



Australian Bush Hospitality Pty Ltd. trading as:

diamantina touring company

since 1988 abn 14 051 678 212

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Burke and Wills Expedition 2011 Detailed Itinerary

A prize of 2000 pounds had been set for the first person to successfully cross the Australian continent from south to north. Although this was a large sum at the time, only two men set out to try and receive it. One of them was John McDouall Stuart. The other was Robert O'Hara Burke. Burke was chosen to lead the expedition by the Royal Society of Victoria, which hoped to beat Stuart, who was supported by South Australia. It became the great race. The Victorian expedition would be the best-outfitted and most expensive expedition of its kind. Camels were imported from India. The expedition set out from Melbourne on August 21, 1860, and three months later, burdened by some 20 tons of equipment reached Menindee, at the frontier of the known world, where second in command George Landell, the expedition's flamboyant camel master left after a disagreement with Burke. Young William Wills, expedition surveyor and scientist took his place. Burke split up the group, eight men among which Burke himself would push on to Cooper's Creek, while the rest would remain in Menindee. After arrival at Cooper's Creek, Burke sent Wright back to get the rest of the expedition. Burke grew impatient waiting under the coolabahs, and although Wright had not yet returned, on December 16, Burke, Wills, John King and Charlie Gray left Cooper's Creek for their trek to the Gulf of Carpentaria. William Brahe was left behind at the camp, and told that they expected to return in three months. They made excellent progress north, and on 9 February 1861 they reached the delta of the Flinders River, where they were close enough to notice the tide and ascertain its closeness. The voyage back was extremely wet, and they had problems continuing because of heavy rains and lightning storms. They were short of provisions and Burke assaulted Gray when he was caught stealing provision. Gray grew ill, although the others thought he was just pretending, and he died of suspected dysentery on April 17 probably at Lake Massacre. On April 21 they reached the Cooper. Unfortunately, they found it deserted. Wright and his extra supplies had never arrived, and Brahe, having waited one month longer than the three he had been told to, had left the camp just eight hours before they arrived. The day that had been spent burying Gray had proved fatal. Brahe buried some supplies in case they would come back beneath the now famous dig tree. Wills and King wanted to try to overtake Brahe, who was only miles away from them, but Burke decided against it. They and their camels were much weakened and it would be impossible. Instead they would try to reach Mount Hopeless, the nearest outpost of civilization, some 300 miles south west at the tip of the Flinders Ranges. The men set out for the southwest, but found themselves running around in circles. They lived on nardoo, a type of grass seed, and some fish native mammals and birds, but the men grew weaker and the aboriginals that had helped them travelled on. Burke and Wills died of malnutrition in late June 1861, King was cared for by a group of aboriginals until a rescue party found him. Brahe, in the meantime, had met Wright who had finally set out, and returned to Cooper's Creek on 8 May. However, Burke, Wills and King had removed all traces of their presence to avoid the aboriginals from removing the note they had written. He did not check the provisions he had left behind, and returned convinced that the four men had not been at the camp. Tragically, Burke, Wills and King were only a few miles away at the time. There are many other ironies, theories and mysteries surrounding the Burke and Wills Expedition. Played out like a Victorian





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pantomime-horror, the expedition still fascinates. In the sesquicentennial year of 2010, a convoy of desert equipped four wheel drives vehicles will follow in the footsteps of the expedition, to experience the incredible scenery and better understand the hardships, torment, triumph and despair these brave but ignorant explorers suffered. Today, this is one of the truly great Australian expeditions.

Day 1 We pick up from all Melbourne CBD hotels and head out to Royal Park to commence our expedition to cross the continent at the plinth that marks the spot where the original Burke and Wills Expedition set off. At this historic site we will hear some of the speeches and accounts of the spectacle that accompanied the Expeditions departure back in 1860. Through Melbourne peak hour traffic, we turn onto Mt. Alexander Road and shortly pass the site of Camp One at Moonee Ponds. Aside from a detour around Essendon Airport, we faithfully follow Burke and Wills exact route north through Romsey and Litchfield, across the Great Divide to Elmore in Central Victoria. Here we leave the bitumen and the country opens out to vast plains as we follow wheat roads to Terrick Terrick and on to lunch beside the Murray River at Swan Hill. We cross into New South Wales and on to Balranald, and then take the Prungle Mail Road to our first nights camp in the Mallee. **L D C M P**

Day 2 Past Prungle Lakes we head to Mungo National Park. After look at the visitor's interpretive centre and the impressive woolshed, we drive across Lake Mungo and take a boardwalk before ascending the dunes at the Walls of China. We continue on through the Cyprus covered dunes of the Willandra Lakes World Heritage area until we reach the Darling. We turn north and head to Pooncarie where we lunch beneath River Red gums on the banks of the Darling. In the afternoon we continue north to the Menindee Lakes. We visit the site of the base camp at Pamamaroo Creek – then on the edge of civilisation. We also visit the Maiden Hotel, on the original expedition known at Pains Pub. Some sections of the original hotel are still standing. **B L D C M P**

Day 3 We head out across the Irrigation regulator to the Sunset Strip caravan park for a shower before heading out to the Little Topar Pub on the Barrier Highway. We take station tracks north past Waterbag to Mutawintji National Park. Here we take a short walk to see the cave where Brahe painted his initials over ancient Aboriginal art. We camp north of Mutawintji. **B L D C M P**

Day 4 We travel through some spectacular rangeland, past Noonthorangee Creek affording some grand views of Koonenberry Mountain that so struck Wills on their journey north. We meet the Barrier Highway just south of Packsaddle and continue north to historic Milparinka for a visit to the excellent museum. After lunch we visit Depot Glen, where Charles Sturt was hemmed in by drought in 1844/5. As the waters receded and scurvy set in, one of his party-Poole-died. We visit his grave; beneath the very *Grevillea striata* they buried him under all those years ago. At Tibooburra we visit the family hotel, where artist Clifton Pugh's murals adorn the walls of the front bar. The lowering sun turns the iron-clad plains of Sturt National Park deep red as we cross the Queensland Border and the Dog Fence at the Warri Gate and head to camp. **B L D C M P**





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Day 5 We turn east past Rotten Swamp and shortly come to spectacular breakaway country at Grey Range, looking out over the vast Bulloo Swamp. We descend to Old Tickalara and take station tracks through to Bulloo Downs Station and out to a lonely desolate site on the banks of the Bulloo River at Kooliatto Waterhole where Becker, Purcell and Stone died. We continue on to the town of Thargomindah for a shower and then on to camp beneath the Grey Range **BLDCMP**

Day 6 We travel through the oil and gas fields of Nockatunga and Jackson, finally crossing the wide floodplain of the Cooper beyond Naccowlah oil field. We lunch at Bullah Bullah Crossing on Nappa Merrie station, the site of the famous Dig Tree. The famous blaze is still visible, and there is a small interpretive museum here. We continue on to Cullymurra waterhole and visit Burke's memorial at the site where he died. After a stop at Innaminka and perhaps an ice cream at the general store or a beer at the pub (whichever takes your fancy) we travel north to Kudriemitchie Outstation to camp on the banks of the northwest branch of the Cooper. **BLDCP**

Day 7 We visit the world heritage listed Coongie Lake, and extraordinary wetland in the desert, home to many wading birds and desert species – a birdwatchers paradise. We travel northwest through the white clay and statuesque coolabah trees to Walkers Crossing. We camp on the Cooper floodplain. **BLDC**

Day 8 The floodplain gives way to a few sandhills, and in no time we are enveloped in the gibber plains of Sturts Stony Desert. Vast ironclad plains and a shimmering horizon punctuated by the occasional creek bed, we cross the desert to the Birdsville Track. Skirting Goyder Lagoon we head north on the Outside Track to Birdsville. Here there is the chance for a shower, and to visit the iconic Birdsville Pub, the extraordinary working museum and the Caravanserai Café and Blue Poles Art Gallery. There is plenty to see and do in this classic Outback town. We camp on the floodplain of the Diamantina River. **BLDCP**

Day 9 We visit the Dingo Caves, commanding a wide view of the surrounding desert, including a large patch of the rare Waddy tree (*Acacia peuce*). We continue north through Channel Country, past Lake Mahattie - usually dry - to Bedourie and on to Boulia, the home of the Min Min lights.... We camp on the Burke River outside Boulia. **BLDCMP**

Day 10 We take the Selwyn Road across desolate country to the Phosphate Hill mine and on to The Monument mining town. We are now entering hilly country, leaving Channel Country behind. The road climbs up to the railway siding of Duchess, where we stop at the quaint pub for refreshments. We camp outside Duchess. **BLDCP**

Day 11 We travel in to Mt. Isa. There is the opportunity for a shower and a free morning to explore this thriving town on the edge of the savannah. After lunch we head north to Riversleigh to see the dinosaur fossils before heading to our camp in the rainforest at Adele's Grove. **BLDCMP**





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Day 12 Today we have a full day to explore Lawn Hill. There are numerous walks around the gorge, and a magnificent canoe paddle and swim beneath the deep red walls of the gorge on turquoise water. At Adele's Grove there is a café/bar for relaxing. **BLDCP**

Day 13 Today we head north to Burketown on the Gulf, named after Burke even though he never visited it. We travel across the gulf savannah to the Bynoe River, and visit Camp 119, where King's blazes on several trees are still visible. This was the expeditions northernmost camp, although Burke and Wills had one further bivouac in the mangrove swamps to the north. We continue on to Karumba to watch the sun set on the Gulf of Carpentaria and if we can get fresh mud crabs dine on Singapore Chilli mud crab. **BLDCMP**

Day 14 We commence our journey south, first to Julia Creek and then on to Kynuna with its famous Blue Heeler pub which can trace its existence back to the 1880s when it was a Cobb and Co staging post. It was also one of the first places Waltzing Matilda was performed, and Banjo Paterson's signature is on the wall of the pub, as is Slim Dusty, Rolf Harris and Joh Bjelke - Petersen among others. **BLDCMP**

Day 15 Today is a day of Outback towns. Firstly we visit Combo Waterhole, where the jolly swagman of Waltzing Matilda fame is reputed to have camped. Then its on down to Winton with its magnificent streetscape and fascinating outfitters store, the Waltzing Matilda Centre and a whole swag of historic buildings. We continue south along the Landsborough Highway to Longreach. **BLDCMP**

Day 16 We spend a full day in Longreach visiting the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame and the Qantas Pioneers museum. **BLDCMP**

Day 17 We travel east to Barcaldine where the Great Shearers Strike of 1891 gave birth to the Australian Labor Party. We see the site of the tree of knowledge under which the party was allegedly formed. The tree was poisoned in 2006. We continue south to Blackall and lunch at Augathella on the Warrego River. We continue south to Charleville, and camp at Nardoo Station. **BLDCMP**

Day 18 We visit Cunnamulla, with the chance to walk around the town and check out the Bronze statue of the Cunnamulla fella. There is also a tree on a sand dune where bank robber Joseph Wells hid in after making an armed withdrawal from the local bank. We cross into New South Wales at Barrington and continue south to the town of Bourke and camp at a bend on the Darling River east of Louth. **BLDCMP**





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Day 19 A brief stop at the tiny settlement of Louth we continue down the Darling to the Port of Wilcannia. There is plenty to see at this historic town, including the Police station and old prison. We camp south of Wilcannia. **B L D C M P**

Day 20 We head south along the Cobb Highway through Ivanhoe, crossing the Lachlan River at Booligal. We visit Hay on the Murrumbidgee before heading to our camp in the Barmah forest. **B L D C M P**

Day 21 We travel south along the Midland Highway arriving in Melbourne late morning and the end of a phenomenal double continental crossing. **B M P**

