

## The Ladies Leichardt Search Expedition

'Last drinks at Menindee in the year of 1860; after eleven drunken weeks it's time to take your leave and be the first to cross the country to the Gulf.'

These words by Neil Murray are from a song, 'Menindee', and though they specifically refer to the ill-fated Burke and Wills Expedition (B&W), Menindee looms large in another expedition – that of the 'Ladies Leichardt Search Expedition'.

People will have heard of the Australian explorer, Ludwig Leichardt, zoologist, botanist, geologist, anatomist, linguist and philosopher, who disappeared after leaving a Queensland sheep station in 1848. At least nine search parties tried to find him. In one of these was a Bendigonian William Frederick Barnett. His father was the well known Dr Barnett of Sandhurst and William owned the Crown Hotel in Market Square (Hargreaves Street).



Leichardt expedition under Duncan McIntyre.

The Expedition was led by Duncan McIntyre who in 1864 had written to the Royal Society of Victoria with news that he had discovered in northern Queensland two old horses, tracks and two trees with an 'L', about 15 years old, which he believed were from Leichardt's expedition. The Victorian Government contributed 500 pounds, South Australia likewise and Queensland 1000 pounds. A committee of Melbourne society ladies, headed by Eliza Sophia Bromby, raised funds by public subscription, as did a Queensland ladies committee headed by Lady Bowen, wife of the Queensland Governor. The ladies raised an additional 1500 pounds.

The search party was known as the 'Ladies Leichardt Search Expedition' and consisted of 12 men, 42 horses and 14 camels. The latter were selected from the original herd that had survived the B&W Expedition and had been grazing peacefully at Longerenong Station in the Wimmera. Because the leader, Duncan McIntyre, was still in Queensland buying stock, the Expedition was assembled by Dr Ferdinand Mueller the famous botanist and Botanical Gardens man.

The expedition comprised:

Duncan McIntyre, Leader

Dr James Patrick Murray, Second-in-Command

William Frederick Barnett

Alexander John Barnes, William McDonald and Thomas Kelly in charge of camels

Alexander Gray, Colin Stewart, John McCalman and Stephen Harney in charge of horses

Baluch Khan and Esau Khan, camel sepoys

It is worth noting that in a photograph of the expedition, there is an image of a Queensland aboriginal, named 'Bendigo'. It is a fair assumption that this man was named by the only other Bendigonian in the party, William Frederick Barnett.

They left Bullock Creek Station near Glengower in Victoria on 3 July 1865 and headed to Menindee on the Darling River to meet McIntyre. Nicholas Chevalier sketched the departure and the lithograph of this sketch was published in the newspapers. The party travelled from Glengower via Newbridge, Serpentine, the coaching stop at Durham Ox, Kerang (to cross the Loddon) and arrived at Swan Hill on 9 July. They spent five days there to allow the animals to rest and feed before making the crossing of the Murray River and heading to Kyalite (to cross the Wakool), Balranald (to cross the Murrumbidgee) and then Pooncarrie on the Darling River – a similar route taken by B&W five years earlier. They arrived at Menindee 9 July 1865 and camped near the B&W depot camp at Pamamaroo.

Whilst Dr Murray spoke highly of the men, leader, Duncan McIntyre was not happy with the composition of the party. When they arrived at Mount Murchison, in addition to changing the horses, McIntyre also reduced the size of the party, dismissing Harney, Kelly and Stewart. It may have been fortunate that Colin Stewart left when he did, as the expedition degenerated into a shambles at Coopers Creek, when drought hit and Dr Murray was accused of drunken negligence. Many of the men were dismissed and it took McIntyre many months to resupply the party and restart the expedition.

When it reached the Gulf of Carpentaria in April 1866, McIntyre contracted fever and died at the Gilliat River. His replacement, Sloman, died soon after and William Frederick Barnett from Bendigo was appointed. However, by May 1867, no traces of Leichardt had been found and the expedition ended.

William Frederick Barnett was buried in the Bendigo Cemetery with his father and other members of the Barnett family.

Research by Collection Manager, Kay MacGregor and presented on ABC local radio on Monday 23 January 2017 by Jim Evans. The image with this article shows the Expedition with William Frederick Barnett seated front left and 'Bendigo' a 'Queensland native', seated front right.