

This year's field trip was a bit different as we used Katherine's Low Level Crossing Big4 Caravan Park as a base camp. After spending a long day walking around in waist high spear grass, and getting covered in dust and sweat it was nice to come back to a comfortable camp with hot water showers.

Muster point was at Katherine's Big4 caravan park but my group (Judy Boland & Jane Farr), as per usual, set off a day earlier (Thursday 23) to spend the night in Katherine.

Friday 24 July Darwin Show Day – Katherine Museum, Overland Telegraph pylons & Emungalan

The morning was spent at the Katherine Museum where we were shown around by volunteer, Joan. The building was the passenger terminal and air radio building for the Katherine aerodrome. It was used for 30 years from 1945 until the aerodrome closed in 1975. In 1942, the building was taken over by the Americans and bombed by the Japanese. The museum has displays on Katherine and the region. Since my last visit, the Museum has included more displays such as on the Territory Police, Noel Buntine who was prominent in the trucking and cattle industry, the Tapp dynasty of pastoralists, the Katherine Italians and a section on the centenary of the ANZACS which includes a beautiful hand made quilt dedicated to the ANZACS. We then headed to the hanger which has more displays and contains "Flying Doctor" Clyde Fenton's gypsy moth. With the tour ending at the Overland Telegraph display. After our yummy Devonshire tea at the museum cafe, we then visited the two Overland Telegraph pylons which are on opposite sides of the Katherine River. The pylons were constructed in 1898-1899 and were heritage listed in 1996.



Katherine Museum



Wendy James, Ruth Kerr & Janie Mason



Judy Boland, Jane Farr, Earl James, Mary Fathers & Wendy James



The group in the front of Clyde Fenton's gypsy moth
From left: Bev Phelts, Matthew James, Jane Farr, Wendy James, Mary Fathers, Brian Reid, Judy Boland, Janie Mason, Linda Howard, Roger Heapy & Alan Mitchell



Indulging in delicious Devonshire teas



Earl James talking about the history of the pylons



The pylon on the Katherine side of the river



The pylon on the other side of the river
(Knotts Crossing)



Our convoy and Judy Boland, Brian Reid & Wendy James

The ruins of Emungalan was our next stop. The township was founded in 1914, long before Katherine, and it was the railhead for the North Australian Railway from 1917 to 1926. In 1972, when the HSNT last visited the site, the group located the stumps to the water tank, the goods shed, several bottle dumps and the concrete floors of the O'Shea Hotel, the school, the teacher's residence and the blacksmith's wheel shrinkage pit.

Emungalan was named after an aboriginal name for place of stone. Within a short time of settlement, the town grew to over 200 people with 90% being males. The town consisted of a school, hotel, three saddlers, a blacksmith, general stores, railway gangers huts, Chinese stores and a cattle yard. An airstrip was constructed just south west of the town and the racetrack was used for regular meetings. The first teacher was Miss Ellen May Elliott and she had an average attendance of eight pupils. The railway station also served as the unofficial Post Office. A billiard saloon and dining room built by Tim O'Shea in 1917 served the local area but it wasn't licensed until 1924.

In 1924, O'Shea built his licensed Railway Hotel. Police were stationed at Emungalan for a short time but because there was no goal, prisoners and lepers awaiting rail transportation to Darwin, were chained to what is known as "Prisoner Tree" which has since been cut down. By 1925, the population decreased to 165. With the completion of the high-level railway bridge in 1926, Emungalan eventually became a ghost town as residents moved across the river to the newly created township of Katherine.¹



Emungalan township



Emungalan school

There is very little evidence that Emungalan existed, however we managed to locate the railway platform which had remnants of the railway track and the foundation of the station master's residence. Over the other side of the Stuart Highway is the wheel rim shrinkage pit and on the other side of Zimin Drive is the Emungalan cemetery.



Matthew & Earl James with their finds at Emungalan



Bev Phelts with part of the foundation of the station master's residence

¹ Information from the Katherine Museum website



Jane Farr at the foundation ruins of a "storehouse", a rusted "laundry tub" was found buried on the same site



The end of the railway platform



A railway line spike



Railway tracks at the end of the platform



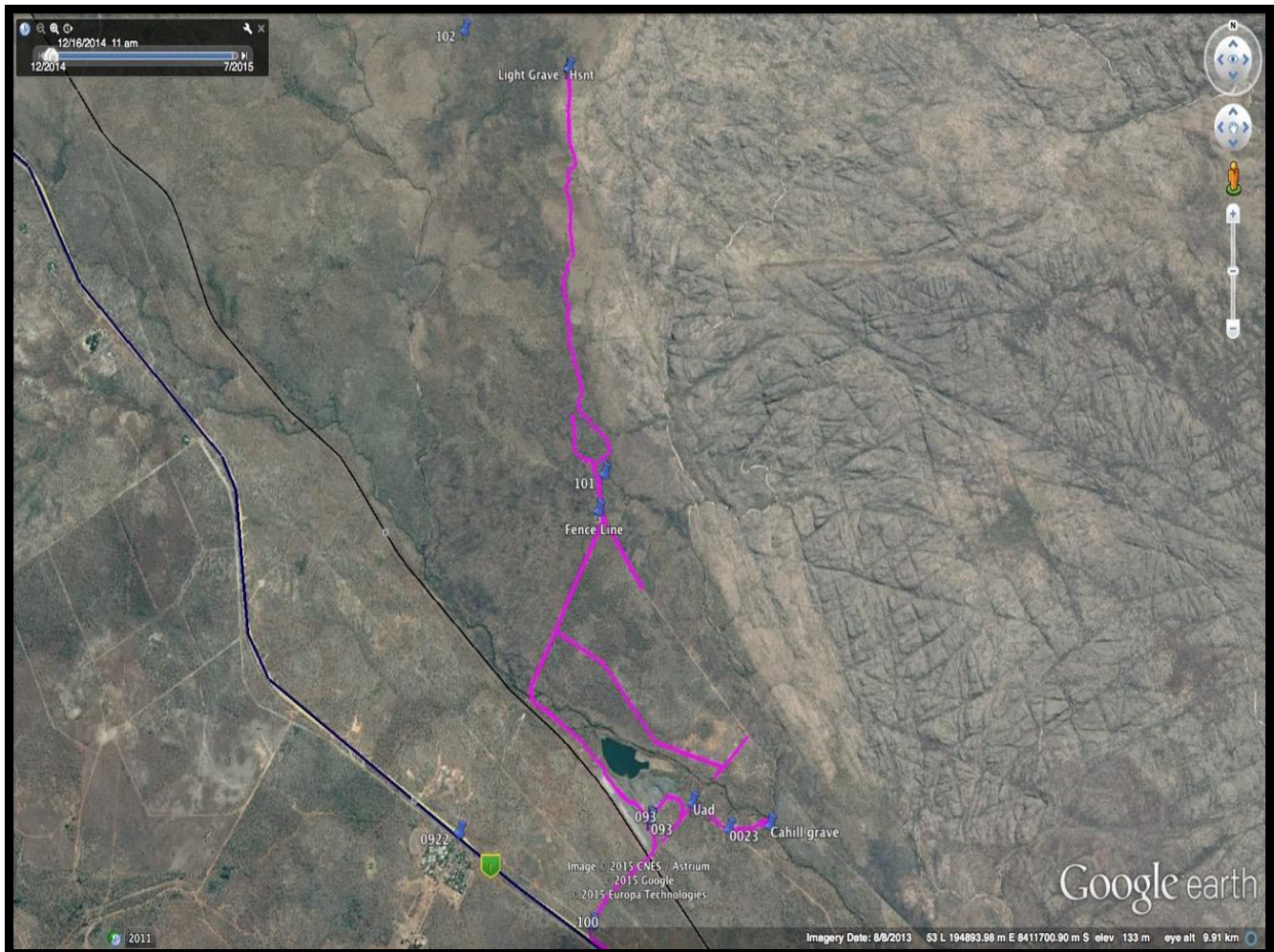
Bev Phelts at the blacksmith's wheel rim shrinkage pit



A foundation corner and hook

Saturday 25 July – William Light & Matt Cahill graves and Manbulloo

This morning my group had time to go to the Katherine markets for breakfast, do some shopping and see the old Katherine Anglican church before setting off to the graves.



The location of William Light and Matt Cahill's graves provided by Allan Mitchell.

Later this morning, Katherine local, Dennis McIntyre led us to William Light's grave and then to Matt Cahill's grave. William Light's grave is located on Jawoyn aboriginal land. Light was an Overland Telegraph operator at Daly Waters who died aged 33 in April 1890. It took us nearly 1.5 hours each way to travel the 6km of rough track often criss crossing the original Overland Telegraph road to reach his grave. On the way, we discovered original OLT poles and telegraph wire with some poles still in situ.



We were lead by Dennis McIntyre & his little dog Poss, on quad.



Matthew James holding up original OLT wire

Information on William Light's death

Reported in the The North Australian and Northern Territory Government Gazette Friday 25 April 1890

The death has been announced of William Henry Light, a telegraph operator, who had been stationed for a considerable length of time at Daly Waters, one of the inland stations on the overland line.

For some time past Light had been in failing health, and two months ago he applied for leave ; but until quite recently the Department had no one to put in his place. When in due time the deceased was advised that his application had been granted he at once set out for Palmerston.

He was still in very poor health, and had improved nothing by the time he reached Mr. Murray's house at the Katherine. He spelled for several days at the Katherine station, where he was shown every attention and kindness by the proverbially kind-hearted Murrays.

On Sunday he started for Pine Creek in a buggy in company with Mounted Constable Hadge, but before they had got twenty miles on the journey poor Light was dead. He appears to have died so suddenly and yet so quietly that his companion had no warning of his approaching end.

The body was buried by the wayside. Deceased had the character of being one of the steadiest men on the Overland Telegraph line, and he was moreover quite a young man. By those of his brother officers who were acquainted with him, Light's death is universally regretted.



An OLT pole in situ – Judy Boland, Mary Fathers, Earl James & Allan Mitchell



Criss crossing the original Overland Telegraph road



A fallen Overland Telegraph pole



At Light's graveside – from left: Earl James, Ruth Kerr, Janie Mason, Jane Farr, Brian Reid, Judy Boland, Mary Fathers, Roger Heapy, Linda Howard, Bev Phelts, Matthew James & Allan Mitchell



The grave and headstone are in remarkable condition

Matthew Cahill was the brother of Paddy Cahill of Cahill's Crossing fame. Cahill was born in Ipswich in 1860 and was the manager of Gordon Downs Station, WA. In June 1908, Matt had been delivering horses from the Victoria River district for his brother while suffering with a "bad leg" and ill health. When the other drovers had set off for the day with the horses, Matt killed himself with his gun. His grave is located on Arthur Jarrard's property approximately 6km north east of Katherine.

His death was reported in the *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 19 June 1908,

A TRAGIC DEATH.

News was received in town on Friday last of the violent death, ten miles this side of the Katherine, of Mr. Mat Cahill, who was engaged in bringing in some half dozen horses from the Victoria River district for his brother, Mr. P. Cahill, at present living in Palmerston. At moment of writing no details of the tragedy have been received. The deceased is known to have been suffering for some time past from a bad leg.

Since above was written further details received leave no doubt that poor M. Cahill took his own life. On the morning of 12th inst. deceased remained in camp, as he had frequently done previously, whilst McKenzie and another started on with the horses. Later on the same day M. White discovered poor Cahill's body in a sitting position in bed of creek, with back against a rock, revolver recently discharged, clasped in right hand, and bullet hole in right temple. Mr. Jaensch left Katherine for the scene of the tragedy the same evening, and issued the necessary authority for burial. Deceased had for some time been in very depressed spirits, due to ill health.



At Matt Cahill's grave.
From left: Linda Howard, Marcus, Roger Heapy,
Bev Phelts, Jane Farr, Mary Fathers, Judy
Boland & Allan Mitchell

In the afternoon, we headed for Manbulloo and explored the ruins of the WW2 Army's operations centre. Over the other side of the Victoria Highway is the Manbulloo WW2 meat works with many of the structures still very visible.

Manbulloo History

Works on the airfield were initially undertaken by the 43rd Engineer Regiment (US Army) in April 1942. The Allied Works Council completed the works and the airfield was operational by 19 May 1942. The runway was 1,981 m x 30 m (6,499 ft x 98 ft).

The B-24 Liberators from the 529th and 530th Bombardment Squadrons moved to Manbulloo shortly after arriving from the United States in April 1943, with Headquarters of their parent unit, the 380th Bomb Group being at Fenton Airfield. With the Northern Territory being subjected to the occasional Japanese air raid at the time, it was decided to disperse the operational squadrons over several airfields. From Manbulloo Airfield the squadron attacked Japanese airfields, ground installations, shipping, and industries in the Netherlands East Indies and the Bismarck Archipelago. Other missions included disruption of enemy sea channels; dropping photoflash bombs and propaganda pamphlets. Both squadrons were reassigned to Long Airfield in late 1943.

The airfield was closed in 1944 and apparently abandoned. Today from the air no wartime buildings, taxiways or hardstands are evident, only the remains of the main NW-SE runway exist which is being used as an access road to an irrigated mango plantation, which was planted in 1972, the first commercial mango plantation in NT, it is now owned by Manbulloo Limited who export mangoes around the world. The remains of what appears to be a second runway (NNW-SSE) is faintly visible in aerial photography, along with some roads possibly a part of the airfield are also faintly visible. No evidence of a containment area is visible.

An access road to the airfield is joined to the Victoria Highway, however, the airfield is on private property as part of the million hectare cattle property Manbulloo Station.²

1915

- Manbulloo station established 11km W of Emungalan (original township north of Current Katherine town area). Used for holding cattle waiting for shipment to Vestey's Meatworks in Darwin (established 1917)
- Manbulloo & Wave Hill were leased to Vestey's under agreement that abattoir in Darwin was to be built and operated

1941

- 7 December 1941 Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour and quickly occupied most of South East Asia
- The Territory was suddenly vulnerable and the government evacuated women and children from Darwin and communities.

1942

- 19 February 1942 Japanese bomb Darwin.
- All sea lanes are closed
- By 21 February, the northern portion of the NT had come under martial law
- All male civilians medically examined – those fit for service conscripted into the army
- Unauthorised persons excluded from the area north of Pine Creek
- Situation was now extremely serious
 - * labour shortages affected day to day operations of beef industry
 - * difficult to move large numbers of stock due to lack of skilled stockmen

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manbulloo_Airfield

1942 cont..

- Whydham meatworks closed
- Due to fear of being captured by the Japanese as many cattle as possible were being moved from the east Kimberley and Victoria River district for fear of invasion. Need to deprive invaders of ready food source
- Military meat contract sub committee emphatic that killing should be concentrated at a large abattoir in the Katherine region
- Reduce need for additional droving and rail transport to current processing sites
- Allow more efficient processing of offal
- Meatworks built by the army, but offered to Vestey's to operate
- Construction started – Army constructed, to feed the 3 services stationed in the NT, site consisted of 46 buildings including mess halls, barracks, poultry farm, shilling rooms which could hold 1000 carcasses. Cattle came from Pine Ck, Mataranka and around Katherine
- Vestey's operation was accused by local pastoralists as having unfair advantage in animals being processed and supplying army with rations and stores
- Slaughter occurred at site, cool storage plant was built in Katherine, meat was bought in and frozen then distributed to troops

1944

- March - Abattoir commissioned, cost £70,000
- Was built (on then Manbulloo- Vestey's) by A.W.C cost £65,000
- by end of 44 was killing 700 head cattle a week, several butchery units stationed at the abattoirs including 2/3rd Australia field butchery platoon, engineers, cooks and quartermaster personnel

1946

- Over 23 months processed 34,000 head. Following the immediate postwar departure of personnel, facility was closed in early 1946

1947

- Bovril Australian Estates purchased Manbulloo, moved sections of it to Katherine to establish new meatworks. Manbulloo plant & equipment sold for £10,000³



Abattoir water tank stand



Brian Reid at the abattoir power house site

³ <https://australianabattoirs.wordpress.com/2013/06/14/manbulloo>

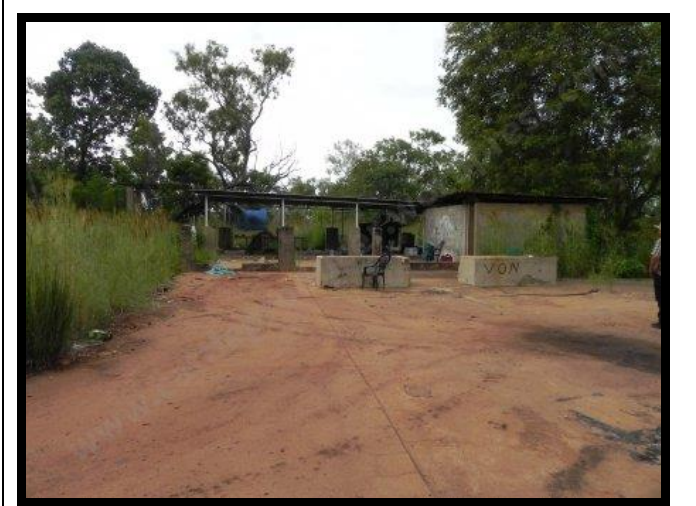
Photos taken from the NT Heritage Register on Manbulloo



machinery foundation beds



Mess with bar footrail in place



Abattoir



Operations centre power house site



Operations centre power house site, partially underground



Abattoir cattle track to killing room



Abattoir looking towards the slaughter room



Looking down inside the Manbulloo WW2 operations centre for allied aircraft



Inside Manbulloo WW2 operations centre



Saturday had been a very long day and it was our last day.
So one last get together for "happy hour"



Jane Farr & Judy Boland



Happy Hour – Wendy James, Ruth Kerr, Brian Reid,
Mary Fathers & Allan Mitchell



Sunday 26 July – Ronan graves and then home

Before heading north, we decided to visit the graves of Tom (1907-1976) and Mary Ronan (1917-1982), their daughter Margaret Mary (1948-1952) and son Phillip James (1950). Also Sydney (1895-1971) and John Fullerton (1927-2007) are buried in the tiny cemetery at Springvale homestead.

Tom Ronan at the age of 14, he went droving with his father in the Kimberley, and then worked as a ships clerk and pearl shell opener in Broome 1923-26. Between 1927-34, he worked with his father managing the Victoria River Depot on Koonbook Station. In 1940, he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force and fought at El Alamein, Egypt and returned to Australia with his regiment in 1943. He was discharged from the Army in 1944 and he worked in the cattle/meat industry an essential war occupation in the Territory. In 1945, he was the manager of Newry Station (on the border of the Territory and WA) and he wrote his first book *Strangers on the Ophir*, which was based on some of the characters he had worked with. In 1947, he married Mary Kearins and they went on to have ten children. In 1949, they bought Springvale Homestead and ran a herd of 100 milking goats. Tom wrote four more books at Springvale – *Deep of the Sky*, a biography on his father; *Packhorse and Pearling Boat*, two volumes of autobiography and *Once There was a Bagman*. Tom won numerous literary awards and a fellowship for his books. In 1976, he died of bronchopneumonia in Royal Adelaide Hospital and was cremated and buried at Springvale.⁴



Ronan and Fullerton graves

The Society thanks Allan Mitchell for organising the trip and fabulous reconnoiter, Dennis McIntyre for his untiring patience and dedication in leading us to the graves.

Participants:

Earl James, Ruth Kerr, Janie Mason, Jane Farr, Brian Reid, Lyn Reid, Judy Boland, Mary Fathers, Roger Heapy & Marcus, Linda Howard, Matthew James, Bev Phelts & Allan Mitchell

⁴ *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 16, 2002