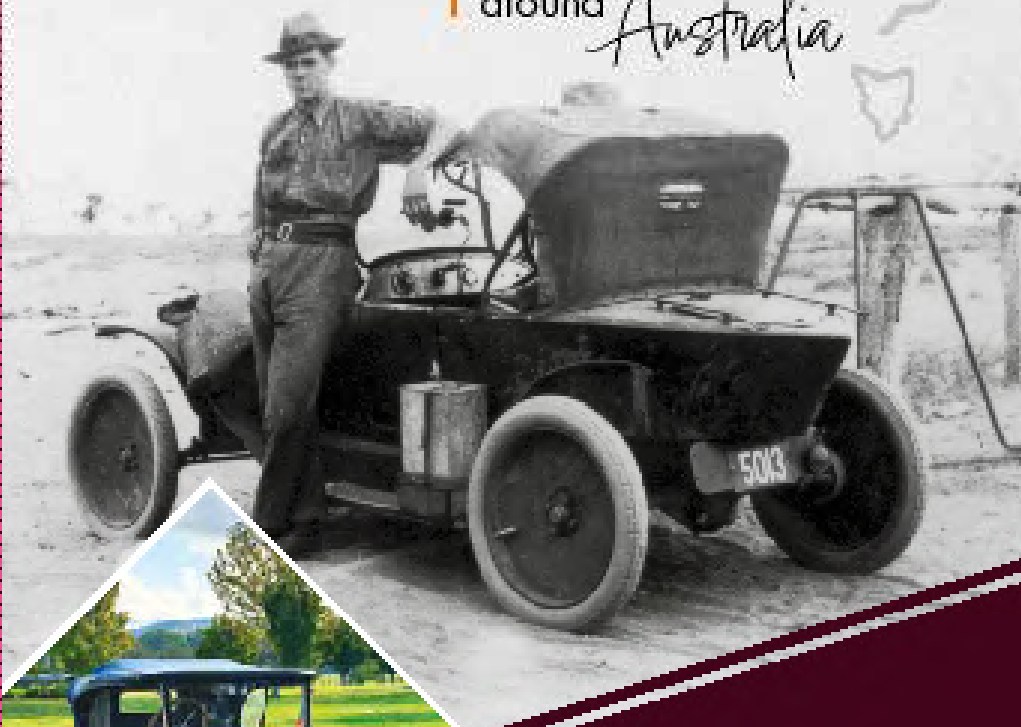


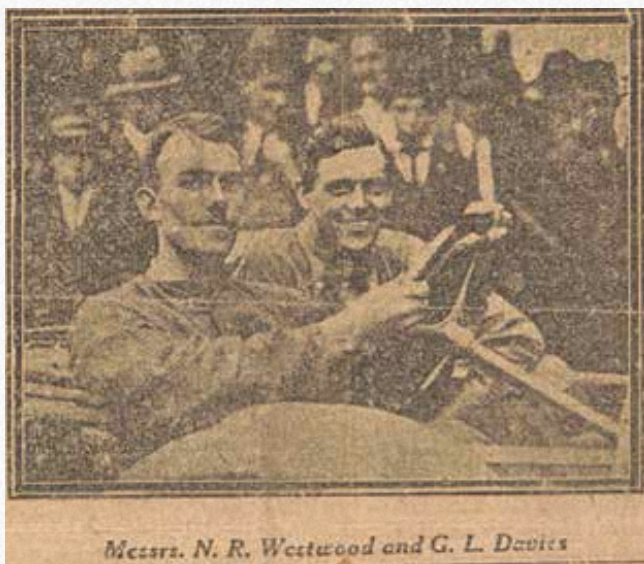
The OVERLANDER

Celebrating the centenary
of the first car journey
around *Australia*



Sukeshinie
Goonatilleke

with foreword
by Gary Kent



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Foreword

When I first stumbled upon the story of Nevill Westwood and his plucky Citroen 5CV that became the first car to circumnavigate Australia, I was instantly captivated. It wasn't just the audacity of the feat that caught my imagination, but the window it opened into a pivotal time in Australian history.

The epic story of Nevill Westwood and his trusty Citroen 5CV—affectionately nicknamed “Bubsie”—stands as a shining example of perseverance, ingenuity and adventure.

What seized my attention was the sheer scale of the challenge. In 1925, when Nevill Westwood and his colleague, Greg Davis, embarked on this journey, the notion of driving around the entire continent seemed not just ambitious, but bordering on the impossible. Much of Australia was still a vast, largely unmapped wilderness. The contrast between the fragile, almost toy-like Citroen and the harsh, unforgiving landscape it had to conquer was striking.

But Bubsie wasn't just a car; she became a trusted companion, a shelter, and a lifeline in the harshest of conditions. Through scorching deserts, treacherous mud flats and dense bushland, Bubsie soldiered on, her small engine humming defiantly against the odds.

As you embark on Bubsie's journey through the pages of this book, you'll find yourself marvelling at the magnitude of the undertaking. In an era before GPS, satellite phones, or even reliable maps of the largely unexplored outback, Westwood and Davis relied on their wits, local knowledge, and the welcome and help from the many people they met along the way. Every mile covered was a victory against the elements, every breakdown a test of resourcefulness.



The Incredible Journey's replica "Bubsie" painted in its original colour.

But why does this story matter? Why should we care about an automotive adventure that took place a century ago?

First, Bubsie's journey is a reminder that great achievements often start with a simple idea and an unwavering commitment to see it through. In an age where we're constantly pushing the boundaries of technology, Bubsie's story serves as a humbling reminder of how far we've come and the innovation and courage of those who paved the way.

Second, this story provides a unique lens through which to view Australia's history. It's a snapshot of a nation on the cusp of change. Through Bubsie's journey, we gain insights into the Australia of the 1920s—its people, its challenges and its evolving identity.

Third, this story matters because it celebrates the collaborative spirit that has long been a hallmark of Australian culture. As you'll read, Bubsie's success wasn't just down to the determination of Westwood

and his colleague. It was made possible by the kindness of strangers, the wisdom and assistance of the Indigenous people, and the collective effort of communities across the continent. In our increasingly divided world, this reminder of our capacity for cooperation and mutual support is more valuable than ever.

Finally—and perhaps most importantly—this story matters because it transcends mere automotive adventure. At its core, it's a spiritual odyssey, a testament to one man's unwavering faith and his extraordinary journey to share the message of Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Bible in the remote and sparsely populated corners of the land.

This dimension adds profound depth to the story, transforming it from a simple travelogue into a powerful narrative of faith, perseverance, and the human spirit's capacity to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds in service of a higher calling.

As we look back on Bubsie's achievement from the vantage point of the 21st century, it's easy to forget how groundbreaking this journey was. Today, we can circumnavigate Australia on sealed roads, with rest stops and fuel stations at regular intervals. But in 1925, each day brought new challenges, each mile was hard-won, and the successful completion of the journey was anything but certain.

So, buckle up and prepare for an extraordinary ride through time and across the Australian continent. Let Bubsie's story inspire you to dream big, to persevere in the face of adversity, to appreciate the indomitable spirit of adventure and to value your faith. As you turn these pages, I hope you'll be as inspired and moved by this remarkable story as I have been.

Gary Kent
Speaker
The Incredible Journey



Prologue

In April 1925, Will Bowden wrote to his sister describing his adventures in one of the most isolated places in Australia. Bowden was an immigrant from England who had been sent to work at the Mundiwindi telegraph station as a linesman. The letter is full of hair-raising stories detailing his life in the remote north of Western Australia. He described massive snakes, vicious biting flies, iguanas the size of alligators and gale force winds strong enough to pick up a grown man and carry him along several feet in the air. Reading his letters is like reading an Australian version of Indiana Jones, only the entire narrative is true.

Interspersed among his intrepid tales is a story about a stampeding herd of cows in the dead of night. Will watched them thrash through the bush beneath the silver glow of the moon from the safety of his verandah. He described the destruction, the noise, the dust, and the expert horsemanship of the drovers. The picture he paints is at once romanticised and terrifying. It was also a picture that would soon reproduce itself in a different form.

Four months after Will wrote his letter, two young men pattered past Mundiwindi crammed into a small car. They were in their early twenties, off on a grand adventure, determined to make a difference in the lives of the people they met along the way. We do not know if they met Will. The historical record is silent on this point. Perhaps they did,

for the outback is a lonely place, perched on the edge of the world and the isolation lends itself to making strangers friends within minutes.

But when one of these two young men, Nevill Westwood, wrote to his sister about his time in Mundiwindi, he added his own account of stampeding cows in the Australian outback. Nevill and his friend Greg Davies trundled past the telegraph station in their Citroen 5CV, a sturdy little machine that valiantly navigated the thin ribbon of packed dirt posing as a road. They were enjoying the cool August weather when a scattering herd of cows barrelled after them at a gallop. Nevill was clearly unfazed for he tells his sister that they were merely curious. How he arrived at such a conclusion is a mystery. However, Greg perceived the situation in an entirely different light. He lunged behind him for his satchel, snatched up his revolver and prepared to defend life and limb with it against a mob of bawling bovines.

At this moment, jostled by potholes and chased by cows, the Citroen sputtered and died. Nevill doesn't tell his sister what happened after that. Did the cows jostle the car? Were they surrounded? Did the drovers manage to corral their charges? All he reports is that further investigation of the car revealed that they had run out of petrol, in the middle of nowhere.

This story is a fitting prologue to the adventures that awaited them further down the track. In many ways, their story is the story of Australia at that time in its history—young, spirited, craving adventure and a chance to make their mark on the world around them. In the first quarter of the 20th century, Australia had defined itself as a nation, participated in World War I and was forging a path into an unknown future seemingly rife with possibilities. It was an age of exploration and discovery when the population of five million inhabited only a fraction of the land mass of the continent. The fascination with the outback was strong and growing.

In fact, it was a desire to explore and influence this untamed frontier that led the Seventh-Day Adventist Mission Board to call for missionaries willing to venture into the northern part of Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Nevill Westwood and Greg Davies answered this call, fully expecting to do their part and return home. But life rarely turns



out the way we expect it to, and in addition to becoming a missionary of sorts, Nevill became the first man to circumnavigate Australia in a motor car. He became one of a handful of Australians, who has faced the ruggedly breathtaking heart of this continent and conquered it at that time. His story is worth telling not only because of its historical significance but also because of its human interest. It is the great modern retelling of an odyssey: a man and his machine facing down the elements and conquering the obstacles before him against all odds. When we retell the story of Nevill Westwood, we also explore the story of Australia during the early 20th century, including her people, her land, her way of life, her failings but perhaps most importantly her irrepressible spirit.

The Books Nevill Sold

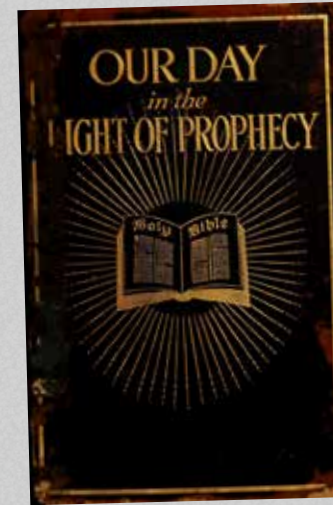


Nevill Westwood

Nevill Westwood was employed by the Seventh-day Adventist Missions Board as a colporteur, essentially a door-to-door salesman who sold books. Considering how sparsely populated the outback was, selling anything door-to-door was unconventional, but Nevill was determined to visit every pastoral station he could find and sell his books there.

While Nevill had a variety of books on hand, the primary piece of literature he offered was *Our Day in the Light of Prophecy*. The book was written by W A Spicer, a Seventh-day Adventist minister born in Minnesota in the mid-19th century. Spicer served in the United States, England, and India as a missionary in various capacities. His book was published in 1918 in the United States by the Review and Herald Publishing Association and made available for distribution globally.

Nevill became a Seventh-day Adventist after listening to a series of presentations on Bible prophecy and Spicer's book dealt with many of the topics that had led Nevill on his own journey of faith. The book touches on the major themes of the Bible, with a special emphasis on its prophecy. Bible prophecy is inextricably linked with world history. Perhaps that is the most fascinating thing about studying Bible prophecy—it opens doors to unexplored frontiers. The Bible includes many prophecies focusing on nations, individuals and movements throughout time.



One of the most intriguing prophecies is found in the book of Isaiah, chapter 45. The prophecy names the Persian King Cyrus, a recognisable historical figure, and details some of his exploits including his conquest of Babylon. The most fascinating thing about this prophecy is that it was given to Isaiah more than 200 years before Cyrus was born.

Another group of significant prophecies in the Bible map the life of Jesus in intricate detail. They predict where He would be born, the supernatural circumstances of His birth, how He would die and His response to His abusive enemies. There are more than 60 major prophecies relating to Jesus in the Bible, which were all fulfilled. The statistical probability that

Jesus could have fulfilled even eight of these prophecies is 1 in 1017. In other words, it's nearly impossible, yet Jesus fulfilled all 60.

The Bible also details the rise of some of the major superpowers of ancient history. Written in the 6th century BC, the book of Daniel charts the rise of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome, while also predicting the division of the Western Roman Empire and the fragile relationships between the peoples of Europe.

Bible prophecy is perhaps the most compelling argument in favour of the validity of the Bible. When Nevill grasped this, it drove him to accept Jesus. He went a step further by taking a book that detailed this message into the Australian outback so he could share his discoveries with others.

During his travels, Nevill met countless individuals who bought his books but more importantly asked him thoughtful questions about what they contained. He answered each of these questions enthusiastically, praying for those he met along the way. He coupled his desire to share the message of the Bible with a willingness to offer tangible assistance. Whether it was offering someone a ride, repairing a broken-down car or simply speaking a kind word, Nevill Westwood combined his love for Bible prophecy with genuine kindness that often won over the people he interacted with. He demonstrated the best parts of what it means to be a Christian missionary.