



HSNT ANNUAL FIELD TRIP 27-30 JULY 2023
DALY WATERS, HAYFIELD STATION,
NEWCASTLE WATERS & ELLIOTT REGIONS

BY BEV PHELTS

Day 1 - Thursday 27 July

Our base camp was at the HiWay Inn, Daly Waters which is 600kms south of Darwin on the Stuart Highway.

My group set off on Thursday 27 July and spent the night at the beautiful Mataranka thermal pools camping ground (400km south of Darwin) On the way down we stopped at the Pine Creek Mining Park for morning tea. Then visited Katherine River Crossing and lunched at the Katherine Information Centre café. Before setting up camp for the night, we visited the Mataranka Museum which had expanded somewhat since my last visit. The Museum is run by the Council and has an excellent display of historical artefacts. After checking in for the night there was time for a swim in the thermal pools followed by a delicious tea at the bistro.

Day 2 - Friday 28 July (Show Day)

Next morning we headed off to Daly Waters to meet the rest of the group at the pub. On the way, we visited the Larrimah Rail Head and opposite is the Larrimah Museum. The Museum building is a heritage listed WW11 telephone repeater station and powerhouse which was opened in 1942. The railway siding nearby was a vital road/rail transshipment and refueling depot and military staging camp. The Birdum WW11 Army camp was located 4 kms south next to the railway line and some remnants can still be seen.

Another stop on the way to Daly Waters was the Alexander Forrest cairn, located 50km south of Larrimah. Forrest was a surveyor who undertook extensive exploring in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. His party was often in danger of starvation and thirst and on more than one occasion a packhorse had to be killed for food. Near this cairn it is claimed that to prevent death from thirst, Forrest killed a bird and drank its blood.

We met the rest of the group at 1pm at the Daly Waters Pub. The camping ground was absolutely jammed packed out with caravans that the overflow paddock across the road was filled up with vans side by side. The afternoon was spent exploring the Daly Waters region which took in John McDouall Stuart's "marked" tree which was burnt many years ago and the "S" signature has now disappeared. Next was a stop at remnants of the Daly Waters repeater station, then on to the WW11 hanger and runway which is now being used by AirFlight.

Nearby is the Birdum Creek flying fox which was used to move supplies and people across the creek during flood times. The flying fox is still in very good condition. On a walking track down from here, is a small pioneer cemetery but unfortunately the graves are no longer marked.



Daly Waters Pub
Jane Munday & Libby Siebert



Daly Waters Pub
Mark Ames, Peter Siebert, Heather Boulden,
Margaret Donald & Rachel Francois



At the John McDouall Stuart tree



Daly Waters hanger



Birdum Creek Flying Fox
The line across the creek still in situ



Remnants at the Daly Waters Repeater Telegraph
Station

With the afternoon sightseeing over, we travelled to the HiWay Inn, Daly Waters to check in for the next two nights. After a much needed shower, some of us had predinner nibbles and drinks on the verandah and then we all regrouped for dinner in the Roadhouse dining room. This Roadhouse is renowned for its massive meals which really feeds two people. Even the kids meal is too large for one person.

Day 3 - Saturday 29 July

We headed off at 8am south towards Newcastle Waters stopping at the Buchanan Highway turnoff. This dirt road was a 1960s beef road initiative because of the increasing use of cattle trucks post war. This route and others were largely responsible for the decline of the Murrumbidgee Stock Route and the Newcastle Waters township. At the Todd memorial cairn about 20km south of Dunmarra we walked into Hayfield Cattle Station to where the north and south overland telegraph line was joined. We had previously obtained permission from the station manager who asked that we ensure that we all met the government and station's biosecurity requirements. [Foot & Mouth disease threat to Australia. The request that anyone who had returned from overseas in the previous two weeks refrain from entering] The walk to the joining pole is about 2km from the Stuart Highway. Nearby Frew Ponds named by JM Stuart was dry as expected.



Resting at the Todd Memorial parking bay
Mark Ames, Jane Munday, Libby Siebert & Heather Boulden



The group at the joining poles, Hayfield Station

Photo courtesy Jane Munday

Further south is Newcastle Waters Cattle Station which became a major junction of cattle movements north and south and east and west. This industry required servicing and in 1920 the government made a small excision from the Station and gazetted a townsite on a rise by the Newcastle Creek. It grew as a town that included a pub, police station, store, school, feeder line to the Overland Telegraph Line and post office, stockmen quarters and camps. Kerry Packer once owned the Station and his son James, was a stockman for a short time at the Station. In 1988 during Australia's bicentennial, the Station was host to thousands of people who came to witness the last cattle drive from Newcastle Waters to Queensland. We visited Pic Willett's statue, and the NT National Trust's Jones' Store and the Junction Hotel.

Lunch was at the Newcastle Waters picnic/parking area further down the Stuart Highway.



Group at Pic Willet's statue



Jones' Store



Junction Hotel
Brian Reid & Jane Munday



Jones' Store
Rachel Francois, Margaret Donald & Peter Siebert

After lunch we headed further south and stopped at the Beetaloo Station turnoff. It is a large prosperous cattle station to the east of Newcastle Waters on the Newcastle Waters Creek. The proposed Beetaloo Gas Basin fracking site is a little further to the east. The relevance of Beetaloo Station to us extends back to the events in the 1960s. Station attitudes to Aboriginal people living on or about the station changed and many chose to walk off to the new town of Elliott. They camped on the southern edge of the town in what became known as South Camp.

At the back of Elliott, we take the Longreach Waterhole track. The track on the whole isn't too bad, sandy in parts with some deep rough pockets. A high clearance or 4WD is recommended. This track is not open to the general public but we obtained permission from the Elliott Barkly Shire. Surprisingly, the waterhole had a lot of birdlife even though it was in the middle of the day. The area around the waterhole is flat with many shady trees which makes it a great camping spot.



Lunch at Newcastle Waters
From left: Jane Munday, Fiona Scott, Peter & Libby Siebert, Heather Boulden & Mark Ames



Longreach Waterhole

Our last stop for the day was the World War 11 memorial park in Elliott. Foundations of Army installations are very much present in the park and well worth the stop.

Our last catchup together was at dinner in the dining room and a vote of thanks was toasted to Brian and Lyn Reid who organised another great 4WD trip.



Dinner in the HiWay Inn dining room
From left: Margaret Donald, Rachael Francois, Brian & Lyn Reid



Jane Munday, Peter & Libby Siebert

Day 4 - Sunday 30 July

This morning some people headed elsewhere besides Darwin and some stayed on. We went north to Darwin and stopped at the Mataranka markets. The markets even though small offered a variety of items for sale – clothes, homemade food and fresh fruit. The paw paws attracted my group and they were quickly snapped up. Last stop was at the Katherine Information Centre. This is great spot for a toilet break and it offers a lovely shady area out the back which has a coffee van. When we arrived at Adelaide River, we were hoping some stalls were still operating after Friday's Rosella Festival but not so. It would have been another nice place to take a break. Unfortunately, no stalls were to be seen so we drove straight back to Darwin.

Thanks

Big thanks to Brian and Lyn Reid who led the trip and undertook the initial reccie run to make sure our trip would be perfect.

Participants

Brian and Lyn Reid, Bev Phelts, Libby and Peter Siebert, Merry Cooper, Mark Ames, Janie Mason, Margaret Donald, Rachel Francois, Jane Munday, Heather Boulden, Jeremy Hemphill, Fiona Scott, Jane Farr and Brian McLachlan

Mechanical problems and flat tyres - Nil !!!

Photographs

All the photographs, unless otherwise indicated, were provided by Bev Phelts

Information

Provided by Brian Reid and Bev Phelts