

## ***Afghans in Australia***



In 1860 24 camels were shipped from Karachi to Port Melbourne as baggage animals for the Burke and Wills trip. Three cameleers came with them.

On 31 December 1865, thirty-one camel drivers first arrived in South Australia with 124 camels. Many of the men were from Afghanistan. Thomas Elder imported the camels and they became the nucleus of a stud at his property in Beltana. The camels were used for cartage but also the Afghans and their camels played an important part in opening up the Australian continent.

The Afghans were involved in transport, exploration, supplying homesteads and mining camps, carting ores, wool, timber, stones, water, railway sleepers, and delivering the mail. They took part in projects such as the Overland Telegraph Line, the Transcontinental Railway Line, the Rabbit Proof Fence and Canning Stock Route. Some of the exploration trips were only successful because of the expertise and endurance of the camel drivers. Afghan camel drivers also contributed to the war effort of WW1.

The camel drivers were denied citizenship in Australia and could not bring their wives and families. Cigler and Stevens were the first authors to write about the Afghans themselves and not just the camels or the explorers. About 3000 Afghans took part in the camel-driving work and for nearly sixty years played an important part in the outback until the truck reached the outback in the 1930s. Islam in Australia is one of the most important cultural contributions of the camel drivers.

Recently there have been Afghan refugees and Afghan asylum seekers coming to South Australia to escape the war in Afghanistan. There is an Afghan Association in Adelaide.

### ***To find out more***

- Cigler, M 1989, '*Afghans in Australia*', Ethnic Heritage Series, AE Press, Melbourne.
- Hawke, R 2006, *Mustara*, Lothian, South Melbourne.
- Hawke, R 2004, *Soraya the Storyteller*, Lothian, South Melbourne.
- Stevens, C. 1989, '*Tin Mosques and Ghan Towns*', Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

See more information on this website under *Soraya the Storyteller*.