



# the CITATION

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NOTHERN TERRITORY POLICE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



*Vic Hall &  
Ted Morey on  
Groote Island 1938  
with Ted's dog Kaze.*

The following extracts are from Sidney Downer's Novel "Patrol Indefinite." A poem, written by Mounted Constable Vic. Hall, as a tribute to Tom Turner.

### "The Scourge of the North"

*The stalwart topper snuffles the breeze  
As he sits his restless horse,  
While the dawn wind rustles the drooping trees  
And his eyes shine t'wards the north.*

*Full many a league of stony kloof  
And miles of echoing gorge  
Shall ring to his iron-shod horse's hoof  
Ere he brings in Bullita George.*

*By many a wilderness flat and creek  
His unmapped trail shall wind,  
But a finger dipped in beer last week  
Has traced what we may not find.*

*His inscutable look sets stern and wild  
On a face that is hard as steel,  
As the wilderness yields to her favourite child  
Her secrets as miles unreel.*

*What boots it the wily bush-wise black  
To double and dodge and turn,  
For Tom of the Mounted has taken his trail.  
One went-but two shall return.*

*And so it shall be with the Men of the North,  
No epic their tale shall lack,  
The dawn wind knows of their going forth  
But what of their coming back?*

Hall wasn't the only poet to use the title of that poem in application to the Territory Police. A contributor to the Northern Standard in February 1933 was rather more satirically disposed to the force when, under the title of "The Scourge of the North", he wrote:

*There's fear in the heart of the Territory toughs,  
There's a sword hanging over each thug,  
For the scourge of the North had returned to his beat,*

*An with his mighty grip on their collar and seat  
They'll soon be inmates of "jug".*

*Well over six feet stands the pride of the Force,  
He's determined; he'd never say die.  
He has hair on his chest that would gap any axe,  
And he fills up his pouch as he hauls up his slacks  
With a truculent look in his eye. . .*

*To the stern call of duty he answers with glee,  
And he mutters, "I'll get 'em or bust."  
"Get up, or I'll sell you!" His horse takes the hint  
And is off like a flash, while the onlookers squint  
At a large cloud of lingering dust.*

*And after our hero has ridden for days,  
His tucker runs out. Is he daunted?  
He just tightens his belt and chews a few straws  
Which he shares 50-50, just him and the horse,  
Till he catches the abo, he wanted.*

*At last he returns with his duty well done  
And resumes routine life quite contented,  
For although he has camped with twelve tribes on  
the way*

*He claims for expenses at so much a day  
And the pay cheque's thereby much augmented.*

*So here's to our hero, 'The Scourge of the North.'  
He's the cream of a force of renown.*

*May he live long, and more murderers track,  
For while he's man-hunting or on the way back,  
It will keep him away from the town!*

The poem is simply signed "Chicken".

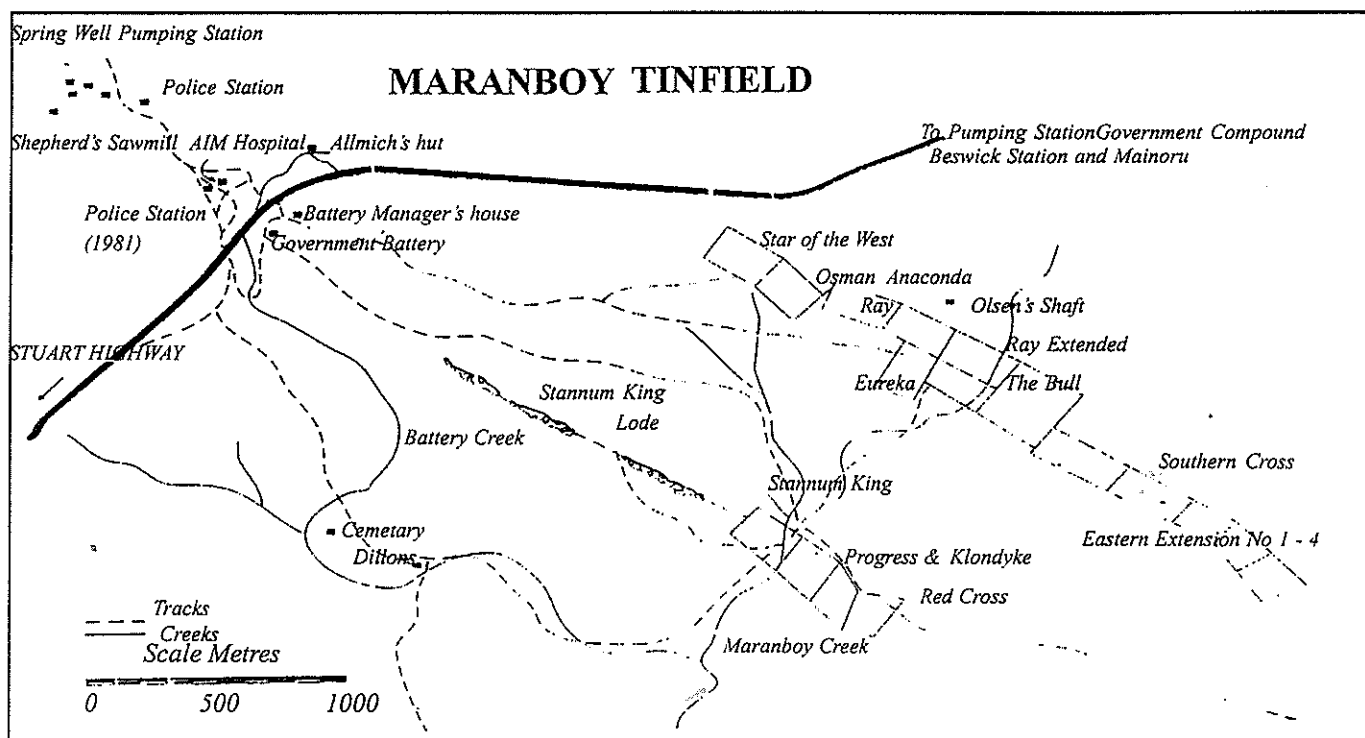


## TIN GODS OF MARANBOY

The recent publication of the book *Tin gods: the social history of the men and women of Maranboy 1913-1962* by Sue Harlow highlights life on a small often struggling tin field in the Northern Territory. It looks at many of the people who spent time at Maranboy, not only the miners and their families, but also those who supplied essential services such as nurses and police. The Northern Territory police have had a long association with this field, located 70 kms east of Katherine.

Later his wife and children also moved to the field. As a police officer's duties encompassed wide and varied responsibilities and some of his bush patrols meant he was away for long periods, it often fell to the untrained wife to make decisions and act for the absent husband.

Daily routine of bush police work was a full time effort by both husband and wife. After 1932 all police officers had to be married to be stationed on bush stations.



Tin was first discovered there in 1913 and with the first rush of hopeful miners, came the need for a police presence. Police were vital to the orderly workings of the community. Times were tough for all the new residents to the tin fields as they stock piled their ore waiting for the new battery to be completed. Police had to contend with claim jumpers, suicides and monitor the employment of Aboriginal workers.

The Government tin-concentrating plant and tinhead stamper (the remains of which can still be seen today, constructed by Louis Stutterd was completed in 1915. The same year a police station was relocated from Horseshoe Creek near Mt. Todd, to Maranboy to administer to the various needs of the growing population. The officer-in-charge was Mounted Constable Emery.

Policing was more than just maintaining law and order. Wives of police officers, for example, were expected to act as the postmistress. They played an important part in the daily life on all bush stations. Within a few months of the opening of the battery, a malaria epidemic ravaged the community resulting in the death of several inhabitants.

The Administrator of the Northern Territory, Dr. John Gilruth decided a hospital was needed at Maranboy if the community was to survive. He approached the Reverend John Flynn of the Australian Inland Mission to supply nurses for the government built hospital. The hospital was completed in 1917 and for the next fifteen years twenty nurses spent up to two years administering to the need of the community. Not all nurses returned to their home State on completion of their tour of duty.



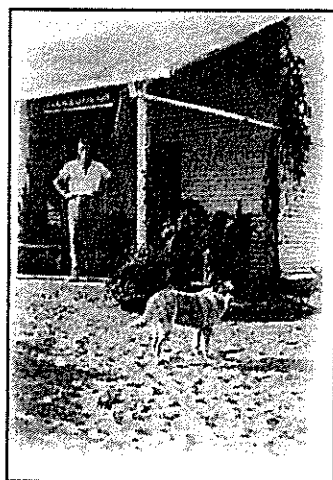
*Police cells,  
Maranboy.  
(Photograph  
Sue Harlow 1996)*

Several nurses, one of the more famous being Ruth Heathcote, married local police and remained in the Northern Territory.

When the staff of the Maranboy hospital were relocated to Katherine in 1931, the old hospital building became the police station, the third on the site, was completed and more recently a new police residence.

A long list of well known police spent some time working at Maranboy. Many such as Jack Stokes, Jock Reid, Vic Hall and others are remembered not only for their policing skills, but also for the part they played in the everyday life of the small community.

*Mounted Constable  
Robert Reid outside the  
Maranboy Police  
Station. (Photo courtesy  
of Hazel Southwell).*



Others are remembered for more tragic circumstances, such as Mounted Constable Clapp who accidentally shot himself with a confiscated pistol in 1927 while arresting the owner and Constable Bill Condon who was shot in 1952 when stationed at Maranboy and visiting Katherine.

The old hospital - cum - police station still stands as tribute to the pioneering spirit of the nurses and police of Maranboy.

### POLICE MEMORIAL (by Peter Forrest)

September is the month of the National Police Remembrance Day, when police officers throughout Australia will recall their colleagues who have given their lives while doing their duty.

The day will be commemorated in Darwin with a special service at St. Mary's Cathedral, when local officers will particularly remember Territory police who have died while serving.

Research by former Assistant Commissioner Bill Wilson, now a post graduate history student at NT University, has revealed that the first officer to die while on duty in the Territory was Mounted Constable John Shirley, who, in November 1883, perished from thirst about 100 km north east of Tennant Creek Telegraph Station.

Shirley had led a party of five other white men and two black trackers into the desert to search for the killers of a teamster. Only two of Shirley's party returned to tell the ghastly story of the agonising deaths of their colleagues.

John Shirley had arrived in the Territory in 1879, to take up a posting to Alice Springs, where he was the first police officer. Previously, police presence in the Centre had been limited to Charlotte Waters and Barrow Creek, but a number of "outrages" by Aborigines had led to a clamour for added protection in the Alice Springs area.

Shirley was later transferred to Barrow Creek, and was there in September 1883 when he received instructions to organise a party to search for the killers of teamster Joseph Martin.

Martin, with his partner John Rees had been travelling down the telegraph line south of Powell Creek Telegraph Station when, on 29th August 1883, they camped on water at Lawson Springs, about two miles off the track. They were accompanied by five friendly Aborigines, who had been joined that day by two strangers.

At about half past ten that night Rees was awakened by a commotion among the Aborigines. Rees found that Martin had been killed, apparently by the strangers.

Rees rushed back to Powell Creek with the news. Police Inspector Foelsche of Darwin soon telegraphed instructions to Shirley to organise a party to capture Martin's killers, but it is not clear



why Shirley did not assemble his party until 29th October 1883, two months after the killing. Shirley was told that the killers had fled toward Anthony Lagoon, and the plan was to set out overland from known water at Attack Creek, north easterly toward Corella Lagoon, where it was known that Harry Redford had a camp. Incidentally, Redford is better known to history as 'Captain Starlight', the perpetrator of the theft of more than 1000 cattle from Bowen Downs, in Queensland's Central West, in 1870.

Shirley's party comprised John Rees, who claimed that he would recognise the killers, bushmen Arthur and George Phillips (who had come to the Territory with the first stock overland to Springvale, near Katherine,) teamster James Hussey, and Alan Giles of Tennant Creek Telegraph Station, and two black trackers.

The fatal flaw in Shirley's preparations for the expedition was the pack horse which was to carry the water bags - 'a very old animal supplied by Powel Creek, quite unfit for the work' Giles later wrote.

On the first day out from the telegraph line an advance party comprising Shirley, Giles, Rees, and one tracker travelled about 30 miles east north east and then made a dry camp in barren scrub. On the second day they travelled six miles before Rees found a native well (called Ree's Well) and water in shallow 'crab holes'.

Giles was sent back to Attack Creek to bring up the rest of the men, but, ominously, the old pack horse died before the party was joined on the fourth day.

On the fifth day Rees and Hussey scouted forward and were encouraged to find tracks left by Redford, and more crab holes with water. On the sixth day Shirley decided to follow Redford's tracks to Corella Waterhole. That day the party travelled thirty five miles, and camped without finding any new water.

On the seventh day the men lost Redford's tracks, and despite seeing water birds and promising blue-bush creeks, they found no surface water. The weather was extremely hot, and that night Shirley decided to immediately retreat to Rees Well.

The men left all their surplus gear hanging in trees

and taking just a little flour, tea, sugar and the three gallons of water they had left they set out at 6:30 PM for a night march back to Rees Well.

Giles claimed that Shirley led the party too far south during the night, and the next day they had to take a more northerly course. By 8 AM on the eighth day it was so hot that the men decided to camp until evening. "The horses were all done up, and four died that afternoon in camp" Giles wrote.

There was now only one gallon of water left. As the horses died their throats were cut, and most of the men drank the blood which flowed. Giles attributed his own survival to not doing this.

On the ninth day the men split up. The black trackers were sent on to Rees Well to bring back water, and it seems that the white men took refuge under bushes. Giles and Hussey struggled on, after shaking hands with Shirley, who "tried to walk and fell, so we were compelled to say goodbye."

On the tenth day Hussey could go no further, so Giles staggered on for two miles until he collapsed. "I recollect no more until I was roused by the boy pouring water over my head; he managed to get me along for about two miles .....when he left me in shade and went for more water."

Giles and the "boy" went back for Hussey, but could get no replies to their coo-ees. Finally Giles and his sole surviving companion, the tough and faithful but anonymous black tracker, arrived back at Attack Creek, and from there sent messages alerting the outside world to the tragedy.

Soon after, relief parties were sent out, but there was nothing to be done but bury the bodies. Mounted Constable Shirley, the first police officer to die on duty in the Territory, was buried on the banks of Brunchilly Creek, about 40 miles east-north-east of Attack Creek.

**WANTED**  
ARTICLES OF INTEREST FOR  
INCLUSION IN FUTURE ISSUES  
OF THE CITATION.

Please forward to:  
Garth Macpherson, C/- Community Relations,  
P O Box 2630, ALICE SPRINGS, N.T. 0871



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

*Letter received from Bill Wilson*

In Joyce Johnson's letter (*The Citation Vol. 2 12 June 1998*) there is mention of the site of the original Police Station. On the arrival of police in Palmerston (now Darwin) in 1870 the police were first quartered with the main camp, at the bottom of the cliffs where Government House now stands. A site the Government Resident later said was "a mistake". Work on the first permanent police station, which was located near Government House, commenced in December 1870.

The article also refers to "Knight's Folly". The house was called by a variety of names "Mudsville by the sea" "The Mud Hut" and "Knight's Folly". This was a house built by the Architect John George Knight (1826-1892) for himself below Government House overlooking the Port. The *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* of 5th January 1884 the house:

*Was the first two-storied house erected in Palmerston.  
The double verandah, having massive piers and arches all formed in concrete, so that little will be seen of the plain walls which now show with somewhat undue prominence. The roof is flat, the first of its kind in Palmerston, and finished with an embattled parapet. The walls are 28 FT high, and the building when finished will be 61 FT in length by 88 feet wide.*

Archival files in Canberra suggest that, the then, Sergeant A.V. Stretton lived in the house for a short time in the early 1920's, although the exact dates are not provided. The "Mud Hut" was also the boyhood home of the former Administrator, Austin Asche.

The 'Mud Hut' was destroyed by fire in late 1933. Knight was the Architect responsible for the design of the stone police station and courthouse on the Esplanade. The Navy took over these buildings in 1942 and continued to use them as Naval Headquarters until Cyclone Tracey damaged the buildings in 1974. They were rebuilt in 1981 and are now used as offices by the Administrator.

It is interesting therefore that the two buildings mentioned in the article both have connections to the early days of policing in the Northern Territory.

*Letter received from Peter Dunham*

In your latest Bulletin Vol. 2 No 11 referring to Robert Stott and Gordon Stott may I add :- Robert Stott and his wife Agnes had five children. The first child Agnes was born at Borroloola before the mid-wife could arrive by lugger. With her second pregnancy Agnes set out by lugger for Cooktown, however the baby - Gordon Cameron arrived during the journey assisted into the world by the master and native crew. His birth was registered at Cooktown.

Robert was a remarkable man - but his wife Agnes was no less remarkable.

Gordon Stott was a very big, quietly spoken man whose attention to detail ensured his survival and those he was sent to serve.

At the lonely post at Rankine River he cared for stockmen, mailmen, drovers, travellers and adventurers.

His records show:-

Entry 26/9/27 Mr. and Mrs. C Dale Chidley, East Kimberley W.A. To Townsville.

Car number W.A. 4969 Chevrolet Tourer Model 1926.

Entry 5/10/27 Mr. & Mrs. George Dowling, Duchess to Katherine

Car number Qld. 53465 Dodge with Miss Dowling - 2 children.

He controlled a very rough lot of miners at the new gold tenements of Tennant Creek. He led a camel patrol to the goldfield at Tanami and surrounding area. He was an excellent horseman and cameleer.

No matter where his posting he was always active - if not on mounted patrol to the most inaccessible parts of the Territory - he built yards, cared for his native helpers, established gardens and maintained his horse plant.

Although his postings were mostly in the bush he did stints also in Alice Springs and in and around Darwin. In one break in 1933 he sailed by pearling lugger to Dutch Keopang. He was friend and mentor for many later recruits to the force.

He did not have a "checked career" as you mentioned.

Gordon deliberately chose "the bush life in preference to advancement in the force" - but make no

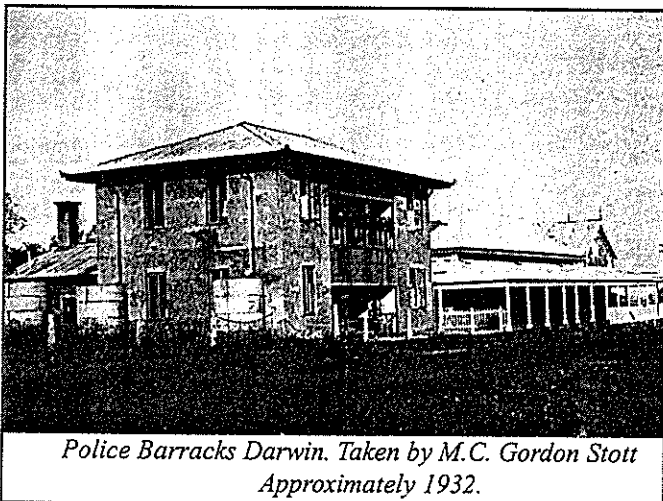


mistake - he was a well read intelligent and dedicated officer with vast practical experience.

The charge of "blood thirsty assault" was dismissed by Judge Wells in Darwin. Quote "The charges are absolutely without foundation" - they had been laid by a group named "The Association for the Projection of Aboriginal Races" after photos of native prisoners in chains were printed in the Southern Press. Mounted Constable Stott was alone at Borrooloola and had in custody about thirty prisoners. Gordon was about twenty-five years old. His father Robert had served at the same post twenty years before.

Along with his brother-in-law Mounted Constable Jack Mahony, Gordon left a photographic legacy of life in the Northern Territory in the 1920's and 1930's.

Many of the prints in public circulation are from their collections.



*Police Barracks Darwin. Taken by M.C. Gordon Stott  
Approximately 1932.*

**PHOTOS FROM TIMBER CREEK  
CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS.**

(Courtesy of Richard Cheal, Ngukurr)

Below: Mrs. Margaret Vigants (Timber Creek Council President), Maggie Jones (wife of Tracker George) and Commissioner of Police, Mr. Brian Bates unveiling a street sign to Tracker George.



Below: Snr. Constable Dave Hutchinson and ACPO Chris Jones with Mr. John Godon, ex Timber Creek Police.



Below: (On horse back ) Snr Const. Mike Wyatt, B/Sgt. Dave Hutchinson, and ACPO Chris Jones. (Standing ) Superintendent Warren O'Meara , Commissioner Mr. Brian Bates, & Ex. Commissioner Mr. Bill Mc Claren.



*Letter received from R.J. Pitts APM JP Hon. Secretary S.A. Police Historical Society Inc.*

Congratulations to Northern Territory Police personnel for the excellent commemoration of 100 years of policing recently held at Timber Creek. (Reported in *The Citation*, Volume 2, No 12 June 1998)

Members of the South Australian Police Historical Society, which acts as the Historical Section of S.A. Police were pleased to provide some background material re the early South Australian Police personnel who were stationed initially at Gordon Creek and then at Timber Creek up to 1911. Responsibility for policing in the Northern Territory then passes from South Australia to the new Commonwealth Authorities.

It was good to see references to early Mounted Constables including Edmund O'Keefe, Uriah Holland, and Charles Dempsey and to many later Northern Territory Police personnel, each of whom helped to establish and build on the finest traditions of outback policing.



While members of this Society were unable to attend the Centenary celebrations (due to the distance from Adelaide, would you believe!), we appreciated the contact and exchange of information with Northern Territory Police personnel from Katherine etc.

Some of us hope to be able to visit the Timber Creek Police Museum one day, and to view the Centenary Plaque which we believe portrays the badges of the Police organisations responsible for policing in the area over the past century.

Thank you also for the excellent write up on the event etc. in the 'Citation'.

Well done by all involved!

---

## **MANHUNT AND ARREST OF BILLY BENN** by Laurie Kennedy

On Saturday, 5th August 1967, the Harts Range races were in progress when the Officer in Charge, Constable Tony Stenhouse received word that an aboriginal by the name of Billy Benn had shot and killed another aboriginal called Harry Neal. I don't know what his reason was for shooting Neal. There was probably a reason given but I have forgotten it over the years.

Following the shooting, Benn immediately decamped, taking his relatives into the bush in an effort to evade the obvious police investigation that would result from his actions.

Sergeant Len Cossins ( Alice Springs) and Constable Blake Jobberns (Lake Nash) were attending the race meeting. Tony Stenhouse obtained their assistance in organising a search for Benn. While they searched along a nearby range, Benn opened fire, wounding Jobberns across the stomach and Cossins in the buttock. After the casualties were evacuated to Alice Springs, reinforcements were organised to go to Harts Range and help in the search. It appeared to us who attended that we had a desperate and dangerous man on the loose.

2/C Sergeant Peter Haage headed the search. In addition, there were 6 constables who included myself, Malcolm (Bluey) King, Ross Kerr, Rob Moore, Les Perry and Terry O'Brien. I know I was working night shift when told to join the search but not certain what the others were doing.

In those days, Harts Range was only a 1 - man station so the extra members were a bit of a drain on Tony's resources. Also, we had the services of 2 trackers, Teddy Egan and Sonny Woods. On arrival at Harts Range, Tony told us Benn had gone bush with his mob and he was still in possession of a .22 rifle.

It took some time to work out what the best plan of attack was but in the end, we commandeered station horses from the racetrack - each having 1 riding horse and a packhorse.

Then we decided where we would get tucker. There was precious little sent out from Alice Springs but Mt. Riddock Station came to the rescue and supplied our needs from their store. They also provided some of the horses we used.

I had previously ridden a horse on one other occasion so this was certainly my first time on a 'racehorse' as such. The rest of the team were generally pretty green except for Peter Haage and perhaps one other and of course, the trackers.

We eventually got organised and set off with out 'plant' but not without mishap. One of the packhorses must have had a loose girth because the pack slipped and away he went through the bush spraying the scrub and ranges with flour, sugar and what ever else the packs contained.

The offending animal was located and a few items salvaged.

Another incident was when I tested my racehorse but it was more like he tested me. The mongrel bolted twice and left me behind - twice.

By the end of the first day, we didn't achieve much - there was a cold south easterly blowing, the terrain was rough as hell which made tracking very difficult and slow going for horses and trackers alike. Much of our progress was done on foot.

That night, we realised there was another factor to our lack of planning - Peter Haage cooked the meal and we only had 1 plate, 1 spoon and 1 cup between the lot of us so we ate in turn. The night was cold but perhaps we were fortunate to have a ground sheet and a couple of blankets so we huddled up together to keep warm and got whatever sleep we could.

**DAY 2** :Conditions were no better than yesterday with rough terrain and little sign for the trackers to follow but occasionally they would locate a disturbed stone or something to indicate we were on the right track. The astuteness of the tracker is amazing. We were fortunate it had been a good season so water was easily obtainable in the form of soaks and water holes.

There had been very little human activity in that area so the water was very clear and palatable. There were no bores in that part of the country. If we needed to water the horses, it was virtually just find a likely spot, dig down about a foot or so and we had it. Needless to say, the trackers knew that country and had a good knowledge of where to look.





A fixed wing aircraft flew over from time to time but didn't achieve a great deal as far as spotting Benn went. This pattern went on for several days - cold, rough country, no change of clothes and very little to cook with.

**DAY 6:** Peter Haage, Les Perry, Ross Kerr and Rob Moore left to check out another area with Tracker Sonny before returning to Harts Range. The rest of us remained, as there was still an inkling that Benn may still be in the ranges. We had a bit of mishap with O'Brien's horse while negotiating a steep hill. The horse tripped and broke it's leg and subsequently had to be destroyed. The department got a bill for \$600.00 as compensation for an "extremely valuable racehorse". I know the owner, Bloomfield from Loves Creek Station was very pleased with the result. \$600.00 was a lot of money in those days.

That evening, we were in a steep gorge, when Tracker Egan started to get a bit toey and reckoned Billy Benn was close by. It turns out; we had walked right past him, as he lay camouflaged in the bush. If he was a snake, he could have bitten us. We set up camp as it was getting dark - about 7pm and Teddy heard noises so went to investigate. He saw some of Billy's relatives and went over to them, took a rifle from a fellow called Long Dick and fired a shot into the air. Then he sang out to us that he had the rifle. We scrambled up to where Teddy was and soon spotted Billy Benn close by and grabbed him. He made no attempt to run away. I believe that Billy and his mob had just about had enough. There wasn't much tucker out there and we had found where they had been eating the small paddy melons that grow in the area. Not the best tucker by anyone's standard but it's about all they had. They were poor as crows.

Teddy gave the rifle, which had a broken stock to Bluey King who checked it, and 13 rounds fell out.

We couldn't do much with Billy at that time so we spent a very cold night guarding him before setting out for Harts Range the next morning, which took all day. Billy led the way via a few water holes for the horses.

We arrived at Harts Range just on dark where the rest of the search party was waiting for us. We were filthy dirty and couldn't have a shower because the Harts Range water supply wasn't very good.

The following day, a plane came out with some welfare people on it to take Billy back to Alice Springs. We got a resupply of food and clothes so dumped our old outfits. The resupply of food was well needed too, because we just about cleaned Stenhouse out when we arrived.

Billy was charged with murder but subsequently found not guilty on the grounds of insanity.

There was one amusing event during the search.

Some how or other, around day 4 or 5, someone provided us with a few bottles of beer. We decided to cool the bottles down by wrapping them in wet hessian bags and hanging them from the trees. After a while, Haage, Bluey and I tested them. They were nice and cold. The others didn't think they would have cooled down sufficiently so we let them believe it. We certainly enjoyed a nice pleasant drink.

Bluey was the only one who thought to bring a camera with him.



The picture above (Courtesy of Bluey King) shows: Bluey King, Tracker Teddy Egan, Laurie Kennedy, Billy Benn and Terry O'Brien.

The truth is, we had no time to prepare for the trip once we got notice.

In good circumstances, the area we travelled would have been very enjoyable. It was some magnificent country as far as scenery goes but we had no idea where we were going and if it wasn't for the trackers, I believe we could have still been there. There was nothing like a compass or map to help us. The search took about 7 days. From the time he shot Harry Neal to the time we got notified, arrived at Harts Range and finally mounted would have been possibly 5 or 6 days.

It was a long time ago and I didn't keep any notes. I am just relying on memory at this stage.

*Laurie Kennedy would be well known to many of our members. After serving with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade in Melbourne, he joined the Northern Territory Police Force on 25th November 1963. After completing his basic training in Darwin, he was transferred to Alice Springs where he served until 1967 before spending 5 years at Finke. The ABC television programme "A Big Country" used Laurie in one of their weekly shows titled "The Law at Finke". In 1972, Laurie, Eileen and their children moved to Papunya where they remained until 1976 before moving back to Alice Springs but he wasn't finished with the bush. For the next 2 years, he relieved at various stations, which included Harts Range, Kulgera and Ayers Rock.*

*Laurie retired from the police force on 31st May 1997 and is currently residing in Alice Springs. - Ed.*