

Joy in every walk of life

Charles Warren Bonython AO

Explorer, founder of the Heysen Trail

Born: September 11, 1916; Adelaide

Died: April 2, 2012; Adelaide

WARREN Bonython was a conservationist, explorer, author and chemical engineer, who exerted a great influence on heritage and conservation in South Australia. He died, aged 95, after a short illness.

Terry Krieg, a long-time friend and walking companion, paid tribute to Warren's sense of direction when, in 1982, they became the first white men to walk 500km around Lake Eyre.

He said in those days before satellites and GPS, Warren found his cache of water in a desert area with no obvious land marks.

Warren trained at the University of Adelaide as a chemical engineer, then went to London for postgraduate work.

He had to leave the UK in 1939 because of the outbreak of war, arriving home at the time of the death of his grandfather, Sir Langdon Bonython, a former owner of *The Advertiser* and a participant in negotiations which led to the Federation of Australia. His father was Sir John Bonython and his siblings included the late Kym Bonython.

Warren joined ICI in 1940 and spent WW2 working on explosives in Melbourne, before managing the ICI salt-fields north of Adelaide and becoming a world authority on production of salt using solar evaporation.

It fuelled his interest in Lake Eyre. After he retired from ICI in 1966, aged 50, Warren



was able to concentrate on his passions – a love of the outdoors, bushwalking, exploration and conservation.

He walked many of South Australia's greatest and most challenging landforms.

His north-south crossing of the Simpson Desert with Charles McCubbin, pulling a 250kg cart, took 32 days.

Walking in those arid and desert places usually involved carrying water and Warren was renowned for the size and weight of his

backpack. He was a founding member of the National Parks Foundation (later Nature Foundation), president of the Royal Geographical Society (SA Branch) from 1959 to 1961 and was instrumental in establishing the Heysen Trail, the walking trail extending 1200 km from the northern Flinders Ranges to Cape Jervis.

He was made an Officer of the Order of Australia in 1980 in recognition of his services to conservation. In 1990 he was made *Australian Geographic's* Adventurer of the Year.

He was at different times president of the Scientific Expedition Group, National Trust of SA and the Conservation Council of SA and held many other offices in state and national organisations, including as a member of the Australian Heritage Commission for 15 years.

His trekking activities extended well beyond Australia and included Mt Kilimanjaro, which he climbed at the age of 75, the Scottish highlands and Lo Manthang in the Himalayas. He trained regularly and vigorously with timed walks that stretched from Waterfall Gully to Mt Lofty summit and back, in later years allowing himself an extra minute per extra year of his age.

Warren and Bunty were married for 71 years. As the family arrived – Simon, Veryan and Alice – she regarded her role as keeping the home fires burning while Warren was away exploring the arid parts of Australia. He was author of a number of books including *Walking the Flinders Ranges* and *Walking the Simpson Desert*. His most recent book was *The History of the Heysen Trail*.