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JOHN MCDOUALL STUART (1815-1866)

One of Australia's greatest explorers, John McDouall Stuart, was born on 7 September, 1815 at Dysart, Fifeshire, Scotland. He came to Australia at the age of twenty-three and worked as a draughtsman in the Survey Department of South Australia. He also tried his hand at sheep farming for a short period.

His interest in exploration commenced in 1844 when he was appointed to act as draughtsman to Charles Sturt's expedition north from Adelaide to Cooper Creek and the edge of the Simpson Desert.

This party was the first to penetrate almost to the centre of the Continent.

Stuart's first expedition in his own right was made in 1858 when he covered a distance of more than 1600 kilometres in three months.

He opened up much of the mining area of the North Flinders Ranges and, during the following year, in 1859, he completed two expeditions to Lake Eyre.

Stuart had established a reputation for exploration when, in 1859, the South Australian Government offered a reward of 2000 pounds for the first man to cross Australia from south to north.

John McDouall Stuart accepted the challenge and set out from Adelaide and thence Chambers Creek, in March 1860.

Proceeding northward he discovered a large sandstone formation which he named Chambers Pillar after which he crossed and named the MacDonnell Ranges after the Governor of South Australia, Brother His Excellency Sir Richard MacDonnell.

He then reached the geographic centre of mainland Australia, the first European to do so. The hill named Central Mount Stuart commemorates this achievement.

This, and a second subsequent attempt in November 1860, both failed to achieve the objective of reaching the northern coast.

On one occasion he was forced to return due to lack of provisions, on another because of hostile aborigines at Attack Creek.

