

Looking west across the sandy bed of the Ord from "Dortch's Diggings".

OPERATION

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At the time of going to press Operation Ord Noah had reached a temporary standstill. This lull in the rescue activities was caused by the unseasonable dry weather experienced in the Kimberleys in the past few months. Although the major part of the rescue work is yet to be done a tremendous amount of groundwork, planning and surveying has been carried out during Phase 1.

Phase 1 began with the arrival of Mr Henry Hall at the dam site on December 17, 1971. At the dam site, he was joined by Fauna Wardens Bob Dear (Onslow), and Geoff Hanley (Wyndham), and on the following day by Departmental Fleet Maintenance Officer, Mr. Bert Lee. Cyclone "Sally" had recently passed over the area and reports had been received that the Ord catchment area was flooding rapidly. However, these reports proved to be somewhat exaggerated, for although there was a vast expanse of water it was obvious that the water level was not rising very rapidly. Mr Hall reported: "The water has reached a level at which Mr Beeck and I had agreed we would begin rescue operations **if the water was still rising**".

As will be apparent from the following summary of the co-ordinators' field diaries, part of the first

phase involved the removal of cattle from islands in the flood area. Many of the larger islands will become permanent refuges for wildlife. If the cattle had been allowed to remain they would have destroyed the future habitat of these animals. Of no less importance were the dangers they presented to would-be rescuers; some of the bulls were extremely fierce and had they not been removed they would have made subsequent rescues extremely hazardous. During the month they were present for Phase 1 the team cleared all the smaller islands of mammals and reptiles. But until more rain falls and the rising water breaks the larger islands into smaller ones, no further rescue work can be undertaken. The team plan to return as soon as the water level has risen 5 to 10 feet **and is still continuing to rise**. Despite the first-rate camping facilities, and the unstinting co-operation of the Public Works Department, the first phase was certainly no picnic. The following summaries of Mr Hall's and Mr Beeck's daily field diaries show that a tremendous amount of valuable work was done in extremely arduous conditions and that, despite the many dangers and discomforts, the team remained in excellent spirits throughout.



The same scene as above after Cyclone Sally. A



"digging" before Cyclone Sally. Carr Boyd Ranges in background.

ORD NOAH

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December 18 (Hall)

Lee and I travelled upstream to locate islands and try to drive cattle. Located 4 small islands with feral cats and wallabies.

Destroyed cats, but will have to trap wallabies. Located 60 to 70 cattle belly-deep on a land rise in the water. Though hampered by the tops of trees and bushes, we succeeded in starting to swim cattle to mainland about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile away. Did well until leaders shied away from object in water and mob started milling. It was necessary to shoot the three leaders to start the herd moving again. Doing fine until calf left behind belated and the whole herd turned and swam back to the belly-deep patch and would not budge again.

Proceeded upstream, had good look around. Pegged water levels and returned to base. Debris is thick in water—have damaged one prop.

December 19 (Hall)

Lee and I chartered 'plane and flew upstream about 30 miles past the Bow-Ord junction. The trip was very worthwhile; we got a very good picture of the flood boundaries and marked in unknown (by boat) islands for future examina-

tion. Upstream the river was not affected by the flooding and was running about half the capacity of its high flood mark.

We have about 18 small islands on which we have to destroy feral cats, move cattle and trap marsupials. I do not think we need the whole team yet but would like my son Ian to come up about Christmas Eve to act as boatman which is a pretty onerous job among the trees. Another 20 feet of water will make for much better going.

In evening we set traps on some nearby islands.

December 20 (Hall)

Did big drive on cattle that are standing belly-deep in water, but without much success. The bulls charge on the slightest provocation and can obtain good speed in shallow water. Had to shoot down several charging beasts when boat stuck in mud or motor stalled—hence request for .303's and Ian Hall to act as rifleman or boatman. This will give double the fire power from each boat, leaving a man at the tiller. This sounds a bit dramatic but there are no trees to climb and the water in the area is too shallow to hide under so it is a dead bull or I don't know what. Decided to try and clear a few cattle from another big island.



ly. Approximately 60ft of water above river bed.



Project co-ordinators Neville Beeck (left) and Henry Hall. Both are ardent conservationists and farmers from Katanning and Dangin respectively. They have been members of the Western Australian Wildlife Authority since its inception



Had a very nasty moment when a "dropped" bull got up and pursued Hanley who fell heavily on stones. Got a solid stream of .44's into bull who decided to die. Hanley had got to his feet and had made the boat very smartly indeed, leaving me with sweating hands on the rifle and a very dry mouth—must be getting old!

December 21 (Hall)

With the assistance of Graham Bell, Manager of Argyle Station, we did a successful cattle drive. The chopper drove the cattle headlong into the water and before they could turn we slid the boats in between them and the land and forced them into deep water. Once they were swimming we had them and then ensued an hour or two swim to land. Rescued 147 today.

December 22 (Hall)

Tried all morning to get 70 cattle from one island and 47 from another but cattle would not budge, even rearing on hind legs to try and horn chopper. I would not let any of our crew set foot on land. Bell and his men were "treed" several times with maddened bulls—had to shoot bulls from underneath them. Had council-of-war with Bell and we decided to shoot all the bulls on the two islands. We did this and hoped cows and bullocks would swim, but no go, in fact the bloody cows are getting more sneaky than the bulls! We decided to let them do a starve for a day or two as the feed is pretty scarce on this island.

Tell anyone coming here that on no account set foot on any island without contacting this party. Those islands may look clear but sulky cattle lie up in crevasses and come out at a dead run.

Two lads in a camera crew (Follow the Sun) have dropped in, want to do a bit of footage with us.

December 23 (Hall)

Just about finished island survey, though the next two runs will take longer as we are not out on Argyle plains. Ended up at Argyle Homestead and had lunch on the shed roof—107°F in the shade and like a sauna bath. Think we are in for another hazard—two huge logs in the water (shallow) suddenly came to life and sounded; Hanley thought they might have been salt water crocs. This was right up near Old Lissadell Station. Think I will do a sneak run along the bank up there using paddles instead of motor to see what's there. Had blood samples taken. Excuse writing, but I have crushed my thumb. Merry Christmas.

December 24 (Hall)

Attempted survey of Argyle Plains by boat but had to abort the mission owing to shallow water on the perimeters. However, found bunch of small low islands about 2 miles east of the Behn River delta. These are knee high in buffalo grass and look like harbouring a lot of snakes. Saw black headed python, dingo and a couple of Euros.

Bert Lee got caught in a stinking windstorm—crawled out of it O.K. but had about 50 gallons of water in the boat.

I was working several hundred yards away from him and saw this black storm coming up the gorge. Shouted to Bert to run for another sheltered gorge, but he is a very precise boatman who checks everything before getting under way and he got caught in the full force of the squall. The

wind lifted the top of the water into great spumes 20 foot above the surface and Bert had a nice old job getting in. If he'd lost his head and "gunned" the motor he would have kited the boat for certain, but he kept his "cool" and got in to where I was circling waiting for him. We then made it to the sheltered gorge, but often we were spun round and round out of control. It is the wind funnelling down the gorges that causes this vicious, twisting turbulence.

December 25 (Hall)

The situation on the whole set up of the rescue operation is this—

We have 92 islands, ranging from a square chain to 6,000 acres and from 3 ft above water level to about 300 ft or more. The islands, except three big ones, have been cleared of cattle, but sometimes a bull will come from a big island at night and swim to a little one. Wallabies have swum to the big islands and are staying there, but I don't know how they are doing with the dingoes.

Water level is falling, owing to evaporation and absorption. The fall is about 6 inches per 24 hours.

On the next rain, and when the water levels rise by 10 ft, a few deserted islands will go under, but the big ones will break up literally into hundreds of smaller ones. This will continue for the next ten feet, then I think the position will reverse and islands will become scarcer as the water rises.

Argyle Station have promised to have a go at the last two mobs of cattle with us between Christmas and New Year, but these cattle are getting a bit sophisticated and will take some shifting.

December 26 (Hall)

Bert Lee and I took some P.W.D. boys and engineers from the dam up the river to drowned Argyle; they all seemed very impressed at the sight. Had a lively few minutes when a swimming King Brown snake came up the side of the boat and into the stern. Had everyone overboard in a split second, then had a lively few minutes skirmishing round the boat with our boy—snake versus a bit of rubber hose. Found it was no use hitting at its head, they dodge too fast; best to go for a spine break about two feet from the head. Quite a good specimen—measured 6 ft 8 in.

We had a bit of trouble getting one bloke into the boat again, so I put the dead, but still wriggling snake into the water with him and he was into the boat without touching the sides!

These boats are excellent for the job, stable, fast, easily manoeuvred and really tough. To date only one damaged prop, though have nicked five others, but we file the nicks out and that leaves them perfectly useable.

December 27 (Hall)

Picked up Neville Beeck and Ian Hall from Kununurra, and took them on orientation run up to Behn River and across to Argyle. Saw only one small copper headed snake swimming, and one Muscovy Duck at Argyle.

(Beeck)

Departed Perth Airport 6.00 a.m. en route to Operation Ord Noah to join Henry Hall and party. Ian Hall also flying to join the party.

Very clear conditions as we approached Kununurra where we had our first view of the water impounded in the main dam. This first sight was very impressive and thrilling. From 20,000 feet it was possible to see the whole area flooded to date—this looked quite extensive.

Henry Hall was at Kununurra Airport to meet us—looking very fit and his usual self. Had quick lunch in Kununurra during which Henry brought us up-to-date on all the happenings thus far. It was evident that Henry, Bert Lee, Bob Dear and Geoff Hanley had been very busy, and had accomplished a great deal.

However, I don't have to report on this as Henry has already done so. Suffice it to say, I'd give them full marks for the excellent job done and the good spade work which has enabled us to settle in, and I'm sure be able to be a very happy and, I trust, efficient team.

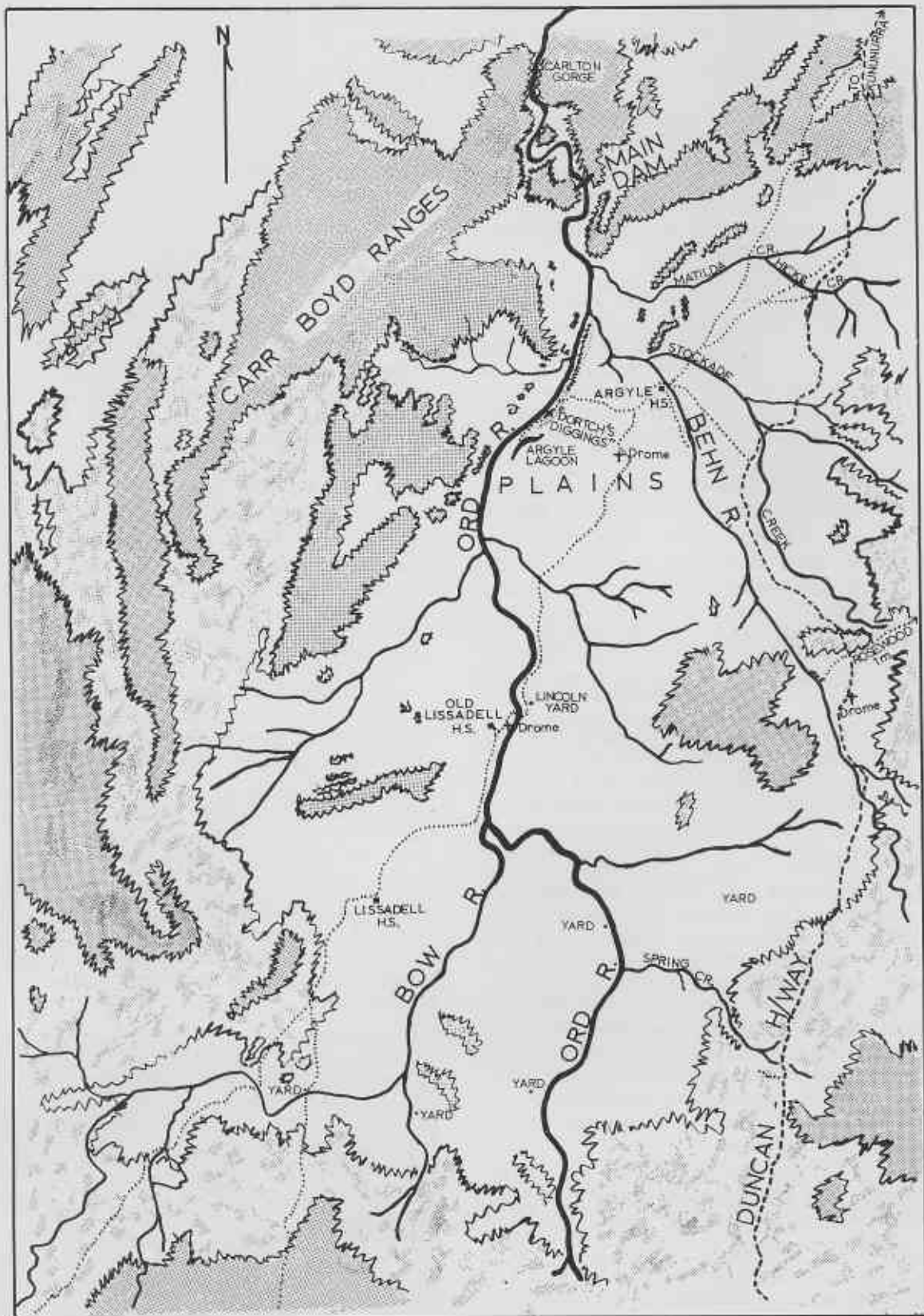
Arrived Headquarters about 2 p.m., moved into quarters (very good too) and immediately prepared for a briefing run up as far as Argyle Downs Homestead by boat.

First impression of the dam, once having got right up to it, was that there wasn't much water but as we travelled upstream past the confluence of Hicks Creek and then into the Behn River, it became obvious that there is a fairly large area under water but mainly on the flood plain and bases of the rivers mentioned. Cattle were seen on two islands. One herd of about 40 beasts, obviously very shy and spooky. Wouldn't care to be on foot here.



Reptile expert Harry Butler with a deadly King Brown snake

LAKE ARGYLE AREA



SCALE:



Travelled up Behn River to Argyle Downs Homestead site. Strange feeling to see all the sheds engulfed up to the guttering and various other objects sticking out of the water. Estimated depth here about 11 feet. Took the boat right over where the house used to be. Old Patsy Durack would turn in his grave if he could see his station now! Apart from birds and cattle the only life noted was one Muscovy Duck and one copper headed snake; he would have liked to come aboard—would have assisted him but had nowhere to keep him.

This orientation trip gave Ian Hill and I a good grip of the situation. Henry at the tiller very ably briefed us all the way. It is very obvious that this first stage of the fill will not yield much fauna. Only as the level rises pushing animals up onto the higher levels and small areas will we be able to work successfully and produce results.

As already stated in Henry's reports cattle are, and will be for some time, our No. 1 problem. These big brutes are tremendously quick and will have a bloke up on their horns in a flash. So no chances can be taken.

Returned to base with a fairly clear picture of the Behn River area. Must admit it is very easy to get lost in blind gullies, and cul-de-sacs, etc.

December 28 (Hall and Beeck)

Went for a run upstream to see if any saltwater croc tracks; saw plenty of Johnston tracks but nothing as big as a saltwater. Also we were to ascertain how the water position was on the west bank of the river 10-20 miles upstream, what islands had formed, cattle numbers and animals which could be candidates for rescue.

As we travelled parallel to the cliff face fronting onto the river we saw one antilopine kangaroo and one rock wallaby.

Also climbed a hill where we disturbed a pair of Agile Wallabies. This section of rocky foreshore which will later be cut into a number of islands is now surrounded by water isolating the animal population to be rescued later.

Travelling up river from here we noted that the water was much clearer than at the dam site itself. It was also very noticeable that the river had been at a very high level in the last few weeks and had now dropped considerably. Proceeded on past Cooe Creek—eventually water flow was noticeable.

Tried to reach river crossing at Old Lissadell but shallow banks of sand and rock plus 3-4 knot flow—decided to return. Estimated width of stream 100 yards, depth 5 feet yet dam level dropping.

Returned to area near Dortch's excavations—recorded Rock Wallaby, Nail-tail, Agile, Euro and probably Antilopine.

A very productive day, giving us a much clearer picture of the place. Plotting our course on the map we estimate that at point of turnback we were 40 miles from the dam site.

According to the engineer this area will be flooded to a considerable depth and will extend some miles up river from Old Lissadell.

December 29 (Hall and Beeck)

Did a big probe into the Hicks Creek area. In fact got right through to the Argyle Plains and could hear traffic on Duncan Highway. There are large areas of open water interspersed with numerous islands. Located Nail-tails, Agiles and Antilopines.

There are a number of large islands, impossible to survey or work yet, but when water level rises these will be divided into many smaller ones—which should carry a fair population of animals.

Another backwater about 3 miles from base has an almost bare island which has three Nail-tailed Wallabies. We intend to attempt rescue tomorrow with some nets we have acquired. Also TV camera crew to assist and shoot film.

Have done just about all the surveys possible now.

Badly in need of water level rise. There is no sign of rain yet. If it hadn't been for "Cyclone Sally" this would be a late wet season. We agree that when it does rain sufficiently for a good water rise the aeroplane will be essential, but as of now we can manage nicely, even though it necessitates considerable boating mileage.

December 30 (Beeck)

Made plans to attempt rescue of Nail-tails on bare island. This was to be the first attempt to net animals. Unfortunately it didn't work out. Firstly only one wallaby was still on the island, the other two must have swum for it.

After setting up the net in what we thought would be the most suitable spot we drove the island, an area of about 1 acre, in line-abreast eventually flushing out the wallaby, which immediately took evasive action and headed in every direction but the net. At last, after much sweat,



A rather bedraggled Euro receives a helping hand from team member Bert Lee

shouts and stubbed toes the wallaby headed out to a small peninsula and immediately took to the water, striking out strongly for some hoped-for distant shore. At this stage Ian Hall cut off its progress by boat but was unable to do anything more than head it parallel to the shore. Henry arrived at that precise moment, plunged in and did a fine water rescue. All things considered, this rescue was a copy-book effort, i.e. the actual rescue, not the initial planning and net laying, this didn't work out. However, many good lessons were learnt and we feel confident that we can apply these at a later date with good success.

The animal taken is a female Nail-tailed Wallaby (*Onychogalea unguifera*). She was in fairly poor condition, owing to the island being completely barren. We brought her back to our holding rooms which had been prepared previously for the reception of animals. Placed her in the room with water and grass and other food. After several rushes and leaps she quickly settled down and by evening had begun to eat.



A rescued Rock Wallaby takes a close look at its offspring

As sufficient time remained this afternoon we decided to try to net a Euro and Agiles on an island up Hicks Creek. Conditions were different here, being rugged, rocky ground covered with spinifex and larger trees. Here our efforts didn't yield anything except blood, sweat and in one or two instances, I'm pretty sure, tears, though well hidden. Even though the island was quite narrow, the spinifex coverage was so thick that the animals literally went to ground and couldn't be flushed after our first sightings. We intend to try this area again with different tactics. Swimming distance for these animals is too great for them to get out safely on their own power, so must have another try.

Boats are working well. These Hercules are a very wise choice, good to handle, roomy and feel very safe.

Ian Hall very good at his work—good boat handler—an asset to the team. Bert Lee a tremendous help, always there and has the happy knack of being able to anticipate events.

Going back to the Nail-tailed Wallaby, she had a joey about 3-in. long which she "threw" as soon as she was back on land. During the swim she had taken a fair amount of water into her pouch, and this came out in a stream when we upended her. The thought occurs here that any does forced to swim some distance have a good chance of drowning any joey they may be carrying.

December 31 (Hall and Beeck)

The day starts here with breakfast at 5 a.m., which is great, enabling us to get an early start, especially while the air is reasonably cool. The days may sound long, but to us there is never a dull moment even in routine patrols.

Our captive Nail-tailed Wallaby has settled in well and is consuming large quantities of grass. Seems to have picked up in condition already.

This is a delightful place. The scenery as we travel into gorges and circle islands is superb. The contrast of water and red cliffs or green grass slopes dotted with cattle reminds one of Scotland or perhaps Scandinavia, except for the heat and humidity.

We are the bloody unsung heroes up in this cattle country for the way we got so many out alive, with minimal shooting, and it is going to stay that way.

Have got bait mixed for big trapping programme—we think this caper will be very successful as we have pinpointed colonies of pairs of five different species of macropods. Weather cooking up again—would love to see big rain.

March flies prevalent. Bert Lee has grown a new skin on his face; he lost the other to sunburn!

January 1, 1972 (Beeck)

Happy New Year everybody. A nice mild day here. Henry and Ian Hall have taken the boats upriver for a short run. Bert and I have a few routine duties at base.

Present estimated holding of water 1,000,000 acre feet. That's a lot of water! Wait till this hole is full (4,800,000 acre feet).

During late afternoon trapping run we rescued a Blue-tongued Lizard swimming strongly towards shore, at least 150 yards out. Must have come from a tree someplace as the nearest land, sighting along from head to tail, was at least a mile away.

Full marks to P.W.D. and Dravo for the treatment we receive, good atmosphere. Have a bit of a cold or something. Could be airconditioning or chlorinated water—bloody vile! All the team is getting fatter no matter how long a day we put in.

January 2 (Beeck)

Breakfast not till 8 a.m. today, so checked the traps we set. No luck even though there are signs of macropods. However we do have much more promising areas to trap over—this first effort was mainly to experiment.

Before the flood—14 miles upstream. The water will rise up the cliff face on the right leaving the top as a permanent island.



After lunch, Henry, Ian Hall, Bert and I took the boats into a big backwater west of the river about 2 miles upstream from the dam. Henry had seen wallabies on small islands here and eventually scared them out onto higher ground. This was before Ian and I arrived. We inspected a number of other islands not checked before. No wallabies on smaller ones, larger islands not possible to check properly because of area and in many cases, ruggedness.

Grasshoppers large and small very plentiful. Even get into the bait in our traps. Frogs too are very plentiful in places. Small fish, appear to be rifle fish, are here in their millions. The hotter the water the better they seem to like it—as we see the biggest concentrations in backwaters that are sun traps, the water being unpleasantly hot. Odd snakes seen from time to time, also fresh water tortoises occasionally.

January 3 (Beeck)

Did trap round at first light—but no success. One Blue-tongued Lizard which we promptly released.

No small mammals such as native rats, native cats, bandicoots or possums seen at all. No sign on trees even of possums.

Henry and I went to Kununurra to meet plane bringing Harry Butler and his assistant Barry Vaughn.

Afternoon plan was to try for wallabies on an island in Hick's Creek where we had previously attempted a capture by netting. Full party strength mobilised for this. No result. Animals had left island. These beasts can swim quite well and don't hesitate to leave an island if the next land is only a short distance. After this effort it was decided to investigate Hick's Creek. Some of us were of the opinion that Hick's and Stockade Creeks could have backed-up sufficiently to make an island of the Mt. Misery area. An extensive search proved us wrong, but it is considered that another 5-10 feet rise would enable us to force a passage around Misery giving us a vast new area to investigate.

Each day the conviction grows that there will be a great many permanent islands here—10 to 20 maybe. This is a paradise and will be just fantastic when the levels reach maximum.

January 4 (Hall and Beeck)

Picked up Museum boys at Kununurra. Took them for orientation run. They are drooling at the stuff they saw and champing at the bit to get to work.

Did a patrol 12 miles up to Dortch's diggings to assess animals and give Harry Butler an idea of the place. A lot of macropods seen, 9-10 Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies, 12-13 euros and Agiles. We decided a trapping programme should get started as soon as possible up in this area inspected. Also noted 2 Euros and 1 Agile on a small island and decided to rescue these in the afternoon, under the coverage of the cameras of the "Follow the Sun" team.

Net was run and drive made. Agile tumbled through net, larger Euro took to the water like a fish and struck out dolefully for distant shore. Ian Hall and Neville Beeck set off by boat and hauled her in, very wet and very frisky. The Agile could not be seen—probably swam off—they are strong swimmers. However the young Euro was run into the net where a dashing capture was made by Mal Douglas (cameraman) and Harry Butler.

Too late to set traps—a good day we feel.

Found a new large area to do a survey in. Had 279 points of rain near Lissadell and there has been a 5-6 in. rise in the last few days. There is about another 7,000 acres flooded as a result on the Argyle Plain. We intend to do a run into the Stockade Creek area too as this is an untouched area.



Henry Hall with a rescued Euro



Cameraman David Oldmeadow keeping a Bungarra at safe range

Hope the ABC Channel 2 boys arriving tomorrow will be as good as the two units we've had. These blokes look like starved 'roo dogs and can run just about as fast—always up with the action!

January 5 (Hall and Beek)

This is a day to remember. Some cattle were stranded on an island 4 miles up. There had been several attempts to get these off before, some of the chaps had been "treed" and Hanley had been hurt.

Argyle Station hands had shot all the bulls but evidently left one with a superficial shoulder wound—hardly white hunter tactics. We were running the cows, bullocks and calves quite successfully when this big bloke broke cover from the back of us and went through us like a packet of salts. Everyone up a tree in a trice except Neville Beek who disappeared head first into the Ord. Trees everywhere were literally crawling with bokes, just like monkeys. Unfortunately David Oldmeadow, one of the "Follow the Sun" cameramen slipped while climbing a tree with his camera in one hand. The bull headed straight for him catching him in the groin with a horn and tossing him downhill onto sharp rocks. Dave received some nasty cuts on his back from the stones and cut head and legs. Blood all over him; his worst injury was a nasty horn puncture in the groin, but his main concern was that his mate didn't get the "toss" on film! We whipped him into the Dam

for first aid, then into Kununurra for a really thorough job. He has been discharged and is walking around again. Tough as old boots!

January 6 (Beek)

Cattle drive up the Behn River, but not a success. The beasts on the rocky islands refuse to swim no matter what we do. We'll leave them until the water rises some more, then perhaps they'll move.

We decided to drive a small group of cattle off a very small flat island a short distance away. This drive, with the help of the "chopper" was a success and the beasts took to the water quite easily. While driving the cattle off we flushed a small Nail-tailed Wallaby which we nearly caught by hand.

ABC Today Tonight team arrived so we tried the capture of a Nail-tail under the camera. Set up the net across a small peninsula in the hope of running the animal into it. Didn't work out. The Museum team came along to help also so we had sufficient manpower to run the beast down. After some pressure he (it proved to be a young male) took to the water. Ian Hall went in and effected a good rescue. Harry Butler and others collected five bungarras.

Set traps for Brachyotis. Home for tea. A big, but successful day. The team are always ready to do the job no matter what. Their spirit is tremendous.

January 7 (Hall and Beek)

Morning. Cameras whirred while we did a rescue on a Euro. She headed straight for the water and swam strongly, heading for distant land. This was the opportunity for a boat rescue—beautifully executed—under the cameras. A Euro swimming for her life, the W.A.W.A. boat drawing alongside, arms reaching out to rescue the animal—everything just right. Barry Vaughn reaches out just that bit too far, loses his grip and does the neatest header possible—all captured on film. It was a riot!

We have a few sick, or rather I should say emaciated wallabies that have suffered stress on a very bare island—all are recovering. I have sent on tonight's plane to be picked up at Perth Airport, two Nail-tailed Wallabies, both in need of further nursing, one Euro joey too young to be released here alone and one female Brachyotis in good health but has to be removed from restricted territory.

All things considered this has been a very successful week. Mammals have been rescued and others pushed off islands to other areas. Lizards and bungarras taken and released. More islands cleared of cattle and donkeys. A considerable amount of exploratory work done for future rescue work.

Worried tonight. Museum boys are upstream somewhere. At 9 p.m. had not returned and there have been several squalls this afternoon.

January 8 (Hall and Beeck)

At first light (3.30 a.m.) we took both boats to search for Museum team. Covered Dravo airstrip area where we knew they had been working. No sign.

About to return home and make further plans when we saw their boat coming. Cheers!

They had had motor trouble, couldn't do anything in the dark, so waited for moon rise and started rowing. Got caught in a thunder shower and squall so very cold for a while. They had eaten a bungarra for tea.

Most of morning spent checking over our "Mother Ship" the "Lillian Hamilton", and spent the afternoon helping Harry Butler catch snakes. Caught 8 of the blighters, plus a lot of lizards.

January 9 (Beeck)

Henry and I took a boat each to Argyle with interested visitors. We feel in most cases the people here should be looked after in this way as most are helpful and interested and while we are not "snowed under" we can do a trip for them.

After lunch Harry Butler went snake catching up to Argyle, while Bert Lee and I took another boat up to the confluence of the Behn and Ord and worked over two big backwaters that had not been looked at yet. We found at least forty (40) islands, some only as big as a soup plate and one of well over 1,000 acres which is very high and will be a permanent island.



Neville Beeck scooping a lizard from the water

January 10 (Hall and Beeck)

Finally cleared up cattle on the nearby big island. Did a very good, clean, quick job. We rescued some and it was pleasing to get them off



Henry Hall gives Bert Lee a helping hand with a Euro

alive. Being cattle men we don't like having to shoot beasts, but there is no alternative in situations like this.

This means the larger portion of area is free from stranded cattle, but we still have 30 on a 1,200 acre island near the mouth of the Behn. These can wait till we get a water rise to split them onto smaller islands.

Set more traps for *Brachyotis*. This species is very plentiful here. Would say more common than any other macropod in this area. One beautiful male "rocky" just about bowled me over today when I looked into a small cave. They go like a flash of light.

Still no rain and no sign of it. We have discussed the situation at great length and are wondering if it might be wise to pull most of the team out until we get a good rise. A skeleton team of say three could remain to watch the gear and do patrols. As soon as there is a rise the rest could return. Will sleep on this one.

No growls or grumbles. Team all happy. Bert Lee will be returning south soon, also Barry Vaughn. Sorry to lose Bert. Good chap and stands out as a quiet but extremely efficient and almost embarrassingly willing worker. Sorry to lose Barry too—very willing.

January 11 (Beeck)

V.I.P. morning. Henry took some American cotton magnates up Argyle way for a look around.

It was my privilege to take Bill Withers, M.L.C. and his family up to Argyle in the other boat. Like many others Mr Withers wondered about the usefulness of an operation such as ours. Once he had seen the area he appreciated the value of the work and commended us for the job being done.

Now the big question in the team's mind is—what of the future? The static position of the water level definitely is restricting our activities.

Then the other day the P.W.D. pulled the plug out of the dam and let a lot of water downstream to the diversion dam. This has caused an appreciable drop in the level. As we have said before, we have a lot of islands in the making, hundreds in fact, but impossible to work now. Six to ten feet of water would do the trick but when we look at the area to be flooded yet to that level, an awful lot of rain will have to fall. A three feet rise will double the existing area of the water.

We think that Bob Dear could be left in charge here to monitor water levels and rainfall. He is completely familiar with the area and what is required. Harry Butler can still work O.K. with the reptiles and any other animal that turns up. We are thinking of the economics of the operation and as it is going so successfully we don't want to see any curtailment of our efforts in the long term. Hence the thought that it might be more economical to send some of us home to await rain. It would be a month before there is sufficient water, or even longer, who knows?



Barry Vaughn hands a sack of bungarras to Bob Dear on the "Lillian Hamilton" while Ian Hall manoeuvres the rescue boat

January 12 (Beeck)

Trapping is continuing with varying results. Nothing this morning. We have absolutely skinned the smaller islands (estimated 127 small ones).

Henry is tying up loose ends prior to his departure south with Bert Lee.

We have now received a request from our Director to obtain if possible the plaque from Pumpkin's grave, 7 miles up the old Rosewood-Argyle road on the Behn River. This operation planned for Friday morning. Thunderstorms tonight. Some rain. Very vivid lightning.

January 13 (Beeck)

All traps brought in today. One *Brachyotis* caught, nice male.

We decided that since Henry was going down, it was a good opportunity to send down some more animals—2 Rock Wallabies and one Euro.

Took Henry into Kununurra together with Bert Lee and Barry Vaughn.

Henry has been handling the situation here with finesse. He's right on the ball and is a bundle of energy. The spade work he did here made the running of the Operation very smooth. It's a pleasure to work with him.

Had a good storm again last night, about 50 points of rain. Creeks came down strongly, especially "Match Box Creek". This creek cuts off the site from Kununurra every time it rains.

A lot of small animal forms turning up on some of the islands. The Museum people are getting a lot of material that in many instances could not be found for rescue.

January 14 (Beeck)

As requested we went in search of Pumpkin's grave. We knew that the site was some seven miles up the Behn River from Old Argyle. We went via the old road. There had been some fairly heavy rain in the Matilda and Hick's Creek area so that we had to be careful. Further on towards Rosewood and "New" Argyle the road was dry. At the new homestead Graham Bell gave us directions. We came back along the same road, turned in towards the Behn River and 2½ miles down this old track we came to the cattleyards where not far away was Pumpkin's grave. After photographing the headstone we removed the plaque. The inscription reads—"Here lies PUMPKIN, (Member of the Bootamurra tribe of Cooper's Creek) who from boyhood served Patrick Durack of Thylungra, Western Queensland, following his sons to the West in 1887 and rendering faithful friendship and devotion to the day of his death in 1908. Erected to his memory by M. P. Durack 1950".

Afternoon spent in reporting, office work etc.

January 15 (Beeck)

The Museum team going to investigate some areas new to them but known to Harry Butler and I. We decided to take a joint look and take one of the W.A.W.A. boats as there were six in the party.

Our first spot was in the vicinity of Dortch's diggings. Some good caves here, loaded with bats. Four species were taken amid a bit of excitement. Quite a spectacle to see a virtually naked body hanging out of a cave 100 ft up a cliff, clutching a couple of miserable little bats. All in the cause of science!

From there we came back downstream to a big backwater and finally to an interesting place called Banana Springs. These springs are still above water level, beautiful clear water bubbling out of a valley. The water then flows over a Cadjibut swampy flat spreading over a considerable area with thick swamp grass. Some interesting bird forms here.

Harry Butler and I walked up a gorge to try and get some idea if islands would be formed with a 20 foot or so rise. A big scrub bull loomed up and, looking mighty mean, advanced on us with malicious intentions! A well placed .44 slug at 80 yards brought the matter to a sudden conclusion. Don't like shooting these beasts but just have to survive at times.

Harry and I turned back at this point and taking another valley back to the springs flushed a couple of cows and a calf right into the laps of the Museum boys causing one hell of a panic! When we arrived on the scene bodies slid out of trees all over the place.

Returned to camp. An interesting day. Broke new ground which will be helpful when the next phase commences.

January 16 (Beeck)

Decided we should investigate the upper reaches of Stockade Creek and the Behn River before returning south.

Didn't get far in the Stockade Creek area, but skirted the southern edge of Mt. Misery which now has water on three sides. A ten foot rise would probably make the mountain an island. Appears to be a fair population of macropods here. Some will be quite safe, but the large area of tangled country west of Mt. Misery will break up into countless islands later. From Stockade Creek and Mt. Misery we went up the Behn River past Argyle Downs' flooded homestead—we were able to penetrate up river for several miles following the tree

line. The surrounding plains have water on them but very shallow. Eventually we travelled the channel itself with dry land each side for some distance.

Our aim in doing this patrol was to investigate the bird life, especially waterfowl and to get some idea what effect future flooding will have on the big plain itself; what islands are likely to form etc. At least a 10-15 ft rise is needed in this area to cause us to mount a rescue operation here. There appears to be quite a lot of animals on this plain too. Wild turkeys are everywhere, one flock of 11 took wing together—a grand sight!

About a mile from Old Argyle we came upon a breeding colony of waterfowl. Plumed Egrets, White Egrets, Pied Herons and Little Pied Cormorants were all breeding together. Estimated at least 500 breeding pairs. Some of the nests seem to be dangerously low to the water—so if we get a sudden rise some of these nests will be in peril.

The steady build up of water birds is noticeable now. Every shallow backwater has its population of waterfowl to some degree. What a place this will be when the water reaches its maximum level and birds and animal populations reach their ultimate numbers. Hope some bloody fool doesn't get bitten by a mosquito some time and decide that the whole area has to be sprayed with polutants! This patrol has given us a virtual coverage of the whole area inundated to now.

Returning to Perth tomorrow.

End of Report of Operation Noah (Phase 1).

Roll on Phase 2!

STOP PRESS—Operation Ord Noah has now been postponed until the next wet season. Animals remain only on the larger islands, and will be able to survive until heavy rains cause these to be reduced in size.