



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH

Hansard 15 May 2001

BURKE AND WILLS; DI ZISCHKE

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (12.18 p.m.): It took Burke and Wills six months to reach the Gulf of Carpentaria. Di Zischke and her camels hope to take four months including the return journey, both following as closely as possible to Burke and Wills' footsteps. Di set out from Nappa Merrie Station four days ago on her way to Innamincka before heading north to the Gulf of Carpentaria. One thing Di does not have to worry about is burying anyone and she will not have to spend a day drying out horse meat because of hunger.

Di has permission from the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to camp at many of the same sites as Burke and Wills did, including the 'dig tree'. Between Innamincka and Birdsville, Di will be accompanied by her husband, Cederic, who will be carrying supplies for both of them and the camels. At this point they will not meet again until Di reaches the 15 blaze trees in the gulf. This was the northernmost camp for Burke and Wills. At that point Di will be resupplied for her return journey to Birdsville.

Di's love of camels started a long time ago. In 1984 she took a 14-day safari on a property outside Alice Springs and developed a long friendship with the owners of that property. She began entering camel races and in 1994 won the prestigious Alice Springs Camel Cup on a camel called Bundy. Di's love of camels intensified and she and her husband bought a mob of wild camels and built their own racetrack at Coominya. They spent months breaking them in and started their own tourist property. It is a beautiful area of the Nanango electorate. If any members wish to take the opportunity to visit, I assure them that it would be well worth their while for the unique experience.

On her trip Di has taken four fully educated and prepared camels that were originally caught in the Northern Territory—that is, a lead camel, two camels to carry food and one for water. These camels will also carry up to 1,000 pounds of gear. Di will physically load and unload this weight every day—no mean feat! Di hopes to cover an average of 40 kilometres per day depending on terrain, some of which is extremely rugged. Her only concern is the possibility of running across crocodiles, not the fact that some rogue male camel might take a liking to her female camels. These camels were freighted by Queensland Rail to Quilpie and they will be freighted back at no cost. Parks and Wildlife in the Territory have issued permits free of charge.

Once Di reaches the northern-most camp, as did Burke and Wills, she will take a helicopter to the water and place a wreath in memory of the first expedition of the brave men who gave their lives trying to achieve the impossible. Those brave men never returned and, to this point, no-one has ever retraced the steps of Burke and Wills and returned. Many have travelled north to the gulf, but this will be the first time someone will reach the gulf and hopefully return by the same route. We have been informed of a rumoured reward put up by the South Australian government a long time ago when the area which Di will cover was still unopened. This reward was for someone who could travel to the gulf and back to achieve what was unachievable at the time. Di plans to claim this reward on her return if the offer is still valid.

The trip Di Zischke is undertaking is monumental. Some may say it is foolish; some, but most, would recognise her courage, her drive and her tenacity. It is only because of people such as Di who push the comfort zone barriers that we progress through life as individuals and as communities. I ask this parliament to recognise this woman's courage and that, on her return, she be welcomed in a manner which is befitting of such a remarkable effort. I am sure the communities of Esk, Coominya and

Toogoolawah will put on a great feast for her, but such an effort should not go unrecognised by this government.

Many people helped to get Di where she is today. Those involved include the National Geographic Society and the Esk Shire Council, including Mayor Jean Bray, who moved heaven and earth to get hold of a satellite phone which was then donated by Michaels Electronics at Toowoomba, which also supplied the battery and solar panel for the trip. Clutch Start is a group in the Esk area which strongly believes that many opportunities are lost because people with great ideas get no initial support from official bodies. It believes it can offer support to 'clutch start' interests and worthwhile projects. It is an inspiration to smaller communities and it should be emulated. It donated \$1,000 to help. Di and her camels have left their footprints over 15,000 kilometres.

Time expired.
