

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN MINT BURKE AND WILLS COIN LAUNCH

RED ROTUNDA ROOM STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA

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Good morning.

Thank you, Graham (*Smith, Acting CEO RAM*) for that kind introduction.

I would also like to thank our distinguished guests for lending their support to the launch this morning – world record holder Jesse Martin...the Hon Dr Barry Jones... representatives from the Royal Society of Victoria... and from the State Library of Victoria, including the acting CEO Sue Hamilton.

I am honoured to be here in Melbourne to unveil the Royal Australian Mint's first coins for 2010, a fitting commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Burke and Wills expedition.

Australia is an island continent, located great distances from the northern hemisphere countries whose people 200 years ago dreamt of a better place. So it was no wonder that our great country was founded on the spirit of adventure. Our forbearers' had to take huge risks and great adventure just to get here, some voluntary and some, such as our convict ancestors, involuntary.

Continuing in the great spirit of adventure that characterises all Australians the Royal Society of Victoria initiated the "Burke and Wills" expedition in 1860, with the aim of exploring inland Australia from the south coast to the north coast, something that had never been done before.

It is fitting to launch this coin here, in Melbourne, as Burke and Wills departed almost 150 years ago from a site not too far from where we stand today.

The story of Burke and Wills did end in tragedy...but not in vain.

They were able to provide a complete picture of inland Australia and prove there was no inland sea.

This immense achievement in exploration and scientific discovery is a significant contribution to Australia and Australian history.

And even though this happened almost 150 years ago, the great pioneering spirit of Burke and Wills, still today, resonates with all Australians.

I am pleased that the Royal Australian Mint has designed two new coins to mark this historical milestone.

The 20 cent coin features Burke and Wills astride a camel and a horse, departing on their epic journey. The camel tracks represent their travelling route, while the footprints narrate the aid of the Indigenous peoples, as well as the Middle Eastern cameleers.

The one dollar coin spotlights the hardships endured by the Burke and Wills expedition team. The weary remaining sole survivor of the expedition is featured under the iconic carved dig tree at Coopers Creek in southwest Queensland.

The coin is housed in unique packaging, made to look like a diary from the 1800s. The proof set has included a copy of an excerpt from Wills' diary and the uncirculated packaging shows on a map of Australia how the coin designs fit into the Burke and Wills story.

Once again, I would like to thank the Royal Society of Victoria and the Royal Australian Mint for working collaboratively to pay tribute to the achievements of Burke and Wills in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the expedition.

Now I would like to invite Jesse Martin back up on stage to join me in unveiling the new coins.