

LEICHHARDT — THE SECRETS OF THE SANDHILLS

A Legend and an Enigma

[By Dr. RUTH SMOUT]

(Read at a meeting of the Society on 28 October 1965)

I am going to talk to you tonight about Ludvig Leichhardt, the scientist from Prussia who is known in the history of Australian exploration as the man who dared the impossible



LUDWIG LEICHHARDT

once too often. There is more romance and more mystery surrounding the life and death of this man in Australia than any of the other gallant men who pitted their strength and intelligence against discovering the secrets of the great unknown Continent.

Why did this man become such a legend? Probably because he was an idealist, a dreamer with a reckless courage that

called up the spirit of high adventure dormant in all of us—but the appeal goes deeper too, because his fate is still clouded in mystery, a mystery that can never be solved completely, that has cost four other men their lives and provided food for thought for anyone's imagination from shepherds to Governors of the country. I hope that you will come with me through the intricacies of evidence that has accumulated over the last 117 years to try once again, as hundreds of others have done, to find truth among the mass of conjecture that has followed his disappearance.

Leichhardt was born in 1814 in the Prussian town of Trebatsch. He was the sixth child of an industrious, God-fearing couple, but he showed while he was still at school that he had no intention of following in the family tradition of farming and peat cutting.

STUDENT OF MEDICINE

Since he was so determined to go on to higher education his parents sent him off to Gottingen when he finished his ordinary schooling in 1833. He was enrolled there as a student of medicine and natural science. He was not a particularly good student, and it is not recorded that he ever took a degree in medicine. In 1835 he moved to Berlin University, still studying Science and Natural History. His letters to his parents from Berlin are full of good advice which he gave them gratis, as students will, but which he never took to heart himself.

While studying at Gottingen, he had met two English brothers, John and William Nicholson, and it was due to his close friendship with William Nicholson that he decided to come to Australia to study the native fauna and flora. He was staying with William in Europe when his call up for his year of compulsory military training came through. William Nicholson had supported him for more than three years at this time. They had travelled and studied together in London and on the Continent. Now William was called home to London by his family and Ludvig accepted a boat passage to Australia and a loan of £200 from his friend as a parting gesture. By refusing to return to Germany he became automatically an army deserter with a prison sentence waiting for him at home. He arrived in Australia in 1842, and among his letters of introduction was one from Professor Owens in London to Sir Thomas Mitchell, who was Chief Surveyor of the Colony. Leichhardt hoped to join the exploration party that was being formed by Sir Thomas Mitchell to open up new land between the known territories of New South Wales and Port Essington on the northern shores of Arnhem Land.

LEICHHARDT'S FIRST EXPEDITION

There was much delay in finding the £1,000 needed for the undertaking and Leichhardt was too enthusiastic to be held back by such irritations. He canvassed among the friends he had made in the Colony and raised enough money to equip his own private expedition. He was regarded by many people as a most foolhardy young man since he had very little experience. Coote says—"he was a singularly bold intruder on a work equally beyond his province and his powers." But Leichhardt was supremely confident of his own powers, and in 1844 he left the last settled areas of the Darling Downs for the long trek.

The trials and tribulations of that expedition over the sixteen months they were on the march are there for everyone to read in Leichhardt's journal, and in the diary of John Gilbert, the unfortunate naturalist of the expedition, who was killed by the blacks. After being presumed dead, the party returned to Sydney in triumph. Leichhardt was lauded as a hero, and for the first time received the praise and adulation that his soul craved.

SECOND EXPEDITION A FIASCO

As soon as he had sent off his botanical specimens to England and put his journal in order for the publishers, he was collecting equipment for a new expedition. He intended to explore the Queensland rivers of the interior and go right across to the West Coast. There was no lack of funds or stock, and he started out better equipped from the Darling Downs. But this time the expedition was a dismal failure. Rain washed out their camps and ruined their supplies, the stock and he started out better equipped from the Darling whole company making it impossible for them to travel for days on end. The men were dispirited and depressed, and petty quarrels eventually broke the party up. They returned in dribs and drabs from a fiasco which accomplished nothing. All the stock animals donated by the Government and by well-wishers were lost and Leichhardt himself dropped a great deal of the prestige he had earned by his first success.

He was not a man to be daunted by adverse opinion. The mocking of others made him simply more obstinate and more resolute to succeed. Before long he started preparing for the journey across the Continent again. He was a difficult person to obey because of his impractical nature, and on both treks he had found trouble keeping the respect of his men. He was therefore anxious about his choice of companions.

He was extremely jealous of keeping the successes of his expedition for himself. Roper, Mann, Bunce and other men

who knew Leichhardt well from the trail have all signified on this point. He wanted no men of science except himself on this expedition. Indeed, he wanted no men who would be likely to question his authority at all. He wrote himself about this several times in letters to family and friends. "I want men of good humour, complete elasticity of mind, strong in moral principle and in body," he wrote in another letter home. And again in a letter to William McArthur, he says, "I suffered of a strange fit of melancholy which was no doubt connected with my disappointment and with annoyance originating in my dissatisfied companions of both expeditions, and I almost despaired of being able to form a party which would suit me."

LEICHHARDT'S COMPANIONS

There is a difference of opinion about the men he *did* choose in going through his reports. We know definitely of two men in the expedition. First, Adolf Classen was with him. In the same letter to William MacArthur, Leichhardt says, "Mr. Classen is a connection of mine whose sister is married to my brother." Adolf Classen was born in Hamburg on 15 April 1813, making him a year or so older than Leichhardt. He was a ship's carpenter and had borne hardship bravely when shipwrecked earlier. He had not been long in Australia and could not speak English very well. "I believe Classen will be very suitable for my undertaking, although a land journey is very different from even the most difficult sea voyage," Leichhardt wrote in German to his family.

There was a third German in the party too, Arthur Hentig, who had been in Australia some years. He was described by Leichhardt as a friend and a gentleman, and had been employed as an overseer on Mr. Busby's station at Cassilis in the Hunter River district. He was an experienced bushman about 30 years old. In some reports he is stated to have had red hair and to have been of Russian parentage. Certainly Leichhardt trusted him because for some time he could not decide whether he or Classen should be second in command of the party. Finally he decided that Classen should fill this place.

Two hired men were taken into the party while Leichhardt collected his forces on the Darling Downs. In some reports, mention is made of an Irish stockman named Kelly and a Scot named Donald Stuart. Alec H. Chisholm in his book *Strange New World* says the latter was *William Stewart*, taking his information from a letter in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1867. But a letter in the possession of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland from Leichhardt to a friend

describes the man as Donald Stewart, a stockman from a Darling Downs property.

Some informants insist that there was a third hired man, Thomas Hand or Hands, with the party, but Mr. Chisholm infers that Hands did not go because his ticket-of-leave release was not written by the Colonial Secretary until 18 April 1848—after the explorers had left. However, this is not proof that Hands was not with them—only that the release was late. The application for release from “ticket-of-leave” *could* have been sent in by Leichhardt just before the party left. Phillips of the first expedition had been a convict on parole too. A young surveyor, John Kirkland, also started out but returned after 60 miles, finding Leichhardt too difficult a companion for a proposed two to three years’ trek.

There were also two aboriginals in the party—“Wommaï” or “Jimmy” or “Killali” of the second expedition and “Billy Bombat,” “Billy Wombat,” or “Flash Billy.” Both of these young blacks were from the Port Stephens tribe.

POOR EQUIPMENT OF STOCK

The expedition was poorly equipped with stock. Since Leichhardt had such difficulties in keeping herds together he was not taking more than a minimum. He wrote that he had 50 bullocks, 20 mules and seven horses. I presume that these horses were in addition to those ridden by the men. The party took muzzle-loading guns and two double-barrelled pistols, and may also have had police carbines from the Government stores. The leader himself did not use firearms, preferring a sword which he slung across his back when riding, but he entrusted his gun probably to his favourite blackboy, Jimmy.

Including the leader then there were eight—or was it seven—men who left McPherson’s station, “Cogoon,” the last settled sheep station of the Western Downs at Mount Abundance, near Roma, Queensland.

The last letters that Leichhardt wrote on 3 and 4 April were from there; the now famous letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* describes briefly the expedition and the route it was hoping to follow. He wrote then and in several epistles, that he would journey north for several hundred miles, then across the top of the continent and down the west coast to the Swan River.

On 25 February 1848 he had written to William Macarthur: “My intention is to follow Mitchell’s track to the Victoria (Barcoo), to go first to the northward until I come on decided waters of the Gulf of Carpentaria and turn then to the westward to make the west coast of the Continent.”

He wrote to his brother-in-law in Germany about the hazards he was facing and described briefly the nature of the arid terrain Sturt had encountered. "It is a desert at least as far as lat. 24 deg. S," he said in a lecture. "I am again alone in the field," he wrote, "and I believe I shall solve numerous interesting problems if I succeed in getting around the northern end of Sturt's Desert."

MANY SPECULATIONS ON PARTY'S FATE

Did he ever accomplish that wish? The fate of his party has called up a host of hypotheses from the scattered evidence. Unfortunately, a great amount of evidence is hearsay or unsubstantiated, and errors made by one informant have been believed and repeated, until confusion covers the actual facts and the whole question has been bypassed as too fantastic and involved for serious conjecture by historians. Alec. H. Chisholm treated the mystery in this offhand beneath notice attitude in the 1941 edition of his book *Strange New World*. However, in the 1955 edition he had done a great deal of research into the question, and I believe his notes are the most complete record of the available information, even though as a scientist he has not put forward any opinions of his own. Papers by E. E. Larcombe in the Royal Australian Historical Society journals (especially of 1926) and in the Parramatta Historical Society journals also contain a great deal of material.

Before I describe the evidence and elaborate my own hypothesis there are two things which must be discussed.

First, the nature of Ludwig Leichhardt's personality and the possible effects it would have had on the fate of the party. Second, the nature of the aboriginal tribes through whose territories he was travelling.

Firstly, then, we know practically nothing about the early life of Ludwig Leichhardt, except that he was born sixth in the family and that his parents considered him worth educating. He made no great impact on his teachers as a student, but we do know that he was *not* a wild, boisterous type. He tells us that he was given to moods of melancholy and found his chief pleasure in going for long walks by himself.

LEICHHARDT'S PERSONALITY

The military inclinations of the Prussian State meant that German soldiers moved about the country a great deal when he was a youth. Leichhardt detested them—he found them noisy, dirty and disgusting so no wonder he did not want to do his National Training. Yet he was profoundly moved by stories of great military heroes and brave explorers. Germany's heroes of the day were his heroes too, and he dreamt

of emulating them and their power over circumstances even in the days before he came to Australia. He felt leaders were superior beings, beyond reproach, who could make their own rules and demand not only the respect of lower mortals but also their succour. In his day-dreams he undoubtedly put himself in this class even as a student. The great strength of his ambition to succeed and be praised as a great man, stems from this desire to be a law unto himself. He was extremely jealous of keeping praise and recognition for himself. In writing home from London he comments on the tranquillity of the country, the orderliness without force of arms, and the cleanliness of the people compared with those of Europe. Yet he showed no particular love of cleanliness himself. Certainly he was orderly with his specimens and a careful and possibly a brilliant natural scientist, but his companions on the trail complained that he would not wash and would rub himself over with rancid fat.

Leichhardt was a charming man in company. He could hold his own as a raconteur and was well-mannered and engaging to the ladies. He was able to form friendships easily, and he showed he was capable of keeping friends too. But, like most impractical people, he tended to become dependant and self-seeking in his friendships because he needed a patron. He lived on the patronage of his friend William Nicholson for six years (from 1834 to 1838 and in part until 1841) when William lent him his passage to Australia and £200. In Australia he found a benefactor in Robert Lynd, and when travelling he went from place to place living on the bounty of friends and squatters. He never had a regular job in his life, and the first money he ever earned were the grants made to him by the Government and the public in 1846 when he was 33 years old.

THE MAN UNDER STRESS

This is Leichhardt at ease—a sociable man, an engaging speaker, a devoted scientist, keen, ambitious, observant, imaginative and full of quaint philosophy and whimsy. From the diaries and letters of men who had accompanied him we learn about another Leichhardt—the man under stress.

Daniel Bruce, John Mann, Hovenden Hely, William Phillips, John Gilbert, John Roper have all testified on the man under the stresses of the trail.

He was impractical and selfish; he was gluttonous and unreasonably obstinate; he was high-handed and unjust; he was bad tempered and complaining, and his judgment of the character and motives of others was extremely poor. When his men were sick or exhausted he was cruel and unsympathetic, but if he himself was ill he became extremely

anxious and depressed. In times of frustration he was spiteful, jealous, and accusing to his companions and this unstable mood would go on for days at a time.

A man like this is not a leader—he is a danger to the lives of those entrusted to his care because he will fail them when they need him most.

The personality faults that Leichhardt had are not inherent—they are acquired reactions whose pattern is set in childhood. We know very little as I said about his early life, but without a doubt he received some unhappy setbacks between his first and eighth year of life that stopped normal development and determined the course of his isolationist personality. In the years that followed he learned to compensate for his defects very well in the normal run of events; it was only under conditions of deprivation that his personality defences broke down.

It is most pertinent that he changed his study from medicine to natural science before he reached the clinical years of his medical course. That is the time when a student comes to realise that to be a practising doctor he must be able to *feel* for his patient—to put himself in the other person's shoes. Leichhardt, no matter how good his intellect or how thorough his training, could not overcome the basic faults of self-centredness that made him isolate himself emotionally from other people.

The only deep personal ties he could form were dependent relationships with protective, understanding men. This does *not* mean that he was an invert at all, as Patrick White has inferred in his thinly-veiled novel about Leichhardt. It means probably that the only person he could feel close to as a small boy was an elder brother who looked after him and was tolerant of his different ways. He never grew past this dependence, but he chafed under the hidden yoke of inner feeling which made him realise his dependency.

HIS JOURNEYS WERE SYMBOLISM

In over-compensation for his defect he had to prove to himself and to the whole world that he was complete master of external circumstances, that he was strong and powerful, a man who could face the great forces of nature alone. His journeys were pure symbolism and being such, to him the practical details of supplies, methods of travel, care of personnel and equipment, were trivial compared with the general dream of power and glory.

It is amazing that the first expedition ever succeeded. It was inevitable that under his singularly inappropriate leadership a journey over less hospitable terrain would fail.

ABORIGINAL ECONOMICS

The second question I must discuss, the nature of the aboriginal economics, is most important in the light of the rumours which led to all sorts of conjecture on the part of white settlers and the spreading of relics over half the continent.

The native tribes of Australia at that time were already dying out on the eastern settled areas, but inland much of the old tribal life remained. Each tribe had its circumscribed hunting area, demarcated by known landmarks of rock, vegetation, undulation or claypan just as effectively as by written signs. The farther west and the poorer the country the greater the hunting area—in a similar way our pastoral holdings measure “carrying capacity” of the land.

To transgress tribal boundaries was a serious offence. Language changed from tribe to tribe and in many instances customs changed also. There was diplomatic immunity about border crossing in a very few instances and a party travelling through some other tribes' territory openly made signal fires in advance. The two main reasons for travel were trading and initiation festivals. Often the two synchronised.

Well-established trade routes passed from one end of the Continent to the other, and the network made it possible for goods to travel a thousand miles or more. So could quartzite knives from north of the Simpson Desert, and pituri (the native hypnotic), come east to the Maranoa, south along the Darling, north through the Carnarvons. It was bartered for baler shell from the coast, special types and patterns of weapons and woven goods and other prized commodities.

With the trading parties went the news of the regions they passed through, and this news was passed on in song, chant and dance so that it would be remembered. An event of lasting interest, or a poignant story, would be carried in corroboree dance, not hundreds but even thousands of miles in this way. Murder stories were first-class news in anybody's language. It is not at all strange that news of the Cullin-laringo massacre travelled by the native grapevine to western New South Wales before the stage coach routes. That was a native “scoop.”

CORROBOREE “MASSACRE” WIDESPREAD

It is no less strange that corroboree dances of the Leichhardt party massacre came down the Darling to New South Wales, down Cooper's Creek to South Australia and up into the Northern Territory, probably within months of its occurrence. In western Queensland W. Ogilby, P.M., and Gideon

Lang heard the story in 1850. Walker and Lang went to the Maranoa to investigate but returned without success.

By 1851, three years after Leichhardt had set out, the story was so widely known that even the New South Wales government could not ignore it. The blacks could not say where the catastrophe happened. They heard about it and learnt the dances from their native "commercial travellers." The story formed a starting gun for the search parties however, and we will now pass on to discuss in chronological order the information that has come in over the years.

In May 1851, Capt. J. Beckford Simpson was sent by the Government to Port Essington to see if by any chance the party was there. He found it deserted, as it had been since 1849.

HOVENDEN HELY'S DISCOVERIES

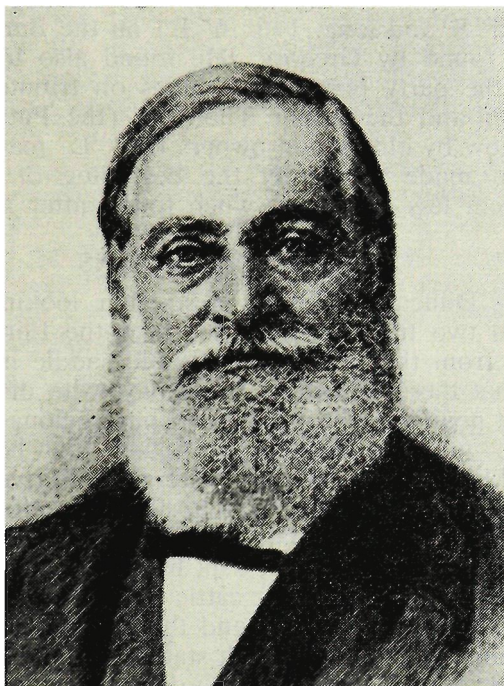
Early in 1852, Hovenden Hely, who had been with Leichhardt on the second expedition, started out to follow tracks of the party. He found old camp sites to the north-west of Mount Abundance, two marked trees on the headwaters of the Warrego (Alice) and Nive—long. $146^{\circ} 29'$ lat. $25^{\circ} 9'$ approximately. He saw three tomahawks made from the gullet plate of saddles, and the blacks who had them said they had belonged to Leichhardt. All the evidence from natives he questioned pointed to the fact that there had been a massacre. *I say "fact" because this is the first evidence, but it was so persistently the same that it must have meant something—it had been a news item for three years.*

The natives said the party had been followed for many days when they rushed the camp at dawn and speared all the men. One white man shot a native but was speared immediately. All the horses and mules were killed and eaten. The cattle escaped. The reason given for the massacre was that Leichhardt's natives had ill-used some of the local gins—the same precipitating factor caused the attack by natives in the first expedition which resulted in the death of Gilbert. The natives here were very fierce and would not lead Hely to the murder scene, because actually it was away to the south-west. They expected retaliation from the whites and would not have made up such information.

GREGORY'S JOURNEY

In 1855, when gold fever was subsiding slightly, A. C. Gregory made a journey from the Victoria River in the Northern Territory right across the continent to the east coast to Port Curtis. Under his competent leadership the journey took only four months—but nothing of significance was found. *In 1858* Gregory went out again, this time specifically

to look for Leichhardt in Central Queensland. He found a tree marked with an "L" near where Blackall now stands on the Barcoo above the junction of Cooper's Creek and the Alice River in lat. $24^{\circ} 36'$ S. and long. $146^{\circ} 6'$ E. He went on down Cooper's Creek and through South Australia to Adelaide but he found nothing further.



A. C. GREGORY

In 1861, after the Burke and Wills disaster, William Landsborough went south from the Albert River across the Plains of Promise but found nothing. The search parties for Burke and Wills and their party itself obscured the fate of Leichhardt by bringing whites into the area and causing confusion over camping sites and European articles left there.

FINDS BY MCKINLAY AND WALKER

In 1861 John McKinlay, travelling north-east from Adelaide reached the south-west of Queensland, where he found a grave and a skull with bone fractures. He called the place Lake Massacre, because the natives put on a "murder play" corroboree. There was not more than one definite skeleton however, and the blacks' story included camels and three other men who attacked the natives first. McKinlay also discovered very old horse and camel dung, parts of a

nautical almanac of 1858, and some empty Eley cartridges and empty Terry rifle cartridges. Many scholars think this skeleton was Gray's or one of the rescue party. If it was not for the date on that almanac my summing up would be quite different.

In the same year 1861 Frederick Walker, travelling west from Rockhampton found another tree marked "L" (near lat. $24^{\circ} 35'$ S. and long. $146^{\circ} 6'$ E) on the Barcoo not far from that found by Gregory. He found also unmistakable tracks of the party horses and mules on tributaries of the Alice River and the Upper Thomson (the Patrick). It is reported now by old station owners that "L" marks on trees were often made to signify the beginning of a lease so making them less significant when found after an area was settled.

OTHER EXPEDITIONS

In 1864 Duncan McIntyre, a squatter looking for land, came upon two trees marked "L" near the Flinders River, 300 miles from the coast, and two old saddle horses. It is possible that these related to McKinlay, who discarded two horses, but possibly, also, they could have belonged to Leichhardt. He wrote to William McArthur that he would go north until he came on "decided waters of gulf rivers and then turn west." It is probable that he left the cattle at a base camp and went on to satisfy himself that he was near the Flinders. In the same way he sent little exploring parties out when on his first trek—a few cattle were found on branches of the Barcoo with his brand and the blacks said they came from the north-west. Leichhardt stated in a letter of 26 February 1849: "If I succeed in my journey I shall probably be able to trace the outline of that dry seabed (the supposed Central Australian Sea) which formed, when filled in former times, an immense inlet of salt water, either communicating with the south or west." Kennedy had just returned with the news that Mitchell's "Victoria" was probably Sturt's "Cooper," so that important problems existed to lure Leichhardt to the south-west, following the Cooper at least far enough to establish the truth of Kennedy's supposition.

In 1865, on the instigation of Ferdinand von Mueller, who had gone searching with A. C. Gregory, the ladies of Melbourne collected £4,000 to send an expedition to investigate. Quarrels and illness disrupted the party and the leader, John McIntyre and Sloman, another member, died of fever, probably endemic malaria, near the Gulf of Carpentaria.

In 1868, Dr. G. Neumayer, Director of Flagstaff Observatory in Melbourne, and a Hamburg scientist, tried to persuade the London Geographical Society to equip a party

to search for Leichhardt between the route of Burke and Wills and that of John McDowell Stuart. He had studied available evidence, and had come to the conclusion that the party never reached the north-west (which was then supposed), but ended on the Queensland border. Other people came to the same conclusion.

In 1871 Mr. (Sir Charles) C. H. Todd, in a long report, compiled all the facts that had been collected through employees of the Australian Central Telegraph Line. He came to the conclusion that the catastrophe had happened about 25° of latitude between the telegraph line and the route of Burke and Wills.

A paper of the time says: "News has reached Adelaide by way of the Australian Central Telegraph which allows the almost certain conclusions that Leichhardt and his companions had perished approximately several hundred miles east of Charlotte Waters. The expedition is supposed to have passed in two sections, and to have been ambushed and slaughtered by the blacks."

WILD WHITE MEN WITH ABORIGINES

During the same period *in the late 1860s* other rumours from the west of Queensland said that a wild white man was living with the aborigines in the far west or in Northern Territory. Many squatters in Western Queensland were told this story by the blacks.

Henry Powell, a western settler, wrote from Roma to Robert Baird, a Brisbane barrister, in January 1870. He was told by natives that many years previously a party of white men going west crossed the Cooper about 70 miles below the junction of the Barcoo and Thomson Rivers and that soon after all except one of them died. This man, now crippled, was living with a tribe many many sleeps to the westward, at a place supposed to be named "Beerewiwarra."

GILMOUR'S STORY

The same story was reported by the police in October 1870. On 13 October 1870 James M. Gilmour, Sub-Inspector of the Native Mounted Police, wrote from Bulloo Barracks to Henry Browne, Chief Inspector of Police at Roma Street, reporting that he had been on patrol on Cooper's Creek during the latter part of September 1870, and had taken with him a blackboy from Mr. McDonald's station (Mount Margaret) on the Wilson River. The blackboy was able to speak the language of natives living in the Cooper's Creek area.

Gilmour had, he said, made enquiries from the blacks as to the truth of the report he had heard about the white man. Previously, both he and Mr. Macdonald had assumed that

these reports referred to King of the Burke and Wills expedi-
W.N.W. from where McIntyre had camped on Cooper's
Creek on his last expedition to the Gulf. The white man was
aborigines further west, at least up to a period two or three
years earlier. They had never seen him themselves, but
aborigines from further west had told them about him. He
estimated that the white man was living about 250 miles
W.N.W. from where McIntyre had camped on Cooper's Creek
on his last expedition to the Gulf. The white man was
described as walking with his elbows on his knees. Gilmour
went on:

"Should there be a white man alive out to the westward
among the blacks, I think it is more than probable that it
must be either Leichhardt himself, or one of his party. I
think, if I recollect right, that the last traces of Leichhardt
were found by Mr. Gregory on the Thomson River, and
where this white man is described as being alive, must be
somewhere almost due west from the junction of the
Thomson with Cooper's Creek.

"The only way, I think, to make certain of finding out
the truth of the statement of the blacks would be to take
one from each tribe, as the language of the blacks changes
about every fifty miles, of course first getting one black
that could talk both English and the Cooper's Creek lan-
guage. . . ."

Henry Browne sent the report to the Commissioner of
Police, stating that Gilmour could easily reach the locality
where the white man was supposed to be. On 15 November
1870, the Commissioner instructed that orders be issued to
Gilmour to visit the locality at once. He sent a letter to the
Colonial Secretary, who presumably forwarded it to the
Governor, for it is today bound in the series, "*Official Letters
Addressed to the Governor.*"

GILMOUR'S TWO TRIPS

Gilmour made two trips—the first one *in February 1871*
was during a very wet season, and the going was wretched.
At Cooper's Creek, an aboriginal, on close questioning, told
them that when he was a child, more than twenty years earlier,
a party of white men had been killed at Wantata waterhole,
well to the westward. Other natives, when questioned,
admitted that this was true, and Gilmour found the place
about 500 miles west-north-west from Mount Abundance,
some miles to the westward of the Diamantina. The natives
shunned the spot for fear of white men's ghosts. In three days
searching in over-century temperatures, the party found por-
tions of several skeletons on the ground, which, being

unburied, meant they were white men. In a big blacks' camp at Kulloo, 25 miles away, tent, moleskin cloth, blankets and many other camping goods were found.

Conditions were so wet that the party had to return, but Gilmour was certain that even though he had not found any white man, the relics were those of Leichhardt's party. In September, he went out again with his mounted police, and with C. Nutting, who had taken up a station in the district. They found more remains of white men's skeletons, and in three different blacks' camps portions of European clothing, an old-type tomahawk head, horse-hair saddle stuffing and white men's hair woven as decoration into a pituri bag.

Unfortunately, the blacks that far away spoke a different language, and could not be understood, otherwise Gilmour's party might have learned something about the white man they were seeking. They returned with relics, which were sent with Gilmour's journal to Baron von Mueller in Melbourne. He was convinced, as many other people were, that this was real evidence. Unfortunately, the field of search favoured Western Australia, where John Forrest was exploring at the time, and nothing further was done.

ANDREW HUME'S ACCOUNT

But in this year 1871 another fascinating story began to unfold. Andrew Hume, a prisoner in Parramatta jail, gave the authorities an account of a white man he had come across in the desert west of Queensland.

Andrew Hume was an odd character—not the sort of man the class-conscious society of the day would take to at all, for apart from being a prisoner, he was also a “combo”—a man who forsook his own people and lived with the blacks by preference.

He was born in Northern England and came to the colony with his parents when he was one year old. His father was a stockman in the Hunter River area, and young Andrew spent most of his days with black playmates. He left home to join a Hunter River tribe when he was 14, practically illiterate, and much more at ease with natives than with whites. He was a good talker and a “curiosity,” and because of this, he was able to travel widely over the aboriginal routes as a sort of itinerant one-man sideshow. He learned 32 native languages in his touring, and he proved that he knew not only a very great deal about native folk lore and customs, but also about the geographical features of the far west of New South Wales and Queensland. In the company of white men he was a babe-in-the-wood-native, untutored and dumb. He had a giant-sized inferiority complex, and he

tried to overcome it by drinking too much, letting other people sway him with their opinions, so that he sometimes contradicted himself and became muddle-headed.

He returned to civilisation briefly in 1851 to go to the Turon diggings, but was soon off again to the Never Never. In 1866 Hume worked for a time on a station in Queensland. When he was paid off he bought a stallion and a broken pistol, but no caps, and started off home to the Hunter Valley. At Barradine, he unfortunately went on a drinking spree and shortly after was arrested on suspicion of stealing the horse and the gun. At the time, the citizens of the west of New South Wales were pestered by bushrangers, and the police were on the lookout for vagrants who were, or were likely to be, leading a life of crime. Hume, with no real evidence against him, was sentenced as a bushranger to 10 years' jail by Judge Carey at Wellington in June 1866.

REMARKABLE DISCLOSURES

After five years in prison Hume became ill and thought he was going to die. He spoke to the prison padre about information he had concerning a white man he had met, west of the Cooper, who was one of Leichhardt's party. He said the white man could not return to civilisation because he was too feeble, but he asked Hume to tell Dr. Lang, the Presbyterian parson in Sydney, that all the party had been murdered except himself, and that Dr. Lang would know what party he meant, and would send to search for buried documents.

"After leaving the station of Mr. Wills on the Comet River in 1862 I started for the west coast, crossing all the rivers running north. I stayed with the blacks until I happened to find a white man who had been among them some time." In another account he says he went west and north-west, making for the sea. The sea he meant was almost certainly the Gulf of Carpentaria.

On Hume's travels, he found two trees with "L.C." or "L.L." on them, and beneath the first tree, two bottles of papers. He came to a creek and followed it to a lagoon where he threw himself down to drink. A dozen natives surrounded him, but they made signs of friendship and pointed to an aged white man. First, this man took him to be mad, but later he took him into his confidence, and gave him a written message to take to the Government of New South Wales.

"Underneath the first tree was a bottle containing letters. In the rock, or rather, in a hollow of the rock close to the second tree were papers rolled up in a saddle cloth, with other papers which appeared to be maps or plans. I placed

the letters which I found under the first tree, along with others under the second tree, and promised the white man I would take them to Sydney, or let the Government know. I found a telescope, quadrant and thermometer with the other articles concealed in the rock under the tree.

“The above is only a rough sketch but I am ready to answer questions and would have made the facts known before, but I thought the authorities might fancy I was making them up to obtain my liberty by fabrication of my own.”

WAS THIS MAN CLASSEN?

The white man told him that he had gone ahead of the party to search for water. When he returned, he found the leader injured and alone. The rest of the men had taken all they could and gone back, intending to retrace their steps or go down Eyre's Creek to South Australia following Sturt's route. After some days in the desert, the leader had died and the man believed to be Classen, now alone, had met up with a friendly tribe of natives, with whom he had remained ever since. He was now an elderly man, almost crippled. He had been initiated into the tribe and had a native wife and three children. He spoke in the native tongue and seemed to know only a few words of English. Hume said he had promised the man he would return, but he had no great love of civilisation at the time so he had not taken the things with him as he himself wanted to continue his wanderings with the blacks.

Hume was not sure of the area, but said Classen came to the blacks from *west* of the desert. I believe what he said at this time was true. He made no mention of places except Wills Station because he was uneducated, and had no knowledge of geography as read in a map. There is a very great difference between being able to find your way about in the bush and knowing distances and places on a map, as you will find out if you ever question natives about directions and distances. Hume, to all intents and purposes, had a native way of thinking, because he had grown up under their tutelage. Everything that happened to him afterwards is coloured by his simple mind, and his confusion in discussing his discovery with too many people who tried to put their own opinions into his mouth.

After much questioning by various officials, Hume made a written request to the Inspector-General of Prisons, asking that he be allowed out of prison to collect the papers this man had entrusted to him. He would also try to find the man again and bring him back to civilisation.

Further questioning followed by a Commission of Enquiry, and later in Darlinghurst jail, various explorers and western settlers who probed the truth of his experience were convinced that Hume knew a great deal about the Interior. He was released in January 1872 and given £15 and a ticket on the *Omeo* to the Roper River. It was supposed that by "the sea" he must have meant the sea of Western Australia.

HUME'S WANDERINGS

Hume wandered about the Northern Territory for 22 months, including two intervals when he worked for the Overland Telegraph Line, and finally returned to Sydney with nothing but a telescope and a leather bag that had been split open. The telescope was inscribed "L.L.D.H.D. 1845" and was probably authentic, bartered from the blacks. However, someone had stolen the rest of the relics while he was ill on the ship from Brisbane. No one believed him, of course; he was branded a humbug, a liar, and a scoundrel and his whole story was promptly discredited. Now this was where the mistake was made. Although he was not successful and tried to pull a very stupid trick to "save face" that does not prove he was lying originally.

Subsequent events bear me out, I think, because he was sure enough of his facts to call for public support to go out again. There was no need for him to do this, except his determination to prove he was right. He said that the natives would not give the old man up, because he was a medicine man, and a great worker of magic for the tribe. He said the man whom he now recognised as Classen had a black wife and three children. Classen could not speak English—just a few words and with an accent. Hume thought he could exchange himself for Classen, and to this purpose he would not go alone. He must have men who could help the old man who was very bent and feeble back over the long journey.

Hume found champions, especially in Edward Eccleston du Faur, Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society. He found two men to accompany him, and he started his trek *not* from the Northern Territory, but from Western Queensland.

TRAGIC SEQUEL TO HUME'S TREK

It was October 1874, and Hume had been suffering from dysentery. With his companions, Timothy O'Hea, a Victoria Cross winner from Canada, and Lewis Thompson, a game piano-tuner, he went first to Thargomindah, and then through drought-stricken mulga, spinifex, and saltbush country to Nockatunga Station, owned by the Drynan Brothers. The Black Prince, as he was called, felt he was in country he

knew, and that soon he would meet up with old native friends. He was over-confident; he did not realise the extent of the drought. Thinking there was water in the next creek he did not fill the waterbags. When he and his companions found the creek was dry, they went on instead of going back, and by the third day they still had found no water. They were too dehydrated and exhausted to make it back to the waterhole they knew. Hume and O'Hea died of thirst. Thompson let his horse have its head, and was able to hang on until the animal found a waterhole. So perished the only man who had first-hand knowledge of the party—trying to prove it, and for no gain but that. All he wanted was a simple chance to make a fair exchange and to live out the rest of his life with a people who had shown him friendship.



TIMOTHY O'HEA AND ANDREW HUME

Lewis Thompson told his very moving story of the death of his two companions, and his own courage and endurance, to Eccleston du Faur, who published it in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in February 1875. In spite of his terrible ordeal—eight days without food and five without water—he so believed in Hume that he was willing to go back to try to accomplish what he had set out to do. Other well-informed

and thinking people were convinced that Hume was right, among them John Campbell, Eccleston du Faur, Baron von Mueller, and Dr. J. D. Lang. His original story tallied with other reports that came from people who had never heard of him.

“Narren Jim,” or James Arnold, an old settler of the border country near Curriwillingbi, went to Eulo, near Cooper’s Creek, during the drought of 1867-68 looking for pasture. He came to Cooper’s Creek about the camp of Burke and Wills. About 45 miles up a tributary creek channel he saw a leaning tree on the right bank marked “L.L. Dig.” He had no spade, but thought of coming back later. Going west from there, he came to a lake, where the blacks told him some white men had been killed nearby many years ago. They had a half-caste girl, 18-20 years old, with them. Further west still, he came to a mob of wild cattle, mostly clean skins. “Narren Jim” was the first settler on Cooper’s Creek. Nutting and Doyle followed him as owners of his run when he was convicted of cattle stealing and sent to St. Helena in August 1868. His story was told to G. M. Kirk of Gulnabar by a fellow prisoner.

“Tiger,” a blackfellow tailing horses for Thargomindah Station west of Bulloo, said that a wild white man moved with a tribe about 700 miles from there. He was a good intelligent black and could be trusted.

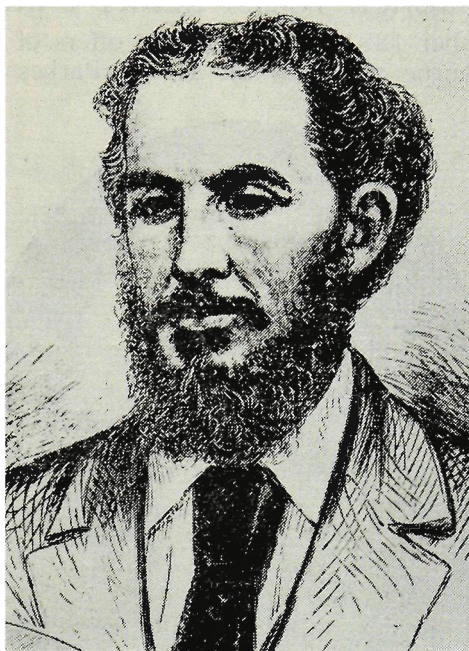
Mulligan River blacks told Colcough Kirwan on the Herbert (Georgina River) that they had Classen with them, but would not give him up because of his magic. He had half-caste children, a boy of 20 and a girl about 17 years. They told Kirwan that Classen died trying to reach Kirwan’s camp on the Herbert in *November 1876*. He was then an old man so doubled over with arthritis that he could hardly walk alone.

SKUTHORPE’S SEARCH

Unfortunately, Kirwan himself died in *March 1877* of fever and malnutrition, when his supply wagons were held up by severe flooding of the Channel Country. However, he had already told John Richard Skuthorpe, a visiting western cattleman, about his blacks and their prisoner. Skuthorpe had met Hume briefly at Mungindi in 1874, and though Hume had not told him much, the stories tallied. Skuthorpe, being the nearest neighbour to the late Kirwan, went to his station to administer the estate. The blacks showed him the bora grounds of the Mulligan and Herbert natives, but would not tell him where Classen was buried. There was plenty of papers left, they said, in the saddle bag with no rings.

They confirmed that Hume had been there a long time before, had stayed two moons and left his brand on a coolibah tree near the river—"A.H. 1867" in six-inch letters.

Skuthorpe described to R. B. Dawson of Curra Station the German bible the blacks had, the half-caste children, the



J. R. SKUTHORPE

thatched huts to store nardoo seed that the wild white man had taught them to make.

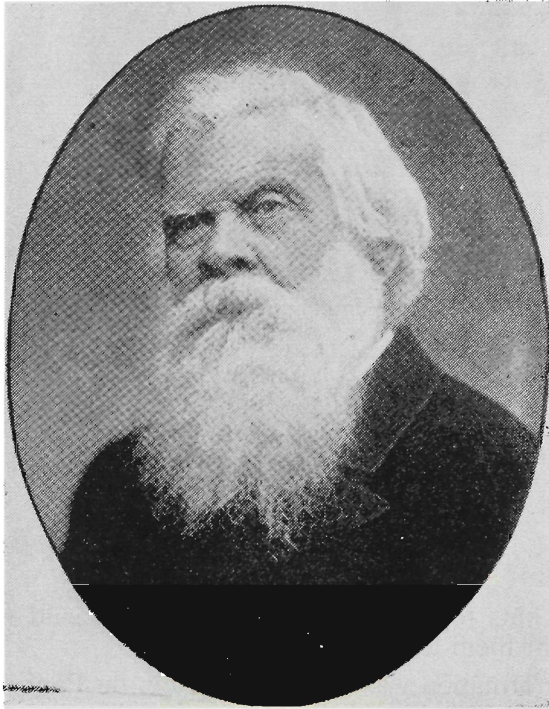
The information was sent to Eccleston du Faur in *January 1880* by Mr. Dawson, and in December that year Skuthorpe himself wrote about it to George Kirk, pastoralist, the same man who had heard about "Narren Jim." Skuthorpe, in three years of searching and cogitating, had come to the conclusion that the relics, if recovered, would be worth something. He had also come to the conclusion that the wild white man was not Classen *but Leichhardt himself*. This would, of course, put greater value on any finds made. He undoubtedly knew that Leichhardt had arthritis as a young man and this wild white man had been crippled with it. He was also classed by the natives as a medicine man—and was not Leichhardt known as "Doctor" Leichhardt?

In January 1881 Skuthorpe sent a telegram to Eccleston

du Faur, stating that he had found Leichhardt's and Classen's journals and other relics. He was evasive and contradictory to newspapermen who wanted the story and would show them nothing, but when the Blackall *Western Champion* published a sceptical piece about him, Skuthorpe horsewhipped the editor, and threatened to sue him.

APPROACH TO SIR HENRY PARKES

In September 1881, having had no offers of cash for the relics, Skuthorpe wrote to Sir Henry Parkes offering the



SIR HENRY PARKES

journals, a telescope, a compass and his own services as a guide for six months "to point out localities connected with the discovery" for £6,000.

Sir Henry Parkes answered that a reward commensurate with the value of the relics would be given when they were produced. Skuthorpe never collected the reward. Nothing more was heard from him, but his descendants say that he was a touchy old "hatter," and felt he had been made a laughing stock. He undoubtedly had found them but had most probably cached them away again, and would not make

them available without a long trek back to the west. (He was then in St. George.)

Skuthorpe was the only man who had intimate information about the relics—he had met Hume and Kirwan and the implicated natives. He was in a position to search also, since his holding was near the area. His attitude of obstinacy was not just “sour grapes.” Many an old fossicker will place such high emotional value on gems he has found that he would never sell them even though the money would keep him in luxury—he prefers to bury the treasured object rather than share it with people he does not know!

MANY EXPLORATION PARTIES

In these years other exploration parties were on the move in Central Australia and some had things to report. *In 1888* David Lindsay, on one of his exploration parties, found an “L” tree near Arltunga on a waterhole of Elder Creek long. 135° lat. $23^{\circ} 26'$. The natives stated that many years before there were dray tracks and iron to the east. Leichhardt was not known to have taken a dray. *In 1889* W. G. Pledge found another “L” tree north-east of this, near 22nd parallel of lat. in long. 137° W. These finds were particularly interesting when considered with the reports of Sir Charles Todd, of Overland Telegraph fame, and R. Randall Kunchey, who had spent many years in Central Australia.

Mr. Jarvis, of Mount Margaret and the Peake, informed Lindsay that natives round there said a party of whites were murdered many years ago some distance east of Dalhousie Springs, in the direction of Milligan River. Mr. Bagot, Mr. Chandler, and William Crick, all residents of the Interior, reported that natives in their various locations had told the same story—east of Charlotte Waters, east-north-east of Dalhousie, etc. Lindsay's informants said they had not heard of a massacre, but some whites had died a long way to the north-east. It is noteworthy that aboriginal stories reported from Queensland, South Australia, Central Australia and New South Wales, all pointed to a locality east of Alice Springs and west of Cooper's Creek.

S. E. Pearson, in *Pastoral Review*, 1929, summed up a great deal of evidence about the Leichhardt party. He says 1848-49 was a good rain year, according to the natives of the interior, and Leichhardt could have reached Central Australia west from the Diamantina by the Georgina (Herbert) River, Mulligan, Fields Hay, and Marshall Rivers to Arltunga—taking in the two “L” trees. He says, in corroboration, that *in 1880* Charles Wienecke exploring the desert found

traces of a very old expedition such as must have been made by Leichhardt. Wienecke recorded that the marks could not have been made by any other party.

TWO OTHER FINDS OF IMPORTANCE

Two finds of importance were made outside this area. *In 1934* Charles Harding, a drover, discovered a half-burnt rifle butt with a plate on it inscribed "Ludwig Leichhardt 1848" in the correct German spelling. There is doubt about where it was found. Some stated it was found in the Musgrave Ranges of Western Australia; others in the Musgrave Range near the Finke River. It must be authentic, however, and the blacks may have carried it over a long distance from its origin as a trade article.

The same applies to two pre-Leichhardtian coins, one a half-sovereign, the other a Maundy threepence of 1841—issued six months before Leichhardt left England. These relics were found, together with old steel, a wrought iron pack saddle ring, fragments of boot and saddle leather, an aboriginal tooth, and human bones of a person under 21 years of age on an old aboriginal camping ground by the South Australian Government Search Party *in 1938* at lat. 26° 05' 12.5" and long. 135° 56' E, about six miles south of the Northern Territory border, and 41 miles east of Mount Dare Station. There is no proof that the skeleton was that of a white person, but the coins could very well have been originally from the Leichhardt expedition. Dr. A. Grenfell Price, who led the expedition, compiled a booklet that brings together much of the information available about search parties, but unfortunately does not mention Sergeant Gil-mour's findings from Lake Wantata at all.

LEICHHARDT'S WATCH FOUND

As recently as *1939* an aboriginal-Afghan dogger by the name of Reg. Nichols showed Harry Rippen, a stockman working for Boltanier Pastoral Company, a key and a silver half-Hunter watch, inscribed "L. Leichhardt," which he found while he was employed on Cordillo Downs Station just over the Queensland border in South Australia, and very close to Lake Massacre. He may still be in that district, because he was a "loner"—a man who lives alone, making little contact with civilisation. Mr. Rippen says the man is no hoaxer and the relic is definitely authentic.

In summing up all this evidence, I have come to these conclusions. The Leichhardt party followed a north-westerly direction after leaving Mt. Abundance. Their tracks through the headwaters of the Alice, the Nive, the Thomson and the

Barcoo prove this. Leaving the cattle on the Barcoo, a small party probably went north to the Flinders and returned. The whole party then followed Cooper's Creek to probably about 70 miles south of the junction of the Thomson and the Barcoo, then striking directly westward, crossing the Diamantina and coming by the Georgina and Mulligan's Creek to the worst of the desert country. You can imagine how the privations of the journey must have affected them—not only the lack of food and water but the constant plodding over gibber plain and claypan and sand ridge country where nothing but spinifex and saltbush will grow; the pitiless sun constantly dehydrating the precious water out of them and creating mirages to lure them away from reality. And what a reality! They were only halfway through their journey with the prospect before them of worse and worse country.

MUTINY IN THE DESERT?

Mr. Les. Martin from Toowoomba, who went into this region recently looking for Leichhardt relics, describes it as a frightening country. Not even the aborigines will go into the silent, still valleys between the sand ridges, row upon row of them all running north to south as far as the eye can see. The wonder is that the expedition found its way as far as that. We know how moody and irritable Leichhardt became under stress. Minor mutinies had occurred frequently on the other two expeditions. Similar, but much worse, physical circumstances prevailed here. Somewhere to the north-west of the Simpson Desert, or perhaps only on the eastern edge about the Mulligan and Herbert River junction, the men decided they could take no more of him and mutinied, leaving him and his German relative to die in the desert.

Did all the rebel party follow the same route back along Eyre's Creek following their tracks? We do not know. We know only from the blacks that the native boys were with them, and by assaulting local gins made it inevitable that the whole party would be tracked down and killed. The blacks followed them to Wantata waterhole where they were murdered and probably eaten.

LEICHHARDT DIED MISERABLY

The leader died a slow, miserable death in the desert, but Classen survived and was cared for and revered by the Mulligan River blacks until he died at the age of 62. The descendants of his half-caste children are still probably living in the west. His journals and those of Leichhardt were probably found where Hume put them and disposed of by J. R. Skuthorpe when nobody was interested in buying them. The

relics are scattered along the aboriginal trade routes and the skeletons lie out there among the sandhills in a terrain that still proves Nature's supremacy over mere man.

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