

William John Wills Encyclopedia Article

William John Wills

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1834-1861

British-born Australian explorer who made the first overland crossing of the Australian continent in 1860 as second-in-command and surveyor on Robert O'Hara Burke's (1821-1861) ill-fated Great Northern Expedition, on which he and Burke died of starvation. After beginning medical studies, Wills migrated to Victoria, Australia, where he accepted work as a Crown Lands surveyor (1852). In 1858, he became a staff member of a meteorological observatory on Flagstaff Hill in Melbourne. In 1863, Wills and Burke's remains were reburied in Melbourne with a memorial to their transcontinental adventure.