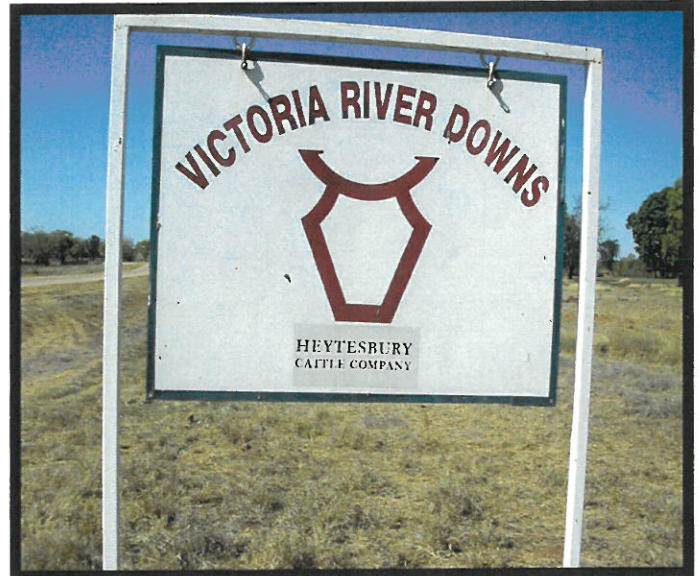


# Historical Society of the NT's Field Trip to Victoria River Downs Station, 21-24 July 2011

By Bev Phelts

VRD Station was first established by Charles Fisher and Maurice Lyons in 1880. The original cattle, 20,000 of them, were overlanded by Nat Buchanan in 1881 from Wilmot. Since then, the station has had several owners including Goldsbrough Mort & Company, Sidney Kidman and Bovril Australian Estates Ltd. The current owner is Janet Holmes a'Court.

During the early years, the Station received renowned visitors such as Sir George Le Hunte, Mick Madrill who initiated the first mail run and Harry Peckham – "The Fizzer" from the book *We of the Never Never*. Station size is 12,359 square kilometres, carrying 10,000 cattle and is 730km south west of Darwin.



It can boast of its historical past with its old buildings dating back to WW2 and beyond. The Station had previously operated a hospital/nursing home (one of the earliest Australian Inland Mission Hospitals), a school, medical clinic, a post office with its very own postcode, a supply store, stables, a cemetery (still in use) and ownership of two WW2 bomb shelters.

The infrastructure of the Station is very impressive with its helicopter pad (we counted 4 helicopters at one time), a light aircraft landing strip, power station and a weather station.

Historical Society members were the guests of the managers, Julie and Russell Richter for the weekend. Russell was away and Julie, who was suffering from broken arm and juggling two young children, remarkably - managed to spend a morning with us showing us around. We are very grateful to our most wonderful host.

\*\*\*\*\*

As customary for my group, we set off early on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> and stayed in Katherine for the night. Next morning we headed to Top Springs to meet with the others.



At the Paraway, Katherine. Note: all 4WD's

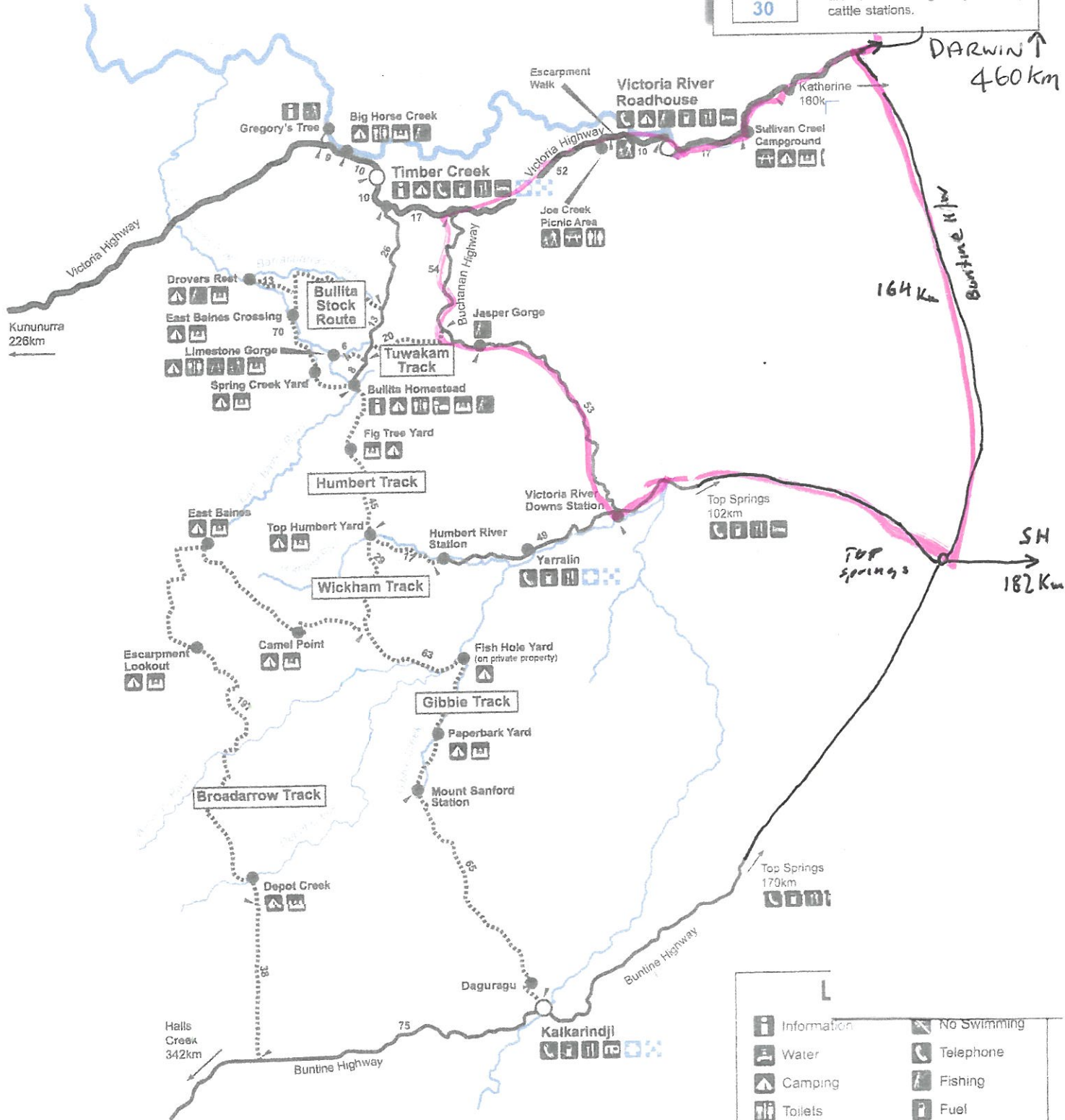


At the Buntine/VRD Highway turnoff. Judy Boland and Jane Farr. Named after Noel Buntine, who opened up the beef roads in the area and owned Roadtrains Australia

# 4WD TRACKS

White square indicate the direction and location of the 4WD tracks.

Boab markers are at located 10 km intervals along the tracks and near intersections. They indicate the distance you have travelled and are also used to guide you through cattle stations.



Estuarine (Saltwater)  
Crocodiles are present



	Information		No Swimming
	Water		Telephone
	Camping		Fishing
	Toilets		Fuel
	No fires		Food
	Ranger Station		Accommodation
	Walking Track		Caravan Park
	Lookout		Police
	Barbeque		Emergency Care



Leaving Top Springs and heading to VRD Station. Buchanan Highway named after drover, Nat Buchanan who opened up stockroutes from Queensland into the north east of the Territory



Top Springs Roadhouse. Petrol \$2 a litre



Dashwood Xing at the Victoria River. This is where "The Fizzer" drowned



Dashwood Xing at the Victoria River.



Dashwood Xing at the Victoria River. Lyn and Brian Reid's 4WD coming through.



Our camp site



Setting up camp - Penny Baird & Julie Mastin pumping up the mattress



Jane Farr setting up her tent



Ruth Kerr with her 1974 vintage tent



Setting up camp – Ruth Kerr & Janie Mason setting up the “kitchen”



Sheryl Keat & Lyn Reid getting the butterfly nets ready



At camp - Sheryl Keat, Lyn Reid, Arthur Keat & Brian Reid



At camp - Judy Boland, Jane Farr & Bev Phelms



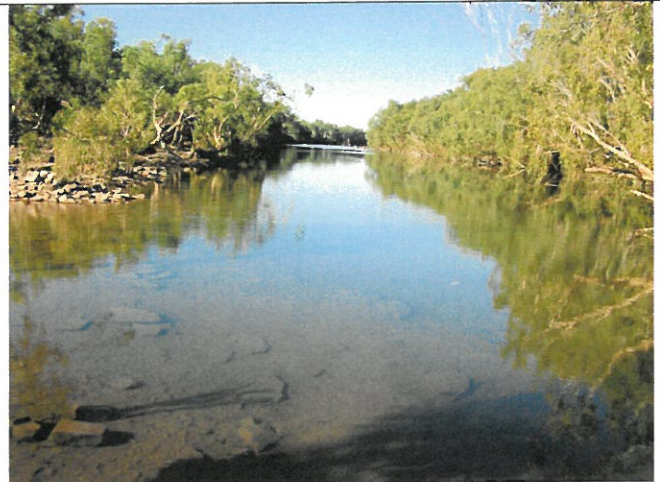
At camp - Julie Mastin cooking breakfast with Janie Mason & Ruth Kerr



At camp - Ruth Kerr & Janie Mason



Brian Reid in the back of his 4WD searching for that elusive bottle of red!



Our camp was at the stunning Wickham River. Much too cold for a swim



Tour around VRD Station. Manager, Julie Richter showing us one WW2 bomb shelter



WW2 bomb shelter



VRD post office – post code 0852



Front of the post office



VRD cemetery



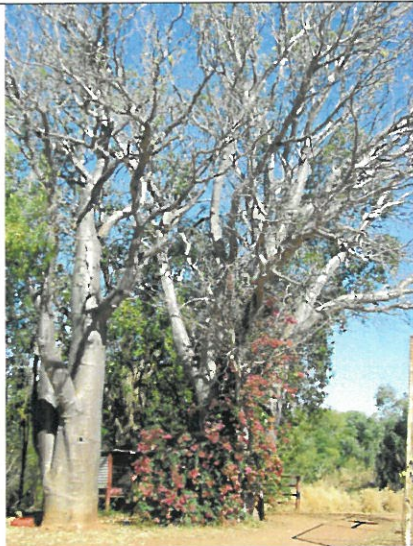
VRD bar. We had drinks with some of the ringers on Friday night



The beautiful old homestead completely renovated inside and extended. C.1910



Some of the stunning woodwork inside the homestead



Boab tree in the "backyard"



An old shed now used for storing machinery



VRD power station



The old Stores building which closed in 2006. Contains a bomb shelter and now partly used as a weather station.



Inside the old Stores building



The old hospital



Inside the old hospital. Bev Phelts, Brian Reid & Julie Richter



Inside the old hospital. Lyn & Brian Reid, Julie Richter & Ruth Kerr



Inside the old hospital. Penny Baird & Judy Boland



Inside the old hospital.



The weather station. Note the old iron water tank



The station grounds



Station grounds



The cookhouse and dining room



Inside the cookhouse. The cook, Elaine Chisholm & Julie Richter. We were treated to a delicious homemade morning tea by Elaine



The helicopter pad



While we were out for the morning, back at camp, something had attacked the food. Biscuit boxes were ripped open and biscuits, cereal and a sugar bag partly chewed and eaten. The culprit/s had dined out well! Further inspection revealed bird foot prints. Chief Suspect – a cheeky crow/s !

Other highlights were – our camp toilet



Understandably, some preferred a bush !



VRD wildflowers





On the way home we went via Jasper Gorge and stopped off at VRD Roadhouse. Sign reads "Now Open Under New Wife"



Judy Boland and Jane Farr



The bar was open for a much needed drink. Bev Phelts



Great scenery at the VRD

Another fabulous and successful field trip. It was good to arrive home safe, have a much needed shower after rolling around in red dust for 4 days.

Thanks to Col Beard and Earl James for organising it, and for Earl and Wendy doing a recci so we knew what to expect.

A BIG thanks to Julie Richter and all her marvelous staff at VRD Station for being great hosts and making our stay so enjoyable.

Group consisted of – Brian & Lyn Reid, Sheryl & Arthur Keat, Judy Boland, Jane Farr & Bev Phelts, Penny Baird & Julie Mastin, Janie Mason & Ruth Kerr.