

LEICHHARDT'S EXPEDITION (1844-45)

Who Were The Members?

It is of particular interest in this centenary year of Dr. Ludwig Leichhardt's discovery of the Burdekin River on the 2nd of April, 1845, and his subsequent journey to the Gulf of Carpentaria to gather some facts regarding the men who comprised this intrepid party which traversed 3,000 miles from Jimbour Station (near Dalby) to Port Essington (in North Australia) in 15 months, and which was responsible for the most successful overland exploration in the history of Australia, writes "Bertie Frere."

In addition to Dr. Ludwig Leichhardt (the leader) and John Gilbert (the deputy leader), there were James Calvert, Thomas Roper, John Murphy and William Phillips. The ages of these explorers at the time of their arrival at the Burdekin River would be approximately as follows: Leichhardt 32, Gilbert 31, Calvert 20, Roper 25, Murphy 16 and Phillips 45.

Leichhardt was born in Prussia, Germany, in 1813 and had studied science and medicine at the universities of Göttingen and Berlin. He had also visited London and Paris and spent a few years travelling in England and on the Continent of Europe, before his arrival in Sydney (N.S.W.) in 1842. He had cherished the ambition to lead an overland expedition from Moreton Bay to the Swan River through virgin country never traversed previously by white men.

After landing in Sydney and meeting all the official authorities and citizens who might be of assistance in organising an expedition he then spent two years in gaining colonial experience in the country districts lying north of Sydney as far as Moreton Bay and the Darling Downs. Leichhardt, at this period was a tall, angular, young-old man, with an aquiline nose, piercing blue eyes and straggling hair and beard. He had defective eyesight, and was not considered a good bushman nor a good horseman. He was, however, a very resolute man and he succeeded in his expedition to Port Essington when many experienced bushmen and pastoralists predicted that his project would turn out to be an utter failure.

Gilbert, the deputy leader, was born in Yorkshire, England, and was an accomplished zoologist before coming to Australia as a collector with the famous ornithologist, John Gould, in 1835. He had spent the previous six years in the bush of Tasmania, Western Australia and North Australia and had visited parts of South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales during the same period (1838-44). He was really a naturalist-explorer at the time he joined Leichhardt's ex-

pedition in September, 1844, and had already carried out considerable research work on the fauna and flora and geological formations in different parts of the Australian States. He was anxious to carry out further scientific research on the journey to the Gulf of Carpentaria with Leichhardt. He was able to find his own finance for the purchase of his horse transport, as he desired to be independent so that he could do his own scientific research work from day to day. He was a very reserved man who disclosed no information about his family in England and about his antecedents before his arrival in Australia in 1838. He kept a diary on the journey to North Queensland and every night he made very copious notes therein. This diary is still in existence and discloses more accurate dates, locations and other information than Leichhardt's diary between the 1st of October, 1844 (when the party left Jimbour Station) and the 29th of June, 1845 (when Gilbert was speared to death in the explorers' camp at Dunbar Creek near the Gulf of Carpentaria).

James Calvert was born in the North of England, and migrated to Australia in 1841. He met Leichhardt on board ship whilst travelling from England, and then learned of his plans for exploring the interior of Australia. During the course of the expedition Leichhardt named the following places after him, namely, Calvert's Plains (on the Dawson River near Taroom, November, 1844), Calvert's Peak, in the Peak Range (Central Queensland, February, 1845) and the Calvert River in the Northern Territory, which flows into the Gulf of Carpentaria. After his return from Port Essington to Sydney in 1846 he became a station manager and botani-

cal collector. He died in Sydney in 1884.

John Roper was born at Gayton Thorpe, Norfolk, England, in 1820, and joined Leichhardt's party in 1844.

Thorpe, Norfolk, England, in 1820, and joined Leichhardt's party in 1844. Roper's Peak in the Peak Range, between the Isaac and Suttor Rivers in Central Queensland, and a very fine river running east through the Northern Territory into the Gulf of Carpentaria.

in his honour. The famous Elsey Station

the Roper River. He arrived back in Sydney in 1846 on the return of Leichhardt's party and then lived in Albury (N.S.W.). He became Mayor of Albury in 1862. From 1886 to 1895 he was an inspector of stock at Merriwa (N.S.W.). He died in 1895.

John Murphy was born in Pembroke-shire, Wales, in 1829. He left for Australia with his parents in 1841. On board the ship he heard Leichhardt expounding his views about the exploration of Central Australia. He joined Leichhardt's expedition at the age of 15 years and proved a most useful member of the party. Murphy's Lagoons and Murphy's Range, near Taroom, were named by Leichhardt in honour of his youth. After he returned to his parents in Sydney they would not permit him to join any more expedition and he then qualified as a surveyor and an artist. He died in 1870. His father, James Murphy, became Mayor of Sydney in 1860.

William Phillips had been a London attorney and stable coach proprietor before his arrival in Sydney in 1838. He was then aged 38, with a wife and two children. In 1844 he volunteered to join Leichhardt's expedition. He was very retiring and circumspect during the course of the journey. He put forth his best endeavours to assist the party at all times, but he pitched his camp at a distance from the others. His narrative on the expedition is in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, but it has never been published. Mount Phillips, in the Peak Range, Central Queensland, was named by Leichhardt in his honour.

The Expedition Range (north of the Dawson Valley and north of the Lynd Range in Central Queensland) was named in honour of Leichhardt's expedition in 1844-45. The Zannia Creek further north was named after the Zannia plant, probably at Gilbert's request. The Christmas Range on Leichhardt's track through Central Queensland, was discovered during the Christmas period of 1844, and was named accordingly. The Comet River, which flows east into the Mackenzie River was named after a very brilliant comet observed in the sky by the explorers in December, 1844. Mount Coxen, discovered between the Isaac and Suttor Rivers in Central Queensland, was named after Henry Coxen, of Sydney, a brother-in-law of John Gould.

Mount Lang, in North Queensland, situated adjacent to Leichhardt's track (on the 23rd of May, 1845) between the Valley of Lagoons Station

and the Valley of Lagoons Station and the Ronana Station, was named after Dr. John Dunmore Lang, D.D., patriot and statesman, born 1799 at Greenock, Scotland, died 1878, at Sydney (N.S.W.). His monument is in Lang Park, between Margaret Street and Wynyard Street, Sydney. Leichhardt knew that Dr. Lang had established German missionary families in the Moreton Bay district for the purpose of Christianising the wild blacks, and in 1843 Leichhardt had lived for some time with these missionaries when he travelled on horseback from Sydney to Moreton Bay. Dr. Lang had assisted Leichhardt in his efforts to prepare for the expedition in 1844.

Mount Nicholson, in Central Queensland, was named after Dr. Charles Nicholson, of Sydney (N.S.W.), and not after the Nicholson family in Bristol, England. The Mitchell River, flowing east into the Gulf of Carpentaria, was named by Leichhardt after Sir Thomas Mitchell, the Surveyor-General of New South Wales and an explorer who did not have a high opinion of Leichhardt as a bushman, nor as a horseman. Leichhardt evidently had other qualifications which pulled him through.

The Nicholson River, flowing into the Gulf of Carpentaria, was named after Henry Allyne Nicholson, of Bristol, England. This family had greatly assisted Leichhardt before he left England for Australia in 1841.