

# The 1965 Freedom Rides

*One lesson we can all draw from the Freedom Ride is the importance of speaking out against injustice, challenging oppression and discrimination, and doing it now.*

Ann Curthoys, honorary professor, author, and original freedom-rider.



On the 12th February 1965, a group of Sydney University students called "Students for Aboriginal Rights" (SAFA), led by Aboriginal students Charles Perkins and Gary Williams, began a trip that would change Australian history. Their journey was both an attempt to emulate the US Civil Rights Movement action in the early 1960s, and designed to expose the racist underbelly of Australian society in rural NSW. The book "Freedom Ride: a freedom rider remembers" by Ann Curthoys, relives the experience of the Freedom Ride, drawing largely upon a diary written during the journey and the recollections of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who were involved. Contemporary media reports as well as secondary accounts supplement the story, drawing attention to the impact of the ride and highlighting the ways in which the events have been remembered.

Learn about the 1965 NSW Freedom Rides against prejudice and racial discrimination by exploring the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies' (AIATSIS). AIATSIS' site includes the diaries of freedom-rider Ann Curthoys, a photographic exhibition and a great reading list which includes a list of sources, news articles and external websites about the 1965 Freedom Ride. Your first stop for information could be the curated online exhibition, *The 1965 Freedom Ride*, which brings together primary sources from students that took part in this landmark event with newspaper coverage from the time.

Amongst the Freedom Riders was Darce Cassidy, an Arts student who was also a part-time reporter for the ABC. His vivid recordings of the 1965 Freedom Ride weren't broadcast until 1978. In this excerpt, we're taken right to the centre of the confrontation at the Moree swimming pool, where tempers run high, revealing the extent of racial segregation that prevailed in country towns at the time.



The Daily Mirror's full-page coverage of the demonstration at Moree pool, 22 February 1965. (Photo courtesy of Newspix)

Image from The Daily Mirror, February 22 1965, found at: <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/images/history/1960s/freedom/fr13.htm>

Previously unpublished photographs of the 1965 Freedom Rides discovered in the State Library of NSW archives, were first exhibited in 2015. Encourage students to [explore](#) these photographs, useful for meaningful discussions and presentations.



Watch the 2015 anniversary of the Freedom Rides film on [Living Black](#) about the Freedom Rides. Discuss how things were then and how the freedom riders feel about that time, and their historic action. Alternatively, students, especially primary school students might prefer to watch the [BTN](#) program on the Freedom Rides 50th anniversary and discuss similarly.



**Why were students compelled to take this action? What do these types of actions achieve?**

#### Victorian Curriculum: History

[VCHHK094](#) The different experiences and perspectives of Australian democracy and citizenship, including the status and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, migrants, women, and children: *History 5-6: Australia as a nation*.

[VCHHK155](#) Effects of methods used by civil rights activists to achieve change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the role of one individual or group in the struggle.

*Elaborations: investigating the role of Charles Perkins in the Freedom Ride of 1965 and the efficacy of television in bringing the struggle: History 9-10: Rights and freedoms (1945 – the present).*

[VCHHK153](#) Effects of the US civil rights movement and its influence on Australia for rights and freedoms to national attention: *History 9-10: Rights and freedoms (1945 – the present).*

[VCHHK156](#) Continuity and change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in securing and achieving civil rights and freedoms in Australia: *History 9-10: Rights and freedoms (1945 – the present).*



Excerpt of Unidentified boys in wood shack, February 1965 / from The Tribune archived collection. At:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/statelibraryofnsw/20829135935/in/album-72157654250887374/>