

# AUSTRALIA'S REAL "DEAD HEART"

## RIBBED DESERT WHICH NONE CAN CROSS

### Return of the Madigan Expedition

After an investigation by aeroplane of certain unknown portions of Australia, Mr. C. T. Madigan returned on Saturday with information that disproves the belief that great sheets of water exist in the Lake Eyre region. Between Oodnadatta and the Queensland border a desert was flown over that Mr. Madigan considers to be one of the most remarkable formations in the world. It consists of perfectly parallel lines of red sandhills on which not a sign of life can be discerned.

The expedition, which was arranged by the Royal Geographical Society (South Australian branch), the president of which is Mr. A. A. Simpson, C.M.G., had as its primary object the elucidation of the myths that cling to Lake Eyre. The floodwaters of half a continent are supposed to drain into this area, but after a careful survey Mr. Madigan is convinced that if the region ever forms into a lake the depth of water is never more than a few inches. The party included Flying-Officers F. J. B. Wight and A. G. Gerrard, who acted as pilots; Flight-Sergeant Stewart, Aircraftsmen Bain and Thomas, and Leading Aircraftman Roach. Mr. Thomas looked after the photography, and Mr. Bain was in charge of the wireless. Another aircraftman attended at Alice Springs to fit up a special camera. Mr. Madigan expressed his appreciation of the great assistance rendered by these Air Force officers. The schedule was observed practically to the minute, and no trouble was experienced with the planes at any part of the journey.

#### Utterly Dead Region

"We had three main objectives," said Mr. Madigan, "the primary one being to investigate the unknown area between Oodnadatta and the Alice Springs railway line and across to the Queensland border. It is completely surrounded by sandhills, and as no man, either white or black, has crossed it there has been a good deal of speculation about the country within. All who have tried to penetrate it have been turned back by the sand and lack of water. The area runs into about 30,000 square miles. Investigating it from the air seemed to be the quickest and safest way, and we covered it in three different flights. Our worst fears were confirmed. It was sandhills all through. No watercourse could be traced, and not even a claypan was seen. There were absolutely no topographical features, other than parallel ridges of red sand which extended for hundreds of miles. The formation of these ribs of sand, with almost mathematical accuracy, and the uniform conditions extending over such a large area, make this desert one of the most remarkable in the world. There was not a sign of life. Apparently, even lizards could not exist there. The only growth was a little spinifex and scattered mulga. There might have been other species that could not be identified. The circles of spinifex and mulga were, however, definitely observed. It is a region that can be written off as utterly dead. When our plane descended for a close view, a rise of

temperature from the burning sands was immediately noticeable."

#### Rivers that Disappear

Mr. Madigan made special enquiries whether anybody had ever crossed this desert, but there was no reliable evidence of even the blacks having ventured into it. Other observations from the air established the fact that the watercourses from the eastern MacDonnell Ranges soon fade away into small claypans in the northern part of that area. The Hale River disappears in a similar way from near the Queensland border. Only the Finke maintains a definite course right to Lake Eyre. It is so wide in its lower reaches that it can hardly discharge much water into the lake. Three flights were undertaken in this terrible region, covering 5 hours 10 minutes in the air. Had the machine experienced a forced landing on the sand it could not have taken off again.

#### Would Walk Across Lake Eyre

"The second objective of the expedition was to investigate the lakes in Northern South Australia," said Mr. Madigan. "This applied particularly to Lake Eyre, about which so many myths have existed. It has been definitely established that Lake Eyre at present consists of about 5,000 square miles of flat plain, without a drop of water on it. We could not observe any trace of islands, there were no watercourses, and not a suggestion of drainage lines. I am convinced that, under no conditions, would it ever contain more than a few inches of water. For many years past I am satisfied that it has not held any water at all. The Cooper and Diamantina rivers very rarely flow into the lake, and when they do their immense volume of water, spread over this 5,000 square miles, would not last any appreciable time in a country where the evaporation is 16 feet per annum. Stray camel pads may be seen almost anywhere on the lake, and I would be prepared to cross it in any direction on foot. Only in one place did we observe tracks which seemed to be in boggy ground. Two long flights were made, and over the lake area itself we flew for nearly four hours. The third objective was geological work in the MacDonnell Ranges. I flew a long way in one machine to take notes, and the other flew at about 10,000 feet, photographing about 130 square miles on a mosaic pattern with a special camera. The results of the expedition will be of considerable scientific interest and importance, but it cannot be said that anything of economic value was discovered. On the other hand, further efforts in the direction of developing this hitherto unknown area can be saved."

## FLINDERS RANGE

### GEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION

## Traces of Ancient History

The party of geological students from the Adelaide University which left Adelaide on August 12 on an expedition to the Flinders Range, returned on Sunday, and had a most interesting and instructive time. The students included Misses E. M. Turner and E. S. Wannan, and Messrs. F. M. Hocking, F. J. Semmens, D. J. Glastonbury, J. O. G. Glastonbury, and C. Rooney, and were under the leadership of Sir Douglas Mawson, Professor of Geology at the Adelaide University, who was accompanied by Lady Mawson. The party travelled by motor cars.

Sir Douglas Mawson stated on Monday that the expedition had been a complete success. All the members of the party had enjoyed the best of health, and had had a very interesting and instructive time. They had covered over 1,200 miles, and had found much of geological value to them. The route was mapped out so that they travelled upwards on the west side of Flinders Range and came down on the eastern side. They halted for a time at Inoolawartina and subsequently stated Mount

Searle and Wooltana stations, going then on to the Paralana Hot Springs, where a few days were spent to considerable educational advantage. The country and rocks were of absorbing interest to the students. On the homeward trip they called at Wirrialla station, Blinman, and then went to Hawker. At Wilpena Pound further geological investigations were made. The party had examined during the tour many fine fossils which were connected with ancient history, some of the formations of the Flinders Range dating back hundreds of millions of years, and the fossils were found to be quite good.

Members of the party had meals of wild donkey steak, and were pleased with it. In the interior some men gained a living by hunting wild donkeys and kangaroos and other native animals. Although the drought had affected the livestock in most parts, and also the wild animals, in the high hills there were supplies of good food, where the timber was thick. All the members of the party expressed their delight with the experience, the instruction gained, and the arrangements made for the tour.

#### REG. 28-8-29

### Science Congress In Brisbane

The Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science will hold its next meeting in Brisbane in May, 1930, when Mr. E. C. Andrews, the Government Geologist of New South Wales, will preside. There has not been a meeting of the Association in Brisbane since 1899, when the President was Professor W. A. Bagg, of Adelaide.

## BUSY PROFESSORS

### STUDENTS ASSISTED

#### Expeditions Undertaken

Adelaide University possesses not only an able but a particularly enthusiastic staff of professors and lecturers. During the vacation of a fortnight which ended on Saturday several of them, in the interests of their students, conducted research parties, or spent a great deal of time in their laboratories.

Prof. R. W. Chapman (professor of engineering) and Mr. H. W. Gartrell (lecturer in mining) accompanied a party of students to Sydney to examine the construction of the North Shore Bridge, and other items of engineering interest. Several also accompanied Mr. Gartrell to Newcastle to study certain sections of the coal-mining industry, and the steelworks of the Broken Hill Associated Smelters Proprietary Limited.

Prof. Kerr Grant (professor of physics) attended a conference at Melbourne University dealing with mathematics, astronomy, and physics, and Mr. C. T. Madigan (lecturer in geology) completed an aerial survey of portions of Central Australia.

Sir Douglas Mawson (professor of geology) accompanied a party of his students on a geological survey of the northern section of Flinders Ranges, while Mr. J. G. Wood (lecturer in botany) paid a visit to Koonamore Station, 50 miles north of Yunta.

About 1,400 acres of this area have been presented to the University for experimental purposes by Mr. Hamilton Wilcox. A research laboratory in charge of Mr. C. Paltridge has been established, and the work is being conducted in conjunction with the Commonwealth Council of Scientific and Industrial Research. In addition to other enquiries, valuable information has already been obtained on the subject of regeneration of the salt-bush flora.

#### MAIL 24-8-29

## ABO LOVE SONGS

### Professor's "Finds"

### MUSIC INSTINCTIVE

## "Put Students to Shame"

"This is my fourth expedition among the aborigines, and I have now collected more than 100 songs," said Prof. Harold Davies (director of the Elder Conservatorium) tonight when asked about the recent University expedition to Central Australia.

"The Australian 'native' is instinctively musical, to an extraordinary degree. Men, women, and children will sing, not only in ceremonials and corroborees, but walking out bush, and round their camp fires.

"The range of subject matter includes practically everything of which these simple folk are conscious, insects, beasts, birds, rain songs, war songs, and so forth.

"My last phonograph record at Hermannsburg was a song of the 'new moon,' and on our recent trip I have found for the first time what are known as 'Ipintja,' or love songs of a primitive character."

What is the special value of this investigation? "Speaking as a musician," said Prof. Davies, "I should say that the prime interest of this research is its bearing upon the origin of music.

"Our aborigines are stone-age men. They have no musical instruments, used as such, so it is very wonderful to find that the basis of their songs is those outstanding pitch relations upon which we have built our own musical system.

"We must bear in mind that they have absolutely evolved these relations for themselves. This surely is positive proof that music at bottom is an instinctive thing as well as a deeply human thing.

"Then there is, of course, the psychological interest of the songs. They are a strange aspect of the mentality of primitive man—being essentially a form of self-expression."

Asked whether he thought the aborigine capable of musical development, Prof. Davies said:—

"I am quite sure it would be possible to train the blackfellow up to the point of real musical skill. With only a limited amount of teaching they have already learned, at Hermannsburg, to sing correctly in four parts—treble, alto, tenor, and bass.

"Also in 'testing' the musical susceptibility of several of the full-bloods I rarely found one who could not sing any note that I gave him.

"More than this, I came across one man who could do ear tests that would put many students of music to shame. It was all tremendously interesting."

#### REG 29-8-29

## NO SITE FOR BARR SMITH LIBRARY

### Lack Of Space Hinders 'Varsity Development

## SPECIAL ACT MAY BE REQUIRED

(BY FRESCO)

THE University authorities are ready to build the Barr Smith Library, at a cost of £32,000 as soon as a site has been fixed. There is no suitable space on the existing grounds.

The proposal is to erect it on the lower level at the rear of the Jubilee Oval Pavilion, but it would be unwise to do so unless an assurance can be given that the land around it will, at some future date, be available for further development of the University block.

The only way in which such definite assurance can be given is by the passing of an Act placing the Jubilee Exhibition grounds under the control of the University, subject to existing leases, but it will not be necessary, nor is it proposed, to interfere with the Exhibition Building itself in any way.

#### FURTHER BUILDING PROJECTS

The Bonython Hall, for the erection of which £40,000 will be available at the end of next year, it is proposed to site so as to give a vista down Pulteney street, but a right-of-way will be left between the Hall and the Exhibition Building.

When the matter of the Frome road deviation through the Exhibition Grounds was referred to the Registrar (Mr. F. W. Eardley), he pointed out that, though it may be advisable from a townplanning point of view, it would not be considered desirable to isolate the School of Mines from the University, in view of their present intimate connection and probable future developments.

He also pointed out the difficulties previously met with in laying out the grounds, and locating the buildings in relation to each other, when the actual extent of the land eventually to be under the control of the University was unknown.

For instance, they must look forward to the erection of an Arts Building, which should be contiguous to the Library, and even further still to the erection of a Chemical School.

#### VICTORIA DRIVE FRONTAGE

The granting of the low level land fronting Victoria Drive eased the situation for a while as regards space, but this has by now been practically all allocated. When the building programme is complete, the main frontage of the University will be to the river, across Victoria Drive.

There is no intention at present, to place under the control of the University the land on which stand the Teachers' Training College and Technical School, now the site of the old Destitute Buildings, which will probably be reserved for further departmental buildings as the need arises.