

# Mparntwe Alice Springs Community Foundation Community Builder of the Week



## A new Sikh volunteer group

ENCOURAGING, supporting and amplifying positive community action.

On International Day of Volunteers, Tuesday December 5, the launch of a new community volunteer group: Compassionate Connections - SEWA Volunteers was celebrated at the Alice Springs Library.

Volunteering and community service is at the heart of Sikh faith principles.

During the COVID pandemic, Australia's eyes were opened to their compassion and energy as Sikh communities prepared thousands of meals weekly and reached out to assist people facing hardship.

They continue to do this across the country.

Awareness of the sacredness of the natural environment also sees Sikh communities active in environmental care. Here in Alice Springs, a partnership that organises an annual tree planting is already one of many partnership commitments in the group's calendar.

Plans are underway to build and strengthen volunteering in our community through Compassionate Connections - SEWA Helpline.

At the short and sweet launch, complete with edible treats, members of the Sikh community, Alice Springs Town Council and ALEC spoke on the spirit behind this initiative, the local collaboration and some of the activities that the group plan for 2024, along with their longer term vision.

Attendees enjoyed a short tabla performance and a fresh mango lassi refreshment along with networking with community leaders.

If you'd like to nominate someone to be the Mparntwe Alice Springs Community Foundation Community Builder of the Week, email [editorial@centraliantoday.com.au](mailto:editorial@centraliantoday.com.au) and let us know who, why you think it would be great for the community to know about what they are doing and how to contact them.



SPEAKERS: Satinder, Randhir and Harpal Singh, Nicole Battle, Adrian Tomlinson and Arvinder Kaur were speakers at the Compassionate Connections event. 378263  
Picture: PHIL WILLIAMS

## Faces of Australia Ted Egan



## Nat Buchanan, the world's best cattle drover

UNDOUBTEDLY, the world's greatest ever cattle drover is a vital component of Australian history. Indeed, the same man is arguably the best 'bushie' in the accepted sense of the term.

His son, in a book titled Packhorse and Waterhole said: 'My father opened up more of Australia than any of the explorers'. That was son Gordon Buchanan, writing of his father Nathaniel (Nat) Buchanan.

Nat Buchanan was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1826 and came to Australia in 1837; His parents settled in the New England region of NSW. In 1849 Nat and his brother went to the Californian goldrushes. Rather than digging for gold, Nat saw value in acquiring and butchering cattle for the hungry miners; he returned to Australia a wiser man, still impoverished, but his fortunes improved when he did the same on the Australian goldfields in the 1850s.

In 1859 he moved to Queensland and established himself as a very knowledgeable drover and bushman. In 1863 he had the good fortune to marry Catherine (Kitty) Gordon. Kitty had two experienced brothers, Wattie and Hugh, who teamed up with Nat and Sam 'Greenhide' Croker to establish a formidable droving team.

Nat was known as Bluey among white people; he had Celtic skin and reddish hair, so he developed the habit of always carrying a large umbrella as he rode. To many frontier Aborigines he was known as Faraway (pronounced Paraway). He was aware of First Australian protocols and always sought to establish that he did not seek to take over their land; he sought permission to travel "far away" – more further. There are still songs about Paraway in northern tribal areas.

Nat had become a partner in Bowen Downs Station, near Longreach in 1859. Starting from that base in 1867, he also took many mobs of cattle westward, to enable the development of several huge stations, particularly those extending into the attractive Barkly Tableland plains of Flinders and Mitchell grass and further on to the VRD and Wave Hill country.

In 1883, Nat Buchanan was in charge of the world's greatest ever movement of stock. He took 20,000 head from St George, Queensland to Glencoe, near Pine Creek in the Northern Territory. He divided the mob into seven groups, with seven drovers for each. With natural increase, he arrived at Glencoe with an even bigger herd than the original mob. His personal task was to establish 'depots' with sufficient water. He would rest the cattle there, then ride on alone to establish the next depot.

He had an unerring sense of direction

He later took up Wave Hill station with the Gordon brothers, but his management ability did not match his droving skill, so he eventually moved into the Murchison region of WA, also unsuccessfully. One of his latterday achievements was to establish the famous Murrumbidgee stock route in 1886, creating a short cut for drovers from Top Springs to Newcastle Waters.

Nat Buchanan finally left northern Australia in the 1890s and moved, with his beloved Kitty, taking up a small block near Tamworth, NSW. He died and was buried there in 1901. Kitty moved to Walcha, but eventually had Nat re-buried there. Their adjacent tombstones are highly respected in the region, rightly so.

I attended a moving ceremony at their graveside, organised by their grand-daughter Bobbie Buchanan, to launch Bobbie's book *The Tracks of Old Bluey*. I sang my song *King Paraway* as Bobbie and a young local girl poured bottles of water on their graves, water that Bobbie had collected from all the major northern rivers that Nat had crossed with cattle in his memorable droving career.

This is the last verse and chorus of my song. It features on my *Faces of Australia* album *The*

*Overlanders* – available on iTunes Ted Egan.

*If drovers had titles, Bill Guydir's a Prince  
None better at Birdsville, before him or since  
Matt Savage is Duke of the Murrumbidgee  
Edna Zigenbine's Queen of the plains way out back*

*Arch McLean, Teddy Sheehan, Old Walter Rose  
They'd be Knights of the Saddle as everyone knows*

*There are hundreds of drovers of whom we could sing*

*But everyone knows Nat Buchanan was King  
Nat Buchanan, old Bluey, old Paraway  
What would you think if you came back today?*

*Not as exciting as in your time, old Nat  
Not too many drovers and we're sad about that*

*Fences, bitumen, road trains galore  
They move cattle quicker, but one thing's for sure*

*Road trains go faster, but of drovers we sing  
And everyone knows Nat Buchanan was King.*

See you next week. Aritjinanga