

## How Far We've Come

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Blue Mountains Crossings Bicentenary poem commissioned by Blue Mountains Lithgow & Oberon Tourism.

The Three Explorers' crossing is a dinkum Aussie yarn.  
The kind that comes right after that laconic, "Air ya garn?"  
A case of Chinese whispers that our nation glorifies.  
Mark Twain said that our history reads like beautiful fresh lies.

It's likely that they weren't the first, but were the *best*, for sure.  
A well-planned business venture by three men who wanted more  
has since become a legend ... and it's replicated still.  
A story that's familiar – free resources; use at will.

Of course, it wasn't perfect, their provisions got quite low;  
they had no maps, no certainty, weren't sure which way to go  
and lost the pathway back, a trap for all those who explore.  
And many Europeans did. Let's see who'd gone before:

Compassionate Will Dawes despised ill treatment and corruption  
and kept the count of paces walked in spite of interruption.  
The first white man in Linden, an astronomer, marine,  
surveyor, engineer and native linguist in between.

Then Paterson, a Scotsman and an officer of note,  
tried hard to cross the mountains in – now wait for it – a boat!  
Another daring doer that the mountains soon sent packing  
was *Sirius's* quartermaster – tippler, Henry Hacking.

Ex-convict Matthew Everingham explored the northern side  
and may have reached Mount Wilson, though it's tricky to decide.  
Some Sydney cattle quickly gained their freedom from the plough,  
so first non-native 'cross the mountains ... could have been a cow!

Then Matthew Flinders' mate, George Bass, thought he might have a go  
with ropes and hooks for hands and feet. His route we'll never know.  
But later on he found Bass Strait and sailed with other men,  
then risking trade in Spanish seas, was never seen again.

A 'ranger of the bush' was surely first white 'cross the range.  
Once freed, John Wilson carried out a cultural exchange.  
He learnt some native ways and words, traversing lots of ground.  
The governor thought he could help stop rumours getting round.

A group of Irish convicts scored this man as mountain guide  
to prove to them that China wasn't on the other side.  
No China nor utopia was found whilst in the bush  
but Wilson reached near Goulburn when he made a second push.

So wild-man Wilson found a way around the mountain wall  
but no one followed up and he gained no acclaim at all.  
His journey was forgotten, he went bush. Within two years,  
abduction of a woman meant he died from native spears.

Barrallier, an architect, surveyor, engineer  
decided using depots may just conquer this frontier.  
He met with Aborigines – his journey still enthralled,  
but ended in frustration staring up at waterfalls.

George Caley was a botanist and labelled with this jewel:  
*If born a gentleman, would have been shot whilst in a duel!*  
His effort was amazing with its constant up and down  
described as like traversing tops of houses in a town.

A campfire error by his men could hardly be applauded –  
description of that bushfire may have been our first recorded.  
Then as he reached Mount Banks, expecting nature to submit,  
he saw the gaping canyon and I reckon he said ... “Bother!”

Well, these are trips we know about. There may have been some more;  
by 1813 kids grew up with bushland at their door.  
So *all* of these explorers helped to build up information.  
The crossing was a *process* with advances and frustration.

A mountain map existed too, before the white man came –  
a detailed web of stories, landscape features, plants and game.  
Some parts were shown to white folks who would never understand.  
Subduing nature’s not the same as living *with* the land.

But Blaxland, Lawson, Wentworth were the first to do it ‘right’.  
They marked their way, showed stock could pass and pastures were in sight.  
They hadn’t found extensive plains; there still was much to do  
but as respected gentlemen, did all they needed to.

Macquarie said, “Yeah, right! And now you’ll tell me China’s there!”  
“Oh, well, there’s Lithgow pottery, but *that’s* more earthenware.”  
Macquarie was compelled to follow up on their report  
but breaching of his prison’s wall was not a pleasant thought.

Political conditions, chance of economic gain,  
available resources and adventure can’t contain  
enthusiastic businessmen who have a prophecy  
and then their vested interests help dictate the policy.

Now, does that sound familiar? It seems nothing much has changed.  
Some short-term gain with long-term pain. Can’t that be rearranged?  
The toll on Aborigines cannot be quantified.  
The ignorance, the shameful deeds were *never* justified.

The Three Explorers’ crossing caused a freedom of the mind  
for Sydney Europeans who no longer felt confined.  
And now I wonder have we made ourselves another trap –  
locked-in to sap resources and ignore the looming slap.

So let’s reflect on what’s been lost – both beautiful and strange  
but like the Three Explorers, have a vision things can change.  
Our vision, like an ancient culture, never should succumb.  
Let’s ask ourselves the question: really, how far *have* we come?