POINT STUART: STRATEGIES FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM

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Introduction
In April 1989 the Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory invited the authors to compile a heritage resources inventory of the Mary River Crossing, Point Stuart and Wildman River Reserves. The extent of professional services sought were: first the documentation and identification of items and areas of archaeological or historic interest and priorities for selective protection or presentation of sites of present or future significance; and, second, identification of heritage values so that a unified plan of management could be developed for these areas.

In undertaking research for a report which was presented to the Commission in November 1989 it soon became clear that the focus should be on the journey of the explorer John McDouall Stuart, who in June 1862 travelled through the areas on his epic crossing of the Australian continent from south to north, reaching the sea at the point which now bears his name. The research was partly based on vehicle trips and an aerial survey in addition to use of documentary and oral sources. A ‘Stuart’s Heritage Trail’ was mapped out and some attention was also given to other historic aspects, especially the buffalo and crocodile hunters. Using Stuart’s route and the identified buffalo and crocodile hunters’ camp as a base, areas were ‘linked’ in a way that would allow visitors to enjoy all aspects of the reserves. Suggestions as to the interpretation of specific sites were also included, as were recommendations as to the type of development best suited to the reserves with regard to the needs of visitors.

Background to Stuart’s 1862 expedition
The mid-nineteenth century was an era of exploration and discovery in Australia. A dominant issue was the discovery of a route for the proposed telegraphic link with Britain through a line recently extended to India. The South Australian government offered 2,000 pounds to the first person to cross the continent from south to north. James Chambers, a leading South Australian pastoralist, proposed that John McDouall Stuart lead an expedition north to both look for new grazing land and a possible route for an overland telegraph line. The expedition would be financed by Chambers and William Finke, who had supported Stuart in earlier expeditions. Stuart made three attempts to complete the south-north crossing. The first expedition, consisting only of himself, William Kekwick and Benjamin Head, with 13 horses, left Adelaide in March 1860. The party turned back after an almost fatal encounter with hostile Aborigines at Attack Creek (near Tennant Creek).

Only 13 days after his arrival back in Adelaide, New Year’s Day 1861, the first party of Stuart’s second expedition of nine men and 45 horses headed north once again. This time the expedition penetrated 250 kilometres beyond Attack Creek, but was eventually forced to turn back after spending two months trying to break through the depressed tracts of Sturt Plain. The expedition arrived back in Adelaide in September 1861. The South Australian government promptly voted to equip another expedition. Despite his exhaustion, Stuart made preparations for yet another journey. The party, which consisted of 10 men and 70 horses, left in October 1861. Those who accompanied Stuart were William Kekwick, F.W. Thring, W.P. Auld, Stephen King, John Billiatt, James Frew, Heath Nash, John Mcгрorrey, and J.W. Waterhouse. This time the expedition achieved its objective. On 24 July 1862 Stuart recorded in his journal that he had reached the Indian Ocean, and had had his initials, J M D S cut in a large tree nearby.

On 18 July 1862 Stuart’s party entered the area now known as Mary River Crossing Reserve. It is from this point onwards that we attempted to identify his exact route and camp sites with the view to creating a heritage trail through the Conservation Commission reserves of Mary River Crossing, Wildman River and Point Stuart.

There were two problems faced in identifying Stuart’s exact route. One was the fact that Stuart had no way of judging longitude. The other was that his journals covering the expedition were heavily edited before publication in 1864.

While Stuart could gauge latitude accurately by sun and star sights, he had no way of knowing his exact longitude.

Not having a chronometer, he was unable to check his longitude in the way he could check his latitude: moreover the maps of the day were at fault, and likely to mislead him.

The only map of the area, used by Stuart, had been compiled from earlier Admiralty surveys carried out by John Lort Stokes from the Beagle in 1838-39. Stokes had identified only one major river, the Adelaide, in the area west of the Alligator River. The
Adelaide River survey had been carried out by Lieutenant Wickham and Lieutenant Helpman. An entry in Stuart's journal dated 16 July 1862 reads:

From twenty to twenty-five miles distant is another range at the foot of which there is a blue stripe, which I suppose to be the main stream of the Adelaide. It was in fact a completely different river - the one now known as the Mary River. That it was a different river was suspected by J.W. Waterhouse, a naturalist appointed to the party by the South Australian government. Waterhouse made his suspicions clear in a report he presented to Parliament on his return to Adelaide. The consequences of Stuart's error were far-reaching. His glowing descriptions of land along the Mary River were taken as applying to the Adelaide River. This created great confusion when the land was opened up for settlement and grave doubts were cast on the veracity of Stuart's journals. There was even doubt as to whether Stuart had ever reached the north coast, a doubt only laid to rest when Gilbert McMinn, travelling by steam launch from Darwin to Point Stuart, found Stuart's Tree in January 1884.

The publisher of Stuart's journals chose Sir William Hardman to edit them. Hardman did not content himself with simply tidying up the text, but removed whole sections of text at will. In his view the public would show little interest in the journals as they stood. 'The Journal in its untouched form is' he asserted, 'frequently little better than a collection of rough jottings without the slightest regard to literary composition.' The writing in the journals was, according to Hardman, 'full of dreary platitudes' and he felt free to 'add, curtail, or dish up as I may fancy best for Stuart and the public at large.' Hardman also felt that the drawings included with the journals needed 'improving', mentioning that a Mr Angas had made 'beautiful drawings' from Stuart's 'very feeble sketches'. The drawings were in fact not Stuart's, but King's. Thus The Journals of John McDouall Stuart which appeared in print in 1864 sometimes differed from Stuart's originals. Mona Stuart Webster in John McDouall Stuart, published in 1958, has provided valuable additional information about the expedition by using material from original Stuart diaries held then by South Australian Archives, but since transferred to the Mortlock Library in Adelaide. However, while the information added by Webster provided a broader background knowledge of the expedition, there are few changes in the navigational information provided in the 1864 publication.

In following Stuart's track north from the Mary River Conservation Reserve the published Hardman version, still in print, was used. Where the journal version differs in description of terrain from diary extracts in Webster's biography, the relevant information has been added.

The terrain has obviously changed considerably since Stuart's time. Even allowing for the fact that our aerial survey was undertaken at the end of the Dry season,
there is little sign of many of the features noted in the journals. The red lilies which were clearly widespread in 1862 were nowhere to be seen in the immediate area, although Dave West, a Conservation Commission ranger at Wildman Station, advised that there was a Red Lily Lagoon close to Wildman River Station. There was no sign of the bamboo which also seem to have been widespread in 1862. Richard Baker in a study of the area in 1981 noted that:

The Mary river plain has been particularly affected by buffaloes due to their high density. The vast strands of dead Melaleuca . . . on the plains testify to this impact. Buffaloes tend to take the same route through swamps, causing the development of swim channels.23

People involved in the buffalo and safari industry over the years, such as Lou Bellinger, Willi Pedersen and Vic Pedersen, cannot remember a time when the wetlands rivers and creeks were lined with bamboo. That the landscape has changed considerably since Stuart passed through had to be taken into account at all stages of the survey.

From the point of view of visitor usage, Mary River Crossing Reserve is identified in the Conservation Commission’s 1989 Top End Wetlands as a ‘key area to be developed in the wetlands’. The primary activity was seen to be ‘nature appreciation/wildlife observation by interstate and international tourists using the Arnhem Highway to access Kakadu’. Areas of natural heritage have been well identified in the 1989 report, and the reserve’s proposed visitor facilities were broadly summed up as:

Carpark, access road and walking trail to lookout on granite hills interpreting the vastness of the plains, the granite outcrops, the unique monsoon forest and possibly the Aboriginal rock art.

Camping areas with toilet facilities and basic park furniture were recommended, as was a walking trail interpreting the waterbird habitat on the billabong and river system.25 If greater tourist numbers are being encouraged, however, the fragile wildlife habitats and monsoon forest patches are certain to come under undue pressure. Much of this pressure could be avoided by an emphasis on the human history of the area.

Following a ground survey of Stuart’s route north, a trail can be quite easily marked out. While catering for four wheel drive vehicles is undoubtedly necessary, purely horse or walking sections of the trail that allow visitors to experience the challenge of the wilderness might also be developed. A lookout on the top of Mount Goyder, named by Stuart, could be one such section. A clear identification of Stuart’s Lily Marsh camp site is also desirable so that it can be connected with the trail. Commercial safari operators at Annaburroo and Wildman Station could benefit from the trail as they would have a concrete proposition for visitors – to follow in the steps of the great explorer John McDouall Stuart. Perhaps the operators could work out an overnight horseback safari, camping at Stuart’s Lily Marsh, 18-19 July 1862, camp site, between nights spent at Annaburroo and Wildman. The introduction to the 1989 Top End Wetlands contains an apt quotation: ‘It is very difficult to manage a resource if its extent and behaviour are only fragmentarily known’.26 The broadening of the Conservation Commission’s horizons in looking at the history of the wetlands reserve areas may produce fragments of information which will assist in developing a theme for the development of the reserves – a theme which will satisfy both environmental and visitor needs. In laying down a heritage trail the Conservation Commission has several options. In following Stuart’s route it can highlight areas which are historically interesting, or physically beautiful, but of little environmental importance. In this way the sensitive natural heritage sites, while used as part of the incentive to visit the area, could be protected from excessive visitor pressure.

On Saturday 19 July 1862 Stuart’s party left Lily Marsh at 9.10 am following course 20° east of north. At 4.83 kilometres it crossed some stony ranges and broad alluvial grassy valleys and at 6.44 kilometres met the river, moving almost a kilometre south-east to go round it. It changed to the first course, 20° east of north and at 12.07 kilometres crossed a creek. The men then ascended a sandy tableland with an open forest of stringy-bark and other trees for 4.83 kilometres. There was a small stony range of hills to the west, dropping after 4.83 kilometres into a grassy plain of ‘beautiful black alluvial soil covered with lines and groves of the cabbage palm trees’. It took 3.22 kilometres to cross. Again the party ascended a low tableland, striking a creek 22.54 kilometres on. Named Anna Creek, its identifying marks were thick trees, palms, large masses of volcanic rock on sides of the creek and a large body of springs about one mile to the east.27 Stuart stayed at Anna Creek on Sunday 20 July 1862. The mosquitoes were the worst the party had encountered. ‘The grass in’, he wrote, ‘and on the banks of, the creek is six feet high; to the westward there are long reaches of water, and the creek is very thickly timbered with melaleuca, gum, stringy-bark and palms’.28

The search for Anna Creek proved to be one of the most frustrating aspects of attempting to follow in Stuart’s footsteps. Anna Creek is not on any map looked at, and while those involved with the old buffalo camps had heard about Anna Springs, no one knew exactly where they were. Dave West of the Conservation Commission has driven through the area just north of the road from Wildman River Station to the Point Stuart Road, to search for Anna Springs and Anna Creek, but has not found them.
felt that Stuart may have been referring to Brian Springs, but they are too far south, and Stuart was usually exact as to latitude. We ended up with no other option than to place Stuart's Anna Creek camp site in the most logical position on the correct line of latitude.

On Monday 21 July 1862 the party left Anna Creek and Springs at 8 am on a course north-north-west. At 4.83 kilometres it came on an extensive fresh-water marsh, too boggy to cross. There was rising ground to the north-west and north. The river seemed to run between. Clumps of bamboo and trees were at about one and a half kilometres north-north-west (Stuart presumed they marked the river's edge). Ground for the first 4.83 kilometres was of a sandy nature. Stuart was forced to alter course to 30° south of east to get across a creek running into the marsh:

running deep, broad and boggy, and so thick with trees, bushes, and strong vines interwoven through it, that it would take a day to cut a passage through.

The party crossed a stream at 4.83 kilometres and changed course to north-north-west. After another 2.41 kilometres a further creek of the same description was encountered so the course was changed to east. The men crossed the creek three quarters of a kilometre later and returned to the original course. They met another running stream, but were able to cross without going far off course. They proceeded north-north-west, passing over elevated ground. At 27.37 kilometres from Anna Creek they came across a thick clump of trees and beautiful palms around a dry spring. They continued for 1.61 kilometres, again being blocked by a marsh, seeming in the middle of it. There was swamp to the south-west, north-east, and south-east. The men camped on a point of rising ground running into the marsh where they could see the river about 1.61 kilometres west. To the east, the swamp appeared to meet rising ground at between 8 and 10 kilometres.39

Stuart's party stayed at Freshwater Marsh on Tuesday 22 July 1862. Surveys were made of the river bank in the hope of being able to follow the river north. But the banks were broken in places by deep and broad water-courses. Stuart decided that his only option was to try and get around the marsh before returning to his north course. The camp site showed evidence of Aboriginal use. Stuart noted a great quantity of fish bones, mussel, and turtle shells. There was also a structure of three poles fixed in the ground, forming an equilateral triangle, on the top of which was a framework of the same fixture, over which there were placed bars of wood - its height from the ground being 2.4 metres. 'This had apparently been used by them', he wrote, 'for smoke-drying a dead blackfellow'.40

We have taken the rising ground to the north-west and north as the Point Stuart Abattoir area. This fits in with Stuart's movements north to Freshwater Marsh. The thick clump of trees with beautiful palms was in the area now known as Shady Camp. Stuart's camp site was probably right in the middle of an Aboriginal sacred site. The Shady Camp terrain has clearly changed considerably since Stuart's time. Only a few scattered trees and clumps of palms remain of what was once obviously a beautiful spot. It may be that it has been over-used in the past. Shady Camp was used intensively for many years by buffalo and crocodile hunters, as well as for fishing. The Wildman and Mary River Aboriginal people also often stayed there. According to a story told to anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt, 'Death of the People at Marabibi', the Aboriginal name for the site is Gadjalngadjara - where a Tortoise Dreaming site runs down to the Rabalya River (Mary River). There is a tortoise hole here.31

The Shady Camp area has many attractions for visitors. The Tortoise Dreaming site, and Stuart's Freshwater Marsh camp site have great potential for sensitive and interesting interpretation. People, in particular overseas visitors, are often fascinated by the Aborigines and their culture so perhaps the Aborigines of the area would be prepared to share the Tortoise Dreaming legend. The 1989 Top End Wetlands identified Shady Camp as suitable for a commercial camping area. However, it also noted that the trees there needed protection from vehicles and that the barramundi population was suffering from intensive fishing.32 Rather than simply increase camping facilities, which would seem to put even more stress on this area, it would be better to allow a commercial development to operate the site. Regeneration of the area, in an attempt to return it to some of its former beauty, would prove a costly exercise for the Conservation Commission. If a commercial development, of the lodge style accommodation favoured in the 1989 report, was allowed, part of the contract could be for the operators to beautify and maintain the area. This could be helped greatly by restricting vehicle access. If the area was intensively planted, and well maintained, it could provide a beautiful walking and picnic zone as well as a prime place of historic significance for the enjoyment of visitors.

On 23 July 1862 Stuart's party left Freshwater Marsh on a course 22° east of south. It took 1.61 kilometres to round the marsh, moved 1.61 kilometres south-east and then 9.66 kilometres east. It struck a large creek, moving 1.2 kilometres south to cross it. It was named Thring's Creek. The party then travelling east for 2.41 kilometres, then north for 14.49 kilometres when it again struck the marsh. Stuart noted that he had 'come twelve miles east to get around marsh'. He and his men camped at where the Thring spreads itself over a portion of the marsh. He could see rising ground to the north-west on the opposite side.34

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From following Stuart's fairly straightforward description of his progress from Shady Camp, it is clear that the creek he crossed and named Thring’s Creek is in fact Swim Creek. Travelling north, Stuart must have thought that they were one and the same. From the point of crossing the creek, it is possible to retrace Stuart’s journey using the existing track up to Point Stuart. Visitors could also visit the Swim Creek monsoon forest. One proposal for the area in the 1989 Top End Wetlands was that: ‘Interpretive facilities, including a walking trail. . . may be suitable’.  

Stuart’s Thring’s Creek camp site of 23 July 1862 should not be very difficult to identify in a ground survey. It will not be too far from the main track north, and could provide a pleasant, isolated camp site on the heritage trail. Another feature of interest is a very beautiful lagoon covered with water-lilies.

On Thursday 24 July 1862 Stuart and his men took a course north. At 13.68 kilometres they came on broad valley of black alluvial soil about half a kilometre wide. From here Stuart could hear the sea. He and the others crossed the valley and entered thick scrub, which was a complete network of vines. They advanced on to the beach, and were ‘delighted to behold the Indian Ocean in Van Diemen Gulf’. Stuart had told only Auld and Thring that the party was so close to achieving its objective – the rest of the party was taken completely by surprise. The beach was covered with a soft blue mud, some shells, but no seaweed. Stuart noted a point of land bearing 70°. He returned to the valley and had his initials, J.M.D.S., cut in a large tree. The party then proceeded on a course of 302° along the valley, and at 2.41 kilometres came upon a small creek, with running water. Stuart camped here to allow the horses the benefit of the beautiful green grass. At this stage Stuart made the often-quoted journal statement that stimulated such intense interest in the Territory amongst pastoralists and speculators of the time:

If this country is settled, it will be one of the finest Colonies under the Crown, suitable for the growth of any and everything – what a splendid country for producing cotton.

Stuart called the creek they camped at Charles Creek, after one of the sons of his patron James Chambers. This creek, however, is part of Thring’s Creek, not a separate water course.

Mona Webster provides some additional information on Stuart’s arrival on the north coast from loose pages, written in pencil, which are held with Stuart’s diary in South Australia.

I found that I had struck the sea on the east beach of the point about a mile south of the extreme point. From this, although the beach is not above 4 feet above the level of the sea I can see to the horizon to the east the dim shade of the land on the west side of the mouth of the Alligator River which has some high sand hills on it. 

On Friday 25 July 1862 Stuart sent Thring south-west to see if he could find a way around the marsh to get to the mouth of the river. After a long search Thring returned with the information that it was impracticable, being too boggy for the horses. In Stuart’s view:

As the great object of the expedition is now attained, and the mouth of the river already well known, I do not think it advisable to waste the strength of my horses in forcing them through;

The party therefore crossed the creek and proceeded on a west-north-west course for 3.22 kilometres. At this point the mud proved impassable for the horses. Stuart and Thring rode on for another 3.22 kilometres but the terrain did not improve. Returning to the rest of the party, Stuart had an open space cleared and the tallest tree in the area stripped. He then raised the Union Jack and named the sea near by Chambers Bay. He buried a box containing details of the ‘South Australian Great Northern exploring Expedition’, ‘DIG ONE FOOT S’. He and his men returned to Charles Creek and camped.

Auld in Recollections of John McDouall Stuart gives some additional information on the flag-raising ceremony. He, ‘being the most modest of the party’ had been given the task of approaching Stuart to ask if they might indulge in an extra cup of tea and some burgoo to celebrate the occasion. Stuart refused, and Auld was ‘on the black-list for some time’. Stuart later explained to Auld that the reason for his refusal was that he feared he himself would die on the return journey and that the party would need all its provisions to get back safely.

Webster, working from Stuart’s diary, also adds the information that the bay named by Stuart at the flag-raising ceremony was initially named Elizabeth Bay after Elizabeth Chambers. It only appears to have been changed after Stuart returned to Adelaide.

Point Stuart is a lovely area, both on the ground and from the air. However, much of its charm lies in its isolation. The memorial cairn erected in the destroyed stump of Stuart’s Tree is in a shady grove of trees. Just a short distance away is the sea, reached, much as in Stuart’s time, by pushing through undergrowth and vines. Too many visitors, and this sense of really sharing Stuart’s achievement could be lost. Vehicles are particularly damaging. If unrestricted access to this spot is allowed, in time the vegetation would probably be destroyed. Apart from the historic value of the site relating to Stuart’s expedition, Point Stuart has other significant values. Richard Baker in his 1981 survey investigated and listed the relic beach ridges, the cheniers, and sites once used by Aborigines in the area. Again the changing landscape is a feature to be considered. Baker was informed by Toby.
Thomson, who had lived in the old Point Stuart station some 40 years before, that much of the pandanus zone had disappeared probably due to the buffalo. Many of the Aboriginal sites Thomson remembered as being surrounded by pandanus were treeless.\textsuperscript{41} There is one (treeless) Aboriginal midden site very close, on the edge of the black soil plain, to where Stuart's Tree is located.\textsuperscript{42}

As the 1989 \textit{Top End Wetlands} had made it clear that no vehicles be allowed on the cheniers at Point Stuart,\textsuperscript{43} perhaps it would be possible to also restrict vehicles to an area east of Stuart's Tree. The final part of Stuart's Heritage Trail should involve some physical commitment if it is to mean anything. It is sensible to make it accessible only on foot or on horseback. This would serve the dual purpose of both protecting the area from vehicle damage and providing a challenge and sense of achievement for those who follow the trail to its conclusion. Also mentioned in the 1989 \textit{Top End Wetlands} is the possibility of a camping area near Thring's Creek, and the possible requirement for an on-site range or concessionaire.\textsuperscript{44} Perhaps this site would be suited to lodge-style facilities. Overseas and interstate visitors would be sure of a barramundi catch and the photos to prove it. The water is teeming with fish, unlike many of the other fishing areas along the Mary River. Finally, perhaps a Stuart's lookout tower in the east of the Stuart's Tree could be constructed. The views of the coast-line, and back down Swim Creek Plain, would be spectacular. It would certainly keep visitors occupied and, hopefully, lessen the impact of people tramping through the bush.

Unlike the painfully slow progress north, Stuart's return journey was swift. Leaving Charles Creek on 26 July 1862, the party passed the old Thring's Creek camp site, and having crossed the creek, followed the old course west for about two and a half kilometres and camped.\textsuperscript{45} The party spent the next day at the Small Grassy Plains camp site, and left here on the morning of Monday 28 July 1862. Stuart headed on a course of \textsuperscript{25}\degree towards his camp of 18 July, Lily Marsh, and managed to avoid the boggy creeks that had slowed his progress north. He reached Lily Marsh and camped.\textsuperscript{46} The following day the party passed its old Priscilla Creek camp of 17-18 July\textsuperscript{47} and moved out of the area covered by our survey.

\textbf{The search for Stuart's Tree}

Many attempts were made in the years following Stuart's epic expedition to find the tree he had said was carved with his initials. Failure to discover the tree caused some to doubt if he had ever actually accomplished the south-north crossing.\textsuperscript{48} These doubts were laid to rest when, in January 1884, news reached Palmerston (Darwin) that Stuart's Tree had been found. It was, of course, found near the mouth of the Mary River and not the Adelaide River.\textsuperscript{49} Gilbert McMinn, head of the survey department in Palmerston, had always firmly believed that Stuart had made the south-north crossing as he claimed. He set out from Palmerston in late 1883 on a 'steam launch' for Van Diemen's Gulf. He was accompanied by Mr Hingston, a surveyor, H.W.H. Stevens, an old settler, R.G.S. Buckland of the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company, and several Aborigines who had promised to show the party the tree, some of whom remembered Stuart's arrival on the north coast.\textsuperscript{50} The party eventually located the tree. It was further to the east than expected.

Deeply sunk in the bark and swamp, two feet in length, (were) the initials J M D S, in letters . . . quite black from exposure, but as plain as when the explorer carved them twenty-two years ago.\textsuperscript{51}

'The discovery of the silent witness', wrote Alfred Searcy, 'once and for all removed the stigma resting on the great man’s (Stuart's) name, and under which he died'.\textsuperscript{52} In the 1890s Searcy visited Stuart's Tree, accompanied by the Government Resident, C.J. Dashwood. Shortly afterwards there was a proposal that the tree be cut down and the section with the letters sent to the Adelaide Museum. Searcy opposed the cutting down of the tree as a piece of vandalism, but later regretted that it had not been done as a bush fire destroyed the symbol of Stuart's great achievement.\textsuperscript{53} Dashwood, returning to the site in 1902 found only a charred stump.\textsuperscript{54}

Fortunately, from the point of view of history we have, at least, a photograph of Stuart's Tree included in Paul Foelsche's fine collection. In 1971 the Reserves Board of the Northern Territory placed a substantial cairn on the spot where Stuart's Tree had once stood.\textsuperscript{55} No trace has ever been found of the tree which formed the flag-pole, or of the buried box carrying the details of Stuart's expedition. However, in 1899 an Aborigine told the explorer R.T. Maurice what had happened to the flag:

'Soon remembered his uncle telling him how he first saw the flag while walking on the beach, and that at first he thought it debbil debbil, called by the natives, Peyarn; how that his uncle took down the flag and followed the white's tracks till he was knocked up, and then returned, when he cut up the flag and divided it amongst his friends.'\textsuperscript{56}

Stuart was awarded 2,000 pounds for reaching the north coast, but the public applause was prompt, loud - and brief. His health ruined, he returned to England where, alone except for his immediate family, he died in London on 4 June 1866.\textsuperscript{57} His achievement, though, was great. He had opened up the north by charting a virtually permanently watered route across Australia's arid heart. His path laid the framework for the Overland Telegraph Line and later for the road and rail links between Adelaide, Alice Springs and Darwin.\textsuperscript{58}
The buffalo and crocodile hunters

Buffaloes are a recent addition to the Northern Territory landscape. They were brought in from Timor to the first British settlement on Australia’s north coast, at Fort Dundas on Melville Island in 1824 and later to the second and third settlements at Raffles Bay and Port Essington. Those which escaped, or were left behind when Port Essington was abandoned in 1849, became the basis of the wild buffalo herds which were a feature of the Top End of the Northern Territory.59

With no natural predators, the buffalo herds flourished. In 1885 the Government Resident, J. Langdon Parsons, wrote:

Many men might find profitable employment killing these animals for their hides, and be doing a good work by keeping down the otherwise inevitable increase.60

There were many men who followed Parsons’s advice. According to E.O. Robinson, known as Buffalo Bill, the commercial shooting for buffalo hides commenced in 1876, when Fred Dewar and three partners leased 322 square kilometres between Mount Norris Bay and Raffles Bay.61 In the mid-1880s Joe and Harry Cooper started shooting for buffalo hides, and collecting timber, at Mulay Bay.62 Joe Cooper and Paddy Cahill were two of the best known buffalo hunters. Cahill was credited with being the first man to shoot buffalo from horseback.63 His well-trained horse, with the unlikely name of Saint Lawrence, was reputed to be able to function without a rider. Cahill also wrote articles for the Northern Territory Times and Gazette from 1896 to 1899 on the buffalo, and on buffalo hunting.64 Cooperation between white and Aborigine was part of the buffalo industry. Some associations ended in tragedy, but men like Cooper and Cahill worked with Aboriginal teams, and established long-term links with the indigenous people of the area. Stalking, killing, skinning, washing and salting of buffalo hides was a co-operative venture which involved both men and women.65

Buffalo hunting increased during the first couple of decades of the twentieth century; to the extent that the Acting Government Resident in 1920, voiced his concern that the number of buffaloes had diminished to around 20000.66 In a faltering Northern Territory economy, the market for buffalo hides remained constant.67 Most of the hides went to Turkey, where the different qualities were used for everything from furniture upholstery and industrial belting, to handbags and purses.68 Between 1886 and 1912 the average number of buffalo hides shipped annually from the Northern Territory averaged 4000. This increased to an average of 7000 per year between 1912 and 1956. The peak was in 1937/38 when 16549 hides were exported.69

The collapse of the buffalo hide industry came suddenly, and permanently, in 1956. The early 1950s were a boom era for buffalo hunters, with the hide of a mature bull bringing seven pounds. But, with the big money came the new gun shooters whose inexpertly-cured hides gave the Territory a bad name with the buyers in London and Singapore.70

Some of the buffalo hunters turned to shooting crocodiles. The boom year for crocodile skins was 1963, with buyers in Darwin handling hides worth 250000 pounds. Some hunters made fortunes; others went broke. The decline in crocodile numbers so alarmed the government that legislation has since been introduced to protect the species.71

Other hunters turned to running safari operations. In 1947 a real Territory character, Ted Morey, took up a buffalo lease in the Wildman River area, hoping to make a fortune from buffalo and crocodile hides. With a slump in buffalo hide prices in 1948, Morey was persuaded by aviation pioneer E.J. Connellan to accommodate guests and take them on shooting safaris. An airstrip was levelled, Connellan’s Silver Ghost Rolls Royce was probably the first safari vehicle in 1947 and Wildman River Station the first safari camp.72

The history of the buffalo and crocodile hunters, and the safari operators of the Top End is full of colour and characters. Many of these characters, such as Paddy Cahill and Ted Morey, wrote articles about their experiences.73 Others later wrote books. Carl Warburton’s Buffaloes: Adventures and Discovery in Arnhem Land was published in 1934 while Ion Idriess’s In Crocodile Land: Wandering in Northern Australia, appeared in 1946. The 1960s saw the publication of Keith Willey’s Crocodile Hunt in 1966, Vic McCrystal’s Top End Safari in 1967 and The Green Eyes are Buffaloes by Annaburroo safari operator, Allan Stewart, in 1969.74 That public interest continues in this colourful aspect of Territory life is evident by the success of ex-buffalo and crocodile hunter Tom Cole’s books, such as Spears and Smoke Signals, published in the 1980s75 and, most notably, the film Crocodile Dundee.

The interpretation of the history of the buffalo and crocodile hunters and their camps in the Top End has enormous potential for cultural tourism. The era is well documented, and there are superb photographs available both from the written works mentioned above and in collections of photographs held at the State Reference Library in Darwin. The 1989 Top End Wetlands accepts the fact that the buffalo is a symbol commonly associated with the Top End, and many visitors wish to view buffaloes in the ‘wild’. It mentions the possibility of maintaining a managed ‘camera herd’ of buffaloes in the Wetlands for tourist viewing; also a hunting herd.76

There are probably several areas within the reserves which can be used for this purpose. However, in flying over the considerable infrastructure in place at the old Point Stuart Abattoir, it would seem that the site may...
be best suited to the development of a major tourist centre. Visitors could see 'wild' buffaloes, and the centre could be developed along the lines of a hunter's camp – encompassing the photographs and history of a vanished era. Longreach in Queensland has its 'Stockman's Hall of Fame'. Why should not the Northern Territory have something similar to commemorate the wild and colourful days of buffalo and crocodile hunting in the Top End?

Some conclusions

There is a wealth of history worthy of interpretation and presentation in the Mary River Crossing, Wildman River and Point Stuart Reserves. We have suggested that a series of heritage trails would assist in linking areas of significance into a format enabling visitors to enjoy many aspects of the reserves. In our report to the Conservation Commission the following concluding recommendations were made:

- There should be further research and field work in the interpretation strategy for appropriate heritage trails.
- Shady Camp, while just outside the study areas, should be given special consideration. The heritage of all the reserves, including Stuart’s expedition, Aboriginal Dreaming sites and the role of the buffalo and crocodile hunters comes together at Shady Camp.
- The first heritage trail ought to be 'Stuart’s Heritage Trail'. This should include some Aboriginal sites.
- Another trail should include some of the buffalo hunters’ and crocodile hunters’ camps.
- Construction of an interpretation centre concerned with the history of the era of buffalo and crocodile hunters should be considered. There is plenty of photographic material available.

Endnotes


3 Stokes
4 Stokes
5 Stokes

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7 W. Hardman (ed), The Journals of John McDouall Stuart during the years 1858, 1859, 1860 & 1862 when He Fixed the Centre of the Continent and Successfully Crossed it from Sea to Sea, Saunders, Otley & Co., London, 1865, p. 407.
10 Webster, pp. 226-227.
11 Webster, p. 223.
13 Webster, John McDouall Stuart, p. 221.
14 Webster, pp. 226-227.
15 Webster, p. 227.
16 D.D. Daly, Digging, Squatting, and Pioneering Life in the Northern Territory of South Australia, Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, London, 1887, pp. 247-249.
17 W. Hardman, quoted in M.S. Webster, John McDouall Stuart, p. 258.
18 Hardman, quoted in Webster, p. 258.
19 Hardman, quoted in Webster, p. 258.
20 Hardman, quoted in Webster, p. 259.
21 Hardman, quoted in Webster, p. 309. Stuart’s handwritten diaries were, at the time they were used by Webster, held in South Australian Archives: Items SAA 27 and SAA 26. They have since been moved to Mortlock Library of South Australian.
26 Quote inside front cover for A.J. McComb & P.S. Lake (eds), The Conservation of Australian Wetlands, Chipping Norton, N.S.W., Surrey

28 Hardman, p. 401.
29 Hardman, pp 401-403.
30 Hardman, pp. 403-404.
32 Conservation Commission, Top End Wetlands, pp. 40-41.
33 Conservation Commission, p. 3.
34 Hardman, The Journals, pp. 405-406.
35 Conservation Commission, Top End Wetlands, p. 43.
37 Webster, John McDouall Stuart, p. 230.
40 Auld, p. 204.
41 Baker, The Aboriginal and Environmental History, p. 72.
43 Conservation Commission, Top End Wetlands, pp. 40-41.
44 Conservation Commission, p.41.
46 Hardman, p. 412.
47 Hardman, p. 413.
48 Searcy, In Australian Tropics, p. 277.
49 D.D. Daly, Digging, Squatting, and Pioneering Life, p. 247.
50 Daly, p. 248.
51 Daly, p. 249.
52 Searcy, In Australian Tropics, p. 277.
53 Searcy, p. 278.
54 Northern Territory Department of Lands, John McDouall Stuart, Northern Territory Department of Lands, (n.d.).
55 Northern Territory Department of Lands.
58 Stokes, also in Searcy, In Australian Tropics, p. 275-276.
61 Clinch, p. 21.
62 Clinch, p. 21.
63 Clinch, p. 21.
64 Clinch, p. 23.
65 Clinch, p. 23.
67 Clinch, p. 6.
68 Clinch, p. 16.
69 Clinch, p. 1.
70 Clinch. See also K. Willey, Crocodile Hunt, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1966, p. vii.
71 Willey, p. vii.
76 Conservation Commission, Top End Wetlands, p. 36.

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