



Above from left: The 1961 party building the cairn. The dedication ceremony.

Smith of Dunesk Mission

CAROLINE STOK, ARCHIVIST

The Geelong College and its Exploration Society have a long history with outback Australia, from treks exploring the landscape and donations made to local communities. In 1961 the Exploration Society visited the Smith of Dunesk Mission to honour the work of the mission's pioneers, including one of the College's own leaders.

The Smith of Dunesk Mission was founded at Beltana, South Australia in 1894 as a base for the traveling Presbyterian mission across northern South Australia. The name comes from its benefactor, Lady Henrietta Smith (1782-1871) of "Dunesk" Lasswade, Scotland.

Rev. Sir FW Rolland, who served as The Geelong College Principal from 1920-1945, started his ministry career as the mission agent from 1905 to 1908. During his tenure, the Rolland family sponsored a deaconess and trained nurse to expand the mission work.

The mission provided health and pastoral services, becoming the foundation for the Australian Inland Mission (AIM, established 1912) and the Royal Flying Doctor Service (established 1928).

Rolland's experience at Beltana and the College's Presbyterian Church

connections led to the Exploration Society setting their sights on Beltana and the Flinders Ranges in 1961.

"This being the centenary year it was decided that the activity of the Exploration Society for the May holidays should be one which linked it with the past, as well as one which fulfilled the ideals of the Society by means of strenuous activity in the open air and by observation of our native flora and fauna. With this threefold aim in mind, discussions were held with the Rev. J. F. McKay, the Superintendent of the A.I.M., and he suggested that we assist with a long range plan to establish a memorial to pioneers in the outback regions of Australia. This set the wheels in motion for the planning for the erection of a memorial cairn at Beltana in South Australia."

- Ad Astra, November 1961

A party of 24, including 22 students, set out for the Flinders Ranges in May 1961.

The group stayed at Beltana Station where half the group built the memorial cairn while the rest of the group went on day trips. The cairn was unveiled by College staff member GC Robertson, during a short service.

After the cairn dedication they trekked from Angorichina Hostel to Wilpena Pound and Wilpena Chalet, and climbed St Mary's Peak.

Maps of the country with sufficient detail for accurate navigation are not available and due to the dryness of the season most of the creeks were without water.

Both of these factors turned what should have been a pleasant two and a half day hike into a long, dry struggle.

- Ad Astra, November 1961



The legacy of Rolland and the 1961 group remains to this day.

In 2006 the Exploration Society returned to Beltana. A group of students hiked the Flinders Ranges and finished the expedition with a trip to the memorial cairn. The group cleaned up the cairn, remembering the students who had come before them.

In 2020, the memorial plaque was refurbished through the dedication of Chris Ward and sponsored by the College. Unveiling the plaque has been hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic.



The 1961 Exploration Society expedition.

Flinders Ranges party 12-29 May 1961

Derek Berney	Guy Gregg	Ross Paton
Max Cameron	David Leslie	Graham Peace
M Ross Campbell	Kenneth MacLean	John Read
David Dennis	Peter Mann	Campbell Seward
Peter Dobie	Alastair McDonald	William Troedel
Roger Douglas	Ian McLean	Donald Urquhart
Ian Falk	Stephen Miles	
Malcolm Florence	Bruce Mulligan	



The 2006 Exploration Society expedition.