



## CANADIAN FLAGPOLE

**T**he Canadian Flagpole is located in a prominent position on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin at Regatta Point. Its erection was one of the catalysts leading to the eventual development of a significant central park – Commonwealth Park – for the national capital.

In 1955 the Hon. C.D. Howe, Canadian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, offered this large flagpole to the Australian Government as a memento of his visit.

The two year operation to erect the Flagpole was closely followed by the press and created great public interest. Considerable technical difficulties had to be overcome before the pole could be brought safely across the Pacific Ocean from Canada, overland from Sydney to Canberra, treated, and erected on 29 August 1957. A previous offer, decades earlier, had been declined '...owing to the impossibility of transporting it from Sydney'.

In November 1955 a 40.2 metre single green spar of Douglas Fir, logged from a forest in British Columbia and weighing 7.1 tonnes, arrived in Sydney with its bark still attached. After being submerged in Sydney Harbour for several days for quarantine reasons, it was transported by train to Canberra straddled along the length of three railway trucks, arriving on 24 November. Subsequently, under the watchful eye of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), the Commonwealth Forestry and Timber Bureau, and the Department of Works, the pole was trimmed to 39 metres, debarked and shaped. It was encased in felt and kept constantly damp by water sprays. Eventually it was transferred to a 42.7 metre polythene plastic film bath, where it lay for three weeks in a special mix of chemicals to ensure protection of the timber.

Transfer of the treated pole by truck and trolley from the railway station to the site proved to be a dramatic event, the trolley at the tail end veering from side to side and occasionally off the road. A crane followed to lift the trolley back on the road. The erection went smoothly, the pole being set into a concrete pit three metres deep, thus leaving the remaining 36 metres unsupported above the ground. Those working on the preparation and erection of the pole over the two years became so attached to it, they nicknamed it 'Polly'.

His Excellency T.W.L. MacDermot, High Commissioner for Canada, handed the pole over on 20 November 1957 to the Hon. Allen Fairhall, Australian Minister for the Interior and Works.

On 1 July each year a special flag-raising ceremony takes place to celebrate Canada's National Day. The Canadian Flagpole has also become a centre of celebration on Australia Day.

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## Further Reading

- John Gray, *Commonwealth Park, Canberra A Review of its History 1913–1993*. A Research Report to the ACT Heritage Council, October 1994.

