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LANDSCOPE Expeditions

Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management, PO Box 104, Como, WA 6152
in association with
UWA Extension, the University of Western Australia, Nedlands, WA 5907

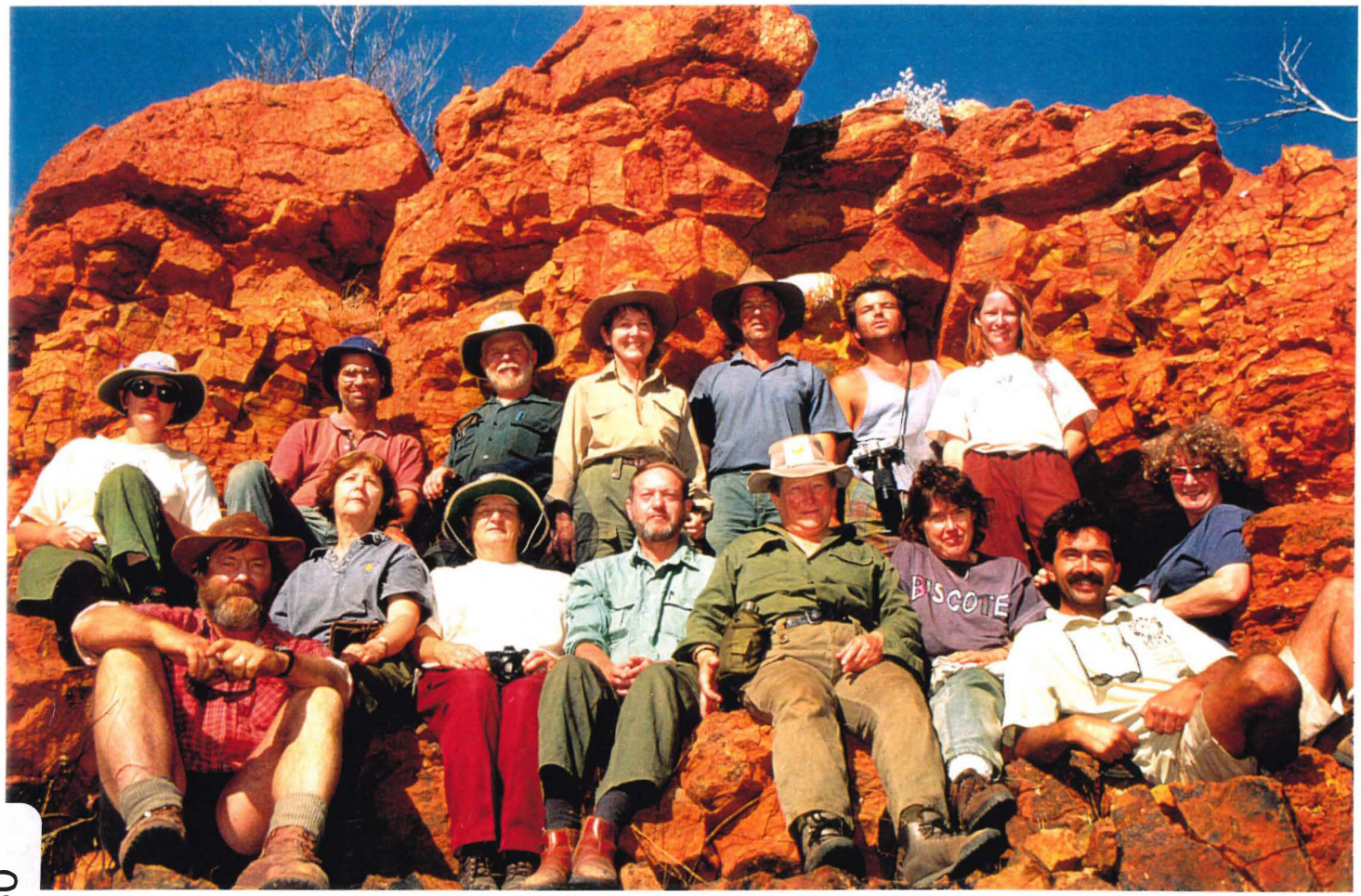
Gibson Desert Expedition Report 1995

On behalf of CALM and UWA Extension, we would like to thank all members of the Gibson Desert Expedition for their fantastic support both financially and physically and for making the trip such a success. The trapping, feral animal track counts, the vegetation surveys and sampling and the dalgyte survey continue to add to our knowledge in these arid areas. Thanks to Tom Keating, not only for the driving and cooking, but also for the group photo and photographs on page 12. Other photos supplied courtesy of Jean Paton (UWA).

All would have benefited from the opportunity to see and work in this remote area of Western Australia, camping under the stars and returning to nature.

We hope future *LANDSCOPE* Expeditions will have the pleasure of your company.

Graeme (Tub) Liddelow
Per Christensen



Members of the Gibson Desert *LANDSCOPE* Expedition 1995

PAM09050

EXPEDITION ACHIEVEMENTS

Feral Animal Track counts in the area baited in 1994.

Pit trapping in the baited and unbaited areas and the new site established by *LANDSCOPE* Expedition 1994.

Photographic records again of the 11 permanent vegetation sites within the study area.

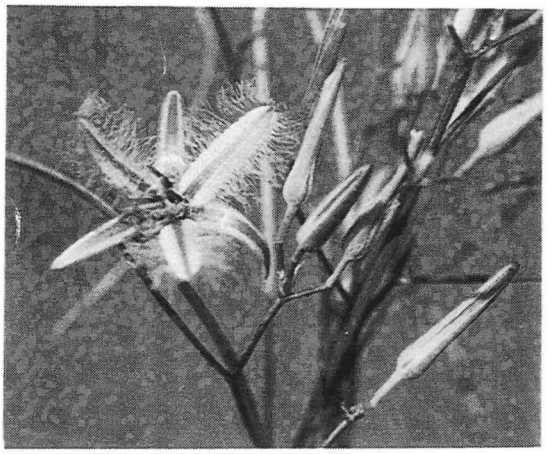
Vegetation samples collected from within the permanent sites in the study area plus opportunistic samples collected as we travelled around. It was the first time a botanist (Terry Macfarlane) had accompanied a *LANDSCOPE* Expedition to the Gibson Desert. New species (including a fringed lily) were collected.

Survey of 25 permanent sites checking on the activity of the dalgyte in the Gibson Desert.

The Air strip at Hussah was dragged to keep it serviceable not only for us but also for the Royal Flying Doctor Service in case of emergency, especially on the Gunbarrel Highway.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Kellie Agar, Beth and Alfred Haines, Coralie Hortin, Gail White, Graham Wontner, Judith Bensley, Coral Stewart and Diana Whyte





Dr Terry Macfarlane holding an undescribed species of Fringed Lily (*Thysanotus* sp. - see inset) discovered at the turn-off to the Tjirrkarli Community.

WHERE WE WENT

Perth to Gibson Desert (Eagle Camp) = 1615 km

Day 1 Perth to Wanjarri = 870 km

Day 2 Wanjarri to Carnegie = 475 km

Day 3 Carnegie to Gibson camp = 270 km

Day 4 in Gibson camp area

Day 5 in Gibson camp area

Day 6 in Gibson camp area

Day 7 Gibson camp to Young Ranges = 54 km

Day 8 in Young Ranges area

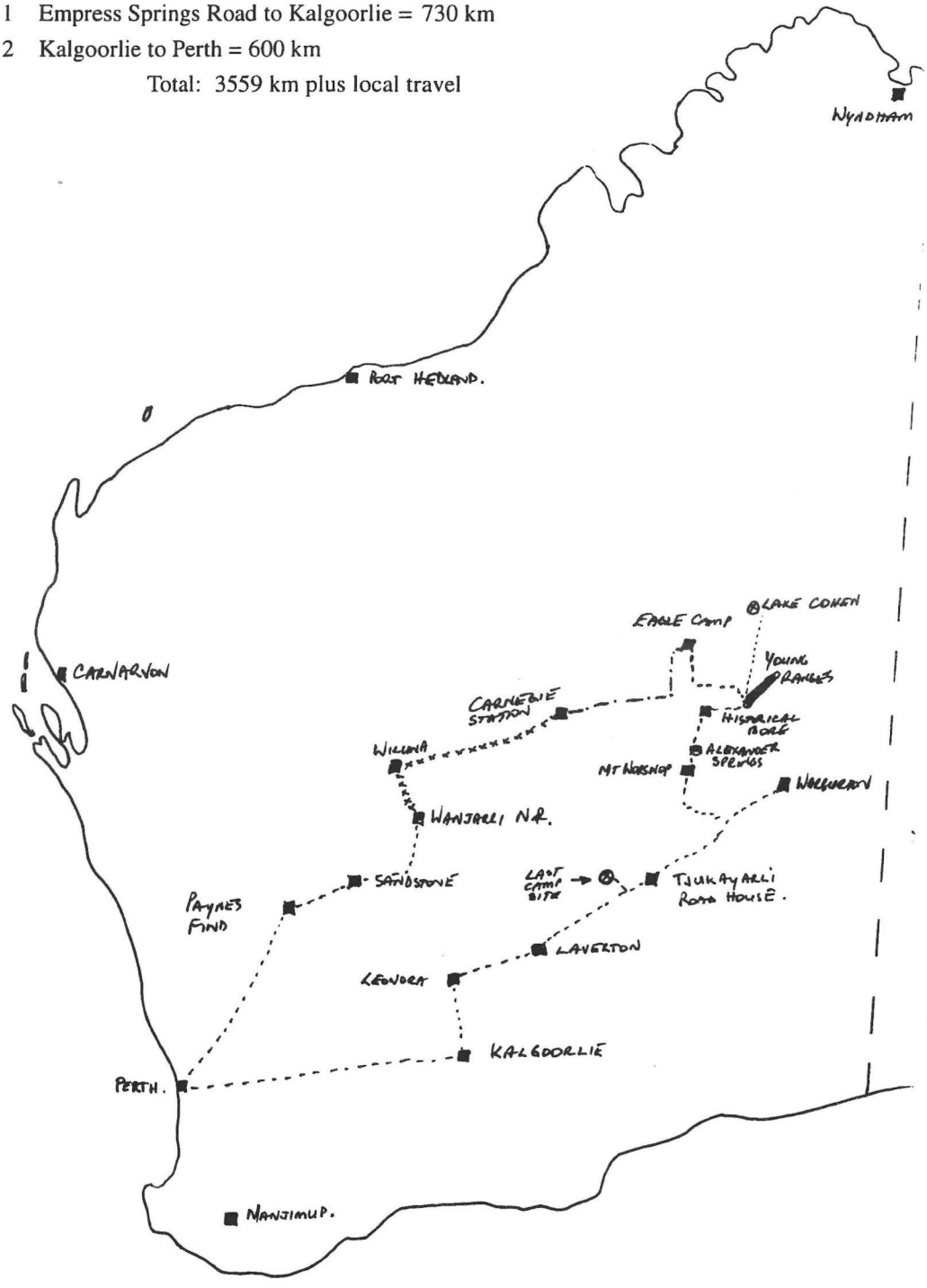
Day 9 Young Ranges to Alexander Springs = 160 km

Day 10 Alexander Springs to Empress Springs Road = 400 km

Day 11 Empress Springs Road to Kalgoorlie = 730 km

Day 12 Kalgoorlie to Perth = 600 km

Total: 3559 km plus local travel





Warren Christensen at the last night campsite on road to Empress Springs.



Petalostylis cassioides - an attractive shrub common at Camel Flat.



The desert landscape north of Eagle Bore Camp.

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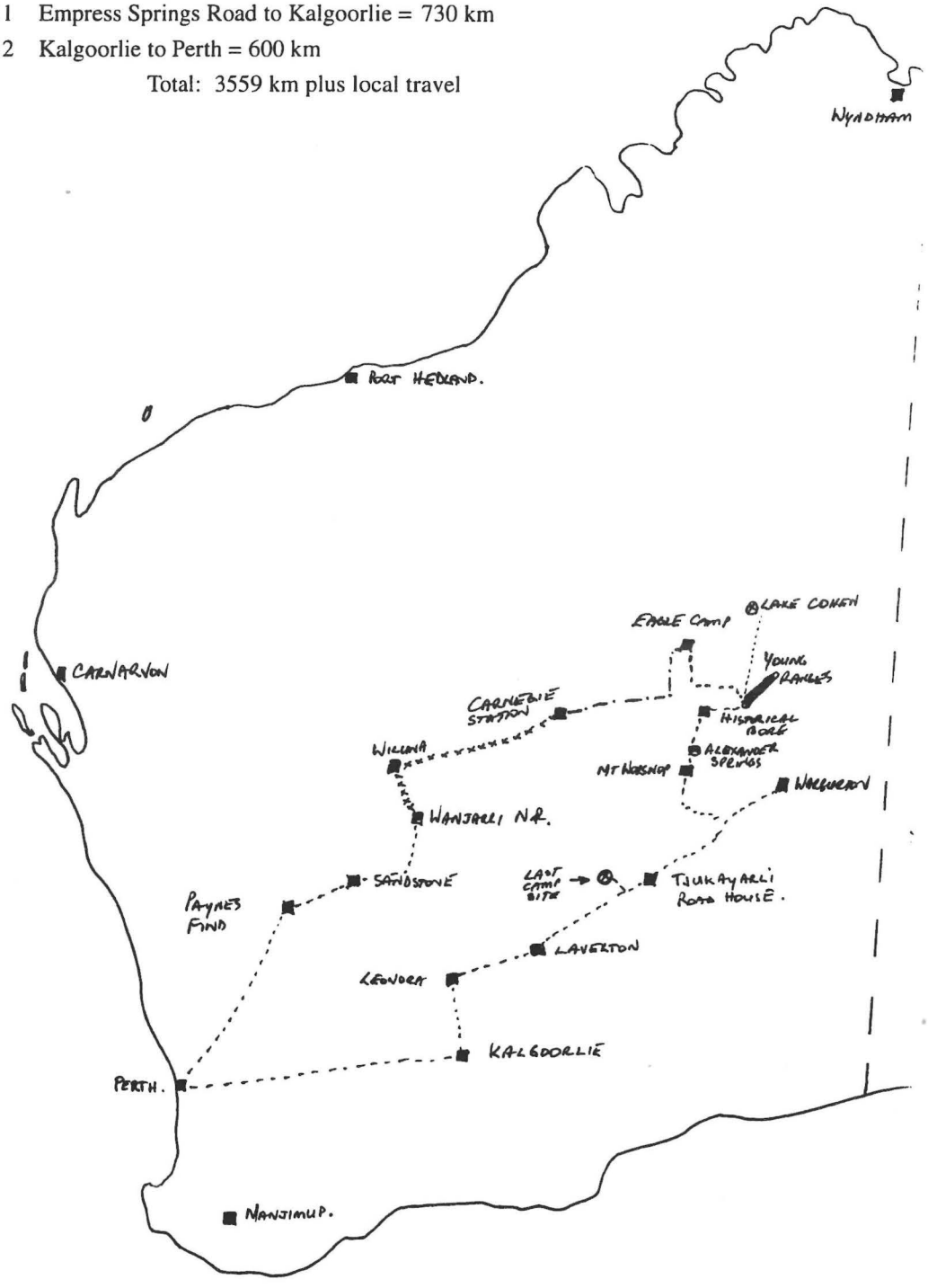
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DIARY OF GIBSON DESERT *LANDSCOPE* EXPEDITION 1995

Wednesday August 30 Assemble at UWA Extension with Per Christensen and Terry Macfarlane from CALM and Tom Keating (no relation to Paul) from Travelabout for an early start. The first day's trip is *via* the Great Northern Highway to Paynes Find then to Sandstone and on to Wanjarri Nature Reserve on the Wiluna/Leonora road for the overnight camp.

Thursday August 31 Leave Wanjarri and travel to Wiluna for fuel, a visit to Desert Gold Farms and then on to Carnegie Station, with stops for Terry to collect a special grass *(Neurachne minor).* Overnight at Carnegie Station.

Friday September 1 Gibson Desert here we come. Goodbye civilisation for a while. Morning tea at Mt Nossiter (Telegraph Hill) then on to Hussah Airstrip for lunch. Arrived at Eagle Camp and set up swags (hope they are safe out here in the Desert!) and helped Tom set up the mess area (or is it messy area?). Tub and Warren join the group after being way out west dragging roads and setting traps. More traps to set so one group goes with Tub to set these and another group goes with Terry to botanise on the claypan, leaving Tom with a small group to prepare the evening meal. After tea Per gave a slide show and talk on the Desert work done to date, directions for the future work in arid zones and then a rundown of tasks to be undertaken on this trip.

Saturday September 2 Up early and off to check the traps. One group is with Per to the compound area, one with Warren to the north (40 km) trapline, one with Terry on vegetation and the last group with Tub on the Western Trapline and also checking for cat tracks over a 25 km transect. Where does the morning go! The afternoon is spent collecting vegetation to the east of camp, in an area burnt one year ago, looking for birds (especially the Crimson Chat) and discovering a new dalgyte site. The Mulled wine after tea makes the rest of the day.....!

Sunday September 3 After early morning church service the groups head off to their respective traplines and Terry's group go vegetating again. Once again the morning disappears in a whirl and after lunch its up towards the northern trapline to look for dalgyte signs in one of the permanent plots. Unfortunately no luck and all signs were at least 18 months old. Definitely becoming warmer.

Monday September 4 Trappers away early again and Terry's valiant vegetators travel with Tub's terrific trappers to the western end, whilst Per and Warren's entourages head north and east. Coral had fun creating great clouds of dust way out west and bringing home the drag helped to subdue any enthusiasm the vegetators may have had left. After lunch people went in all directions, some to the burnt area in the east for vegetation and dalgytes, some with Tub to photograph the vegetation sites and others stayed with Jean in camp to paint some of the flora that had been collected or to paint scenes of the desert. Last night in Eagle Camp.

Tuesday September 5 Early start to go trapping as all pits have to be cleared today. Around the traps, closing lids, checking cat traps, last minute vegetation forays, then back to camp for packing up and last showers for 3 days then off to the Young Ranges. The overland "track" to the Young's has become overgrown with the vegetation that came up after Cyclone Bobby in February and is lost. The G.P.S. keeps us on track and we eventually arrive in the Young's and after setting up camp everybody goes exploring, especially up to the trig point.

Wednesday September 6 Today we divide into two teams, one with Per looking at 5 dalgyte sites from just north of the Young Ranges down to Gunbarrel Highway, the second group is with Tub and travel 70 km north of the Young's as far as Lake Cohen looking at 4 dalgyte sites along the way. All arrive back at the Young's mid afternoon feeling dejected as only one site 65 km north had any fresh evidence. The remainder of the day was spent looking at stick nest rat nests and exploring the Young Ranges. A pleasant evening was spent by some admiring the stars from the top of the Ranges.

Thursday September 7 Pack up camp and head down to the Gunbarrel topping up with water from the emergency tank on the way. West along the Gunbarrel to the Historical Bore then south down the Alexander Spring Road with 7 dalgyte sites to check before we reach our camp at the Spring. Another disappointing day as only one site had any fresh evidence. Arrived at the Spring late afternoon and after a walk up the creek to have a look at Alexander Spring we set up camp for our second last night in the desert.

Friday September 8 Eight dalgyte sites to check today on our way down to the Warburton road but first a climb up to the top of Mt Worsnop. No matter how many times I climb this hill it is always a magnificent experience sitting on top and surveying the surrounding desert landscape. Onward to the Warburton Road checking for dalgytes. Again another disappointing day. It is not until the last site that any fresh evidence is found. Where have all the dalgytes gone? The only bright spot of the day was the showers at Tjukayarli Roadhouse. Here we are informed the road to Empress

Springs is in "bad" condition, so we set up camp 10 km along the road for our last night in the desert. Oh what a display the sunset put on for us, and then the magnificent desert night lit by a full moon.

Saturday September 9 Kalgoorlie here we come. 320 km of gravel and then this smooth black stuff to drive on. Fuel and fast food stop at Leonora. A short tour of the Gwalia townsite then on to Kalgoorlie. Hot showers, white towels and Tom's night off from cooking. Ales later, off to bed - don't like walls or soft beds, give me a swag and the stars.

Sunday September 10 A morbid day - the end of the trip. Lots of other people and cars, trucks and things on our road... at least it is smooth. We arrive at UWA Extension and unload, then farewells as all depart for home and loved ones. Shark Bay for me tomorrow, then home in two weeks time. Gibson Desert *LANDSCOPE* 1995 had finally come to an end. It was an enjoyable time together but more importantly it was very successful with all targets achieved. Thank you for your support and excellent efforts.



Expedition leader Dr Per Christensen checking drift net lines with volunteer Coral Stewart.

BIRDS OF THE GIBSON - *LANDSCOPE* EXPEDITION 1995

Although very few birds were recorded on this trip, the list below represents those that we did see plus all the birds we have recorded from the study site and surrounds. No effort has been made to record numbers of individuals sighted, we have just concentrated on species and breeding records where possible.

No.	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	RAOU	1995
1.	Emu	*Dromaius novaehollandiae*	001*	#
2.	Pacific Heron	*Ardea pacifica*	189	
3.	White Faced Heron	*Ardrea novaehollandiae*	188	
4.	Straw-necked Ibis	*Threskiornis spinicollis*	180	
5.	Pacific Black Duck	*Anas superciliosa*	208	
6.	Black-shouldered Kite	*Elanus notatus*	232*	
7.	Black-breasted Buzzard	*Hamirostra melanosternon*	231	
8.	Brown Goshawk	*Accipiter fasciatus*	221*	#
9.	Collared Sparrowhawk	*Accipiter cirrhocephalus*	222	
10.	Wedge-tailed Eagle	*Aquila audax*	224	#
11.	Little Eagle	*Hieraaetus morphnoides*	225	#
12.	Spotted Harrier	*Circus asseimilis*	218	#
13.	Peregrine Falcon	*Falco perigrinus*	237	#
14.	Grey Falcon	*Falco hypoleucos*	236	#
15.	Brown Falcon	*Falco berigora*	239	#
16.	Australian Kestrel	*Falco cenchroides*	240*	#
17.	Stubble Quail	*Corturnix novaezealandiae*	009*	#
18.	Little Button-quail	*Turnix velox*	018*	
19.	Australian Bustard	*Ardeotis kori*	176	#
20.	Banded Lapwing	*Vanellus tricolor*	135	
21.	Inland Dotterel	*Peltohyas australis*	145	
22.	Black-fronted Plover	*Elseyornis melanops*	144	
23.	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	146	
24.	Silver Gull	*Larus novaehollandiae*	125	
25.	Diamond Dove	*Geopelia cuneata*	031	#
26.	Common Bronzewing	*Phaps chalcoptera*	034	
27.	Flock Bronzewing	*Phaps histrionica*	036	
28.	Crested Pigeon	*Geophaps lophotes*	043	
29.	Spinifex Pigeon	*Geophaps plumiferra*	042	#
30.	Galah	*Cacatura roseicapilla*	273*	#
31.	Pink Cockatoo	*Cacatura leadbeateri*	270	
32.	Little Corella	*Cacatura pastinator*	271	
33.	Cockatiel	*Leptolophus hollandicus*	274*	
34.	Budgerigar	*Melopsittacus undalatus*	310*	#
35.	Port Lincoln Ringneck	*Barnardius zonarius*	294	#
36.	Mulga Parrot	*Psephotus varius*	296	#
37.	Bourke's Parrot	*Neophema bourhii*	304*	
38.	Pallid Cuckoo	*Cuculus pallidus*	337	#
39.	Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoo	*Chrysococcyx basilis*	342	#
40.	Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	*Chrysococcyx lucidus*	344	#
41.	Barn Owl	*Tyto alba*	249	
42.	Tawny Frogmouth	*Podargus strigoides*	313	
43.	Spotted Nightjar	*Eurostopodus argus*	331*	
44.	Red-backed Kingfisher	*Halcyon pyrrhopygia*	325*	#
45.	Tree Martin	*Hirundo nigricans*	359	#
46.	Fairy Martin	*Cecropin ariel*	360	#
47.	Richard's Pipit	*Anthus novaehollandia*	647	#
48.	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	*Coracina novaehollandiae*	424	#
49.	White-winged Triller	*Lalage tricolor*	430*	#
50.	Red-capped Robin	*Petroica goodenovii*	381	#
51.	Hooded Robin	*Melanodryas cucullata*	385	#
52.	Rufous Whistler	*Pachycephala rufiventris*	401	

No.	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	RAOU	1995
53.	Grey Shrike-thrush	*Colluricincla harmonica*	408*	#
54.	Crested Bellbird	*Oreoica gutturalis*	419*	#
55.	Willie Wagtail	*Rhipidura leucophrys*	364*	#
56.	Chiming Wedgebill	*Psophodes occidentalis*	865	#
57.	Chestnut Quail-thrush	*Cinclosoma castanotum*	437	
58.	Cinnamon Quail-thrush	*Cinclosoma cinnamomeum*	440*	
59.	Grey-crowned Babbler	*Pomatostomus temporalis*	443	#
60.	White-crowned Babbler	*Pomatostomus superciliosus*	445	#
61.	Spinifex Bird	*Eremiornis carteri*	507	#
62.	Rufous Songlark	*Cinclorhamphus mathewsi*	509	
63.	Brown Songlark	*Cinclorhamphus cruralis*	508	#
64.	Variegated Fairy-wren	*Malurus lamberti*	536	
65.	White-winged Fairy-wren	*Malurus leucopterus*	535	#
66.	Rufous-crowned Emu-wren	*Stipiturus ruficeps*	528	
67.	Striated Grasswren	*Amytornis striatus*	513	#
68.	Inland Thornbill	*Acanthiza apicalis*	476	
69.	Chestnut-rumped Thornbill	*Acanthiza uropygialis*	481	
70.	Southern Whiteface	*Aphelocephala leucopis*	466*	#
71.	Banded Whiteface	*Aphelocephala nigricincta*	469*	#
72.	Varied Sitella	*Daphoenositta chrysoptera*	549	
73.	Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	*Acanthagenys rufogularis*	640	
74.	Yellow-throated Minor	*Manorina flavigula*	635	#
75.	Singing Honeyeater	*Lichenostomus virescens*	608	#
76.	Grey-headed Honeyeater	*Lichenostomus keartlandi*	621	#
77.	White-plumed Honeyeater	*Lichenostomus penisillatus*	625	
78.	Black Honeyeater	*Certhionyx niger*	589	
79.	Pied Honeyeater	*Certhionyx variegatus*	602*	#
80.	Crimson Chat	*Ephthianura tricolor*	449*	#
81.	White-fronted Chat	*Ephthianura albifrons*	448	#
82.	Mistletoebird	*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*	564	#
83.	Painted Firetail Finch	*Emblema picta*	654	
84.	Zebra Finch	*Taeniopygia guttata*	653*	#
85.	Masked Woodswallow	*Artamus personatus*	544*	#
86.	Black-faced Woodswallow	*Artamus cinereus*	546	#
87.	Little Woodswallow	*Artamus minor*	548	
88.	Pied Butcherbird	*Cracticus nigrogularis*	700	#
89.	Australian Magpie	*Gymnorhina tibicen*	705	
90.	Little Crow	*Corvus bennetti*	691	#

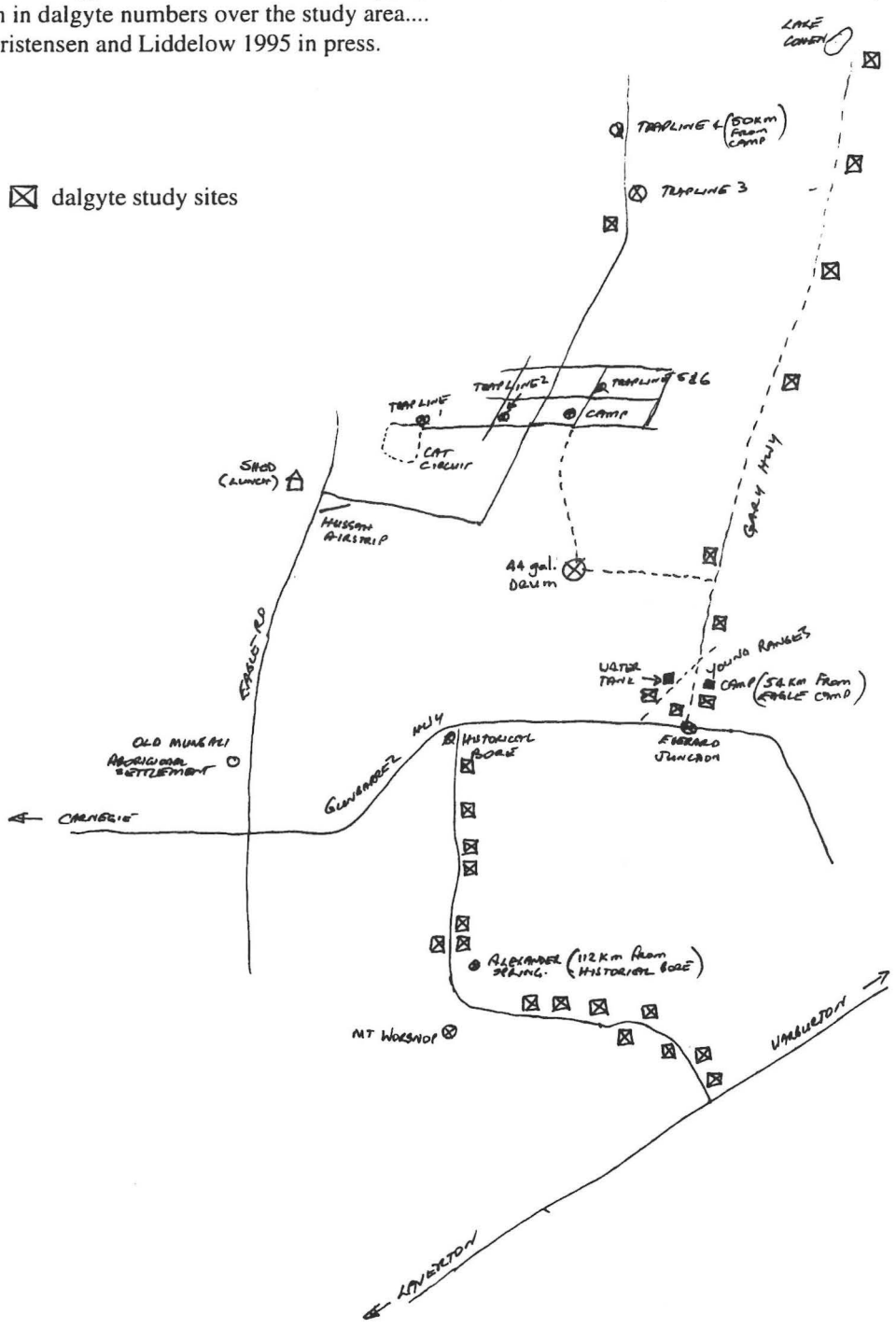
* breeding records
\# recorded during 1995

DALGYTE SURVEY 1995

Twenty-five sites were visited and surveyed during this expedition, of them only four showed any fresh evidence of dalgyte activity. The table below shows the recorded activity of these sites since we started monitoring them in 1988. Not all sites are visited each year.

ESTIMATED AGE OF DIGGING	NUMBER OF MONITORING SITES VISITED EACH YEAR															
	1988	%	1989	%	1990	%	1991	%	1992	%	1993	%	1994	%	1995	%
0-3 months	3	60	21	55	3	60	5	24	2	10	1	14	4	22	4	16
3-6 months	1	20	3	8	1	20	1	5	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
6-12 months	1	20	8	21	0	0	0	0	2	10	1	14	2	11	1	4
12 + months	0	0	6	16	1	20	15	71	15	75	5	72	12	67	20	80
TOTAL	**0**	**100**	**38**	**100**	**5**	**100**	**21**	**100**	**21**	**100**	**7**	**100**	**18**	**100**	**25**	**100**

These results suggest a reduction in recent digging activity at the monitory sites which can only by interpreted as a reduction in dalgyte numbers over the study area....
From Christensen and Liddelow 1995 in press.



FERAL CAT TRACKS

25 km of track was dragged in the baited area until the surface was powdery to make animal tracks easily visible. The track was inspected each morning for the four days of trapping and all feral tracks were noted and an index of animal numbers calculated.
The track was swept clean after each day's inspection. The track index of feral animals is shown in the table

	CATS		DOGS		FOXES	
	1995	1994	1995	1994	1995	1994
1ST NIGHT	4	12.5	0	0	0	0
2ND NIGHT	12	6.25	4	0	0	0
3RD NIGHT	12	9.4	0	3.1	4	0
4TH NIGHT	12	6.25	0	3.1	0	0
MEAN	**10**	**8.59**	**1**	**1.5**	**1**	**0**

No track counts were carried out in the unbaited area this year and the baited area was last baited in March 1994. The table below shows the difference in track index's in both baited and unbaited since 1993.

DATE	BAITED	UNBAITED
MARCH 1993	35 (pre baiting)	35
MAY 1994	32 (post baiting)	52
JUNE 1994	20 (post baiting)	32
SEPTEMBER 1994	8.5 (post baiting)	35
SEPTEMBER 1995	10 (post baiting)	No records

The aerial baiting in March 1994 has had a significant impact on cat numbers. It will be interesting to see any increase in cat numbers in 1996 if no further baitings are carried out.



Veteran expeditioner Coralie Horton, on her third Gibson Desert trip, botanising at Camel Flat.

TRAPPING RESULTS 1995

WEST (BAITED 1994)	NORTH (UNBAITED)	EAST (UNBAITED)
02-09-1995		
Ningaui ridei (2)	*Ctenophorus isolepis gularis*	Mus musculus
Sminthopsis crassicaudata		
Pseudomys desertor		
Pseudomys hermansburgensis (3)		
Mus. musculus (2)		
Ctenotus pantherinus ocellifer (C.P.O.) (4)		
Diplodactylus elderii		
Heterontia binoei		
03-09-1995		
Smnithopsis crassicaudata	*Pseudomys hermansburgensis*	*Mus musculus*
Pseudomys hermansburgensis	*C.P.O.* (2)	*Diplodactylus elderii*
C.P.O. (5)		
Omolopidia branchialis		
Diplodactylus elderii		
Delma nasuta (2)		
Delma borea		
04-09-1995		
Sminthopsis crassicaudata	*Pseudomys desertor*	*Mus musculus*
Pseudomys desertor (2)	*Pseudomys hermansburgensis*	*Delma borea*
Mus musculus	*Mus musculus*	*Delma nasuta* (2)
C.P.O.	*Delma borea* (3)	*Delma tincta*
Ctenotus catenifer	*C.P.O.*	*Diplodactylus elderii*
Diplodactylus elderii (2)	*Varanus branchialis*	*Morethia ruficorda*
Delma nasuta		
Omolopedia branchialis		
05-09-1995		
Sminthopsis crassicaudata (2)	*Mus musculus*	*Delma borea* (2)
Pseudomys hermansburgensis		*Delma nasuta*
Ningaui ridei		*Diplodactylus elderii* (4)
Ctenotus catenifer		*C.P.O.*
Varanus brevicaudata		
Omolopedia branchialis (4)		
Delma borea		
Diplodactylus elderii		
Lerista bipes		

SUMMARY

	WEST (BAITED)		NORTH (UNBAITED)		EAST (UNBAITED)	
	1995	1994	1995	1994	1995	1994
MAMMALS	19	7	5	13	3	no records
SKINKS	19	6	4	16	2	
PYGOPODS	6	2	3	4	7	
MONITORS	1	0	1	2	0	
DRAGONS	0	0	1	6	8	
GECKOES	6	2	0	1	8	
TOTAL	**54**	**17**	**14**	**42**	**20**	

Trapping results from 1994 have been included in this summary to show the comparison between the baited (West) and unbaited (North) results of last year (the East trapping line was not in operation in 1994). Next year's results will be very interesting.

BOTANICAL NOTES: GIBSON DESERT, *LANDSCOPE* EXPEDITION 1995

by Terry Macfarlane

We were fortunate to have a good display of everlastings and other ground flora along the great Northern Highway *en route* to the Gibson Desert. Everyone soon became familiar with the masses of pink *Velleia rosea* (Goodeniaceae) and, in dryer parts, the introduced Rosy Dock *Rumex vesicarius*. However the splendour of the floral show lessened as we travelled eastward, and in the Gibson Desert it was only moderate. Although the spectacle was less, there was nevertheless a reasonable flowering, and many species were seen.

Our combined efforts resulted in 195 collections (it would have been 196 but for the famous "Lost Grass", which fell out of my rucksack after being collected, and no more could be found). For all the collections, particularly full habitat details and notes on colour etc. were recorded. Thus this collection plus those of previous expeditions will combine to make a fine record of the flora of the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve in its present relatively undisturbed state, once the identifications are completed. There have been very few detailed collections made from defined areas in the Western Australian deserts. This collection is enhanced by the fact that the area has been visited several times in different seasonal conditions. There is also a fine collection of photographs from an earlier trip. Unquestionably, the participation of the *LANDSCOPE* volunteers have made possible the completeness of the collections and the quantity of data recorded. It would have been beyond one person to have done that quantity of spotting, snipping, tagging, bagging, recording and pressing.

Interesting aspects of this expedition included the extra information forthcoming as a result of Coralie Hortin's previous visits. For example we were able to see Sturt's Desert Pea (*Swainsona formosa*, formerly *Clianthus formosus*) at the exact place seen by earlier visitors, and to compare the extent of its growth and flowering with earlier seasons. Regrettably there were few plants to be seen this year, but there were enough to reassure us that the population still persists. Similarly, Coralie was able to revisit a particular tree next to which there was a colony of "Coralie's Creeper" (Convolvulaceae, not yet identified with certainty), which had so intrigued her previously.

Some of the more interesting plants seen during the trip included the Upside Down Plant (*Leptosema chambersii*), with its red flowers clustered around the base at ground level, the odd-looking Caustic Bush, the mallees with large, fluted fruits (*Eucalyptus youngiana* and *E. kingsmillii*), the attractive silvery inflorescences of the *Plectrachne* spinifex grass, the succulent parakeelya (*Calandrinia* species), and the brilliant flowers of the sandhill Grevilleas (*G.juncifolia* and *G.*sp. - unidentified as yet, possibly un-named). There were also the native Tobacco (*Nicotiana* sp.) from the Young Range, the Nardoo fern (*Marsilea drummondii*), with its four-leaf clover-like appearance, which we found beside the stream near Alexander Spring, the Desert Black Boy (*Xanthorrhoea thorntonii*) east of Laverton, and of course the Fringed Lily (*Thysanotus* sp.) which was found for us by the camel, who forced us to stop for lunch at that particular place.

The expedition enabled collections and observations to be made of several species that are particularly important scientifically speaking. Early in the trip, beside the Gunbarrel Highway on Carnegie Station, we collected seeds of *Neurachne minor*, a grass of special interest because it has a virtually unique means of producing sugars from the sun through a particular variant of the process of photosynthesis that is intermediate between the main two versions of the process, namely the C3 and C4 processes. Seeds were required by a researcher in Darwin who wishes to study the process further. A related species, *Neurachne lanigera*, is regarded as rare, although there is some doubt as to how rare it is because it occurs in the desert regions of Western and South Australia. A lookout was kept for this species throughout the trip but none were seen, so this tends to confirm that the species is rather rare and may require protection at the few sites where it is known. Another grass, *Monachather paradoxa*, which only occurs in the inland, was needed by some researchers in Sydney and the United States for analysis of its DNA. This was in order to help work out relationships between various grasses. We were able to find good plants at "Camel Flat" and to preserve leaves in alcohol (laboratory, not drinking grade). A Canadian researcher studying the genus *Wurmbea* was interested in material of *W. deserticola* (Desert Nancy). Although prior to the expedition I had asserted confidently that there would be no trouble getting her some material of this species, it was not so easy in practice. We found only one plant, near the water tank south of the Young Range, but this was sufficient because it had seeds. Finally, the Fringed Lily again: this was an excellent find because this particular species is un-named and we lacked information about its habitat, root system and the colours and other aspects of the flower parts, which are important features for distinguishing species in this genus. We were also able to photograph the species. Consequently a better description of the species can now be published, and we can better differentiate the three or four desert Fringed Lilies. This species is to receive a name meaning desert-loving, and many volunteers will be able to guess what I mean from the genus name of another group of plants who, like us, love deserts.