

Pulling back the veil on the first 6 months of the marriage of Noni and Geo, *(Helen and Geoff Derrick)*

April to November 1964



And what remains a mystery to many of our younger family members.

This compilation pictorially describes the first 6 months of the married life of Helen and Geoff Derrick, from 2 April to 2 November 1964 approximately

Helen (nee Greenwood) married Geoff on 15th February 1964; both were aged 23. After a few post-nuptial days at Mooloolaba, this young and happy couple found themselves walking at sunset along the Broome jetty on Anzac Day, April 25th, 1964, embarking on a journey that remains firmly in their memories, even 56 years later in 2020—a 6 month working experience into the rugged and (at that time) little known Kimberley region.

Very few family members would know about this Kimberley experience, so this compilation provides a record of this time, in the belief that our story may inspire others to get out there and do what others may never do, while young, healthy and optimistic.

At the starting gate on our wedding day. . . .



15.2.1964, at the reception in the lounge room of Professor and Thora Greenwood at 164 Victoria Avenue Chelmer, and about to cut the cake. . .



Chick Archer—field hand and good bloke, part of the Lansdowne team, 1964:

QUOTE: (to Helen)

'Ellen, what'd your dear mother say – "I reared you to be a proper lady ... and look at you ... When you came up here 'youse was like a little girl and now you're an old married woman"'.



In early April 1964 we flew to Perth from Canberra in a prop-jet Electra. Geoff was a newly-recruited junior geologist with the Bureau of Mineral Resources, or BMR, based in Canberra. At that time their charter was to go out and map Australia at a scale of 4 miles to the inch scale, or 1:250,000 scale in metric language.

This was simply an exercise in Government acquisition of knowledge that was to serve the nation into the future in areas of land planning and management, tourism, the advancement of earth science, and most importantly, to assist the mineral exploration industry with pre-competitive basic geological data available to everyone, contributing to the private sector growth of exploration discovery and mining in Australia.

Specifically, our party of 4 geologists, 4 field hands, a cook , mechanic, and draftsman were given the task of mapping the LANSDOWNE sheet area in the period April to November 1964. See Figure 1

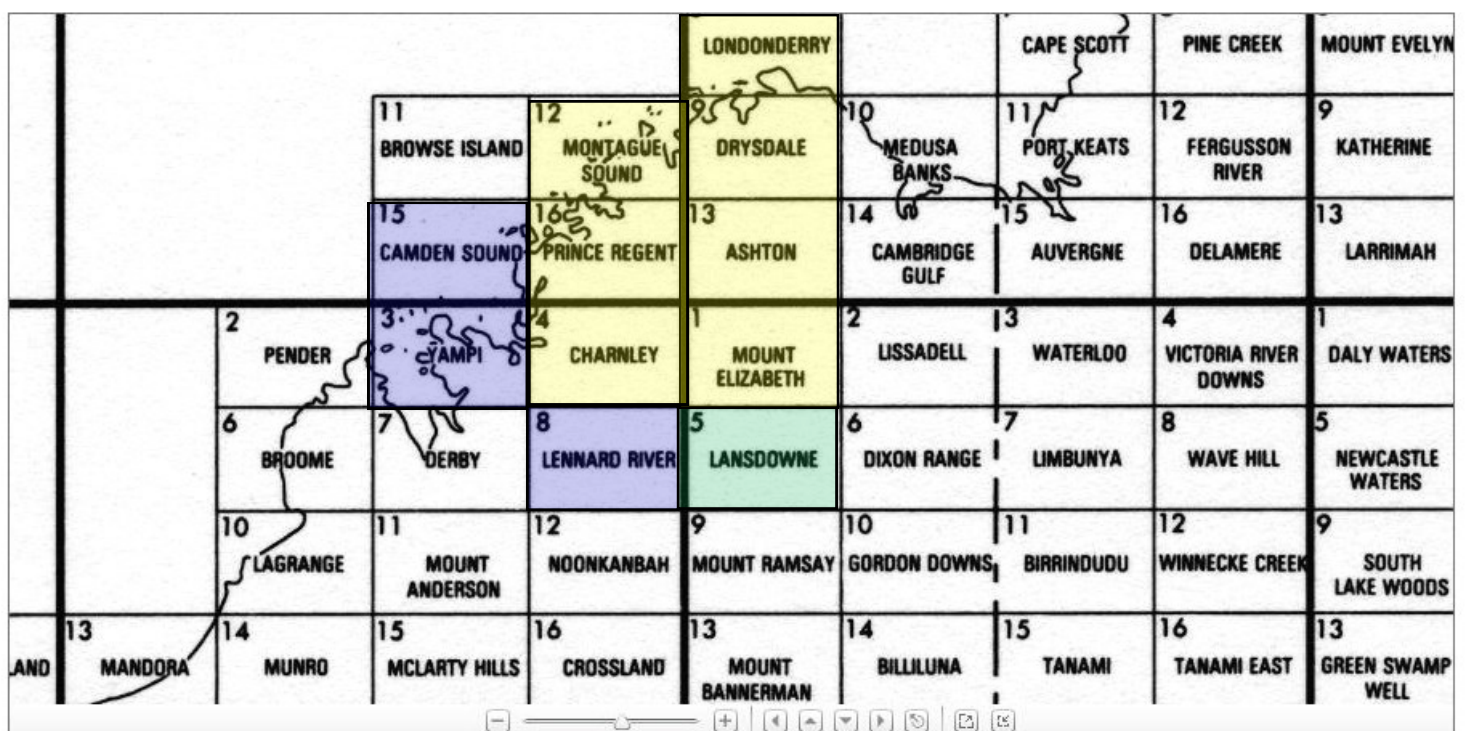


Figure 1: The Lansdowne Sheet area is highlighted in green in this diagram showing how Australia is divided into a grid network of named map sheets; this grid network is at 1:250,000 scale, but grids showing named map sheets at other scales are also available. Note the outline of the Kimberley coastline for locating oneself.

Geoff continued on in later years with similar mapping programs in the rest of the Kimberley.

GREEN is 1964 (Lansdowne); **YELLOW** is the 1965 season; **BLUE** is the 1966 season

The 1964 road trip from Perth to the Kimberley was not your average Grey Nomad trip. In Perth the party assembled a convoy of vehicles and equipment from the then Department of Supply—a large old WW2 Bedford truck and trailer, 4 short wheel based Landrovers, drafting caravan, a box trailer and a water trailer. The trip took about 10 days or so, and was eye-opening long before we arrived at Lansdowne. **Much of this is documented by Helen in her letters written to Thora. These letters are another composite volume in themselves.**

The convoy travelled on the coastal road from Perth to Derby and Halls Creek, in company with another convoy similar to ours which was a BMR team mapping the adjoining sheet area of Mount Ramsay, to the east of Lansdowne (see Figure 1). The Bedford trucks would get away at sunrise, as they were slow beasts that managed about 300km per day, tops.

We have very few images of this trip up, so we can only show a map of our route, and where we camped or rolled out our swags for the night in caravan parks, the backyards of local pubs, or just along the side of the road. Helen's letters have more.

Remember that in 1964 there was NO iron ore development in the Pilbara, and there were few or NO motels or fancy roadhouses anywhere. There were few tourists and many dodgy characters, and it became a necessity for us all to make the best of a pretty rough old highway, with the sheer excitement of it all overshadowing the many uncomfortable and primitive circumstances that came our way at regular intervals.

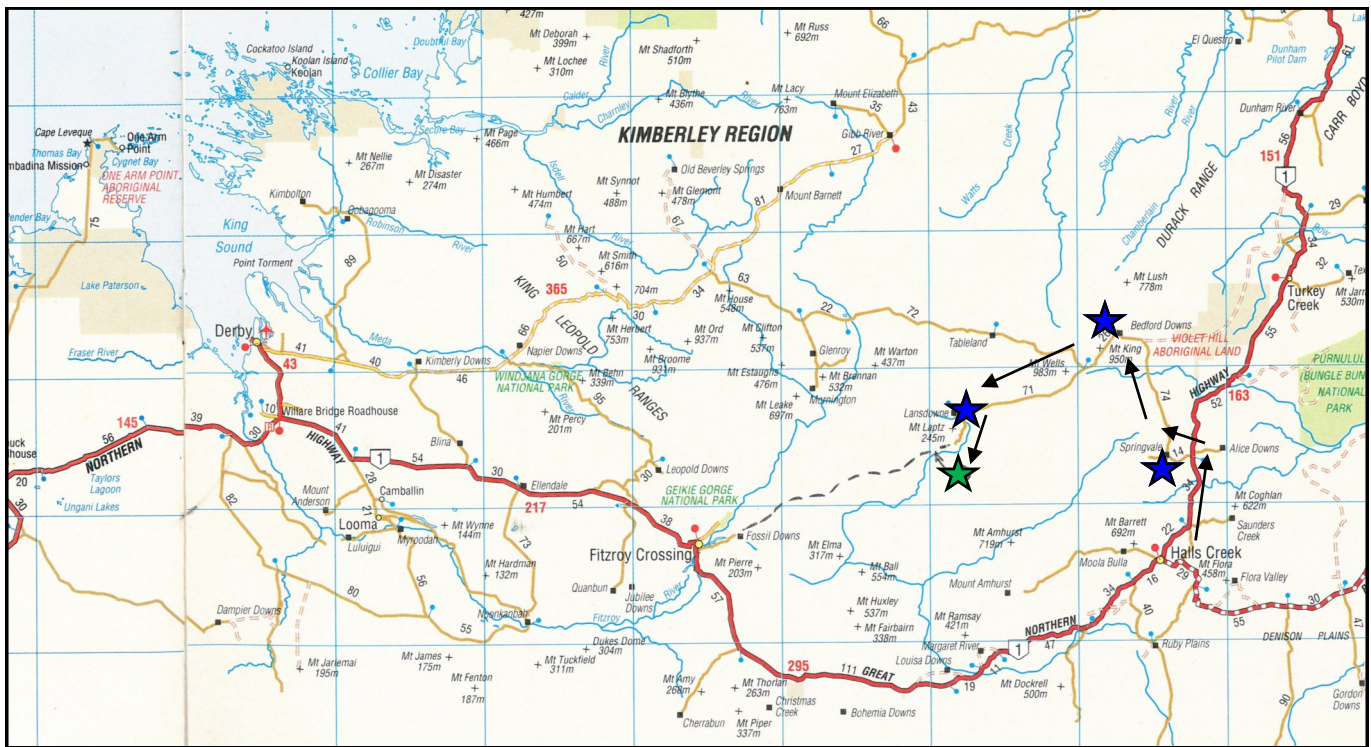


Figure 3: More detailed map showing access to Lansdowne; from Halls Creek we turned into Springvale homestead, then via station tracks to Bedford Downs, then a big left turn following the King Leopold Ranges down to Lansdowne homestead. Our campsite was Hong Kong Water-hole, about 15km past Lansdowne to the south—the GREEN star shown above.



Figure 4: Google map showing the areas of the Lansdowne sheet area— folded and rugged sandstone cliffs and ranges with valleys of softer sediments, and some grey igneous and volcanic rocks scattered around in this world of complex geology that we would try to unravel in the next 5 months.



Figure 5: Google Earth map of the immediate area around Lansdowne and Hong Kong Waterhole. This rich landscape was dominated by a large mountain of sandstone, named Mt Laptz, shown as the prominent elongate bluff top left of image;



Figure 6: The spectacular ramparts of Mt Laptz seen from the Lansdowne-Hong Kong track; view to NW.

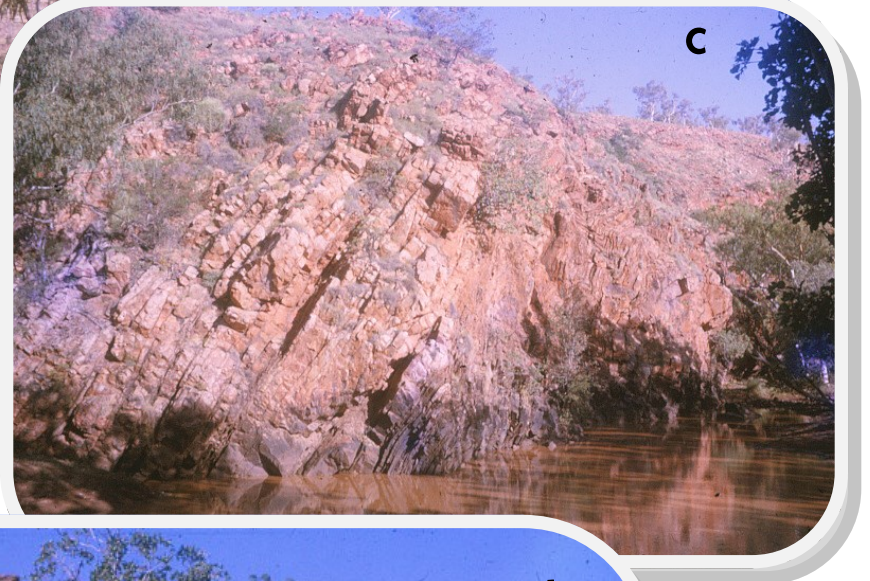


Figure 7 a,b,c,d : We were being paid to work in this scenery in and around the Kimberley ranges. a,b: standard scenery of the King Leopold Ranges: c: steep-dipping sandstone strata with a water-hole—very common overall: d: Flat-lying quartzite strata with a waterhole at the cliff base.

And so to the Lansdowne camp, home to 15 or so people of mixed interests, various personalities and temperaments for the 5-6 months from April 28 to October 11th 1964

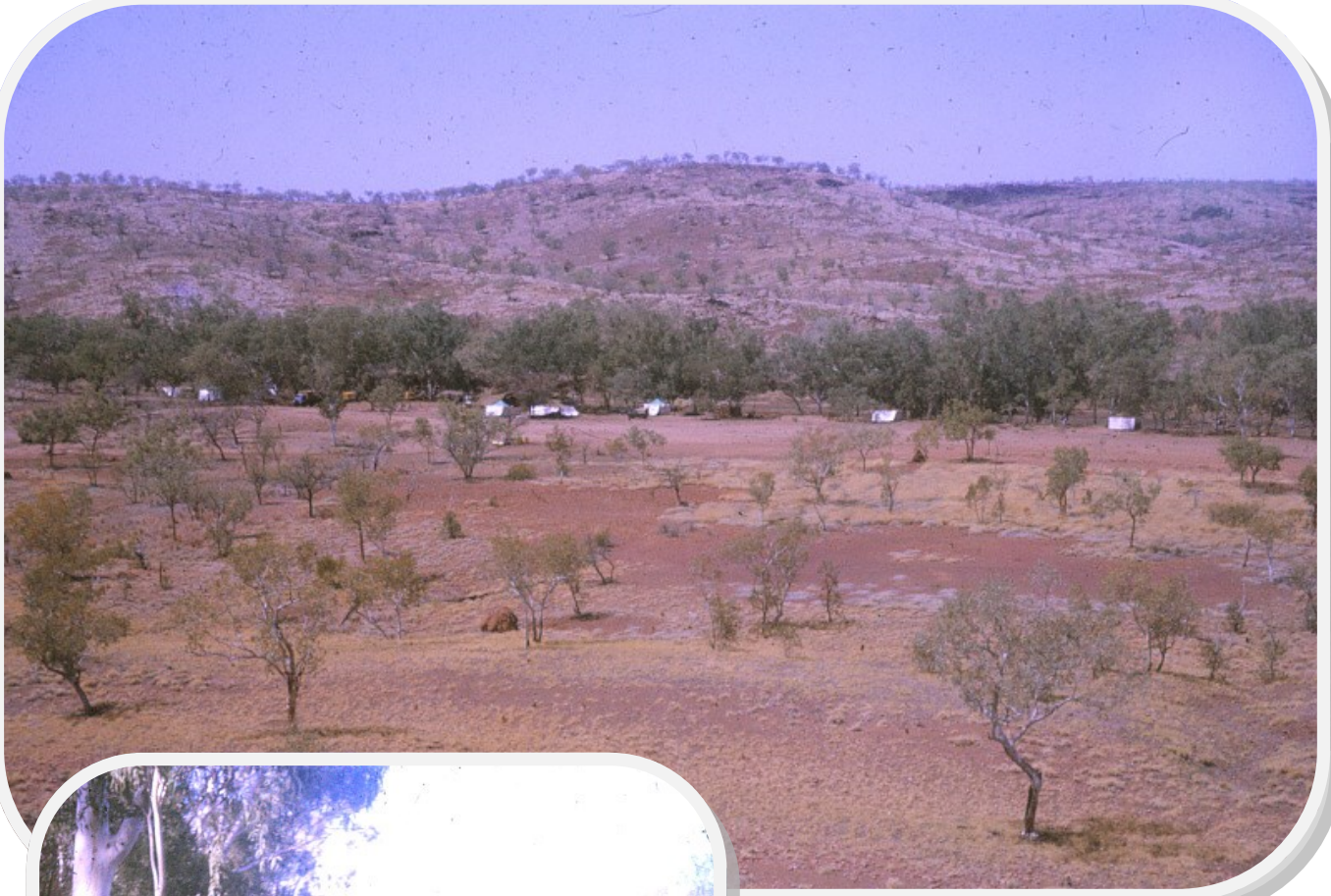


Figure 8: top: Our camp along the Hong Kong waterhole, with view to the south. The station track from Lansdowne to Fossil Downs runs left to right across the view.

Chez Derrick tent is 2nd from right—the tents are the old George Pickers style of high walled canvas sides with netting inserts. Office and mess at left centre in larger tents.

Figure 9 to left: Hong Kong waterhole, with the camp on the bank to left (north). Black bream and yabbies' were abundant in the waterhole, as were freshwater crocodiles. By late September the water level was dropping and water for camp was a problem, which was solved by digging a well in the wet sand that got us through to camp breakup.



Figure 10,11: This was both the honeymoon suite and our first home– the waterhole to the right, shady from 11am onwards, with camp beds and sheets (!!!) evident, and our tin trunk that carried all our gear, resting on bush furniture. Inside the 4m x 4m tent we had a porta-gas lamp, some hessian flooring and a couple of bush tables and a foldachair . Luxurious.

Meet the Field Hands and Cook

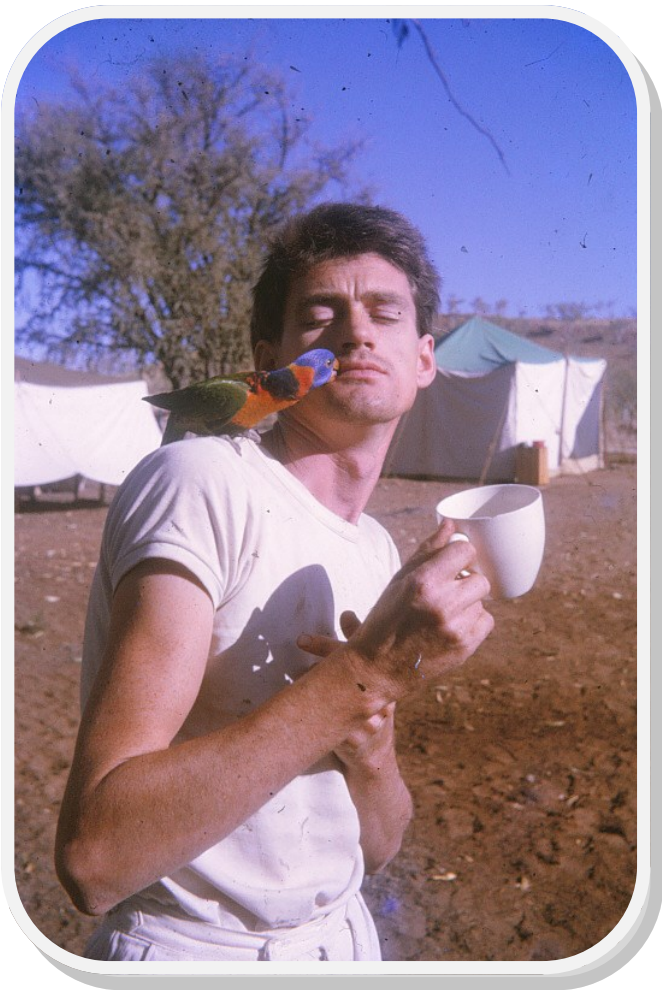


Figure 12: Meet our cook, HARRY MACANALLY. From Perth, 28 years old, Harry was married and a pastry cook by trade. He knew the ropes, had been out before with similar parties, and overall was a key person in keeping the camp running and in good spirit.

At weekends at morning tea, Harry made sure that profiteroles and choux pastry were on the menu, of a standard that would not be out of place at any pastry shop in the city—all cooked in the wood stove, and with tinned butter and powdered milk.

The lorikeet just happened to like the camp; in the background are an accommodation tent for WA geologist Tony Allen, and a bigger tent used as the geological office.



Figure 13 : Meet Chick Archer and Alan Winkler; Chick at the left was a regular and old school field hand who happily saved money earned as a field hand for 6 months of the year, to have a very relaxed time back home in the Canberra-Queanbeyan area. Alan Winkler was a much younger tearaway lad from Queanbeyan who Chick knew and mentored. Both were 'stayers'.

More about Alan Winkler. . .



Figure 14, 15: Alan Winkler, young man from southern NSW on his first field trip; his Land Rover is named 'El Diablo', and in the front near the radiator grill is a collection of cattle horns, deemed by the field hands to be collectibles from dead animals, to be cleaned up and put on a wall back home like a game trophy. Wearing a bra (Figure 15) was no problem provided it didn't interfere with his job.

Meet Len Adams. . . .

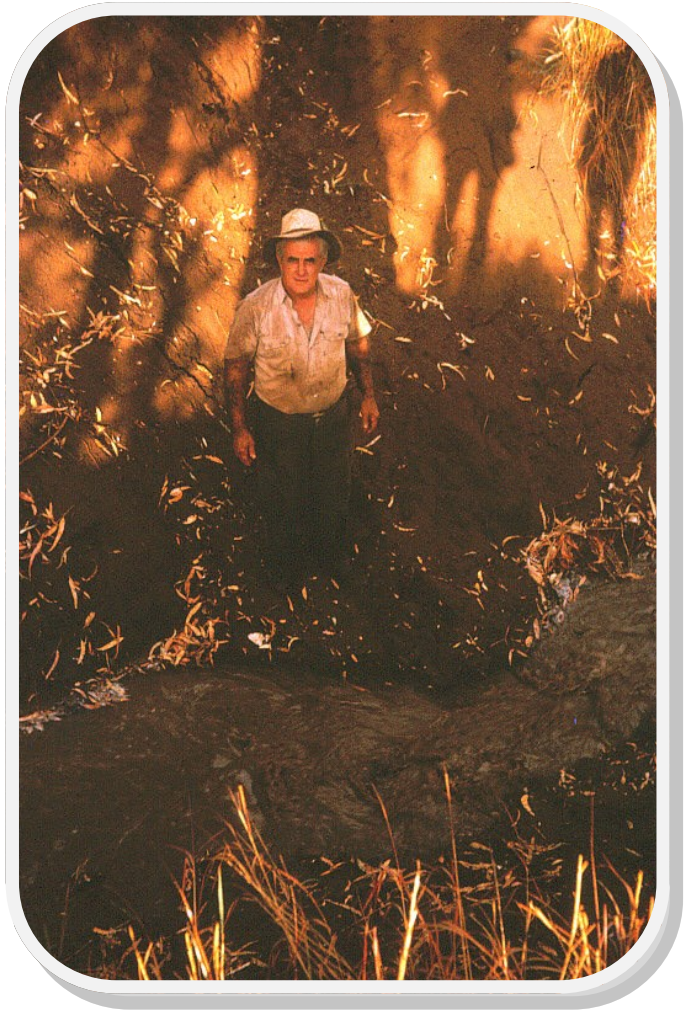
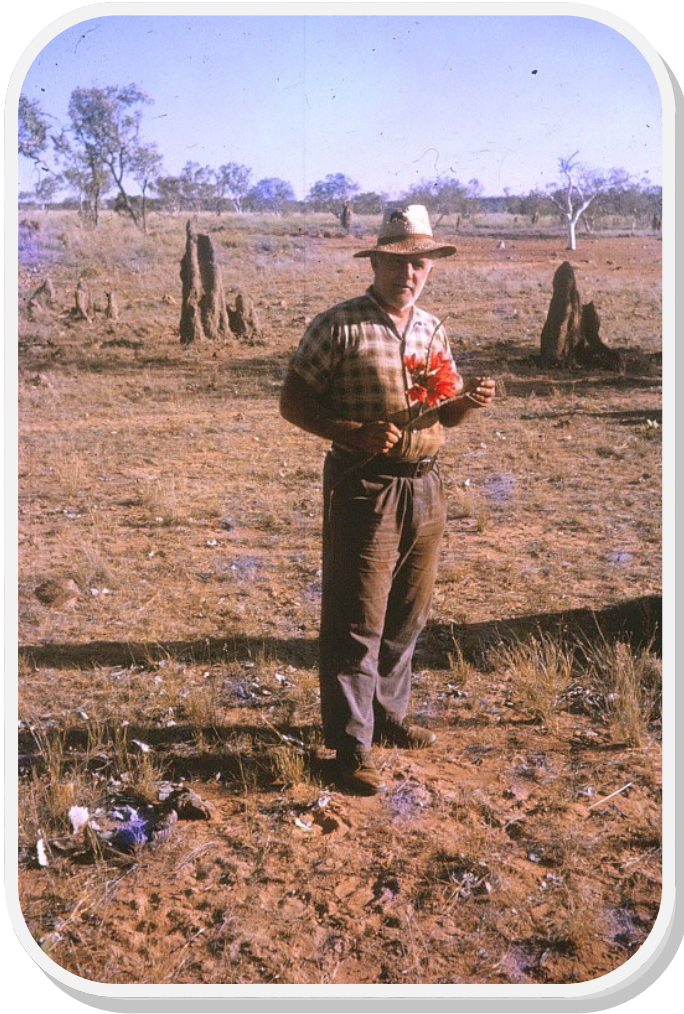


Figure 16,17: Len Adams, field hand, was the oldest in camp, very crusty, laconic, told good stories dating back to Afghan camel drivers, and liked a drink. A bit of a binge half-way through the season saw him walk away/sacked from the party, partly because he started drinking other people's beer.



Figure 18,19: Alan Winkler to left feeding a young donkey, probably orphaned as donkeys were considered feral pests in the Kimberley, to be shot if possible. To the right, Fig. 19, Chick is cutting Len's hair, watched by Alan.

Camp 'facilities' and characters



Figure 20,21: TOP: The wood stove in the kitchen, and the supply of wood needed to keep it going almost 24/7. At weekends it was one of the jobs for the field hands that firewood be collected in quantity for the camp kitchen and also the camp shower.

Figure 22 to left shows our garden which supplied some fresh greens for camp.

Figure 23 below is our camp shower; 44 gallon drums x2—one for hot water on the ground,

covered in ant bed and with a fire under it;

In the tree is the cold water, and our plumbing was in the shower, mixing the hot and cold water. When the cold water ran out, the shower stopped, and had to be re-filled from the waterhole in the back-ground. The hessian was not private when back-lit.



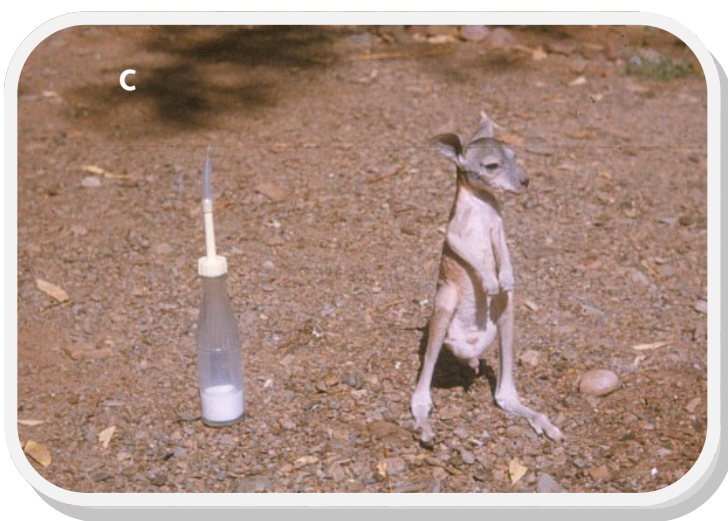
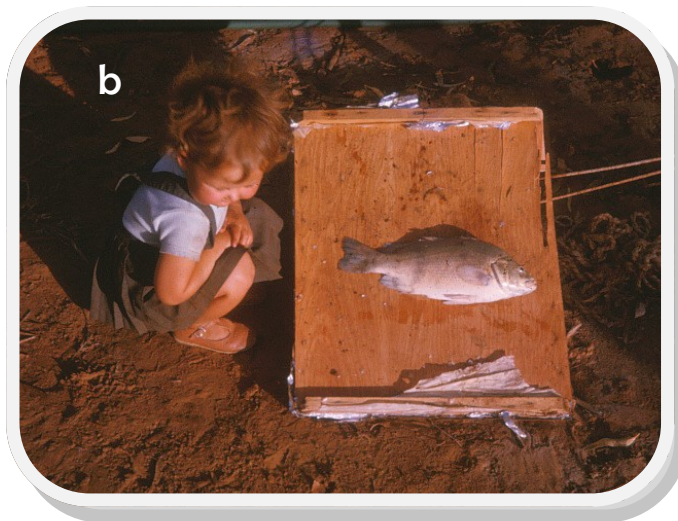


Figure 24a-e: Catriona Gellatly, 3yr old daughter of Evelyn and Dave Gellatly, beside one of the largest (deceased) freshwater crocodiles from HK waterhole; we caught black bream, and suckled a young orphan kangaroo which sadly survived only a few weeks



Figure 25: Helen at a very early version of the laundry; later it was covered with a bough shed for shade. In the background are the living quarters of the field hands, and to the right is the lean-to and tent used by the mechanic, Peter Smith, who is not shown here but who was not exactly a 'tidy' mechanic.

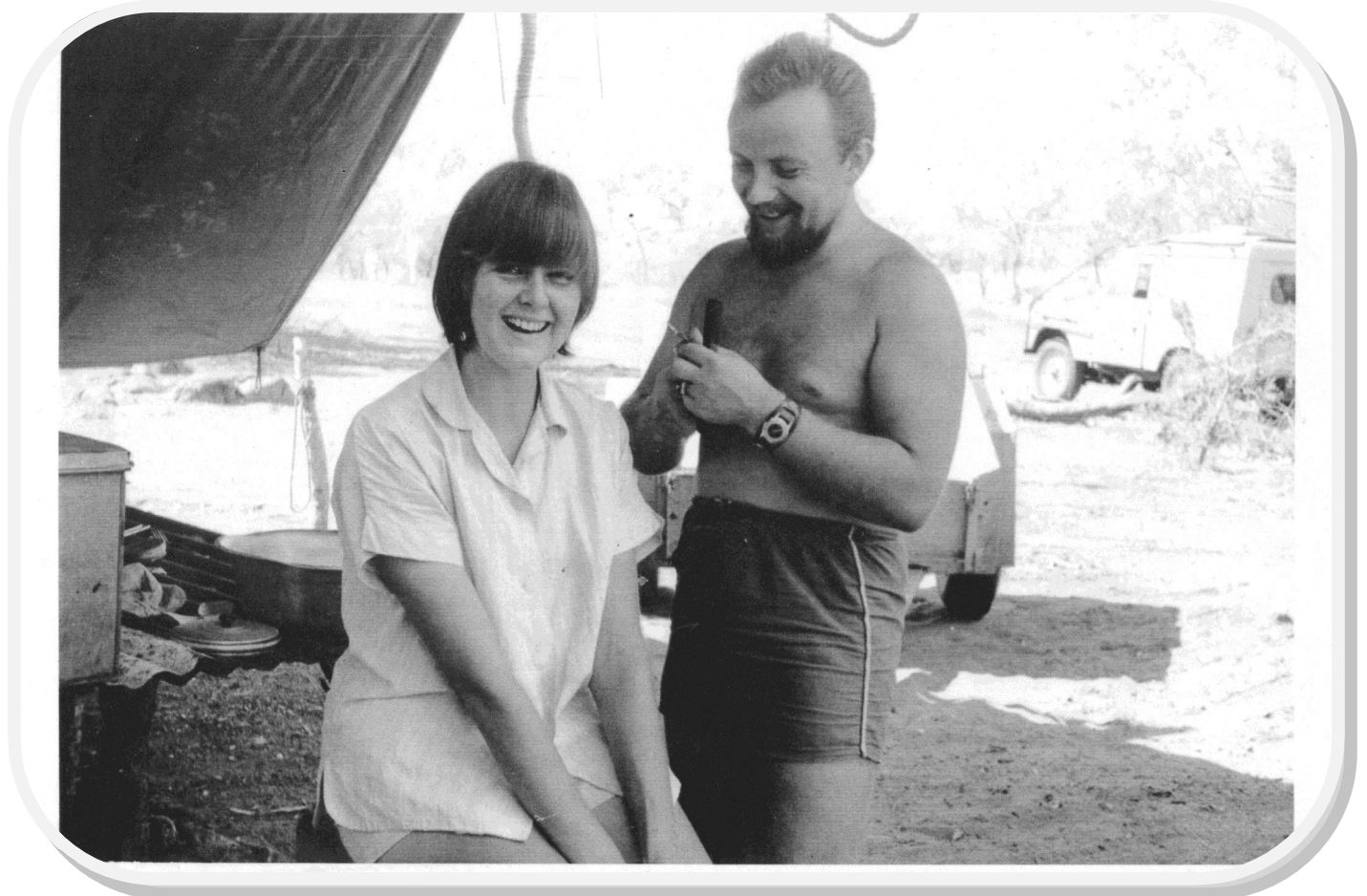


Figure 26: A lovely Helen having her hair done by draftsman Andy Mikolyjac; he had more finesse than Chick Archer, and more hair on his chest than Geoff.



Figure 27

Figure 27: A storm late in September laid waste to some of the camp, not least the mechanic's 'donga', shown here with ripped tarpaulin full of water.

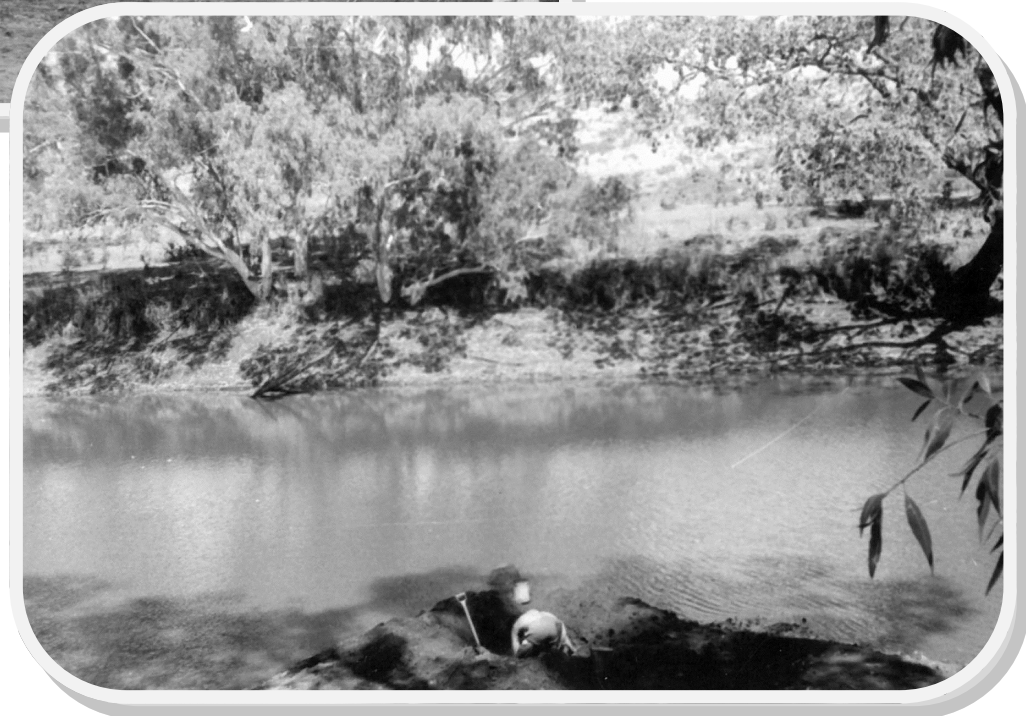


Figure 28

Figure 28 is also late in the season, as the waterhole began to dry up quite quickly; to help get us through for another month Tony Allen is shown here digging a metre deep well in the sand to collect cleaner water from the sands.

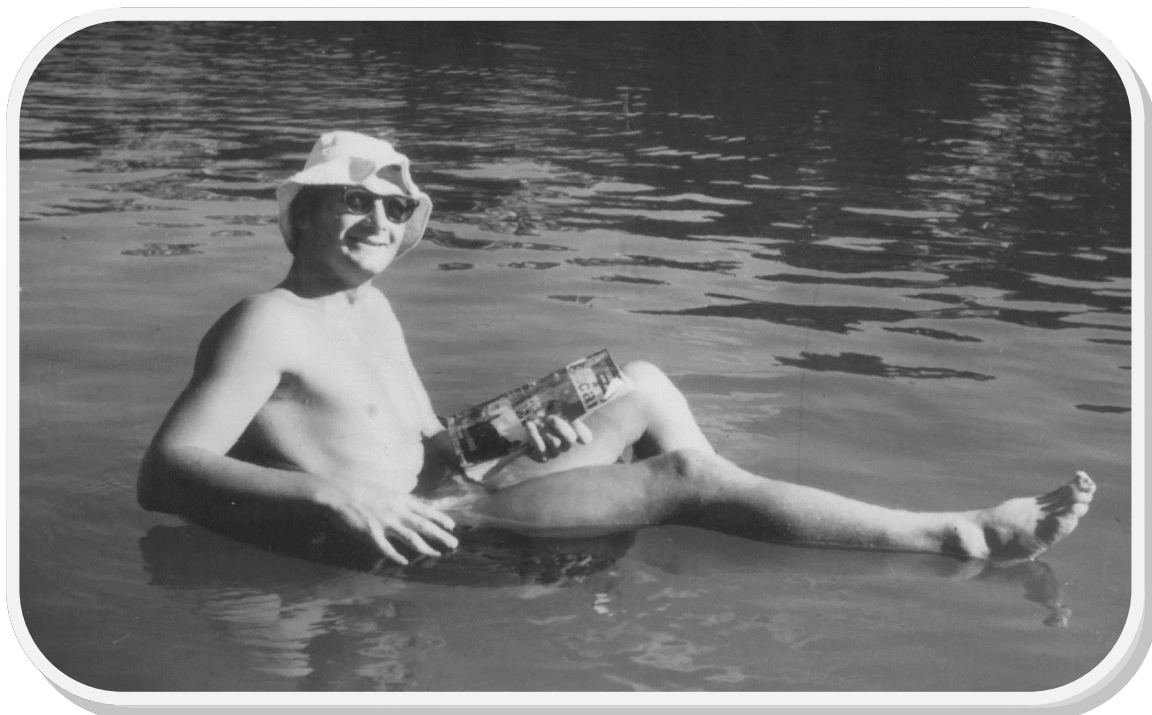


Figure 29 is the first picture of Geoff relaxing in the waterhole on a Sunday, the only day that officially was NOT a work-day.

Meet 'Bootlace'



Figure 30: 'Bootlace' was the camp mascot—a lovely little bitzer puppy found and adopted by Alan Winkler from one of the local cattle stations. Bootlace was a Pomeranian-Daschund cross (???).

The camp also had a cat which spent most of its life being cuddled or choked by Catriona. Hong Kong waterhole is forever in the background.

Figure 31 below shows Helen washing 'Bootlace'. Sadly, Bootlace ate a dingo poison bait while out on traverse with Alan late in the season, and we all felt a bit deflated after this setback, as Bootlace was much loved in the camp community.



Out there on traverse. . .



Figure 32, 33: We walked and drove into remote places little touched by humans before us; Chick often came with me and helped with rocks. Gorges and overhangs often were host to Aboriginal artworks

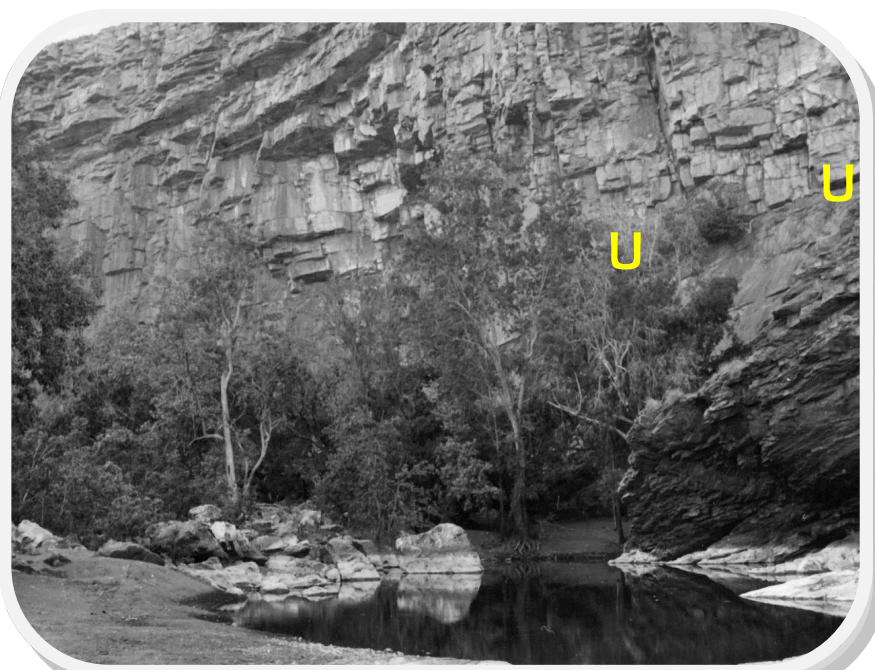


Figure 34: at left—Geoff on the job after a long walk. Figure 35 above is worth all the hardship of being a geologist—a classic out-crop in a creek, exposing what we call an unconformity. Strata at bottom right are 2300Ma old, and are overlain by younger strata in the cliff, about 1900Ma. So at the surface labelled U, there is a time gap of 400 million years



Figure 36: It did not happen often for safety and operational reasons, but Helen came on traverse with Geo to experience the full story—bush bashing across country in the Land rover, sleeping on the stretchers on a bit of flat earth, feeding ourselves out of the tuckerbox, and with Helen looking very feminine in her best singlet. The passenger seat shows the little table geologists used to work on their aerial photos.

Figure 37: At the end of the season in late September we called in the helicopter to take us into the very remote corners of the sheet area to map the last bits of geology. Messrs Bob Halligan and Bruce Walpole are shown at right.

Helen got the chance for a little joy flight in Figures 38 and 39 below.



Fig 38



Fig 39

But the season end was nigh. . .

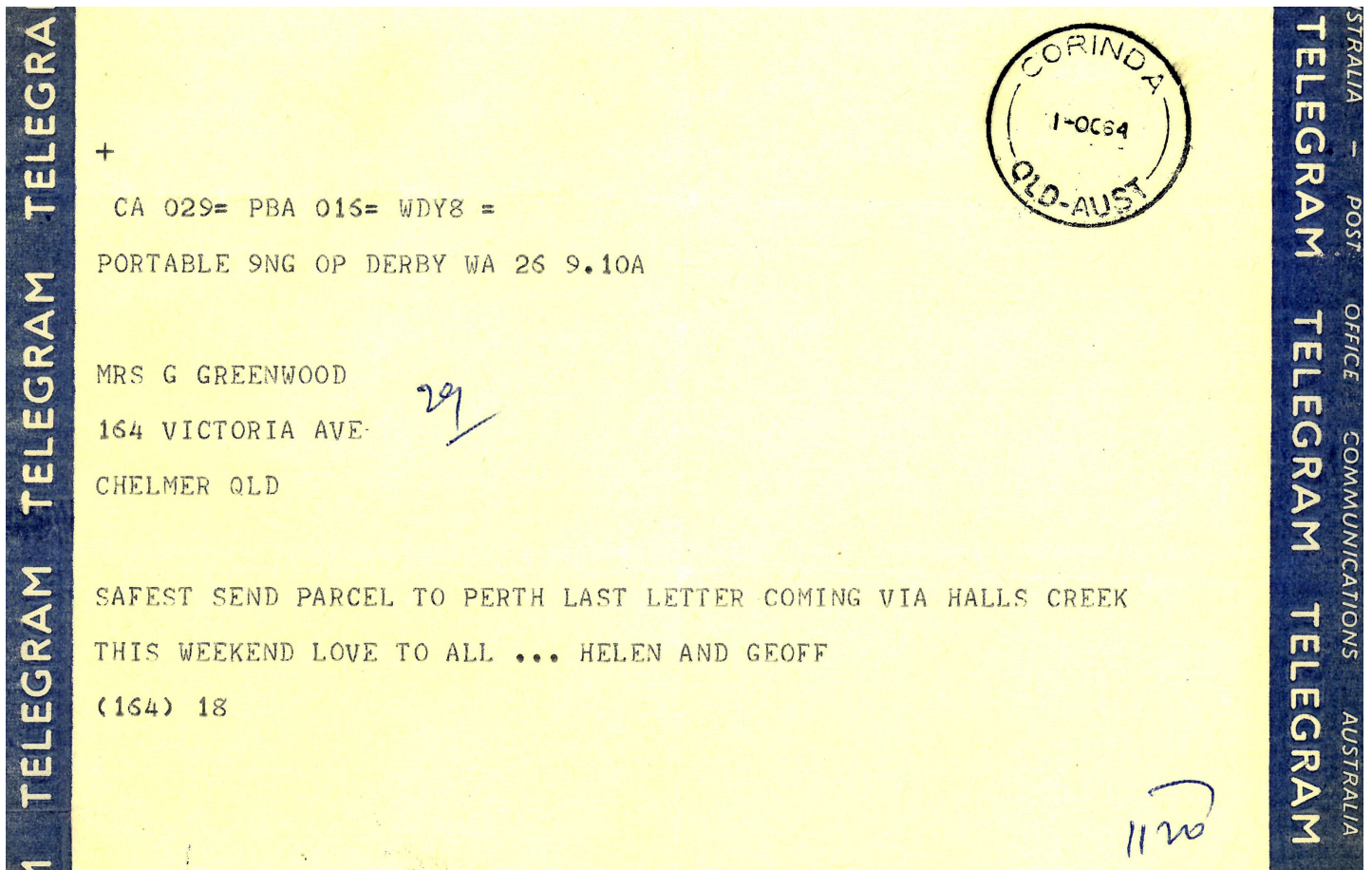


Figure 40 A telegram dated 1st October 1964 with our '9NG' Flying Doctor' call sign from Helen to Thora—we are out of here in a few days time



Figure 41 Camp breakup—literally. Just collect all the rubbish and BURN IT !!! Perth and Canberra beckon.



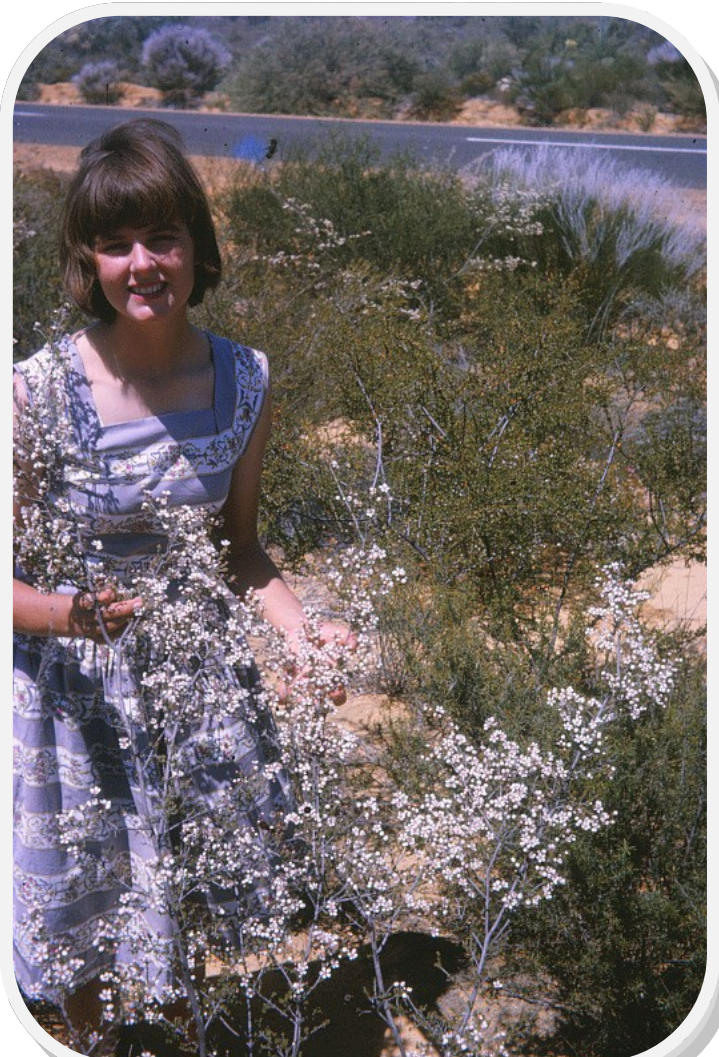
Figure 42 above: Heading home at last, exiting the Lansdowne area via Fossil Down homestead. Helen says farewell to the bough sheds and the cattle yards as we saddle up with our water trailer for the long trip back to Perth, exhausted and relieved but also exhilarated that our long season was nearly over.



Figure 43: to left: A memorial at Fossil Downs tells of its establishment as a cattle property in 1865—a steel rim from one of the old wagon wheels that helped the “Kings in Grass Castles” establish their cattle stations in the late 19th Century.

From Broome to Perth, October 1964

Helen describes all of this in her letters to home, so in this penultimate page we can only say that the pressure and the responsibilities of a 6 month season were at last lifted a little from our shoulders, and we began to enjoy the next chapter in our lives together. But the images below show happiness, relief and joy as we travel south from Broome to Perth via a bit of coastal scenery at Point Samson, just near Roebourne, and immersed in the springtime wildflowers beside the highway near Geraldton— two of my favourite photos of Helen, evah. . .



Point Samson
above and
right



Geraldton above



An epilogue

One could call these 6 months in the Kimberley our own *compass* and *lighthouse* experience:-

‘Compass’ because we found ourselves with some fresh new directions in our lives and careers. . .

and ‘Lighthouse’, because we were shown where safe harbours may be and where peril and danger may lurk when living closely with one’s fellow man. Two young adults grew up and matured quite quickly, to start their married lives and take a fulfilling place in the world.

