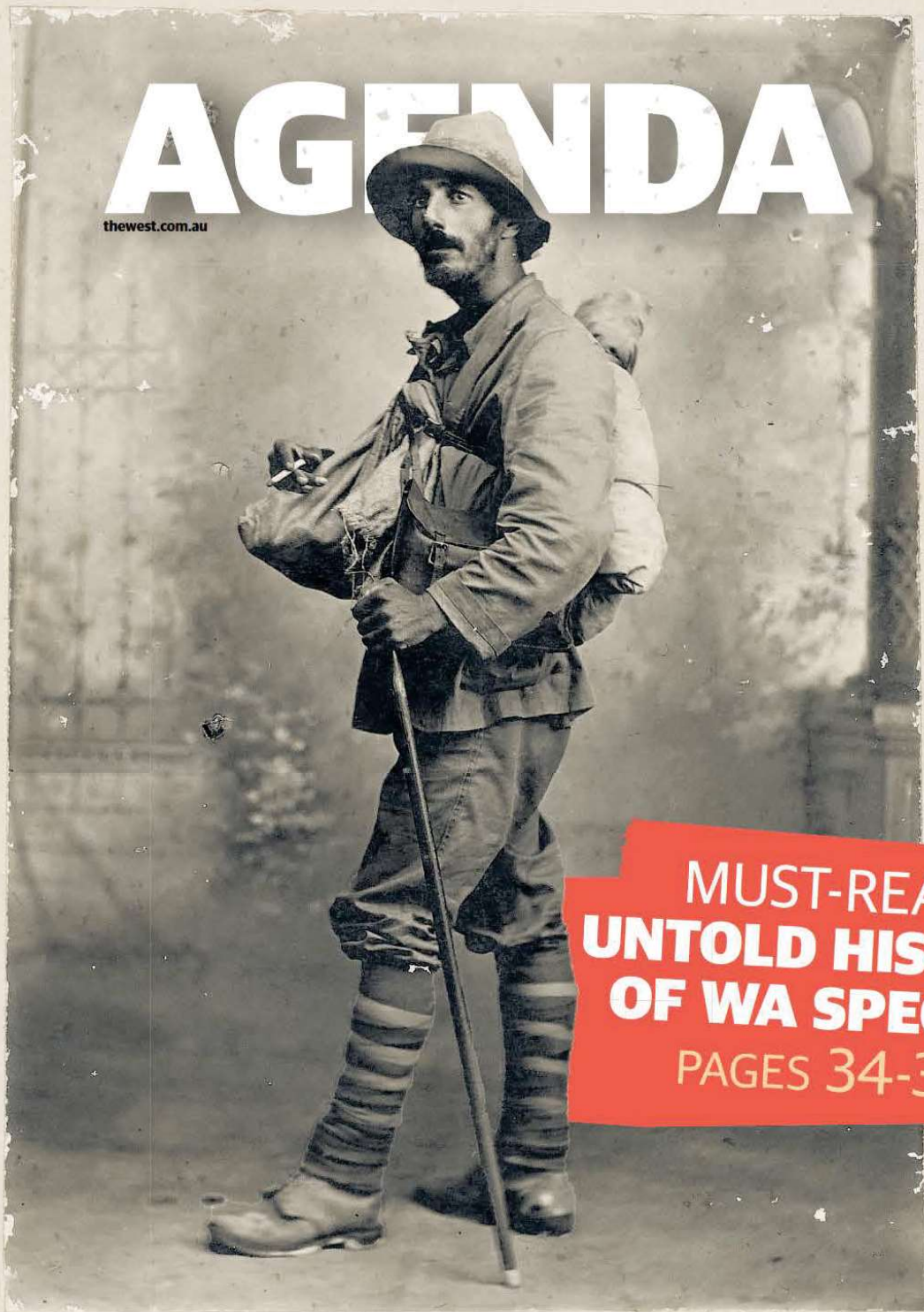


AGENDA

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**MUST-READ
UNTOLD HISTORY
OF WA SPECIAL
PAGES 34-35**

J. Hallan Thomas

Aidan de Brune,
The Tramp-Journalist,
who walked
Around Australia

He walked 5000 miles & then he walked 5000 more

Meet the extraordinary Amateur Tramp of Australia and follow the twists and turns of his truly incredible life story

MALCOLM QUEKETT



Where to start with the remarkable story of the man who came to be known as

The Amateur Tramp.

Is it about Herbert Charles Cull? Or Aidan de Brune? A story of endurance and perseverance? Or a family mystery?

In fact, it is all of the above. A story lost to time before it was recently found again. A story anchored at its beginning in WA, and returning here after going full circle around the country — literally.

Key to the story's rediscovery was the work of free e-book curators and enthusiasts Terry Walker, Roy Glasham and Colin Choat.

They began investigating the works of a de Brune, and references to him, which had appeared in newspapers in the 1920s and 1930s, which were available online via the National Library's Trove site.

Choat put the story together in his book *The Amateur Tramp, A Walk of ten thousand miles around Australia*.

"Aidan de Brune was the first person to walk around the perimeter of



Australia... a hundred years ago, unaccompanied and unassisted, walking 10,000 miles (16,000 kilometres)," Choat wrote.

De Brune was also a prolific writer, a journalist and accomplished musician. And Aidan de Brune was also the alias of Herbert Charles Cull.

Choat wrote that Cull was born in London, in 1874. He married Ethel Crofts in 1907 and a son, Lionel Charles Cull, was born in 1909.

In 1910 Cull sailed to Fremantle, and he was joined later that year by his wife and son.

Cull was briefly editor of the South Western Advertiser, at Pinjarra, and then he worked with the Murray Roads Board, offered music lessons and performed at "concerts, dances and entertainments".

In October 1912, Cull's wife and son returned to London.

"A letter, seemingly Herbert's last to Ethel, was written from Perth, dated 10 June, 1913," Choat wrote.

Cull wrote that "I do so long to be with you both again and once we come together again we won't separate again in a hurry."

"First chance I get I'm for England so don't be surprised to hear I am on the way any day."

FAST FACT:
De Brune made a diary entry for every day he was on his walk, a total of 897 days.

ROUND AUSTRALIA ON FOOT. MR. DE BRUNE IN GERALDTON.

Speaking to a good audience at the Queen's Hall on Wednesday evening last, Mr. Aidan De Brune, the walk-about representative of the Sydney "Daily Mail," gave an interesting account of his travels over and his impressions of the Northern portion of the Australian continent. The Mayor (Mr. Kempton) introduced the speaker, and subsequently the meeting was presided over by Mr. J. M. Drew.

But it seems certain that Cull never did return.

He worked for a while as a clerk and journalist and in 1920 was working for the Bunbury Herald and Blackwood Express, when the first incarnation of the name de Brune appeared in print, Choat wrote.

He wrote two serial stories for the Herald, *The Pursuits of Mr Peter Pell*, and *The Mystery of the Nine Stars* — which was unfinished when de Brune suddenly upped and left — and walked to Sydney, which he reached in February 1921.

He then cut a deal with Sydney's Daily Mail that he would walk around Australia — and the paper would publish his articles.

"The Amateur Tramp, as he styled himself, at least for some of the walk, maintained a travel diary for the entire trip, which provided details of daily distances travelled and the places he passed through, or at which he camped," Choat wrote.

"He also sought certification of the fact that he was at a particular place at a particular time and the diary is littered with testimonials and good wishes.

"Following his walk, he typed up the diary into a book, titled *Record Diary of a Walk Around Australia*."

In 1924, he donated the diary — in four small pocket books — and a copy of the book, to the State Library of NSW. It and Choat's book can be seen on the Project Gutenberg Australia site.

De Brune's epic walk began when he left the office of the Sydney Daily Mail on September 20, 1921. He made an entry in his diary for each of his 897 days on the journey.

But his use of the name Cull disappeared as he travelled the nation anti-clockwise, with stops in State capitals and Darwin, as well as myriad towns and stations along the way.

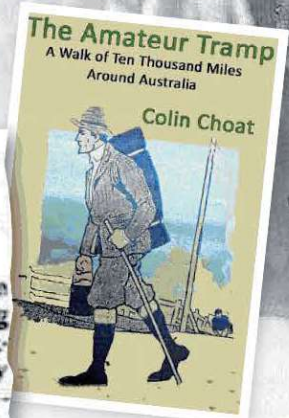
He supplemented his payment for his articles with talks at venues such as town halls and even at cinemas during intermissions.

He often sought out a town's local newspaper, which could verify, publicise and document his travels.

His arrival in Cairns was reported in the Cairns Post of December 22, 1921, under the heading "The Amateur Tramp", which told readers of his bona fides and intended ports of call.

The paper described him as burnt by the sun and "presenting a lean figure with a considerable growth on his face".

The Geraldton Guardian on May 22, 1923, recorded his visit and journey in detail.



Geraldton Guardian's front page of May 26, 1923, 'ROUND AUSTRALIA ON FOOT'.

"He looks fit and well, with his skin tanned a deep brown. He is not carrying any surplus flesh, for humping a swag, weighing about 50lbs in addition to a water bag, is not conducive to the putting on of weight," the paper said.

"Having walked round the biggest part of Australia's coast, and having come into contact with all sorts of people, from heads of administrations, local bodies, squatters and farmers, to lonely prospectors and boundary riders, Mr de Brune has naturally a huge fund of interesting experiences to draw upon.

"Coming through the Nor-West and on towards the Gascoyne country he was troubled much by the heavy rains, walking for days up to his knees in water, with the result that his feet began to protest, and since then he has had to make his daily trek a little shorter to give his feet a chance to recuperate."

He had been laid up with fever, spent time in hospital, and "on one occasion, not knowing where he was, tumbled into a creek in which there was fifteen feet of running water and he was carried a hundred yards or more before he was able to catch hold of the branch of a tree, and save himself".

"Mr de Brune said he undertook the journey as a result of a conversation over the much discussed question of what various parts of the empire had done in the war, and this caused him to ask what Australians had done for Australia.

"A challenge was thrown out to him to go and see for himself, and that was the reason he commenced his lengthy walk.

"Asked what he did when offered a ride, Mr de Brune said he must hold the record for the number of rides he had refused. He had to do the whole



Aidan de Brune at Esperance, WA, from a pamphlet, 'Esperance - the Sunrise Town'. Picture: Colin Choat/State Library of WA



Aidan de Brune delivers a letter from Darwin to Jack Flannagan at the Imperial Hotel, Adelaide. Picture: State Library of SA

Aidan de Brune's great-grand daughter Melanie De Cull Picture: Jackson Flindell



of the journey on foot.

"He remarked that he had probably worn out six or seven pairs of boots, but when the going was soft in the sand, he usually slung his boots over his shoulder and walked barefooted.

"Everywhere he went, he concluded, he received the greatest hospitality and kindness, whether at a station or at a lonely camp.

"The only supplies he carried with him were rice, tea and sugar, in case he did not strike any people, and, of course, tobacco.

"On one occasion he had to live eleven days on rice," the Guardian reported. And finally: "He has about 3500 miles yet to walk."

And so on he went. Until on March 4, 1924, he walked back into the Sydney offices he first left.

Choat wrote that de Brune then embarked on a career in Sydney as a writer. His first book, *The Carson Loan Mystery*, was published in 1926, followed by *The Dagger and Cord* (1927) and *The Shadow Crook* (1930), and he wrote serialised stories which were published in newspapers.

Choat indicates that a key to unravelling de Brune's story was the discovery of an article published on October 25, 1938, in the *Sydney Labor Daily* under the heading *Puzzle of Missing Writer*.

The article said that "Aidan de Brune, sixty-five, writer of many mystery thrillers, is himself the subject of a mystery puzzling the police of two States.

"They cannot locate him, and he has been listed at the Missing Person's Bureau.

"His real name is Herbert



The only supplies he carried with him were rice, tea and sugar.

The Geraldton Guardian

Charles Cull, but he is known all over Sydney and New South Wales by his professional nom-de-plume," the article says.

It said WA police had received a request from the NSW Agent-General in London to locate de Brune.

"His wife, of Earlsthorpe Road, Sydenham, England, who last saw him in 1913, is inquiring for him," it said.

Choat wrote that it was likely de Brune's wife had not seen him, but had received the letter he had sent in 1913.

The paper reported the next day that de Brune had been located and "can be reached via a GPO box".

Choat wrote that "Charles Francis Aidan de Brune, as his name appears in the Australian Electoral Rolls in the 1930s, died at the Little Sisters of the Poor Home at Randwick, Sydney on 15 February 1946."

But the family story does not end there. Via an online ancestry "tree", Choat was put in touch with members of the Cull family. And amazingly, there were family members in Perth.

A great grand-daughter of Herbert Cull, Melanie De Cull, said that her grandfather Lionel had unsuccessfully tried to track down his father.

She was astounded when she

received an email in 2018 from a distant relative alerting the family to Choat's research.

"It's crazy that we are here in Perth," Ms De Cull said. "My Dad, Michael was in the merchant navy sailing the world and after eight years decided that he liked Perth and as he had friends here was the perfect place to stop.

"He had no idea of the story of Herbert coming to Perth from London in 1910.

"My Dad has three siblings and two of them with their families later on also moved to Perth," Ms De Cull said.

The Cull family believes that the 1938 newspaper article about the search for Herbert Cull/Aidan de Brune was to advise him of the birth of his first grandchild.

A family note in Choat's book says that since the article mentioned both names "one must ask whether Ethel knew of Herbert's pseudonym".

"If she did, we can only presume that she never told her son, as this would have been a key fact for Lionel in assisting him to trace his father's footsteps," the note says.

Determined to bring the story to light, Ms De Cull shared the tale with friend and playwright Jenny Davis, who was so moved she wrote a one-act play about it.

The play, titled *The Mysterious Amateur Tramp*, is a re-imagining of de Brune's round-Australia walk. It will show at Garrick Theatre in Guildford from February 8-17 as part of its one act season, and Ms De Cull will direct it. See taztix.com

DO YOU HAVE ANY QUIRKY OR FORGOTTEN TALES OF WA?

Email Malcolm.quekett@wanews.com.au