

170th Anniversary - Mt Bryan Expedition - Commemoration Fair and Celebrations - Morgan

History of Event

In 1839, Governor Gawler, a visionary statesman believed he had to prove to England, the importance of Adelaide and the Province of South Australia due to its integral water supply, he ordered Captain Charles Sturt who at the time was the Assistant Commissioner of Lands to organise an expedition along the Murray River.

With three disassembled whaleboats transported by bullock team to a spot on Currency Creek, Sturt led a party of 12 including Lt Col Sir George Gawler, KH the 2nd Governor of the Province of South Australia, Lt William Jonathon Samuel Pullen (olater Admiral RN), Henry Inman, the first Superintendent of the Newly formed, South Australian Police, Aboriginal Interpreters 'Encounter Bay Bob' and 'Tommy' and 18 year old Henry Bryan, a distant relative of Gawler.

Henry Bryan and his brother Guy, arrived in South Australia on 25th February 1939 and settled on land at O'Halloran Hill and called it Bryan Station.

The expedition set off on 26th February 1939 and traveled the length of the Murray River until arriving at the Great Bend at Morgan on the 10th December.

On the 11th December, whilst the main party remained at the Bend, Gawler, Sturt, Inman, Craig and Bryan rode out northwards to explore the country. At 12 noon on a small hill to the NE of the campsite, Gawler named the hill Mt Bryan.

As the party's water supplies were depleted, Gawler and Bryan set off from the group on the hill to ride back to camp to find a rescue party however Sturt, Inman and Craig followed a little time later but traveled in a different direction towards the south to search for water.

On the 14th December with the temperature well into the century, Gawler and his horse could not proceed. Bryan handed over his horse in order that Gawler could ride the 14 or so miles to camp. Henry followed on foot with Gawler's horse in lead. An hour later, a hot wind in the Burra Creek floodplain whipped up a dust storm causing Gawler to collapse and Bryan to veer off course.

According to the trackers, Bryan continued for about 6 miles where he removed the saddle from the horse he was leading, they found Bryan had a taken a few steps towards the SSE and then all signs vanished.

Bryan was never seen again to this day and has not been declared missing, presume dead or a death certificate issued. In 2004, four of the descendants of the 5 riders gathered near Morgan on the 14th December and held the first ever Memorial Service for the Soul of Henry Bryan. A huge stone monument stands on Samson Well Road about 700 metres north of the Morgan-Burra highway.

The mystery and intrigue that surrounds this disappearance is legendary which prompted historian and writer Graeme McVitty to investigate and document the expedition and propose a commemoration in Morgan to acknowledge the 170th anniversary of the Mt Bryan expedition.

The Mid Murray Council in conjunction with the Morgan Community Development and Tourism Association has proposed to conduct a commemoration fair at the Morgan riverfront reserve on 12th December 2009 to acknowledge this historic event.