

Escorted small group tour of Western New South Wales

Reading List

Cry Me A River: The Tragedy of the Murray-Darling Basin

by Margaret Simons

The Murray-Darling Basin is the food bowl of Australia, and it's in trouble. What does this mean for the future - for water and crops, and for the people and towns that depend on it?

In *Cry Me a River*, acclaimed journalist Margaret Simons takes a trip through the Basin, all the way from Queensland to South Australia. She shows that its plight is environmental but also economic, and enmeshed in ideology and identity.

Her essay is both a portrait of the Murray-Darling Basin and an explanation of its woes. It looks at rural Australia and the failure of politics over decades to meet the needs of communities forced to bear the heaviest burden of change. Whether it is fish kills or state rivalries, drought or climate change, in the Basin our ability to plan for the future is being put to the test.

"The story of the Murray-Darling Basin ... is a story of our nation, the things that join and divide us. It asks whether our current systems - our society and its communities - can possibly meet the needs of the nation and the certainty of change. Is the Plan an honest compact, and is it fair? Can it work? Are our politics up to the task?"

Burke and Wills: The triumph and tragedy of Australia's most famous explorers

by Peter FitzSimons

The iconic Australian exploration story - brought to life by Peter FitzSimons, Australia's storyteller.

'They have left here today!' he calls to the others. When King puts his hand down above the ashes of the fire, it is to find it still hot. There is even a tiny flame flickering from the end of one log. They must have left just hours ago.

MELBOURNE, 20 AUGUST 1860. In an ambitious quest to be the first Europeans to cross the harsh Australian continent, the Victorian Exploring Expedition sets off, farewelled by 15,000 cheering well-wishers. Led by Robert O'Hara Burke, a brave man totally lacking in the bush skills necessary for his task; surveyor and meteorologist William Wills; and 17 others, the expedition took 20 tons of

equipment carried on six wagons, 23 horses and 26 camels.

Almost immediately plagued by disputes and sackings, the expeditioners battled the extremes of the Australian landscape and weather: its deserts, the boggy mangrove swamps of the Gulf, the searing heat and flooding rains. Food ran short and, unable to live off the land, the men nevertheless mostly spurned the offers of help from the local Indigenous people.

In desperation, leaving the rest of the party at the expedition's depot on Coopers Creek, Burke, Wills, Charley Gray and John King made a dash for the Gulf in December 1860. Bad luck and bad management would see them miss by just hours a rendezvous back at Coopers Creek, leaving them stranded in the wilderness with practically no supplies. Only King survived to tell the tale.

Yet, despite their tragic fates, the names of Burke and Wills have become synonymous with perseverance and bravery in the face of overwhelming odds. They live on in our nation's history - and their story remains immediate and compelling.

World Heritage Sites of Australia

by Peter Valentine

Peter Valentine presents Australia's 19 World Heritage sites in a magnificent tribute to natural and cultural history. The outstanding qualities of each site are described and illustrated in exquisite detail, along with an account of how the site came to be on the World Heritage List. In many cases, the path towards listing was not straightforward, with the Australian Government having to exercise its constitutional powers against other parties with vested interests in using sites for other purposes, including forestry and mining.

Rainforests that show the connections of the ancient super continent Gondwana. Rock art that points to a history of human settlement reaching over 60,000 years into the past. Sandstone remnants of eighty years of convict labour and imprisonment. A marvel of twentieth-century architecture. This is Australia's world heritage.

In a thoughtful foreword, former minister for the environment, heritage and the arts and Midnight Oil lead singer Peter Garrett describes his own experience of these wonders and concern for their continued existence.
