Ludwig Leichhardt, scientist and explorer, was born on 23rd October 1813 at Trebatsch, Prussia. While he attended the Universities of Berlin and Göttingen, he pursued knowledge for its own sake and not in preparation for any particular qualification or career and failed to follow a prescribed syllabus. No university degree was ever conferred.

In 1837 he went to England with a close friend, William Nicholson, where they both studied medical and natural science at the Royal College of Surgeons, the British Museum and the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, and by field observation in England, France, Italy and Switzerland. To enable Leichhardt to fulfil his plan to study the natural sciences in a vast new field William Nicholson paid his fare to Australia, provided clothes and necessities for the journey and gave him £200.

On arrival Leichhardt expressed an interest in exploring the inland of Australia. In September 1842 he went to the Hunter Valley where he studied the geology, flora and fauna, and observed methods of farming and viticulture. Overland journeys undertaken alone between Newcastle and the Moreton Bay District occupied 1843 and early 1844. From May to July 1844 Leichhardt was in Sydney arranging his collections of plant and
rock specimens and working upon the notes of his observations of the geology of the areas he had visited.

Early in 1844 the Legislative Assembly had recommended an overland expedition from Sydney to Port Essington (an inlet on the Cobourg Peninsula in the Garig Gunak Barlu National Park in Australia's Northern Territory.) Leichardt hoped to join it. However, Governor Gipps hesitated to authorise 'an expedition of so hazardous and expensive a nature, without the knowledge and consent' of the Colonial Office. Leichhardt, frustrated by the delay, with the aid of private subscription, to lead an expedition of volunteers himself.

Six, incuding Leichhardt, sailed from Sydney on 13th August 1844. In the Moreton Bay District four more joined the expedition, which left Jimbour, the farthest outpost of settlement on the Darling Downs, on 1 October. Two of the party turned back and on 28 June 1845 John Gilbert was killed in an attack on Leichhardt's camp by aboriginals. However, when they approached the settlement at Port Essington, the party received a friendly reception from the natives. The following is from Leichaedt’s “Journal of the Voyage” (held by the University of Adelaide Library).

“We were here visited by a tribe of natives, who were well acquainted with the settlement; they were all friendly, and willing to assist us; and many of them spoke very tolerable English. One of them, apparently the chief of the tribe, though a hunchback, named “Bill White,” promised to guide us to the settlement. He gave us to understand that we had come too far to the northward, and that we had to go to the south–west, in order to head Port Essington, and to follow its west coast, in order to arrive at Victoria. We were, in fact, at Raffles Bay. The natives knew every body in Victoria, and did not cease to give us all the news; to which we most willingly listened. They fetched water for us from a great distance, and gave us some Murnatt, which was extremely welcome. Perceiving the state of exhaustion and depression in which we were, they tried to cheer us with their corrobori songs, which they accompanied on the Eboro, a long tube of bamboo, by means of which they variously modulated their voices. I may mention that we experienced a heavy thunder–storm during the afternoon.”

Leichhardt had three blacks on his first expedition, Harry Brown, Charlie Fisher, and an American negro cook named Caleb. Charlie Fisher had been a native policeman and tracker.
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