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The Millstream Homestead

Millstream-Chichester National Park's visitor centre is the old Millstream Station homestead. The centre was opened in 1990. During its conversion, minimal alterations were made to the building.

The original homestead at Millstream was built in the late 1800s, approximately 50 metres south-west of the present building. Timber was shipped from England at a cost of £1,200, delivered to Cossack and carted out to Millstream by wagon. The verandah was built out of the local paper bark tree or cadjeput (*Melaleuca argentea*).

A new homestead was built in 1914 on the present site. Lawns extended to the streams and included a tennis court. A large vegetable garden, which included a banana plantation, was maintained by a Chinese gardener.

The corrugated iron building at the back of the homestead was the kitchen and was set aside from the main building in case of fire. The homestead had four bedrooms and a central dining room, with a bathroom and schoolroom on each corner of the back verandah.

At its peak, Millstream station covered one million acres and carried 55,000 sheep, and at one time held the Australian record for the highest price paid for a fleece. There was a large 12-stand shearing shed at Millstream and an 8-stand one at the "cattle camp" about 30 km south-east of the homestead.

The first Europeans to visit the area were members of an expedition led by F T Gregory in June 1861. Gregory comments in his journal (7 June 1861): "A quarter of a mile up the river brought us to a fine tributary from the south, running strong enough to supply a large mill . . . it was found to take rise in several deep pools, fed by springs issuing out of the plains." Hence the name Millstream.

The area was later taken up as a pastoral lease by Alex McRae around 1866. In the early 1900s Claude Irvine and his family managed the station for Cookson and Sons of England. It was later purchased by Claude's son-in-law, Les Gordon. After his death it was managed by his two sons, Stuart and Doug Gordon, until 1964; the lease was then purchased by the Kennedys.

In 1980 the lease was resumed by the Government for its water reserves. Part of the former pastoral lease was incorporated into the Millstream-Chichester National Park.

Chinderwarriner Pool near the homestead was an important campsite of the Yinjibarndi people who lived along the Fortescue River. Until the early sixties a large community of Aboriginal people lived near the homestead and worked on the station as stockmen, cooks and kitchen hands. The area continues to have great significance to the Yinjibarndi people.

The natural vegetation around Chinderwarriner Pool was dominated by river gums, cadjeputs and Millstream palms, and the ground was covered by a native couch grass through which the streams flowed. Early pastoralists dammed the springs and developed a water garden and a vegetable garden. Dominant survivors of these developments include date and cotton palms, oleanders, water lilies and Indian water fern.

Chinderwarriner Pool was once used as a domestic water supply and a source of water for the extensive gardens in the area.

