



*Freda du Faur, George Mannering, Canterbury Mus*

Marketing Brief

# The Freda Experience

**Concept & direction:** Verity Higgins

**Key collaborators:** Jillian Pearce & Jim Coad

**Set design:** Georgie Humphries

**Sound design:** Wayne Parker

**Performers/guides:** Aurora Kurth, Jillian Pearce, Kate Finnerty, Tim Ratcliffe

**Projections:** Jim Coad

**Lighting design:** Katie Sfetkidis

**Costumes:** Janette Wotherspoon

**Contact:**

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## Background

### The Woman

Emmeline Freda Du Faur was born on 16 September 1882 at Croydon, Sydney, Australia. Freda lived with her family near the Ku-ring-gai Chase national park where, as a young woman, she explored and taught herself to rock-climb. Freda Du Faur travelled to New Zealand with her father in 1906. Photographs of Mt Cook at the New Zealand International Exhibition, Christchurch, inspired her to journey to the Hermitage where the snowclad mountains captivated her and she determined to climb to the summits. This visit and another in 1908 introduced her to the mountains and the chief guide at the Hermitage, Peter Graham. At a time when few people climbed, Freda Du Faur gave mountain guides the opportunity to attempt challenging ascents, while she found enjoyment, freedom and an escape from many of the constraints and frustrations of family and society. Freda Du Faur compromised on dress, wearing a skirt to just below the knee over knickerbockers and long puttees when climbing. She extended the limits of the possible, not just for women, but for all guided climbers of the period. Key factors were her rock-climbing ability, determination, and physical fitness. Three months training under Muriel Cadogan at the Dupain Institute of Physical Education in Sydney, before her trip to New Zealand in November 1910, enabled her to climb Mt Cook soon after her arrival. The ascent, on 3 December 1910 with Peter and Alexander (Alec) Graham, was the first by a woman and the fastest to that date. She wrote: 'I was the first unmarried woman...to climb in New Zealand, and in consequence I received all the hard knocks until one day when I awoke more or less famous in the mountaineering world, after which I could and did do exactly as seemed to me best.'

She did not marry, and her close relationship with Muriel Cadogan drew her to England in 1914. After the death of Cadogan in June 1929 a lonely Freda Du Faur returned to Australia to live at Dee Why, Sydney, where on or about 11 September 1935 she committed suicide by poisoning herself with carbon monoxide.

*Adapted from <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3d17/du-faur-emmeline-freda>*

### The Work

I first came across the story of Freda Du Faur (1882-1935) in 2005 whilst reading Maggie MacKellar's book 'Core of my heart, my country', on a flight to work in the UK. In the book MacKellar unearths the stories of remarkable pioneering women in Canada & Australia and their journey in new landscapes from estrangement to belonging. Freda's story stayed with me. I was both astounded and disappointed I had never heard of her. I would have loved there to have been a chapter in one of my primary school readers about Freda and her achievements – we certainly read about Sir Edmund Hilary and Scott of the Antarctic. How inspiring it would have been! Her story is a complex one – exhilarating and devastating in equal measure. Her passion and drive for climbing was in part a natural extension of her love of the natural world. She felt truly herself when climbing, something she no doubt struggled with in the narrow conventions (and waists!) of Victorian/Edwardian society. This flouting of convention would have been further compounded by her intimate relationship with her physical trainer, Muriel Cadogan.

How to tell this story?

When mulling over how best to convey this extraordinary tale I thought the experience of height & sense of the landscape would be integral. This led to my connection with aerial artist Jillian Pearce and video artist Jim Coad. Together through a weeklong creative development in late December 2013 we created the basic shape of the show.

The immersive, participatory nature of the piece came out of this development phase as a way to try to provide the visceral experience of walking in Freda's footsteps.

The work premiered at the Castlemaine State Festival 2015 and was also presented at NatiFrinj 2015.

## Copy – short

Register for *The Freda Experience* and be taken on an evocative, lived experience following in the footsteps of Freda Du Faur, a young adventurous Australian mountaineer from the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, who broke the glass ceiling of convention and in 1910 was the first woman to climb Mt Cook, New Zealand.

## Copy – long

*The Freda Experience* is an immersive participatory theatre piece for an audience of 24 that premiered at the Castlemaine State Festival 2015. Audience members register for a climb, undertake an exercise class in the style of the Dupain Institute, which Freda attended in readiness for the climb (and where she met her lover Muriel Cadogan), they are then roped together in three groups of eight and are guided through a number of 'stations'. These 'stations' are drawn from aspects of Freda's - a slide show presentation by Freda of her Mt Cook ascent; a romantic poetry reading salon; and experience a 'rest cure' in a private hospital ward where Freda was administered deep sleep therapy to try and reorient her sexual preference. The guides then lead the audience in the pitching of their bivouacs – three tents accommodating eight in each – in readiness for the final ascent. Elements of Freda's life, as well as the experience of being high up on a mountain are conveyed through projections on the tent surfaces, sound-scape and live action.

## Industry reviews:

*'Congratulations on an absolutely delightful journey and performance last night. It was a highlight theatre experience for a number of people I spoke with.'*

**Martin Paten, Castlemaine State Festival Director, March 2015**

*'Fantastic- thankyou for bringing us this remarkable & moving story. Following her journey was inspiring & incredible.'*

**Suzi Cordell, Regional Arts Victoria – Education & Families, NatiFrinj Oct 2015**

*HUGE congratulations on Freda! It's an experience I'm still thinking about. Brilliant storytelling, complex emotions, excellent use of the body of the audience as performer/participant.*

**Esther Anatolitis, Director of Regional Arts Victoria, NatiFrinj, Oct 2015**

## Audience responses:

*'It was a wonderfully transportive experience & certainly left me with wanting to find out more about this amazing woman.'*

**Denise Martin, Castlemaine State Festival attendee, March 2015**

*'The Freda experience was the best theatre experience I have had in a long time. A fresh and different way to entertain*

*It is one of those wonderful stories of courage that need to be told.'*

**Lana Osterfield, Castlemaine State Festival attendee, March 2015**

*'Wonderful and very evocative- it really gave the sense of being there and triggered the emotional reaction.'*

**Catherine de Vaus, NatiFrij attendee, Oct 2015**

*'Incroyable! Such performance! I did not expect so much fun. I was totally immersed in the experience. The actors are so professional, it's been a terrific experience.*

*Inforgettable.'*

**Corinne Menage, NatiFrij attendee, Oct 2015**

*'Very entertaining & special experience- so inventive & informative – had a blast.'*

**Alice Pearce, NatiFrij attendee, Oct 2015**

*'Such a wonderful journey through history & philosophy, clever yes but beautiful. '*

**John Fuller, NatiFrij attendee, Oct 2015.**

*'Fantastic. Well done. Best performance at Frij so far!'*

**Elaine Uebergang, NatiFrij attendee, Oct 2015**

*'Evocative, poignant, thought-provoking. A quality performance.'*

**Rebecca Pirzi, NatiFrij attendee, Oct 2015**

*'What a treat! The use of spaces, projections, interactivity, costumes, FX, Woo! Great for a range of all ages.'*

**Kate Elliot, NatiFrij attendee, Oct 2015**

## Digital Media

<https://madeinnatimuk.com/thefredaexperience/>

<https://www.facebook.com/thefredaexperience>

## Topics/Hashtags:

#Feminism #pioneerwomen #mountaineer #trailblazer  
#youneedtoseeittobeit #LBGTQI #sexuality #MentalHealth  
#PoetryLiterature #Empathic #HerStory #FemaleTruths  
#History #ItsNotJustaMansWorld #womeninhistory  
#tellthewholestory #addwomen  
#climbinginnewzealand #aoraki

## Key Advisories

- Duration 70 minutes – no interval
- Suitable for ages 12+
- Warning: this production is an interactive theatre piece with sound and projection that requires guided audience movement to different spaces

## Marketing Collateral

See Dropbox link [here](#) for the following resources:

1. Photography
2. Logos
3. Previous Program
4. Video trailer

## Video Trailers

<https://youtu.be/Prkuim3ABsE>

<https://vimeo.com/102098097>

<https://vimeo.com/84507273>

## Key selling points

1. Immersive, impactful experience
2. Small group audience size (3x8)
3. Uses a range of non-traditional spaces and a range of performative modes
4. Little known Australian heroine
5. Story that connects Australia, New Zealand & England