

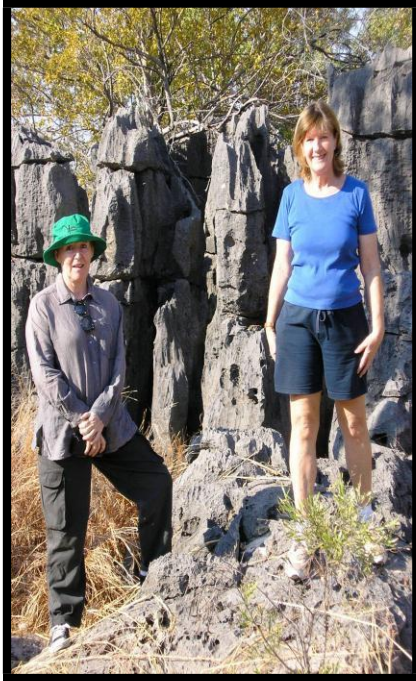
BY BEV PHELTS



Muster point was at Mataranka but my group (Judy Boland, Michael Smith & Jane Farr) decided to set off a day earlier and spend the night in Katherine.

Friday 25 July Darwin Show Day

This morning we went to Cutta Cutta Caves on the way to Mataranka and took a tour of the caves with Ranger Ethan.



Jane Farr & Bev Phelts at Cutta Cutta Caves



Inside Cutta Cutta Caves

Morning tea at our mustering point – Mataranka



Sheryl Keates, Jane Farr & Bev Phelts



Michael Smith & Judy Boland

Turn off to the Roper River Road was just south of Mataranka. It was excellent for a gravel road, corrugated in parts, but pretty good overall. The Sherwin Iron Mining Company had collapsed a couple of weeks before our trip, which meant we hardly had to deal with road trains.

Scenic signs and scenes that we passed



Mt McMinn



The convoy on the Roper River Road

We found a great rest spot for lunch. There was a large water tank at the site and as soon as we stopped, the birds hung around and started squawking. Obviously for water - so we filled up an empty butter container and were subsequently amused by the antics of the birds.



Morning tea on the way to Roper River
Left: Christine Gleeson, Michael Smith, Judy Boland,
Allan Mitchell, Jane Farr, Penny Baird & Julie Mastin



Earl, Peter & Wendy James

Pressing on, we reached the Roper Bar Store early afternoon and set up camp at the store's camping ground. It is very a nice little camp ground with lots of shade trees but no electricity. So you need to provide your own lighting.



Roper River Store



Inside the store, Jane Farr, Christine Gleeson & Allan Mitchell

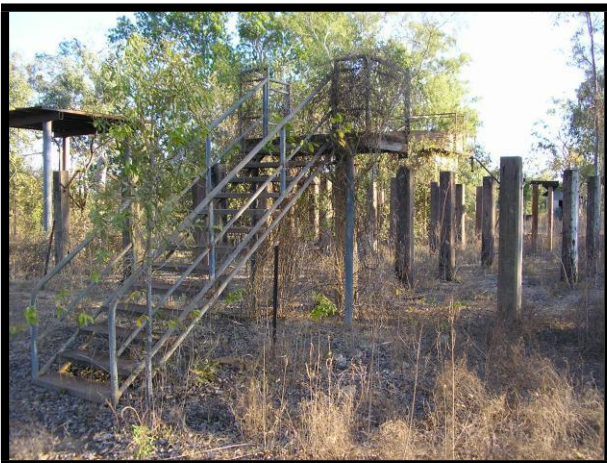
There was plenty of time before dark to go exploring. So down to the Roper Bar we went then up to the old Roper Bar Police Station. A police station was established in 1885 on another site but was later moved to the current site in 1937. Although situated on a high bank it was regularly flooded and residents had to take refuge in a small shed that stood on the hill beside the airstrip. Sometimes floods would take weeks to subside. When the nearby settlement of Ngukurr was founded, it became necessary to have a police presence there. On 31 March 1982 a new police station was opened at Ngukurr and the Roper Bar Station abandoned.¹



At the old Roper River Police Station lockup.
Left: Ruth Kerr, Christine Gleeson, Jane Farr, Judy Boland, Julie Mastin & Penny Baird



It is believed stockmen and trackers lived in this shed

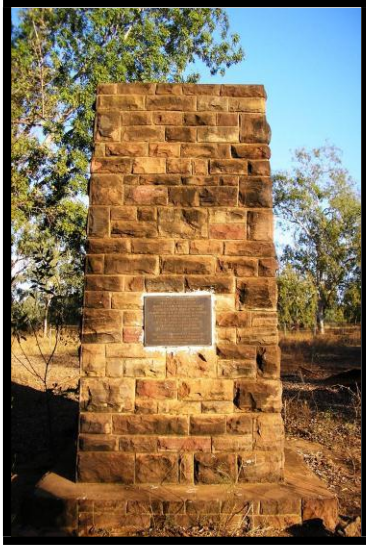


The stairs to nowhere – the Police Station



Bev Phelts & Christine Gleeson at Roper Bar

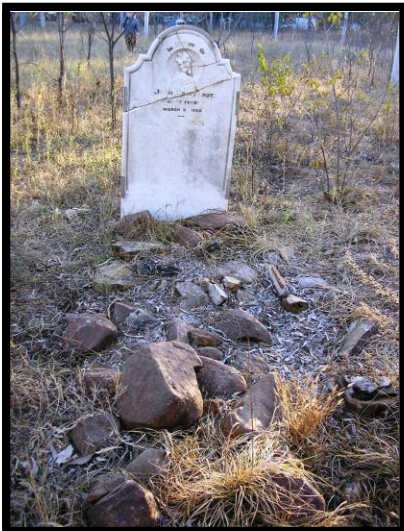
¹ A Stroll in History down the Roper River by HD & VJ Januschka



Friedrich Wilhelm Ludwig Leichhardt (1813-1848),
naturalist and explorer, monument



Near the camping ground there is a lonely grave belonging to John Urquhardt who died of fever on 3 March 1885. According to his great great granddaughter, Cheryl Gossner, his name was John Alexander McDonald Urquhart (no "d" in Urquhart). He was born in 1840 on the ship "Isabella Watson" at sea during a voyage to Australia. His mother was Marianne Herrett and his father was Andrew Urquhart. He was married with one child with his wife living in Collingwood, Queensland. He was a drover for the Duracks and was driving cattle into the Territory and when he died at Hays & Co store, Roper River of fever.²



John Urquhardt's grave



² information from Cheryl Gossner

Saturday 26 July

On Saturday, we made an attempt to locate the Roper River Overland Telegraph Depot but became stumped about 1.5km from the site. The track over the black soil plains became obscure with the track turning into a dead end and several tracks crisscrossing over it. With the high long grass and boggy black soil it wasn't worth risking vehicle damage. So the attempt was abandoned.

We pressed on to the "newly" developed Tomato Island camp ground which is a must if you want to camp in a flash camping ground. There is plenty of room to spread out and the grounds also cater for returned service personnel. There is an "Anzac park" complete with a flag pole and monument. Anzac day and other services are held regularly at the little park.

A beautiful back drop to the camping grounds is the Roper River and the "Young Australian" ruins.

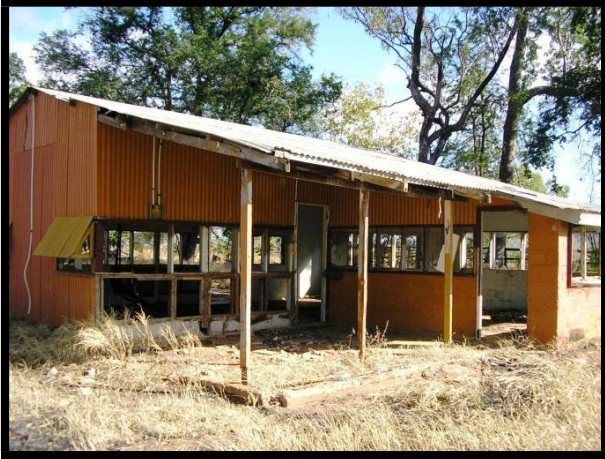


Group photo at Tomato Island camping ground. The Roper River & 'Young Australian' ruins in the background



Brian Reid, Judy Boland, Earl James & Penny Baird

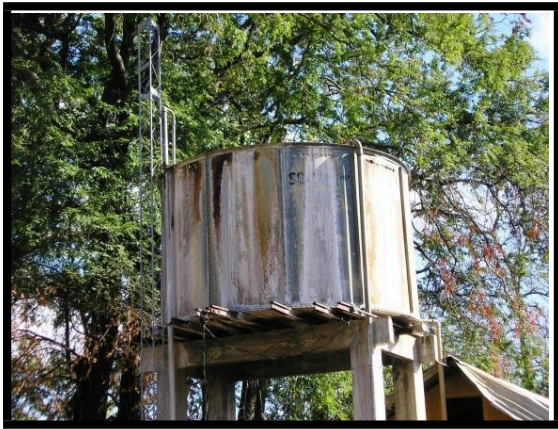
We headed off to the ruins of Urapunga Station. In 2002, the 1800 square kilometre station was handed back to 1200 traditional owners. Urapunga was bought through ATSIC in 1996 with the Northern Land Council helping in the formal land claim under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act. Urapunga was one of a number of handbacks that occurred around that time. Others were Elsey Station and Hodgson Downs.³



Urapunga Station ruins



Urapunga Station ruins – stockyards – Jane Farr



Urapunga Station squatters water tank



Urapunga Station – entrance to the homestead.

Next stop was at the St Vidgeon station ruins. The ruins are the most recent of three homesteads built since 1888. The first was destroyed by floods, the second by white ants and fire and the third homestead, built in 1960 was destroyed by a cyclone.⁴ In 2012, the Northern Land Council secured an agreement with Adelaide based company, Western Desert Resources for an iron-ore mine on the station.⁵

³ www.abc.net.au/site-archive/rural/nt/stories/s558111.htm

⁴ www.ntforeveryone.com.au/limmen-np.htm

⁵ www.nlc.org.au/files/various/FCM_lease_agreements_June_2012.pdf

A tea break was enjoyed at nearby Lomareium Lagoon.



St Vidgeon Station ruins



At Lomareium Lagoon, Judy Boland, Jane Farr & Michael Smith



Christine Gleeson, Allan Mitchell, Julie Mastin & Penny Baird



Lomareium Lagoon

Back at camp by 2.30pm, we decided that we had enough daylight time to fit in Port Roper. This was a narrow dirt (approx. 50km) track with some very rough sections. What struck me was that the amazing scenery that constantly changed. There were plenty of horses, donkeys and wallabies to see.

Not much is at Port Roper but camps. We found a crabbers camp that had a Vietnamese flavour and we decided to venture in. Crabbers Vo and Vivian who live there 8 months of year kindly showed the intruders around their amazing camp. Their tin building on stilts over the water is designed so that boats can pull up to it and unload their catch easily. Inside the building was a huge kitchen and lounge area complete with TV.



Vo



Vivian



Vo & Vivian's transport – and it goes!



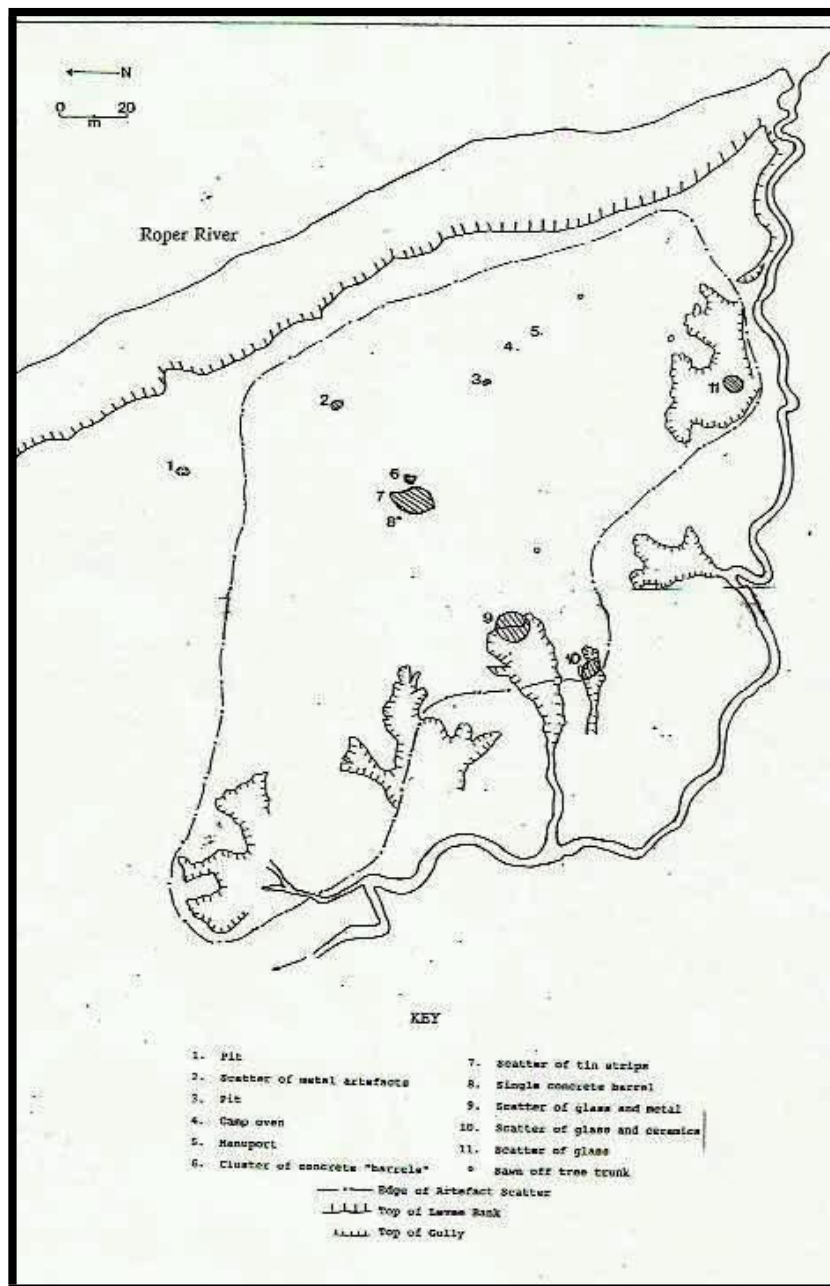
At Port Roper, Penny Baird, Julie Mastin, Allan Mitchell, Bev Phelts, Jane Farr, Judy Boland & Christine Gleeson

Around the campfire that night, Michael Smith celebrated his birthday in style. His sister, Judy Boland had bought a cake from Darwin which had managed to survive being tossed around in the back of the 4WD. Complete with sparklers we sang happy birthday to Michael.

Sunday 27 July

In the morning, Glyn, the owner of the Roper Bar store took us by boat to the Overland Telegraph Depot site. Resting on the bank where we wanted to disembark was a crocodile. Glyn made some extra noise with the boat motor and thankfully it moved along. The Depot had been a tent community, so there was no physical evidence of any buildings. We found a cluster of concrete "barrels", a horseshoe, iron ring, iron tools and hooks and scattered tin. More iron tools were found in the dry creek bed.

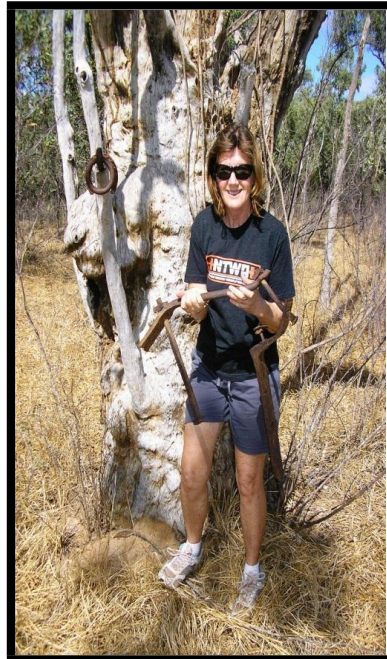
Mud map of the Roper River Overland Telegraph Depot site.⁶



⁶ The History and Archaeology of the Roper River Overland Telegraph Construction Depot', Scott Mitchell, 1993, prepared for the Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory



On the boat to the Overland Telegraph Depot



At the OLT Depot site, Bev Phelts with the finds of a horseshoe, iron ring & various iron tools



"concrete barrels" and various iron bits. One iron piece could be part of a bore casing



Bev Phelts with Iron hooks

In the afternoon, some of us went into Ngukurr and visited the art centre. Others had success finding the petroglyphs near the Hodgson River/ Rocky Bar Crossing.



Ngukurr Art Centre



petroglyphs



Brian Reid, Barbara Vos, Ruth Kerr Earl, Peter, Matthew
& Wendy James



Crossing the Roper Bar

This morning it was time to head home. On the Roper River Road to the Stuart Highway we passed creeks named after characters of the Never Never - Elsey fame – Sayles, Packsaddle, Fizzer, Cheon, Mahyew and Elsey.



It was a good run with lunch and a fuel stop in Katherine. Home by 4pm, and sadly the end of another fantastic camping trip.

Participants

Earl & Wendy James, their sons Peter and Matthew, Barbara Vos, Ruth Kerr, Judy Boland, Michael Smith, Jane Farr, Bev Phelts, Allan Mitchell, Christine Gleeson, Brian and Lyn Reid, Sheryl and Arthur Keates, Julie Mastin, Penny Baird

Big Thanks

The Historical Society thanks the generosity and the great assistance given to us by the owners of Roper Bar Store – Veronica and Glyn. Without them, the trip wouldn't have been such an adventure!

Photographs

Photographs were provided by Bev Phelts and Michael Smith