



## HSNT Annual Field Trip 22-24 July 2022 Victoria River Region - Augustus Gregory National Park

by Bev Phelts

The Victoria River region is full of wonderful pastoral and exploration history. Augustus Gregory (1819-1905) and his party are one of the most notable. In 1855, Gregory and his men set up a camp on the Victoria River and explored the area. Gregory went on to explore the Elsey, Roper & MacArthur Rivers and named the Leichhardt River.

My group headed off on Thursday 21 July and stopped for lunch at Katherine. We arrived at the Victoria River Roadhouse mid afternoon where we set up base camp. The road from Darwin is bitumen all the way and takes around 6 hours. All of the group met up at the Roadhouse over drinks on that evening. The Roadhouse offers shady camping grounds, motel units, showers, basic groceries, diesel, bar/restaurant & helicopter rides.

### Day 1 - Friday 22 July (Show Day)

It was a very brisk, chilly & windy morning of 15C when we gathered at 8.30am to start the day.

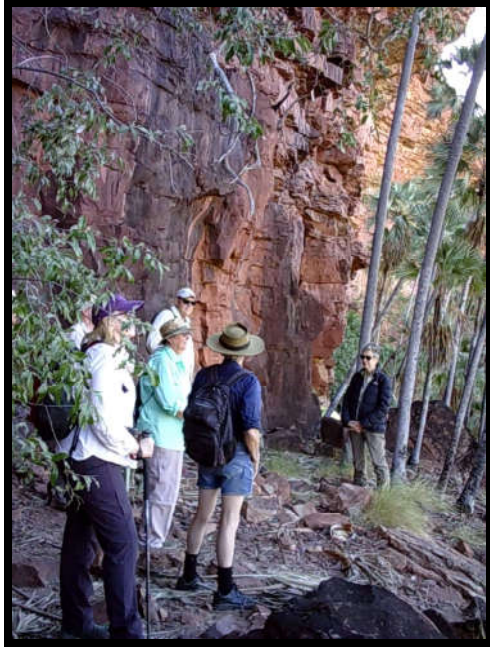


The convoy met near the helicopter pad  
Photograph Brian Reid



The helicopter taking off

Our first activity for the day was to climb Joe's Creek Escarpment. It was very steep and rocky taking us nearly two hours. But the view and the rock art was worth it. However, only half of us managed to complete the climb.



Joe's Escarpment



Jane Munday & Christine Tarbett-Buckley climbing Joe's Escarpment



Bev Phelts climbing Joe's Escarpment  
Photograph Jane Munday



The group at Joe's Escarpment





Rock art at Joe's Escarpment



Morning tea at Joe's Escarpment  
From left: Ruth Kerr, Lyn Reid, Allan Mitchell, Peter & Libby Siebert, Fiona Scott & Janie Mason



Penny Baird & Ian Anderson

Lunch was on the Timber Creek Council lawns and then a visit to the Timber Creek Police Museum. The Police Station was established in 1898 and later upgraded due to the population growth in the area.



The group outside the museum



Inside the Timber Creek Police Museum. Penny Baird, Brian Reid & Mark Ames



Inside the Police Museum



Last stops for the day were at Policeman's Point and the Nackeroo Lookout.

With WW2 lapping the shores of north Australia and the threat of a Japanese invasion, the 21st North Australia Observer Unit was formed. This was a highly mobile unit which was led by local Aboriginal guides who were responsible for reporting any enemy landings. The Unit later became known as the "Nackeroos" and has since been recognised with a plaque on "Nackeroo Lookout" near Timber Creek.



Ian Anderson photographing the Victoria River  
Photograph Jane Munday



At Nackeroo Lookout

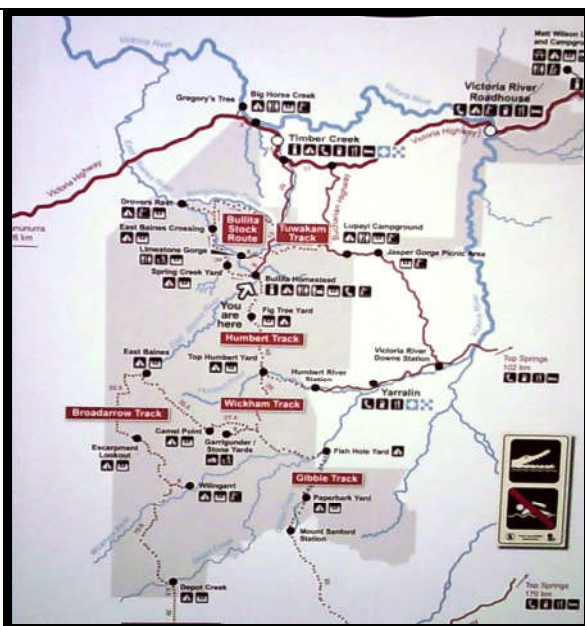
Back at camp we met up for drinks.



From left: Mark Ames, Ruth Kerr, Janie Mason, Allan Mitchell, Jane Munday, Christine Tarbett-Buckley, Libby & Peter Siebert, Ian Anderson & Merry Cooper

## Day 2 - Saturday 23 July

Another very chilly morning greeted us this morning. Morning tea was on the Baines River, Bullita station/Gregory National Park. Bullita was originally an outstation for the Durack family. The family owned pastoral stations in the Territory and northern Western Australia and were responsible for opening up the region with cattle during from the 1880s onwards. A boab tree near the homestead is carved with the Durack name. The notable Les Humbert spent many years on Bullita Station. Les made an enduring mark on the cattle industry particularly in the Victoria River Downs and Kimberley region. He started as a ringer in his early teens and worked his way through the ranks of drover, head stockman and manager on stations throughout the Victoria River Downs. He also rode and trained horses for Noel Buntine for many years and was the Territory's most successful jockey in over 100 years. The old Bullita homestead, outbuildings and stockyards still stand.



Map of the Bullita/Gregory Park region



The old Bullita homestead





Kevin Coonan & Ian Anderson at the Bullita stockyards



Bev Phelts at the Bullita stockyards



Southern Cross trough, Bullita stockyards



Lunch at the back of the Bullita homestead

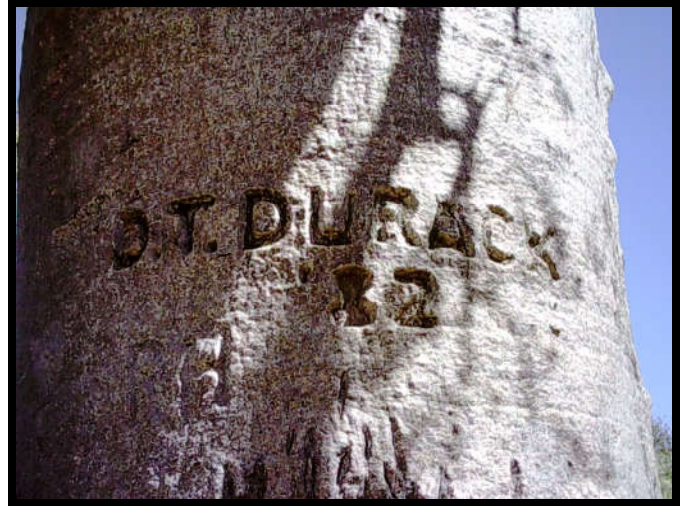
From left: Peter & Libby Siebert, Janie Mason, Ruth Kerr & Julie Mastin

Photograph Libby Siebert



Bev Phelts & Ian Anderson lunching under the trees on the Bullita grounds

Photograph Brian Reid



The boab tree engraved by a Durack next to the Bullita homestead

After lunch we drove back to the Victoria Highway then on to Timber Creek and the Bradshaw Bridge. We walked across the Bridge to the Army training base on Bradshaw Station.

We managed to have a chat to the guard who told us he does 12 hour shifts/ one week on and one week off. He retreats to Darwin or Bali on his week off



Crossing Bradshaw Bridge.

Merry Cooper, Bev Phelts, Julie Mastin & Allan Mitchell

Photograph Libby Siebert



Bradshaw Army Training base entry



Our last stop for the day was at Augustus Gregory's tree. Gregory's Tree is a boab tree located on the banks of the Victoria River, 15 kms north-west of Timber Creek. The site was a base camp for Gregory and his party who explored the region from 1855-1856. A boardwalk surrounds the boab where Baines, the expedition artist, marked the arrival and departure dates of Gregory's North Australia Expedition.



Photograph Brian Reid



### Day 3 - Sunday 24 July

On our final day, some of the group explored another escarpment walk which was located 2 kms west of the Victoria River Roadhouse. While Libby & Peter Siebert and Fiona Scott took a helicopter ride to view the beautiful escarpment from above.

Our group headed off back to Darwin and lunched at Katherine on the way home.



## **Thanks**

Big thanks to Brian Reid who led the trip and Ian Anderson who assisted. All with a smile!  
Also thanks to Matthew & Earl James who undertook the initial reccie run to make sure our trip would be perfect.

Many thanks to Barry "Bazza" Burrows of the Timber Creek museum who gave us his time and humour. It was very much appreciated.

## **Participants**

Brian & Lyn Reid, Bev Phelts, Janie Mason, Ruth Kerr, Allan Mitchell, Ian Anderson, Fiona Scott, Julie Mastin, Penny Baird, Jane Munday, Christine Tarbett-Buckley, Libby & Peter Siebert, Merry Cooper, Mark Ames, Kevin Coonan.

**Mechanical problems and flat tyres** - Nil !!!

## **Wild Animals**

Sighted were horses, pigs and dingoes

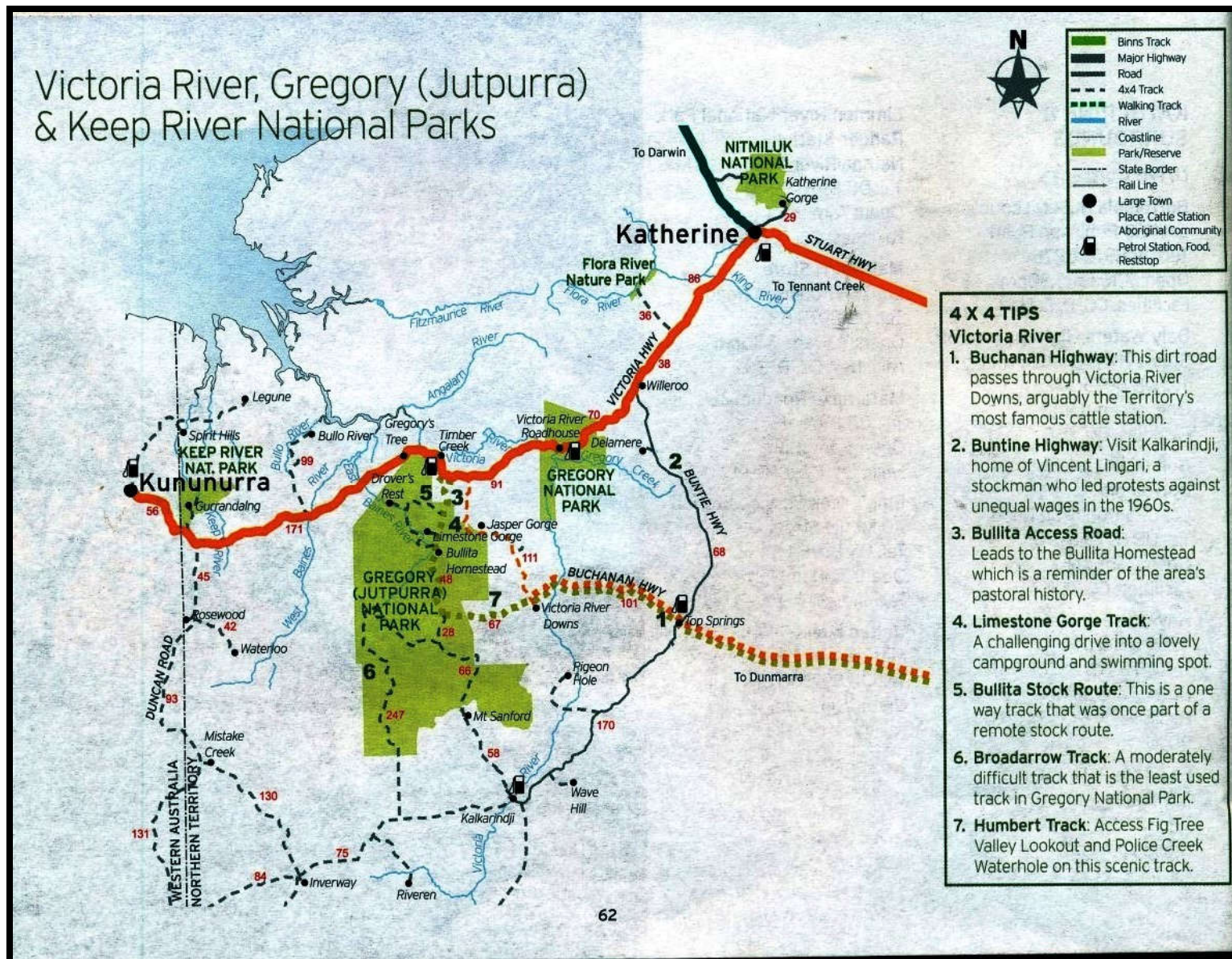
## **Photographs**

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

## **Bibliography**

Cumpston, JHL, *Augustus Gregory and The Inland Sea*, 1972

Waterson, DB, "Sir Augustus Charles Gregory", *Australian Dictionary of Biography*



Map of the Victoria River Region