

Notes from overland trip from Sydney to Roper River Mission Station, May-Oct. 1919 / written by C. E. Latham

1. The Rev. E. A. Burgmann, principal of St. John's Theological College at Armidale and later Bishop of Canberra – Goulburn Diocese. Mrs Burgmann and children and a clergyman from Armidale Cathedral whose name I have forgotten at this late date. These good people gave us accommodation on 14th July.
2. The Rev. Canon Fairbrother Rector of Tamworth and his wife and family. These kind people made us welcome to their home on July 12th. We spent the next day (Sunday) with them and left Tamworth on Monday July 14.
3. The Roman Catholic Church and St. Joseph's convent at Glen Innes N.S.W.
4. This is a part of the centre of Brisbane in 1919. St. John's Cathedral stands out on the higher land in centre of picture.
5. Goomby. This is the Railway Station at Goomie, where we spent an hour on 23rd July 1919 hauling the Ford on to the Northern side of the Railway line to find a better track to Columboola. This country was fairly flat and sandy. It was in the middle of a bad drought. As we arose one morning we saw water in all the indentations of the track. It also stretched out on either side of us as far as we could see. As the sun rose higher the water quickly disappeared. We had seen a very fine example of a MIRAGE.
6. King Friday of Tanabaranie Station, N.T.
7. The desolate drought-stricken DALBY. The boy is probably taking home his breakfast in his right hand. I cannot now remember what it was. This was a desolate poverty-stricken place.
8. Man and Model T Ford at Dalby
9. PRICKLY PEAR in the DALBY region provided both food and water for the stock that seemed to thrive on it.
10. On 25th July 1919 we ran five miles to Eaglehawk Creek where we were stuck in the sand –we unloaded- and advanced only 50 yards in 7 hours. Eventually we built up a track with old fence rails and set off again only to be stuck again in sand up to the axles. Did only 7 miles all told that day between 7.55 am and 6.15 p.m. These photos show the kind of spot we were in near the railway that ran through to Charleville.
11. Railway near Charleville
12. This is one of the many places where we were obliged to unload along the Toowoomba-Charleville line- so as to get the car up the hill. Note the gear in the bottom of the valley. This had to be carried to the flat ground above- these loads usually were cases of petrol, tyres &c.
13. We arrived at MUCKADILLA HOTEL 27th July 1919 and stayed till the 30th July waiting for a new differential to be sent from Mitchell by rail. Here was to be found the sulphur baths where people came for healing purposes. When the water came up from the bore it had the objectionable smell of Hydrogen Sulphide (rotten eggs). Turned into a glass, the sulphur sank quickly to the bottom of the tumbler of water-

the odour disappeared and the water was fit to drink. This hotel was the only building then to be seen at MUCKADILLA. We camped near here on the 28th and 29th July while repairing the car's differential.

14. A shearing shed and wool storage shed somewhere between Blackall and Longreach

15. This is the homestead of the AVON DOWNS cattle station just inside the Northern Territory and 50 miles from Camooweal. We arrived here on Monday 11th August at 1.30P.M. Mr Warren had the use of the blacksmith shop here to make new spring leaves and carry out sundry repairs. We spent the night with the good people here. I cannot remember their name as I have long since lost all my own notes of the trip, but can well remember their kindness to us both.

16. Thursday 7th August 1919 Roy Warren is talking to the Storekeeper at BOULIA, where we arrived at 12.45p.m. The outside temperature was about 140° F. It was a relief to get out of the direct rays of the sun for a short time. This was about the worst day that we had experienced for heat. Travelling had become almost impossible under the circumstances.

17. At Brunette Downs N. T. 13/8/19 waiting for the new back axle and wheels to return from the Station workshop. Mr Warren seems to be examining what looks like the car's differential.

18. Camels. These were wild camels on BRUNETTE DOWNS station. The people on this station were now turning to the use of petrol-driven vehicles. Camels in a train going out of Camooweal were carrying loads up to about ten hundred weight.- mostly flour, sugar and such like for the various stations towards the Interiors.

19. The police Station at ANTHONY'S LAGOON with the Ford at the rear.

20. Two waggons belonging to a HAWKER plying between CLONCURRY and the various stations up to the Gulf. This man carried clothes, tobacco and all sorts of odds and ends to sell to the station hands. He usually spent about three months during the "DRY" travelling backwards and forwards. Note that the teams are led by the men on horseback.

21. The usual mob of goats to be found at every police station in the Territory. There were 500 of them at Alexandria Downs, N.T.

22. A black fellow at Anthony's Lagoon carving up a goat to be cooked for the policeman's table.

23. These are some of the black women who do the domestic chores on the cattle stations of the Territory. Some are the wives of black drovers.

24. Black women on territory stations

25. This is the mailman whom we met somewhere between Brunette Downs and Anthony's Lagoon. Three horses, two of which carried the mail and his camping gear. The journey takes 3 weeks from Pine Creek to BOOROOLOOLA then 2 weeks to Camooweal. After leaving us his load of mail would increase so he drives a light vehicle from Alexandria Downs to Camooweal. Our people in Sydney were worried when we were unheard of for six weeks or more. This will explain the situation. I imagine that between November and March- during the "WET" that the mail carrying

would be entirely impossible. This was then the only means of regular communication between this part of the N.T. and the outside world.

26. This shows the work of TERMITES in the N.T.

27. At Rankine Downs on 12th August where we had stopped to see if we would obtain means of repairing our speedo cable before going on to Alexandria Downs.

28. A lubra and her child at Alexandria Downs. –probably the wife of a black stockman and employed as cook or waitress on the Station property.

29. This was a place in Western Queensland where two tracks ran off in different directions and we did not know which one to take. When we had decided to take one track, this man appeared and directed us to take the other track. The track we would have taken went to Burktown on the Queensland side of the Gulf of Carpentaria. He saved us a journey of 200 miles. The aerial survey team operating about this time made the mistake that we were prevented from doing. They were told at Burktown that they must retrace their steps as they would be prevented by sand from getting into the Territory otherwise. They ignored the warning and ended up by having to pay heavily for horses to drag their cars through many miles of sand which they encountered. Mr Warren met this team of men after I left him at Borooloola later.

30. The cook and cook house at Brunette Downs Station

31. A plain turkey shot in the long grass of the vast West Queensland plain between Longreach and Winton. It supplied quite a number of good meals. This is the last of the grass now trampled down by cattle. After the "Wet" it would stand higher than the horses ridden through it.

32. The Federal Hotel stands alone on the western Queensland plains- fifty miles from nowhere- waiting for the shearers to come along with their large cheques.

33. This was a section of the Georgina River, which runs along the border of Qld. and the N.T. during the "wet". At this time it was merely a long lake. The water was white like milk owing to suspended lime. Most of the country around is composed of limestone. The Sub-Artesian water is pumped up from limestone caverns 150 to 300 feet below the surface. All the water on Barkly Downs Station is pumped from limestone caverns. When the Georgina flows, its water would ultimately reach Lake Eyre.

34. On Barkly Downs. The wood is used for steam raising to drive the pump. The windmill is an alternative when the Steam engine breaks down and has to wait for someone to repair it. These places are only visited by men from the main station about once a week. Note funnel of the steam apparatus on the left of the windmill just above the heap of Coolibah logs.

35. This is the Rev. H. E. Warren with the back of the car in Queensland and the front in the Northern Territory.- The border gate- The gate and fence served no other purpose than just to mark the boundary between the two States.

36. This is TOP SPRING – the source of the Macarthur River N.T. For twenty miles after leaving this really wonderful basin of water- the course of the river was absolutely dry.

37. This was the camp fifty miles beyond BOOROOLOOLA. Note the long grass

which concealed the STUMP that wrecked the engine. We spent sixteen hours at this camp taking the engine from the car patching the oil pump with part of a biscuit tin lid, replacing the engine and connecting a large dry battery to give the spark. The magneto was useless and was thrown away. All this happened between 12-15p.m. on the 13th August and 5 p.m. on 14th August after which we limped back toward BOOROOLOOLA for 12 miles, camped and reached BOOROOLOOLA at 1 p.m. on 15th August. This was a tribute to the ingenuity and courage of Mr Warren. "How I would welcome the approach of a black fellow!!!" were his words when we found the extent of the damage and discussed what was the best to be done.

Being young and inexperienced I wanted to walk to the next station and procure horses to shift the car. Mr Warren said that the manager of that station lived in the black's camp and I would probably not find him. Anyhow we had no food and the heat was terrific and he told me that I would probably perish on the trip. He would not allow me to take the risk.

The dry battery had saved us; hitherto we had wondered why we allowed it to take up so much space in the car. It had been given to Mr Warren by a friend in Melbourne. The safe arrival back at Boorooloola in the middle of Aug.15 was good but, the car could go no further without storage batteries which Mr Warren hoped to obtain from the Sir John Forrest when it at length arrived at Boorooloola. The faith, courage and ingenuity of Rev. H. E. Warren was a real gift from God.

38. A poor unfortunate lubra from the bush camp at Borooloola with an arm and leg not set after being broken. This might have been the result of a domestic upheaval due to a beating by her husband.

39. Ka Hen, the Chinese gardener at Borooloola, outside his tin home. With whom we spent many enjoyable evenings listening to his many gramophone records.

Bill Harney in a Christmas broadcast over the A.B.C. years ago told the story of the most wonderful Christmas Day he had ever spent.

He was on an island in the middle of the flooded Roper River without food with a few blackfellow companions.

Looking across the flood and brooding on their unhappy condition they at length saw a native dugout approaching. In it was a large DUGONG which they decided to roast for lunch.

Along with the dugong was a sack of potatoes sent by Ka Hen from the Macarthur River to Bill for Christmas.

Roasted dugong and the roasted potatoes sent by the gracious Chinaman made that Christmas day more wonderful for Bill than any he had ever known.

Ka Hen was the "Whitest" man we met at Borooloola.

40. Vestey's Meatworks at Darwin. Work had virtually ceased here in September 1919. A large amount of beef in the freezing rooms was waiting for a ship to move it away. The Waterside Union practically ruled Darwin at the time so shipping companies were not interested in a port that was run by these people. Liquor was very dear owing to the expense of transport plus the great loss by the "breakage" on the Jetty. The town frequently ran out of necessary foodstuff.

While on S. S. Victoria on the way back to Sydney a wireless message came through to us at Thursday Island saying that the Waterside Union had rounded up the Government Administration and had shipped them away to Perth in the S. S. Kolinda. On these occasions a gunboat would be sent from Sydney to round up the law breakers only to find that they had taken the train to Pine Creek or the Katherine and could not be found by the police. The police could not arrest these lawless leaders because they were protected by the rank and file. One of these men while I was staying in Darwin had evidently become so obnoxious to his mates that they told the police to come and get him if they could, while the rest looked on. This man fought

for two hours with the police in the street outside one of the hotels before he was taken into custody. I do not know the result of this arrest. It was only a few weeks later that the Administrators were shipped away to Western Australia.

41. Cocoanut palms in Darwin Gardens.

42. Darwin Railway Station and the train just arrived from Katherine. In those days there was only one train a week between Darwin and Katherine.

43. This is BOOBY ISLAND in Torres Strait- 20 miles due west from Thursday Island and taken from the deck of S. S. Victoria in Sept. 1919.

With a glass you can see a lighthouse in the centre of the island. We were told that the Victoria had on a previous trip, stopped there to pick up one of the eight lighthouse keepers who had gone raving mad on account of the loneliness of his situation.

44. This is Mr Fred Blitner of Boorooloola and his two black wives and two children- FRED and GERALD. I cannot now remember which is which. As half-caste children they were compelled by law to be sent to the Roper River Mission to be brought up. They were camped on the bank of the Macarthur River. Fred took these two children in a small sailing boat from BOOROOLOOLA to the Roper round about 1919. On page 188 of "A HISTORY of the CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY of AUSTRALIA" BY Dr. E. K. COLE- mention is made of these two people now grown up and living at the ANGURUGA MISSION on GROOTE EYLANDT in 1945 as follows: "Mr and Mrs Fred Blintner Junior and Gerald Blintner were also of great help in the work" This referred to the building up of a new mission station at ANGURUGA. Between page 56 and 57 of "GROOTE EYLANDT MISSION" by Dr. E. K. Cole we can see a photo of "Mr Gerald Blintner" I will have a letter written to me by Fred Blintner Snr. Round about the beginning of 1920. (His initials.)

45. Pumping air into the tyres of the Model T Ford The air was free but somewhat difficult to get into the tyre with its great weight of material on board.

46. Pumping water from a somewhat tired bore in Western Queensland.

47-51. At Weroona Bore where we arrived on 9th August 1919. This is one of many pumping stations on the Barkly Down Cattle Station. The water is Sub. Artesian and is pumped up from the limestone caverns 150 to 300 feet below the surface either into large circular corrugated iron tanks or into earth reservoirs raised above the level of the flat country to a height of 15 or 20 feet. You will see the pumping overseer with his boiler, beam pump and an example of each kind of water container. You will also see the huge load of Coolibah wood used for firing the boiler. The tanks and troughs belong to different pumping stations in the same area.

52-53. This is a small part of the BOOROOLOOLA HOTEL. The proprietor- TOM LYNOT- is seen on the verandah wearing a waistcoat-

Note the heavy load on the side of the car- MOSTLY PETROL.

These photos were taken just before leaving BOOROOLOOLA a few days before our final breakdown- fifty miles away from here.

54-55. The Anglican church of St. Paul's, ROMA. We arrived at Roma on the 26th July 1919 and stayed with the Rector- the Rev. Arthur Edwin Henry- and attended the services on Sunday 27th July. Mr Henry was an architect as well as a priest of the Church. He designed this building and built it. After studying the making of cement blocks in Europe he either made or superintended the making of 27,000

blocks that were used for this building. He employed only those who were willing to do exactly what he told them to do. The result was this wonderful structure. Mr Warren gave the address in the Church at Evensong on the Sunday we were there. I had the privilege of reading the Lessens.

56. [C.E. Latham in Ford Model T with Rev. Henry who designed and built the church.] The car is shown here about to leave Roma. Rev. Mr. Henry is standing at the church door. Mr Warren took the photo. You can see how "easy" it was to jump out of the car and give an extra push to get it over a sandy crossing.

57. The Auxiliary Ketch-"the Sir John Forrest" alongside Darwin jetty at high tide. When the tide is low- the ship is twenty or more feet lower down and has to be approached by way of the rigging. In the background is Fort Neill on which we saw the grave of J. W. O. Bennett and Richard Hazard.

58. The grave of J.W.O. Bennett and Richard Hazard

59-60. The broken scarp of the Barkly Tableland which we negotiated with great fear and trembling on 9th August and with much damage to the car before reaching the flat top and so on to Weroona Bore.

Note the dry grass along the way. It was the end of the 'dry' season. This grass after the 'wet' would be high enough to conceal the cattle that would be driven through it. Note the flat top of one section.

61-63. The homestead and out-buildings of Eldersleigh cattle station beyond Winton where we arrived 5th August 1919 and were entertained by Mr & Mrs Brabazon

64. Mahony's Imperial Hotel at Longreach

65. Longreach Railway Station – terminus of the line from Rockhampton

66. The Sir John Forrest on its way down the Macarthur River to the Bluff of Carpentaria

67. A pearling lugger at anchor in the Macarthur River near Boorooloola

68-69. These are teams of horses drawing wool bales from the area south of Longreach to be shipped to Brisbane via Charleville or some other nearby rail lead. Each team would consist of between twenty and thirty horses. Black drovers would be bringing anything up to 100 horses behind these loads to act as spares for the team

70-75. Last stages of the first overland trip, 1919 and arrival at Roper. With Mrs Warren, Miss Cross, Josie and Bill

76. This is the Hawkesbury River taken from the northern highlands 9/7/19. It was up here that a pile of stones beside the road saved us from a bad accident when the steering gear failed.

77-78. We crossed the Macdonald River (between Wiseman's Ferry and Wollombi) over a small ferry almost as long as the river was wide.

These two photographs show the interior and exterior of a Roman Catholic Church that had once served the Macdonald River region.