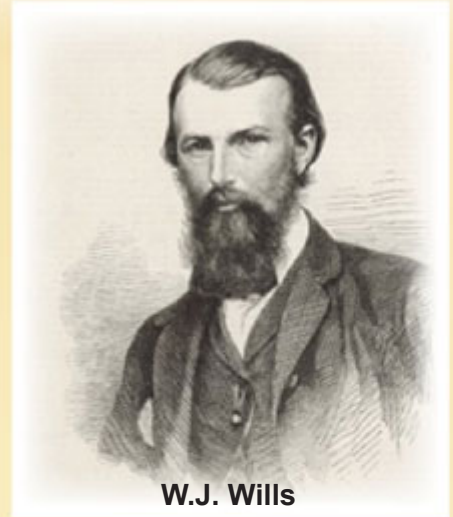




Robert O'Hara Burke

# LAST DAYS



W.J. Wills

Robert O'Hara Burke, a police officer, led an expedition from Melbourne in 1860 with the object of crossing the continent from south to north. W.J. Wills became second in command. The expedition from Cooper Creek to the Gulf of Carpentaria by Burke, Wills, King and Gray was accomplished on 11 February 1861.

Tragedy marked the return journey. Gray died of exhaustion. The other three struggled back to Cooper Creek only to find that the depot party had left a few hours before their arrival. The party had remained there six weeks longer than they had been ordered to stay.

Burke and Wills died of starvation. King was cared for by friendly natives until a relief party rescued him.

Here is part of the final diary record by Wills.

## Friday June 21st 1861

Last Night was cold and clear winding up with a strong wind from NE in the morning. I feel much weaker than ever and can scarcely crawl out of the shelter. Unless relief comes in some form or other I cannot possibly last more than a fortnight.

It is a great consolation at least in this position of ours to know that we have done all we could and that our deaths will rather be the result of the mismanagement of others than of any rash acts of our own. Had we come to grief elsewhere we could only have blamed ourselves but here we are returned to Cooper Creek where we had every reason to look for provisions & clothing, and yet we have to die of starvation in spite of the explicit instructions given by Mr Burke "That the Depôt party should await our return, and the strong recommendation to the Committee that we should be followed up by a party from Mininda."

About Noon a change of wind took place and it blew almost as hard from the west as it was previously from the NE as clouds continued to pass over towards East.

## Sunday June 23rd 1861

All hands at home. I am so weak as to be incapable of crawling out of the shelter King holds out well but Mr Burke finds himself weaker every day.

Illustrations: Burke and Wills Australian exploring expedition  
(nla.pic-an8960212. National Library of Australia)