

EXPLORER STURT and the Christian Connection

Another in the series of “and the Christian Connection.”

Charles Sturt, 1795—1869

Death seemed imminent. Sturt and his men were stranded on a sand bar at the Murray- Darling river junction. Confronting them on the bank were nearly 600 Aboriginals, painted, armed and making menacing gestures to their war-song. This was Sturt’s second exploratory journey into the outback; would it be his last?

He tried without success to pacify the natives. As they drew nearer, they were even more threatening raising their spears, poised to hurl them. Seeing it would be impossible to avoid an aggressive engagement, Sturt reluctantly picked up his double barrelled shot gun, hoping that shooting would scare them off. He levelled his gun at the closest native with his finger on the trigger.

At that very moment, a new party of Aboriginals appeared on the other bank. Sturt recognised one of the new arrivals as friendly from an earlier meeting further up the river. The man leapt to the stranded party’s rescue.

Sturt’s journal records the ‘miraculous intervention of Providence in our favour’ which saved our lives. This was a remote and inhospitable uncharted part of Australia at the time, but Sturt and his men were out to solve a mystery. If all the major rivers flowed westward, where did they go? Was there an inland sea? By tracing several of these West-flowing rivers Sturt and his men established that they merged into the Murray River and then flowed in to the sea in the Great Australia Bight. The mystery was solved; no inland sea.

Sturt’s third exploratory journey was one of the most famous Central Australian expeditions, the most difficult and dangerous of all his expeditions.

On 10 August 1844 Sturt set out, well equipped he thought, from Adelaide with fifteen men, six horse drawn wagons, a boat and two hundred sheep. They headed north-west from Menindee on the Darling River. They travelled over 4800 kilometres into unknown territory and reached the Simpson Desert. But just 113 kilometres from the equator, the party were forced to turn back. The heat reached 53 degrees Centigrade and caused the thermometer to burst.

In May 1846 Sturt was awarded the gold medal of the Royal Geographical Society for his achievements. Sturt documented his great discoveries and numerous scientific observations in his journals. He wrote about his faith and how he took all his plans, difficulties and sorrows to God in prayer. Always recognising the ‘Providential care and intervention of God’. He was known for his ability to inspire and maintain the loyalty of his men, even under the most adverse conditions, and for his conciliatory manner towards the Aboriginals.

Sturt was concerned that his exploits were thought to be purely for the love of adventure, but he put this thought to rest when he journalled his real motivation ‘... but also with an earnest desire to

promote the public good, and certainly without hope of any reward than the credit due to a successful enterprise.' These words were written in the Preface to his book, Travels in Australia.

Historian Jill Waterhouse wrote: 'Sturt, like most Australian explorers faced with a hostile environment, leaned hourly on God's mercy'. He slept with a Bible from his father-in-law under his pillow, and when he had to throw away most of his possessions in the desert, he decided to keep the Bible in preference to an oil lamp.

Sturt had learned the secret of the Christian life – to trust in God and to look at how he could benefit society. His Christian faith and character contributed much to the establishing of our Nation. He is a worthy role model.

What do you think you could do to benefit our society?

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*archive.org/stream/expeditionintoce04976gut/old/xpcst10.txt