

FIELD TRIP TO THE ROPER RIVER - GULF AREA, 22 TO 24 JULY 2005

The Roper River and the country along the Nathan River Road are particularly beautiful. There are some wonderful weathered sandstone formations and intervening alluvial valleys. The area is rich in significant Aboriginal and European cultural sites. The principal Aboriginal groups prior to contact with Europeans included the Alawa, the Binbingka, the Marra, the Ngarnji, the Wilangarra and the Yanyuwa. European exploration commenced with Ludwig Leichhardt in 1845 and later in the 1870s with John Costello establishing 'Valley of the Springs' station. A depot for supplies required to construct the Overland Telegraph Line was established near Roper Bar in 1871 and the police were in the area from 1885. There was extensive black versus white conflict that escalated into unfettered violence and retaliation, displacing, and in some areas destroying, the original inhabitants. The Coast Track stock route that traversed the area helped to 'open up' northern Australia. Among the best-known cattle stations were Hodgson Downs, Roper Valley and St Vidgeon. The Roper River Mission of the Anglican Church, now Ngukurr, was set up in 1908. There was transitory military settlement during the Second World War with the Roper Bar Store being established after the war.

Private or hired four-wheel drive vehicles are needed for the trip. Camping is at places without facilities. Participants must have sufficient food and water for two days and enough petrol for up to 450 kilometres. It is recommended that each vehicle carries at least two spare tyres. No permits are required for the areas that are being visited.

David Carment, Professor of History at Charles Darwin University and Honorary Secretary of the Historical Society, is organising the trip. He can be contacted at 08-89466744 (office) or David.Carment@cdu.edu.au.

Please complete and return the form below by 9 July 2005 if you wish to take part. An information kit will be posted to each participant.

Friday 22 July (Darwin Show Day public holiday)

Travel to the Roper Bar Store independently and meet there at **12.30 PM**. This means an early start if driving straight from Darwin (a journey of about seven to eight hours including stops) or a Thursday night stop in, say, Katherine if departing from Darwin on mid to late Thursday afternoon. Those wishing to look at the historic Roper Bar Police Station complex, Telegraph Hill (near the store) and the Leichhardt memorial at Roper Bar should do so before midday on Friday.

Depart from Roper Bar at **1.00 PM**. The entire group travels to **either** the Aboriginal rock art site at Mountain Creek Waterhole and views the extensive cave paintings there before camping near the attractive waterhole **or** to a camping site with a river view near either of the two landings at Port Roper, the proposed location of a nineteenth century town. The destination for the day depends on whether or not the Mountain Creek Waterhole art site can be accessed and this will be known before the trip commences. If travelling to Port Roper there are stops near the wreck of the *Young Australian*, used for transporting supplies during the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line, and at the ruins of St Vidgeon homestead, located besides a lovely lagoon.

Saturday 23 July

Travel slowly with stops from Mountain Creek Waterhole or Port Roper to and along the Nathan River Road, which follows sections of the Coast Track. Lunch at Limmen Bight River. Visit the Southern Lost City, spectacular rock formations with historical associations. Camp at a pretty spot near the intersection of Nathan River and Ryans Bend Roads.

Sunday 24 July

Return independently to Darwin via Cape Crawford.

Some Recommended Reading

Bob Alford, 'A Conservation and Management Plan for the Former Roper Bar Police Station Site, Roper Bar, NT', Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment, 2004.

Stephen Allan Ashford, *Endurance, Courage and Shipwreck in the Roper River 1871-1872: A Story of the Steam Ship Young Australian, Her Crew and the Events Leading up to Her Grounding*, Darwin, 2004.

Jack Gibbs, *Son of Jimmy*, Darwin, 1995.

Darrell Lewis (Ed.), *Patrolling the 'Big Up': The Adventures of Mounted Constable Johns in the Top End of the Northern Territory, 1910-1915*, Darwin, 1998.

Charles P. Mountford and Eric Brandl, 'Aboriginal Cave Paintings, Mountain Creek Waterhole, St. Vidgeon, Northern Territory of Australia', in *Records of the South Australian Museum*, vol. 15, no. 3, 1967, pp 371-382.

Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory, *Limmen National Park (Proposed) Fact Sheet*, Katherine, no date.

Tony Roberts, *Frontier Justice: A History of the Gulf Country to 1900*, Brisbane, 2005.

Troppo Architects, 'A Report on a Study of Historic Sites in the Lower Roper District, Northern Territory', National Trust of Australia (N.T.), 1990.

FIELD TRIP RESPONSE FORM

Please complete and return to the Historical Society of the Northern Territory, PO Box 40544, Casuarina NT 0811 by **9 July 2005 with a payment of \$5.00 per person for Historical Society members and \$10.00 for non-members** to partly cover the cost of copying materials in the participants' information kit. Cheques and money orders should be to the 'Historical Society of the Northern Territory'.

NAME/NAMES

POSTAL ADDRESS

EMAIL ADDRESS AND/OR CONTACT TELEPHONE NUMBER

CAN YOU TAKE ADDITIONAL PASSENGERS?

IF SO, HOW MANY?

DO YOU WISH TO TRAVEL IN ANOTHER PARTICIPANT'S VEHICLE?