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Desert Discovery Inc.

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Aims of Desert Discovery Inc.

Desert Discovery Inc is a non-profit voluntary organisation with the principal purpose of ensuring the protection and enhancement of the natural environment in remote regions of Australia. This aim is achieved by selecting and researching a remote location on a biennial basis, and placing the findings on the public record.

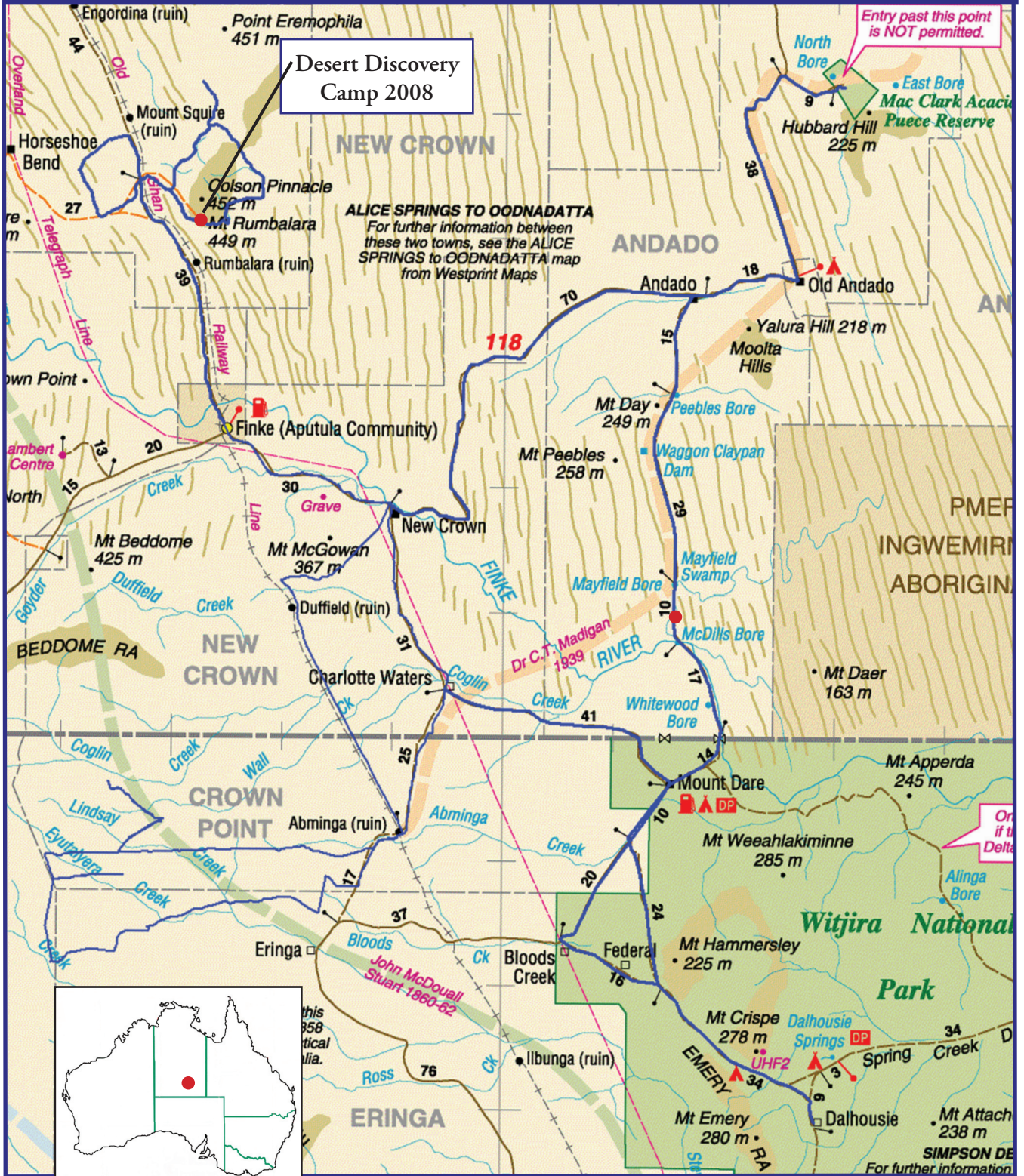
A secondary aim is the involvement of natural sciences students in the field research at each project to provide them with practical experience to enhance their studies.

To be successful, Desert Discovery needs to attract and retain a mix of volunteers skilled in the natural sciences and all aspects of outback travel and logistics. Desert Discovery also needs to maintain contact with government and non-government agencies to identify areas where research would be beneficial.

Committee Members of Desert Discovery Inc.

President: Keith Johnson
Secretary/Treasurer: Tony Morrison
Committee: Clive Crouch
Ben Blomfield
Garth Strong

General Location Map



— Approximate routes traversed by participants of Desert Discovery

Background to Desert Discovery Incorporated

Keith Johnson

Desert Discovery had its beginning in 1994 when a small expedition sponsored by Australian Geographic visited Dragon Tree Soak and Joanna Spring in the Great Sandy Desert of Western Australia. These locations, 450 km south east of Broome, are significant semi-permanent waters. One of the members was Dr Mike Bamford from Perth who had been in the area as the Australian representative with a Durham University Exploring Society party in 1981.

In the 13 years between 1981 and 1994 there had been changes around Dragon Tree Soak caused mainly by feral camels. Many decisions can be made around a campfire on a still desert night and the 1994 trip was no exception. Traveling with Mike Bamford on this trip were Leanne and Jon Gregory and Margaret and David Hewitt. There were opportunities for major, privately sponsored, scientific surveys to study some of these remote desert areas and it was decided to organise such a project in the Great Sandy Desert for 1996.

Preparations started immediately and the following year Leanne and Jon Gregory went back to the desert in search of a suitable site for a base camp. Two of the main criteria were water and an area close by that could be made into an airstrip. With advice from former oil exploration personnel in Broome and Derby, they drove 280 km due east of Anna Plains Station on the Eighty Mile Beach and located an ideal site between sand dunes, with a good water bore, which had been used for an oil drilling program ten years earlier. An old airstrip two km away could be cleared for emergency use.

Valuable sponsorship was received and for three weeks in July 1996 the first Discovery Project worked out of the base camp, 35 km from Joanna Spring and 120 km from Dragon Tree Soak. Features within a 150 km radius of the camp including the McLarty Hills were visited. Thirty-nine members attended the camp, staying from two days to three weeks and included Aboriginal people who knew that area, an archaeologist, a linguist, biologists, botany students, teachers and senior students from two schools, an environmental engineer, pilots of two aircraft, a professional photographer, a writer for four wheel drive magazines, an experienced backup crew and other people who were interested in observing the work. One of the teachers had a background in land navigation. Simon Wilkinson who had been part of the 1981 Durham University expedition came out from England to join the project. Members contributed to a report edited by Carolyn Graham -Taylor and Mike Bamford and published the following year. The report provided valuable information on the botany, biology, archaeology, water resources and history of an area that had rarely seen this kind of study.

The Discovery Project (also known as the Pegasus Project) created a lot of interest around Australia. The

name came from Discovery Well, a native soak 20 km south of the base campsite. White fellows first visited it in 1897 when the leader of the Calvert Exploring Expedition, Lawrence Wells discovered the bodies of two young members of his party near the well. Charles Wells and George Jones had died tragically, after failing to find what was expected to be a reliable supply of water at Joanna Spring. It had been given an incorrect position by Colonel Peter Egerton Warburton, 18 years earlier. The explorers usually had difficulty determining accurate longitude because of the need for reliable time and Warburton was no exception.

Following the success of the first project, Desert Discovery Inc. was established and incorporated in NSW in January 1998 as a non-profit Association. Aims of the organisation were defined. One of the principle objectives throughout has been to involve family groups, younger people and anyone with an interest in the Outback, with experts in the ecology of the desert. Student groups have been involved at most of the projects.

Such was the beginning of what has proved to be a very successful venture. Six projects have followed on a biennial basis with camp participation growing steadily over the years to 120+. Although Desert Discovery has a membership, non members are welcome at projects.

Prior to 2008, all projects have been located in Western Australia. The venues and names of the projects that followed the original Discovery Project were:-

- 1998 Warri – Gibson Desert
- 2000 Cooper Hills – Great Victoria Desert
- 2002 Plumridge Lakes – Great Victoria Desert
- 2004 Robert Butte – Great Sandy Desert
- 2006 Rough Leaf – Great Sandy Desert

All projects have been documented and those interested can obtain a CD of the reports by contacting the Secretary. The project reports are, as a matter of course, made available to the appropriate State Government Department. In the case of Western Australia, this was Conservation and Land Management now Department of Environment and Conservation. Copies have also been lodged with the Battye Library.

The scientific work performed by Desert Discovery has been well received as we operate in remote areas at no cost to the taxpayer. There have been a number of notable achievements. A new species of plant was discovered by Maree and Graham Goods at the 2002 project. The find was given the name of *Eremophila sulcata*. In the same year, Clive Crouch 'captured' a very rare blue winged *Ogyris* butterfly thereby extending the range of the species. Dragon Tree Soak was re-visited in 2004 for bird surveying and a fresh assessment of camel activity. The Rough Leaf

project in 2006 saw Marsupial Mole surveying added to the list of natural sciences covered by our scientific personnel. Frequently our field work extends the known range of plants, birds and other fauna.

Desert Discovery's expertise in operating in remote areas was used by Birds Australia during 2000 and 2001 for surveys for the new Bird Atlas of Australia. With Desert Discovery's assistance, gaps in the coverage of the Atlas were closed. The expeditions required specialist logistic and navigation skills as much of the surveying was done 'off road'. Liaison with Aboriginal Communities was also necessary.

Success of the Desert Discovery projects has been greatly assisted by sponsorship and donations of equipment and expertise. Major donations have been received over the years from Bob Hancock, Stuart Kostera, Helen and Geoff Handbury and Lowan Foods. Although Desert Discovery is financially self supporting for projects, financial assistance is required for the funding of our student program. Donors can achieve tax deductibility status by channeling funds to Desert Discovery via Landcare Australia.

Enough about the past; it is time to hear about the 2008 project. In response to requests from the membership, the committee sought a venue in the Simpson Desert. Let the story begin...



Travelling to Desert Discovery 2008 (Libby Sakker)

Why the Colson Pinnacle Venue?

David Hewitt

Discussion by the Desert Discovery committee commenced soon after the Rough Leaf Bore project in July 2006 regarding a venue for 2008. A return to a previous site was considered, possibly Warri, north of the Gunbarrel Highway in the Gibson Desert or Cooper Hills on Connie Sue Highway in Great Victoria Desert. They were visited in 1998 and 2000 respectively and some value was seen in collection of data eight to ten years after the first surveys. All of the six projects held to date had been in Western Australia and while our work was always valued by CALM (later WA Department of Conservation) it was felt that a venue in another state should be considered. The committee was conscious of the fact that the majority of our members come from the Eastern States and with the increasing price of fuel, the cost of travel was a very big consideration - also that many of the participants were retired and on limited incomes. We had already looked at sites in south west Queensland and the far north east of South Australia without receiving much support from the key stakeholders in these areas.

One of our members, John Wilkinson had traveled through the Simpson Desert on camel safaris and was an experienced traveler in remote regions. He suggested we approach Peter Morphett at Horseshoe Bend Station regarding a project possibly near Colson Pinnacle, a spectacular feature on the western side of the Simpson. John Wilko had some informal discussions with Peter who was receptive to the idea though naturally had some questions about who we were and what impact we would have on a working cattle station. In January 2007, Margaret and David Hewitt were in Alice Springs and met with Chris Pavey and Catherine Nano from NT Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts. They were very helpful and keen to support our work. They mentioned plant and bird studies that their Department was planning on New Crown and Andado stations to the south east of Horseshoe Bend that Desert Discovery could possibly be involved with.

A formal approach was made to Peter Morphett in July 2007. The following month Desert Discovery members Maree and Graham Goods and Norma and Keith Boschen, while on a visit to Northern Territory from Horsham, Victoria called at Horseshoe Bend and introduced Peter to Desert Discovery. As they would be involved in our botanical surveys, the DD committee was keen to hear of the potential for their work. They brought back an encouraging report but commented on the very dry conditions in the western Simpson Desert. Two possible campsites within view of Colson Pinnacle were suggested, both of which met with the support of the Morphett family.

In September Maureen and Ross Campbell, Desert Discovery members and Margaret and David Hewitt

drove down the Old Ghan track from Alice Springs to Horseshoe Bend and left via Finke and Kulgera. Ross's civil engineering background was valuable in confirming the actual campsite and in checking out access. The site finally selected, in a stand of scattered mulga scrub was 3km from Cym Bore that would be used as a camp water source. Water samples were taken and subsequently tested with assistance from Bob Read in Alice Springs. As expected, the water was not suitable for drinking because of a high mineral content but would be welcomed for washing and cooking. Drinking water would be carried in by individual vehicles/groups.

With a range of different landscapes - creek beds, rocky outcrops, claypans and sand dunes, Clive Crouch's small-animal surveys had some great possibilities. The site had fine views of Mt Rumbalara and Colson Pinnacle to the east, with challenges for daily walks, usually led during the project by John Hewitt and very popular amongst members. The road to the site was rather rough from both the north and south but probably no worse than that in to other Desert Discovery projects. The preferred access was via Finke, 45 kilometres to the south of the site.

A concern throughout the months leading up to the project was the very dry conditions, as stations to the south of Alice Springs had received well below average rainfall for the previous five years. From a practical point of view dust around the camp could be a real problem - though Ben Blomfield's signs restricting the speed of vehicles in to the camp was a real help here. An alternative site that the project could move to at short notice was considered but in the end we decided to remain with Colson Pinnacle. Now, post-project we believe that the lack of rain did not adversely affect any of the project's activities.

We considered the possibility of Aboriginal sites in the region. A clearance for the area was sought and subsequently granted by the NT Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority as there were no significant sites in the project area. We were keen to involve local Aboriginal people and on the September trip last year caught up with Harold Matasia, chairman of Aputula Community at Finke who had worked with David Hewitt at Ernabella 35 years ago. An invitation was extended to the community and Finke school to participate with day visits to our camp. Unfortunately the project dates clashed with school holidays but the community's youth activities provider, Mission Australia brought up groups of young people and adult leaders on two occasions. Desert Discovery provided lunch and there was some good interaction between the visitors and younger members of the camp.

The area was different from all previous project venues, being in cattle country that meant a different

continued on page 7...

Horseshoe Bend

John Deckert

European settlement of Central Australia closely followed two major explorations:- the first by John McDouall Stuart in 1861-2 and the more detailed survey and construction of the Overland Telegraph Line ten years later.

Although there are conflicting references to dates it seems fairly certain that R E Warburton first stocked the area that included Horseshoe Bend in 1876. It is possible that Warburton was the public face of the partnership of Grant and Stokes who took up the pastoral lease of Engoordina sometime later that year. Engoordina is the Aboriginal name for a feature on the Finke River somewhere near Horseshoe Bend and most of that lease is now incorporated into Horseshoe Bend station.

The following year E H Sargeant opened a store at Bloods Creek south of the Northern Territory border and then another at Horseshoe Bend. Both were built from bush timber thatched with branches. The store became the mail station (Post Office) and hotel. It is reputed to be the first hotel in Central Australia, preceding the Stuart Arms hotel in Alice Springs by a year or two. A homestead built at Mt Musgrave was moved to the Finke River about two kilometres south of the present homestead when Warburton moved to Erldunda in 1884.

Sargeant was granted a small lease surrounding the store in 1894 and then the following year a much larger portion from the western half of the cancelled lease of Grant and Stokes. Three years later E H (Gus) Elliot joined Sargeant with leases of more land to the east. Elliot rebuilt

the hotel and purchased Sargeant's share of the lease some years after Sargeant's death in 1912. Although the hotel was strategically placed at the end of a particularly difficult section of the track to Alice Springs known as the Depot Sandhills it lost custom due to the realignment of the road built to serve the railway line to Alice Springs in 1928.

The Morphett family took over Horseshoe Bend Station in 1957. Peter Morphett remembers that attractions to the purchase of the property were the Overland Telegraph Line that gave the station a party line access to the small township of Finke and pastoral stations at Maryvale and Bokara and the railway line that had a station serving the property at Rumbalara, 20 kilometres away. At this time most of the station business was done in Adelaide.

In an interview Peter Morphett did in 1986, he recalls these highlights of his time on Horseshoe Bend;

During the 1950s there were 50 Aborigines living permanently on the station.

The 1960s brought eight years of drought.

In 1974 there was 40 inches of rain. The Finke River came down in flood, tearing most of the large trees from the river. Water flowed continuously for almost a year. A 240 volt lighting plant was installed in the mid 1970s.

By the 1980s there was only one family other than the Morphett family living at Horseshoe Bend.

Peter also makes the observation that the feral cat population appears to have been static for as long as he can remember.



Colson Pinnacle. (Libby Sakker)



Looking from Colson Pinnacle. (Graham Goods)

...*Why the Colson Pinnacle Venue* continued from page 6 approach to driving out from the camp. We respected the Morphett's privacy and the need to avoid contact with cattle. The result was an outstanding example of how environmental studies and the pastoral industry can work together. Without a doubt Desert Discovery feels that it has established a lasting friendship with a station owner. Our sincere thanks to Peter and Libby Morphett, for making the Colson Pinnacle project possible.

Base Camp Preparation & Equipment Report

Ben Blomfield

General Equipment

After problems with getting the trailer to the project, it returned safely from Alice Springs and is now in safe storage at Stuart Kostera's industrial estate.

Trailer Delivery

Somehow, the trailer wound up being off-loaded in Adelaide instead of going straight to Alice Springs, and it sat there for a week. Thanks to a quick response by the transport representative, and Mick Corney and Daniel Blomfield revisiting Alice Springs, this was sorted out. There were some challenges provided by the condition of the Ghan track on the heavily loaded trailer, but towed ably behind Mick's V8 F250, it arrived at Camp in the dark on Monday night 30/6.

Camp Setup

By this time the camp was already bustling with a large contingent, with no facilities.

An intrepid group had already started digging the toilet hole, so this was set up and functioning by lunchtime on Tuesday 1/7, much to the relief of the ladies.

With so many capable volunteers, the water tank, donkey boiler, shower, and vanity plus connecting piping were installed and operating by mid afternoon.

The marquee was laid out in the morning and Mick Corney performed a professional repair on the rip, and this was erected in the mid afternoon.

It was a mammoth effort by all and since it was done in less than a day, one wonders why we often take two to three days.

Many thanks to all the contributors.



Water Tank (Ben Blomfield)

Toilet

Fortunately, the digging of the hole had started early, and went on over two days. Even though the digging was in sand, it was very compacted and it was agreed a jackhammer would be a useful aid next time.

The toilet was positioned near the middle of the sprawling camp and supposedly downwind. The wind proved to be very unpredictable, changing direction several times a day, but this was not a problem. The venting system worked satisfactorily last camp, so this was re-instated.

After a couple of trial systems, a flag arrangement for vacant / engaged was set up in front of the enclosure, and this had some reasonable success.

Shower Arrangements

We lashed out and purchased a new light duty 'Ensuite Tent' for the shower. This provided more room and incorporated a safety handrail system on the new base which was manufactured by Daniel Blomfield.

The seating arrangement for our esteemed Secretary / Treasurer to put his shoes on after a shower was still not satisfactory, so I promise this will be improved upon for next project.

Unfortunately, the zip did not last, so this will be upgraded with a heavier duty one.

Marquee

The star picket tie downs were getting a little tired, so Daniel Blomfield welded a cap and a chain link ring on to each. They do get a bit of a hiding from enthusiastic hammering into hard ground, so these will be monitored.

One of the zips on a side curtain has also failed, so the marquee needs to be treated gently on future camps.

The display boards proved useful and these became a focal point.

Water Transport

Without an available bore to use our submersible pump in, we decided to purchase a water bladder and transport it in the trailer. Water was pumped into the bladder from a diesel pump at Cym Bore approximately 2kms away, then this was pumped into our overhead tank using a new centrifugal pump which Daniel Blomfield mounted on a small frame.

Unfortunately, the bladder developed a leak toward the end so this will be repaired.

Thanks again to the wonderful cooperation and contribution by all participants.



Water Bladder. (Ben Blomfield)



Vanity Basin. (Ben Blomfield)



Shower. (Ben Blomfield)



Toilet. (Ben Blomfield)



Marquee. (Libby Sakker)

List of Participants – Desert Discovery 2008

Keith Johnson

Ben & Jeni Blomfield with:-	Singleton, WA
- Daniel, Penny, Mia & Xander Blomfield	Baldivis, WA
- Simon & Jan Binder	East Victoria Park, WA
- Mick Corney	Baldivis, WA
Roy Burton with:-	Ferntree Gully, VIC
- Martin & Sandra Bailey	Ferntree Gully, VIC
Ross & Maureen Campbell	South Yunderup, WA
Roger & Sue Charles	South Croydon, VIC
Clive Crouch with:-	Nhill, VIC
- Michael & Sharon Williams	Newport, VIC
- Kara Humphrey	Bacchus Marsh, VIC
John & Bev Deckert	Nhill, VIC
Perry & Alma de Rebeira	Glen Forrest, WA
Lawrie & Pat Draper with:-	Bendigo, VIC
- Bruce & Anne Hillas	Kingaroy, QLD
Graham & Maree Goods with:-	Horsham, VIC
- Alan & Jan Hall	Yarrawonga, VIC
Bob & Kathy Hancock, Ian, Ava & Mitchell McDermott	Northmead, NSW
Ken & Vivien Harris	Whealers Hill, VIC
Tony & Mary Hertog	Darwin, NT
David & Margaret Hewitt	Tumut, NSW
John & Jenny Hewitt	Vincentia, NSW
Len & Joan Hubbard	Chinchilla, QLD
Robyn Hyde & David	Roseville, NSW
Mario Ioppolo & Carol Burroughes	Joondanna, WA
Ian & Glenda Isbister	Bathurst, NSW
Keith & Shirley Johnson	Whealers Hill, VIC
Malcolm & Sue Jordan with:-	Jolimont, WA
- Bill & Karen Groves	Cottesloe, WA
Bob & Doreen Kendell	Lockhart, NSW
Graham & Anne Kent	Nambour, QLD
Stuart Kostera & Meg Carty	Kalamunda, WA
Bob & Elsie Lasseter	Seven Hills, NSW
Tony Morrison & Dimity	Castle Hill, NSW
Lou Norgard	Cooktown, QLD
John & Beverley O'Brien with:-	Camden, NSW
- Adam Tuinman	Collaroy, NSW
Pat & June Pawson	Ringwood East, VIC
Bert & Marion Philips	Leopold, VIC
Cath Reiher & Laurie Ernst	Woodburn, NSW
Elizabeth (Libby) Sakker with:-	Mt Colah, NSW
- Lyn Huyskens	Forestville, NSW
Terry & Nella Smith, & Warwick with:-	Narrandera, NSW
- Adrian & Anna Smith	Anembo, NSW
Steve & Helen Stephinson	Clontarf, QLD
Rob & Alexis Stogdale	Narrandera, NSW
Garth & Jan Strong with:-	Queanbeyan, NSW
- David & Irene Blair	Bacchus Marsh, VIC
- Stewart & Pam Pinney	Fadden, ACT
- Neil & Sandra Telfer	Coleambally, NSW
John Wilkinson	Oberon, NSW
Graham Young	
Duke of Edinburgh Students	
- Emma Campbell, Adam Baker, Kristy McGregor and Lucy Nicolls-Small	Camden, NSW Bowral, NSW

Weather Report 2008

Keith Johnson

Date	Max temp	Min Temp	Rain	Cloud*
Saturday 28 June	23° C	8° C	None	0
Sunday 29 June	27° C	10° C	None	0
Monday 30 June	23° C	2° C	None	1
Tuesday 1 July	22° C	1° C	None	4
Wednesday 2 July	21° C	1° C	None	0
Thursday 3 July	21° C	2° C	None	1
Friday 4 July	22° C	0° C	None	0
Saturday 5 July	23° C	9° C	None	4
Sunday 6 July	22° C	8° C	None	7
Monday 7 July	18° C	-3° C	None	0
Tuesday 8 July	19° C	0.5° C	None	0
Wednesday 9 July	18° C	1.5° C	None	0
Thursday 10 July	25° C	1.5° C	None	4
Friday 11 July	20° C	9° C	None	6
Saturday 12 July	25° C	5° C	None	0
Sunday 13 July	22° C	0.8° C	None	No record
Monday 14 July	20° C	3° C	None	0
Tuesday 15 July	21° C	1° C	None	0
Wednesday 16 July	21° C	9° C	None	0
Thursday 17 July	23° C	9° C	None	0
Friday 18 July	26° C	5° C	None	0
Saturday 19 July	28° C	9° C	None	Dust
Sunday 20 July	29° C	5° C	None	No record
Monday 21 July	No record	No record	None	No record
Tuesday 22 July	No record	No record	Light showers	No record

* Cloud - Scale: 0 none – 8 full cover.

Additional Information

There was some wind each day during the project. The records are incomplete but there were 16 days recording 15 km/hr or less. Four days recorded 20 – 25 km/hr with a severe dust storm on Saturday 19 July with gusts estimated at 30 km/hr. The weather during the project was dry until the last day when light showers fell during the morning. These did not affect the break-down of the camp unduly, because the Marquee had been packed away on the previous afternoon.

Weather Station. (Maree Goods)





Cym Bore, the source of our vital water supply. (Adam Tuinman)



Pumping the water from Cym Bore into the bladder on the trailer. (Libby Sakker)

'Duke of Edinburgh' at Desert Discovery

John and Beverley O'Brien

Another successful Desert Discovery for us. It was wonderful to catch up with old friends and make new ones. We arrived to help with set up and fortunately were able to stay for pack up. We were thrilled to be asked to be members; an honour to be officially a part of Desert Discovery. Thank you for accepting us into your group.

At this Desert Discovery Project we were able to organise for our God Daughter Emma and three of her peers to attend as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award –Adventurous Project. It required a lot of planning on our behalf and for Emma, the three others and their parents. The logistics at first seemed immense though once the planning got underway it all fell into place. We don't have children of our own and suddenly to have one 18 year old "son" – Adam, and three 16 year old "triplet daughters" – Emma, Lucy and Kristy, was quite an undertaking; particularly in the desert. A special thank you to our friend Adam Tuinman who assisted the students – particularly with providing extra transport as we couldn't fit the four (and luggage!) in our vehicle - much appreciated Adam.

They were great kids – they didn't complain, just got on with it! They were involved in as many camp activities as they could be and cooked the meals, including ours – successfully! We introduced them to a new way of life as none had been in the desert before – they were all pleasantly surprised and coped well. John was their official assessor and felt they all fulfilled the criteria for the Award admirably. The adventure started on July 7 when they flew from Sydney and stayed overnight at a Bed and Breakfast in Alice Springs. They caught the Greyhound bus from Alice and we picked them up at Eralunda on the Stuart Highway at noon on July 8. On July 12 we did a side trip overnight to Dalhousie Springs, via Finke, and at the end of their stay, July 17, we took them back to Alice Springs,

stopping overnight at Chambers Pillar on the way. So they certainly got to see a lot in the time they had with us. Desert Discovery was a great venue for their Adventurous project – walking, climbing, camping, camp-cooking, mammal trapping and identification, plant identification, bird identification, 4WD driving, navigation, first aid, living in the desert and probably many more experiences we don't even realise they had.

One of the highlights was a visit to Finke – thank you David Hewitt for arranging this with the Chairperson of Finke. We were fortunate to be there for a religious service run by the Seventh Day Adventist church. We were invited to attend and were able to meet a lot of the community who were present. We even attempted to sing the hymns in their aboriginal language!

Of course Dalhousie was a real hit. I think we all managed to be in the natural springs for the majority of our visit there. A truly beautiful spot with the lovely warm water! It was very cold when we got out – but worth it!

The experience the students obtained from the Desert Discovery Project will hopefully build into their lives, an appreciation of our wonderful country; particularly the desert regions. They all appreciated the efforts of everyone involved in Desert Discovery to make this adventure come to fruition; the experience they gained could not be achieved without the input of so many people – so thank you one and all! Particularly to Desert Discovery for the funds to help cover the Students' expenses – very much appreciated. We will keep everyone up to date on the Students' progress over the coming years.

Now we are at Eyre Bird Observatory in Western Australia till March 2009 – counting the birds! We are certainly looking forward to the next Desert Discovery Project in 2010.



Duke of Edinburgh students with Keith Johnson, President of Desert Discovery Inc. Students from left to right are Kristy McGregor, Emma Campbell, Lucy Nicolls Small and Adam Baker. (Libby Sakker)

A few thoughts on the Desert Discovery camp

Kristy McGregor

When people asked me what I was doing for the July holidays, I said I was going for ten nights to the Simpson Desert, camping. I was very excited; they thought that it seemed really boring. When I got back, I proved them wrong! They'd been sitting on the couch for the whole holidays; I'd been out seeing parts of Australia they'll probably never get to see.

The most exciting thing at first about Desert Discovery was that it was in the Simpson Desert, in the Northern Territory! I'd never been there before, so flying into Alice, the landscape was new and absolutely gorgeous! On our first day and night in Alice we had a great time – at the Royal Flying Doctor Service museum, and camel riding in the Todd River bed.

At Desert Discovery, I loved the opportunity to meet and get to know people from all over Australia – and to meet adventurous people with a passion for the outback. John and Beverley made the best 'mum' and 'dad'! It was interesting to get the feel of what it'd be like as a triplet with two older brothers!

I learnt so much from everyone out at Desert Discovery. I enjoyed learning First Aid, fire lighting and the whole camping experience. Pizzas cooked on the campfire were delicious; and so were the one-pots (however I tried to do the recipes at home and they didn't turn out nearly as well). I didn't miss my bed at all – my sleeping bag and mat was so comfy! While it was the longest time I'd spent under canvas (my family doesn't do much camping as you have probably realised) it only reinforced my desire to go camping more often! I came to think of the camp as home, especially in situations such as when we were taken out blind-folded and had to find our way back. Then we were very concerned to get home.

Going out scrub-walking and mountain-walking (well it wasn't really bush, was it?) was great for the sights and most importantly fitness! It was great to do active things (which I should be keeping up now I'm home). I thought I'd be "killing" after Colson's, but piggybacking the Finke kids to the windmill was the most challenging!

Being at the Desert Discovery camp would have to be one of the best holidays I've ever had, mainly because it was such a unique experience! It wasn't about the touristy stuff, where you drive past and go 'ooh' and 'aah' and don't learn anything about where you are. When I was told we were going to be dealing with mice, I was very worried. Animals and plants - science, in fact - isn't really my thing, but with mice I have a real phobia. Luckily though, the Spinifex Hopping Mouse and Sandy Inland Mouse were much more pleasant than the domestic ones at home!

I had some wonderful photographic opportunities. I think I took about ten rolls of film and it cost a whack. But it was certainly worth it! Mainly my pictures are of textures and landscapes and trees – all of which are so amazing

out in the desert. I'm meaning to get a copy of someone's photos, because I didn't get any of the interesting little things like the vanity or washing machine at the camp! Also, I thought I had a tan building up, but unfortunately it all washed off when I got home, and now I'm back to my usual white colour now.

The experience of meeting the Indigenous people of Finke was one of the best parts of the trip! I had to write a speech over the holidays, and I brought it out with me to do. The topic was 'Over the fence: cultivating our own backyard' and so doing it on Indigenous Poverty was most appropriate. Margaret helped me with some information about the situation of Aboriginal communities. Here's just some of what I wrote – I found it really good to write because it made my thoughts succinct.

Two weeks ago I was in the Simpson Desert and visited Alice Springs. In Alice, Aboriginal men and women sat around in town and in the Todd River bed, drinking grog and playing with their dogs. This reinforced the stereotype often portrayed by the media; that Aboriginals depend on centre-link payments and lack initiative. It opened my eyes to the issues facing our Indigenous people...

Ernie Dingo's cousin Mitchell is a friend of a friend of mine. He says of Indigenous poverty: "It's not just poverty of money. It's poverty of education, spirituality, opportunity and, most unfortunately, poverty of hope."...

While out west, I experienced the Aboriginal community of Finke, five hours drive southeast of Alice. Here no alcohol or pornography is allowed. We shopped like locals, buying a kangaroo tail from the store, and were invited to church. Everyone was warm and friendly. We met doting parents (good parents), proudly holding their beautiful babies. The children were gorgeous – excitable and fascinated by the smallest things – I learnt the local lingo from nine year old Lofty and thirteen year old Rene, while I was piggybacking a seven year old for 2km. They amazed me with their survival skills and practical knowledge. They were walking across desert with bare feet, and had me pulling up a dead tree root to find lizards, meanwhile telling me where the witchetty grubs were – the six and seven year olds had so much to teach me!

I believe the solution to Indigenous poverty lies with the children. They are the next generation; the future. They must be given access to culturally appropriate education and healthcare. They must be empowered by learning skills to build self-esteem and resilience. I looked into the big, brown eyes of Aboriginal children from the desert and I saw hope. If I'm lucky enough to visit Finke in ten or twenty years, my biggest wish is that the hope of children like Lofty and Rene will have been cultivated.

The side trips to Dalhousie Springs and Chambers Pillar were lots of fun; I loved the swimming (I think we all did!) in the hot baths – so relaxing! Sleeping under

the stars was awesome! When they said we were lining up in order from youngest to oldest, I was worried, because being the youngest I would have to be on the end. And no way was I going to be on the end when there was a dingo sleeping under the tree next to us!

I had such a wonderful time in the desert I didn't want to come home! It was quite sad leaving people I'd come to know and a landscape I came to love so much! Getting off the plane in Sydney was disgusting with traffic and fumes (compared to the clean air and night sky of the desert). And suburbia seems so boring now! I'm looking forward to going back to central Australia – we've got a family holiday planned for October which is quite exciting! – and now I can't wait to explore more of outback Australia. For ages I've been saying I want to move out west after Uni, as a social worker or teacher. After going to central Australia, I'm thinking I might like to move as far as the NT (David gave me some info on teaching in Indigenous communities) - I loved it so much with the experience Desert Discovery gave me! Thank you!

Kristy (the one who wore the colourful striped pj's)



Kristy McGregor in her colourful striped pj's. (Libby Sakker)



Lucy Nicolls Small assisting the mole research, by digging one of the mole trenches. (Libby Sakker)

An Unbelievable Experience

Lucinda (Lucy) Nicolls Small

I could say again and again what an “unbelievable experience” our trip to the Northern Territory was. I visited places and met people along the way I would never have come into contact with normally. I experienced a whole new way of life—4-wheel driving, camping, traveling and living in the outback or remote areas, and assisting with scientific research on Australia’s flora and fauna. The communities, landscape and people have made a deep impression on me. There is nothing like looking out on a bush landscape for miles on end, standing on the peak of Colson Pinnacle and seeing the trees and river beds below; or seeing red sand and an undivided blue sky-line as far as the eye can see, with maybe a kangaroo or a camel in the distance.

This landscape is incredible in itself but when you add to it, contact with unique flora and fauna and people like the community of Desert Discovery, the whole is more than incredible.

Everyone at Desert Discovery was so helpful and always willing to impart specialised knowledge, whether it was on camp-craft, photography, marsupial moles, birds, *Eremophila* species or much more. It was a privilege to meet so many committed and interesting people who made us all feel so welcome and like a real part of the group.

I learnt more in that week than I had ever believed possible—something new every day in so many areas, even though this was only the beginning of what is able to be known. I soon adapted to an extremely different environment, out of my comfort zone and look forward to returning to the area in the future.

Our Desert Discovery Adventurous Project was definitely the experience of a lifetime. Not many city high school students have the opportunity to visit a remote Aboriginal community, to climb landmarks such as Colson Pinnacle, to visit Chamber’s Pinnacle or to swim in the moonlight at Dalhousie Springs. From the perspective of the Duke of Edinburgh’s award, it certainly fulfilled the outcomes of the scheme to challenge and extend young people.

The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award requires young people (under the age of 25) to be involved in a number of areas, completing a designated number of hours of community service, physical activity, a skill (for example, piano), and an adventurous journey (expedition, exploration or adventurous project) involving group-work, camp-craft and learning navigational skills in the outdoors. There are three levels – Bronze, Silver and finally Gold. When the student completes the number of hours for each area he or she receives the relevant level of the “award” and receives a certificate and a badge.

All four of us were doing the trip as part of our Duke of Edinburgh’s award (Emma and I at Gold Level). Our

stay and activities at Desert Discovery were classed as an Adventurous Project, which is an “an activity of an expeditionary or exploratory nature” unlike an Expedition (a “journey with a purpose”, usually hiking to a destination and camping along the way) or an Exploration (a “purpose with a journey”, involving the investigation of a specific subject or area) and has to be approved by the State Award Committee.

We were responsible for doing the planning for the trip and once we arrived at Desert Discovery, had to complete activities and be signed off on navigation and route planning, safety, first aid, camp-craft, care of environment, observation and recording, and group skills. Our stay at Desert Discovery provided the opportunity to fulfill these outcomes and complete the Adventurous Journey component of our award in the most interesting and unforgettable way possible, while also broadening our horizons by learning about a unique environment extremely different from what we had been used to at home.

I wholeheartedly thank every group member of Desert Discovery for making this experience possible.



Lucy Nichols Small & Emma Campbell at the base of the plaque and Kristy McGregor leaning over from the top with other members of Desert Discovery. (Anne Kent)

The plaque is on the grave of Allen Roberts, an RAAF member, who was buried near Colson Pinnacle in 1971.

Reflections of a Desert Discovery Adventure

Emma Campbell

With my three friends, Lucy, Kristy and Adam, I took part in the 2008 Desert Discovery Colson Pinnacle Expedition as an Adventurous Project for our Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award. For every Award, it is necessary to complete a Skill, Service and Physical Recreation component, a practice and qualifying Expedition and also a Residential Project for the Gold Award, which involves spending five days and four nights away from home with people who are not your normal companions. For my Gold Award my Skill is clarinet. I play Softball, Hockey and Soccer for Physical Recreation. Lucy and I visit the local nursing home together, for the Service component and my Battlefield Tour to Gallipoli as part of the Simpson Prize (see page 65), counted as my Residential Project. As you progress through the Awards the number of hours for each component increases, as do the length of the Expeditions. Our group was lucky enough to have our DD trip approved by the Duke of Edinburgh State Ward Committee as an Adventurous Project, normally only allowed for those over 18, as it was to be a 10 day venture of an exploratory nature, involving careful planning and to be carried out in a remote environment.

Special thanks must be given to John and Beverley O'Brien (my godparents) and their friend Adam Tuinman who helped us to organise and undertake the trip, to Keith Johnson, David Hewitt and Clive Crouch, with whom we corresponded prior to our participation and also to Desert Discovery as a whole, from whom we found out so much. During our journey we all learnt many amazing things, however, one of the most important things which the camp and desert experience taught me was the ability to stop and reflect; causing me to become very philosophical and speculate on society, happiness and other important things.

To be truly happy, you have to take things slowly, work to the best of your ability on the things you enjoy and always remember to appreciate all that you have. Hurrying through something as precious as your life, and working so hard that you forget what it's like to really live, is a pointless and destructive way to exist. While on our trip we learnt patience and how to really relax, both very important qualities, which will assist us in our lives.

During the time that we were away, we did things, which most people will never get the chance to do, and had the most precious and wonderful opportunity to explore and experience the real Australian outback. Some friends whom we told about our trip before we went, found our enthusiasm totally incomprehensible; they believed that we would be 'so bored' and they asked, "What was there to do while in the middle of nowhere for ten days?" In modern society, most people, and particularly teenagers of our generation, don't understand that sometimes you

don't have to *do* anything to become a learner and be a contributor.

The 'times out of time' on our trip when I stopped and reflected on what I'd accomplished personally, and as part of the group, and when I thought of how I'd grown as a person, were something very special. One of these priceless moments was when we were at Chamber's Pillar. I lay on one of the 'tables', which was actually meant to sleep on, and looked up at the blue sky through the branches of a Desert Oak at the waxing moon. It was so peaceful to listen to the gentle whispering of the trees and just think. I discovered that out "there" you can actually listen to the silence.

Another precious experience and one which I will never forget, was waking around dawn at Dalhousie Springs and watching the sky lightening as the sun began to rise. The number of colours was surprising at first, but I had forgotten that as there was no pollution or mist, everything would naturally be clearer. The sky lightened from dark indigo and through all the shades of purple, until the sun's rays began to spread golden across the horizon and bleed pinkness into the ever lightening blue, turning the undersides of the deep grey clouds rosy; it was such a strikingly beautiful image.

Being part of Desert Discovery was an experience which I will always cherish as everyone was so welcoming and I learnt so much; particularly from Clive, about the native animals which I am so interested in. The opportunity to share the knowledge of people who have such passion and dedication to their chosen areas of research was priceless and I really enjoyed talking to everyone about my own interests and future aspirations in their fields.

To have been associated with a group which fulfils its aim of carrying out essential research in such an eager and passionate manner, was inspiring and satisfying and left all of us with an increased desire to volunteer and contribute. I find it amazing to consider how much each member of our group changed over the course of only a few days, with everyone doing things which they would never normally get an opportunity to do and all of us learning so much about a wide variety of fascinating things, while having a great time! It would be so great to be involved in another DD Project in the future and I think that many of us are already planning the purchase of camper trailers and 4WDs for the 2010 project!

We embarked on this Adventurous Journey seeking an unforgettable experience; and this is definitely what we got.



Left: Kristy McGregor, Adam Baker, Lucy Nicholls Small, Adam Tuinman and Emma Campbell walking in the desert. (John O'Brien)

Right: The Duke of Edinburgh students with participants of DD at a First Aid session conducted by John O'Brien. (Beverley O'Brien)



Left: The Duke of Edinburgh students preparing their sleeping bags on one of their camps. (John O'Brien)

Bird Report

Ken Harris

Introduction

During the project more than 100 surveys were conducted by Alexis Bisgrove and Rob Stogdale, Sue Charles, Ken Harris, Tony Hertog and Keith Johnson. Each survey was conducted for 20 minutes and covered approximately two hectares. In addition to surveying extensively on Horseshoe Bend Station this group made a side trip through Andado Station to Mac Clark Acacia Peuce Reserve and from there to Dalhousie Springs. Throughout this trip, twenty minute surveys were conducted en route at least every five kilometres and an effort was made to ensure all habitats were included. At the request of the Northern Territory Department for Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts (NRETA), this group also spent two days searching an area on New Crown Station for Thick-billed Grasswrens. Separate reports have been forwarded to NRETA detailing this search and all individual surveys conducted. The majority of the sightings within this report were provided by the surveys conducted by this group. Others who contributed valuable sightings were Perry and Alma de Rebeira, Beverley and John O'Brien, Cath Reiher and Laurie Ernst and Nella Smith.

Habitat and Prevailing Conditions

The Western Simpson Desert region is generally quite arid. The most common habitat was *Acacia* scrub varying in height and density. Eucalypt and dense or tall *Acacia* scrub were mostly confined to creek beds. There were extensive gibber plains, dunes with canegrass-cover, mostly near Andado and a large area of Old Man Saltbush on New Crown Station. Species richness and overall bird numbers were further reduced due to especially dry conditions and grazing pressure. Grasses were almost completely absent except for some patches of reasonably young Spinifex.

Summary of Sightings

Altogether 68 species were seen but of these only 26 were seen in more than five surveys. To demonstrate the poor species-richness throughout the area the average number of species seen over all the 20 minute surveys was 3.5.

Significant sightings were –

- An Inland Thornbill seen near Cym Bore, a Singing Bushlark seen along the East Dam Track and a party of six Chestnut Quail-Thrush seen near Colson Pinnacle. None of these species had been previously recorded in the area in the Australian Bird Atlas, although the very limited number of surveys done within the region is no doubt a significant factor.
- Sightings of both a Yellow Chat and a Grey Falcon are significant at any time as they are both rarely seen birds.
- Sightings of a White-fronted Honeyeater near Cym Bore on Horseshoe Bend and a Rufous Songlark at

Mac Clark Acacia Peuce Reserve were notable for these areas.

Details of Sightings

Emu *Dromaius novaehollandiae*

A single sighting south of Mt Dare and fresh tracks were observed on Andado and New Crown Stations.

Grey Teal *Anas gracilis*

Two birds seen at Good Friday Dam.

Letter-winged Kite *Elanus scriptus*

A kite-shaped bird that was very white underwing, glided through the camp at night at Mac Clark Acacia Peuce Reserve. No definite identification was obtained but this is a known haunt of the species and it was assumed to be a probable sighting.

Black-breasted Buzzard *Hamirostra melanosternon*

Single birds seen on New Crown Station and near Base Camp.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

A single bird was seen on one occasion over-flying Base Camp.

Whistling Kite *Haliastur sphenurus*

A single bird was seen on one occasion over-flying Base Camp.

Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus*

A single bird seen near Base Camp.

Wedge-tailed Eagle *Aquila audax*

A pair seen in the vicinity of Colson Pinnacle.

Brown Falcon *Falco berigora*

Uncommon. Seen several times in the vicinity of Base Camp, at Mac Clark Acacia Peuce Reserve on New Crown Station and at Bloodwood Bore SW of Finke.

Grey Falcon *Falco hypoleucus*

A single sighting west of Mt Dare of a bird perched close to the road.

Black Falcon *Falco subniger*

Two sightings, one close to Base Camp and the other on the road to Alice Springs just north of the turn off to Base Camp.

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*

A single sighting at Good Friday Dam.

Nankeen Kestrel *Falco cenchroides*

Uncommon. Seen at Mac Clark Acacia Peuce Reserve and at two other locations.

Australian Dotterel *Charadrius australis*

A group of seven birds seen north of Old Andado.

Cinnamon Quail-Thrush *Cinlosoma cinnamomeum*

Moderately common. Seen in areas with there was sparse to almost no shrub cover.

Chestnut Quail-Thrush *Cinlosoma castaneothorax*

A party of six seen near Colson Pinnacle and a pair seen at Dalhousie Springs.

Crested Bellbird *Oreoica gutturalis*

Uncommon. On Horseshoe Bend there were six sightings in reasonably well wooded areas and a bird was seen regularly around Base Camp during the last week. There were two other sightings in riverine vegetation North of Mt Dare.

Rufous Whistler *Pachycephala rufiventris*

Uncommon. Seen twice near base camp and also in riverine vegetation north of Mt Dare and on New Crown.

Grey Shrike-Thrush *Colluricincla harmonica*

Uncommon. Four sightings well spread, all in riverine vegetation.

Magpie Lark *Grallina cyanoleuca*

Seen only twice, at Good Friday Dam and east of Finke, close to the river bed.

Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys*

Moderately common. Seen mostly in reasonably well wooded areas but also in areas of very sparse vegetation.

Masked Woodswallow *Artamus personatus*

Uncommon. Very small flocks seen twice near Base Camp, near Finke and on Mac Clark Acacia Peuce Reserve.

Black-faced Woodswallow *Artamus cinereus*

Very Common. Seen in all habitats, mostly single birds but there were several sightings of flocks of up to 30 birds.

Little Woodswallow *Artamus minor*

A flock of around 20 birds was seen near Mt Rumbalara.

Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus nigrogularis*

Uncommon. Six sightings along creek lines and two surprising sightings in arid dune country.

Australian Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen*

Uncommon. Ten sightings almost exclusively in areas with eucalypt or other tall trees.

Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides*

Uncommon. Single birds seen on three occasions and a small flock was seen on another. Seen across varying habitats.

Little Crow *Corvus bennetti*

Moderately common. Sightings of small flocks on eleven occasions. A breeding record at Mac Clark Acacia Peuce Reserve.

Torresian Crow *Corvus orru*

Uncommon. Heard near Base Camp, at Good Friday Dam and in the river bed east of Finke.

Singing Bushlark *Mirafra javanica*

A single sighting of one bird on the East Dam Track in one of the few areas with any grass.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*

Uncommon. Found in nine locations in small numbers. Generally located in areas with little vegetation.

Zebra Finch *Taeniopygia guttata*

Moderately common, although the numbers were very much down compared with those likely to be seen with some reasonable grass-cover. Very small flocks sighted with reasonable frequency and flocks of up to 100 near water.

White-backed Swallow *Cheramoeca leucosternus*

Moderately common in dune country.

Tree Martin *Hirundo nigricans*

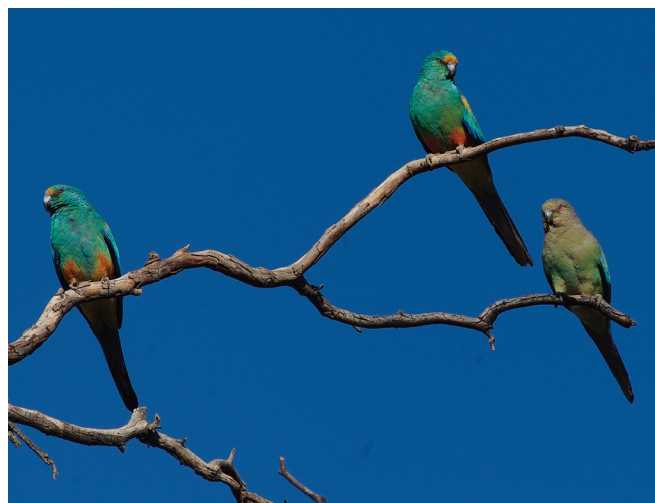
Uncommon. Seen once each on New Crown, north of Mt Dare and at Dalhousie Springs.

Rufous Songlark *Cincloramphus mathewsi*

A single sighting at Mac Clark Acacia Peuce Reserve.



Crested Pigeon. (Steve Stephinson)



Mulga Parrots. (Steve Stephinson)

Australian Pratincole *Stiltia isabella*

A single sighting on a gibber plain along the East Dam track on Horseshoe Bend.

Crested Pigeon *Ocyphaps lophotes*

Uncommon. Seen only in close proximity to water.

Galah *Cacatua roseicapilla*

Uncommon. Good numbers seen close to water on four occasions.

Major Mitchell's Cockatoo *Cacatua leadbeateri*

A flock of eight came in to drink late one evening at Good Friday Dam.

Australian Ringneck *Barnardius zonarius*

Uncommon except along East Dam track on Horseshoe Bend. Seen in other places where there was water and good numbers of eucalypt trees.

Mulga Parrot *Psephotus varius*

Uncommon. Seen several times but only on Horseshoe Bend Station in reasonable proximity to water.

Bourke's Parrot *Neopsephotus bourkii*

Very common on the East Dam track on Horseshoe Bend where one flock of more than sixty birds was seen sheltering from a dust storm. Not seen anywhere else.

Pallid Cuckoo *Cuculus pallidus*

Uncommon. Single birds seen at Good Friday Dam and Dalhousie Springs.

Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalis*

A single bird seen at Dalhousie Springs.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

A single bird seen near Cym Bore on Horseshoe Bend.

Spotted Nightjar *Eurostopodus argus*

A single bird flushed just north of Cym Bore on Horseshoe Bend.

Variiegated Fairy-Wren *Malurus lamberti*

Moderately common. Found in canegrass and where there was reasonably dense *Acacia*.

White-winged Fairy-Wren *Malurus leucopterus*

Common. Found in most habitats.

Eyrean Grasswren *Amytornis goyderi*

Three separate sightings in canegrass in the Andado area. Given the very limited number of surveys conducted in dune/canegrass habitat these sightings give strength to the reports that this bird is common in this area and habitat.

Red-browed Pardalote *Pardalotus rubricatus*

Uncommon. Found only where there were substantial numbers of eucalypt trees.

Striated Pardalote *Pardalotus striatus*

One sighting in the river bed east of Finke.

Rufous Fieldwren *Calamanthus campestris*

Two sightings on New Crown Station.

Weebill *Smicrornis brevirostris*

Uncommon. Seen on four occasions in areas of eucalypt trees.

Inland Thornbill *Acanthiza apicalis*

A single sighting near to Base Camp.

Chestnut-rumped Thornbill *Acanthiza uropygialis*

Moderately common. Small parties were seen where *Acacia* became sufficiently dense.

Slaty-backed Thornbill *Acanthiza robustirostris*

Uncommon. Seen three times within a few kilometres of Base camp and once east of Finke.

Southern Whiteface *Aphelocephala leucopsis*

Moderately common. Seen in areas of sparse vegetation throughout the area surveyed.

Banded Whiteface *Aphelocephala nigricincta*

Uncommon. Several sightings close to Base Camp including a flock of thirty. Four other sightings from Old Andado to Mac Clark *Acacia* Peuce Reserve.

Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater *Acanthagenys rufogularis*

Uncommon. Seen mostly where there was eucalypt or dense stands of *Acacia*.

Yellow-throated Miner *Manorina flavigula*

Common only in areas with substantial numbers of eucalypts.

Singing Honeyeater *Lichenostomus virescens*

Very common. Seen in all habitats except the barest of gibber plains.

White-fronted Honeyeater *Phylidonyris albifrons*

A single sighting close to Cym Bore.

Crimson Chat *Epthianura tricolor*

Seen several times on New Crown Station but nowhere else.

Orange Chat *Epthianura aurifrons*

Seen only at Mac Clarke *Acacia* Peuce Reserve.

Yellow Chat *Epthianura crocea*

Seen once north of Cym Bore.

Red-capped Robin *Petroica goodenovii*

Moderately common. Found in singles and pairs and was present in most habitats including areas with only scattered, poor *Acacia* growth.

Hooded Robin *Melanodryas cucullata*

Uncommon. Several sightings near to Base Camp but only four other sightings.

Grey-crowned Babbler *Pomatostomus temporalis*

Moderately common. Seen in areas where there was a reasonable cover of *Acacia* scrub.

White-browed Babbler *Pomatostomus superciliosus*

Moderately common. Seen in areas where there was a reasonable cover of *Acacia* scrub.



Brown Falcon. (Michael Williams)



Black-faced Woodswallows. (Michael Williams)



Zebra Finches. (Maree Goods)



Female Red-capped Robin. (Maree Goods)



Little Eagle. (Steve Stephinson)

Surveys for Thick-billed Grasswren on New Crown Station - July 2008

Keith Johnson

Introduction

As part of the bird program for the 2008 Desert Discovery project in the western Simpson Desert, the bird group undertook an extensive survey of areas of saltbush (*Atriplex nummularia*) on New Crown Station targeting specifically the Thick-billed Grasswren (*Amytornis textilis*). Four plots of saltbush (A – D) had been identified by the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts within an area of approximately 20sq. km.

The surveying was carried out during the period 12 – 14th July 2008 by Rob and Alex Stogdale, Sue Charles, Ken and Vivien Harris, Tony and Mary Hertog and Keith Johnson after a preliminary visit on 29th June by Keith Johnson.

Results

No Thick-billed Grasswrens were sighted. Two sightings each of a single Rufous Fieldwren were recorded in Plot D at different locations and on different days. Two Cinnamon Quail-thrush were also seen in this plot. Small groups of White-winged Fairy Wrens were sighted in all plots. Other 'non-grass birds' were sighted during the exercise. These have been recorded in the overall DD project report.

During the saltbush survey, bird numbers were not high and little insect life was evident.

Review of Habitat

Three of the four plots were surveyed. Plot B was found to be badly degraded. The view was that insufficient vegetation remained for the habitat to be viable for grasswrens. Comments on the other plots are:-

Plot

A – Some good patches of saltbush but the coverage was not as wide as depicted on the map supplied by the Department.

C – The best presented plot with large areas of unbroken saltbush to 75cm high.

D – Area of vegetation is much smaller than shown on the map. There were some thick patches of saltbush interspersed with wide stretches of bare ground. The habitat was still viewed as viable for 'grass-birds'.

Methodology

It was agreed at the outset that with the time available, our efforts should be concentrated on Plot C followed by A then D. The main method used during the visit was line searching with up to eight birders in line and ten metres apart. GPS references were taken of the start and finish points. Three digital recorders programmed with Thick-billed Grasswrens calls were used during line searches.

After completing line searches of the three plots, some independent surveying was done at locations as chosen by the birder concerned. Most of this additional surveying was done with a minimum of movement and without the use of calls.

For C, the aim was to cover as much of the prime habitat as possible and this was achieved. From 09:15 – 11:18 on the 12th, seven traverses of approximately 4.1km were completed in this plot. The team, varying in number from six to eight during the morning, covered approximately 235,000 sq. metres.

Plot A was line searched during the afternoon of the 12th with approximately 40,000 sq. metres covered during four traverses totalling 1.4km. As with C, the view was that all significant stands of saltbush were surveyed.

Plot D was visited on the morning of the 13th. Seven traverses (and some individual surveying) covered approximately 19,000 sq. metres. As the plot was fairly patchy the traverses were short and some of the plot was better served by individual surveying.

The afternoon of the 13th was devoted to individual surveying. Two birders spent two hours each in C. Three others surveyed elsewhere.

The group left the site on the morning of the 14th. Four birders checked a spot in D for 30 minutes before closing down the exercise.

Weather Conditions

12th ~AM – wind medium to strong, temperature cool to cold; PM - wind light to medium from north east, temperature cool.

13th - AM - wind strong from south, temperature cold; PM – wind low to moderate.

14th ~ wind strong from south, temperature cold.

See Appendix 1 for Thick-billed Grasswren Surveys - Charlotte Waters

Journey to Horseshoe Bend

By TGH Strehlow

A summary by John Deckert

Pastor Carl Strehlow arrived at Hermannsburg in October 1894. Strehlow was a strong, vibrant man who had no hesitation in standing up to the police who used to raid the area indiscriminately, the Hermannsburg area in their hunt for cattle thieves. No raids took place after Strehlow's first clash with Mounted Constable Wurmbrand, one of the chief offiders of Constable Willshire who had been sent by the South Australian government to pacify the Aranda Aborigines of Central Australia.

Pastor Strehlow was a good administrator and a highly principled man who earned respect from the Aboriginal people under his care. For many years he laboured unceasingly to develop the Hermannsburg Mission that was originally established in 1877. However, difficult times had forced the abandonment of the Mission three years before Strehlow arrived, increasing his difficulties during the early years.

Mid way through 1921 Pastor Strehlow began to get stabbing pains in the stomach. As the weeks of pain continued he grew more concerned with his health and began consulting the home medical books in his library in an attempt to diagnose the problem. By late September, Strehlow was in no doubt about his illness. He had earlier contracted pleurisy and as a result of neglecting his health in order to keep on with his work commitments, he had further contracted dropsy, an old term for swelling in the lower limbs caused by retention of water in the soft tissue. Nowadays this is also linked to congestive heart failure. Strehlow knew he was very ill and needed immediate hospital treatment, only available in Adelaide.

A message asking for the use of a car was carried by one of the Hermannsburg Aborigines to the Alice Springs Telegraph Station. He returned within three days having walked a total distance of 240 kilometres. Unfortunately, cars were very expensive to send from Adelaide and the mission board would not approve the cost. They told Strehlow to put his faith in God and make his way to Oodnadatta by buggy. Strehlow had his faith in the people of the church badly shaken when they failed to help him in his greatest need. He knew this was an almost certain death sentence.

Pastor Strehlow's body was now severely distended with fluid and he could barely walk. His clothes had been split at the seams to accommodate his swollen limbs and he was now taking pain-killing medication to help him sleep. When it came time for him to depart from Hermannsburg he was gently lifted onto a comfortable chair wired to the tray of a buggy. It was a very sad parting. Strehlow knew he had little chance of ever seeing his flock again and the people of Hermannsburg felt they no longer had a leader to care for them.

Another buckboard was quickly loaded with supplies to accompany the buggy on what was expected to be a month-long journey to Oodnadatta. It had been a difficult decision to put Strehlow on the buggy because it had no protection from the fierce sun of late October. However, it did have the advantage of a superior suspension giving a much smoother ride. The only protection Strehlow had from the sun was from an old umbrella tied to the back of his chair.

Although the main track from Hermannsburg was to Alice Springs and south along the Telegraph Line, the shortest and quickest way to Oodnadatta was down the Finke River. At the end of the first day the party had travelled 20 kilometres to a waterhole where camp was set up for the night. Strehlow was tired but satisfied with the first day's travel.

By the following mid-day the party had reached Alitera Waterhole, more commonly known to modern Europeans as Boggy Hole. This had been the site of a police station but was abandoned earlier when its police officer, Mounted Constable Willshire was taken to Adelaide to answer charges of murder. Willshire was acquitted of the charges but his particularly vicious punishment raid on Aborigines from this area brought much closer attention to European clashes with Aborigines. As a result, punishment raids ceased and Willshire was never again allowed to return to Central Australia in an official capacity.

Crossing the Finke River near the waterhole was extremely difficult because the only safe track was strewn with huge boulders. The jolting that resulted from this kilometre-long crossing was very taxing on Pastor Strehlow's swollen and weakened body. After a short stop to allow Strehlow to recover the party moved off toward the end of the Finke Valley. Just before dark they camped to the south of Parkes Pass about 14 kilometres south east of present day Finke Gorge National Park.

By morning it was clear that the day would be very hot. Travel across the plains country to Henbury Station saw the two teams shrouded in choking bulldust for most of the way and it was with much relief that the party finally arrived within sight of the Henbury Homestead by evening. A visit from Bob Buck and Alf Butler from Henbury left Strehlow in no doubt that he needed help to make the next section to Idracowra Station because fifty kilometres of heavy sand would totally exhaust his horses well before they arrived at their destination. Bob Buck proposed the use of Henbury donkeys to pull the heavily-loaded buckboard thereby leaving all the horses to pull Strehlow's buggy.

It is interesting to note that the author of *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*, Strehlow's son Theo, writes quite a long section about the problems Strehlow experienced with

his Adelaide administrators who continually doubted his ability to know what was best for any given situation and how they often gave him directions contrary to his own advice or requests. He writes this following paragraph:

“The church people down south had often failed to appreciate that Strehlow, who had grown up in a farming village before he had come to Australia, had always taken a keen interest in all stock work done on the mission station. He had thereby acquired a much better insight into the stock problems of Hermannsburg than most of the inexperienced wheat and dairy farmers of the Barossa Valley and adjoining areas. Through listening to the experienced cattleman of the Centre and through watching keenly the methods of the skilled outside drovers hired from time to time to take the mission cattle down to Oodnadatta, Strehlow had also gained a far better appreciation of efficient stock work procedures than the so-called southern stock experts among the Mission Board members; but these had, quite naturally, disliked admitting their somewhat pitiful lack of grasp of the unique problems of Central Australia – a country so completely removed from their own spheres of experience.”

Not much has changed in the last 100 years.

It took at least three days to cross the Britannia Sandhills, a notorious section of desert dunes through which the Finke River passes on its way south east toward Idracowra. The journey through this section was particularly difficult and by the time Strehlow reached Idracowra he was in a serious condition. His body was racked with pain from the frightful swelling of his limbs and his determination and faith in his own survival was now non-existent. His only chance was to rest at Idracowra for a few days and hope he could recover sufficiently to continue.

Gus Elliot of Horseshoe Bend Station had been informed by telegraph that a car sent to Oodnadatta by train had broken down in a creek only about 80 kilometres north of Oodnadatta. Mrs Elliot immediately decided to take a hand in trying to rescue Strehlow and bring him to Horseshoe Bend where it was hoped that one of the few cars on station properties in the area, would be waiting when she returned. From there it should be possible to make Oodnadatta in time to catch a train to Adelaide.

It was a seven-hour ride for Mrs Elliot to reach Idracowra. When she arrived and saw the plight of Pastor Strehlow she decided that they must travel immediately through the night to stand any chance of Strehlow reaching Horseshoe Bend alive. It was immediately apparent that he was very near death. Mrs Elliot would ride in front, carrying a lantern to guide the buggy driver during the fifteen hours she expected it would take to reach their destination.

All night the buggy lurched onward, each bump causing excruciating pain to Pastor Strehlow. By morning they were within ten kilometres of Horseshoe Bend but the searing heat and dust caused Strehlow to have an exhausting coughing fit. It was necessary to allow him to rest in the shade of some trees until he was able to travel

again. The party reached Horseshoe Bend at 10 o'clock in the morning. The temperature was already more than 40C and the only place fit to rest was on the verandah of the hotel. That night Strehlow slept, but only with the help of a far greater amount of medication.

By morning every breath caused Pastor Strehlow to moan in agony. His upper body had wasted away to little more than skin and bone while his legs and hips were so bloated that none of his clothes would fit and only a thin sheet covered him. A doctor from Marree was making his way to Horseshoe Bend by the fastest means available but was not due to arrive for at least two days. Strehlow knew he was close to death and there was little chance that the doctor would arrive in time so he asked for a private conversation with Mrs Elliot. His need was to organise some of the details that he wanted attended to after his death and from his brief conversations with Mrs Elliot during the trip from Idracowra, he knew she was the one person who would not only look after his wife and son but would also convey his appreciation to the people who had helped him in his time of dire need.

Ruby Elliot was one of those enigmas that are often found in the bush. Raised in Geelong, without much apparent knowledge of outback Australia, she married at the age of 20 to Gus Elliot, who although very reluctant to reveal his age, was commonly believed to be 56 at the time. Ruby quickly developed into a very competent bush-woman and Gus appeared to shed years off his age, possibly due to the influence of a much younger woman. Pastor Strehlow recognised Mrs Elliot for a unique person who could understand the grief his wife was experiencing and who would also attend to his last wishes in the way only bush people understand.

Carl Strehlow died late in the afternoon. Arrangements for burial had to be made immediately for there could be no delay in the heat of an early Central Australian summer. Every able-bodied man turned up early next morning to prepare the grave and construct a coffin. These tasks were difficult due to the stony nature of the hillside where the burial was to take place and because of the lack of appropriate timber for a coffin, both compounded by the huge size of Pastor Strehlow's distended body. The service was conducted by Paster Stolz who had arrived at Horseshoe Bend from the south, in a vain attempt to help Strehlow. The service ended with the singing of Rock of Ages, the grave was filled and then covered with stones. The last touch was to construct C S in stones to identify the grave.

During the afternoon many of the locals who had earlier gathered in preparation to assist the dying missionary, gathered in the hotel to reminisce about the legacy of Pastor Strehlow. They were amazed to find that he had purchased enough high quality spirits for all the locals to celebrate the memory of his life in the way common to bush people. Pastor Carl Strehlow is remembered as a great missionary, a practical administrator and a sincere friend to the people

of Central Australia and in particular to the Aboriginal people of the Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission.

Historical notes.

Hermannsburg is an Aboriginal community 130 kilometres southwest of Alice Springs. It was established as an Aboriginal mission in 1877 by two Lutheran missionaries from Germany who had travelled overland from Bethany in the Barossa Valley in South Australia. They named their new mission after Hermannsburg in Germany where they had trained.

The missionaries learned the local Arrernte language, documented the Aranda traditions and developed a dictionary. In 1891, these missionaries left, but the settlement was continued by lay workers until, in 1894, Pastor Carl Strehlow arrived. His son T.G.H. Strehlow became a noted anthropologist and was initiated into Aranda customs.

The mission land was handed over to traditional ownership in 1982 and much of the historic township is now protected by the National Trust. Hermannsburg has a population of about 500 people.

Spanish Flu.

The following quote from *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* is about Mrs Strehlow and Mrs Elliot at Horseshoe Bend discussing the Spanish Flu.

“Mrs Strehlow, who had been greatly surprised on the previous afternoon by the relatively small number of dark folk she had seen at the station, was curious to know the reason for this decline. “I think I saw many more people here last time,” she remarked to Elliot at the breakfast table; “there don’t seem to be many left now.” “You’re right there,” Elliot replied. “That Spanish influenza did it, three years ago. The blacks here died like flies, and it was the same everywhere, all the way down to Oodnadatta.”

“Yes, we heard about the Oodnadatta epidemic from the Kramers two years ago,” replied Mrs Strehlow. “Mr Kramer helped the police to bury the dead. So many died that the rest all fled out bush and did not stop even to bury their relatives. It must have been a terrible time.”

“It certainly was,” interrupted Mrs Elliot, “Hundreds of them died within a few weeks at Oodnadatta. It was the same at all stations between there and here; and nobody’ll ever know how many died out bush after they’d rushed away from the stations. I’ll tell you how bad things were at that time. Gus sent out old Gallagher Tom, one of our best stockboys, with five other boys to take some cattle down to The Charlotte. There was nothing wrong with any of them when they left. And then, ten days later, old Tom came riding back on his own, with a couple o’ packhorses. He was in tears when he walked up to Gus. He and the others had all caught the ‘flu from some of the New Crown boys. The other five boys had died on the track, and only old Tom had managed to come back alive. Of course, they’d lost the cattle and the rest of the plant, and Tom was

frightened that Gus’d be absolutely wild with him. But, of course, we only felt sorry for the poor old thing, and for the other boys, too—a couple of them had been our very best stockboys. Old Tom was pretty ill for another month or so before he could come back to work. But we got our horses and most of our cattle back at the next New Crown muster.”

The **1918 flu pandemic** (commonly referred to as the **Spanish flu**) was an influenza pandemic that was first found in the United States, appeared in Sierra Leone and France, and then spread to nearly every part of the world. It was caused by an unusually severe and deadly Influenza virus. Many of its victims were healthy young adults, in contrast to most influenza outbreaks which predominantly affect juvenile, elderly, or otherwise weakened patients. The Spanish flu lasted from March 1918 to June 1920, spreading even to the Arctic and remote Pacific islands. It is estimated that between 20 and 100 million people were killed worldwide, or the approximate equivalent of one third of the population of Europe, more than double the number killed in World War I. It has been cited as the most devastating epidemic in recorded world history. More people died of influenza in a single year than in four-years of the Black Death Bubonic Plague from 1347 to 1351. This extraordinary toll resulted from the extremely high infection rate of up to 50% and the extreme severity of the symptoms. The virus kills by causing an over-reaction of the body’s immune system—the strong immune systems of young adults ravaged the body, while the weaker immune systems of children and middle-aged adults caused less morbidity and mortality. In this case, a healthy immune system may have been a liability rather than an asset.

Finke Flood of 1920. Quote.

“The Finke’s never looked so poor as regards gums till that last big flood came down in the beginning of last year. When I first came here, I often used to look at the beautiful big gums behind the yard, and on the other side of the river at the road crossing. And then the big rains came, late in 1920. The Finke started running, and so did the Hugh, and so did the Palmer, and so did all the creeks on the Horseshoe Bend run. They all run into the Finke above The Bend, and the Finke ran past the station for more than six months. I’d never seen so much water rushing past me all my life. The first flood got down here about a month before Christmas, 1920, and it wasn’t till late last year that the last trickles stopped running between some of the waterholes. That was after the heat-waves’d set in. The biggest flood came down in March last year. I remember standing out in front of the hotel. It had been pouring rain all night, and all creeks and gutters on the run were running into the Finke, and the flood reached from near the top of the bank behind the stockyard up to the box gum flats on the other side—about half a mile wide. All of a sudden we could hear something come roaring down from the

west like a real tornado. It kept coming closer, and all the people in the camp and everyone in the hotel rushed out to see what it was. And then we saw it coming—it was a shock -wave of water, about ten feet higher than the level of the flood. When it reached the station, the water went right through the yard and came up within half a chain of the hotel. On the other side it spread right out as far as the sandhills. The Finke must've been about a mile and a half or two miles wide at this stage. Down went all the big gums, on both sides of the main channel. At sundown the only big trees still standing were what was left on the flood flats. That's why there aren't any big gums left all along that horseshoe bend along the eastern side of the Finke where the cliff walls are. All you can see now are a few young gums growing up out of the sand; but it will take twenty or thirty years before the Finke is going to look nice again at The Bend”.

Lonely Grave. Quote.

“About half a mile from the station the buggy passed a lonely grave. It was that of a prospector who had tried to walk the 26 miles from Old Crown Point to Horseshoe Bend at the turn of the century during the time of the Arltunga gold rush. He had attempted to cover this distance on a hot summer day; but he had already drained his waterbag dry after walking little more than the first twelve miles. A few hours later he became delirious from thirst, and his pace had lessened with every mile walked in the scorching heat. His strength had finally given out when he had almost reached the one remaining sand-dune which lay between him and safety. Had he walked the last few chains to its crest, he would have caught sight of the green Finke valley stretching out below him; for these sand-dunes reached forward from the high-level country situated east of the valley, and completely covered the tops of the high cliff wall that protected the river bed below from the menace of their ever-encroaching sand waves”.

Below: Horseshoe Bend Station and grave of Pastor Strehlow on right (Photo provided by John Deckert)



Right & Below: Grave of Pastor Strehlow. These photos were taken in July 2007. (Keith Boschen)



Colson Pinnacle Project - Acacia Report

Len Hubbard

We left Chinchilla and travelled west to Windorah, via Betoota (very dry) to Birdsville (very wet). In the last three weeks they have received five to seven inches of rain in a narrow band down past Innaminka to Thargominda. There were sheets of water in the swales and a green tinge appearing on the sandhills.

We met up here with Graham and Ann Kent, travelling south to Clifton Hills. Turning west, we crossed the Warburton, The rain had long run out and the desert was extremely dry. We travelled north up the KI and then turned west along the Rig Road. Large sand-blows have covered the once clayed sand ridge road, requiring several goes to get over. Along the Rig Road the lone gum looks green and very healthy considering the dry times. Camping at Purni Bore the following Acacias were collected: *A. dictyophleba* totally white in colour as its waxy coating has dried; *A. murrayana*, *A. ligulata* and *A. sessiliceps* in the swales, a dwarf form of *A. oswaldii*. We found many examples, none beyond one metre in height, and all had large, full, woody seed pods, from a recent flowering. Further west along the French Line we renewed friendships with the Hancocks who were travelling east. Next day, at Dalhousie, we had lunch with Stuart, Meg, Tony and Dimity. Arriving at DD Camp the following afternoon, the great backdrop of Colson Pinnacle and surrounding mesas welcomed us there - along with renewal of old friendships. We made camp amongst the dead and dying Mulgas. Over the next few days, after travelling round the eastern and western sides of Horseshoe Bend station in company with Graham and Maree Goods, Alan and Jan Hall, the following Acacias were identified.

Acacia murrayana - Colony Wattle

Widespread in drainage areas. Some specimens 4-5 metres in height. Plenty of recruitment evident. Mostly budded up ready to flower in a couple of months.

Acacia ramulosa - Horse Mulga.

Widespread. Grows with Mulga. Doing it tough. No budding evident. Sterile. It flowers after rain.

Acacia ligulata - Sandhill Wattle.

Dominant in sand hill areas and moister drainage lines, where it was found flowering well. The phyllodes here were a pretty green colour. When we collected this species at Round Leaf Bore project, the phyllodes were a bluish-green, indicating it was growing on limestone. It is a variable species.

Acacia aneura - Mulga.

In total drought shut-down. In good conditions forms dense stands. Around base camp their phyllodes have shrivelled up and many have just fallen off, giving the suffering skeletons an eerie appearance, in this drought-ravaged area.

Acacia dictyophleba/melleodora - Waxy wattle.

Two closely related species. Both have a waxy appearance. Due to the very dry times, *A. dictyophleba*, which usually has larger phyllodes, ball flowers and stronger venation, is suffering and in this condition looks more like *A. melleodora*. There are two recognisable differences with *A. melleodora* having smaller ball flowers and the plant having a sweet smell. We could not convince ourselves one way or the other, even though specimens were flowering.

Acacia kempeana - Witchetty Bush.

All specimens were sterile. No flowers or seed pods. Phyllodes shrivelled and turned a sickly dull green. In good conditions it has an attractive rounded shape with bluish-green phyllodes. Its roots contain the larvae of a large grey moth (*Xyleutes biarpiti*). These grubs, full of fat and protein, are much sort after by Aboriginal people.

Acacia tetragonophylla - Dead Finish.

At 300-400 metres another species found on Horseshoe Bend station, *A. nyssophylla* can be confused with Dead Finish. In excess of 100 sightings were checked and all found to be *A. tetragonophylla*. Specimens at Cym bore contain safe nesting places for Zebra finches, away from predators, due to their bunches of spiny phyllodes along the stems. It was found flowering in moister areas. One in particular at Elliot Dam was spectacular.

Acacia minyura - Desert Mulga.

After coming home, with better equipment and with more time for study, we considered this broad leafed specimen having resinous ribbed branchlets, and showing a percentage of phyllodes slightly sigmoidly curved, along with prominent nerves, to be Desert Mulga. Found growing with mulga in the sand.

OTHER SPECIMENS: Jan Hall collected a small specimen from a shrub on top of Mt Rumbalara. The phyllodes 16 mm long, 7 mm wide, obovate in shape were heavily covered with wax. Being new to us we handed it over to Catherine Nano for identification. As she had recently collected this new species it is still in the system in Alice Springs waiting to be named. We will be advised of proceedings.

Mulga Variations: One with longer than normal and flatter phyllodes, another in a sterile form could not be matched with any of the known variations.

The Goods, Halls and Hubbards were invited by Dr Chris Pavey, Senior Scientist, Threatened Species, Biodiversity Conservation, NRETA, Alice Springs, to accompany Catherine Nano and Anstee Nicholas to Crown Point Station and assist in expanding the distribution of *A. latzii*. We met up on the Finke track and travelled down to Adminga ruins on the old Ghan Line, and camped

beside a gidgee lined creek. Next morning, Catherine with maps on the vehicle's bonnet, discussed our line of attack.

A. latzii occurs on low hills (typically mesas or buttes) characterized by skeletal soils and occasional steep gullies. It also occurs along small, rocky watercourses associated with hill foot-slopes especially in the Bacon Range. It often grows in pure stands. The country to the west contains all these features. We travelled past 12 mile bore, across Lindsay Creek to a threeways and headed NE towards Mosquito Camp dam. We went NW from here towards the headwaters of Colgin Creek. Whilst making slow progress along a rocky ridge, Catherine spotted *A. latzii* in a small gully draining into Colgin Creek. There were about four to five handsome mature trees and a few smaller specimens. The comment being, "even the younger ones could be 100 years old". Checking our position on the map we realised we have now extended the south easterly distribution of *A. latzii*. We travelled back to the threeways and said our goodbyes to Catherine and Anstee. A few kilometres west we made camp on the gravel amongst the Mulga. Catherine had left us directions to check other areas to the south and east. Next morning we headed west to the Teyon boundary, then south along a track that was badly overgrown with large washouts. Many sidetracks were made and gullies filled, making travel slow, until finally we came out on a well-graded road heading east. After 12 kilometres we ran out of rocky country and retraced our tracks to the south track. Following a line of rocky ridges, Stephensen Creek came into view. With a bit of track clearing we travel NE to Beefwood Dam. Alan had our only flat tyre here, but it was quickly repaired, What a great camp amongst a mature clump of beefwood trees! Next day we travelled back to Adminga rail siding with some 220kms spent on Crown Point. As *A. latzii* has a distinctive green colour we did not see any other specimens on our travels.

Catherine confirmed the following *Acacia* list for Crown Point.

Acacia latzii – Tjilpi Wattle

A. latzii is a small tree or shrub 4m high with thick rough bark. The flowers are in globular heads and the pods linear. Potential threats include inappropriate fire regimes, trampling and grazing of seedlings by cattle, browsing by rabbits and invasion by buffel grass (along creeklines). The infrequent success of reproduction and recruitment of this species exacerbates the impacts of threatening processes.

Acacia calcicola – Myall/Gidgee

Rounded shrub or straggly tree 3-5m. Canopy spreading and bushy. Grows along ephemeral water courses with *A. cambagei*. On the sunny side is very silvery waving in the wind. The shady side changes to a dark green colour. Very attractive. Sterile.

Acacia stowardii – Bastard Mulga

Bushy shrub or tree to 5m high. Common in shallow soils

of stony or rocky ridges and breakaways. Also occurs on sand dunes. Often in Mulga communities on low hills. Appears to flower (tails) throughout the year. Fruits mainly Aug-Dec. Specimens checked here were sterile.

Acacia paraneura – Weeping Mulga

A slender, single trunked tree to 7m high with long (to 20cm) almost cylindrical, drooping leaves. It is otherwise similar to typical Mulga. An uncommon tree. We found it growing on gravely scree slopes, often in small communities, amongst the Mulga at Crown Point. It was also found growing in the sand south of Finke.

Acacia aneura var conifera

Its Christmas tree form attracts attention initially. On inspection the phyllodes are clustered along the branchlets with two or three arising from a single point, straight or curved, terete or flat. King (1995) states the upright pointing leaves aid in directing water to the soil beside the trunk. A specimen found here could have used the water as it was nearly dead. Completely sterile.

Acacia aneura and variants

A species with a bewildering degree of variability that requires detailed investigation, both in the field and in the herbarium. A single stand may contain several distinct variants. One day somebody will work them out.

Acacia cambagei – Gidgee

Gidgee growing on Crown Point was found along sandy/gravely watercourses with *A. calcicola*. It appeared to be in good condition considering the many dry years. Gidgee is well known for its odour which is worst in rainy or humid weather during flowering. Sterile. Found flowering round Isisford (QLD) after recent good rains, on our way home.

Acacia georginae – Georginae Gidgee

Closely related to *A. cambagei* but, unlike that species, contains fluoroacetic acid and is extremely poisonous to livestock. It also has an offensive odour in humid weather. It is most easily identified by its broad curved or twisted seed pods and can also be distinguished from *A. cambagei* by pressing the leaf apex with a finger. *A. georginae* remains firm and will indent the flesh but *A. cambagei* will bend and snap below the apex. Specimens found here were sterile. A few specimens were found flowering, just south of Finke. We camped in a clump east of Urandangi on the way home, and the trees here were loaded with mature seed pods.

Acacia tetragonophylla – Dead Finish

Another survivor and scattered throughout the area. It is usually found in non-sandy habitats especially on low hills. Dead Finish is a hardy, slow growing, fire-intolerant shrub. Many years ago I turned a very fine port glass from a small green limb. It has completely retained its integrity.

On our return to Alice Springs, the Hubbards and Halls called into the Arid Research Centre to report our findings. We met up with Dr Chris Pavey and Dr Joe Benshemesh.

After a most interesting morning thanks were exchanged all round. Thanks also to Catherine and Anstee for allowing us to accompany them on a most interesting expedition. Thanks also to Keith and David and the committee, for once again organising a most unforgettable project under very trying conditions.

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Threatened Species Information Sheet *Acacia latzii*
Compiled by: Raeleen Kerrigan, David Albrecht, Catherine
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Top left: *Acacia latzii*. (Len Hubbard)

Above: Alan & Jan Hall, Joan & Len Hubbard and Maree & Graham
Goods standing in front of *Acacia latzii*. (Catherine Nano)

Top right: *Acacia aneura* var *conifera*. (Len Hubbard)

Right: *Acacia tetragonophylla*. (Graham Goods)

Colson Pinnacle Project - Plants of the Region

Graham & Maree Goods

On our arrival we were amazed how dry the countryside was. We felt that it had been dry 12 months earlier when we had been here, but nothing like this. Despite the dry, we found some interesting plants and some in flower, which is amazing considering the conditions.

One disadvantage of this Desert Discovery, was the limited number of participants who have a special interest in botany. We did miss other botanists who have contributed in the past. This report and the list of plants only cover a small number of what does grow in the region. We believe that dry conditions greatly reduced the number recorded. It is impossible to know all the plants and the ones we have noted are those that are of reasonable size and visible to all participants. Our knowledge does not extend to most of the small herbaceous plants, grasses, spinifex grasses and chenopods.

We were privileged to spend two days with Catherine Nano and Anstee Nicholas, botanists from the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts, on New Crown Station in search of *Acacia latzii*. Len and Joan Hubbard, our Acacia experts were also involved in the search. We have not included any of the acacias as Len has already given an extensive report on them.

The vegetation communities in the region varied and this is mostly because of the geographical formations such as clay pans, dry creek beds, sand dunes, sand plains, rocky outcrops and gibber or stony plains. It is difficult to know for sure but some of the barren plains that we encountered may be natural or due to over-grazing. However, of all the stations we have travelled through we must say that Horseshoe Bend is one of the most attractive and well-managed we have seen. It shows what can be done with a combination of grazing and conservation of the vegetation. We would imagine that this station would be magnificent in times of good years.

However some of the plants we encountered were:

Abutilon leucopetalum - an occasional plant growing in the region between the camp and Colson Pinnacle.

Allocasuarina decaisneana - Central Australia's Desert Oak, A few grand specimens remain on the station. The best tree was about 1 km south of the camp site.

Aluta maisonneuvei - coming into flower on the sand dunes on the west of the Ghan Track.

Amyema maidenii - a mistletoe in flower and attached to *Acacia ligulata* at East Dam.

Atalaya hemiglauca - these could be found growing on the side of tracks, on sand plains and up on the crests of the sand dunes. Most were straggly specimens but occasionally a magnificent specimen could be found along a creek bed or on the side of a track where it would have had extra moisture.

Atriplex holocarpa - covered in fruit growing on the side of the track.

Bergia henshallii - a prostrate perennial herb growing where it would have been flooded previously near Good Friday Dam.

Canthium latifolium - at least one very dry shrub growing on the top of Mt Rumbalara.

Corymbia terminalis - growing in small colonies. One growing beside the grave on the west side of Colson Pinnacle.

Crotalaria cunninghamii - a very striking shrub when in flower and growing on the crests of sand dunes.

Crotalaria eremaea var. *strehlowii* - a perennial herb growing in the base of creek beds. There were remains of some old flower spikes.

Dicrastylis costelloi - growing on the sand plains on the Good Friday Dam Loop.

Dodonaea viscosa subsp. *angustissima* - a very common hop bush growing throughout the station.

Enchylaena tomentosa - Scattered throughout.

Eremophila battii - had been growing right throughout the camp site but the only remnants left were dead shrubs. The previous year there had been some flowers even though the shrubs were not in good health.

Eremophila duttonii - one *Eremophila* that was thriving in the drought and mid way through DD many shrubs were in full flower. An excellent *Eremophila* for the birds.

Eremophila freelingii - it was struggling except where it grew along the edges of dry creek beds. It had obviously received some extra moisture and a few shrubs were heavily in bud.

Eremophila latrobei var. *latrobei* - this species was extremely dry and had gone into dormancy except on New Crown Station where there was a small pocket in full flower.

Eremophila longifolia - had gone into dormancy and would most likely respond to rain.

Eremophila macdonnellii - had gone into dormancy and would most likely respond to rain.

Eremophila maculata subsp. *maculata* - near Mt Squire Dam where there had been some overflow and some shrubs were coming into flower.

Eremophila neglecta - most of the flowers had fallen but it was still very colourful with its bright calyces. It was growing on New Crown Station.

Eremophila serrulata - one shrub on New Crown with a few flowers.

Eucalyptus coolabah subsp. *arida* - many trees could be found along the edges of creek beds.

Frankenia species - on a dry flood plain on New Crown

Grevillea juncifolia subsp. *juncifolia* - most were suffering from the drought but some fresh shrubs were found along the edge of a dry creek bed on the Good Friday Dam Loop.

Grevillea stenobotrya - most shrubs were quite healthy and were growing on sand dunes.

Grevillea striata - there were a few small trees near the entrance to the camp site and some larger ones between Mt Squire Dam and the Ghan Track. The best specimens we have ever seen were on New Crown Station at Beefwood Dam which was aptly named as Beefwood is the common name for *Grevillea striata*.

Gunniopsis zygophylloides - growing on the side of Colson Pinnacle

Gyrostemon ramulosus - growing on the west side of the Ghan Track near Half Way Dam.

Hakea eyreana - scattered throughout the station and some trees were in full flower.

Hakea leucoptera subsp. *leucoptera* - there were several healthy shrubs on the side of the track between the entrance and the campsite and further north on the East Dam track.

Hakea lorea - some magnificent trees found on New Crown Station

Helichrysum apiculatum - a perennial herb in flower on New Crown Station.

Holtze name: *Halgania cyanea latisejala* - a small shrub in profusion on some of the sand plains that had been burnt within the last three to four years. The only remains of flowers were old ones.

Ipomoea muelleri - a prostrate creeper. This year there were no flowers whereas last year there were a few.

Isotoma sp - A small herb which was growing in between some rocks on the top of Colson Pinnacle.

Ixioclamys cuneifolia - A few small plants near Mt Squire Dam.

Leptosema chambersii - Up-side-down pea. Several small plants on the side of the track to East Dam. Most of the plants were in poor health but we did find one with a couple of flowers.

Lysiana exocarpi - Harlequin Mistletoe with a few red flowers that stand upright from the branches.

Minuria denticulata - daisy. A few perennial plants in full flower growing where it had flooded out from East Dam.

Muehlenbeckia species - Lignum. Growing near Good Friday Dam.

Pachycornia triandra - two large colonies growing on the side of the track to East Dam.

Pittosporum angustifolium - several large shrubs growing in breakaways near Colson Pinnacle and in full flower.

Prostanthera striatiflora - also in full flower and growing in breakaways near Colson Pinnacle, Mt Rumbalara and other outcrops.

Pterocaulon sphacelatum - growing along the edges of creek beds and in flower.

Ptilotus exaltatus var. *exaltatus* - the only remains were dead plants from the previous year.

Rhagodia species - there were at least two species possibly three. Most shrubs were in such poor condition or had been eaten by cattle that it was difficult to key out.

Santalum lanceolatum - between Cym Bore and Good Friday Dam.

Scaevola spinescens - an occasional shrub found on sand plains.

Sclerolaena species -

Senna artemisioides nothosubsp. *coriacea* - there were several species of *Senna* and even the experts have difficulty in keying them out.

Senna artemisioides subsp. *filifolia*

Senna artemisioides subsp. *oligophylla*

Sida ammophila - growing between the camp site and Colson Pinnacle.

Solanum ellipticum/quadriloculatum - both species are very similar and the best source of identification is the fruit. Both species are recorded for the station.

Stemodia florulenta - a few small plants in full flower at East Dam.

Themeda triandra - a small clump growing beside a creek bed on Horseshoe Bend Station and also on New Crown. It is commonly known as Kangaroo Grass.

Zygophyllum crassissimum - a very thick-leafed succulent, commonly known as a twin-leaf. It had a few flowers and was growing on a rocky outcrop near Colson Pinnacle.

Plants not previously listed for Horseshoe Bend were:

Acacia kempeana

Eremophila duttonii

Amyema maidenii

Grevillea striata

Atalaya hemiglauca

Isotoma species

Canthium latifolium

Minuria denticulata

Pittosporum angustifolia

Pachycornia triandra

Themeda australis

I discussed with Catherine Nano why these plants had been overlooked in previous surveys. Her explanation was that when plant surveys are carried out, botanists assume that the common plants have been noted so it is not unusual for them to be missed in plant surveys. This list with vouchers and GPS locations will be forwarded to Catherine at the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts. She will forward the information to the appropriate personnel and the vouchers will be stored at the Herbarium.

Some plants that were flourishing or in full flower from the previous year were:

<i>Calotis erinacea</i>	<i>Newcastelia spodiotricha</i>
<i>Eremophila willsii</i>	<i>Ptilotus obovatus</i>
<i>Euphorbia wheeleri</i>	<i>Ptilotus polystachyus</i>
<i>Indigofera</i> species	<i>Sida platycalyx</i>

A very big thank you to Desert Discovery for allowing us to be part of their wonderful organisation and for the excellent camp. Desert Discovery has opened up new opportunities for us that we never envisaged and we cannot thank them enough for that. Thanks to Len and Joan Hubbard for their input and to Catherine Nano and Anstee Nicholas for the

wonderful two days on New Crown Station. Last but not least, our travelling companions, Alan and Jan Hall. Jan has a wonderful knowledge of plants and helped us out in identifying many species.

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Eremophila latrobei on New Crown Station. (Maree Goods)



Eremophila duttonii flowering beside the track to the camp. (Maree Goods)



Hakea lorea in full flower on New Crown Station. (Maree Goods)



Stemodia florulenta in full flower, East Dam. (Maree Goods)



Prostanthera striatiflora in flower near Colson Pinnacle. (Graham Goods)



Gunniopsis zygophylloides on the side of Colson Pinnacle. (Graham Goods)



Bergia henshallii near Good Friday Dam. (Maree Goods)

Ant species of the Western Region of the Simpson Desert, NT *Tony Hertog*

Introduction

The importance of ant communities in any terrestrial system cannot be understated as their large biomass and diversity are very important for a healthy ecosystem to function properly. Many ant colonies move large amounts of earth and are capable of rearranging the structure of the soil, allowing air, water and nutrients to penetrate while also concentrating nutrients gathered during foraging forays away from the nest. They assist with pollination of some plants and destroy or deter many voracious caterpillars, grasshoppers and other destructive invertebrates from attacking vegetation where the ants forage. Ants influence the behaviour of many other invertebrate and vertebrate animals, as well as contributing to the nutrient turnover and general soil health of an area. Ants are also a very important food source for many invertebrate and vertebrate species. They are useful indicators for assessing the health of an area, and are becoming more widely used as bio-indicators by scientists throughout Australia and other countries.

Because of the sheer number of species of ants in Australia, most species have not formally been given species names and are allocated a species letter so that each species can be separated from others in the same genus. Many have been put into species groups as they are similar to, but not the same as, a named species. CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems in Darwin houses the largest collection of Australian ants in the Southern Hemisphere and it is this repository that is used as a benchmark, against which any new species collected, can be compared, to determine its status as a new species or not.

The area where Desert Discovery held its 2008 camp, named the Colson Pinnacle Project, was located close to Mt. Rumbalara and just south of Colson Pinnacle, and to the East of the Old Ghan Railway corridor on Horseshoe Bend Station, approximately 210km South of Alice Springs on the Western edge of the Simpson Desert. To my knowledge there have been few if any ant surveys done in this and surrounding areas and ant distribution and diversity were poorly known for this region. The Desert Discovery project allowed the opportunity for ant surveys to be conducted from 5th to 25th July inclusive and to collect in this remote area of the Northern Territory, adding valuable information about the diversity and distribution of the ant fauna of this desert region.

The aim of this study was to sample a number of areas thus maximising the habitat types that were found in the Western Simpson Desert region and increasing the likelihood of obtaining a greater diversity of ants for the area. This work was primarily done to gain some understanding of the ant fauna of the area and to make a reference collection for any ant work that may be undertaken in the future.

The types of habitat sampled included gibber plain, sand dunes, swales, mesas, rocky outcrops, riverine, dry swamp, black soil and infrequently inundated clay flats. Many areas were devoid of grasses and Spinifex (*Triodia* sp.) cover due to past fires and cattle grazing. Most habitat types were sparsely covered with low vegetation which consisted mainly of *Acacia* sp. Riverine habitat was dominated by River Red Gum *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* and swamp areas were dominated by Coolibah *Eucalyptus coolabah*. The vegetation of much of the area was in poor condition mainly due to a number of years of severe drought and the added pressure of stock grazing over much of the area sampled.

Temperatures during the survey period ranged from average night time lows of 4.2°C to average daytime highs of 23.2 °C, with many nights closer to 0°C than the average. The cool night time and early morning temperatures had an effect on ant activity and foraging would not commence for most diurnal species until mid-morning when temperatures exceeded their activity threshold. Most nocturnal foragers would start foraging early in the evening but would cease their activities once temperatures dropped below their minimum threshold. Ant activity was fairly restricted during the survey period and may be much higher during the warmer months of the year, or after drought breaking rains.

Within the scope of the study, all habitats could not be extensively surveyed because of time constraints. The ant species obtained from this study represent a snapshot in time, and by no means form a complete ant inventory of the general area. Many more surveys would need to be undertaken at different seasons and under different weather conditions, to gain a more complete picture of the ant diversity of the area. All information in relation to the ant fauna of the area, even though not complete, enhances our knowledge of the ant biodiversity of this poorly surveyed area and can be built upon by other workers in future surveys.

Methods

Ants were sampled by hand collection, baiting and using small pitfall traps.

- Hand collections were made opportunistically during random searches whenever specimens were located whilst in the field, and when dedicated searches were made during stoppages, whilst on vehicular forays into areas of biological interest. The specimens were collected during the day as well as early in the evening with the aid of a spotlight, and whenever the opportunity arose. Ants collected by hand were placed in small vials filled with a mixture of 70% ethanol and 30%

water and labelled with the date, area, and GPS coordinates.

- Pitfall trapping consisted of burying 10 small plastic cups into the soil with their tops flush with the surrounding ground and three-quarter filling these with water, to which a small amount of detergent had been added, to break the surface tension when small specimens fell in. The traps were placed 10m apart along a transect line traversing as many micro-habitats as possible. They were left in the ground for a period of 24 hours (where time permitted) and collected the next day. All captured specimens were then transferred into a small glass vial filled with the 70% ethanol mixture and then labelled accordingly.
- Baiting consisted of ten baits using small amounts of Pecks Anchovy paste and placed near ground level, on shrubs, and on the ground in areas of interest and at intervals of 10 metres along a transect line during daylight and at night. These were checked several times, at half hour intervals and any specimens attracted were collected and placed into a small vial filled with 70% ethanol mix and labelled.
- The Colson Pinnacle Desert Discovery base camp area (Lat 25°18'38"S, Long 134°31'29"E) consisted of habitats made up of rocky hills, sand dunes, swales, gibber flats, and infrequently inundated clay flats with some dry drainage lines. All sampling points were within 15km from the base camp's central point. All methods of sampling were undertaken in this area with three pitfall sessions, two baiting sessions and four random hand collections made. A total of twenty two species were recorded and of these, three were new and were not represented in the reference collection held in Darwin. This area had the most concerted effort put into it due to the greater amount of time spent in the area.
- The Charlotte Waters area (Lat 25°58'46"S, Long 135°00'10"E) consisted of habitats made up of black soil, gibber flats, small rocky outcrops and dry drainage lines. The black soil areas were covered mainly by Old Man Saltbush *Atriplex* spp. as the dominant plant species and along the drainage lines there were Coolibah in association with various *Acacia* spp. No pitfall trapping was conducted in this area, but two random hand collections and one baiting session were used to sample the area. A total of eleven species were collected and of these, one was a new species that was not represented in the reference collection held in Darwin.
- The Mayfield Swamp area (Lat 25°45'50"S, Long 135°15'51"E) consisted of sand dunes, swale and an extensive Coolibah swamp area. Many of the dune areas had cane grass with scattered clumps of *Spinifex* and the swamp had a sparsely spaced understorey of lignum with some *Acacia* spp. scattered in small clumps. A total of sixteen species were collected from this area and of these, three were new species for the reference collection held in Darwin. All three sampling methods were undertaken in this area and included one pitfall session put in prior to setting up camp and collected the next morning, two random hand collections and one baiting session.
- The Old Ghan Railway corridor area (Lat 25°16'53"S, Long 134°26'39"E) consisted of sand dune, swale and rocky outcrops. The area had not been burnt recently and much of it had some sparse ground cover consisting of grasses and *Spinifex* with several *Acacia* spp. comprising the over-story. All sampling areas were within 10km of the central GPS co-ordinates above. A total of eleven species were recorded, and no new species were recorded for the reference collection held in Darwin. All three sampling methods were used in this area and included one pitfall session, one baiting session and two random hand collections.

All ants collected were transported to Darwin at the end of the survey and several representatives of each species were mounted on points, pinned, and then checked against known specimens housed at the CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems Laboratories, for identification. These were then checked to establish genus using keys and a dissecting microscope. Once the genus was confirmed the specimens were put into subfamily, genus groups and temporarily stored in unit trays. For each specimen, species group level was established where possible using identification keys from, *The Ants of Northern Australia* by Alan. N. Andersen. Identification of each specimen was then verified for accuracy by Dr. Andersen personally, prior to being incorporated in the CSIRO laboratories collection, where they will be housed as a reference collection for use by researchers doing ant surveys in the area in the future, or by other workers using the collection for taxonomic purposes.

Results

A total of forty six species were collected from all the areas surveyed and of these there were seven new species that had not been recorded prior to this survey. The number of ant species collected from each area is summarised in **Table 1** and **Figure 1**. Most of the sites were sampled using all three methods, as well as some random hand collections being made along roads at various points whilst traversing from one site to the next. All samples collected in or around the named sites were combined for that site, because these were close enough to eliminate the use of mutable sites, as many overlapping species were collected from the close proximity sites.

- The Rainbow Valley area (Lat 24°17'39"S, Long 133°36'19"E) consisted of sand dune, swale and rocky outcrops and was patchily burnt quite some time prior to the surveys. The area had large tracts of *Spinifex* with sparse as well as dense stands of *Acacia* spp. throughout the areas sampled. A total

of seven species were recorded and no new species for the reference collection held in Darwin were recorded. Hand collecting and baiting were used in this area but no pitfall trapping was done, due to time constraints.



Photos 1, 2 & 3: Tony Hertog preparing ant traps. Photo 4: ant trap. Photo 5: ant trap with water and detergent. Photo 6: a phial to store the collected ant in. (Maree Goods)

Table 1: Ant species collected at all sites during the survey period from 5th July to 25th July 2008

Species * new species	Colson Pinnacle	Charlotte Waters	Mayfield Swamp	Old Ghan Track	Rainbow Valley
Myrmeciinae					
<i>Myrmecia</i> sp. A (<i>desertorum</i> complex)			x		
Ectatomminae					
<i>Rhytidoponera punctata</i>				x	
<i>R. taurus</i>		x		x	
<i>Rhytidoponera</i> sp. A (<i>tyloxys</i> gp.)	x				
<i>Rhytidoponera</i> sp. B (<i>convexa</i> gp.)	x	x	x		
<i>Rhytidoponera</i> sp. D (<i>reticulata</i> gp.) *			*		
<i>Rhytidoponera</i> sp. F (<i>metallica</i> gp.)			x		
Myrmicinae					
<i>Crematogaster</i> sp. A (<i>queenslandica</i> gp.)	x				
<i>Meranoplus pubescens</i>		x	x		
<i>Meranoplus</i> sp. A (Group D) *		*			
<i>Meranoplus</i> sp. C (Group D) *	*				
<i>Monomorium fieldi</i>				x	
<i>Pheidole</i> sp. A (<i>hartmeyeri</i> gp.)					x
<i>Podomyrma adelaidae</i>	x				
<i>Tetramorium</i> sp. A (<i>impressum</i> gp.) *	*				
Dolichoderinae					
<i>Iridomyrmex agilis</i>	x	x			
<i>I. bigi</i>		x			
<i>I. discors</i>			x		
<i>I. rufoniger</i>	x		x	x	x
<i>I. spodopilus</i>		x	x		
<i>I. viridiaeneus</i>	x		x		x
<i>Iridomyrmex</i> sp. A (<i>mayri</i> complex)	x			x	x
<i>Iridomyrmex</i> sp. D (<i>pallidus</i> gp.)	x				
<i>Iridomyrmex</i> sp. E (<i>mattiroloi</i> gp.)	x				
<i>Iridomyrmex</i> sp. F (<i>suchieri</i> gp.) *	*				
<i>Iridomyrmex</i> sp. G (<i>suchieri</i> gp.)	x				
<i>Iridomyrmex</i> sp. H (<i>suchieri</i> gp.)		x			
<i>Iridomyrmex</i> sp. M (<i>rufoniger</i> gp.) *			*		
Species * new species	Colson Pinnacle	Charlotte Waters	Mayfield Swamp	Old Ghan Track	Rainbow Valley
<i>Tapinoma</i> sp. A (<i>minutum</i> gp.)				x	
<i>Ochetellus</i> sp. A (<i>glater</i> gp.)				x	
Formicinae					
<i>Calomyrmex purpureus</i>	x		x	x	
<i>Camponotus aurocinctus</i>	x			x	x
<i>C. denticulatus</i>			x		
<i>C. ?donellari</i>				x	
<i>C. ephippium</i>		x	x		
<i>Camponotus</i> sp. A (<i>claripes</i> gp.)					x
<i>Camponotus</i> sp. C (<i>discors</i> gp.)	x				
<i>Camponotus</i> sp. E (<i>discors</i> gp.)		x	x		x
<i>Camponotus</i> sp. G (<i>terebravis</i> complex)			x		
<i>Melophorus</i> sp. A (<i>fieldi</i> gp.)	x			x	
<i>Melophorus</i> sp. B (<i>fieldi</i> gp.)	x				
<i>Melophorus</i> sp. C (<i>wheeleri</i> gp.)	x				
<i>Melophorus</i> sp. D (<i>turneri</i> gp.)		x			
<i>Melophorus</i> sp. F (<i>bruneus</i> gp.)	x				
<i>Polyrhachis macropus</i>	x				
<i>Polyrhachis</i> sp. B (<i>schwiedlandi</i> gp.) *			*		
Total number of species	22	11	16	11	7
Total number of new species	3	1	3	0	0

In Table 1, all species have been identified to either species level, species groups or species complex and are listed under the subfamilies (bold) to which they belong. The species with an * after the name and an * in the area column are new species that were not represented in the CSIRO Darwin ant reference collection prior to this survey and show from which area they were collected.

Discussion

In Table 1 each species that was recorded can be linked to the area/s from which it was collected. It shows that *Iridomyrmex ?rufoniger* was the most widespread species being collected in four of the five sites. This species was also the most commonly seen whilst surveying for hand collections. Two other species of *Iridomyrmex*, one *Rhytidoponera* sp., two *Camponotus* sp. and *Calomyrmex purpureus* were the next most widespread and these were found in three of the five sites sampled. All other species were found in only one or two sites. A total of one species of *Monomorium* collected from the Old Ghan Railway corridor area, and one species of *Pheilole* from the Rainbow

Valley area, were collected. Both these genera are small species (<4mm) and are usually quite common and often encountered, especially when baiting and pitfall trapping is used in an area, and it is unusual that except for these two species, no others of either genus were collected. In general very small species were low in number throughout, and these results may be a consequence of prolonged drought.

In Figure 1, it can be seen that the greatest diversity of ant species was recorded from the Colson Pinnacle camp area where a total of twenty two species were recorded and three of these were new and had not been collected prior to this survey. The Mayfield Swamp area had a diversity of sixteen ant species and also had three new species not collected before. Both the Charlotte Waters and the Old Ghan Railway corridor area each had eleven species, with Charlotte Waters having one new species not collected before. The Rainbow Valley area had seven species recorded and there were no new species for this area.

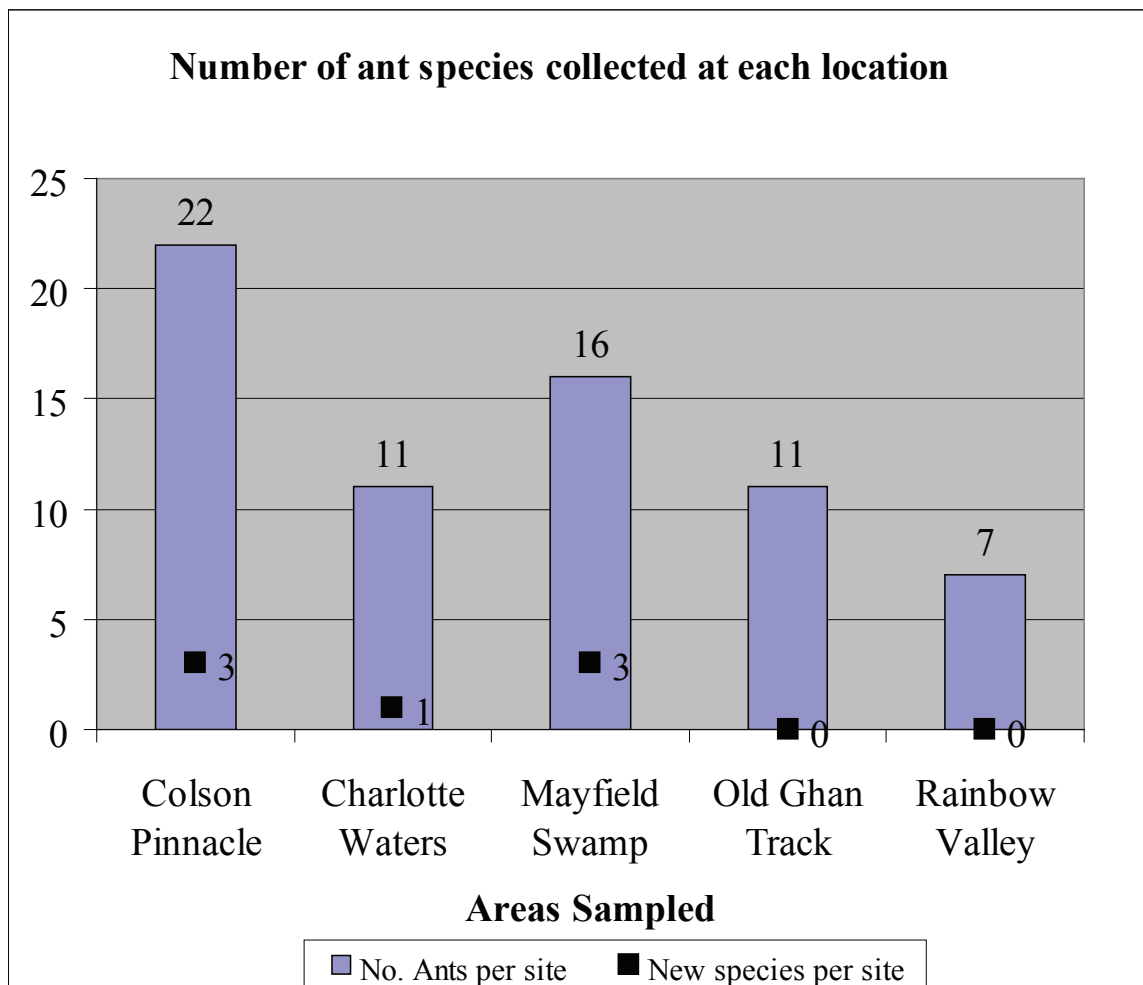


Figure 1. Ant diversity and new species recorded for each of the locations sampled.

A total of thirty pitfall traps (3 sites) were set in and around the Colson Pinnacle camp and four hand collections plus two baiting sessions were also done in this area. The Old Ghan Railway corridor area had one pitfall trapping, two random hand collections and one baiting session done. The Mayfield Swamp area had one pitfall trapping, two random hand collections and one baiting session done. The two areas that did not have any pitfall trapping sessions done were Charlotte Waters and Rainbow Valley. At Charlotte Waters two random hand collections and one baiting session were done. At Rainbow Valley one hand collection and one baiting session were done. Pitfall trapping was not done at either of these two locations due to time constraints.

A large amount of the area in the vicinity of the Colson Pinnacle camp had been burnt prior to our visit and ground cover was almost non-existent or very limited at most collection sites. In areas that may not have been burnt, the ground cover of grasses and Spinifex was also very sparse or non-existent, for nearly all areas surveyed. This lack of ground cover was most likely due to several years of drought with only small amounts of rain falling in the area during that period. The drought plus grazing pressure may have prevented most grasses from re-sprouting and this appeared to have an adverse effect on the number of ants in the whole area.

Foraging by ants was very poor up until about 10am when the ground temperature increased to a more tolerable level to encourage ants to leave their nests. Very little ant activity was noticed prior to this time and even during most of the day ant numbers encountered were extremely low, and this may have contributed to the low diversity of all sites sampled. Very few nocturnal species were encountered during spotlighting, again probably because of the ambient temperature drop once the sun had set.

Because the areas sampled were not sampled using the same techniques or effort at each site, it is not possible to compare directly, one site against another for different ant diversities. All areas would need to be sampled systematically at many more locations and during different seasons to be able to give a proper estimate of the areas' true ant diversity. In the scope of this study it was never

intended that this be done, and an areas' ant diversity is really just a snapshot at a particular point in time, and was done so that other workers would have a starting point to build upon in any future ant projects that may occur in these areas. Because the ant diversity is so poorly known in these remote areas, any information in relation to the diversity of an area and particularly during such harsh and prolonged climatic conditions, is very relevant to any future long term studies.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Desert Discovery for allowing me to be part of the survey team, and giving me the opportunity to sample ant fauna in this remote part of the Northern Territory. I would like to thank those members of the Desert Discovery group who accompanied me on collection forages, and others, who located and collected species of ants in my absence, enabling me to concentrate my efforts elsewhere and adding to the collection areas that were sampled. An extra special thanks to Dr. Alan Andersen who sorted through the collection and checked the identification of each species against our reference collection held at the Darwin Laboratories. Without his expertise and commitment the species list would not be as complete as it is and some of the new species may have been missed.



Tony Hertog at work setting up the ant traps. (Libby Sakker)

Hay River Trip

Graham Kent

After leaving Horseshoe Bend Anne and I drove via Cattlewater Pass to Jerois on the Plenty Highway. I have been asked to write a report on our subsequent trip down the Hay River to Poeppel Corner.

The Hay River is one of a half dozen rivers flowing on an occasional basis from NNW to SSE through the northern Simpson desert.

In the wetter north, the Hay is a tree-lined sandy bed some 100m. wide following swales vegetated with species of *Eucalyptus*, *Acacia*, *Grevillea* and *Hakea*, many of which were in flower and attracting plenty of birds.

In the south the river becomes braided and the many channels discharge floodwater over the floodout area, where the water is absorbed into the sand.

Permits in hand, we stayed at the established Batton Hill camp situated on Atnetye aboriginal land a short drive from Jerois. The next day we were guided through a landscape of mesas, eroded gullies, scree slopes and rocky ridges. The predominant colour was deep red but there were leached areas showing whites and yellows. These areas were sources of ochre. The day ended with a spectacular sunset view of Goyder's Pillar. Goyder's Pillar, along with Hay River and Mt Tietkins, were named by Charles Winnecke who surveyed the area in 1883 while looking for pastoral land.

Heading south from Batton Hill it was not long before the rocky country gave way to sand, and the track and adjacent river became fringed by red dunes.

The relatively young dunes in the southern Simpson Desert are pale in colour. Further north the clay particles transported with the sand have had time to weather, thus releasing red iron oxide which forms a coating on the grains. Consequently the dunes in the northern Simpson are deep red in colour.

In places the track runs closely alongside these beautiful big dunes, with their live tops wonderfully wind-sculpted. Elsewhere the track winds between trees in the river bed, or runs for a time along a dune crest.

Points of interest on the trip included places showing evidence of past occupation: grinding and sharpening stones and stone-tool manufacturing sites. There are also a couple of abandoned oil wells in the southern section.

Lake Caroline is also well worth a visit. Due to its high evaporation rate it is an ephemeral lake despite monsoonal rains. This lake and Hay River have been identified as key biological areas by past surveys. We found the lake dry and were able to explore its surface and extensive shore line.

South of Lake Caroline the track crosses the route taken by Cecil Madigan on his scientific-based expedition of 1939, and we visited his camps 14, 15 and 16. A tree blazed by Madigan is to be found at the site of Camp 16.

We were very fortunate in the timing of our trip. In June, a wide area from Andado across to SW Queensland received good rain – although unfortunately missing Horseshoe Bend. For hundreds of kilometres we drove through a wonderful display of flowers, down to Poeppel corner and east to the Big Red sand dune.

Not only were the shrubs and trees in flower but also vast, dense swathes of yellow and white daisies together with a sprinkling of other species. The flowers formed a wonderful contrast to the blue sky and red sand.

For those contemplating the drive, good remote-area preparation is essential. Navigation is not generally a problem late in the season as the track becomes well defined. In a few places in the south, the track crosses challenging dunes. Here the wind had obliterated recent tracks, necessitating some exploration on foot to check the way forward. There was little other traffic, no corrugations, and no rubbish anywhere. We measured 763kms from Jerois to Birdsville via Poeppel Corner.

For us the trip rates as a great experience and was a graphic illustration of what a transformation, good rain can make.



The crest of a sand dune in the Simpson Desert.
(Graham Kent)



Above & right: scenes from the Simpson Desert.
(Graham Kent)



Below: *Senecio gregorii* growing on the side of a sand dune.
(Graham Kent)



Bushwalking at Colson

John Hewitt

Colson Pinnacle area was an amazing place to explore on foot. During my nine day stay I organized and led four walks out from base camp in various directions.

Walk 1

To Mt Rumbalara, walking up the south east corner. An exploratory walk looking into caves and overhangs for any signs of animal life, especially bats. Unfortunately we only found Euro droppings and scratchings. However the plateau of Mt Rumbalara was very interesting. The remains of the trig., cattle tracks and even camel tracks; it is amazing how these animals were able to reach the top. The views from the top were incredible, especially to the north with many flat-topped mesas. We returned down the North Western slope and discovered the vivid reds, whites and orange colours of the rocks.

Walk 2

To Colson Pinnacle and beyond. This walk was to the base of Colson following an old vehicle track from near base camp. We didn't climb Colson on this walk instead walked around the base to the north then headed in an easterly direction behind the hills towards Mt Rumbalara. Some very interesting valleys and gorges were explored. One particular gorge had very vivid colours of reds, whites and orange. This was a gorge I had explored by mountain bike the afternoon before.

Walk 3

To Sand Dune country to the south of base camp. Twenty-one people were on this walk. I don't think there were many left in camp. We walked over about six dunes. The

dunes were covered with the tracks of mammals, similar to the tracks that Clive was finding. On one of the dunes we found the tracks of a wild cat which we followed for some distance; the size of the tracks was large and I'm glad we didn't meet the creature.

The Duke of Edinburgh participants accompanied us on this walk. At the turn around point it was their task to get us back to camp and thankfully they did. On the way back we found a solitary Desert Oak - an old tree in a very stressed condition, more foliage on the ground than on the tree - a sign of how dry the area is.

Walk 4

To the summit of Colson Pinnacle. We walked, or should I say strolled, to Colson in a more or less direct route. We climbed up the South Eastern slope and once again the views were spectacular. A range of hills to the west, on the other side of the old railway looked very interesting but unfortunately time didn't allow a further exploration - maybe another time. Most of the group climbed to the top of Colson. We descended on the western side and found the grave of the RAAF pilot who died in the 1970s. We returned to camp by a similar route and noticed on the way, the destruction the camels had done to the vegetation.

During all the walks we found evidence of camels; their tracks and damaged vegetation. Some tracks were very fresh but we did not see any camels. On the days when I didn't lead any walks, I did some exploring on my mountain bike, mainly to the base of the hills behind Colson Pinnacle and Mt Rumbalara. In all of the gorges the erosion of the rocks really highlighted the colours - every gorge was different. The only wildlife I observed was one Euro grazing on the open plain at the back of Colson Pinnacle.



A rocky outcrop explored on one of the walks.
(John Hewitt)



A lone Desert Oak, *Allocasuarina decaisneana*. (John Hewitt)



Walkers at the top of Colson Pinnacle. (John Hewitt)

Fauna Report

Clive Crouch

The 2008 project was based on Horseshoe Bend Station on the western edge of the Simpson Desert, in the vicinity of Colson Pinnacle, which falls in the Finke Bioregion of the Northern Territory Government's Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts (NRETA).

The project ran over three weeks, from 1—21 July 2008 and involved a total of 120 people over the three-week period.

Over the three weeks of the project period, fauna surveys were conducted on a total of fifteen sites, each of which was selected as being representative of the various habitats found around Colson Pinnacle.

Survey Method

Survey methods included the use of Crouch Box Traps (300mm x 160 mm x 130 mm), Pitfall Traps (consisting of a series of 20 litre plastic buckets buried with the rim at ground level and connected with a 45 cm drift fence), spotlight and night vision equipment observations at night, systematic searching for reptiles (looking under logs, rocks and ground litter) and incidental sightings. The location of each site was determined with a hand held GPS receiver (Map Datum WGS 84—UTM Grid Reference).

Survey Sites

Site 1: 'Base Camp'. Mulga - Spinifex plain.
53 0451914 E, 7200504 N

Site 2: 'Spinifex Plain'.
53 0451720 E, 7200242 N.

Site 3: 'Dune'.
53 0451499 E, 7199784 N.

Site 4: 'CIM Bore Rocky Knoll'.
53 0453046 E, 7200227 N.

Site 5: 'Gibber Plain 1'.
53 0440555 E, 7207125 N.

Site 6: 'Gibber Plain 2'.
53 0447730 E, 7204996 N.

Site 7: 'Dune adjoining Gibber Plain'.
53 0447788 E, 7205091 N.

Site 9: 'West Dam Gibber Plain'.
53 0448781 E, 7205000 N.

Site 10: 'Mt. Rumbalara East Hill'.
53 0455560 E, 7199403 N.

Site 11: 'Mt. Rumbalara East Rocky Scree'.
53 0455334 E, 7100267 N.

Site 12: 'Mt. Rumbalara East Gibber Plain'.
53 0455134 E, 7199317 N.

Site 13: 'CIM Bore East Dune'.
53 0454344E, 7200254 N.

Site 14: 'Red Dune'.
53 0447884 E, 7205810 N.

Site 15: 'Red Dune Swale'.
53 0447839 E, 7205667 N.

EFFORT

Site 1:
8 box traps for 3 nights = 24 box trap nights.
1 pitfall line, comprising 4 pit traps linked with 25 metres of drift fence for 3 nights = 12 pit trap nights.

Site 2:
8 box traps for 3 nights = 24 box trap nights.
1 pitfall line, comprising 4 pit traps linked with 20 metres of drift fence for 3 nights = 12 pit trap nights.

Site 3:
8 box traps for 3 nights = 24 box trap nights.
1 pitfall line, comprising 4 pit traps linked with 30 metres of drift fence for 3 nights = 12 pit trap nights.

Site 4:
8 box traps for 3 nights = 24 box trap nights.

Site 5:
10 box traps for 4 nights = 40 box trap nights.

Site 6:
10 box trap nights for 3 nights = 30 box trap nights.

Site 7:
18 box traps set for 3 nights = 53 box trap nights. (One trap not set on night 3).
1 pitfall line comprising 10 pit traps and 70 metres of drift fence and 1 pitfall line comprising 5 pit traps and 40 metres of drift fence, for 3 nights = 45 pit trap nights.

Site 8:
30 box traps set for 3 nights = 90 box trap nights.
1 pitfall line comprising 10 pit traps and 60 metres of drift fence and 1 pitfall line comprising 9 pit traps and 50 metres of drift fence, for 3 nights = 57 pit trap nights.

Site 9:
10 box traps, set for 2 nights = 20 box trap nights.

Site 10:
20 box traps for 3 nights = 60 box trap nights.

Site 11:
9 box traps, set for 3 nights = 27 box trap nights.

Site 12:
10 box traps, set for 3 nights = 30 box trap nights.

Site 13:
10 box traps, set for 3 nights = 30 box trap nights.

Site 14:
10 box traps, set for 2 nights = 20 box trap nights.
1 pitfall line, comprising 20 pit traps and 60 metres of drift fence, set for 2 nights = 20 pit trap nights.

Site 15:
7 box traps, set for 2 nights = 14 box trap nights.

Total Effort -
524 box trap nights.
223 pit trap nights.
2 hours spotlighting at night.
17 hours of systematic searching for reptiles.

RESULTS

The following is an annotated list of species recorded.

Mammals

Kultarr *Antechinomys laniger*
One captured in a box trap at Site 6 and another in a box trap at Site 12.

Fat-tailed False Antechinus *Pseudantechinus macdonnellensis*
One captured in a box trap at Site 10.

Ride's Ningau *Ningau ridei*
One captured in a pit trap at Site 8.

Lesser Hairy-footed Dunnart *Sminthopsis youngsoni*
One captured in a pit trap at Site 3, one in a pit trap at Site 7 and another in a pit trap at Site 13.

Red Kangaroo *Macropus rufus*
Five sighted near Site 8 and two near Site 9.

Euro *Macropus robustus*
Two sighted near Site 4 and two near Site 10.

Spinifex Hopping Mouse *Notomys alexis*
One captured in a box trap at Site 3, four in box traps at Site 7 and two in box traps at Site 8.

Sandy Inland Mouse *Pseudomys hermannsbergensis*
Two captured box traps and two in pit traps at Site 1, one in a pit trap at Site 2, two in box traps and one in a pit trap at Site 3, one in a box trap at Site 5, one in a box trap at Site 7, two in box traps at Site 8, four in box traps at Site 9, one in a box trap at Site 11 and one in a box trap at Site 15.

* **Feral Cat** *Felis catus*
Tracks seen at Sites 3, 5 and 9.

* **Donkey** *Equus asinus*
A mob of 10 observed at East Dam to the northeast of Colson Pinnacle.

* **One-humped Camel** *Camelus dromedarius*
A total of 12 individuals observed at various locations around Colson Pinnacle.

Reptiles

Fat-tailed Gecko *Diplodactylus conspicillatus*
Three found under tents at base camp.

Tree Dtella *Gehyra variegata*
One found on a tent at base camp and another on a tree near East Dam.

Beaked Gecko *Rhynchoedura ornata*
One found under a log at base camp.

Brook's Skink *Ctenotus brooksi*
One captured in a pit trap at Site 14.

Leonhard's Skink *Ctenotus leonhardii*
One found foraging at base camp.

Narrow-banded Sand Swimmer *Eremiascincus fasciolatus*
One found under a fallen tree at the base of a sand dune—53 04436012 E, 7205694 N.

Sand Slider Skink *Lerista bipes*
One found under a dried cow pat at base camp.

Sand Slider Skink *Lerista labialis*
One found under a log at CIM Bore.

Central Notted Dragon *Ctenophorus nuchalis*
Two found foraging at base camp and another on the roadside—53 0451247 E, 7201217 N.

Western Netted Dragon *Ctenophorus reticulatus*

One captured in a pit trap at Site 13, one (a gravid female) in a box trap at Site 6 and one found on the roadside—53 0436012 E, 7209459 N.

Central Bearded Dragon *Pogona vitticeps*

One dead, desiccated specimen found at Site 4 by John O'Brien.

Eyrean Earless Dragon *Tympanocryptis tetraporophora*

One captured in a pit trap at Site 2.

Western Brown Snake *Pseudonaja nuchalis*

One observed being taken by a Brown Falcon at Site 13.

DISCUSSION

The information presented in this report serves as a record of observations, which gives an indication of the distribution and relative abundance of the species recorded during this survey, and which may be useful in future reference.

Although the Colson Pinnacle area potentially contains a rich diversity of mammal and reptile species, only eight species of native mammals and 13 species of reptiles were recorded during the survey period. This was most likely due to the fact that the survey was conducted in midwinter, when many reptiles and small marsupial mammals are hibernating.

Although daytime temperatures were quite mild, being frequently in the 23–29° C range, and the night temperatures in the 3–12° C range, the temperatures in burrows and under rocks would have been below that needed for hibernating mammals and reptiles to become active.

Apart from the fact that the survey was conducted when many species may have been hibernating, the area was also very dry and, being a working cattle station, the amount of vegetation present was diminished by grazing stock and by feral camels and donkeys. Distribution maps indicate that possibly six species of Dunnarts may occur in the survey area and possibly as many as 60 species of reptiles, but the time of the year and the dry conditions would have contributed to the paucity of species recorded.

Some good rains fell on the area in October 2007 and, as a result, many native grasses (particularly Spinifex, *Triodia* spp.) had flowered and seeded prolifically and this had benefited native rodent species—therefore Sandy Inland Mice *Pseudomys hermannsbergensis* and Spinifex Hopping Mice *Notomys alexis* were found to be widespread and relatively abundant.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to gain a more complete understanding of the diversity and relative abundance of the species occurring in the Colson Pinnacle area, it is recommended that further surveys be carried out at different times of the year and at periodic intervals, should researchers (and funding) be available.

To ease the pressure of grazing on the native vegetation, it may be beneficial to reduce the numbers of feral camels and feral donkeys on the property, should the landholder be agreeable and human and financial resources permit.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This fauna survey was carried out under the terms and conditions of Research Permit No. 29979, issued by the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission on 23 June 2008 and valid from 1—21 July 2008. The assistance of the Permits Branch of the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts in providing this permit is gratefully acknowledged.

The assistance of Dr. Chris Pavey, Senior Scientist, Threatened Species, NRETA, Alice Springs, in facilitating the issue of the above permit is also gratefully acknowledged, as is his assistance, and that of Mr. Jeff Cole and Ms. Ada Nano, in the field work at Colson Pinnacle.

A very big thank you goes to Peter and Lindy Morphet for allowing us to undertake this work on their property, and also to the many members of Desert Discovery Inc. who helped in the setting up and monitoring of trap lines during the survey period.



Clive Crouch taking in the view from the top of Colson Pinnacle. (Michael Williams)



Fat-tailed Gecko *Diplodactylus conspicillatus*



Tree Dtella *Gehyra variegata*



Beaked Gecko *Rhychoedura ornata*



Brooks skink *Ctenotus brooksi*



Above: Sand slider
Lerista labialis



Above: Narrow-banded Sand Swimmer
Eremiascincus fasciolatus



Central netted Dragon *Ctenophorus nuchalis* (Juvenile)

(Photos: Michael Williams - It's a Wildlife Photography)



Kultarr *Antechinomys laniger* (Michael Williams - It's a Wildlife Photography)



Euro *Macropus robustus* (Kara Humphrey)



Sandy Inland Mouse *Pseudomys hermannsbergensis*
(Michael Williams - It's a Wildlife Photography)



Fat-tailed False Antechinus *Pseudantechinus macdonnellensis*
(Clive Crouch)

Steve's collection of photos from Desert Discovery campout at Colson's Pinnacle, 2008



Carnivore man, yummy it's a mouse



Yes Perry, more tall stories.



Eremophila - what's that?



What bird is that?



Age shall not weary them.



Lama David.



Women's business.



It's all a mystery to me.



Bingo - legs eleven.



RIP - you have to be joking.



Curl Up & Dye Salon



He huffed and he puffed and? Satchmo!



Flo's pumpkin scones - a popular venue.



Laurie's penthouse No 1 - exciting

Steve's photos - The Next Generation



Our Benny Goodman.
Go Man Go.



Talent & Style.



Aren't we cute. Me and my
mum.



A star performer.
(Helen Stephinson)



Mia's gecko. What a find.



Here we come. Move over. Make
room.



Aw shucks - what do I say?



Aw gez - they all love me.



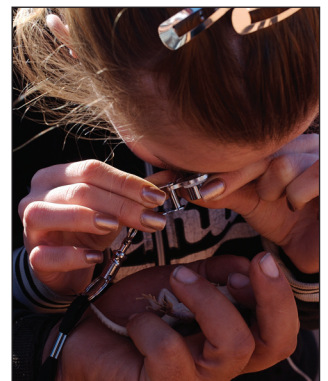
Desperados Of (the) East



Priscilla's Ratisserie.
Where's the pastry?



A star is born - out of the
cosmos.



Gosh! Is that for real?

Seeking Signs of Marsupial Moles

Keith Johnson

After some useful field work on Marsupial Moles at the 2006 Rough Leaf project, Desert Discovery agreed to devote some effort to seeking signs of moles during the Colson Pinnacle project. The field work is done on behalf of Dr. Joe Benshemesh who is Australia's principal researcher on Marsupial Moles.

There are two recognised species of marsupial moles in Australia, the Kakarratul (*Notoryctes caurinus*), which is restricted to the north west of WA, and the Itjaritjari (*N. typhlops*) which occurs throughout central Australia. Both species are regarded as nationally endangered, although so little is known about these animals that even this is uncertain (Benshemesh 2004). Although known to some Aboriginal communities, they are rarely seen.

Moles have no sight and live underground but they do occasionally surface and can be preyed upon by foxes, dingoes etc. One means of detecting moles is to collect and analyse predator scats. This was done at Rough Leaf to provide researchers with DNA material to determine the actual species of mole present in the area. It was thought that we might be operating at the cross over between the two species.

The other means of detection is to dig trenches in sand dunes to reveal evidence of mole burrows. Although moles backfill their burrows as they move through the sand, the backfilled tunnels persist for several years and techniques have been developed to detect the burrows.

As our scientists are confident that the species around Colson Pinnacle is the Itjaritjari, we did not need to collect scats at the project, which was a relief to Shirley, my co-field worker. The suggestion from Joe was "Store scats in a cloth bag if you have one, and hang this in a tree to keep it dry." It was fine while the bag was in the tree but he didn't mention the pong that accompanied us on our travels.

Thanks to a band of willing workers, 21 trenches were dug in four separate locations during this project. A trench is a metre long, 80cm deep and 40cm wide. The aim to produce a single face on each trench so it can be 'read' for evidence of backfilled burrows.

When a burrow is detected it is measured and a sand sample is taken from the burrow for analysis. The sand density is measured in each trench at nine predetermined points with a penetrometer. Each trench and the surrounding vegetation on the dune (and any burrows located) are photographed and all the data and photographs are passed to Dr Joe Benshemesh for analysis.

Examples of the data sheets are included.

Although we have yet to receive the results of the analysis of our efforts around Colson Pinnacle, we are confident that we detected six mole burrows in three trenches. One trench contained four burrows. The results of our 2008 efforts were significantly lower than 2006 where 51 burrows were detected in eighteen trenches. For the 2008 project, the only successful trenches were to the west of the Old Ghan Track.



Shirley Johnson supervising Graham Goods & Len Hubbard digging a mole trench. (Maree Goods)

Data Sheet for Trenches

Trench Data		site#	<input type="text"/>	Topog	crest/mid/base
date dug	<input type="text"/>	date recorded	<input type="text"/>	recorder	<input type="text"/>
GPS	Lat	<input type="text"/>	Long	<input type="text"/>	Datum <input type="text" value="(wgs84/mga)"/>
Photos	<input type="text"/>				
FACE	<input type="text"/>				
Length	<input type="text"/>	Depth	<input type="text"/>	Trench width	<input type="text"/>
No. Moleholes	<input type="text"/>				
Penetrometer		left	mid	right	
	10cm	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
	25cm	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
	50cm	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
NOTES	<input type="text"/>				

Data Sheet for Mole Burrows

MoleHoles		site#	<input type="text"/>	Topog	crest/mid/base
Molehole#	<input type="text"/>	date recorded	<input type="text"/>	recorder	<input type="text"/>
depth	<input type="text"/>	dist from left edge	<input type="text"/>		
Characteristics	MinD	<input type="text"/>	Clarity	Low/ Medium/ High	
	MaxD	<input type="text"/>	Confidence	Low/ Medium/ High	
	Axis	<input type="text"/>	Penet IN	<input type="text"/>	
			Penet OUT	<input type="text"/>	
NOTES	<input type="text"/>				



The sheer side of a mole trench facing the sun. (Maree Goods) Insert: Showing the remnants of a mole burrow. (Libby Sakker)



Tony Hertog & Adam Baker digging a mole trench. (Maree Goods)

The Slow Road Home

Perry & Alma de Rebeira

We left Colson Pinnacle on Wednesday 16 July, tagging along with Mario and Carol. We'd had a disappointingly unproductive camp, not even putting up a single net, but were very glad to have renewed contact with the many friends who share time on Desert Discovery outings.

The road south took us through some handsome stands of Mulga with occasional weeping mature *Pittosporum*. Our camp the first night was on a creek bank within earshot of both rail and road traffic.

The landscape gradually changed to a flat and barren plain north of Coober Pedy, where the tallest thing on the horizon was a jettisoned beer can! Opal mines were marked by cones of pale pink soil and signs warning of open pits. Stopped in Coober Pedy to restock the tucker bag and called at the drive-in grog store at about 12.30pm for a cask of wine. "Can't sell you a cask until after two o'clock" said the attendant as he swiped my credit card. "I'll remember that next time I come to town" I said.

Leaving Glendambo we set off westward to join the Transline – the Telstra Track that runs parallel with the Indian Pacific rail line. The early stages of the track are pleasantly wooded, and with clear but cold conditions we made good time. Mario and Carol had commitments in Perth on Monday morning, but Alma and I planned on heading south from Rawlinna to visit the Eyre Bird Observatory, then taking a casual drive along the Hyden track.

We found most of the old sidings along the Transline are marked with little more than rubble. This proved uncomfortable as the wind was increasing quite dramatically, and cloud banks began to pile up along the southern horizon. Hoping for a sheltering wall at Watson we found instead a deep quarry with piles of discarded detritus, scrap metal, telegraph fittings and insulators, empty metal drums and a warren of dingo lairs. We had a cold night with a high wind streaming above us.

Saturday morning brought strong winds and low temperatures, looming storm banks on the northern horizon with blue rain falling from pink clouds. Lunch and smoko were taken crouched in the shelter of the vehicles. Late in the afternoon I tipped up a slab of limestone that cracked the underside of the chassis with a startling bang. The motor then started surging and then stopped. It took a few seconds for my brain to register that I had run out of fuel, but the gauge showed that the tank was still almost half full. Then the penny dropped. Sliding underneath the truck, cold and damp, I found that the rock had in fact cracked one of the fuel lines. Running out of fuel is not healthy with diesel motors, but I switched tanks, ground away and managed to get the motor running smoothly. A hasty repair of the damaged fuel line stopped the leak so we set off once more, hoping to make up time.

Driving at night is not my favourite way to travel,

and the cold wind and flurries of fine rain kept us both tense and ill at ease. Imagine our reaction when there was a loud bang, the right side of the truck dropped and we lost traction. I did not hear the scraping noise as the undercarriage dragged along the ground and the drive shaft spline gouged a pretty pattern in the track's surface. Here we were, about 35km east of Nurina – the U-bolts securing the spring assembly to the axle had broken. We had no spares; it was dark, wet and windy. Mario and Carol volunteered to drive another 30km to Kybo to raise the RAC. They returned, not finding the station, after we had retired to a sloping bed.

Next morning Mario helped us to contact the RAC through the VKS network. They offered to effect a recovery at a cost of \$12,000!!! We raised ourselves from the ground after vigorous wrist slapping and sips of brandy. Mario, stalwart fellow, made contact with a business acquaintance in Kalgoorlie who undertook to bring us out for \$3,000 – of which the RAC would pay \$2,000. "Yes please" we said. "OK" was their response, "we should be there by about lunchtime". Having arranged the rescue, Mario and Carol resumed their journey home. We settled down to await the rescue truck. The wind and rain continued all day. We expected to be dragged onto a tow-truck so packed up the tent, stored our belongings and sheltered in the cab. The VKS operators had taken a sympathetic interest in our wellbeing and kept in touch throughout the day. They relayed a message from the towing company – "Running a bit late; expect us about 8 pm". We were now seriously cold, so I crawled under the tent canopy to fetch two blankets. Wrapped in these we huddled together watching the sun go down, with the rain sweeping over the wide flat landscape and the temperature creeping below 5°C. A light appeared on the western horizon and brought us to attention, to sink again as the Indian Pacific choofed past with what was probably meant to be a friendly blast of the siren. Eight o'clock came and went; a west bound train greeted us, and at a quarter past midnight a pair of wavering lights in the west filled us with hope. A Toyota ute pulled up alongside us and Jeff introduced himself. I could not see a truck behind him, and I was not sure how he could cart us back to Kalgoorlie on the ute. Admittedly I was in a state of stress-induced confusion, so I asked "Where is the truck?" "Didn't bring the truck, brought the ute" said Jeff. "What is the plan now?" I asked. "Fix it" said Jeff. And he did. With his jack and mine, two large flat rocks and a few lumps of old sleepers he raised the spring assembly, kicked the axle into position, attached new U-bolts, cleaned out the spline of the drive shaft and coupled it up to the universal joint. All this was done by the light of his vehicle, in, by now, 0°C temperature, a howling wind and fine drizzly rain. With not a word of complaint!

Jeff finished work at 04.15 hrs on Monday morning. By

04.30 hrs we were ready to set off for Kalgoorlie. By 05.30 hrs I was hallucinating, seeing a forest of trees overhanging the track with vague Catharine wheels sparking around the edge of my vision. Daylight eased the stress, and having Alma take over the wheel for a couple of hours, ensured our safe arrival in Kalgoorlie at about 14.00 hrs on Monday. Jeff re-checked the U-bolts, led us to the office and retired gracefully from the scene. We paid the balance of \$1,270 owing and went home. What else could we do?

Another thoroughly enjoyable and rewarding Desert Discovery experience, a new adventure with new friends, and another lesson in life that we are both glad to have experienced....now that it is over of course! Our sincere thanks to Mario and Carol for their support and companionship to us. We look forward to the next DD in 2010.



Perry & Alma's kit for bird banding. (Libby Sakker)



Bob Lasseter, Graham Young listening to one of Perry's stories. (Libby Sakker)

Horseshoe Bend - Feral Animal Sightings July 2008

Keith Johnson

Date	Type	No.	Location
4	Camel Tracks - new	2	East Dam track - 10km from main track
4	Camel Tracks - new	3	Cym Bore - previous night's tracks
4	Donkeys	15	Good Friday Dam
4	Camels	2	26km NW Birthday Bore
6	Donkeys	2	26km NW Birthday Bore
6	Camels	8	26km NW Birthday Bore
7	Camels	11	Good Friday Dam
9	Camels	7	East Dam
9	Donkeys	9	Good Friday Dam
10	Camels	7	East Dam track
10	Donkeys	8	Good Friday Dam
11	Donkeys	5	Good Friday Dam
14	Camels	2	Half Way Dam
14	Donkeys	10	Half Way Dam
19	Camels	2	Lat 25. 12. 17 Long 134. 35. 26



Wild camels. (Libby Sakker)

Thanks

Keith Johnson

First up, Desert Discovery would like to thank those outside of the 'DD family' for their assistance in making the 2008 project a success.

- Without a suitable venue we don't have a project, so special thanks are due to Peter and Libby Morphett for allowing access to their property for our base camp and field work. The site suggested by Peter was an ideal setting with Colson Pinnacle and Mt Rumbalara close by.

- Thanks also are due to Don and Colleen Costello for allowing our participants to undertake field work on New Crown and Andado.

- The support from the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts led by Dr Chris Pavey, gave real purpose to the field work done during the project. The early visit by Chris and his team, to the camp site, was appreciated. Hopefully, there will be opportunities for collaboration in the near future.

- Marsupial Mole field work, which was taken up in 2006, was continued at this project. It was great that Dr Joe Benshemesh found time in his busy schedule for a visit to discuss the 2008 program.

- Lowan Whole Foods of Nhill has been a long-time supporter and once again we thank the management for a bumper supply of breakfast cereal.

Desert Discovery Inc is a voluntary organisation and is only successful through the combined efforts of its members and friends. It is a great team effort but there are some individuals who do more than their fair share and these should be recognised formally. The committee, therefore, wishes to thank the following people for their efforts before and during the Colson Pinnacle Project:-

- Special mention is appropriate for David and Margaret Hewitt for their efforts over many years. David has been president from the start and has seen an idea discussed around a desert camp fire mature into a very successful organisation. David and Margaret have worked tirelessly to make the dream a reality and both deserve our heartfelt thanks ...and a rest.

- Harold Matasia, Chairman of the Aputula Community, Finke.

- John Wilkinson for convincing Peter and Libby Morphett that they should take a punt and allow Desert Discovery onto Horseshoe Bend!

- Ben Blomfield, Daniel Blomfield and Ross Campbell for preparation of the camp equipment in Perth, between projects and for Ben in sourcing the new water bladder and electric pump. Daniel performed a major rebuild on the trailer after its problems at Rough Leaf.

- Stuart Kostera for continuing to provide free storage facilities in Perth, for our trailer and equipment.

- Bob and Barry Hancock, Stuart Kostera and Bob Lasseter for the reconnaissance of potential project venues during 2007 and Stuart Kostera, Meg Carty and Tony Morrison in 2008.

- Graham and Maree Goods, David and Margaret Hewitt and Ross and Maureen Campbell for visiting Horseshoe Bend station in 2007 to select a suitable camp site.

- Mick Corney for towing the trailer from Alice Springs to camp, and Roger and Sue Charles for returning it to Alice Springs.

- Terry Smith, Bob Kendall, Roy Burton and Martin Bailey for collecting a 'mountain' of old railway sleepers for the camp fire, thereby easing pressure on the camp's environment.

- Alex Stogdale for making calico bags, and Perry and Alma de Rebeira for donating the name tag holders. The bags and the name tags were new to our camp format and they were well received.

- Maree Goods taking on the role of editor for the project report (her second and last she assures me) and Libby Sakker for vetting the articles to ensure conformity to standards and correctness of scientific names.

Finally, thanks to the set up and knock down teams. 'Many hands make light work' but next time let us make sure we don't pack the electrical adaptor for the tow vehicle at the bottom of the trailer!

PS: On 17 November 2008, Horseshoe Bend Station had recorded 2.5 inches of rain for the previous few days.

THE COLSON CHRONICLE

EDITION No. 1.

4 July 2008

Editor for this edition: Clive Crouch

WELCOME

The committee of Desert Discovery Inc. welcomes you to the 2008 Colson Pinnacle Project and hopes that you have a very enjoyable time during your stay here.

THANKYOU

Many people helped to get this year's project off the ground. Our thanks go to Peter and Libby Morphett for allowing us to base the 2008 project on their magnificent property - Horseshoe Bend Station. Thanks also to our President David Hewitt for negotiating with Peter and Libby to gain access to the property. To our tireless Secretary/Treasurer Keith Johnson, a very big thank you, for his great work in organising bookings, newsletters, collection of fees and a million other tasks. A big thank you to Ben Blomfield and his family for organising the transport of the DD trailer and all the equipment to the campsite – and thanks to the many willing helpers who helped to get the base camp set up – including our expert 'dunny-hole digger' Steve. A big thank you to Lowan Wholefoods for their generous sponsorship of the project with 21 cartons of their breakfast foods. Also thank you to the many people who helped to transport it from Nhill to Colson Pinnacle. Thanks to the wood suppliers who travelled out to the old Ghan railway line and brought in a load of old sleepers for our campfire.

WEATHER

Our 'Meteorologist in Residence' Ross Campbell has provided the following weather report;

Date	Max. Temp.	Min. Temp.	Rainfall	Cloud Cover (Oxa)
Sat 28 June	23°C	8°C	0mm	0
Sun 29 June	27°C	10°C	0mm	0
Mon 30 June	23°C	2°C	0mm	1
Tues 1 July	22°C	1°C	0mm	4
Wed 2 July	21°C	1°C	0mm	0
Thurs 3 July	21°C	2°C	0mm	1

Note: An 'Oxa' is used as a measurement of cloud cover. One Oxa represents one-eighth of the sky, so zero Oxa means that there is no cloud at all and 8 Oxa means that there is total cloud cover.

CAMP ACTIVITIES

Already, there have been a few excursions out of camp and we thank the Hancock family for their report on a trip across the Old Ghan Line to explore the country to the west and thanks also to Jan Strong for her report on a trip along the East Dam Track.

BIRD LIST

Thanks to Ken Harris for the list of birds sighted so far.

Brown Goshawk, Brown Falcon, Nankeen Kestrel, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Crested Pigeon, Mulga parrot, White-winged Fairywren, Chestnut-rumped Slaty-backed Thornbill, Southern Whiteface, Banded Whiteface, Yellow-throated Miner, Singing Honeyeater, White-fronted Honeyeater, Red-capped Robin, Hooded Robin, Rufous Whistler, Willy Wagtail, Brown Songlark, Crested Bellbird, Cinnamon Quail Thrush, Grey-crowned Babbler, White-browed Babbler, Black-faced Woodswallow, Grey Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Australian Raven, Little Crow, Zebra Finch, Australian Pipit, White-backed Swallow.

PLANT LIST

Thanks to Nella Smith for providing details of some of the plants found around camp: *Acacia melleodora*, *A. tetragonophylla*, *A. hovita* and *Corymbia opaca* (formerly *Eucalyptus terminalis*) the Desert Bloodwood.

MOLE REPORT

Keith has begun his Mole Patrol Work for Dr. Joe Benshemesh, with help from lots of willing workers. To date, 9 'mole pits' have been dug. Although Keith thinks that there is not much sign of mole activity, we will keep monitoring the pits for the next couple of days for signs of back-filled tunnels.

FAUNA SURVEYS

Clive began his fauna survey work on 1st July, with a great deal of help from many willing workers. Three trap-lines were set up to the south of the camp and resulted in the capture of the following species: 6 Sandy Inland Mice *Pseudomys hermannsbergensis*, 1 Lesser Hairy-footed Dunnart *Sminthopsis youngsoni*, 1 Spinifex Hopping Mouse *Notomys alexis*, and 1 Eyrean Earless Dragon *Tympanocryptis tetraporophora*. Traps were also set on the rocky knoll near Cym Bore, but nothing was caught. Also, Laurie Draper found a Tree Dtella Gecko *Gehyra variegata* on the wall of his shower tent. One Red Kangaroo was sighted on the gibber plain west of camp.

This morning many wonderful helpers pulled up the trap-lines and we now plan to set up lines on the gibber plain and sandhills to the west of camp.

We are most grateful to Dr Chris Paver, Senior Scientist with the Threatened Species, Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts, Alice Springs, for helping to facilitate the issuing of Clive's Scientific Research Permit for the Colson Pinnacle Project. Chris, Jeff Cole and Ada called in to the camp yesterday afternoon and spoke about the work they are currently doing on New Crown and Old Andado Stations and how Desert Discovery may be able to assist their research – particularly in searching for the Thick-billed Grasswren.

CAMP NOTES

Please drive very slowly through camp, to reduce dust.

Don't forget to sign out when you are going out of camp. Take plenty of water and a handheld UHF radio (if you have one) – and don't forget to sign in again when you return.

Thanks to the many people who have volunteered to undertake camp duties and, if you haven't done so already, please be sure to take your turn at the various tasks required to keep the camp running smoothly. Firewood: Please only collect firewood from one km or more from the camp, so as not to denude the area and to leave some habitat for wildlife. Do not take hollow logs, as they provide habitat for wildlife and don't fell standing trees. Also, leave some fallen wood to help prevent erosion of the soil by wind and to provide the opportunity for plant seeds to collect and germinate after rain

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting will be held tomorrow Saturday July 5th, at the marquee, commencing at 4.00pm. Please be sure to come along with your ideas and comments.

THE COLSON CHRONICLE

EDITION No. 2.

6 July 2008

Editor for this edition: Viv Harris

WEATHER

Our 'Meteorologist in Residence' Ross Campbell has provided the following weather report;

Date	Max. Temp.	Min. Temp.	Rainfall	Cloud Cover (Oxa)
Fri. 4 July	22° C	2° C	0 mm	0
Sat. 5 July	23° C	0° C	0 mm	4

BIRD LIST

Thanks to Ken Harris for the list of birds sighted so far.

Brown Goshawk, Brown Falcon, Black Falcon, Nankeen Kestrel, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Crested Pigeon, Bourke's Parrot, Ringneck Parrot, Mulga Parrot, Red-browed Pardalote, White-winged Fairywren, Variegated Wren, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill, Slaty-backed Thornbill, Weebill, Southern Whiteface, Banded Whiteface, Yellow-throated Miner, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Singing Honeyeater, White-fronted Honeyeater, Red-capped Robin, Hooded Robin, Grey Shrike-thrush, Rufous Whistler, Willy Wagtail, Brown Songlark, Crested Bellbird, Cinnamon Quail-thrush, Grey-crowned Babbler, White-browed Babbler, Little Woodswallow, Black-faced Woodswallow, Grey Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Australian Raven, Little Crow, Torresian Crow, Zebra Finch, Australian Pipit, White-backed Swallow.

PLANT REPORT

East of the Cym bore, there is a dry creek lined with *Eucalyptus coolabah* - rough barked gums with distinctive white bark from about half way up. The Weebills love these trees. East Dam, which is fenced, has the healthiest vegetation we've seen in this area. We saw a low-spreading *Eremophila macdonnellii* with large purple flowers, a perennial herb *Stemodia florulenta* (Blue rod) also flowering (purple flowers with yellow centres), and a *Minuria* daisy.

On the way back we saw 3 species of *Senna*, including: *Senna artemisioides zygophylla* (formerly *Cassia eremophila* var. *zygophylla*) (Punty Bush) with long, thin, divided leaves and *Senna artemisioides* nothosp. *sturtii* (formerly *Cassia desolata*) with leaflets that face each other and with a scented flower. One other species was not identified. Also flowering was *Hakea eyreana* that looks a lot like a *Grevillea* (but ain't).

Note: The trees around Base Camp are *Acacia aneura* (Mulga).

MOLE REPORT

Dr. Joe Benshemesh visited briefly, yesterday afternoon, to check on progress with the field work on moles and to deliver some equipment. He checked the 9 trenches dug on 2/7 and confirmed that there were no visible mole holes. A program of field work was agreed.

FAUNA SURVEYS

Mammals

Euro *Macropus robustus*

Mammals at the New Trap Site 11 km West of Camp

Spinifex Hopping Mouse *Notomys alexis*

Sandy Inland Mouse *Pseudomys hermannsburgensis*

Lesser Hairy-footed Dunnart *Sminthopsis youngsoni*

Reptiles (around camp)

Central Notted Dragon *Ctenophorus nuchalis*

Leonhard's Skink *Ctenotus leonhardii*

THE COLSON CHRONICLE

EDITION No. 3

8 July 2008

Editors for this edition: Margaret and David Hewitt

WEATHER

Our resident 'meteorologist' Ross Campbell has provided the following weather report: Temperatures are read at 0900 hrs.

Date	Max. Temp.	Min. Temp.	Rainfall	Wind	Cloud Cover (Oxa)
Sunday 6 July	22° C	8° C	Nil	10km/hr	7/8
Monday 7 July	8° C	-3° C	Nil	16km/hr	0/8

CAMP MOVEMENTS

WELCOME

We would like to welcome Kath and Lawrie, 'old' Desert Discovery participants, to the camp. They arrived yesterday travelling from Lismore in NSW, via Broken Hill, the Flinders Ranges, Newhaven Sanctuary, the Western MacDonnell Ranges and Larapinta Trail, Alice Springs and down the old Ghan Track.

FAREWELL

Sad farewells yesterday to Stuart and Meg, Tony and Dimity, and this morning to Ross and Maureen. A sincere thank you to all of them for their contributions to the project.

FAUNA SURVEY REPORT - Clive Crouch

Since the last newsletter we have trapped two Spinifex Hopping Mice and one Sandy Inland Mouse. Thanks to the many people who helped pick up and relocate the traps to the Spinifex plain 4km to the west of camp. In only one hour, two pitfall lines and 30 box traps were set at this new location - a fantastic effort. It is hoped that we may capture a Ride's Ningauai, a small carnivorous marsupial that lives in clumps of Spinifex.

On Monday, Helen Stephinson spotted a beautiful Central Netted Dragon on the track and Steve got some great photos of it.

On Sunday evening when heading out to release the animals, we nearly collided with two large camels on the track. Other members have reported seeing camels and donkeys. Reports and locations would be appreciated so that details can be forwarded to Dr Chris Pavey in Alice Springs. Steve found some scats in rock overhangs just east of Cym Bore, so we will set traps there soon, in the hope that we may catch a Fat-Tailed False Antechinus. A feral cat was sighted on the run across to Erldunda.

MARSUPIAL MOLE REPORT

Six trenches were dug on 6 July bringing the total to 15. All trenches have been assessed and no mole holes were located. The trenches have been closed.

Our mole 'expert' will be away with the birders on the tour of Mac Clark Reserve, Mt Dare, Dalhousie Springs and Charlotte Waters until 14 July. During this run some trenches may be dug at overnight camp spots, if time permits.

BIRD REPORT

54 species have been identified to date including a single Yellow Chat. The birding group leaves camp on a six day trip to Mac Clark Reserve etc. (see mole report) on 8 July. Further bird surveying on Horseshoe Bend will take place during the last week of the project.

SOME LOCAL HISTORY

Colson Pinnacle was named after E A (Ted) Colson of Bloods Creek Station, just below the NT/SA border, who, in 1936 made the first crossing of the Simpson Desert. He travelled with a young Aboriginal man and six camels from West to East and returned by a more southerly route. Colson took 12 days for the forward trip and 16 days for the return. Incidentally, the next crossing was by a scientific exploring party led by Dr CT Madigan in 1939. He was supported by 14 men and 13 camels and the trek was recorded in Madigan's classic Australian narrative, *Crossing the Dead Heart*.

Horseshoe Bend is a bend in the Finke River, after which the station where our project is located, was named. It was made famous by the book, *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* that describes a trip from Hermannsburg Mission in October 1922 by Pastor Carl Strehlow, his family and Aboriginal companions. Pastor Strehlow was seriously ill and was being taken south to seek medical help. Sadly he died before the party reached Horseshoe Bend. The book was written 27 years later by his son T G H Strehlow, a noted South Australian linguist and an expert on the Arunta language.

Further reading:

The Simpson Desert by Mark Shephard (unfortunately out of print at present).

Journey to Horseshoe Bend by T G H Strehlow

Crossing the Dead Heart by Cecil Madigan

The map, *Alice Springs to Oodnadatta* by Westprint, Nhill, Victoria.

STOP PRESS !!

As today's edition of The Colson Chronicle was about to hit the streets of The Pinnacle, we witnessed the arrival of Glenda and Ian Isbister from Bathurst in NSW. Ian was a member of the very first Discovery project in the Great Sandy Desert in 1996 and has attended most of the projects since. He led groups of students from All Saints College who made a major contribution to the Pegasus project and four years later to Cooper Hills

Also, Emma Campbell, Lucy Nicholls Small, Kristy McGregor and Adam Baker from Sydney have just arrived. John and Beverley O'Brien and Adam Tuinman made the drive across to Erldunda this morning to meet the Duke of Edinburgh students who flew in to Alice Springs yesterday and caught a Greyhound bus down this morning. A very warm welcome indeed to Emma, Lucy, Kristy and Adam who are attending their first Desert Discovery project. We wish them well for their D of E Gold Award.

THE COLSON CHRONICLE

EDITION No. 4

11 July 2008

Editors for this edition: Perry and Alma de Rebeira

WEATHER

Our 'meteorologists' for the past few days have had some problems with the thermometer and some readings have been incorrect. Perry and Alma's Max-Min is being used until the problem is solved when Clive returns from Alice with a new one.

Min temperatures are read at 0900 hrs while Max is recorded at 1500hrs

Date	Max Temp	Min Temp	Rainfall	Wind	Cloud Cover
Tues 8 July 2008	19 ° C	-3.5° C	Nil	5km/ph	0/8
Wed 9 July 2008	18 ° C	0.5° C	Nil	5km/ph	0/8
Thu 10 July 2008	25 ° C	1.5° C	Nil	8km/ph	4/8
Fri 11 July 2008	20 ° C	9.0° C	Nil	30 - 8km/ph	3/8

CAMP MOVEMENTS

WELCOME

We welcome Anne and Graham Kent, Len and Joan Hubbard, Graham and Maree Goods and Alan and Jan Hall to the camp. Late this afternoon we welcomed Mario and Carol Ioppolo as well as Graham Young and Lou Norgard. Even later in the day, Bill and Karen Groves and Malcolm and Sue Jordan pulled in. Welcome to Colson Pinnacle to them as well.

FAREWELL

We said farewell today to Laurie and Cath and to John and Jenny Hewitt. We give a sincere thank you to all of them for their contribution to the project.

FAUNA SURVEY REPORT - Clive Crouch

In the last newsletter Clive mentioned that we may capture a Ride's Ningau, a small carnivorous marsupial that lives in clumps of Spinifex. Since the traps were relocated to the Spinifex plain we have indeed captured one in a pitfall trap during the day. Four Sandy Inland Mice have also been captured.

Thanks to the many people who helped check the trap lines.

BIRD REPORT

The birding group has left camp on a six day trip to Mac Clark Reserve etc. Birding around the campsite has been rather sparse.

FLORA REPORT

Len and Joan Hubbard have started their *Acacia* collection in competition with the *Eremophila* team of Maree and Graham Goods

So far we have:

Acacia aneura, *Acacia dictyophleba*, *Acacia kempeana*, *Acacia ligulata*, *Acacia murrayana*, *Acacia ramulosa*, *Acacia tetragonophylla*.

Eremophila battii, *Eremophila duttonii*, *Eremophila freelingii*, *Eremophila latrobei*, *Eremophila longifolia*, *Eremophila macdonnellii*.

Some other plants to note are:

Atalya hemiglauca, *Allocasuarina decaisneana*, *Atriplex holocarpa*, *Corymbia terminalis* or a variant, *Dodonea viscosa* subspecies *angustissima*, *Grevillea juncifolia*, *Grevillea stenobotrya*, *Hakea divaricata*, *Hakea leucoptera*, *Pittosporum angustifolium* (top of Colson Pinnacle), *Isotoma* species (top of Colson Pinnacle), *Prostanthera striatiflora* (top of Colson Pinnacle), *Santalum lanceolatum*, *Senna* (several species).

SOME LOCAL HISTORY

The Finke River was named by John McDouall Stuart on 4 April 1860 after “my sincere friend William Finke of Adelaide - one of the liberal promoters of the different expeditions I have had the honour to lead”. Stuart first encountered the Finke 30km north of where the old Ghan Railway crossed the river. William Finke made his money from copper mines in the Flinders Ranges that he and James Chambers developed, and from pastoral interests in the same region.

The Finke that has been described as the mightiest of the Centralian rivers, has its origin in the western Macdonnell Ranges and is fed by smaller watercourses such as Ormiston and Ellery Creeks, and the Hugh and Palmer Rivers. For those of us who have been fortunate enough to witness the Finke in full flood, it is simply amazing to think that just on 200km to the south east, it disappears in the Simpson Desert and only in a particularly good flow does it join the Macumba and may find its way into Lake Eyre.

Chambers Pillar was also named by John McDouall Stuart after a promoter of his explorations, James Chambers of Adelaide. It rises from the surrounding plain and sandhills and on first sighting, was described by Stuart as “a remarkable hill which at this distance has the appearance of a locomotive with its funnel”. Chambers Pillar is 150km north of our Colson Pinnacle site and will be visited by some members after they leave the camp.

Reference: *The Heroic Journey of John McDouall Stuart*, by Ian Mudie

STOP PRESS !!

Adam T was overheard by someone in the shower to lament, “I think this machine mashes the dirt in” referring of course to the washing machine.

Beverley asked Perry while looking at impressive clouds, “How would you describe these clouds to a blind person?” upon which Perry pulled out his notebook and read, “A blue sky laced with long white streaks of cirrus clouds emanating from the west, fanning across the world to the eastern horizon, with a symmetrically spreading Mulga at the hub of the cloud fan.

Joan Hubbard was heard to ask “could you put a clothes line up please Len?” Len wrapped a rope around a tree. Is this how the Hills Hoist was created?

Kristy's quote “I thought I was getting a tan but it washed off”

CAMPFIRE DISCUSSION:

Emma Campbell, one of our D of E participants, was asked to talk about her recent trip to Gallipoli at one of our campfire meetings:

“The Simpson Prize is a National competition for Year 9 and 10 students. I entered last year (Year 10) and was lucky enough to be selected as the New South Wales winner which meant I went to Turkey with the seven other State and Territory winners, two teachers and a guide from the War Memorial for Anzac Day. The trip lasted about two weeks with two days in Istanbul at the beginning, six down on the Peninsula and two more days back in Istanbul. We had an amazing Turkish Guide, Gençay, who told us so much and always made sure we were safe. In Istanbul we visited lots of beautiful mosques and palaces. However, the most memorable part was walking around exploring Gallipoli. We each had a soldier's grave to find at the cemeteries we visited and I developed a real connection with my soldier, Milton Frank Thornton, especially on Anzac Day which was very emotional. Gençay allowed us to understand both the Turkish and Allied perspectives and we all came away with a better understanding of the conflict and formed friendships which will last a lifetime.

Emma Campbell

CAMP ACTIVITIES

Yesterday afternoon-Wed 10th- John O'Brien held a First Aid class for anyone interested. He covered the basic D R ABC. Assess the **D**anger, **R**esponse, **A**irway, **B**reathing and **C**ompression. Clearing of the airway and compression were the main aspects of the demonstration. We then covered the procedure for snake bite. Further sessions will be held in the future.

This morning, Ian Isbister spoke on how to use your GPS. He dealt with setting up your map datum and showed the difference between Lat/Long and UTM readings. We then plotted the bearings of the RAAF Grave and found how to use the GPS to walk to the grave.

EXCURSION TO COLSON PINNACLE

At 9.30am, 17 adventurers headed off under the able leadership of John Hewitt heading to Colson Pinnacle anticipating a climb to the top! A lovely flat walk and then the climb started. Most participants made it to the top and some went to the absolute top!! Adam Tuinman was the climbers' assistant and helped everyone to return safely from the last climb.

After the elation of the successful climb we then had to walk down the mountain-everyone looked down and with trepidation took their first steps. A few slips were had with no apparent injuries. As we all know the descent is always the scariest, particularly when there are a lot of loose rocks. With careful manoeuvres we all were down and so proud of ourselves. We can now say "we have climbed Colson Pinnacle"!

We then visited the grave of the RAAF soldier buried at the foot of the pinnacle and sang Advance Australia Fair to pay our respects. Our walk back, although flat, was through loose sand and people returned along different routes, some stopping to 'botanise', arriving back at about 1.30pm, exhausted, but happy to have made the trek. Beverley O'Brien

THE COLSON CHRONICLE

EDITION No. 5

14 July 2008

Editors for this edition: Lucinda Nicolls Small, Emma Campbell, Adam Baker, Kristy McGregor (Duke of Edinburgh Participants)

WEATHER

The following figures have been provided by David for the past two days – We thank him for recording these data.

Date	Max Temp	Min Temp	Rainfall	Wind	Cloud Cover
Sat 12 July 2008	25 ° C	5° C	Nil	15km/ph	0/8
Sun 13 July 2008	22 ° C	0.8° C	Nil	N/a	N/a
Mon 14 July 2008	20 ° C	3° C	Nil	5km/ph	0/8

CAMP MOVEMENTS

WELCOME

Over the past few days we have welcomed Bill and Karen Groves, Malcolm and Sue Jordan, John and Bev Deckert, Mario and Carol Ioppolo, Bob and Elsie Lasseter, Michael and Sharon Williams, Kara Humphrey. Welcome also to Libby Sakker and Lyn Huyskens who arrived this afternoon. Furthermore, welcome back to our bird experts who have just returned from a trip to Mac Clark Reserve.

FAREWELL

Farewell to Lawrie and Pat Draper, Bert and Marion Phillips, Bruce and Anne Hillas, Ian and Glenda Isbister, Bill and Karen Groves and Malcolm and Sue Jordon. Thank you for your contributions to the project.

FAUNA SURVEY REPORT - Clive Crouch

With help from many people yesterday morning, we packed up the traps and pitfall lines on the Spinifex Plain 2km west of camp. In one trap we caught a Spinifex Hopping Mouse. We then packed up the 10 box traps on the Gibber Plain near the dam, and had one Sandy Inland Mouse in a trap. With help from Stevo, we then relocated the traps to the Rocky Hill to the South-East of Cym Bore. This morning we caught a Sandy Inland Mouse on the Gibbers at the base of the hill and a Fat-tailed False Antechinus at one of the small caves. We also set up a pit fall line on the dune to the east of Cym Bore and caught one Lesser Hairy-Footed Dunnart.

A couple of days ago, John O'Brien found the dried remains of a Central Bearded Dragon and yesterday Michael found a Two-Legged Sand-Slider Skink under a cow pat. Our thanks go to the many people who have been helping with the Fauna survey work.

Fauna found since the last newsletter:

- 2 Sandy Inland Mice (*Pseudomys hermannsbergensis*)
- 1 Spinifex Hopping Mouse (*Notomys alexis*)
- 1 Lesser Hairy-Footed Dunnart (*Sminthopsis youngsoni*)
- 1 Fat-tailed False Antechinus (*Pseudantechinus macdonnellensis*)
- 1 Central Bearded Dragon (*Pogona vitticeps*)
- 1 Two-Legged Sand-Slider Skink (*Lerista bipes*)

BIRD REPORT – Keith Johnson

A five vehicle party (comprising 10 persons) completed a Birding survey to Mac Clark Reserve, Dalhousie Springs and Charlotte Waters on 14th July. The party was away a week and had a successful trip with all target birds but one being sighted. The key sightings were a Grey Falcon, Eyrean Grass Wrens, Inland Dotterels, Rufous Field Wrens and Orange Chats. Our search around Charlotte Waters in the salt bush, for the Thick-Billed Grass Wren, on behalf of the Department of Environment did not locate the species. The Thick-Billed Grass Wren was last seen there in 2005. The 2 ½ days we spent looking does not mean the Grass Wrens are no longer present but that any remaining population may not be viable.

FLORA REPORT – Jan Hall

Our list of plant sightings continues to grow with the notable absence of the small colourful ephemerals. Some of these regenerate from seed after rain and others regrow from perennial root-stock. We heard a whisper that daisies were flowering at East Dam with other flowering plants as well. We were ticking trees and shrubs off the existing list on the way out and had only travelled about 4km when we noticed bright green little mounds on a rocky rise. This proved to be *Pachycornia triandra* (Desert Glass-Wart), a succulent with fleshy segments looking more like a samphire belonging to the salt flats. This usually grows on slightly saline soils in a salt bush community and flowers in summer. This is a new addition to the list we have and we have identified a small number of other plants previously unlisted for the area. At the dam, we did find two daisies in flower – *Pterocaulon sphacelatum* (the Fruit Salad Plant or Apple Bush), *Minuria denticulata* (Toothed Minuria) with typical little white daisy flowers, *Stemodia florulenta* (BlueRod), *Ipomoea muelleri* (Morning Glory family) and *Abutilon sp.* Several Acacias were in full flower as well, although, due to the similar soil type in most areas that we have visited, there is no great diversity in the species of *Acacia* that we have found.

On today's trip some of these were also flowering around the West Dam with the addition of another daisy (*Ixiochlamys cuneifolia* – Silverton Daisy).

Flowers on *Eremophilas* are hard to find but today we saw the odd one on our trip. We found *Eremophila maculata* (Spotted Emu Bush), and yesterday on top of Mt Rumbalara there were a few red flowers on the *Eremophila latrobei*. *Eremophila duttonii* were sighted on the track in to camp with their distinctive red flowers.

Other *Eremophilas* seen in good condition: *E. longifolia*, *E. macdonnellii*, *E. freelingii*. Others are looking diminished while they wait for the arrival of the regenerating rains.

STOP PRESS

How plant experts navigate - 'We just passed a large *Corymbia* followed by two small ones' - *So where are they???*

Said by John on a navigation exercise with the kids where he blindfolded them and let them find their own way back: "I'll be here for a while, I'm just getting the kids lost."

"Look at that *Acacia!*"-Adam B. "Isn't that a wattle?" -Kristy

"You know when you get really hungry and your stomach turns around and starts eating itself?" -Emma;
lunch at Mt Dare at 3pm

"I find it hard to know how far to walk when I want to take a leak." -Adam; *Kristy, seeing a puddle of washing-up water under the tree:* "That's not far enough!"

9am Tuesday morning in the marquee, Perry will be giving a talk on birds so come along!!!

CAMP ACTIVITIES

Today (14th July) John O'Brien took the Duke of Edinburgh students, and Adam T to the top of Mt Rumbalara. On this trip we learnt vital skills involving First Aid and Desert survival. We managed to find a suitable track on which it was possible to walk to the top of the mountain. Crossing big boulders, and sliding gravel we eventually reached the top. We found that the top was flat and when we stood in the middle, it seemed as though we were standing on normal ground. After catching our breath and having some much appreciated water, John showed us how to use a signal mirror to reflect a flash of light to the camp which would be powerful enough to signal a passing aeroplane if we were in trouble. It was quite hard because the sun was in the wrong direction but eventually someone from the camp noticed that we were contacting them! We then explored his First Aid kit, which included all the necessities for survival in the bush - a rabbit trap, fishing equipment and other tools. Our knowledge was then tested with scenarios e.g.: "what would we do if Adam fell off a cliff?". After this we continued along the top of the mountain and then began our descent. As we were going down from the 'summit' and heading home to 'Base Camp', we noticed some ochre on the side of the rock platform and John painted the girls' faces. After a somewhat interesting walk we came back enthused and reasonably tired.

TRIP TO DALHOUSIE

On Saturday we (John and Beverley, the two Adams, Lucy, Emma and Kristy) went on a side excursion to Dalhousie Springs. As part of our Duke of Edinburgh Expedition we planned times and distances from the map, but changed plans as soon as we arrived at Apatula (Finke), when we were invited to church (Seventh Day Adventist). That was an experience! The service involved singing, as well as a sermon by a visiting Parson. We had lunch at Mt Dare before 4 (beautiful) swims - in 12 hours – in the thermal pools at Dalhousie. We couldn't find a camp spot so slept out in the car park – with a dingo under the tree next to us all night!

On entering Dalhousie Springs, Beverly was asked 'Are they all yours?', to which she replied 'A son, 28; a son, 18; and three triplet daughters aged 16.' Funnier still, the lady believed Beverly!

On our way back we stopped again at Mt Dare (we would recommend the pies but unfortunately they're not very good at heating the pasties) and some of us bought one of the necklaces of beautiful beads made by one of the Aboriginal ladies from Apatula.

SOME HISTORICAL TRIVIA

It is interesting to note that Cym Bore was named after Constance Isabelle Morphett - Peter Morphett's Grandmother - who was buried the day the bore was put in.

Charlotte Waters was discovered in 1871 by A.T. Woods riding with R.R. Knuckey, a surveyor for the Overline Telegraph Line. Knuckey wrote: 'I name the waters after Lady Charlotte Bacon, daughter of the 5th Earl of Oxford.' At the age of 19, Charlotte married Major General Anthony Bacon, a hero of Waterloo and the Spanish Wars. 'A flat and desolate earth is visible to the eye for 30 miles at Charlotte Waters, but the waters have never been known to fail. Many a life it has saved and many thousands of Cattle. After the railway line went through to Alice Springs in 1927, it has been a police outpost of the Territory, Mounted-Constable Kennett and his wife making their home there for some years... The brilliant and beautiful bird of the "Centre" will never forget Charlotte Waters'. [Walkabout Magazine, February 1944]

THE COLSON CHRONICLE

EDITION No. 6

17 July 2008

Editors for this edition: Lyn Huyskens and Libby Sakker

WEATHER

Date	Max Temp	Min Temp	Rainfall	Wind	Cloud Cover
Tues 15 July	21.2 ° C	1.2 ° C	Nil	5km/h	0/8
Wed 16 July	21.1 ° C	9.3 ° C	Nil	15km/h	0/8
Thurs 17 July	23.1 ° C	9.7 ° C	Nil	5km/h	0/8

CAMP MOVEMENTS

WELCOME

Over the past few days we have welcomed Rex Stanton, Richard Early and John Kent from Agriculture and Wine Science at Charles Sturt University, and Randall Kent who worked for Victorian Health and WHO. John and Randall were especially welcomed by their brother, Graham and his wife Anne. We are expecting John Wilkinson and Robyn and Allen Hyde to join us soon.

FAREWELL

We farewelled the 4 Duke of Edinburgh students - Emma Campbell, Lucy Nicolls-Small, Kristy McGregor and Adam Baker with regret.....they added a lot to everyone's enjoyment through their enthusiasm. Beverly and John O'Brien and Adam Tuinman drove them to Alice Springs to catch a plane home. We also said goodbye to Carol and Mario Ioppola and to Perry and Alma de Rebeira as they set off for their homes in WA. The group of botanists left on Wednesday - Maree and Graham Goods, Jan and Alan Hall, and Joan and Len Hubbard met Dr Catherine Nano from the Dept of

Environment and Heritage in Alice Springs, and will be searching for various species of *Acacia* and *Eremophila*. Fortunately the Goods and the Halls will return at the weekend. We thank them all for their contributions to the project.

FAUNA SURVEY REPORT - Clive Crouch

Since the last newsletter, we have caught another Kultarr on the gibber plain SE of Cym bore. With help from many people, we picked up the traps and relocated them to the big red dune and gibber plain to the west of East Dam track. We now have 20 pit traps and 10 box traps on the crest of the dune and 30 box traps on the swale and across the gibber plain. This morning we caught one Sandy Inland Mouse. Last night several people went out to see and photograph the Kultarr as it was released. It then took off across the gibbers.

Michael found another type of 2-legged Sand Slider under a log in the Cym bore cattle yards. He also keyed out the Netted Dragon caught in the pitfalls on Cym bore dune. It is a Western (not Central) Netted Dragon. We also found a beautiful Narrow-Banded Sand Swimmer on a dune out near Finke Road.

Fauna found since the last newsletter:

- 1 Sandy Inland Mouse (*Pseudomys hermannsbergensis*)
- 1 Kultarr (*Antechinomys laniger*)
- 1 Western Netted Dragon (*Ctenophorus reticulatus*)
- 1 Two-Legged Sand-Slider Skink (*Lerista labialis*)
- 1 Narrow-Banded-Sand Swimmer (*Eremiascincus fasciolatus*)

Incidental Sightings:

Camels, donkeys and horses at Good Friday Dam and 3 Euros (*Macropus robustus*) on Mt Rambalara.

BIRD REPORT – Keith Johnson

Although the portion of Horseshoe Bend available to the project has been well covered with surveys, some surveying is still being done. No new species have been sighted for several days.

MOLE REPORT – Keith Johnson

Four trenches dug on the 15th, in a dune 9km west of the Ghan Track were assessed on the 16th. Six possible mole holes were observed in three trenches. Two more trenches were dug on the 17th. Data have been collected from the first set and the trenches closed.

ANT REPORT – Tony Hertog

On the 15th July, 8 pitfall traps were sunk into the sand near the mole hole project site, at a distance of 10m apart. These were part-filled with water with a small amount of detergent added. The next day the pitfalls were collected at 15.00hrs and brought back to camp and checked. A number of specimens were collected from each species present and were put into 70% alcohol. At least 8 species were identified but more are likely once viewed under a microscope.

FLORA REPORT – Jan Hall

When the country is dry and plant spotting becomes “more of the same” we look at more unusual plants. In the base of the empty dams here were mats of woolly green plants with pink flowers, *Bergia henshallii*, a waterwort. It was named after *Bergia* collector, Hom Henshall and usually grows in shallow water or mud. *Bergia* species are mostly confined to the former Gondwana Continent in warmer places. *Aluta maisonneuvei* is known to most inland travellers as Desert *Thryptomene*. The new genus *Aluta* contains 5 species and is part of a revision to sort out confusing *Baeckea*-like shrubs. *Canthium*

latifolium “Native Currant” is a leafy lettuce-green shrub growing on Mt Rambalara and down gullies and watercourses in the mulga country. Berries are edible but cause a burning rash in the mouth.

FLORA REPORT - Maree Goods

On the northern track of the western loop (west side of the Finke/Alice Springs road) just before Mt Squires dam we found 5 old, stately trees of *Grevillea striata*, commonly known as Beefwoods. They were in good health and some had obviously already flowered since they had seed cases amongst the upper leaves. It may have been a response to last October's rain. Nearby, surrounding a claypan, to the lower slopes of the sand dunes, *Eremophila duttonii* was profuse. Some were in full-flower. The flowers were the darkest and brightest we had seen. Usually the flowers are orange/red with green on the tips of the petals. Some flowers on these shrubs were a deep red with very little green on the tips.

ACACIA REPORT – Len Hubbard

Observation indicates the Acacias in moister areas are surviving well during the current dry spell around Colson Pinnacle.

A. ligulata – found flowering in moister deep sand drainage gullies. Most are holding a good seed supply.

A. murrayana – known as colony wattle; many communities are also doing well in moist areas. Many show forward budding with possible flowering in a few months.

A. kempeana – not found on Horseshoe Bend's *Acacia* list. This multi-stemmed shrub is in a sterile state showing no evidence of budding or recent seed pods – probably due to continuing dry times.

A. tetragonophylla – Even in these very dry times, many in moister areas are in flower. It can be confused with *A. nyssophylla*. Of >100 inspected, only *A. tetragonophylla* was found, recognised by 3-4 phyllodes clustered along the stems.

A. dictyophleba and *A. melleodora* are both very similar. Drought makes positive ID very difficult. The size of the phyllodes, the flowers and the venation are indicators. Poor times contribute to confusing results. Both species have been collected from this area. A clear wax is produced on the phyllodes in the early days but dries to a snow-white covering in more adult forms. These species are known as waxy wattles.

A. aneura – common name, Mulga – is a very variable species. Some 10 varieties are recognised. The bewildering variety requires detailed investigation, in the field and in the herbarium. I have collected at least 2 -3 of these and am not prepared to name them without further expert help.

Other *Acacia* species recorded on Horseshoe Bend Station are *A. calcicola*, *A. desmondii*, *A. georginae*, *A. maitlandii*, *A. nyssophylla*, *A. oswaldii*, *A. paraneura*, *A. salicina* and *A. victoriae*.

A. ramulosa – a rounded shrub 2.5m high with upright bluish-green leaves. This is another plant similar in appearance to Mulga and is often found growing with or near it. It is very common here, particularly on the western side of Finke Road.

CAMP ACTIVITIES

On the 15th, Perry de Rebeira gave us an excellent talk about birds and how to band them. He had many interesting anecdotes to tell us about the problems he and Alma have met during their work. Many people have climbed Mt Rambalara and Colson Pinnacle. More mole holes have been dug and checked and the pitfall line and box traps have been re-located. One of the Royal Flying Doctor pilots, David Marshall and his wife Jenny, visited us and David gave a great talk about RFDS and answered many questions. John Deckert of Westprint Maps, summarised the book “*Journey to Horseshoe Bend*” by Ted Strehlow the son of Pastor Strehlow - a very moving story. On the 16th we had a visit from Scott Wassman, Sonia and aboriginal children from Apatula community in Finke. We have all enjoyed poetry around the fire from John O'Brien and Clive Crouch, and also the terrific trumpet playing by Alan Hall.

THE COLSON CHRONICLE

EDITION No. 7 Late Final Edition

August 25, 2008

Editors for this edition: Beverley and John O'Brien

WEATHER

Date	Max. Temp.	Min. Temp.	Rainfall	Wind	Cloud Cover -
Fri 18 July	26.2 ° C	5.5° C	Nil	5 km/hr	0
Sat 19 July	28.0 ° C	9.0 ° C	Nil	30 km/hr – dust storm	
Sun 20 July	29.2 ° C	5.5 ° C	Nil	N/A	N/A

FAREWELL

It was time for us all to head back home. We hope everyone is now home, and enjoyed their journey. What an amazing pack up – it took 14 people, 20 minutes to get the marquee down! The trailer was quite a job as no one knew exactly how it was packed – we should have taken some photos before it was unpacked – all good in hindsight – so sorry Ben if you can't find anything! Thank you to everyone who was able to stay for the final pack up it was done with great speed and dexterity. On the final morning of departure we were awoken by large drops of rain – they do sound worse on canvas – so there was a bit of a scurry and a slight delay for some of us to get the drops dry! Helen and Graham (AKA “Stevo”) Stephinson won the award for being last in camp! Maureen and Ross Campbell won the award for being first in camp!

FAUNA SURVEY REPORT - Clive Crouch

A preliminary report has been submitted under the terms and conditions of the permit issued by the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission. A total of 15 sites were surveyed, each representing samples of the various habitat types found in the vicinity of Colson Pinnacle, on Horseshoe Bend Station.

MARSUPIAL MOLE REPORT – Keith Johnson

After 15 'dry' trenches, Shirley and I believe we found evidence of mole activity in three trenches dug in the last week to the west of the Old Ghan Track. The data, photographs and sand samples of all our field work have been sent to Dr Joe Benshemesh in Alice Springs for analysis. All up, 21 trenches were dug which is three more than we achieved in 2006. Trench digging is hard work. Thanks again to the volunteers who made it all happen. I only dug two but some one has to supervise!

CAMP NEWS – Beverley and John O'Brien

On Saturday July 19 we had a dreadful dust storm – including strong winds. Thank you to all who helped at the camp, while others (including us) were away on excursions. David and Margaret (and others I think) took refuge in the annex of our camper trailer – David was heard saying to John later – “I like your drill – the case is very comfortable” – obviously we didn't have enough chairs. It was really horrible; everything got covered in a layer of dust! So you did well if you left camp prior to that day! I am still finding dust and no doubt will for a long time yet! Alma and Perry de Rebeira took another award this year – we won it at Rough Leaf two years ago, when we were towed away from camp. They broke down on their way home; luckily they had good help and made it home safely.

PROJECT NEWS – Keith Johnson

It was a very successful project despite some initial concerns about the venue not being remote or diverse enough to support a project. The feedback has been very positive. Importantly our hosts, Peter and Libby Morphett, were delighted with the outcome. They did admit, however, to some initial concerns when Wilko made the request. Shirley and I were lucky enough to visit the homestead on the last evening.



We arrived there just before sunset and this is the view from across the Finke River looking back towards the homestead.

The close working relationship with NRETA (Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts) established prior to the project resulted in some very useful research on behalf of the department. Ken Harris has already submitted the Bird Report to NRETA and other reports will follow shortly. A post project meeting was held in Alice Springs at NRETA's request to explore possibilities for further collaboration.

Work has commenced on the Project Report.

Appendix 1

Charlotte Waters - Thick-billed Grass Wren Surveys

Keith Johnson

CHARLOTTE WATERS - THICK-BILLED GRASSWREN SURVEYS												
1 degree of latitude = 110Km & 1 degree of Longitude = 100Km												
Spacing between birders approx 10 metres during line searches - eg 8 birders covering 70 metres.												
* Pythagoras Theorem used to calculate distance covered by line searches												
Review of Plots												
110												
100												
A	Some good cover of saltbush but many bare patches - linked to C											
B	Only scattered remains of saltbush - not deemed to be viable habitat											
C	Best of lot - some very thick patches											
D	Some reasonable patches but a lot of bare ground between - certainly not as displayed on map											
12/07/2008	Lat	Plot	Lon	Size - Sq Metres	Persons	* Search Length - M	Group Distance	Area Sq Metres	Elapsed Time - Mins	Cumulative Time - Mins		
Line searches												
		C		1500000								
0915	25 58	19	25.97194	135	0	36	135.01					
0930	25 58	10	25.96944	135	0	46	135.0128					
Var			0.0025				-0.00278					
			275	metres			278	metres	8	391	3127	27361
												15
												120
0930	25 58	10	25.96944	135	0	46	135.0128					
1000	25 58	30	25.975	135	0	17	135.0047					
Var			-0.00556				0.008056					
			611	metres			806	metres	8	1011	8089	70779
												30
												240
1000	25 58	30	25.975	135	0	17	135.0047					
1005	25 58	27	25.97417	135	0	14	135.0039					
Var			0.000833				0.000833					
			92	metres			83	metres	8	124	991	8672
												5
												40
1005	25 58	27	25.97417	135	0	14	135.0039					
1020	25 58	5	25.96806	135	0	39	135.0108					
Var			0.006111				-0.00694					
			672	metres			694	metres	6	967	5799	48325
												15
												90

1704	25	57	34.8	25.95967	135	0	32.2	135.0089		Persons	* Search Length - M	Group Distance	Area Sq Metres	Elapsed Time - Mins	Cumulative Time - Mins
Var				-0.00394	434 metres			-0.0005	metres	4	437	1747	13103	14	56
1704	25	57	34.8	25.95967	135	0	32.2	135.0089							
1715	25	57	45.9	25.96275	135	0	34	135.0094							
Var				-0.00308	339 metres			-0.0005	metres	4	343	1371	10285	11	44
1715	25	57	45.9	25.96275	135	0	34	135.0094							
1723	25	57	52.5	25.96458	135	0	29.1	135.0081							
Var				-0.00183	202 metres			0.001361	metres	4	243	973	7299	8	32
Wind Light to medium from NE												Sq Metres	40344		
Comments										Coverage of plot			2.7%	Note 4 below	
4 - General view was we covered most of the suitable habitat with line searches.															
13/07/2008				Plot											
Line searches				D						Persons	* Search Length - M	Group Distance	Area Sq Metres	Elapsed Time - Mins	Cumulative Time - Mins
0900	25	58	40.8	25.978	134	58	0.7	134.9669							
0916	25	58	38.6	25.97739	134	57	56.7	134.9658							
Var				0.000611	67 metres			0.001111	metres	4	130	519	3896	16	64
0922-0932	25	58	41.4		134	57	48.7			2	200	est		10	20
0925 -1020	survey of spinifex to south of D									2	500	est		55	110
0932	25	58	52.6	25.98128	134	57	46.9	134.963							
0937	25	58	58.6	25.98294	134	57	48.4	134.9634							
Var				-0.00167				-0.00042							

Climbing to the top of Colson Pinnacle



Climbing to the top. (Beverley O'Brien)



Above: Libby Sakker. (John O'Brien)



Right: David Hyde & John O'Brien. (Libby Sakker)



I made it! Must have been Graham Kent. (Anne Kent)



Above: Climbing to the top. (Maree Goods)



Left: Some of us did not make it. (Anne Kent)

Colson Pinnacle Project - Photo Album



Left:: Anne Kent shading the camera lens for Jan Hall.
(Graham Kent)



Above: Len Hubbard checking out Keith Johnson's
vehicle. (Maree Goods)



Above: Anstee Nicholas & Catherine Nano,
botanists from the Dept. of Natural Resources,
Environment and the Arts. (Maree Goods)



Right: Happy times around the camp fire.
(Maree Goods)



Left: David Hewitt reading the plaque on the grave of Allen Roberts, buried in 1971 near Colson Pinnacle. (Anne Kent)

Below: Alan Hall playing the trumpet during the Church service. (Maree Goods)



Above & Left: Checking the shade cloth fence and pit fall traps. (Libby Sakker)





Mending the Marquee.
(Beverley O'Brien)



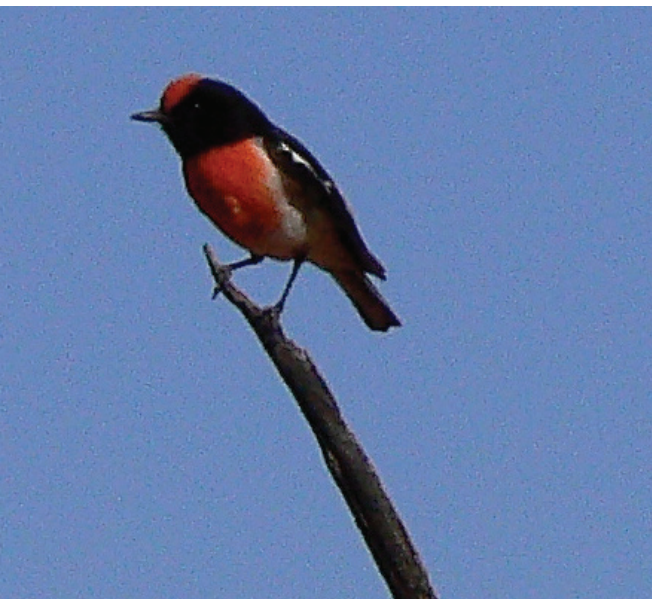
Children from the Finke Community.
(Beverley O'Brien)



Spinifex Hopping Mouse. (Adam Tuinman)



Lesser Hairy-footed Dunnart. (Adam Tuinman)



Red-cap Robin. (Helen Stephinson)



Major Mitchell Cockatoos.
(Michael Williams - It's a Wildlife Photography)

Many Hands Make Light Work



(Photos - Maree Goods)

Colson Pinnacle - late in the day



(Libby Sakker)



(Michael Williams - It's a Wildlife Photography)