

## TODD RIVER DOWNS STATION

### Background

Todd River Downs is Central Arrente country, the traditional owners are the Johnson family.

Todd River Downs came into being as a station in 1954 when the first government lease was granted to Arthur Pope. Previous to that it was Crown land without any grazing leases, possibly as it was so dry and remote. The people there were understandably hostile; and due to stock and people being speared, it was largely left alone in earlier times. However people did run stock there at times including horses, and excellent horses went wild there.

At the end of the nineteenth century William Coulthard, a known horseman and bushman, took horses to the area to breed them (he ran only horses, not cattle) but found it difficult due to many being speared, however with the Wallis family he persevered, and was successful - living at Arltunga and breeding horses - this is country of which part later became Todd River Downs. So the horses were deliberately bred to be a saleable asset. Coulthard's horses had the best of reputations. Coulthard and Co. sold a lot of horses.

Arthur Pope sunk 15 bores in 1954 but could not find fresh water. There is a bore down in the far south west corner of TRD called Jinker bore, not sure when it was put in.

In 1911 there was an action against Sid Kidman for a horse he had, that had been stolen from them.

Kevin Pick took over the lease from his uncle Walter Smith (1893-1990) at some stage. Walter had taken it over from Arthur Pope at some stage. Kevin is still there (2020).

In the 1990's the area reverted to native title. At that time Kevin Pick had the lease, his father Taffy Pick was a local Alice Springs man of Welsh descent and his mother Ada Smith an Arrente woman. Taffy had migrated and gone to Arltunga to mine gold. When that fizzled out he grew fruit and vegetable for Alice Spings. He also served in WW2. The people of Little Wells asked the Central Land Council if Kevin could stay on Todd River Downs, as it was his home, even although he was not of the original people of the particular area.

There were horses on TRD when the Pope's moved there. Prior to 1954 there are several accounts of brumbies being run there, as they were very good

horses that got good prices. Obviously as the country is so tough – little water, dry – only the toughest survive. There were also known for their good temperaments. Several families are connected with the area from having lived there such as the Popes, Johnsons and Smiths. The Bloomfields and the Hayes would also have good knowledge of the general area, having been there a long time. The Hayes of course had Undoolya for a long time and both families were very horsey. Love's Creek borders the top section of Todd River Down, so TRD got the best of Central Australia's first horses – those of Tennant and Love, and Coulthard.

When Walter (Willie) Smith moved onto TRD to work for the Popes, he had three bush racing horses, and took them there. They were Thoroughbreds. Willie liked to give children rides on his horses at the local bush meetings - the horses were known for good temperaments. A horseman, he bred good horses on TRD (from his nephew Kevin Pick).

Diamond Jim Campbell, the famous outlaw, rode through that area once. He was a good horseman and often caught wild horses to sell; it's possible as it was regarded as no man's land, stock was unbranded.

It seems there have been horses there a long time, from the 1880's on at least. They would have come up from the Finke and down from Undoolya, Love's Creek, and nearby stations. As well as Coulthard's horses. Numerous accounts of horses being droved to Alice Springs, Farina, Quorn etc for sale.

A brumby runner called Fred Stone who was well known, went into the TRD area for horses, catching them to sell as they were the best. Tough. A record of him there in 1886. Fred Stone was a later stonemason in Alice, he also knew two other two brumby runners in that area (TRD) in 1886 and those years. An historian wrote it down in 1953 (v. archives). Also might be something in a book about Alice Springs (Our Alice Springs by Mrs. A. Purvis.)

Undoolya, where the very first horses to Central Australia were taken, borders Todd River Downs to the north west. Love's Creek also borders TRD. The Garden Station borders Love's Creek.

Several accounts of horse drovers from Queensland who went through there taking horses to Alice Springs, some all the way to the Kimberley. It was the driest part of their route. Some of these horses were 'hot' i.e. stolen hence the long way to market. Some caught/mustered new horses there and left tired ones there. There is an account of some horse drovers taking horses down from Qld to Adelaide, they left one big white (grey) stallion there, as they thought he could be too easily identified (he was stolen), and a couple of others.

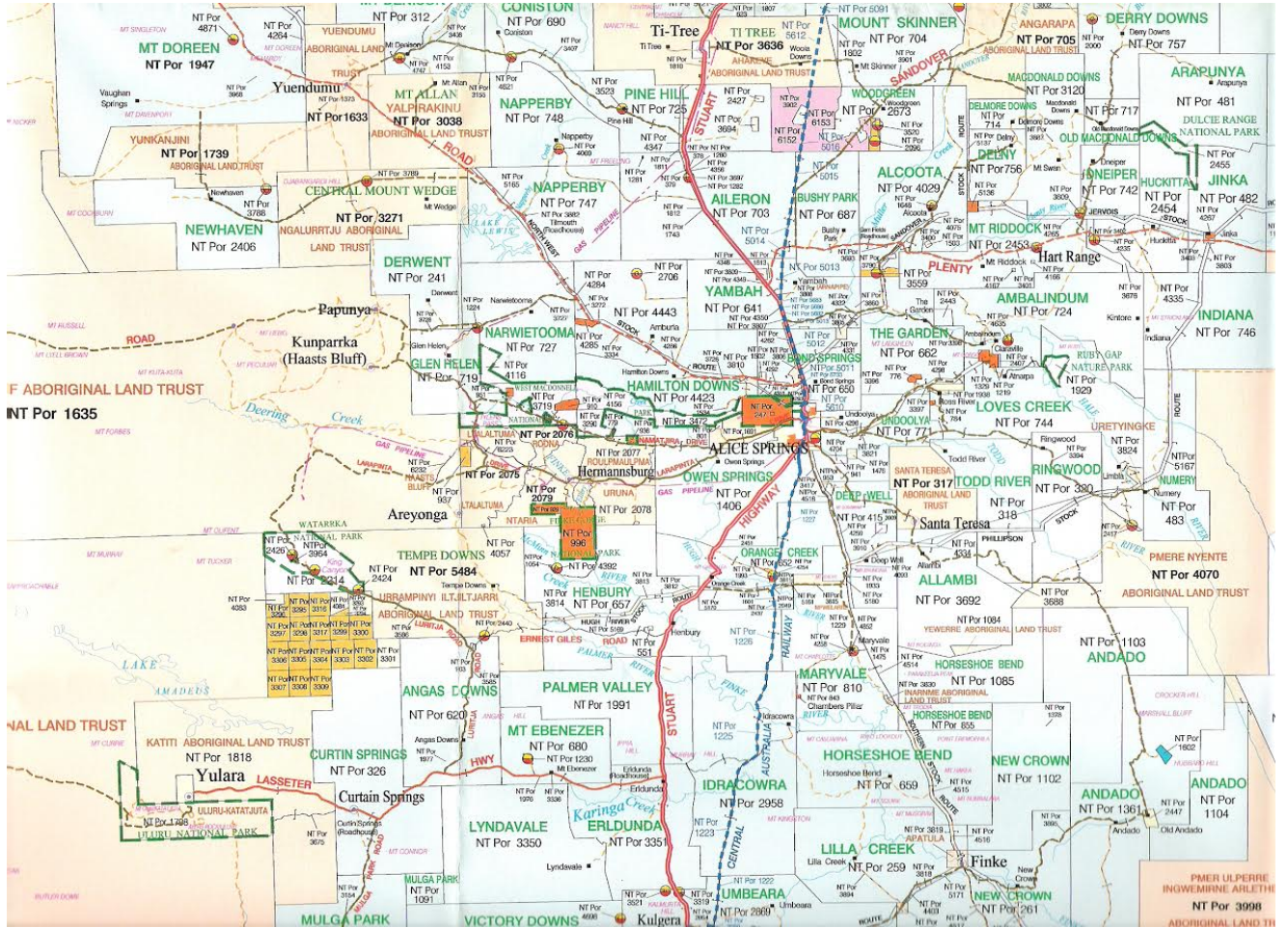
As there are some grey and white horses on TRD it's possible they may be descended from the circus horses of Ireland's Circus, which were put onto Murdowna Station and bred up there, they were all blue and white. Kidman bought this station and sold many of the horses, he found they sold well due to their colour. As he had a string of stations and bores through there it's very probable their genes ended up on TRD and in the area. These colours are also seen on nearby Santa Teresa. Many of the horses on TRD are solid colours, some are broken colours; Undoolya had broken coloured horses, there is a photo in archives taken in 1922 with stockmen there on some. So it's not hard to see they have been in that country a long time. If you cross a grey with broken colours it is also easy to see how blue and white's would come about in that way too.

TRD is at the foot of the MacDonnell Ranges where it meets the Simpson Desert. The water courses are the Jinker Creek, which is often dry, a bore at Jinker Creek, and some waterholes. The Todd River is over the property border to the north and is often dry.

Given the remoteness of the station, the lack of horses being taken there in the past few decades, the origins of the horses – it being a horse breeding area - their looks and temperaments, I would be very confident on the research I have done, they would be Walers with a fabulous heritage. Descended from the very first horses of the area, and added to deliberately be the best horses available at the time, and all adapted to the tough country. DNA should prove this one way or the other, and should link to the Gardens, Love's Creek, and Jinka genes and the Ringwood genes of which we only have one sample I believe. DNA on one TRD that Lynette Sutton of Hoofs2010 rescued and bought by Megan Hollele, is proved to be a Waler. Breed tested at Texas A&M Uni by Dr. Gus Cothran. It would be good to get more done. A few docs included here. There is a mass of more info on the horses of the area in Trove, etc.

Janet Lane 2016, updated 2017 and 2019.

Map, sent to me by Peter Fischer April 2014 when we were discussing Todd River Downs.



Latitude: -23° 50' S (Decimal degrees -23.84045)

Longitude: 134° 30' E (Decimal degrees 134.508548)

Nearest town/settlement to Todd River Downs is Santa Teresa, pop 540. TRD is one of the most southern homesteads in the NT.

Todd River Downs property is 2,006 square miles. Please note the property called Todd River Station on this map is a different property. Todd River Down is on the eastern side of Ringwood, according to a map provided to Angela Tierde by Neil Camm of CLC (happy to update when info to hand)

**Below** selected from my April 2014 research (was emailed to those I thought interested).

From the Centralian Advocate 8th Jan 1954."LEADING TRAINER Mr. Wauchope Tilmouth must have been a very satisfied man after the three days of racing last week. The three horses he trained won five events. Wauchope trains horses for himself and Mr. Willie Smith, of Alice Springs. He proved himself a man who really knows his job, going on the performances of Prince Shakuni, Our Fields and Freshness. Many racing

men extended congratulations to this popular trainer-jockey after his success.”

Note: In March those horses were moved onto Todd River Downs Horses on TRD when Popes moved there

Alice Springs Turf Club started in 1953. So Wille Smith and his trainer (also the jockey - very handy!) had 3 good runners that I have found, in 1954, and were leading trainer and owner.

Can't find any records after 1954. I would say when the Smiths moved to the station with the Popes, Arthur Pope being a footy player, trips away after that were to end of season footy do's only, Pope had to give footy up as they were too far out of town.

It is possible Smith took some TB's out there in 1954. To me that is not a worry. And there is a chance he didn't anyway. Wille Smith was obviously a good stockman and horseman. I wonder did he have greys!

From Peter. p.s. “Bloomfield family mentioned, Reg. did similar interview with same. Just wish I could find...”

Me. It's looking as if some horses drifted from Undoolya - where horses were FIRST taken to breed for India in Central Australia; it was a big horse station for a time. In the 1950's they also had TB's and raced in the Finke River Races.

Found an article of pioneers of Central Australia talking about brumby running (for a living) and horsemen of the area. They were running brumbies there to catch for sale up until about then (1954). Thank God all around has been looked after by the Aboriginals so long. It seems to have kept garbage horses out.

On what so far I can find.

Kidman Resources are exploring there, for copper and rare earth. It's called the Arthur Popes Prospect.

The Popes asked for an Aboriginal woman for domestic help in 1939. She was a full blood being held at Jay Creek detention (Alice Springs) as her husband deserted her, she was from Anna Creek. She was sent to them in 1940, her name was Millie Smith. She was married to Walter Smith, called Willie. He was then up in Tennant Creek. She sold a lot of camels, they had to track him down and he said yes they were his and she was allowed to sell them. But why does a person get jailed for being a deserted wife?! He came back at some stage, as they were with the Popes, that was Wille who had the horses for the kids in 1954 at the footy picnic. The Smiths no doubt stayed out at TRD or in that area. Their descendants would know about horses there too.

Found a top bit of research - an Aboriginal Land claim was put in for all that area, 1992 (although had been going on at least from 1990) - several stations with grazing leases on crown land etc. An outstation called Little Well Outstation was given to them, also Santa Theresa, Ringwood Station, Numery Station etc and a whole lot more - all the stations surrounding Todd River Downs, and I think they got that too.

What is extraordinary is that the Aboriginal people on Little Well asked that the Land claim not go ahead at Todd River Downs as they thought highly of the man there, Kevin Pick. He had been trying to get title for about 40 years. It sounds as if one mob wanted the other mobs land. As they all had land it was superfluous to needs anyway. Decent of them to stick up for him! He had been there a long time. But it looks as if the title claim went ahead as it was part of a big deal.

TRD has got a good history with him. It has his whole history there. If he is still there he would be very old. It may have reverted to traditional owners now?

TRD is 2,006 square miles, bottom of West Macs and in the north west Simpson Desert. Massive run. Dry as.  
Runs only about 1,000 head cattle.

SO I would say there is a chance that whole area has been left alone since title claim. When I was in the Kimberley the Aboriginals from the nearby community came and bought every single grey we ran in, about 17 of them. They paid \$750 a head. It looks to me like these greys might be a selection as some people like the colour? i.e. if there is a choice in shooting were the bays, browns etc shot first?

If anyone was up there, interviewing the Johnsons, local Aboriginals, would be the best to find out info. Best to directly ring TRD, Little Well or Santa Teresa.

JL

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**Conversation by phone, Janet Lane to Kevin Pick, morning of 18<sup>th</sup> April 2017.**

I asked Kevin, who is well spoken and as honest as the day is long, if he knew of any horses that had gone onto TRD in the past few decades, as some people had some TRD horses, two with Megan and at least two with Lynette's rescue group, one colt from Santa Teresa with Fran and 5 others from there for sale in S.A. I asked if, say, any Quarter Horses had gone on there? He laughed, and said no, none had ever gone near there, he had

nothing against them as some people are fond of them, but none had ever gone to TRD or area. He thought it was amusing to even think of that.

His uncle Willie Smith had the place before him and he purchased an Arab stallion from Baden Bloomfield, the stallion had been on Indiana station. Baden Bloomfield died in 1951. The stallion must have been aged when put onto TRD in the late 1950's. (note, I can find no reference to this stallion anywhere else however oral history is important as not everything is written down). Willie also raced horses and had some TB's (as mentioned earlier in this doc.) Kevin knew one good one was called Dark News, originally bought from Victoria, and another was Prince Shakuni.

He was most kind to answer my questions. I think it was a bit of a surprise to him, at first he thought I was a scam caller from India asking about computers!

I explained we were hoping the horses were Walers as DNA tests said at least one was. He didn't seem fussed, and I suggested it might help him get some sales. He said a man named Peter Loeffel came over and bought several hundred, and took them back to NSW where he said he had a big paddock for them. However he proved to be a dodgy character, in whom trust was misplaced. No details, but I'd say Kevin was ripped off or misled. He thought the horses were getting homes. (note, subsequent enquiries found Loffel is a kill buyer also known as Shepp who sells to Shepparton Meat and saleyards).

Kevin said the end of this year (2017) is a good time to go over as some horses might be run in, and that I am welcome there any time. I said I'd love to visit if I could, and would give him plenty of notice - he said just turn up any time. He is a saint (and laughed when I said that!) Also, we spoke about what good temperaments the horses have, safe with children, and that they are very tough to live there. He obviously takes pride and joy in them. He has been their saviour. He said there had been a bit of heavy horse like Clydesdale on there years ago too, still in the horses. It was a good phone call and I feel privileged to have spoken with him.

**Note:** While one Arab stallion in the 1950's might put people off, recall Mt Riddock put an Arab stallion on there in the 1970's and we have Walers from there, and a TB stallion went onto Newhaven in the 1950's, and Arabs and other TB's were there well into the 1960's (all documented), and a Tb x Percheron was put on there in the 1970's according to some reports. It may have been a TB stallion as Baden Bloomfield trained racehorses and was a well known Alice Springs jockey too.

To me Todd River Downs is as good as it gets in the modern era - isolated, the owner is honest, the horses are tough, have good temperaments, good conformation, and it has always been managed for horses. We really can never be sure about any of the earlier horses we got due to a lack of research about most of them at the time. Willie Smith was a pall bearer for

Baden Bloomfield's funeral. Kevin has not needed to take horses there, when he used them they were on site. He's been there decades.

Prince Shakuni was non studbook, by Shakuni out of a Comedy King mare. Shakuni born 1930 by Brazen(GB) from Varta Mozzle, very colonial mare, goes back to Colonial Family 6. Comedy King died in 1929, his blood is in many Central Australian horses. – information on the breeding from Vicki Owens, a racing authority. Out of interest Melbourne Cup winner Trivalve went to the Territory as an old stallion although it's thought he did not breed on, he may have been in the area and at one time was owned by Ben Nicker, who was killed in WW1.

I am personally content the Todd Rivers are Walers.

JL.

Another conversation with Kevin by telephone in 2019 further confirmed there had been no other horses on there for decades. We had a wonderful conversation, Kevin is well spoken, and honest, loads of integrity. At this stage I was trying to arrange an expedition to go there and get some horses. We had a good chat about this. Kevin was very keen for the horses to get good homes, and not be sent for meat. I made copious notes from this phone call, will add when I find where I put them. I was very much looking forward to meeting Kevin and having a cup of tea with him, and looking over his horses, and learning about them. I was determined to try and save some. There was a prolonged drought on, climate change was making conditions dire, and needless to say at some stage culls would have to be done. It would save super good horses, and make an old man very happy; a person who spent his life caring for these horses. Kevin also talked of the camels on his property, also running wild, many had been caught and gone to excellent homes, with trekking companies, all over Australia – he took great pride in positive feedback about the camels. He has wonderful big donkeys there too, and remnants of his cattle herd. I was determined to send him photos of his horses in good homes. Perhaps those with them, would do that. Photo, horse name, state it lives in.

### **Expedition 2019**

No long after this, an expedition to Todd River Downs was suddenly mounted, arranged Jess Liston and Angela Tierde. I provided them with the research I'd done, on request, and contacted Neil Cam of the Central Land Council for them to arrange access. Neil proved extremely helpful for them. Without his guidance in, one would get lost, too. It is a complicated affair getting onto country and all protocols must be followed Liston ran a public go-fund-me style campaign and got over \$26, 000. More than enough to cover the trip. I was very keen for Kevin to be paid a fair price for the horses, as he'd never received payment from the two previous times horses came off there, despite promises from the buyer. As it transpired, some of these horses were sold, ending up in private homes, but the majority were sold to



the meatworks. I was told the Liston-Tierde expedition paid him well for the horses as well as buying him a solar powered pump for his bore, to save him pumping daily for the horses. Kevin has pumped water for years, and part of the reason the horses have a great temperament, is that they are used to seeing him and associate him with providing that life saving substance in arid lands, water. Kevin was on crutches while they were there. He lives alone.

As the Central land Council also believe the horses are theirs, it is necessary to pay them too. It is a minimal price. However it is a point of honour to pay Kevin, who has been there most of his life, looked after the stock while younger, and does his best now he is 81. There would be no good horses there without him, that simple. He has maintained the excellent stockyards there, and the bore. The CLC pass him on a percentage from sales.

Twenty horses were obtained from this expedition. Also some more knowledge, Angela has passed on some bore names, and a bit of background from Kevin. Kevin owned a good horse he thought the world of, named Black Bess, that was a grand-daughter of Dark Archer, Willie Smith's race stallion. I had a good look, and none of Willie Smith's horses were registered Thoroughbreds, so good bush racing horses. Probably thoroughbred lines of course; nonetheless, good hardy horses. Also the last time a buyer went there, he shot all the greys he saw, telling Kevin they all got cancer. Yes greys do but by that time they are aged anyway, and Kevin's greys were extra good horses. It had upset him terribly, and the buyer, a meatbuyer, who also lied to Kevin about where the horses would go, was barred off the property.

The 20 horses obtained by this expedition were sold into private homes. A couple foaled not long after capture. All were DNA tested after capture, well done. All the best to all TRD horses everywhere.

### **Earlier.**

Two lots of horses had come off TRD earlier. These are the ones mentioned previously, that Kevin was not paid for, of which most ended up being dogged. However, probably via the saleyards, some did end up in homes, and those homes seem very good – many are on Facebook. As they are such outstanding horses, particularly their temperament, people seek out their history.

I contacted Lynette Sutton of Hoof2010, by email; Lynette saves brumbies. This was the heart-warming answer (name removed for privacy reasons) *“Thanx Janet we paid good money to \*\*\*\*\* for the 40 we took from Todd river to luffa. And would again if they become available they were very trainable and nice conformation.”* January 2019.

One of the better known horses off TRD is Drover. He has his own facebook page, "For The Love Of Drover" and is owned by Vanja Cunningham. She has done an outstanding job and Drover shows what versatile and lovable horses Walers are, indeed.

This document is all a bit disjointed; will update at some stage, anyway here it is for now.

## Notes and documents.

*South Australian Register August 1883.*

### THE NORTHERN TERRITORY.

#### Quarterly Report.

A report by the Acting Government Resident of the Northern Territory was laid before the Assembly on Tuesday, August 7. From it we learn that pastoral and mineral

pursuits are making steady progress. Agriculture, although as yet only in its infancy, is also beginning to show that good crops can be grown here in suitable localities. The following list, compiled from the best information at my disposal, will show more clearly the quantity of stock within the Northern Territory on the undermentioned runs : — Fisher & Lyons, Glencoe, 7,000 cattle, 400 horses ; Daly River, 2,500 cattle, 38 horses ; Adelaide River, 3,800 cattle, 30 horses. W. J. Browne, Spring Vale, 200 cattle; Delamere Downs, 1,500 cattle, 100 horses. A. Wallace, Elsie Creek, 3,000 cattle, 120 horses. Southern Stations.— Not known, Crown Point, 300 cattle, 200 horses ; Edra Powra, 6,000 cattle, 150 horses ; Mount Barrett, 500 cattle. 60 horses; Henbury, 2,000 cattle, 100 horses ; Mission Station, 200 cattle, 100 horses, 3,000 sheep; Glen Helen, 1,200 cattle, 20 horses ; Owen Springs, 3,500 cattle, 700 horses ; Undoolya, 4,000 cattle, 200 horses. Woolridge, Barrow Creek, 3,000 cattle, 100 horses. Within the Territory, en route for various northern stations, 22,000 cattle, 600 horses. Total— 61,000 cattle, 2,918 horses, 3,000 sheep. The Acting Resident closes an interesting report with the following list of exports and imports for the last six months :— Exports.— Gold, 12,398 oz., £43,443 ; tin, 7 tons 8 cwt., £370 ; sugar, 4 cwt., £2 ; sundries, £259 ; total, £44,079. Imports.— Total value for last six months to date, £54,739. Customs. — Revenue for last six months, £9,248 19s. 4d. Passengers.— Inwards, 539; outwards, 208. Leaving a Balance of 331 in favour of immigration.

*Centralian Advocate (Alice Springs, NT : 1947 - 1954), Friday 12 March 1954, page 3*

13th TIME LUCKY ? 'Salt water' Arthur Pope, of Alice Springs, has sunk twelve bores on his block of pastoral country, 160 miles south of Alice, and each time -has struck salt water. He is still trying and hopes to be '13th time lucky.' Mr. and Mrs. Pope have a block which they have named Todd River Downs — the Todd wends its sandy way through the property. The country right through this area sits squarely on top of what is described as a vast underground sea. It is a drainage area and being a sea the preponderance of water is salty. However, geologists know that 'islands' of fresh water exist in these areas — generally at a higher level than the salt. Arthur Pope has missed to date, but the philosophical Centralian is determined to develop

the block. 'We will go on putting down bores until we strike the fresh water — or oil,' he said. The present bore is down 140 feet — and hopes are still high.

*Centralian Advocate (Alice Springs, NT : 1947 - 1954), Friday 12 March 1954, page 3*

## FLY MENACE IN BUSH COUNTRY

### EUROS BLINDED BY FLIES

Flies are so thick in bush country south of Alice Springs that euros are being blinded by them and horses driven frantic.

Mr. Arthur Pope, of Todd River Downs, one of the new Todd blocks, brought news of the fly plague to Alice this week. He said that horses hang around the camps as much as possible trying to keep in the smoke of cooking fires. It is quite common to see euros with eyes completely blinded by flies and fly bites, struggling about in agony. It seems likely that the good season of feed that has followed rain in this area may be responsible. In January the Todd River flowed right down as far as the southernmost range of hills in the Territory, over two miles- south. Although rain on the block was fairly patchy, Mr. Pope says that lush green feed is situated all along the banks of the river and on the many little creeks running into it. The last time the Todd ran so far south was in 1948. Although there was no one on the block at that time to witness it, Mr. Pope says the condition of feed along the river when he looked the area over that year showed the river had been down.

*Centralian Advocate (Alice Springs, NT : 1947 - 1954), Friday 23 July 1954, page 15*

Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Pope have been around town for a week or so, having a spell from the station, Todd River Downs. Arthur is still striking salt water on the property, and he is now on his 15th bore.

From <http://aliceonline.com.au/2011/08/24/little-well/>

Little Well, by Ron Moss.

We're not looking for ochres or herbal plants this time. The focus is on sitting at Little Well, and for the older folk to reacquaint themselves with their rarely visited homelands, two hundred kilometres from town. Gaining access to this place has been an ongoing saga since I can remember, when many of my deceased friends, relatives of these women, could only get here if I drove them.

Jack, Kat and Marty Bloomfield have spent more than half the first day stocking the trailers, tying down the swags to the roof racks and rounding up the candidates, somewhat anxiously in the case of the men, whose absence disappoints. The trip along the eastern Numery road, which

eventually becomes the Colston Track as it bisects the Simpson Desert, has us arriving a little after dark. The gates marking Ringwood station have been gratifyingly replaced with cattlegrids which reduce the need for someone to open and shut them. And the road has been graded, if not upgraded, after the year's continual rains. We leave the main track and head the last twenty kilometers west towards Todd River Downs.

The dark silhouette of the country's big dreaming, the angry snake, Uluralkwe, signifies our resting place, pointing its head towards the three houses built on the sands of the Todd river floodplain. These houses were built by Ingerreke Outstation Services after the original sheds were abandoned when Gregory Johnson died.

The swags are soon laid on the verandah; women on the eastern porch, men on the west. Their choice brings them the warming morning sun and keeps them from prevailing winds.

Sunrise supplies a vegetative surprise. A vista of intwerrkere/ kerosene grass, now paled by lack of water lies like a vast frost as far as the distant ranges. Upon this sit flourishing acacias of different kinds, a festivity of greens and yellows, bobbing and swaying in the light and chilly breeze. An endless sky untroubled by clouds, is cut to shape by shrub and these final hills that taper into the dune country further east.

A substantial hunk of elegant acacia/ arlepe bursts upon my near vision. It is replicated a hundredfold in the near acres surrounding the houses. Five years ago, on my last visit, these large shrubs were ankle high on grassless red sands. Bees would thrive on these blossoms closer to town. Here, lack of water forbids their presence. The seeds will harden, drop and scatter by bird and breeze, and populate the plains.

It's men's business to make meat and our trusty hunter, Marty is equipped with the big borrowed gun that provided for us two months back. We cut across the floodout towards Kevin Peck's holding at Pinjee Pound. Kevin has occupied this site all my time in the Centre. Though he has yet to get clearance from Central Land Council to build a house, he maintains his improvised shelters and 4WDs, and hundreds of horses that have occasionally wrought the ire of the Land Council and Animal Cruelty.

There's feed aplenty now and horses of all possible hue and patterning. But I've seen this country when it's mere powder with its fund of numerous carcasses. They stare at our passing vehicle and trot towards the protection of Pinjee bore and Kevin's digs. Three roos suffice our quest through the grasslands and thin stands of coolibah. I point out the trees from which Janet Johnson prised a handful of ankerrayte grubs.

<http://www.territorystories.nt.gov.au/jspui/bitstream/10070/232655/1/2007-03-01.pdf> Alice Springs New Volume 14 Issue 4. 1<sup>st</sup> March 2007.

(errors are from not being transposed on the net, as presented)

AT RIGHT: Kevin Pick (background) with visiting rellies: The sheds are Kevin's home. He's been stopped from building a proper home (family photo). BELOW RIGHT ((IVoin left) Natalie Ross with halty Chase, Kevin and Cheryl Sehembri with a sheaf of correspondence spanning 20 years. HELOW: Drought stricken Todd River Downs. Ity ERW1N CIILANDA Todd River Downs is as remote and inhospitable a place as any in the world, 200 km east of Alice Springs, perched at the northern edge of the Simpson Desert, boiling hot in summer, and now several years into a cattle killing drought. Instead of gelling desperately needed steady rain, last month 2() (0)mm - eight inches-dumped on the station in a matter of hours, culling the sole road to it. Kevin Pick has been there for half a century and he wauls slay until he dies. lie lives in three tin sheds and a caravan, has no running water, no air conditioning and a diesel generator he rarely bothers lo lire up. It's rough bul it's home -a home Kevin's been lighting lo keep for a quarter of a century, in a range war whose latest weapons are high calibre rifles fired from low flying helicopters, wiping out much of his meagre entile herd. Other ploys are stopping authorities from fixing the road to his front gate, and prohibiting the use of his cattle brand, effectively destroying his business. "They want to get me off my place," says Kevin. "But I'm not going." "They "-absurdly-are lthe very people supposed lo help him and his extended family. It's lthe Central Land Council (CLC), set up by ihe Federal Government under lthe Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NT) in lthe seventies lo reverse black - while injustice. There is hardly a man in Central Australia who belter embodies black - while harmony. Kevin's father Taffy was a Welsh coal miner who came to Australia in the Depression lo mine gold at Arltunga, east of Alice Springs, just to the south of Todd River Downs. Later Taffy grew fruit EILEEN IIOOSAN and vegetables for the young town of Alice. In World War II he fought the Germans in Europe and the Middle East, was captured and escaped three times. Kevin's mother was Ada Smith, an Arrernte woman born al lthe Arllunga gold fields. Her large family spans lthe Last and West MacDonnell Ranges, from ihe former Santa Teresa Catholic Mission, now the Llycnlye Apurle community, all lthe way through lo where lthe Arrernle lands abul lthe Warlpiri regional Papunya, 200 km wesl of Alice. This family network expanded more than it otherwise would have because of an error by military aulhorilies: they advised Ada thai Taffy was "missing believed killed in action". She started a new family, with Taffy's ultimate consent when he returned from the war, agreeing to a divorce but keeping close links with the huge clan. Brown skinned Kevin, with his thoughtful blue eyes, now has hundreds of "rellies". Some live in outstations, tiny, remote bush communities, and have English as their second or third language. Natalie Ross and Cheryl Shembri are nieces. They live in Alice suburbs. As kids they spent many a school holiday on "uncle Kevin's" block, having the run of its 2000 square kilometres. Eileen lloosou, who lives on an

Alice town camp, is Kevin's step-sister. Eileen is an experienced administrator working in Aboriginal organisations, and a prominent activist for Aboriginal causes. All three women have thick folders of correspondence: with the CLC, Territory departments and Federal Ministers of Aboriginal Affairs, helping Kevin fight his fight. Formidable as the three women may be, they're pitted against a land council with a staff of more than 100, a budget of more than \$5m, and a legal department with several lawyers. More frighteningly, land councils can operate in secrecy to an extent government departments can only dream about. For example, land councils are exempted from Freedom of Information provisions. They answer to nobody but the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs - sitting in Canberra 2000 km away. Natalie, Eileen and Cheryl say the CLC can dictate to NT Government departments - and is using that power to increase the pressure on Kevin to get off what he considers his land. For example, the road to the station hasn't been fixed for a long time. Kevin isn't allowed to build a house on the station, although the foundations were put down decades ago. On June 21, 1989 the NT Department of Lands and Housing told Kevin: "As you are aware, the land contained in your Grazing Licence is under Land Claim ... and as such, this Department is unwilling to approve your request to carry out improvements." Authorities, on demand from the CLC, have stopped CO NT. PAGE 6 him from using his cattle brand. Without it Kevin can't sell his cattle, forcing him onto welfare last year - for the first time in his 67 years. And the CLC hired the chopper-borne marksmen: Kevin says half of his herd of 400 now lies rotting and flyblown in the red dirt of Todd River Downs. Kevin's family has lived there since 1951, first with his uncle, Willy Smith. In 1984 Kevin took over the grazing license. Under the Land Rights Act the CLC managed to secure Aboriginal freehold title to about half of Central Australia. It was able to claim "unalienated" Crown land and existing Aboriginal reserves. Excluded from claims was "alienated" land, such as covered by freehold and leaseholds, including pastoral leases. Tragically for Kevin, he and uncle Willy never succeeded in getting a pastoral lease and always operated under a grazing license. The fact that both of them were illiterate no doubt had a lot to do with this. Grazing licenses did not automatically protect their holders from land rights claims. However, the Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, who schedules land under the Land Rights Act, could have knocked back the claim over Kevin's land. Well before the claim was lodged, former Land Commissioner Judge Toohey wrote in Seven Alice Years On: "Where the holder of a grazing license will suffer serious detriment, the Minister might well decide that he is not satisfied that there should be a grant of the land." Yet the Minister, Robert Tickner, granted the claim, although the report to him by Land Commissioner Justice Olney had this to say: "[Mr Pick] will clearly suffer substantial detriment in the event of the land comprising grazing license 2144 being granted to a land trust unless such grant is made conditional upon the right of Mr Pick to retain the possession and use of the land for a reasonable period." IMPROVEMENTS If a grant were made, Judge Toohey said, the Commonwealth should pay compensation "for the loss of the grazing license including the value of any improvements thereon." Kevin has not seen any such compensation money,

although he says the CLC has hinted that he could get some if he walked off the land. But at the time the CLC's claim over his land was put together, Kevin thought he had no cause for anxiety: all he needed to rely on, he believed, were the assurances from the traditional owners that he could stay. They were his family, after all. The CLC in 1990 lodged the claim on Kevin's block, and a similar sized one to the east, just over 5000 square kilometres, small beer in the land rights stakes. The claim was granted although key traditional owners, some now dead, had made it clear that Kevin's interests needed to be looked after. On April 23, 1990 they sent a letter to the CLC, Mr Tickner and to the Territory Department of Lands and Housing. It was signed by seven members of the Johnson family, two from the Hayes family and one McCormack. It said in part: "Us Johnsons of Little Well are worried about the claim for Kevin Pick's country. "He has been there a long time and is part of our family and it is his country. "He has had a grazing license with the government for a long time and we want him to keep that land. "We don't want to take this land away from him and want to withdraw the land claim over our traditional country which is on Kevin's grazing license before the land claim for the rest of our traditional country. Thank you." It's a communication that David Avery, Manager - Legal Services for the CLC, is apparently ignoring, notwithstanding the fact that the letter was put before Land Commissioner Judge Olney during the hearing of the claim. EVIDENCE Edward and Gregory Johnson, who co-signed the letter, also gave evidence in support of the claim. But Judge Olney, in his report in 1991, said the two men knew what was in the letter and "the fact that they now express a view different from that expressed in the letter is of no real relevance". He said much of Todd River Downs is "Johnson country" - putting beyond doubt that the letter has the highest authority in Aboriginal terms. He said "the problem of what is to become of Mr Pick and Todd River Downs is one which can only be resolved by constructive negotiation carried out in a spirit of goodwill. There is clearly little "spirit of goodwill", prompting 18 prominent Aboriginal people, in a letter in January 2005, to complain about the CLC's "hostile, prejudiced, unfair and unsympathetic" attitude towards Kevin. v In a letter dated August 11, 2004 to the NT Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment Mr Avery referred to Kevin as a "squatter" on the land trust and that he has "no legal rights to occupy any part of it." Mr Avery quotes from a letter the CLC had sent to Kevin in October, 2002. It claims the CLC has no "instructions from the traditional landowners to negotiate any arrangement with you". Mr Avery repeatedly makes allegations that Kevin's land is overstocked: "Clearly something has to be done about that land degradation as a matter of urgency." A number of traditional owners signed three official government forms, "Owner's Permission to Use Run", demanding the return to Kevin of his brand. The CLC's response: The forms weren't valid because they didn't carry the land trust's seal. Kevin denies any wrongdoing, saying the sorry state of the land is a result of the drought. Neighbours' land is equally affected, he claims, including a cattle station owned by Aborigines and managed with the assistance of the CLC. "Everybody's fighting the drought," says Kevin. "I'm fighting the land council as well." He claims he's been tricked by the CLC which solicited his written



consent to cull feral camels and horses. Kevin says he signed the document having been told what was in it-being illiterate he couldn't read it. In fact that letter apparently referred to shooting cattle as well, something for which he would never have given his consent. The CLC declined to answer questions but issued a statement saying "the CLC is not concerned about Mr Pick living on the Land Trust for as long as he likes, but it does have ongoing concerns about serious land degradation.

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In 1954 the people on Santa Teresa sent their first mob of cattle away to be sold. They had broken in 20 of the local brumbies for stockhorses, and walked the cattle to the saleyards at Alice Springs. (from the *Adelaide Chronicle* April 1954).

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*Chronicle (Adelaide, SA : 1895 - 1954), Saturday 9 December 1905, page 10*

#### The Station

More horses in from the Alice Springs district for sale and, considering their condition, they sold well. This time it was our old friend, Mr. William Coulthard, erstwhile of Stuart's Creek, then of Frew River, and now of Arltunga, who brought in a mob. A typical bushman, born and bred for the bush, if not actually in it; the father perished on an exploring trip, and his final messages to humanity can be seen scratched on a canteen among the treasured relics of past explorers. Time has dealt fairly leniently with our friend, though, in expressive bush language, he carries plenty flourbag' about the head. Small wonder, either, when one considers what opening up the Frew River station meant. His old homestead was built like a fort, with an outer, as well as an inner, system of defence against attack from natives. For many months no roof could be put over any of the buildings. The customary covering of cane grass 'was too risky, bearing in mind the fate of Anna's Reservoir station, and the galvanized iron ordered from town took time— its own time, apparently— to find its way up. The natives were responsible for the break-up of the station, ever a much over rated piece of country, and the cattle were brought south to Undoolya and Stuart's Creek. Coulthard then tried to keep horses instead of cattle, but again the blacks were too hostile. This drove him further south, and he made an effort to stock a block of useful country lying 130 miles east of Arltunga, only once again to find his best horses speared. Finally he came further in towards settlements, and, in company with one of the Wallis family, breeds horses in the MacDonnell Ranges, close to Arltunga. The cattle stations on the Finke are having unpleasant experiences...

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*Chronicle (Adelaide, SA : 1895 - 1954), Saturday 15 July 1922, page 15*

Mr. William Coulthard, whose death occurred recently at Nuriootpa at the age of 71, was a native of that town. Early in life he went into the cattle industry, having charge of the Finness station, north of Marree. Later he was manager successively of the Stuart's Creek and Frew River stations, taking stock from the former to the latter station. Subsequently he, in conjunction with several others, took up land in the Alice Springs district, and went in for cattle and horse breeding. After-wards he removed to Queensland, but re-turned to the MacDonnell Ranges country, where he spent many years. Native flora and fauna always claimed his attention, and he was interested in mineralogy and geology, having a large collection of mineral specimens, Mr. Coulthard's father, who arrived in the State in the Buffalo, was one of the earliest explorers, and in his last journey perished of thirst. There are two sons— Messrs Thomas and Robert Coulthard.

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*Chronicle (Adelaide, SA : 1895 - 1954), Saturday 15 July 1922, page 15*

A FEW NOTES from the Macdonald Range District

(From a Correspondent.)

Arltunga, July 5th.

... Mr. Coulthard, the well-known breeder is intending, if the season should be at all favorable to take a mob of draught horses and a few blood horses through to Port Darwin early next year....

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William Coulthard was the Vice-President of the McDonnell Range and Stuart Turf Club, in 1897 (and probably other years).

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*Quorn Mercury (SA : 1895 - 1954), Tuesday 12 December 1905, page 2*

Oodnadatta, November 30.

A special train is taking 192 head of cattle to Adelaide to-night. The cattle are from Crown Point station, W. Coles being the drover in charge of them. Mr. W. Coulthard tracked 192 horses on November 23 for Adelaide. These horses, which comprise' remounts, trolly, and draught horses and hacks, were bred by Mr. Coulthard, on Love's Creek, Northern Territory. Mr. S. Kidman, who has been inspecting the Peake and Macumba cattle stations, will leave by the special cattle train to-night. During the past week he and his partner in the Macumba station (Mr. Bartlett) rode over a good part of that run, which is in splendid condition.

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The people from **Arltunga** were removed to Santa Theresa Mission when that was set up. Many were excellent horsemen, and had run coach horses and wagon horses, as well as having stock horses at Arltunga. It would be certain some horses from Arltunga accompanied them to Santa Theresa.

A bit about Arltunga, where William Coulthard used to live... From

<http://www.macdonnellranges.com/Arltunga-Historical-Reserve-and-hotel-camping-information-guide.htm>

### **Arltunga**

Arltunga is located on the 5 000 hectare Arltunga Historical Reserve. The Arltunga Historical Reserve was established in 1975 and since then there has been a systematic attempt to restore and maintain the existing buildings. At Arltunga Historical Reserve you'll find a complete ghost town - with the remains of mines, mining camps and stone buildings. The police station and gaol have been completely restored and there are even old mines you can walk through.

Arltunga was **officially central Australia's first town**, born out of a gold rush after alluvial gold was discovered amongst a dusty and dry creekbed during 1887. It was a hectic little goldmining town and it's historical heyday lasted from the first gold strike in 1887 until 1913. The fortune seekers of the day of the nations of the world had to travel 600 kilometres from the Oodnadatta railhead, often on foot which seemed to take for ever, to seek their fortune in the harsh central Australian environment. Arltunga once supported some 300 people. At the time, Alice Springs consisted of just the Overland Telegraph Station, and was little more than an outpost that had expanded as it became the supply base of Arltunga. Mining activity continued in the area for 30 years.

To reach Arltunga in the 1880s a person would need to walk or ride alongside the Overland Telegraph Line from Oodnadatta in South Australia to Alice Springs in Northern Territory, then follow the East MacDonnell Ranges eastwardly for another 120 km. This would take at well over a week and often or not much longer in temperatures which often exceeded 40°C during the mid of the day.

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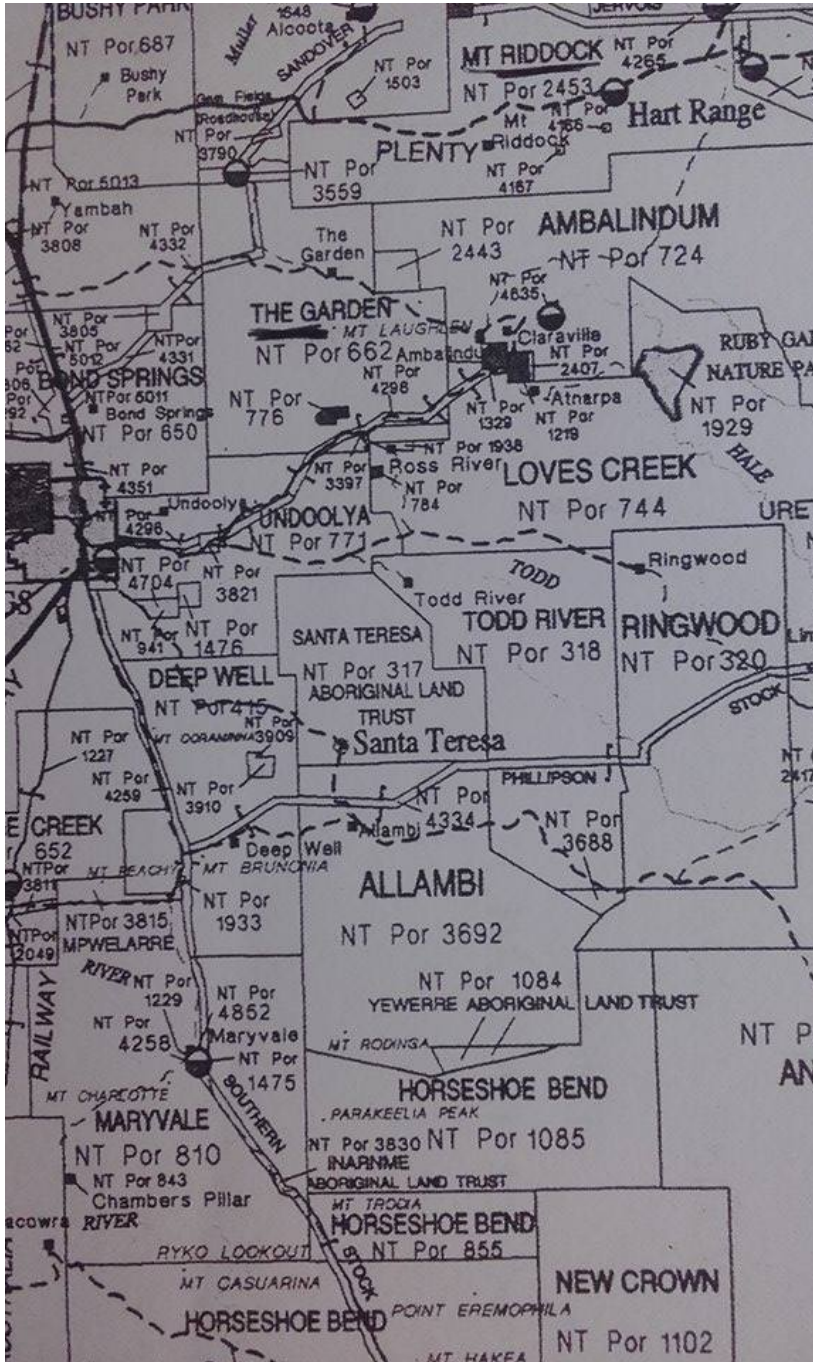
*Register News-Pictorial (Adelaide), Friday 23 January 1931...*

Sid Kidman And Circus Ponies FRANK Parker, Long. Plains, writes:— I "Dear Rufus I enjoy your talks' over the air very much as they recall many happy 1

times and experiences. I have had in the north myself. I spent some time in the Cooper country and on the Queensland and N.S.W. borders. Although it is about 30 years ago I still sometimes feel the call of the bush and your talks bring back old memories. I was reminded of an incident that happened to me when you were speaking, about ponies. When I was a boy I was very interested in some circus ponies that used to visit our local shows. They were an unusual colour, being smoky-blue or roany and white and were very pretty little chaps. I used to spend most of the show day watching them and wishing I owned one of them. Well when I first went to the north I worked on Mundowdna just about the time Mr. (now Sir Sidney) Kidman bought it. While I was there he came up to muster the stock as he had bought it walk-in-walk-out. Well, in the morning when we were having breakfast Mr. Kidman told the manager (Norman Shaw) so that we could all hear, that he was to sack any man he caught knocking a horse about. The first mob that came into the yards (known as the Frome Yards) had about 20 of these little circus ponies in it. The previous owner, so I heard afterwards, had bought out the circus man and turned the ponies on the run and they had been multiplying for years. Mr. Kidman was in the round yard drafting, and when the first pony, a bonnie little stallion, came in, he cracked his whip and sent him round and round the yard. Somebody called out, 'What about knocking horses about?' 'Oh he answered, 'these are circus ponies, they like this.' The ponies had lost their old coats and were in splendid condition and almost without exception had come true to colour. The circus was known as Ireland's' Circus.

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Map Reg Wilson, via Christie Goodlet. Please note that again, Todd River Station is showed here. Todd River Downs is to the east (right hand side) of Ringwood and runs off this map, according to Neil Camm's map. (happy to eb corrected, if anyone has a correct map will only to gladly include it here with acknowledgements.



***ALICE SPRINGS NEWS March 1, 2007.***

**KEVIN'S FIGHT FOR HIS HOME ON THE RANGE. By ERWIN CHLANDA.**

Todd River Downs is as remote and inhospitable a place as any in the world, 200 km east of Alice Springs, perched at the northern edge of the Simpson Desert, boiling hot in summer, and now several years into a cattle killing drought.

Instead of getting desperately needed steady rain, last month 200mm - eight inches - dumped on the station in a matter of hours, cutting the sole road to it.

Kevin Pick has been there for half a century and he wants stay until he dies.

He lives in three tin sheds and a caravan, has no running water, no air conditioning and a diesel generator he rarely bothers to fire up.

It's rough but it's home - a home Kevin's been fighting to keep for a quarter of a century, in a range war whose latest weapons are high calibre rifles fired from low flying helicopters, wiping out much of his meagre cattle herd. Other ploys are stopping authorities from fixing the road to his front gate, and prohibiting the use of his cattle brand, effectively destroying his business.

"They want to get me off my place," says Kevin.

"But I'm not going."

"They" - absurdly - are the very people supposed to help him and his extended family.

It's the Central Land Council (CLC), set up by the Federal Government under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NT) in the seventies to reverse black - white injustice. There is hardly a man in Central Australia who better embodies black - white harmony.

Kevin's father Taffy was a Welsh coal miner who came to Australia in the Depression to mine gold at Arltunga, east of Alice Springs, just to the south of Todd River Downs.

Later Taffy grew fruit and vegetables for the young town of Alice.

In World War II he fought the Germans in Europe and the Middle East, was captured and escaped three times.

Kevin's mother was Ada Smith, an Arrernte woman born at the Arltunga gold fields.

Her large family spans the East and West MacDonnell Ranges, from the former Santa Teresa Catholic Mission, now the Ltyentye Apurte community, all the way through to where the Arrernte lands abut the Warlpiri region at Papunya, 200 km west of Alice.

This family network expanded more than it otherwise would have because of an error by military authorities: they advised Ada that Taffy was "missing believed killed in action".

She started a new family, with Taffy's ultimate consent when he returned from the war, agreeing to a divorce but keeping close links with the huge clan.

Brown skinned Kevin, with his thoughtful blue eyes, now has hundreds of "rellies".

Some live in outstations, tiny, remote bush communities, and have English as their second or third language.

Natalie Ross and Cheryl Shembri are nieces. They live in Alice suburbs. As kids they spent many a school holiday on "uncle Kevin's" block, having the run of its 2000 square kilometres.

Eileen Hooson, who lives on an Alice town camp, is Kevin's step-sister. Eileen is an experienced administrator working in Aboriginal organisations, and a prominent activist for Aboriginal causes.

All three women have thick folders of correspondence: with the CLC, Territory departments and Federal Ministers of Aboriginal Affairs, helping Kevin fight his fight.

Formidable as the three women may be, they're pitted against a land council with a staff of more than 100, a budget of more than \$5m, and a legal department with several lawyers.

More frighteningly, land councils can operate in secrecy to an extent government departments can only dream about.

For example, land councils are exempted from Freedom of Information provisions.

They answer to nobody but the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs - sitting in Canberra 2000 km away.

Natalie, Eileen and Cheryl say the CLC can dictate to NT Government departments - and is using that power to increase the pressure on Kevin to get off what he considers his land.

For example, the road to the station hasn't been fixed for a long time.

Kevin isn't allowed to build a house on the station, although the foundations were put down decades ago.

On June 21, 1989 the NT Department of Lands and Housing told Kevin: "As you are aware, the land contained in your Grazing Licence is under Land Claim ... and as such, this Department is unwilling to approve your request to carry out improvements."

Authorities, on demand from the CLC, have stopped him from using his cattle brand.

Without it Kevin can't sell his cattle, forcing him onto welfare last year - for the first time in his 67 years.

And the CLC hired the chopper-borne marksmen: Kevin says half of his herd of 400 now lies rotting and flyblown in the red dirt of Todd River Downs.

Kevin's has lived there since 1951, first with his uncle, Willy Smith.

In 1984 Kevin took over the grazing license.

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It was able to claim "unalienated" Crown land and existing Aboriginal reserves.

Excluded from claims was "alienated" land, such as covered by freehold and leaseholds, including pastoral leases.

Tragically for Kevin, he and uncle Willy never succeeded in getting a pastoral lease and always operated under a grazing license.

The fact that both of them were illiterate no doubt had a lot to do with this.

Grazing licenses did not automatically protect their holders from land rights claims.

However, the Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, who schedules land under the Land Rights Act, could have knocked back the claim over Kevin's land.

Well before the claim was lodged, former Land Commissioner Judge Toohey wrote in Seven Years On: "Where the holder of a grazing license will suffer serious detriment, the Minister might well decide that he is not satisfied that there should be a grant of the land."

Yet the Minister, Robert Tickner, granted the claim, although the report to him by Land Commissioner Justice Olney had this to say: "[Mr Pick] will clearly suffer substantial detriment in the event of the land comprising grazing license 2144 being granted to a land trust unless such grant is made conditional upon the right of Mr Pick to retain the possession and use of the land for a reasonable period."

#### IMPROVEMENTS

If a grant were made, Judge Toohey said, the Commonwealth should pay compensation "for the loss of the grazing license including the value of any improvements thereon."

Kevin has not seen any such compensation money, although he says the CLC has hinted that he could get some if he walked off the land.

But at the time the CLC's claim over his land was put together, Kevin thought he had no cause for anxiety: all he needed to rely on, he believed, were the assurances from the traditional owners that he could stay. They were his family, after all.

The CLC in 1990 lodged the claim on Kevin's block, and a similar sized one to the east, just over 5000 square kilometres, small beer in the land rights stakes.

The claim was granted although key traditional owners, some now dead, had made it clear that Kevin's interests needed to be looked after.

On April 23, 1990 they sent a letter to the CLC, Mr Tickner and to the Territory Department of Lands and Housing.

It was signed by seven members of the Johnson family, two from the Hayes family and one McCormack.

It said in part: "Us Johnsons of Little Well are worried about the claim for Kevin Pick's country.

"He has been there a long time and is part of our family and it is his country.

"He has had a grazing license with the government for a long time and we want him to keep that land.

"We don't want to take this land away from him and want to withdraw the land claim over our traditional country which is on Kevin's grazing license before the land claim for the rest of our traditional country. Thank you."

It's a communication that David Avery, Manager - Legal Services for the CLC, is apparently ignoring, notwithstanding the fact that the letter was put before Land Commissioner Judge Olney during the hearing of the claim.

#### EVIDENCE

Edward and Gregory Johnson, who co-signed the letter, also gave evidence in support of the claim.

But Judge Olney, in his report in 1991, said the two men knew what was in the letter and "the fact that they now express a view different from that



expressed in the letter is of no real relevance".

He said much of Todd River Downs is "Johnson country" - putting beyond doubt that the letter has the highest authority in Aboriginal terms.

He said "the problem of what is to become of Mr Pick and Todd River Downs is one which can only be resolved by constructive negotiation carried out in a spirit of goodwill.

There is clearly little "spirit of goodwill", prompting 18 prominent Aboriginal people, in a letter in January 2005, to complain about the CLC's "hostile, prejudiced, unfair and unsympathetic" attitude towards Kevin.

In a letter dated August 11, 2004 to the NT Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment Mr Avery referred to Kevin as a "squatter" on the land trust and that he has "no legal rights to occupy any part of it."

Mr Avery quotes from a letter the CLC had sent to Kevin in October, 2002. It claims the CLC has no "instructions from the traditional landowners to negotiate any arrangement with you".

Mr Avery repeatedly makes allegations that Kevin's land is overstocked: "Clearly something has to be done about that land degradation as a matter of urgency."

A number of traditional owners signed three official government forms, "Owner's Permission to Use Run", demanding the return to Kevin of his brand.

The CLC's response: The forms weren't valid because they didn't carry the land trust's seal.

Kevin denies any wrongdoing, saying the sorry state of the land is a result of the drought.

Neighbours' land is equally affected, he claims, including a cattle station owned by Aborigines and managed with the assistance of the CLC.

"Everybody's fighting the drought," says Kevin. "I'm fighting the land council as well."

He claims he's been tricked by the CLC which solicited his written consent to cull feral camels and horses.

Kevin says he signed the document having been told what was in it - being illiterate he couldn't read it.

In fact that letter apparently referred to shooting cattle as well, something for which he would never have given his consent.

The CLC declined to answer questions but issued a statement saying "the CLC is not concerned about Mr Pick living on the Land Trust for as long as he likes, but it does have ongoing concerns about serious land degradation caused by overgrazing".

### ***ALICE SPRINGS NEWS March 8, 2007.***

#### **LETTERS: Devastation on Todd River Downs massive, says CLC.**

Sir, Re "Kevin's fight for his home on the range" (last week's issue).

Since 2002 the Central Land Council (CLC) has repeatedly asked Mr Pick to reduce his stock numbers or adopt better management practices as it was evident that his operation on the Pmere Myente Land Trust was contributing to severe land degradation.

The devastation of the property and the herd is on a massive scale. When

the photos given to the Alice Springs News were taken by a Northern Territory Government officer in May 2005, government officers estimated 500 to 600 cattle and 500 horses had died from starvation and lack of water within two kilometres of the only water source then on the Land Trust.

Mr Pick was dragging animals from the trough into a heap which contained hundreds of dead animals and some dying animals.

106 cattle were saved during a muster by the CLC, Loves Creek Station, Numery, Ringwood and the NT Government that month. These cattle were in an appalling condition and were fed at the CLC's expense until they were strong enough to be trucked off the property. The cattle were sold and the proceeds put into Mr Pick's account at the stock agent.

The remaining animals which were too weak to move were culled by the NT Government. The marksmen from NT Parks and Wildlife spent 20 hours flying and shot 590 camels, 575 horses and 115 cattle.

This action was a desperate move to finally halt this environmental disaster and chronic neglect. This was an extremely serious animal welfare problem. Earlier estimates had numbered some 800 cattle and 1000 horses on the property. At the most generous estimates of stock capacity, Mr Pick was running the operation four times over the stocking capacity for the country. Mr Pick has lived on the Land Trust all of his life and the CLC has no issue with him continuing to live there. However, Mr Pick is not a traditional owner and the CLC is not obliged to assist him with his pastoral activities.

Nonetheless, the CLC has asked Mr Pick on many occasions to present a management proposal for the property which he consistently refused to do. He continued to mismanage the area he occupies. Finally the CLC requested that his brand be withdrawn due to chronic mismanagement.

The Land Trust is very marginal country as it is on the edge of the Simpson Desert and all pastoralists in the vicinity have had difficulties during the drought. Mr Pick's problems pre-dated the drought. The CLC encourages pastoral inspectors to access Aboriginal Land Trusts.

David Ross

Director

Central Land Council

### **Respect and mercy**

Sir, I would like to speak to the question of Kevin Pick at Todd River Downs. I first met Kevin in 1979. For the next dozen years of my life reaching his camp on the edge of the Simpson Desert was always akin to getting home free.

Camels were our common bond, and over the years I bought maybe 12 or 15 of them.

Always we put Kevin's brand on them, the same large stock brand I now learn he is no longer allowed to use. Can that really be true?

Whenever I showed up at Kevin's front gate I found a warm welcome, good stories and a meal not from my fire. If I needed another camel, we found one. If my gear was in disrepair, we fixed it. If a trip into Alice was necessary, the drive of four hours each way was organized.

And not once in all those visits over all those years did Kevin ever ask to see my permit.

Now it seems that not only has he been de-stocked but that he might be getting hunted off the land where he has camped for half a century or so. The de-stocking has been a bitter pill a long time in the coming. Kevin's block is situated where the Todd River makes its final bend before disappearing into the Simpson Desert. It is very marginal grazing country. Escaped stock wandering down stream from other stations eventually fetched up at Todd River Downs. Most of these were strangers and not Kevin's responsibility.

Likewise, during dry times, camels would drift up out of the sand hills to find water at one of the only bores I know of that was always open to the desert. Again, most of these were strangers and not Kevin's responsibility. The goats and horses were a different matter, and I often used to wish Kevin would do a massive cull. But no matter where the blame lies, it seems the de-stocking has now taken place. Can it be left at that?

A fair amount of Central Australia's heritage is attached to Kevin.

From just the little bit I do know, one uncle, Walter Smith, is the Man from Arltunga in R.G. Kimber's book of that name. And the Taffy Pick Crossing linking South Terrace to the casino is named after Kevin's father.

I suggest the CLC wants to pull its head in here and show some respect and some mercy.

Please do not play the corporate bully and push this elderly desert man off his camp. He has earned his right to stay there.

Hal Duell

Alice Springs

Desert town

### ***ALICE SPRINGS NEWS March 15, 2007.***

Kevin Pick's family will fight on

Sir,- I refer to the recent reply by the Central Land Council Director (March 8) to your excellent article about the plight of Kevin Pick at Todd River Downs (March 1). What they have written is wrong.

The following fundamental facts and issues remain to be properly resolved in this most unsatisfactory situation, which was caused by CLC.

Kevin Pick was the holder of a grazing licence at Todd River Downs, which was later cancelled upon the success of a land claim by the traditional Aboriginal owners.

Unfortunately Kevin has to this day never been properly compensated for this, although other grazing licence holders in Central Australia have been compensated.

And he has been looking after the Todd River Downs country and his cattle very well since, with the full permission of the traditional owners.

He has not been personally responsible for any land degradation around Todd River Downs, as wrongly alleged by the CLC administration, and where

is the CLC proof of the alleged "mismanagement".

We have colour photographs which show and prove that Todd River Downs country and cattle are looking good and being well looked after despite the drought conditions.

The CLC administration, not the CLC Executive and not the traditional owners, have been harassing, intimidating and bullying poor Kevin for too long now over all kinds of silly little things to do with Todd River Downs country, in a cruel campaign to force Kevin out of the Todd River Downs Lands Trust country eventually.

The CLC administration is also discriminating against Kevin, who does not deserve such terrible treatment from the CLC bureaucrats.

This is also being done by a cruel CLC administration, against the expressed wishes of the traditional owners of land trust country and contrary to any concept of natural justice or fairness. The CLC administration are not even taking notice of or acting on the wishes and instructions of the traditional owners of the land trust who have always supported Kevin. Surely, it is the role and responsibility of CLC to act on the instructions of the traditional owners in accordance with the provisions of the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976, instead of ignoring and insulting the traditional owners.

The continuing intransigence and inappropriate actions of the CLC administration towards Kevin at Todd River Downs cannot be condoned by anyone and must be challenged by all those who are concerned for justice and a fair go for the Aussie battler, whether the battler is black, white or brindle.

This terrible situation with the CLC administration and Kevin is now such that it surely requires the intervention of the Federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, to see that Kevin is fairly or justly treated, that Kevin is compensated, that the CLC administration is stopped from discriminating against an Aboriginal man, and that the CLC administration is directed to do its job properly in accordance with the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act.

After many years of headaches and heartaches for Kevin Pick, the CLC administration have left Kevin, his family, his friends and his supporters no alternative but to pursue this unacceptable terrible situation directly with the Federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs and the Human Rights Commission for a fair go and justice.

Natalie Ross

Cheryle Schembri

Eileen Hoosan

Alice Springs

*Centralian Advocate (Alice Springs, NT : 1947 - 1954), Friday 24 December 1954, page 15*

Mac Gerrard (known for his walking feats) came up with a good one on Friday night. Claimed he walked some miles back into town because the dust was too thick for his- utility to penetrate. Bearing with him in his tales of woe were Alec Fletcher, Joan Killen, Sandy Pye, of Todd River station (looking all forlorn),

*Centralian April 1954* D.W. Pye of Todd River Station selling poll Herefords.

*Centralian Advocate (Alice Springs, NT : 1947 - 1954), Friday 6 June 1952, page 14* ...and Mr. Sandy Pye. Incidentally Sandy Pye is a Sydney visitor, he had been staying out at Bond Springs with friend Bruce Chisholm. For a week or so Mr. Pye stayed at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Bill Prior. He was back off to his home town this week— Bogabri, N.S.W.

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Copied a lot of information, posts and photos from Facebook in early 2019. Great photos, great information and references for the TRD horses. Some of the posts dated back to 2012, some 2014, some later. Have not included here for privacy reasons.

Janet Lane 2020.