

South Australian Government prospecting expedition, 1903

This prospecting expedition, funded by the South Australian Government, was the first major expedition Herbert Basedow participated in. Its purpose was to inspect the Musgrave, Mann and Tomkinson ranges and neighbouring areas for signs of gold and other mineral deposits.

Expedition leader Larry Wells and his second-in-command Frank George were both well-known explorers. The other members of the party comprised four prospectors (including Basedow), two camel drivers and three Aboriginal people. Arrerika (or Punch) acted as a tracker and assisted with the camels, and his wife, Unnruba (Annie), assisted the cook (one of the prospectors). A young Aboriginal girl named Mijagardonne (Lady) provided general assistance. Basedow, who had recently graduated in science from the University of Adelaide, accompanied the expedition on the recommendation of HYL Brown, South Australia's Government Geologist. Basedow was already well-regarded at the university and Brown was one of his strongest supporters.

The expedition party set off from Oodnadatta for Todmorden station, on the Alberga River, on 6 April 1903. Transport was provided by a string of 20 camels. From Todmorden they travelled in a westerly direction until just over the Western Australian border. At times the party travelled together and at other times divided into two groups to cover more country. On returning to Oodnadatta, instructions were received to continue their exploration into country to the south-east as far as Lake Torrens.

Wells's assessment of the region's geological potential was pessimistic. It is perhaps not surprising that they found little evidence of mineral bodies, given that the available techniques only permitted surface examination or shallow digging. Brown also argued that they did not have sufficient time to undertake a thorough examination.

In addition to his prospecting duties, Basedow carried out various ethnological and scientific research and made collections of rocks, plants, animals and Aboriginal artefacts. Some of the areas in which they

**Tree marked by Herbert
Basedow, Glen Ferdinand
expedition camp, Musgrave
Ranges, South Australia
1903**

reproduced from film negative

travelled were entirely unknown to science. During the trip Basedow extended the known range of species and discovered several new species, three of which were later named after him. These were a cockroach, *Periplaneta* (now *Ataxigamia*) *basedowi*; a beetle, *Bolboceras basedowi* and a land snail, *Thersites basedowi*.

Basedow also kept a photographic record of the expedition using two light portable Kodak cameras: a No. 2 pocket folding and a No. 1 panorama camera. He exposed a total of 272 images, 188 with the pocket camera and 87 with the panorama camera. All but three of these photographs survive, either as negatives or prints. Basedow also published his expedition journal, illustrated with many of his photographs, in the journal of the Royal Geographical Society of South Australia, 12 years after the expedition.

Basedow's expedition photographs embrace a wide range of subject matter, including expedition members, camp scenes, station life, Aboriginal people in settled and remote areas, landscapes and geological features. The chief value of his photographs lies, perhaps, in their depiction of Aboriginal people who had had minimal contact with Europeans. In a journal article, published in 1904 in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia*, he commented on the value of the information he recorded on Aboriginal people and, by extension, the photographs he took of them:

The mineralogical duties in connection with my position of Prospector to the Government North-West Expedition did not permit of my making extensive

anthropological observations, but the following facts are placed on record to afford some account of the natives of a region of Central Australia that has been practically unexplored, from an ethnological point of view, and to bring these tribes into comparison with those natives of Central and Northern Australia which the reports of the Elder and Horn Expeditions and the work of Messrs. Spencer and Gillen have made comparatively well known.

Wells and Basedow shared interests in natural history and anthropology so it is not surprising that they developed a friendship on the expedition. It was from Wells that Basedow learnt many of his bush skills, which would serve him well on future expeditions.

The prospecting expedition finished after five and a half months. Some members of the party, including Basedow, caught a train at Leigh Creek to Adelaide, and the camels were returned to the government depot at Mount Serle. In his published journal, Basedow assessed the cost of the expedition to be £1,166 10/4. An official expedition report was produced by Wells and George.

Brown's faith in Basedow was well rewarded. Not only did he conduct his duties to Wells's satisfaction, he also gave lectures on the expedition to the Royal Society of South Australia and the University Scientific Society and published in both societies' journals three articles on anthropology and geology, derived from his findings on the expedition.