

THE ORD RIVER AREA

The Ord River Scheme with its major waterways is the first attempt to develop on a major scale in Northern Australia, the vast resources of land and water which are available for irrigated agriculture. The vast concept and far reaching potential of the scheme has caused considerable interest and some controversy throughout Australia and overseas. One effect of this has been to draw, for the first time into the East Kimberley, an increasing number of visitors, and even those who came to criticise were gripped by an excitement for the area.

Harnessing Northern Rivers.

The potential for harnessing northern rivers was realised many years ago and the Ord River Project is the result of careful investigation and planning. In 1941 a small experimental farm was established on the Ord and possible dam sites were investigated upstream. In 1945 this small experimental farm was abandoned and the Kimberley Research Station was established on Ivanhoe Plain - part of the 30,000 acre area now irrigated from the Kununurra Diversion Dam - as a joint Commonwealth-State venture. Crop trials were carried out over 12 years and it was found that under irrigation, cotton, safflower, linseed and sugar cane would flourish in the area.

By 1958 the W.A. Government was convinced of the viability of an irrigation scheme on the Ord. The Federal Government agreed to share the cost of Stage 1 of the project and this was completed in 1963. The Kununurra Diversion Dam and associated works cost about \$20 million - of which the Commonwealth contributed \$12 million. By 1966 the 31 farms irrigated from the Diversion Dam had been allocated - their average size, 660 acres. Cotton from the Ord farms is processed in two ginneries, baled and road-freighted to Wyndham for export. The town of Kununurra was built to serve the scheme. By the time the project is fully developed, Kununurra will be the largest town in the Kimberley. Planners envisage an eventual population of 20,000 in the Ord valley.

Produce

Work carried out at the Kimberley Research Station has shown that with irrigation, certain tropical crops can be grown successfully on the Ord River flats. The area also has a potential for growing peanuts and other nut crops which are able to attract overseas markets. Safflower and rice have been grown commercially on a small scale. However, since farming began in 1963 the main crop on the land irrigated from the Kununurra Diversion Dam in Stage 1 of the project has been cotton. In 1967 the Commonwealth Government agreed to provide finance for Stage 2. Current planning provides for the irrigation of 128,000 acres in W.A. and 50,000 acres in N.T.

When the scheme is complete, primary production from the areas sown to irrigated crops is expected to be worth between \$30 million and \$40 million a year. The cattle industry, the most important in the Kimberley, is also expected to benefit from the scheme. At present many station cattle are run on unfenced properties - some of them up to a million acres - without the benefit of supplementary feeding. There are heavy losses among breeders toward the end of the dry season. These losses are expected to be reduced by feeding protein meal to stock during the critical dry period. This could be made from cotton seed, linseed or safflower after the oil has been extracted. Grain sorghum is another crop which grows well in the Ord Valley and which has great potential either as stock fodder or grain for export.

## Damming the Ord

Two dams were planned, a diversion dam on Bandicoot Bar and a major storage dam in the Carr-Boyd Ranges about 30 miles upstream. The purpose of the Kununurra Diversion Dam is to divert water from the Ord River into the supply channels. The principal function of the storage reservoir is to hold a vast quantity of water in reserve and release it in a controlled manner to keep the Diversion Dam full.

The Diversion Dam consists basically of a concrete spillway 1,100 feet long with earth and rockfill embankments on each side, together with almost 3 miles of low levee banks. The spillway comprises a broad concrete sill keyed into the natural rock. Set on top of the sill are 20 radial gates, 49 feet wide and 37 feet high, weighing 95 tons each. These can be opened up to pass without interference the high wet season floods. Stored behind the Diversion Dam are 80,000 acre feet of water. The Ord River carries a large silt load caused by erosion in the catchment area. The Government took steps in 1961 and following years to control the problem by resuming 1,200 square miles of pastoral leases and carrying out a major catchment rehabilitation programme.

The Ord River Dam is an embankment containing an impervious clay core protected on both sides by gravel filters and supported by rockfill. The top of the embankment is approximately 220 feet above stream-bed and is constructed from 2.4 million cubic yards of fill materials. In its deepest part the embankment foundation is approximately 100 feet below river-bed level. The spillway consists of an open channel cut through a rock saddle approximately five miles from the dam and has a flow capacity of 80,000 cubic feet per second. The area of the lake formed by the Ord River Dam is 286 square miles at normal full supply level and 800 square miles at maximum flood capacity.

## Kununurra

The development of Kununurra began in 1960. It is unique in that it was designed for tropical living and laid out to modern town planning methods. Houses were built to form a community with the farmers commuting to their blocks from the town. It is approximately 1,500 air miles from Perth and is the hub around which the Ord Irrigation Project revolves.

## History of the Region

The first reports of the region were made by Alexander Forrest after his Kimberley exploration of 1875 - 1879, when he followed the valleys of the two major rivers - the Fitzroy and the Ord.

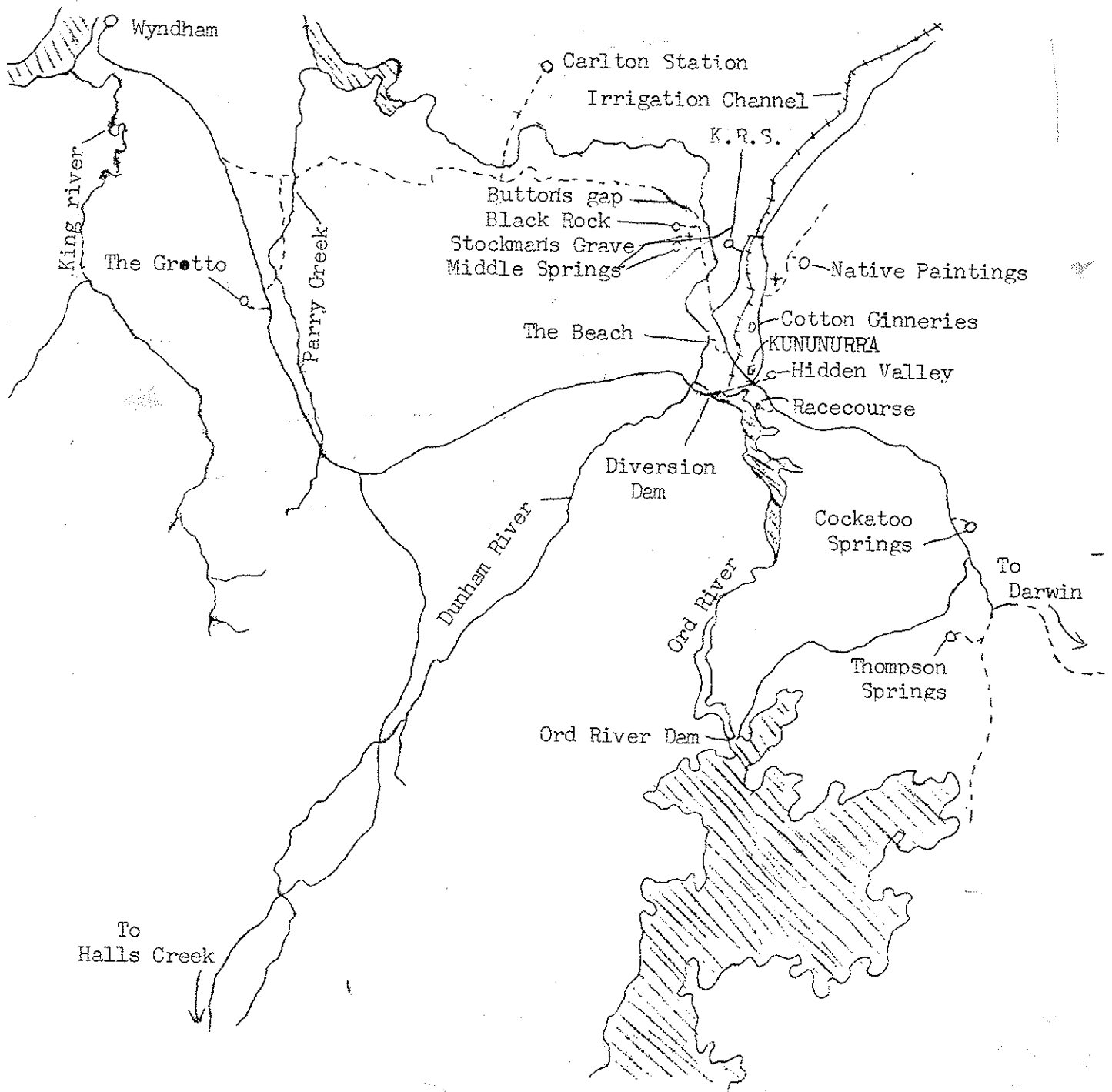
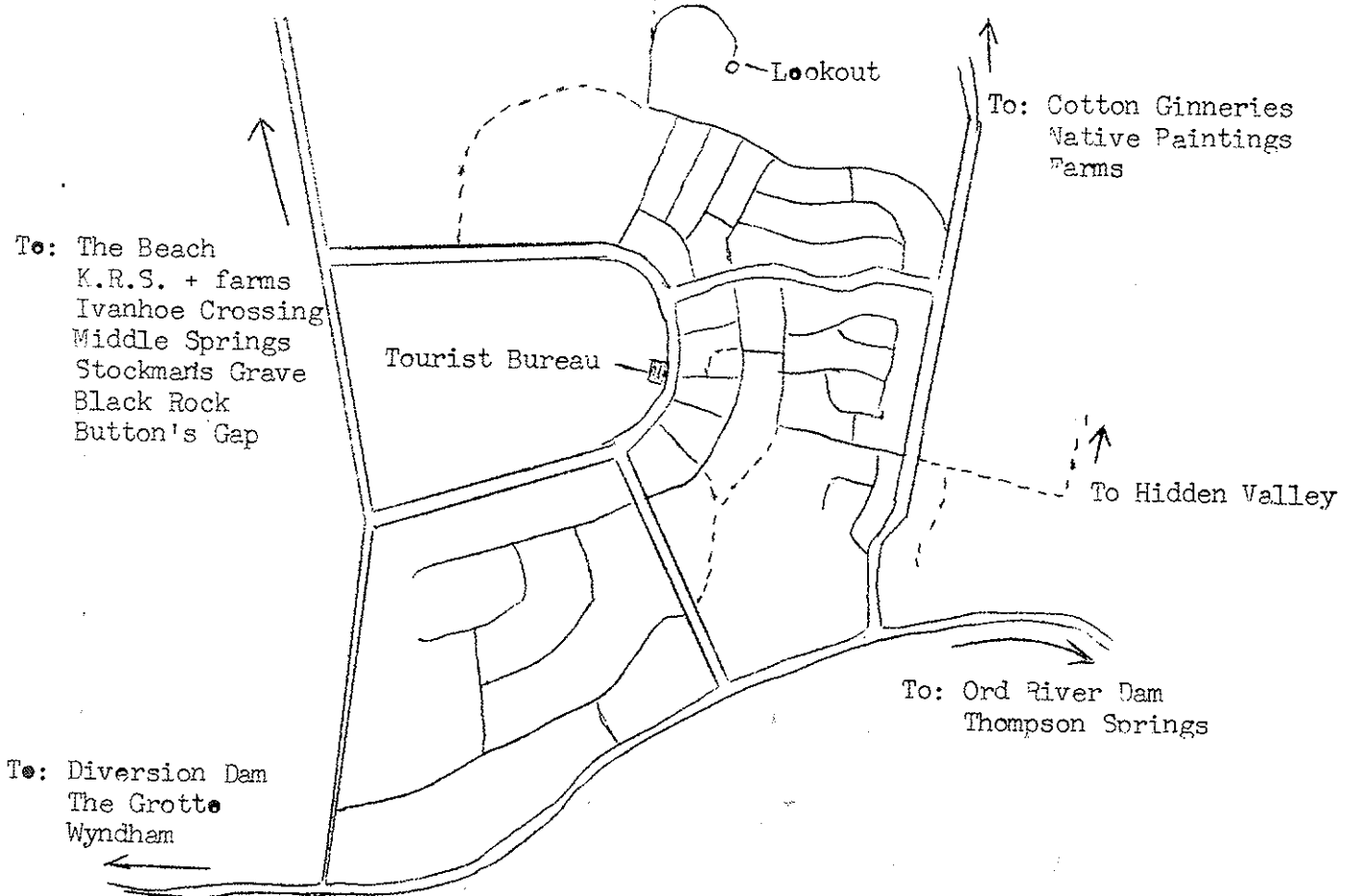
The initial settlement of the region came from the east with the establishment of Ord River Station in 1884. The Durack family arrived in the area in 1885 and established Argyle, Lissadell and Rosewood Stations. Then in 1894 they also established Ivanhoe Station, which, when destroyed by fire in 1950, was later rebuilt where it now stands at Ivanhoe Crossing.

Argyle homestead provides a vital historical link with the early history of the cattle industry, and being the only structure of any architectural merit which would be flooded by the dam, a decision was made that it be dismantled and re-erected at a selected site. The building will serve partly as a museum, and displays will be arranged of old implements and other items of interest which are associated with the early history of the region.

## Aboriginal Tribes

The Ord region was originally occupied by the Gadgerong and Miriwun tribes. The remnants of these two tribes are to be found at Kununurra and on surrounding stations. Within 20 years of the first settlement, many of the aborigines became absorbed into station life and they displayed excellent aptitude as stockmen. Although the aborigines have abandoned their nomadic existence, their traditional life is still operative and they attend ceremonial gatherings occasionally.

KUNUNURRA AND SURROUNDING AREA



## PLACES OF INTEREST

(Total mileages from Kununurra Post Office in brackets after name.)

PLEASE NOTE: Extreme caution should be used when negotiating sand tracks. We suggest you do not tow a caravan or trailer or use heavily overloaded vehicles.

✓ Kelly's Knob Lookout (1.5 miles)

A panoramic view of the township, diversion dam, farming areas and the surrounding Ord Valley can be seen from the Kelly's Knob Lookout.

[ Hidden Valley (1.8 miles)

Hidden Valley is a series of gorges made up of unusual and interesting rock formations. There is abundant bird life and a quick eye will discover many geodes (rock eggs).

↙ Ord River Dam (45 miles)

The recently completed Ord River Dam is set in scenery typical of the rugged beauty of the Kimberley region. Sailing is becoming popular here, and conditions are excellent for swimming and water skiing also.

Thompson Springs (28 miles)

Turn right off Duncan Highway on the old road to Nicholson. Here a stream flows through lush tropic growth into a small pool affording conditions excellent for picnics with safe swimming for children.

Diversion Dam (3.6 miles)

Situated on Duncan Highway, this dam supplies all irrigation water to the present farming area, the water being pumped along a main irrigation channel running through the heart of the farming area. Water skiing and swimming are very popular here.

The Grotto (43.3 miles)

Turn left off Duncan Highway 100 yards on the Wyndham side of Soda Creek. This is a rock bound water hole, good for swimming, except when the creek is running. During the wet season water spills over a sheer rock face 35 feet high into the pool, which has not yet been plumbed. From the cairn on the rock wall steps have been built down to the pool.

Wyndham (66 miles)

In 1885 gold was discovered at Halls Creek, and the rush of prospectors arriving at Cambridge Gulf route to the goldfields resulted in the port of Wyndham being established in 1886, named in honour of the son of Lady Broome. It is the port through large quantities of produce from the Ord Irrigation Area is shipped to other Australian ports and overseas.

The Beach (7 miles)

Turn left opposite the second shed on right and follow the winding track (past piggery on left) to the river. Tall shading gum trees and grassy banks make this a popular picnic and swimming spot for families of all ages.

Kimberley Research Station (10.5 miles)

The Station was established at its present site, opposite the old Ivanhoe homestead in 1945. It is operated as a Commonwealth-State project and is engaged mainly in experimentation with crops most suitable for the area, pest control of same, etc.

Ivanhoe Crossing (7.5 miles)

This is a popular fishing spot and is good for swimming, but can be dangerous when the river is flowing.

Middle Springs (12.5 miles)

Middle Springs is a series of pools fed by seasonal rains, and is a more popular spot amongst the younger set as there's a bit of climbing involved.

Stockman's Grave (11.5 miles)

This is the grave of David Suttle, a well known Kimberley stockman, and character of Jennie Gunn's book "We of the Never Never".

Black Rock (12.5 miles)

This is a rock bound swimming hole, fed by a high waterfall during the wet season rains. It is a very popular swimming spot.

Button's Gap (12.7 miles)

On Parry Creek road (continuing for 3.4 miles) is Button's Gap, named after the first manager of Ord River Station, Bob Button. Bon discovered the Gap when he was a member of Buchanan's driving team in 1884. For many years Button's Gap formed part of the main road between Wyndham and Ivanhoe.

Cotton Ginneries (3.8 miles)

The two ginneries are operated by the Ord River District Co-operative on behalf of the farmers. They are capable of processing 15-20 x 500 lb. bales per hour each. During the height of the picking season both operate 24 hours daily.

Native Paintings (8.4 miles)

Take the right turn before the spray plane airstrip which will bring you to some rocky hills on your right. Amongst these unusual rock formations you will find several native paintings of wildlife and people.

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Half day tours of the local area are as follows:-

- (a) Comprehensive briefing on the Kimberleys and Ord River Project, visit beef cattle feedlots, Ivanhoe Station and river crossing, cotton farms, Kimberley Research Station, cotton ginneries, diversion dam, Hidden Valley, inspect Kununurra and lookouts.
- (b) Through picturesque Kimberley cattle country to Lake Argyle and visiting major spillway development, Ord Settlement village and lookouts, Main Ord River Dam, tunnel discharges.
- (c) River cruise on Diversion dam visiting Elephant Rock, native cave paintings and sunsets, great for the camera fan. Also abundant wildlife.