



the CITATION

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY POLICE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



OLD ROPER BAR POLICE STATION, NT

Old Roper was the place used by Leichhardt to cross the Roper River on his 1845 Moreton Bay-Port Essington expedition. Later it was used by cattle drovers bringing stock from Northern Queensland to the Northern Territory Top End, Victoria River and the Kimberleys.

In 1872 'The Young Australian' paddle steamer was brought to the Roper to assist in transporting material to the Overland Telegraph operation. Later it carried supplies to cattle stations until wrecked in 1892 just downstream from the Bar. Mention is made of a Police Station at Roper Bar in the year 1885. It was established because of attacks being made on travellers in a dangerous section of the range called 'Hells Gate'.

Two troopers and five native trackers lived in tents for a year at Mount McMinn, some fourteen miles west of the present Police Station. In 1889 a rough timber and corrugated iron structure was built. This was the beginning of a more continuous police presence in the area.

Courtesy of Northern Territory Police News Vol 8, No 2 - March 1985



PETER THOMAS



VALE MAX CARTWRIGHT

Dear Members and Friends,

This message will be brief: I wish you all and your families a safe and prosperous New Year. Naturally, our thoughts go to Lisa, Joseph and Ruby HUITSON: Sergeant Glen HUITSON, Officer in charge of Adelaide River Police, was the first N.T. Police member to be feloniously slain whilst on duty since 1952.

On a more positive note, I have started reading 'the Rain Bird' by former Detective Sergeant 1/c Jim ALEXANDER, who served in Darwin, Alice, and elsewhere from 1952 to 1964: and very interesting it is too. I commend it to all N.T. Police Historians.

The N.T. Police Commissioned Officers Association has raised the possibility of producing an index of all persons who have served as Police in the Northern Territory. The N.T. Police Association, Inc. has indicated support in principle. I expect that the 'tired Police Officers Association of the N.T. (RPANT) will have an interest in this. The scope of the project is still a matter for discussion. Naturally, this will be in augmentation of the work already done by the late Lawrie DEBNAM, who compiled a list of Policemen in the N.T. from 1870 to 1914. This included such details of their service as could be discovered. The Genealogical Society of the N.T. has added some biographical data. When I scanned the Debnam Index, I was fascinated that two Police were described in 1907 as being 'on special duties at Port Keats'.

On behalf of all readers, I thank Garth MACPHERSON for his continuing efforts as our editor.

Peter THOMAS

15th October 1999, Max Cartwright lost a long battle with cancer. He was aged 71 years. Max was not a police officer but a very keen historian who wrote several books relating to the Northern Territory and was very supportive of 'The Citation', always ready to offer support, guidance and information, when it was sought. Max had very strong views on what he termed 'Would be historians who have a desire to change history for the sake of political correctness'. He was a proud Territorian although he wasn't born here. Max Cartwright was born at Wombara NSW. on 17 April 1928. His mother died when he was 15 and was subsequently raised by his father.

He served an apprenticeship as a fitter and turner before coming to the Northern Territory aged 21. One of his earliest tasks was with Centralia Holdings in search of Lassetter's lost reef of gold. Max was responsible for making the first motor vehicle tracks from Curtain Springs to Ayers Rock and the Olgas.

Max married Gladys Arbon in 1950. This marriage, which produced 7 children, was annulled after 25 years. Meanwhile, Max formed a partnership with Ray Arbon, his brother-in-law and purchased Urapunga Station on the Roper River. Both men did much to develop the station and in 1960, Bryan Bowman bought the Cartwright share.

Max found employment at Rum Jungle and then to Hooker Creek where he was asked to erect a monument to the aviators Anderson and Hitchcock who perished with the crash of the Kookaburra in 1929.

After a short time at Yuendumu, the family returned to Alice Springs. His health began to suffer including spasms of blindness. Despite his failing eyesight he managed to research and write his historical pieces that included many references to early police patrols.

Max had a genuine interest in the police history of the Northern Territory and will be sadly missed by all who enjoyed reading about our past as it actually happened.



MEMORIES of TENNANT CREEK



Bob Darkin
25/6/92

I was transferred to Tennant Creek as second in charge to Sergeant Denny Smythe and then under Sergeant Bill McKinnon. Tennant Creek in those days was a bit of a 'wild west' town. Only a couple of mines were working, the biggest being the 'Eldorado' but a lot of road workers would come into town from their various camps for a booze-up. The closing time for the two hotels was 10pm. and usually, there were some who would refuse to leave the bar and had to be thrown out. This was good exercise and helped to keep one fit. To do my patrols I had to borrow horses from one Cock Martin out at the old Telegraph Station a few miles north of town. When I first took over the horse plant it hadn't been used for over 12 months. Most of the horses would buck a bit. On one occasion, the horse I was on started to buck around the flat and toppled over a four-foot high ant bed, came down on top of me and broke four of my ribs. That same day, a black fellow from Lake Nash attacked me. I was in a bit of discomfort without messing about with him, but he went back to Lake Nash the next day a bit wiser and more aware of his social responsibilities.

My black tracker was a huge fellow about 18 stone or more with immense feet and could kick like a horse as many a native found out who were unfortunate enough to be kicked in the backside by him. When this happened, Nat would say ... *'im alright boss. I bin kick im belonga harse'*.... One patrol I did with Nat was out east of Tennant Creek looking for the buggy of the explorers Burke and Wills which some fool in Canberra thought was out there. At that time, the middle of summer, very hot. the temperature up around the 120F degree mark and water was very scarce. Of course, we found no trace of any buggy but nearly perished. All the water holes dried up except one rockhole called 'Mumbilla', which had a small amount of green water in it as well as 2 dead kangaroos, crawling with maggots.

Certainly not drinkable but we eventually got back to Kelly Well about 20 miles south of Tennant Creek. Nat would occasionally fall off his horse and say ... *'you go on boss-leavum me here. Might be I'm pinished'*.... The cunning old bugger would always fall off in the shade of a mulga tree. I'd somehow get him back on his horse and plod on until eventually, when we reached Kelly Well Nat fell into the cattle trough. I don't know how much water he drank but it was damned hard to get him out of there.

Our first daughter Sondra Robin Darken was born in the Tennant Creek Hospital which, at that time was run by the army. Both Vicki and Sondra were treated like V.I.P.s - probably because they were the only patients the army nurses had to care for at that time. The doctor was Captain Woods who lived next door and he had a bottle of whisky which was put to good use to 'wet the baby's head'. Soon afterwards, I built a bird cage about 6 feet square with the idea of getting a few budgerigars so that Sondra could amuse herself watching them. I asked Tracker Nat to get a couple out of the bush as they were nesting at the Pigeon Hole camp where Nat lived. Well, some days later, he arrived with a sugar bag of budgerigars. Must have been thirty to forty birds. I told him ... *'how the hell am I going to feed all those birds'?*... Not to be outdone, Nat came back a few days later with half a bag of Nardoo seed. He had all the Warramungas in the camp out collecting seed. He loved to watch Sondra looking at the birds. Eventually, when the seed supply had run out, I cut a hole in the top of the cage and the birds used to climb out, go bush for a feed and most of them would come back and go into the cage.



Sondra and
Joanne Darkin
Circa 1948

Next door to where we lived was the Tennant Creek School. One day, the teacher came to me very upset and said he had smacked one kid named 'Knocker' Renfrey and he and his mate Paul Ruger had run away. Mr. Allen the school teacher was terrified that Knocker's father, Snowy Renfrey would come to the school and perhaps belt him up. I said I would go back to the school and make sure no harm would come to him. Sure enough, Snowy



came back with Knocker. Snowy asked what the trouble was and Mr. Allen explained what swear words Knocker had used at him. Snow took up a ruler, put Knocker across his knee and belted hell out of him. The last time I saw Knocker, he was a very big man about 16 stone and six feet or more tall and Paul Ruger was the Mayor of Tennant Creek. Snowy Renfrey had previously shot and killed a man but that was nothing new in Tennant Creek.

A big copper plate from the Rising Sun mine and owned by Jimmy Weaber went missing. The copper plate was impregnated with gold. I went out to the mine and picked up two sets of tracks which I recognised as those of Snowy Renfrey and his defacto. I knew Snow's track although neither person had bare feet or wore shoes, they only wore socks. This of course made identification difficult but knew from experience that Snow's right foot pointed in, making him 'pigeon toed'. One didn't have to be Sherlock Holmes to work out who carried the copper plate. I worked on Snow for about a month and travelled around Tennant Creek for the same period on horseback but could not locate the plate - until, one night I gave Snow a ride home and after a few words he said ... 'I don't know who took it Bob but you go about two miles west of the hospital and you'll come to a clump of mulga trees. You might find it there'.... Well, I had a look and sure enough, I found it there. I contacted Jimmy Weaber and he drove into the Police Station in his old buckboard. When I loaded it on for him, he drove off - not even 'thanks' from Jim and after a months hard work for the old bugger. I don't know the value of the plate but Snow said it would be worth over a 1000 pound and that was a lot of money in those days. I ran into Snow many years later when Vicky and I were in Hong Kong. We were sitting in the hotel lounge one afternoon when he walked in. He told me he was the captain of a ship out in the harbour which brought oil from the Middle East. We went out to the ship which was a grant of a thing. All the deckhands saluted him and called 'Sir' or 'Captain Bill'. We had a drink and a chat and the last time we saw him was when he saw us off on the plane when we left for home. I always had a lot of respect for Snow, even if he was a notorious scallywag. He died in Darwin and was buried at sea.

When anyone died in Tennant Creek, the Police would get the grave dug and either Bill McKinnon or myself would perform the burial service. One funeral was a disaster however. There were eight or ten mourners present and when we lowered the coffin down the hole, one of the ropes slipped and the coffin fell to the bottom. That was bad enough but the lid flew off and there was the dead man, clothes on and his boots not laced up. I jumped into the grave and tried to get the lid on as quick as I could - then I had difficulty in getting out of the hole. We were good triers but not cut out to be undertakers.

The Warramunga blacks lived out east of Tennant Creek at a place called 'Pigeon Hole'. A Mr. and Mrs. Long - missionaries, lived there also. I had to go out and shoot some of the dogs and borrowed Bill McKinnon's new .22 rifle. Just as I arrived, a black fellow attacked Mr Long with a boomerang. I jumped between the two and hit the black fellow over the head with Bill's rifle and smashed the butt. On returning to the Police Station, I told Bill what had happened. He said ... 'Did you kill him Bob?' ... I replied ... 'No Bill, he's alright' ... Bill said ... 'you silly bugger'

I took Tracker Nat on a patrol out to Mosquito Creek where an Afgan by the name of Noor Dean had a mine and was employing blacks without a license. We were returning to Tennant Creek with the blacks as witnesses when I met Dean heading for the mine in his truck. I pulled him up at a creek crossing and advised him he would be prosecuted. He told me that he was a champion wrestler, a very strong man and he would kill me. He rushed at me and I hit him behind the ear and he collapsed in the creek bed. When I was about to get back on my horse, I noticed Nat had my rifle. I asked him why he had it and he said ... 'I bin watchem that one fight. Might be that damned 'Ghan' bin kill you. Alright I bin shootem then'. He meant it too. Nat was a very good tracker but I would have preferred Nat to have shot Dean before he killed me, not after. Because of a complaint from Canberra, I patrolled to Sid Boon's camp south east of Tennant Creek. Sid was cohabiting with a black woman which was frowned on in those days and was an offence under the law. Sid was a nice old chap and asked for my advice to straighten the matter out.



I told him his only chance was to marry his defacto. He readily agreed to this suggestion so I told him to bring his wife to be into Tennant Creek and I would arrange for one Dougall McTaggart to conduct the ceremony. There was a problem with this suggestion as Sid said he couldn't bring Flora (her name) away from the camp as she was his goat shepherd and if she left them, the dingoes would attack.

After much consideration, I agreed to bring Dougall McTaggart out to the camp. The preacher had his own truck, so one day we set out for Boon's camp and arrived after getting no less than five punctures. The ceremony didn't take long as it was hot in the sun and the flies were bad. During the ceremony, the preacher said to Flora - ... *'Do You take this man Sydney Boon to be your lawful wedded husband etc.'* ... to which Flora grunted. He then said ... *'And you Sydney Boon. Do you take Flora to be your lawful wedded wife etc?'* ... To which Sid replied ... *'I wouldn't have brought you all the bloody way out here if I didn't want to, I'll put the billy on and we'll have a mug of tea.'* ... *'Flora! Put the billy on'* ... That was the end of the funniest wedding ceremony I had ever been at.

ROPER RIVER

About this time, I had to go to Roper River to take charge from Constable Greg Withnell who had resigned to take charge of Roper Valley Station as head stockman during Tom Holts absence. I had to leave Vicki in Tennant Creek with Sondra. I got a ride to Birdum in a truck and then picked up the police horse plant and headed for the Roper. When passing through Elsey Station, I met up with Bob Farrah who was on his way to Roper River and other places with his pack horse mail run. Bob was not what one would call good company. I reckon he would only say about five words per day on average. It rained all the way and we had to swim numerous creeks which were in flood. Bob was very good at living off the land. One night as we made camp, he wandered off to a nearby lagoon, fashioned himself a spear and within 20 minutes returned with a good size fish for our meal which was very welcome, as all our meat and damper was mouldy. When we left civilisation, Bob would take off his boots and ride barefoot. He would throw a spear better than anyone I had ever seen, white or black.

One night, we camped at Crescent Lagoon and

there met Tom Holt who was handing over a mob of cattle to a drover. We later met up with Tom at his place - Roper Valley Station. Tom and I had both been in the permanent army at North Head in Sydney so we had something in common to talk about. We became friends over a long period and Tom became Sondra's Godfather. After Roper Valley Station, he and his wife Julie purchased Tondara Stud at Berthingra, NSW. In 1962, he sent me some brood mares and two very good race horses at Simpsons Gap. One horse called Englishman won just about every race he started in. One of the mares he sent was 'Cragnelia' and I sent her back to Tondara to be mated with 'Singapore Road'. The foal from this mating was called 'Nagpuni'. He won the Doomden Ten Thousand and was sold in the USA. where he ran 6 ½ furlongs in world record time. When I arrived at Roper River, Tom decided on a bit of a celebration. Out came a crystal bowl (capacity about 2 gallons or more) and into it was 'Roper Valley Punch'. Very special and very, very potent. Tom demanded, irrespective of how much punch we had consumed, that each person should do something entertaining. Old Jimmy Gibbs from Urapunga Station did a 'soft shoe shuffle' on the table, I sang a song, Tom stole the show with several recitations and Bob Farrah said nothing!!

During the party a Taipan snake came into the room and went behind Toms beautiful piano. Tom got his very expensive 'Greener' double barrelled shotgun and told us to move the piano away so he could shoot the dammed thing. Jimmy Gibbs and I slid the piano away and Tom blasted the snake with both barrels but he also blasted the innards out of the piano. We all congratulated him on his marksmanship, much to his disgust.

One day whilst at the Roper River Police Station, a black fellow came from Urapunga station and said poor old Jimmy Gibbs was ... *'properly sick Bugger'* ..., and wanted me to help. Off we went raining like mad and swam the Roper which was now in full flood and foot walked to Urapunga. Jimmy didn't look too good. He was crouched over a chair and couldn't move much. He had a carbuncle like a big, red apple on his upper back. His homestead was a big bough shed about seven or eight feet high and about 20 yards square - open on all sides and situated on the banks of the Wilton River.



I found a tin and boiled some water, sterilized my pocket knife in it and said to Jim - ...*'Hold on old chap. I'm going to lance it and you'll be OK but it may hurt a bit'....* When I lanced the carbuncle, it exploded like a bomb and the core and mess that shot out of it landed in the brush roof. I washed the wound out with some bluestone (copper sulphate) and hot water, then stitched it with one of Jim's leatherwork needles and horse tail hair. Within about 15 minutes and a mug of tea brewed by a black lady named Khaki, Jim was as good as new again. He walked outside, had a look around and said ...*'You're the best bloody doctor I've ever seen. Anything I own, anytime, is your's for the asking'....* After that, we became good friends and Jim used to come up to the station with some corned beef. At the station, there was a big chilli bush and we would eat corn beef and chillies so hot, we'd be crying. He was a lovely old man and a good friend.

Jims station was on the banks of the Wilton River which flowed into the Roper River. Sometime after stitching Jim's back, there was a hell of a commotion down on the river bank about 50 yards from the hut. A big crocodile had come out of the river and grabbed one of Jim's pigs. The noise we heard was a combination of the pig squealing, the blacks shouting and the dogs barking. As I raced over, saw a black boy named 'Ginger' hit the crocodile over the head with an axe. Ginger was Jim's head stockman and husband of Khaki. The pig had lost all its interest in living and was also dispatched by Ginger. No doubt the menu at Urapunga was pig and crocodile for some time. Jim told me that when John Lovegrove (Police Inspector) was stationed at the Roper, he was given a lesson on how to knock over a killer for meat - by Jim. He said he told John to pick out a young heifer or steer, ride alongside and when it started to plait it's legs jump off, grab it by the tail and throw it. Jim got on his horse and told John he would show him how it was done. Everything went OK

until Jim grabbed the beast by the tail - it let go with both hind feet and kicked him in the head. Jim said that when he came to, about 15 minutes later, John Lovegrove was still laughing. I developed a much better way of getting a killer. I'd climb a tree and get the tracker to drive a few head of cattle underneath so it was just a matter of shooting one at short range. In those day's station men and others (especially police) didn't want any witnesses when they got a killer because in most cases, the beast belonged to someone else. This happened to me at Mount Bundy Station near Adelaide River. Bill Wyatt was the manager of Mount Bundy at the time and had about 30 head in the yard. He was going to kill one for beef. I wanted to travel a bit before dark so Bill told me there was a baldy heifer in the mob, for me to knock her over and he would come and give me a hand when he finished what he was doing. Out I went, shot the heifer and was skinning it when along came Evan Herbert who wanted to know what I was doing killing one of his cows. I explained to him that I would not have killed it if I had known it was his. Herbert took most of the beef anyhow when he left. Bill Wyatt thought it was a hell of a joke but I reckoned my time would come one day to get even on him and it did!!

WATCHMAN - WHAT OF THE NIGHT

By Ed Fernier

In 1952 I relieved the late Constable Jim Mclean at Hatches Creek, a widely - scattered wolfram mining field some 300 miles from Alice Springs, in a North Easterly direction.

Jim was a World War 2 RAAF pilot. During his flying career he had pranged a Thunderbolt fighter - a memorable experience and he still had bad dreams about his days of submarine hunting in the Norwegian fiords. The Germans used to hide out in the fiords because it was so difficult to detect them there. Jim said he would be flying his Beaufighter at low level in narrow spaces between sheer rock cliffs towering hundreds of feet above him on both sides when, without warning he'd encounter a mass of cloud. Of course he had no idea when the fiord was going to change direction and cause him to slam into a wall of rock. His only hope was to climb as rapidly as possible, flying on instruments, to get out of the trap.

Bob Darlin on patrol
with trackers at
Harts Range area
1945-1948





Ed Ferrer

Casualties in his work were very severe and it is a wonder any of the boys survived at all. However, to my story.

Wolfram is a dark - coloured compound of tungsten, which is used in hardening steel. At Hatches Creek wolfram is found in quartz rocks, recovered by underground mining.

The Korean war was in progress at the time and large deposits in that country were not being worked, so Australian mines were receiving one pound (the equivalent of two dollars, but a significant sum half a century ago) per pound weight for their wolfram

There was a government battery at Hatches Creek where substantial producers took their ore to be crushed and the mineral extracted. Small-scale battlers used to make a big fire, place a sheet of galvanised iron over the coals and spread their ore over the iron. As the wolfram, when heated, expanded more rapidly than the quartz enveloping it, the quartz was broken away and the wolfram collected when it was cold. This was stored in bags until there was about 100 pounds of it, the saleable unit, when a bag would be sewn up and delivered to the wolfram buyer.

I had been receiving complaints from small producers that wolfram was being stolen at night from their partly-filled bags. The thief never stole a

whole bag-just a few handfuls from every bag he found.

Whilst investigating these complaints I noticed bike tyre tracks in the vicinity. In every case the tread pattern was the same. At the time there were quite a few bikes at Hatches Creek, but at least it was a start.

The next step was to find out who was producing good wolfram from a mine that was known to be no good, and who rode a bicycle leaving similar tracks.

Suspicion fell on two young European migrants who lived in a tent half-way up a fairly steep little hill. I resolved to pay them an unannounced visit. As the thief was game enough to sneak into miners' camps at night, and skilful enough to get away with it, I realised he was a formidable foe.

These particular men were reputed to carry knives and as they could have been former enemy servicemen I regarded them with due caution. The nearest Police help was hundreds of miles away and I did not think it reasonable to ask a lowly-paid tracker to take part in an exercise of this type.

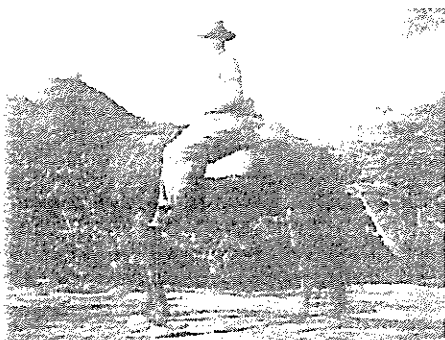
I chose an evening when I could approach the men's camp in darkness and have the aid of moonlight when the action started.

The leading Citizen at Hatches Creek was Leonard Hunter Purkiss, a miner who was a Member of the Legislative council (fore-runner to today's Parliament), a Justice of the Peace and a World War I digger.

Len was a fine man and a pillar of the community. His wife, universally known as 'Ma' Purkiss was a lovely woman who used to invite me to Sunday lunch every week - a treat I looked forward to.

I called on Len and told him what I proposed to do. I said I would report to him at 0700 sharp on the following morning. Len agreed that if I failed to appear he would go to the Police Station and use the Flying Doctor radio to inform Clive Graham, the Inspector in Charge, Southern Division and subsequently Commissioner, that something had happened to me.

On the chosen evening I parked my truck in scrub about half a mile away from the camp I was to raid, and made my way through the spinifex to a point



*Ed Ferrer
1950*



where I could observe the tent, arriving undetected. Sure enough after a while a man wheeled a bike down the hill, an empty bag draped over the bar, and rode off in a leisurely manner. The other chap read for a while and then turned out the lantern. When I thought he would be asleep I left my observation post and took up a position under a bush alongside the track the cyclist had used. To my great discomfort the ants decided to work night shift and I had an unhappy time, being restricted in the amount of movement I could manage.

It is strange how the mind works in time of stress. As the moon came up and the lights in the scattered mining camps went out one by one, the scene was one of peace and beauty, with the moon casting strangely-shaped shadows amongst the little valleys between the spinifex-clad hillocks. Words came into my mind from an old poem I had learned at school long before:

*The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.*

Had my mission not been so grim and had the ants been less industrious, it would have been a pleasant occasion!

At long last the cyclist returned, dismounted and began to push the bike up the hill. The bag on the bar was no longer empty. I waited until he drew level with the bush and then emerged to confront him. He responded vigorously and he and I, the bike and the bag of 'wolfram', all rolled down the hill in an untidy bundle. By the time we had come to a stop I had managed to handcuff him to his bike and a quick search revealed no knife.

The commotion brought his mate running from the tent and I discovered both spoke good English. There was a saying at the time that persons of that type were either at your feet or at your throat-there was no half-way point.

The gentleman from the tent was a good example of that. At first he obviously believed his partner had been caught fair and square and he was humble almost to the point of grovelling. However, when I checked the bag and found it contained not wolfram but meat, the picture changed at once.

Instantly realising I had nothing on them, he became extremely arrogant, claiming the cyclist had been seriously assaulted and promising to report me to the Administrator, who was ex officio Commissioner of Police. The cyclist developed the theme by claiming he thought I was a tiger and that he nearly had a heart attack. I removed the cuffs and commenced an undignified retreat, to the accompaniment of further threats of official action.

I learned later that the cyclist had seen a poker game in progress at one of the camps and had asked permission to join in. Having won all the money, he then accepted a proffered wager of a quantity of meat which one of the players had brought from town that day, having won the meat too he must have decided not to bother about wolfram that night.

When I returned to the Police Station it was late at night but I found it impossible to sleep. I had several cups of coffee and sat on the verandah smoking for some time but I was too stirred up for any chance of sleeping.

In those days we were issued by the Administrator with General Search Warrants which were valid for six months and exercisable on reasonable suspicion. I convinced myself there was a reasonable suspicion that, as the men were almost certainly stealing wolfram, they would most likely be stealing other things too. In particular I wondered where they had procured their truck. Accordingly I decided to return to their camp at first light and turn them over, in the hope of establishing unlawful possession, if nothing else.

This time I spared myself the effort of creeping through the spinifex and drove right into the camp. To my astonishment the campsite was bare-no tent, no truck, no wheel barrow, no bike, no water-barrel - nothing at all. The birds had flown and taken their nest with them!

The wolfram thefts ceased, and to my relief, I never heard from the Administrator!

*Merry Christmas
and a
Happy New Year*

