



The dig tree

By Sarah Murgatroyd

First published in 2002

Genre & subject

Burke and Wills Expedition (1860-1861)

Australia -- Discovery and exploration

Synopsis

Wills knew that he was fading fastest. On 26 June, he decided the only honourable thing to do was to sacrifice himself to save his companions. In 1860, an eccentric Irish policeman and a shy English scientist led a cavalcade of men and camels out of Melbourne to cross the continent south to north. Less than a year later seven men were dead. Sarah Murgatroyd's classic account of an ill-fated expedition is a tragic tale of courage, love, suffering and madness.

Author biography

Sarah Murgatroyd was born in England in 1967 and grew up on a farm in Sussex. After a year in China, India and the Himalayas, she gained an honours degree in Philosophy and Literature at Warwick University, and then studied broadcast journalism at Cardiff University. In 1993 she came to Australia where she travelled extensively, providing news and current affairs coverage for the BBC. To research *The Dig Tree* she retraced the footsteps of Burke and Wills across Australia.

Sarah died of cancer in March 2002, a few weeks after *The Dig Tree* was first published.

Discussion starters (general, not specific to the book)

- How did you experience the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"?
- Describe the main characters—personality traits, motivations, inner qualities.
- Do the main characters change by the end of the book? Do they grow or mature? Do they learn something about themselves and how the world works?
- Is the plot engaging—does the story interest you?
- Talk about the book's structure. Does the author use a single viewpoint or shifting viewpoints? Why might the author have chosen to tell the story the way he or she did—and what difference does it make in the way you read or understand it?
- What main ideas—themes—does the author explore? Does the author use symbols to reinforce the main ideas?
- What passages strike you as insightful, even profound? Perhaps a bit of dialog that's funny or poignant or that encapsulates a character?
- Is the ending satisfying?
- If you could ask the author a question, what would you ask?

- Has this novel changed you—broadened your perspective? Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or a certain part of the world?

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