



BOAB BULLETIN

No. 134

June 2016

NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETINGS

commencing 7.15 for 7.30 p.m.

Dalkeith Hall, 97 Waratah Avenue, Dalkeith

Wednesday, 1 June 2016

“Defence of the North”

Murray Robbins (Army Reserve)

Murray served in the Regular Army from 1979, took his discharge after 11 years, and then, having travelled the world, enlisted in Army Reserve. His talk will cover WW2 history, the formation of the North Australia Observer Unit, and the current role of the Kimberley Squadron and other Regional Force Surveillance Units under Darwin-based Northern Command (NORCOM).

Wednesday, 6 July 2016

“Kimberley projects including Charnley River”

Australian Wildlife Conservancy

AWC, now over ten years old, has sanctuaries covering more than 3 million hectares (7.4 million acres), making it Australia's largest private conservation estate. The Kimberley sanctuaries are located at Artesian Range (Charnley River), Mornington - Marion Downs and Tableland.

DRAFT PROGRAM FOR FUTURE KIMBERLEY SOCIETY MEETINGS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Speaker</u>	<u>Topic</u>
August 3	Rick Fenny	Kimberley 1972–74 and Kimberley Horse Disease
September 7	David Rose	Pro Bono work for not-for-profit aboriginal health and wellbeing program centred in Warmun
October 5	Emma Dalziell	Waterlilies in the Kimberley
November 2	Brennan Rose	Early history of Quanbun Station
December 7	Kim McCreanor	Animal Management in Rural & Remote Indigenous Communities

Please note that, with many of our speakers involved in work-related travel, this program may change at short notice. Should a speaker not be available, the topic may differ on the evening.

Members and visitors are invited to stay for supper after the meetings.

The Society asks a \$2.00 hospitality fee from non-members.

MOWALJARLAI VISION AND VOICE IS ON AT THE LAWRENCE WILSON ART GALLERY

FROM THE PRESIDENT

G'day from your new president. This is the first time we have recycled a President (I was in that role 2004–2007) so I hope I can perform the duties as ably as the previous incumbents.

First, many thanks to outgoing President Jeff Murray and the previous committee for a great job in running the Society over the last three years. Jeff stays on as Vice-President and I am sure he will continue to contribute a lot to the efficient running of your Society. And welcome back to the new committee!

This year's program presents another balanced range of speakers and Kimberley topics that should be of interest to all members. A highlight will be the 'Natural World of the Kimberley' seminar at The University Club of Western Australia on 15 October. A great program has been compiled covering all (well, most) aspects of Kimberley natural history with an impressive list of experts in many fields. The program and other details can be found on page 9 of this newsletter.

I am writing this enroute to the Kimberley in the first of several exploratory trips with Society members into new (for us) parts of this wonderful wilderness. While the Wet has been pretty dry this year, many centres have recorded significant rains in the last month, so we are hoping for full billabongs and running streams! We should be able to give presentations of our findings at the customary first meeting in 2017.

[Rock art research](#) in the Kimberley steps up a notch this year with the UWA's Centre for Rock Art Research and Management joining forces with a team of French experts to continue to unravel the long and complex history of Aboriginal occupation in the region and explore possible links with Arnhem Land art over the last 40 000 + years. The recent report of an [edge-ground axe](#) from **Carpenters Gap** dating to at least 46 000 years further adds to the age-depth of Aboriginal history in 'our' corner of the world.

It looks like an interesting year ahead and I look forward to seeing many of you at our meetings during the year.

Mike Donaldson

KIMBERLEY STATIONS

Changes in the ownership of pastoral leases is again in the news. Shanghai CRED Real Estate Stock Co. Ltd., based in Shanghai, is said to have purchased **Mount Elizabeth** and **Yakka Munga** in the Kimberley and seven other stations in the WA Goldfields for \$25,000,000. Mount Elizabeth, which went on the market in 2013, had been held by the **Lacy family** since Frank and Teresa Lacy established it in the 1940s. Their son **Peter** and his wife **Pat** (fellow members of the Kimberley Society) continued to run cattle and were also kept busy providing accommodation and great home-cooked meals for tourists, bushwalkers and other outsiders.

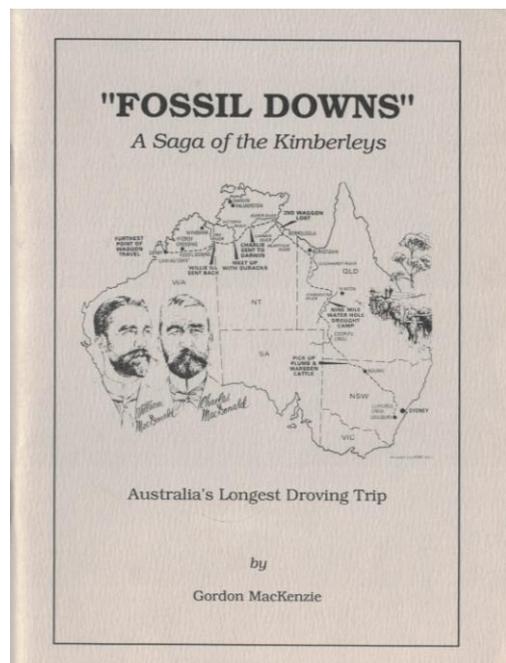
Yakka Munga, previously known as Manguel Creek, has much longer history. It went through turbulent times after the owner, **John James** and his helicopter pilot, Charlie Chambers, crashed and died there while mustering in 2003. John's sister, Diane Mayer, then ran the station for several years before being forced to sell. Experienced pastoralists **Ruth Webb-Smith** her son **Nathan** next held Yakka Munga but in 2014 the collapse of their companies saw the station sold to Buru Energy, which owns the Ungani oil drilling operations on the lease. Buru sold to Shanghai CRED.

Shanghai CRED also took part in recent bidding for S. Kidman & Co., which has **Ruby Plains Station** in the East Kimberley in its portfolio and is one of Australia's largest landholders. That sale, which is proving contentious, is currently in limbo.

OVERLANDING CATTLE TO FOSSIL DOWNS, 1883–1886

On 4 May 2016, [Dr Cathie Clement](#), a freelance historian who focuses on people and places in the Kimberley, spoke to the Kimberley Society about a trek in which cattle crossed Australia to stock [Fossil Downs Station](#). An accompanying PowerPoint presentation contained a selection of maps and old newspaper cuttings.

Much has been written about the overland cattle drives of the 1880s, usually with the boss drovers portrayed as heroes. [Nat Buchanan](#) comes to mind, as do the [Duracks](#). Before [Charlie and Willie MacDonald](#) even set foot on Fossil Downs, they were feted as heroes. Yet, when journalists later asked Willie for details, they got nowhere. In response to an offer of £500 for a record of his party's experiences, he is said to have replied that it was worth that much to forget the trip.



A book cover depicting the MacDonald brothers and the route of the cattle drive.

Cathie's research into these cattle drives began more than 30 years ago. She was surprised to find very little contemporary information about the MacDonalds' drive and, in particular, nothing at all about its start. The early research revealed flaws in legends about various overland cattle drives but it stopped short of showing where fact gave way to fiction.

Last year, spurred on by a MacDonald descendant's interest in having an accurate account of the Fossil Downs cattle drive, Cathie set about trying to document that one. Her research included delving deeply into newspaper coverage of the 1880s, a task now simplified by the availability of [Trove](#) – the National Library's repository of full-text digital resources. Searching for key words on Trove is not foolproof but it beats having to scroll through reels of microfilm.

Months passed with little sign of the new research being fruitful. Then, bit by bit, interesting scraps of information began to emerge. Not enough to reconstruct the cattle drive, or even develop a reasonably accurate account of it, but enough to show that the trek was as soul destroying as it was newsworthy.

The story starts in 1881 when families from the [Goulburn](#) area of New South Wales became interested in Kimberley land. The MacDonalds and McKenzies were related by marriage and they might have known other local families – the Duracks, [Emanuel](#)s and [Kilfoyles](#) – whose names also became part of Kimberley history. The McKenzies retained a financial interest in Fossil Downs until 1900 but it was the MacDonalds who did the physical work of establishing that isolated station in [Gooniyandi country](#). When they set off for the Kimberley with a mob of cattle in March 1883, Charlie was 31 and his brother Willie was 23.

Fossil Downs Station has frontage to the Fitzroy and Margaret rivers, which meet below the spectacular feature known as [Geikie Gorge](#). Far from any seaport, that location added to the cost of establishing and running the station. It was also a long way from medical help and, initially, from communications and police protection. Those factors made the leases cheap. With farmers and graziers having held the best of the grazing land in the settled districts since the late 1850s, their sons and others had been looking towards central and northern Australia for two decades.

Entrepreneurs, speculators and would-be station owners pushed livestock outwards in the 1860s and 1870s. Some failed but the Duracks and their kin were among those who succeeded. By 1881, they were old hands at [droving](#) their Queensland cattle to market in Adelaide, covering distances of almost 2,000 kilometres from their stations around Coopers Creek. [Drives](#) of that length were quite common. Only the most savage droughts and floods halted long distance droving.

Another constraint on the selection of the Fossil Downs leases was its timing. Using a sequence of maps to show how Kimberley pastoral lease allocation unfolded in 1881 and 1882, Cathie explained how a cartel headed by two Fremantle politicians circumvented a [ballot](#) meant to ensure fairness. The politicians – bearing surnames that are still familiar to locals – were [the Hon. William Edward Marmion](#) and William Silas Pearce. The cartel lodged 36 per cent of the 448 applications and won 33 per cent of the resulting [lease options](#). Then, in the allocation of the first batch of Fitzroy River frontages, the Surveyor General, [Malcolm Fraser](#), ensured that the cartel received preferential treatment. Its less attractive lease options were spread much further afield, ranging from the Eighty Mile Beach to the Dampier Peninsula, and as far east as the Margaret River headwaters.

Lease options from the ballot in February 1881 covered most of the Fitzroy River frontages below the Margaret River junction. Some speculators tried to sell their options; others discarded them. The discards provided scope for the Duracks and Emanuels to apply for Fitzroy River leases in December 1881. Years later, the Emanuels established [Noonkanbah Station](#) there, and the [Rose brothers](#), occupying leases relinquished by Michael Durack, established Quanbun Station.

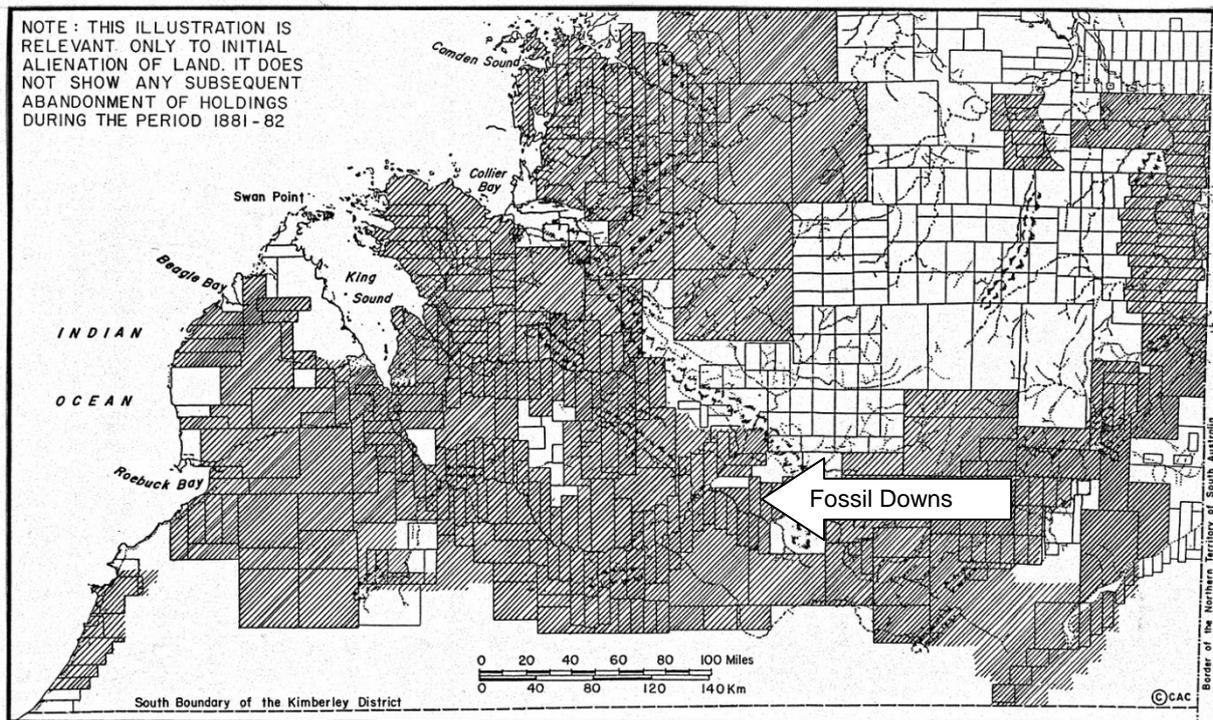
In the [Kimberley Land Regulations](#), Clause 12 was intended to curb speculation by requiring mandatory forfeiture of any lease left unstocked, or understocked, two years after its approval. That gave the cartel only two years to position 20,000 sheep – or 2,000 head of cattle – on nine scattered parcels of land totalling one million acres. Marmion put the cost of compliance at £20,000 and, in September 1881, he had the Legislative Council consider a [resolution](#) calling for reduced rents, a halving of prescribed stock numbers, and an extra year for stocking. The Hon. J G Lee Steere mentioned Marmion's personal interest in the resolution but Malcolm Fraser was among those who lent support. The outcome, following referral of the matter to Britain, was a one year extension of the stocking period. Subsequent pressure from Marmion and others saw the stocking requirements relaxed further in mid-1884.

At the time of the first debate about the stocking clause, Europeans knew very little about the East Kimberley. [Alexander Forrest's 1879 expedition](#) had ridden down part of the upper Ord, allowing early maps to show the supposed course of that river. A Melbourne magistrate named [Joseph Anderson Panton](#) took a punt on two large leases on the upper Ord and another two on the north side of Sturt Creek. By March 1882, smaller leases had been approved along both sides of the lower Ord, some of them for the Duracks and Emanuels. The following month, the MacDonalds and McKenzies received approval to lease the land that would become Fossil Downs. With that, the scene was set for planning and executing the big overland drives.

The first of the mobs, owned by [Osmond and Panton](#), started at the end of 1882. Their 8,000 head of cattle and 200 horses originated in the [Blackall](#) area in central Queensland. Fourteen-year-old Donald Swan joined the drive and, much later, he wrote that he was

the youngest hand of the 300 odd men employed at various times on that lengthy trip (one of 2,250 miles and taking 22 months) yet the only one to travel the whole way from start to finish, except the two blackboys, and G.W. Campbell, the second youngest, who also went right through.

Converted to metric, 2,250 miles is 3,621 kilometres. Looking at a map, the daunting scale of these cattle drives is obvious. Osmond and Panton's got off to a bad start but, once Nat Buchanan took charge, it shaped up as the most efficient of the big overland treks. His mob, destined to be used in the formation of [Ord River Station](#), had the advantage of reaching the Gulf country in north Queensland ahead of the [1883/84 drought](#). Some of the droving parties that followed were less fortunate. None more so than the MacDonalds.



Kimberley land under pastoral lease, 1881 – 1882

At the start of 1883, as the MacDonalds and McKenzies prepared to overland their cattle from Goulburn to the Kimberley, newspaper [correspondents](#) reported on the condition on stock routes in and beyond New South Wales. Conversations, letters and telegrams provided additional information. There were, naturally, shortcomings. The scope for receiving information about tracks west of the Queensland border was limited. Drovers were blazing trails as they took cattle to the [Victoria River](#) – west of the [Overland Telegraph Line](#) – but few Europeans had seen the country between the Victoria and the Ord. A private [exploring expedition](#) involving the Duracks, Emanuels and Kilfoyle had examined land west of the Ord in the second half of 1882.

In the Kimberley – a district the size of Victoria – there was one town. Two had been proclaimed but only Derby was being developed. A [ship](#) owned by Marmion and the Pearse brothers landed police and government officials there in April 1883, leaving them to live under canvas at the mouth of the Fitzroy River. In the hinterland, [settlers](#) and Aboriginal shepherds were establishing a small cluster of stations with livestock delivered by sea from the west coast. The cartel—under the twin banners of the Kimberley and Meda River pastoral companies—owned three of those stations: [Liveringa](#), [Luluigui](#) and [Meda](#). Some settlers had yet to venture out to their leases.

The MacDonalds and McKenzies, situated close to Sydney, might have considered shipping their cattle to the Kimberley and tackling only the last leg overland. If they did, they would have been hard pressed to convince east coast shipping companies to risk a vessel in the little known waters of King Sound or Cambridge Gulf.

A tale about a ship appears in the conflicting accounts and recollections assembled over the years by the MacDonalds and McKenzies. It surfaced in letters sent by Robert A Marsden who believed, firstly, that, in 1882, his father Samuel engaged the MacDonalds to deliver cattle to the Kimberley, and secondly, that, after reputedly letting that mob loose in the Queensland drought, they returned to Goulburn and started out with their own mob. The disappointed owner, on hearing his mob was gone, is then said to have sold a ship bought to send sheep to the Kimberley, and to have failed to recoup, from his partners, any of the loss stemming from that sale.

Cathie knew of Samuel Marsden holding Kimberley leases with Plumb, Oliver and Pascoe, and she had seen archival evidence of Charlie and Willie being in charge of Plumb & Co.'s cattle in the Kimberley in 1896. Further research produced reports of a June 1885 court case in which John Plumb agreed to pay £700 and half costs in relation to a debt incurred by Marsden in purchasing the s.s. [Alhambra](#) for £2,956 in June 1883, and selling it twelve months later. Oliver, who was Marsden's brother-in-law, maintained 'that he had always told plaintiff he would never have anything to do with the ship'. The proposed shipment of sheep did not eventuate.

The mobs taken overland tended to be either sheep, cattle or horses. In the first half of the 1880s, drovers took more than 200,000 head of cattle and sheep into the Northern Territory from Queensland, South Australia and New South Wales. In tracing those movements, Cathie found only twelve reported sightings of the MacDonalds' cattle. Those sightings began on 26 March 1883, at the departure point north of Goulburn, and ended in the middle of 1885, at the Overland Telegraph Line. Sorting fact from fiction for the period between then and late April 1886, when the cattle reached their destination, has been challenging and, at times, impossible.

The trek from Goulburn into Queensland seems to have been uneventful. The mob followed stock routes through [Carcoar](#) and [Wellington](#), reaching [Brewarrina](#) at the end of May 1883. The MacDonalds had at least 400 head with them but it is not clear whether there was one mob of that size, or two, each containing about 400 head. They spent a long time in northern New South Wales, perhaps lending credence to an assertion by Nigel Austin, *Kings of the Cattle Country*, that they picked up cattle belong to Plumb and/or Marsden in the White Cliffs area WSW of Bourke.

August and September sightings in Queensland put the number at 900 as the cattle went through [Langlo Downs](#) and swung westward past [Isisford](#). When they reached Winton in November 1883, the [drought](#) prevented further travel. The [MacDonalds](#), [Duracks](#), [Traine brothers](#), and others were held up for months, putting some of their cattle on agistment. Emanuel, Durack and Clancy's NSW [sheep](#) could not go beyond Coopers Creek. That [flock](#) was put up for sale and plans were made to charter a ship for a [second flock](#). After [rain](#) let the [cattle](#) start again, reports of sightings dwindled.

We know, from an entry in Tom Kilfoyle's diary, that the MacDonalds had crossed into the Territory by January 1885. That was a bad time to be on a sandy track along a swampy coast. The [various mobs](#) sometimes camped, ironically waiting for rain to ease. Supplies were low, fever was rife, and O.P. rum was handy. That combination led to two of the Duracks' men dying – one from malaria and one by his own hand.

The track angled inland at the Roper River, with the Kimberley-bound mobs passing Red Lily Lagoon on their way to the Overland Telegraph Line. Many years later a drover named Charles Hall, originally from Goulburn, told Dame Mary Durack that:

We travelled one mob behind each other, the Durack mobs one day behind each other, Cooper and Stuckley [read as Stuckey] one day behind them and the MacDonalds one behind us... At the Roper my brother George and I left the Cooper and Stuckley party and joined the MacDonalds who had lost all of their men. Here the five mobs left the coast and travelled up the Roper to its head where Charlie

MacDonald got the fever very badly and I was sent to pilot him to Darwin. I had to ride beside him, hold his arm and his bridle rein and steady him in the saddle. At the end of the first day's ride we came to a little mining camp and luckily for me there were two prospectors riding to Darwin who took charge of Charlie while I rode back to the cattle.

My brother and I drove the cattle, Willie MacDonald the bullock waggon and a Chinaman cook the tip-dray. We followed the Cooper and Stuckley mob ...

Little is known of the timing these events but the MacDonalds and McKenzies tell of Charlie's brother Dan going to Darwin and taking him back to Goulburn. That might have been around May 1885 when [the leading mobs](#) in the long convoy of cattle reached the Overland Telegraph Line.

Discrepancies arise here, with someone who used the initials [G. O'S.](#) also recalling Charlie's illness and saying that, when he (the elder brother) left for the south, Joe Edmonds took his place. Edmonds, a highly respected drover, was Goulburn-born but had moved to Queensland as a child. The information from G. O'S., who claimed to have gone through to Fossil Downs with the cattle, is at odds with Hall's account in which Edmonds, who had been with Cooper and Stuckey's mob, replaced George Hall on the Victoria River after the delivery of that mob.

It was July 1885 when the [Duracks](#) reached the Victoria River. On 7 August, a Darwin newspaper reported that '[Mr. McDonald](#), who had been two years on the overland track with cattle for Western Australia, is now ill in Palmerston. His cattle are somewhere in the vicinity of the Ord River.' But was it Willie or Charlie? In 1922, Gordon Buchanan (son of Nat) wrote: 'At the Katherine, Charley and one of his brothers contracted malaria, and the attack was so severe that at [Battle Creek](#) they had to return to the Katherine.' Buchanan said Edmonds took over at that point but, in 1933, he qualified that by saying that Edmonds 'took command until Charley overtook him'. Battle Creek enters the Victoria River from the south-east.

At the time of the newspaper report, the MacDonalds' cattle were heading for the Ord, travelling behind the three mobs owned by the Duracks and their partners. Those mobs reached the Ord in [September 1885](#) and, soon after that, a [surveyor](#) reporting cattle movements mentioned 'McDonnell on Negri with four hundred cattle, bound for Margaret'. That McDonnell could have been either Willie MacDonald or [Jack McDonnell](#) (sometimes called McDonald), who, while not related to Willie, is said to have been engaged by him to help with the final leg of the drive.

Another layer of complexity is added with evidence of D (probably Dan) M'Donald sailing from Sydney on the s.s. *Tannadice* on [29 October 1885](#); reaching Darwin on [10 November](#); and becoming the subject of this paragraph in the [North Australian](#):

Mr. McDonald, a southern pastoralist, is now in town with a few head of horses, waiting till the latter get over the effects of the sea voyage, when he purposes travelling inland to meet his cattle now on the road out to the Fitzroy country in Western Australia. Mr. Cooper, who is also interested in country out that way, goes with Mr. McDonald.

It seems that a change of heart might have occurred, with D McDonald junr sailing from Darwin on 21 November aboard the schooner [Ellerton](#), chartered to take goods and prospectors to Cambridge Gulf. Those prospectors were among the earliest of the thousands who participated in the Halls Creek gold rush. The drover Charles Hall later recalled that Willie MacDonald left the cattle on the Ord while he 'rode down the river to its mouth to get supplies, taking three pack horses. At Wyndham he met his brother Dan who came back with him to camp.' On [28 November](#), a prospector 'met Messrs. Durack, Hayes, and M'Donald on their return from the Gulf with packhorses well loaded with rations... making their way back to where they were camped...'

Continuing the story from Hall's recollections:

Willie was then bad with fever and decided to go south. Willie, Dan, myself and a man from Cooper and Stuckley's [read as Stuckey's] camp on the Victoria, rode to Darwin or Palmerston as it was then called, leaving Edmonds and the chinaman with the cattle on the Ord.

We 4 took boat to Sydney and 2 weeks later I saw Willie and Dan at a Goulburn show and talked to them. From then on I lost all trace of them.

And then, with [G. O'S.](#) taking up the thread:

I was sent out by McDonald to assist Joe. Riding from Port Darwin I picked up a blackboy, and arrived at the camp on the Negri on December 27, 1885. A week or so later we collected the cattle and made a start, our party consisting of Joe Edmonds, myself, two blackboys, and a Chinaman cook. Besides the cattle and horses we had a bullock team which gave us a lot of trouble, as there was no road after passing Ord River Station; furthermore, we had no maps. All we had to guide us was a scratch plan of the country. Finding suitable crossings for the waggon delayed us. Anyhow we got through, landing stock and bullock team at our destination late in April, 1886. After we had formed a camp, Joe joined up with some prospectors, taking all the pack horses we had, and they headed for Derby. There he met both of the McDonalds who had come up with the first boatload of diggers for the Kimberley rush. They took Joe's pack-horses, and with some other men who had accompanied them from the South, they arrived at the camp in May [read as June] 1886, with a good supply of much-needed rations. Joe Edmonds did not accompany them. He took a boat from Derby, and thus ended one of the longest—if not the longest—trips ever connected with cattle. Starting from Goulburn (N.S.W.) and finishing at the Margaret River (Kimberley), the cattle were three years and three months on the road, and not one man that started with them saw the trip through.

While the identity of G. O'S. is unknown, his 1937 account tallies with an innocuous piece of [contemporary information](#) that prompted Cathie, in the 1980s, to begin questioning the legends about various overland cattle drives. That chatty piece in the *Northern Territory Times* of 15 May 1886 mentioned that Messrs C and W McDonald were on a ship bound 'from southern ports' to King Sound. The ship had been in Darwin harbour a week earlier, and it reached Derby on 13 May. The passengers recorded by the Derby police included C McDonald, W McDonald, and one McDonald with no initial. Six days later, the police noted that Thomas Edmondson arrived in Derby from Mr McDonald's cattle station. That man was almost certainly Joe Edmonds, who, as G. O'S. recalled, had ridden to Derby with some [prospectors](#).

On 24 May, in Derby, Charlie MacDonald wrote to John Forrest, Commissioner of Crown Lands in Perth, saying:

I beg to inform you that I have reached my Country on the Margaret & Fitzroy Rivers overland from New South Wales and Queensland with 500 head of cattle. This is the first mob that has ever reached the Fitzroy & Margaret Country overland and I consider I have opened up a track which was hitherto thought impracticable and the 1st class condition that my cattle have reached the country will dispel all fears as to the state of the route.

On the same day, another letter sent from Derby applauded the MacDonalds' 'pluck stamina, and determination' in undertaking 'the longest, most extraordinary, and daring, yet successful trip that has ever been or probably ever will be done in this island'. The island, of course, was Australia. The writer also said:

We feel sure all Australia will wish success to such worthy pioneers. Their names will be handed down in the history of exploration and travels of Australia ...

A [Goulburn newspaper](#) published that letter on 8 July 1886, and in the next three months it appeared, in various forms, in [newspapers](#) throughout Australia. And that, as Cathie's presentation showed, is how the legend of the drive was born.

**THE NATURAL WORLD OF THE KIMBERLEY
A ONE DAY SEMINAR**
to be presented by the Kimberley Society
on
15 OCTOBER 2016

PROGRAM

Geological background

Dr Tim Griffin : *Geology shapes the natural world of the Kimberley*

Plants

Dr Matt Barrett : *Sandstone flora of the Kimberley*

Adjunct Prof Kevin Kenneally AO : *Vine thickets*

Prof Kingsley Dixon : *Orchids and waterlilies of the Kimberley*

Coffee break

Animals and sky

Chris Hassell : *The Arctic and back: a shorebird story*

Kevin Coate OAM : *Kimberley finches and how they spread around the world*

Dr Lesley Gibson : *Treasures revealed – a biodiversity survey of the Kimberley islands*

Lunch

The sea and the coast

Dr Andrew Hayward : *What lives on the seafloor of the Kimberley: understanding habitats and biodiversity*

Dr Scott Whiting : *Collaborative turtle research along Australia's remotest coasts*

Dr Mick O'Leary : *Corals, canaries, and cockroaches: a natural history of Kimberley reefs*

Dr Dean Mathews : *Kimberley indigenous saltwater science: integrating traditional knowledge and practice with western science for healthy management*

Prof Gary Kendrick : *A day in the life of seagrasses of the Kimberley: how they survive and grow in an extreme environment*

Afternoon tea

Protecting the environment

Ed Hatherley : *Fire and biodiversity – contemporary management challenges in the far north Kimberley*

Ben Corey : *Measuring and reporting on fire, feral animal and weed management outcomes in the north Kimberley. What we are doing and is it working?*

Darryl Moncrieff : *Protecting the nature of the Kimberley*

Drinks and nibbles

The seminar will be held at the [University Club of Western Australia](#), Hackett Drive, Crawley. Further details and registration forms will be available at our regular meetings and on our website. A discounted price will be on offer for early bird registrations. For more information, please contact Hamish McGlashan (tel. 08 9381 1698 or hemcglash@iinet.net.au).

CLIMATE AND VEGETATION CHANGE SINCE THE FIRST PEOPLE ARRIVED IN THE KIMBERLEY REGION

On 2 April 2014, our speaker was [Associate Professor Karl-Heinz Wyrwoll](#) from the School of Earth and Environment at The University of Western Australia. His research interests extend across the fields of physical geography, geology and past climates utilising the modern technology of [climate modelling](#) with the aid of computers.

His talk highlighted the extreme climate changes and the controls that have characterised the Earth over the last 100,000 years, showing how some of these have "played out" in north-western Australia. It also drew attention to the likely impact of [traditional vegetation burning practices](#) by indigenous Australians on the northern Australian climate.

Karl-Heinz commenced with a series of satellite images showing the changing shape of **Lake Gregory** ([Paruku](#)) providing the evidence of extensive climate change. Some of the changes in the dimensions of the lake can be attributed to the monsoon response to higher summer incoming radiation at various times in the last few hundred thousand years.

There is also clear evidence of a weaker monsoon regime, evidenced by desert dunes at the margins of **King Sound**. These were first observed by [Rhodes Fairbridge](#) and formed part of the basis of his 'Ice Age Aridity' model, which saw low latitudes arid zone extensions, at times when massive ice covers developed in high latitudes. Fairbridge was a geologist at UWA and after leaving for the United States became one of the leading Quaternary geologists of his time. He and his UWA colleagues, [Joseph Gentilli](#) and [Curt Teichert](#), laid the foundations for the study of past climates in Western Australia.

Other evidence of climate change is provided by river deposits, providing evidence of active stream flow resulting from strong rainfall – monsoon related events. Associated with these, is evidence of human habitation dating to 30,000 to 33,000 years ago. Stalagmites have also acted as guides to past climate events. These have allowed us to recognise abrupt climate 'shifts'. One of these occurred about 15,000 years ago, when climates over the north Atlantic collapsed. This may have triggered 'cold surges' of air out of eastern China, resulting in stronger summer monsoons over northwestern Australia.

In reconstructing past climates complex global-scale climate models are now used. These are the same models that are being employed to predict future climate states. It has proven possible to use these models to explore whether there has been a climate response to Aboriginal vegetation burning practices. The models have shown that a more open vegetation, resulting from vegetation burning, has changed the temperature and rainfall regime of the spring to early summer months in the northwest monsoon region. Such model studies make it now possible to claim that people have impacted on global climates long before the industrial era.

An important outcome of the study of past climates, with geological data being linked to global-scale climate models, is that it is now possible to test the validity of climate models. In this sense it becomes possible to claim that "the past becomes our guide to the future".

Further reading

Wyrwoll, Karl-Heinz. '[How Aboriginal burning changed Australia's Climate](#)', *The Conversation*, 12 January 2012.

Wyrwoll, Karl-Heinz, Jennifer M. Hopwood, and Guangshan Chen. 'Orbital time-scale circulation controls of the Australian summer monsoon: a possible role for mid-latitude Southern Hemisphere forcing?' in *Quaternary Science Reviews*, 35 (2012), 23–28.

BOOK NOTE

They even paid me: Raw reflections of a third generation Kimberley cattleman by Janet R Wells. A Touch of Silk, Capel (WA), 2015. Paperback, 500 pages, illustrations, map, ISBN 978-0-9942327-0-0, RRP \$35.

John Wells, whose stories fill this solid but absorbing volume, is the son of Margaret Wells whose life was recalled in [Ready for anything](#). John's wife Janet did an excellent job in compiling and publishing both books. Poignant pieces of her poetry, which is available through Hesperian Press, introduce each chapter.



John's father **George** was a manager for **Emanuel Brothers** in the Kimberley, first on **Cherrabun Station** and then on **Meda**. George's father **Billy** ran **Oscar Range Station** and then **Brooking Springs**. Between 1900 and 1988, Billy, George and John put 70 years into station management. John spent the remaining 18 years in other roles. In retrospect he says, "a man resembles the land from which he came".

Many things, not least his 32 years on Meda, qualify John to tell Kimberley stories. His commitment to people, animals and work is evident, both in the text and in the naming of individuals in many photos. Particularly valuable are his comments about people who are mentioned only fleetingly elsewhere, little known characters such as Cecil Roderick. Other better known people include **Gerry Ash**, **Robin Campbell**, **Tim Emanuel**, the **Le Lievres**, **Willie Lennard**, **Bob** and **Sheryl McCorry**, **Merrilee MacDonald**, **Frank Mugford**, **Peter Murray** and **Roderick Wells**. The book has no index but the bold subheadings used throughout contain lots of names. In some anecdotes, the use of only a first name or a nickname protects privacy.

The book contains language that is more down-to-earth than one might expect from someone with a strict religious upbringing. Overall, however, it offers a lively stream of stories about people, places and activities. Chapter four, for instance, describes the life a ringer in a stock camp – 'not for the faint hearted or feeble, but for many young blokes in the first flush of manhood it was a thrilling, adrenalin charged existence'. That chapter also discusses horse and cattle diseases and ailments.

They even paid me opens with John's childhood on Meda Station, schooling in Derby and Perth – where life proved grim until he began to defend himself against bullies – and two years' training at Narrogin Agricultural College. In 1961, when an accident claimed the life of **Stumpy Fraser**, head stockman on Meda, John went home and worked with **George Wells** for 18 months. A stint in the city, on much better money, separated that work from a Kimberley Downs job. By the end of Part One, John has married and is about to become a station manager. Part Two covers his time on Napier and Myroodah stations; personal crises that included the end of his marriage; a wet season on Oobagooma; working as studmaster on Meda in 1975; meeting **Janet**; managing Frazier Downs; and marrying **Janet**. Part Three discusses a return to Meda in 1978; an overseas trip; the sale of Meda and the other Emanuel stations to EXIM (an arm of the WA Government); the subsequent sale and subdivision of those properties; dashed hopes of becoming a part owner of Meda in 1991; and five years working in Derby before moving south.

The book is candid and can readily be described as "warts and all". It will interest people familiar with station life and the West Kimberley as well as those who want to know what that area was like between the 1940s and the 1980s. Copies can be purchased from the author (www.janetwells.com.au), with \$14 added for postage and handling, or from selected book shops.

Cathie Clement

CROCODILES

Reports of crocodiles lurking close to Kimberley towns are becoming common, with [reckless human behaviour](#) encouraging some of them to stick around and behave abnormally.

On the weekend of 21–22 May, a trap set near the Wyndham boat ramp by Balangarra rangers and Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPAW) staff caught a [3.8-metre reptile](#). It had grown accustomed to people filleting fish at the boat ramp and discarding pieces in the water. Not content with an occasional feed, it had begun to trail boats, climbing onto the back of them and climbing onto the floating pontoon jetty. It will spend the rest of its life in the Malcolm Douglas Wildlife Park in Broome.

Around Broome, Yawuru rangers and DPAW staff had to deal with a similar situation in March. There, a large crocodile seen over the years at Crab Creek, a popular fishing area about 12 kilometres from town, was thought to have been attracted to [Simpson's Beach](#) by discarded dugong offal. Traps were set at both places, and, after about a month, a 3.65-metre crocodile was caught in the trap at [Crab Creek](#).

Back in January, a crocodile was trapped and killed after attacking local resident Karen Prior, 68, at the [Three Mile Creek](#) in Wyndham, taking off her arm below the elbow. Additional traps were then set to ensure that other crocodiles did not move in to take over that one's territory.

In October 2015, speaking at the Kimberley Economic Forum, [Premier Colin Barnett](#) said that crocodiles were threatening Broome's reputation as destination for tourists and family holidays. His speech was presented less than two weeks after DPAW and Yawuru rangers captured [two crocodiles](#). The first, an aggressive 3-metre male estuarine crocodile, was caught from the shore at Cable Beach using a non-lethal harpoon attached to a rope. The other one was caught in a drain along Old Broome Road, near the airport. Both were moved to the wildlife park.

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