

# EXPLORE

**The Charles Sturt Memorial Museum Trust Inc.**

**CHARLES STURT MUSEUM NEWSLETTER**

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Welcome to a new year for the Trust with lots of plans afoot and projects to be pursued..

We held our Annual General Meeting on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> December. It was good to welcome members and provide a chance to view the new exhibit "On Country" designed by Denise Schumann and funded by The Copland Foundation. Volunteers and Friends joined members at the conclusion for a Christmas barbecue to celebrate the successes of the year.







We were pleased to welcome 20 members of the Attingham Alumni, of The Copland Foundation Scholarship Program on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2023. Denise Schumann AOM Heritage Consultant, accepted an invitation to talk about the life of Charles Sturt within the context of her exhibition *Antipodean Dreams* and offering up a new insight into Sturt's relationship with First Nations Peoples through the launch of her new display *On Country* funded by [The Copland Foundation](#). Margaret Phillips proffered an insight into

the restoration of The Grange, while Anne McCutcheon explained the nature of colonial gardens and how it was reflected in Sturt's garden. Merle Weston gave an informative talk on the history of The Grange, expanding on the family stories as she guided guests through Sturt's colonial home.



### Recognition of Support:

Merle Weston, the Trust President, has once again, shown her dedication to the Trust by donating funds to the Conservation Fund. This enabled the Trust to engage Artlab to conserve and restore two pole screen panels, embroidered by Lady Grey, the niece of Charles Sturt. These were a feature of his drawing room at Clarence House, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire. The fire screens were used to protect guests from the direct heat generated by the hearth fire. In the previous century, men and women wore make-up to cover skin imperfections, such as smallpox scars. The makeup was lead based which could melt under direct heat of the fire and cause lead poisoning. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, pole screens were only a decorative feature.



The City of Charles Sturt continue to support the Trust, this year providing us with \$2,500 for the heritage Garden, \$800 for a reprint of booklets and \$3,140 for the lighting of The Grange. Council's generosity extends to maintaining our park area for the pleasure of the local community and granting the Trust a 50% rebate on our rates.

The completion of the Shared "pedestrian and bike" Path, with its fenced decking area, bench seating and garden landscaping has attracted many visitors to the Museum. Even Mark Butler, Federal Member for Hindmarsh and Minister for Health, out for a stroll with his family, dropped in to see the new Visitor Centre and exhibition.



Earlier in the year the History Trust of South Australia provided funding for the conservation and reframing of the Sturt Family hairlocks. Jodie Prymke, art conservator and framer, undertook the task and produced a magnificent display.





The Royal Geographical Society of South Australia's Rare Book Club visited the Museum in November. We welcomed back our tour guide Paul Hilbig after another of his intrepid journeys into central Australia. Paul provided commentary on Sturt's Central Expedition. He comments -

"Exploring is a bit like carrying out a scientific experiment. An experiment may seem to be a failure, but finding out what does not work, is a very important part of the scientific process. Was the expedition a failure? The honest answer is probably yes. A geographical question was answered, some specimens of flora and fauna were brought back, but Australia did not provide what was expected of her. The thought of the whale boat being dragged all that way on its bullock cart, only to be abandoned because no inland sea was found to sail her upon, must have been quite depressing.

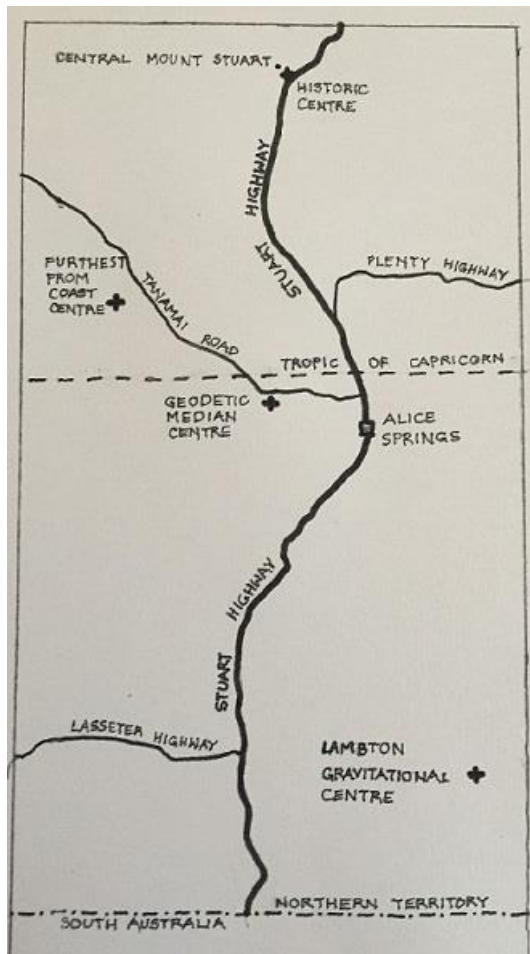
Success in any scientific experiment, is built upon lessons learnt from many failures. If there is a successful ending to Sturt's Central Expedition, then I think it lies in the fact that [newer] Australians have come to love and appreciate the sunburnt centre of this country. We love it to death in our 4WD's these days, as we explore all its remote corners. The role of the Charles Sturt Memorial Trust is to promote the achievements of the man who first showed us what the interior of Australia was really like. It was not what he expected, but he was also the first [Englishman] to show us the qualities that are required, if you are going to survive in this harsh environment. Courage and determination, patience and discipline, brought together under sound leadership.



Paul Hilbig camping up in Corner Country.

## Paul enlightened visitors to his premise **HOW CLOSE DID STURT GET TO THE CENTRE OF AUSTRALIA?**

There is an oft repeated claim that Captain Charles Sturt reached to within 280km of the centre of this country, on his 1844 Expedition into Central Australia. Sturt was not given the task of finding the centre of Australia. He was given instructions to explore a mountain range that supposedly ran SW to NE through the middle of the continent. The furthest North Sturt reached was at a camp on Eyre Creek, about 172km North of present day Birdsville. Even if he had wanted to go to the centre, I doubt that he would have made it from Eyre Creek, as this involves crossing the Simpson Desert from East to West. Sturt had enough problems getting his party back alive to Adelaide.



If, as a rough approximation, you compare the figure of 280km with the direct distance from Birdsville to Alice Springs of 597km, such a difference appears worthy of investigation.

The first thing to note is that there is in fact no official centre of Australia. What we are dealing with is, a large odd shaped continent, that is sitting on the irregularly curved surface of the earth. This results in a number of possible centre points, each of them valid, each depending on the criteria you define as important. Let us look at some of these methods for obtaining a centre.

LAMBERT GRAVITATIONAL CENTRE:- Finding the centre of gravity of Australia is best imagined as having a perfect cut-out map of Australia with thousands of tiny weights equally spaced along the coastline. The centre then, is the point where the cut-out

would balance on a pin while remaining perfectly horizontal. In the Bicentennial Year of 1988, a complicated mathematical exercise was carried out by the Division of National Mapping to accurately determine this point. A monument has been erected at the site and is named after Dr. Bruce Lambert, a former Director.



CENTRE AT THE FURTHEST POINT FROM THE COASTLINE:- Think of this as putting the largest perfect circle you could fit within the coastline of Australia, that only just touches the coastline at three points. The centre of that circle becomes the centre of Australia according to this definition.

GEODETIC MEDIAN CENTRE:- What is done here is to draw a box around Australia that just touches the Northern, Eastern, Southern, and Western most points of the continent. The geodetic median point is where the distance of the four geodesic lines joining the median point to each of the four corners is equal. (A geodesic line is the shortest line between two points on a curved surface like the earth's).

HISTORIC CENTRE:- On 22 April 1860 John McDouall Stuart wrote the following in his diary: "I find from my observations of the sun, that I am now camped in the centre of Australia". He named the mountain he was camped under, Mount Sturt, after his leader on the 1844 expedition. It has since been re-named Central Mount Stuart, in honour of Stuart's explorations that established the route of the Overland Telegraph Line.

We know the co-ordinates of these four possible centre points, as well as those of the point on Eyre Creek which was the closest that Sturt got to the 'centre'. A series of simple calculations establishes the following distances:-

Eyre Creek to Lambert Gravitational Centre-	522km.
Geodetic Median Centre	615km.
Historic Centre-	652km.
Furthest point from Coast Centre	702km.

The choice is yours as to which centre you wish to choose. What is clear is that the oft quoted 280km is incorrect. I leave it up to the scientists to argue the merits of the various choices, but being in awe of Sturt and his achievements, I choose the Historic Centre. John McDouall Stuart was the drafter responsible for mapping and recording the discoveries on the 1844 Central Expedition. He went on to gain fame as the first person to cross the continent from South to North and return safely, having learnt most of his exploring skills while in the company of Sturt.

If you are travelling up Innamincka way and wish see **Wyjudga**, the sand-hill where Sturt encountered 300 – 400 aborigines, here are the directions. Firstly though the area is a Restricted Access Area and permission is required from SANTOS.

Start at Innamincka and drive East on Adventure Way towards Queensland for approximately 148k, at which point the road drops down from a stony plateau onto the flat channel country. Stop at the bridge over C ooper Creek to set your trip meter to Zero.

Continue East along Adventure Way for 8.5k to a t-xion signed 'no public access' but also pointing to Hebe and Vega. Turn Right here and head south, with the road slowly turning to the south-West, for 29.0k.

Turn Left here a t-xion signed to Hebe and Vega, and head south for 0.7k.

Turn Left here at t-xion signed to Hebe, and head East for 0.9k. Ignore xion signed to Vega 1 & 2.

Turn Half-right here and head south-east for 0.7k.

Turn East here for 6.2k and you have arrived at the Wyjudga sand-hill and can walk from here.





Wyjudga Sandhill

