

OPERATION ORD NOAH— A SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION

(See map page 26)

Phase 1 of Operation Ord Noah ended on January 16, 1972 due to unseasonable dry weather experienced in the Kimberleys. During Phase 1 hundreds of animals and reptiles were rescued from the catchment area formed by the main Ord Dam.

There was some doubt as to whether Phase 2 would be "on" due to lack of finance, but the Treasurer, Mr Tonkin announced on November 3, 1972 that funds would be made available.

Although Phase 1 had started on December 18, 1972, Phase 2 did not commence until January 17, 1973. This was due to the continuing dry weather experienced in the Kimberleys in the later part of the year.

The Department and the Western Australian Wildlife Authority are delighted with the results of the whole rescue operation. When the operation finally finished on March 2, 1973 the joint co-ordinators, Mr Henry Hall and Mr Neville Beeck announced that few, if any, animals remained to be rescued, and the only islands which may contain animals were low, flat islands in the flood plain which were too large to enable captures to be made.

As in 1971/2 members of the rescue team worked extremely hard in very trying conditions. Much of the work involved long, arduous patrols and many hundreds of miles walking across islands checking for animal life. Despite the dangers of storms on the lake, rogue bulls and poisonous snakes, the team came through, relatively unscathed and remained in excellent spirits throughout, as may be seen from the following extracts from their field diaries.

Jan. 17 (Hall)

Landed at Kununurra with Ian Hall at 11 a.m. and was met by Ian Cooke [Fauna Warden—Wyndham]. Drove to Wyndham where we had lunch and picked up our brand new 4-wheel drive. Left Wyndham for Kununurra to pick up stores but the whole town was shut-up at 3.35 p.m. which was a good thing because when I turned on the 'fridge in the house at the dam site the damn (pardon the pun) thing chucked it in. It was getting late so I inspected the outboards, which were in a disgraceful state, and went to bed.

Jan. 18 (Hall)

Into Kununurra for a new 'fridge, stores and outboard fuel, Ian stayed behind to fix the outboards. Returned, had a bit of lunch and whipped upstream to have a look.

A few of the islands we were anxious about had gone under but saw euros and agiles on nearby islands so they probably swam for it. The ten foot rise has spread the water tremendously, and our main problem will be the big flat islands on the Argyle Plain. These are about 25 miles from the dam, so we will have to do an all day run taking food with us. There has been a big split up of big islands as anticipated, which will make things easier, but a few of our old friends, the wild cattle, gave us the hairy eyeball on islands back (north) of Mt. Misery.

On the trip we saw agiles, euros and rock wallabies. Big water lilies are spreading from the submerged old Argyle Lagoon. Darters, sea gulls and cormorants are prolific, plus a bird I have never seen before, like a miniature cormorant, with long skinny legs.

No more rain to date, but they had an inch in Kununurra last night. Will be doing the Hick's Creek area tomorrow.

Jan. 19 (Hall)

Did one of the biggest runs we've ever done—pushed off at 4 a.m. (it's quite light here at that time), got back to camp at 6 p.m.

Did Hick's Creek area first. Talk about the River of a Thousand Isles, this is it!—except Hick's Creek is drowned out of existence. We've got an awful lot of work to do in this area, as those islands which we actually traversed all had animals.

We ran N.E. on to the plain country and our eyes fairly bugged out as the water appeared to meet the horizon. As we went the bird life got better and better—pelicans, gulls, ducks, ibis, royal spoonbills and countless darters and cormorants. We went right up to Stockade Creek to the old highway, then swung due East till we struck land near the old Rosewood road. It was getting shockingly hot so turned South and came to a huge flat island of approx. 250 acres. This island was about 2 miles behind the old Argyle Station, so you can see how the water has spread. We landed and from the first patch of so-called shade out vomited 2 agiles and a nail tail. They were making pretty heavy going of it in the mud and Ian got enthusiastic and took off after the nail tail. He hadn't done 100 yards when he was completely blinded by sweat running into his eyes and had to chuck it in.

We landed at several of these flat grass plain islands and saw animals on all of them. Islands too big to drive and capture animals on so we will have to try to get the animals in the water. The perimeter of the grass plain water line will be about 50 miles long. We started the run towards home pouring water on the seats to salve our blistered backsides.



Working close inshore presented problems of submerged trees and other debris.

Jan. 20 (Hall)

Storm hit the dam about 3 a.m. probably brewed up by the previous day's intense heat. Picked up mail and extra fuel and met Ian Cooke and Bob Beeton (C.S.I.R.O.) at Cockatoo Springs. The last remaining link of the Durack dynasty at Argyle disappeared in last night's storm. We did a survey near the old homestead and it has now disappeared.

Jan. 22 (Hall)

Did an all day survey of the West bank of the Ord. There were so many islands that we were overawed but its surprising how many you can cover in a day. We have left a red ribbon on a prominent tree on islands which are a dead loss, and a white one when we see an animal.



Marking trees with streamers to indicate presence of animals on the islands.

We got right past the Old Lissadel crossing and it was pretty turbulent. The bird life is fantastic. We had squadrons of pelicans, ibis, egrets, royal spoonbills, brologas and jabirus in front of the boat all the time and saw about 50 magpie geese.

Jan. 23 (Hall)

Ian Cooke arrived in the morning and I had him hard at it walking islands in the afternoon. Of course, with beginner's luck he caught a beaut nail tail on his first landing.

Jan. 24 (Hall)

Spent most of day up Cooee Creek. Walked all the islands of the mouth of the Cooee in sauna bath heat. Went up Revolver Creek right into the Carr Boyd Ranges. There are two walloping big flat islands between the Ord and the Carr Boyds with animals—these will go under with a 2 foot rise.

It looks as if there could be a water lily problem in the shallow water. Also there are thousands of nesting birds and with "millions" of tons of fish available a bird population explosion seems inevitable.

Jan. 25 (Hall)

Picked up Neville and Geoff Beeck at 5.30 a.m., surveyed more islands in the Hick's and Stockade areas and got a few more animals. Lost my dark glasses today and have sunburnt eyeballs, please tell any visitors to bring dark glasses. We cocky types [farmers] have a feeling that the weather is cooking up.

(Beeck)

Had a sleep as soon as we arrived and after lunch had a run around the Mt. Misery area. Interested to note that the vast beds of algae have gone, so this may not be the problem that we thought. The water temperature is a lot lower than last year. It is most enjoyable now in the water and we jump in clothes and all to cool off.

Jan. 26 (Beeck)

Made run to assess situation up Revolver and Cooee Creeks. Up by "Dortch's Diggings" we found euros and six rock wallabies. Most of the islands here will never be covered in water but will shrink in size as the dam level rises. If there are no dingos the wallabies should be secure. If population levels are not too great we will leave well alone.

On one of these flat islands I stepped into a deep hole while wading knee deep out to the boat and disappeared from sight—rifle, camera, glasses on my nose, hat on head, and all still in place when I finally re-emerged. This trick is called a "Harry Butler" because the said H.B. did exactly the same last year.

In afternoon checked the Banana Springs area.

Jan. 27 (Beeck)

Quiet day. Did survey by vehicle into some country north of dam. Considerable bird life, including red-tailed and ~~yellow-tailed~~ black cockatoos, rainbow lorikeets, brologas, magpies, etc. See 4(2) p 39

Jan. 28 (Beeck)

Met Ray Smith, who arrived full of enthusiasm. Funny thing, as soon as we arrive on the job the rain stops just like it did last year. Haven't seen rain here up to now and there's only been 17 points since Henry arrived. There is a big colony of flying foxes living in paper bark trees at Banana Springs. I estimate their numbers at several thousand. Checked islands on the way back from Banana Springs and found evidence of wallabies and a bower bird's bower in use. Double bar and Zebra finches are plentiful here too.

Jan. 29 (Hall)

Of course, our famous off-Wyndham rain-bearing depression chucked 3 in. down in Kalumburu and we didn't get a drip. Our main concern is this lack of rain and the subsequent static nature of the dam.

Did a big push up the Behn early this morning, followed by a run right up Hick's Creek. An 18 in. rise here will mean we will have to move quickly to get animals off.

(Beeck)

Sighted many birds today including blood finches, bustards, brologas, jabirus and one painted snipe. Also egrets, ibis, darters and pied cormorants in abundance. Long hours in the boats, walking islands, dodging tree stumps, logs and rocks in the lake really take their toll. We could easily knock up an 80 hour week, and not cover every corner of this damn lake.

Jan. 30 (Hall)

The difference between full storage level and maximum flood level is 74 feet but I cannot see this dam ever filling to maximum flood level and drowning some of the big "permanent" islands.

(Beeck)

The whole team did a reconnaissance of the vast flooded plain west and S.W. of the old Argyle Homestead.



Bower bird nest.

We checked about 20 islands in this vicinity but there were no animals on them. There are still some large islands here with wallabies on them, but we can leave these as they will be completely safe. Everyday we add to our knowledge of the area.

Jan. 31 (Beeck)

Another day, another patrol. Gradually we are covering every island in the whole dam area. There is a big backwater which runs into the Carr Boyds west of the river. We landed on island after island, but no animals. There are very few birds here too.

Feb. 1 (Beeck)

Henry and Ian Cooke did a traverse of the Mt. Misery sector, while Geoff Beeck, Ray Smith and I gave the back waters adjoining the Hick's Creek area a good combing over. A number of new islands have formed but there is very little life—any animal there will be safe except in the case of extreme flood. We burnt out a small island to try and flush out a planigale or two—but no luck.

Feb. 2 (Beeck and Hall)

Before the cameras of the *Daily News* we rescued a euro. This was done by setting a net across a narrow neck between two small islands. Ian Cooke did a spectacular dive off a cliff face to rescue the euro.

Did a run into the Mt. Misery backwaters. Made several landings and inspected some caves and found several bats. We also found a black bittern's nest with bird and 4 eggs present—not often one finds a bittern's nest.



Some animals were driven into the water and captured by use of nets.

Feb. 5 (Hall)

We tried burning off spinifex during a planigale hunt—no planigales but we rescued a lot of lizards. I think you could burn off a bloody lot of spinifex before turning up one of these tiny animals!

On one of the huge islands on the plain perimeter we rescued a euro.

Feb. 6 (Hall and Beeck)

Did a long run upriver to look at flat islands. We've had a 6 in. rise over the last week and this should facilitate capture. We found agiles and nail tails and also a big bungarra and took photos of capture and release.

Arrived back at 3 p.m. all well and truly sunburnt and very tired. We covered 90 miles in the boat plus numerous landings and much climbing.

Feb. 7 (Hall)

Got a lot of small things like bungs, snakes and lizards, still no planigales.

The water has sneaked up another 2 in.



Burning off of spinifex to flush out some of the smaller marsupials and reptiles.

Ray Smith had an electrifying experience when an 18 in. bungarra shot up his trouser leg.

Ian Cooke staked his foot, but it is healing up very well. Ian Hall has severe bruising of a leg from a bad fall but it is much better now.

Feb. 8 (Beeck)

Decided we would completely scour the Mt. Misery area. This has the makings of many small islands with only a small water rise. Any animals here are on prospective larger islands and in no danger. With a ten foot rise there would be only about three islands left but, if it rose five feet on that, then these three would break down into smaller ones again.

On our return we found a 9 ft. olive python which Henry rescued. We brought him back with us and released him—he was very docile.

We are collecting sundry lizards and bungs, etc., all the time and releasing them in the best places.

Set traps in the evening.

Feb. 9 (Beeck)

Went round animal traps today—but no success—one trap had been sprung.

Geoff will be leaving today as there is much work to be done on our farm.

Work was done on servicing the outboards.

Feb. 12 (Beeck)

On Saturday 10th we found a Rock Wallaby in a trap.

Weather is still dry and the green tinge on the hills is disappearing rapidly.

The dam is still rising slowly but I don't know where the water is coming from.

I will have to pull out and return to the farm at the end of the week, but the remainder of the team will be able to cope from here on in.

Feb. 13 (Beeck)

We did the flat islands on the east bank of the Ord today—no wallabies but some reptiles. We set some traps and checked the boats.

Feb. 14 (Hall)

Spent yesterday morning walking the big flat islands on the left bank of the Ord, well up stream.

Rescued a euro after much swimming about and the Education Department got good film of this.

Feb. 16 (Hall)

The Minister for Works, Mr Jamieson, visited us yesterday and we spent 4½ hours on the dam. It was agreed that when we have cleared out those few islands still containing animals we will wind up the operation. If subsequent rain should occur the rescue of any animals on the plain's perimeter can be handled by departmental staff, i.e., wardens.

Feb. 19 (Hall)

Neville went south yesterday. We had a most successful morning clearing up some of the remaining islands containing animals and rescued quite a few euros.

The scarcity of snakes is remarkable. I got a nice King Brown this morning, but this is only the fifth during the operation.



Members of the team with a rescued euro.

Feb. 20 (Hall)

I think our team are the fittest men in the territory. We started at 5 a.m. this morning and did very well with the wallabies. We have stocked Cattle Island with male and female euros and nail tails. I don't know how the honeymoons are going but guess they will work that out. We would like some dog bait to clear up some of the dingoes before we leave. Ian Hall and Ray Smith tore an island apart chasing a planigale but only came up with a dirty big King Brown snake. Were they disgusted!

Feb. 21 (Hall)

Had a major tragedy today when the motor smashed up on one boat.

Feb. 22 (Hall)

Had another good morning and rescued some wallabies. We have most of the "marked" islands cleared and have developed a system of lighting clumps of grass to drive the wallabies into the water. This saves an awful lot of running.

Feb. 23 (Hall)

Had a big gather up of animals. The best run in Phase 1 and 2. Joey wallabies, nail tails and agiles. I will send them down tonight to save keeping them. On a rough count back we have done a lot better than Phase 1 and can unconditionally guarantee that any islands that will be submerged are cleared.

Feb. 25 (Hall)

We did a big sweep of Mt. Misery. I drew the centre straw which took me across the bloody peak! No animals, but I got chased by a bunch of 11 wild bulls.

Feb. 26 (Hall)

We have started to get our gear together and it is in pretty good order except for our blown motor. Not much news over the weekend. No tourists, no weekenders and not a soul on the dam. This is our vibrant and developing North!

Feb. 27 (Hall)

Pulled boats out and stored motors.

The lack of water rise has been a big disappointment but we've done all that had to be done on the islands, even if it meant doing it the hard way by running instead of boating.

Feb. 28 (Hall)

Took Ray Smith to Wyndham, he has been an excellent man on this caper—a terrific worker. You won't recognise him as he looks like a native with a Van Dyke beard.

March 1 (Hall)

Got up early to finish packing and storing and heard tumult from the Tourist Development Camp where a herd of donkeys and cattle had completely demolished the 20 acre garden.

March 2 (Hall)

Cleared up house, stored everything, took inventory. Left dam after kissing everyone goodbye.

Enclosed are some notes on the whole operation:—

The team has had a very successful season and have totally cleared, or stocked, every island in the rocky terrain area. We have shifted more animals than in Phase 1.

The slow water rise, only 15 in. in the time we were here, made it necessary to hunt the islands on foot, instead of having the animals confined to a small peak on submerging islands. However, the team worked very well and have come out of the stunt incredibly fit.

Having to clear the islands took us longer than anticipated, but they are totally cleared now and need no further attention except for a few dingos.

Any water rise next year will only endanger animals on the Argyle Plains and Warden Cooke from Wyndham and one offsider can handle this by boat rescue.

Neville has taken some animals back with him and the private wildlife park at Bengar have 1 young rock wallaby, 3 young agiles and 2 young nail tails. All the adult animals were released. The South Perth Zoological Gardens have received plumed egrets, black bitterns and night ~~herons~~ ^{herons}—all fledglings.

Euros

A definite build-up of these animals on the rocky perimeter of the dam. Can be observed in numbers in early morning.

Boating Hazards

Localised windstorms will undoubtedly be responsible for boating mishaps every year. Would-be admirals getting lost will be the No. 2 hazard.

Weather

It has been observed many times that local thunderstorms collapse before crossing the lake. Many storms around the perimeter of the lake while we were here.

Bird Life

Birds, both water and avian are prolific. A tremendous build-up of darters, cormorants and plumed egrets is evident. All other species of water fowl, indigenous to the area are present.

Fish

Huge concentrations of three varieties which can be caught continuously at any time of day.

Aquatic Weeds

A water lily and a type of water couch are becoming prevalent in 15–20 feet of water.

Tourism

The tourist potential of the area is tremendous. Animals are getting used to watercraft and will be a big attraction. This combined with the magnificent scenery and fishing will act as a magnet to tourists.

The Department would like to express its appreciation of the tremendous efforts of Messrs Beeck and Hall and their team. Their enthusiasm never lagged despite arduous conditions, long hours, injuries and often dangers.

Thanks must also go to the Public Works Department for their continuing co-operation throughout both Phases of the rescue. Without their back-up support of equipment, and accommodation facilities, conditions for the rescue teams would have been unpleasant to say the least.

ABORIGINAL HERITAGE

The Western Australian Museum has distributed a large number of pamphlets explaining the Aboriginal Heritage Act. Since many of our readers, especially Honorary Wardens living in country areas, will come in contact with Aboriginal sites and Aboriginal objects, it was felt that reproduction of this pamphlet would be useful and informative. The information is only a guide to the provisions of the Act and for complete details reference should be made to the Act itself. See photos page 25.

What is the Aboriginal Heritage?

In simple terms, it is all the marks that the Aborigines left after their thousands of years of occupation of the land. Cave paintings, engraved rocks, arrangements of stones on the ground, camp sites scattered with stone artifacts and burial grounds. These represent some of the heritage. Some of the locations where such relics are found, known as Aboriginal sites, are important to Aborigines today. Many remain sacred, just as they were long before European occupation; others have been abandoned for centuries, but nevertheless represent a great store of information for archaeologists searching for an accurate account of the pre-history of people in this land.

Why protect this heritage?

A host of reasons. To begin with, some of it is part of the living culture of the Aborigines, much as a community Church is part of ours. Some is of historic interest to people who recall that their forefathers lived the tribal way. Much will one day become the subject of scientific study; if properly preserved, each separate site is a unique record of the people who once lived in that area. Above all it is a heritage of value, interest and beauty which can bring pleasure and enjoyment to future generations of Australians.