



Courtesy of Collection Nolan Gallery, Cultural Facilities Corporation Canberra

Sidney Nolan (1917–1992) *Burke and Wills Expedition 1948*

Australia's most enduring story revealed in an exhibition

Burke & Wills: from Melbourne to myth, a major travelling exhibition focussing on the legendary 19th century expedition that crossed Australia from south to north, opens at the National Library of Australia on 27 March 2002.

Drawing on the library's own material and a large number of institutions and private collections, the National Library of Australia has gathered together the most interesting works of art, relics, scientific specimens, letters and journals produced before, during and after the ill-fated journey.

Tim Bonyhady from the Australian National University, one of Australia's leading art historians and environmental lawyers whose 1991 book about Burke and Wills received widespread claim, is the guest curator.

This exhibition is the first to examine the explorers' place in Australian culture from the 1860s to the present. Art has a large place in the exhibition, both as a record of the exhibition and a response to this legendary story. The exhibition

contains remarkable Aboriginal and European material. It is an exhibition which stretches across culture and time in order to reveal how one of Australia's most enduring stories has grown and changed.

Items in the exhibition include:

- paintings made on the expedition by the renowned 19th century artist, Ludwig Becker, who died during the journey;
- Sidney Nolan's original series of Burke and Wills paintings produced in 1948–50;
- the notes and diaries written by Burke and Wills leading up to their deaths;
- the famous portrait of Burke by William Strutt, Australia's finest figure painter of the 19th century;
- works by contemporary artist Antony Hamilton and photographer Jon Rhodes;
- the earliest preserved example of Aboriginal food — the nardoo cake — made from a type of native grass seed;
- a letter from 'Cupid' — most likely

the comic actress Julia Mathews — to Burke, and the 'love glove' reputedly given by Mathews to Wills before the expedition started (she is said to have given its pair to Burke);

- the original public notice announcing the discovery of Burke and Wills' remains dated 3 November 1861;
- rare maps from the expedition;
- a sample of Burke's hair, his whip, and his Colt revolver; and
- the hoof of Billy, Burke's last horse.

Burke & Wills: from Melbourne to myth is on display at the National Library of Australia from 27 March to 2 June 2002. As a National Library of Australia initiative, William Wills' diary, held in the library's collection, will be available for the first time online from 27 March. Visit <http://www.nla.gov.au> to view the transcript and the digitised manuscript.

The exhibition continues to the Art Gallery of South Australia from 21 June to 18 August and the State Library of Victoria from 13 September to 24 November. ■