Coastline Explorers
(Baudin & Flinders)

By 1800, Sydney was settled, but remarkably, no one yet knew if the land that they lived on was one continent or two. At this time, France and England were in a race for new territory, so knowing more about the map of the world was an advantage, and claiming and owning more bits of it was even better. France sent Nicolas Baudin to map the southern coastline of New Holland and to collect as many plants and animal specimens as he could store on his ship. England sent Matthew Flinders to also map the coastline of Australia, but not just a bit of it – the whole lot!

In April 1802, a historic meeting took place between the two at a place Flinders later named Encounter Bay. Baudin sailing west and Flinders sailing east were surprised and more than a bit wary when they sighted each other’s ship. Although officially enemies, they shared their recently completed maps over breakfast. It was then that they made an extraordinary discovery. When they pieced their information together, the maps showed that the land was not divided down the middle by a large inland river or sea, but in fact one entire continent. Baudin, who died on his way home, is one of Australia’s largely forgotten explorers. Flinders, on the other hand, found fame not only for being the first European man to circumnavigate the continent, but also for naming it Australia.

Well THAT just made my job a whole lot easier!

Indigenous Explorers
(Bungaree)

Without the assistance of Australia’s Indigenous people, most European explorers would have struggled to succeed and indeed survive. At first, European explorers took Indigenous men with them so they could communicate with the Indigenous people. However, it soon became apparent that many different Aboriginal languages existed in Australia and it was impossible for one person to know them all. Despite this, Aboriginal Australians continued to accompany early explorers, as they possessed vital bush skills which saved many explorers from dying of hunger or thirst.

One of Australia’s most famous Indigenous explorers was a man named Bungaree. Bungaree was believed to have been born in the Broken Bay area north of Sydney. He travelled with explorer Phillip Parker King and, most famously, he accompanied Matthew Flinders on his circumnavigation of Australia, acting as an interpreter and guide along the way. On completion of this epic voyage, Bungaree became the first Indigenous Australian that we know of to have circumnavigated the continent. A suburb on Bribie Island in Queensland is named in his honour.

A portrait of Bungaree

Inland Explorers
(Stuart)

Once Australia’s coastlines had been explored, attention was turned to the huge expanse in the middle. Explorers ventured across the land in search of new farming land, rivers, timber, minerals such as gold, and to find routes to get from one place to another. They were driven by a desire for adventure, curiosity, fame or, like John Stuart, money.

In 1860, the South Australian Government wanted to run a telegraph line through the middle of the continent from south to north and they were willing to pay £25,000 to anyone who could cut a route through which would have made the recipient almost a millionaire by today’s standards. John McDouall Stuart took up the challenge with obsessive enthusiasm and within months he had left on his first attempt. In May 1862, on his third attempt, he finally reached the Timor Sea off Northern Australia. The expedition north had pushed him, his men and his horses to their limits. The 3400-kilometre trek home would nearly kill them. Suffering from scurvy, his men lost one eye, vomiting blood and mucus and in constant pain, Stuart was carried by strict bed strung between two horses for a large part of the return trip. He arrived in Adelaide a mere skeleton.

While his actions brought him fame and a highway named after him, his body never recovered from the trials of his and previous expeditions and he died just over three years later. But, for Australia, the reward was communication with the rest of the world. For within ten years an overland telegraph line had been erected along the route Stuart and his team had established.