



Scots who made their mark on..... The History of Australia 3: Thomas Mitchell



Sir Thomas Livingstone Mitchell (1792-1855) was involved in Napoleonic campaigns in Spain as a battlefield surveyor before being posted to The Antipodes as Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales in 1827, where from the 1830's to the mid 1840's he recorded much of the geography of South-East Australia (Queensland) including marking the course of several major rivers, including the Peel, the Namoi, the Gwydir, the Darling and the Glenelg. He named scores of geographical features often using native, classical or British references.

Major Mitchell led four expeditions into the less barren Australian interior pushing away from the unproductive coastal parts which by then had largely been explored and understood. One of his most important reports on the goldfields of Bathurst led to a gold-rush. He also found the first diamonds ever discovered by Europeans in Australia. In 1838 whilst on leave back in Britain he wrote about his first three expeditions and soon after was knighted by Queen Victoria, largely for his skilful map of the Nineteen Counties, which had burgeoned around Sydney as defined by Sir Ralph Darling in 1826.



Mitchell had been born in central Scotland (Craigend, Stirlingshire or Grangemouth, depending on sources) into a family of modest means which led him into military service when he was 19. When the Napoleonic campaigns in Spain and Portugal came to an end he returned to a hum-drum routine in England so no doubt was delighted with his posting to exotic lands.

Mitchell's first (1831) expedition led him to try to corroborate suspicions of a major river which the aborigines called Kindur and was said to flow northwest from the Liverpool mountains to N.S.W. and the sea. Mitchell contested the assertion that the Murray-Darling system was the major river in the area. He set out with two fellow surveyors, 15 convicts and a personal servant. In January of the new year he came across a major river, the Gwydir, and then pushed on to find what he thought was the upper stretches of the Darling, but because natives had killed two of his party and his supplies were running out he had to return to his base.

His second expedition began in the Spring of 1835 with the object of tracing the Darling to the sea. His party was again attacked by aborigines who murdered one of his science officers but he pressed on in very difficult circumstances sometimes having to haul boats overland. On this occasion he returned to base having failed in his objective, but he tried again a year later, this time meeting the fiercest opposition ever from the natives whom he feared would overwhelm his team, who eventually repelled them with superior arms. By this time Mitchell was inclined to agree that the Murray river *did* run into the Darling.

On his fourth expedition he headed south east and discovered the Grampian mountains and a river which he named the Glenelg which his party followed to the sea and finally met up with some of the original settlers who gave them supplies.

Despite leading parties which met hostility from the aborigines, Major Mitchell was sympathetic to them and his writings about his explorations, his noting of flora and fauna and his anthropological commentaries made him the most celebrated Australian explorer of his time.

His role in improving the quality of surveying in Queensland which had been developed by Europeans for almost 40 years when Mitchell arrived was very important as land was being opened up and sold off to settlers. He was responsible for the surveying of the Great North Road linking Sydney to the Hunter Valley which was built with convict labour and the equivalent to the South linking the city to Goulburn.

Mitchell was famously irascible and frequently fell out with those in authority who were responsible for directing his explorations. He also invented "a boomerang propeller" for river steamers, which provide to be the ancestor of the reversible turbine.

Major Mitchell's cockatoo



Cuba 2005 shows the cockatoo on the left of the design along with *Cacatua galerita*

Cacatua leadbeateri aka Major Mitchell's Cockatoo is shown on Australia 1993, and according to *Scots and Philately* (Trew & Burns, 2008) also on St Vincent 1998, Grenadines of Grenada 2000 and Netherlands Antilles 2000.

"It is named in honour of Major Sir Thomas Mitchell, who wrote "Few birds more enliven the monotonous hues of the Australian forest than this beautiful species whose pink-coloured wings and flowing crest might have embellished the air of a more voluptuous region."The scientific name commemorates the British naturalist, Benjamin Leadbeater." (Wikipedia)

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Scots who made their mark on..... *The History of Australia 4: John MacDouall Stuart*



John MacDouall Stuart born in Dysart in Fife in 1815, became the most famous of all explorers of the Australian interior, making six expeditions from South to North in the middle of the Nineteenth Century. He pioneered exploration of the desolate Northern Territory and to his immense credit he did not lose one man in the course of his explorations.

Looked after by relatives when he was orphaned in his teens, Stuart graduated as a civil engineer and emigrated to Australia aged 23. He was not of a particularly robust physique standing 5 foot 6 inches tall and weighing under nine stone, quite remarkable when you consider the astonishing physical challenges he endured.

When Stuart arrived in South Australia in 1839 he found settlements to be little more developed than a shanty town and his first work was to mark out proper blocks for settlers to put their homes on, firstly working for the government and then as a freelance surveyor.

His boss as Surveyor-General of South Australia was India-born Englishman Captain Charles Napier Sturt (GB 1973) who had already established a reputation for himself as an explorer, having identified the full course of the Darling and Murray rivers. Stuart was a draftsman on Sturt's 1844-5 expedition into the interior which hoping to find a fabled inland sea, encountered only desert and more desert and he was appointed Sturt's right hand man when the incumbent died of scurvy during the expedition. The Scot and his commander also suffered from scurvy but both made it back to Adelaide. It took Stuart many months to recover his fitness after that but when he did he took up his previous work as a private surveyor.



With only two companions, Stuart led his first modest expedition in 1858, financed by wealthy land owner William Finke, aiming to find mineral deposits and new arable grounds. He was able to find a few transient watering holes as he travelled near Lake Torrens but to this day no one has been able to settle and farm the area, so barren is it. In four months Stuart travelled 2,400 miles, established a reputation for tenacity and enterprise and won a Gold Medal from the Royal Geographical Society for his efforts.

In order to claim, by right, a lease for one area (Chamber's Creek) he had discovered Stuart agreed to do the surveying of it himself and the next year he set off, this time with three men and just over a dozen horses, did the work and pushed north into what is now The Northern Territory, but had to turn back when they ran out of horse shoes. He did not find the fabled lake but discovered a reliable (though brackish) water supply, which he named "The Spring of Hope".

A new incentive to explore further was the invention of the telegraph whose sub-ocean cables were beginning to make communication across The British Empire much faster. With the cable already near the North of Australia a route to bring the telegraph 3000 south to Adelaide was essential. So the government of South Australia offered a prize of £2,000 who could cross to the north and so flag up a route for the



Australia 1972 marking 100 years of telegraph line and (right) 1960 marking centenary of the exploration of the Northern Territory.

Map showing Stuart's six trans Australia expeditions



telegraph. Stuart and his sponsors threw his hat in the ring but was ignored, officials preferring another bid which failed. Nevertheless when Stuart returned to Chamber's Creek (now Stuart's Creek) to re-survey his claim he explored west of Lake Eyre finding many more artesian springs.

In 1860 with two companions Kekwick and Head, Stuart set out to find the centre of the continent, travelling light and fast, but they were very unlucky with the wet weather which destroyed much of their supplies and all began to suffer with scurvy. Yet in mid April 1860 Stuart reached the centre, where he named a mountain after Charles Sturt, though it was later renamed after Stuart himself.

As they pushed north they were opposed not only by the harsh conditions, but for the first time by hostile aborigines and when kit for shoeing horses was stolen in late June the party had to admit final defeat and return south, to Adelaide 2,400 miles away! Incredibly they made it back by October, mere skeletons of men. Stuart was again recognised by the Royal Geographical Society—and by the government of South Australia.

The fifth expedition, government sponsored and protected, would aim to cover the ground Stuart had just made and make it to the North coast. Stuart left Chambers Creek with twelve men, almost 50 horses and food for six months on the first day of 1861 and after immense hardship and several false trails he headed due north and found a large lake which he named Glandfield Lagoon (later renamed Newcastle Waters), where the party set down came for five weeks in order to regain their strength, but they failed again to find the way north and returned home.

The sixth expedition, grudgingly supported by the government set out from Chambers Creek in January 1862 and made good progress towards the lagoon discovered the previous year, again considerably hindered by aborigines. Finally in early June he reached territory in The Top End which had been surveyed from the North and on 24th July 1862 he reached the waters of the Indian Ocean on a beach east of what we now called Darwin and pinned a Union flag to a tree.

He returned to Scotland in April 1864 to live with his sister, but aged 50 having returned to London John Macdouall Stuart died his bed on 5th June 1866 his modest frame finally succumbing to the most astonishing rigours exacted upon him by the unexplored centre of Australia which he took on time and time again.

Seven people attended his funeral.

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