was the natives, and therefore did not dig down to examine the cache. Had they done so, they would have found the provisions gone, and Mr Burke's letter stating where he was to be found, which at that time was but a few miles distant. Burke and Wills failed in their attempts to gain the advanced out-stations in South Australia, their provisions became exhausted, and they both died of fatigue and exhaustion apparently about the same time.

King, whose strength kept up, joined the Cooper's Creek natives, who behaved kindly to him, and through their assistance his life was preserved, and he was found and rescued by the relief party under Mr Howitt, on the 15th September, in lat 27 deg. 44 min. and long. 140 deg. 40 min. Mr Brahe, who returned to town on Saturday night, brought down Mr Burke's and Mr Wills's diary, together with Mr Howitt's and also King's narratives. The two latter are published in another portion of this paper; the former, consisting principally of rough field notes, will require considerable preparation before it is ready for the press.

The track taken by Mr Burke after leaving Cooper's Creek on his way to Capentaria was as follows:-

He first followed Eyre's Creek to Sturt's furthest; at this point he took a direct easterly course to the 140th parallel of longitude, and then turned due north, going along the same parallel for a considerable time; afterwards diverging to the eastward, and subsequently to the westward again, until he struck the Albert river, which he followed down to the tidal flow. The country from the tropic to the Gulf is described as being richly grassed and plentifully watered, so that the great desert of the interior appears really to have no existence.



Compiled by Pat & Ian Belmont
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