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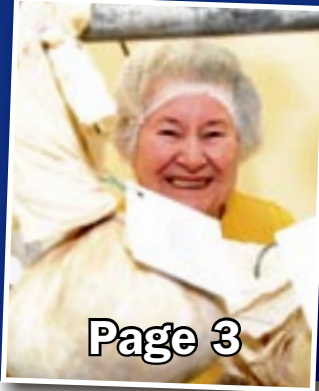
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2009

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Page 3

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Back Page

Odyssey to focus on environment

By Andrew Robertson

A journey that will retrace the Burke and Wills expedition of 1860 next year will be used to draw attention to some of the "enormous" environmental problems facing Australia.

Paying members of the public are expected to join scientists, students and politicians on the 3,000km, 32 week outback trek from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria.

The project is one of a series of events being planned by The Royal Society of Victoria (RSV) to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the ill-fated expedition which left Melbourne on August 20, 1860.

The RSV organised the original expedition that passed through Menindee and later claimed the lives of most of the party including its leader, Robert O'Hara Burke, and his deputy, William Wills.

But next year's expedition will have a very different mission.

Organiser Dr Jonathan King is hoping it draws attention to Australia's litany of environmental issues, in a similar way last month's dust storms did in Sydney.

"People for the first time said 'are there problems out there?'"

Dr King said the damage

that European settlers have done to the country through the introduction of feral animals and unsustainable farm practices had already been well documented.

But he hopes the 150th Anniversary Environmental Expedition will lead to a concerted effort from government to fix the problems.

"150 years later we know so much of the bush has been opened up and so much of the bush has been wrecked.

"We have to try and work out a way of preserving the land ... for the next 150 years."

Dr King, who was in the city this week with another member of the RSV organising committee, Simon Molesworth, said the dry lake beds of Menindee were a good example of why Australia had to act.

"The environmental problems facing Australia are enormous and this is a chance to focus on the less sexy ones," he said.

"We can't take a carpenter's kit bag and fix it all up, but through the expedition we can draw attention to the problems.

"It's an opportunity to (highlight) what the problems are from Melbourne to the gulf."

Members of the public will be able to join next year's expedition which Dr King described as a "moving festival" that

will focus attention on the environment.

Plans are underway for a Burke and Wills inspired art exhibition to coincide with its arrival along with a screening of the film "Burke and Wills", which starred Jack Thompson.

Participants will be able to join the expedition, which will depart from Melbourne on August 20, for up to two weeks.

"The call is going out to intrepid explorers wanting to do something for the environment," Dr King said.



* Royal Victorian Society members Simon Molesworth (left) and Dr Jonathan King at Menindee this week. A journey retracing the Burke and Wills expedition of 1860-61 will take place next year on the 150th anniversary.

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