



Frank Wittenoom, c1880. Courtesy State Library of WA.

## THE OLD STOCK ROUTE TRAIL

### Acknowledgements

The Old Stock Route Trail was originally established by the Shire of Mullewa in 1988 (and named the De Grey-Mullewa Stock Route trail) as a part of the Western Australian Heritage Trails Network – a Bicentennial Project involving community participants.

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### Further Reading

De Grey-Mullewa Stock Route: stock route pioneered by E.T. Hooley, from Geraldine Mine to Nicol Bay, 1866, government wells, 1905 by John R. Taylor, 1998.

Eastward Ho: to Mullewa and the Murchison by Bert Keeffe, 1994.

E.T. Hooley, pioneer bushman: stock route pioneered by E.T. Hooley from Geraldine Mine to Nicol Bay, 1866, and 1905 government wells by Eloise I. Sharp, 1985.

Frank Wittenooms' memoirs of Murchison pastoral and goldfields areas by F.F.B. Wittenoom. Reprinted by the Geraldton Historical Society, 1978.

Mullewa through the years, 1861-1961 by W.D. Barden, 1961.

Wajarri Wisdom: food and medicine plants of the Mullewa/Murchison district of Western Australia as used by the Wajarri people by Estelle Leyland, 2002.

An online version of this brochure is available from the Geraldton Regional Library website, located within the Heritage pages ([www.library.cgg.wa.gov.au](http://www.library.cgg.wa.gov.au)).

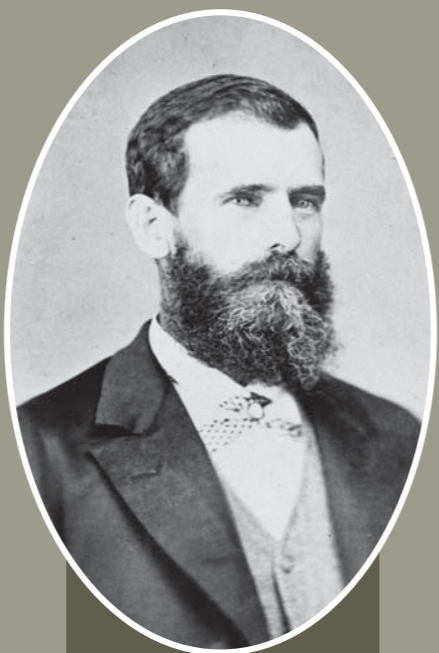
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Beginning of Old Stock Route Trail, Tourist Bay, Mullewa. Courtesy Trudi Cornish.

# Old Stock Route Trail



In 1866, E. T. Hooley pioneered Stock Route 9701 when he drove 1,945 sheep from the Geraldine Mine to the Fortescue River, incredibly with the loss of only eight sheep.

Edward T. Hooley (c1880). Courtesy of Royal Western Australian Historical Society (Inc).



Mullewa townsite, 1894. Courtesy State Records Office of WA.

## The Old Stock Route Trail

The Old Stock Route Trail commences at the tourist pull-off bay on the Geraldton-Mount Magnet Road, Mullewa. Mullewa is 99km east of Geraldton. Travelling from Perth, Mullewa can be reached via the Midlands Road – a distance of 453 km.

The trail is a 102km (return) drive which retraces a portion of Stock Route (No. 9701). It includes some gravel tracks and features three of the original Government wells, two natural rockholes, a nature reserve, seasonal wildflowers and ancient river beds. Travelled at a leisurely pace it offers a half-day excursion with opportunities for picnicking and rock-climbing.

Please note: There are no facilities along the trail route and so it would be wise to observe the following instructions. Carry ample water, take into account road conditions, be mindful of wildlife, take rubbish with you and observe fire restrictions.

# Introduction

'Moola-wa' was the name of a small valley towards the north-western boundary of the Badimaya Aboriginal tribe's traditional grounds. A permanent spring there became the base for a shepherd's camp, one of many which were established as European settlement expanded after 1850.

As the demand for land grew in the 1860s and 1870s this expansion increased, often causing resentment among the Aboriginal tribes as water and food supplies were depleted by the stock.

Occasionally this resentment turned to violence, as when a shepherd named John Lewis was fatally speared in 1864 near Mullewa. Three Aboriginal men were taken into custody and sent to Perth for trial; one of them, Willaka, received life imprisonment, the others were acquitted.

By the 1870s "runs", or pastoral stations, had been taken up in the Mullewa area and a main route from the Port at Geraldton became established to provide access for travellers on foot, cart or horseback.

Sheep and cattle were walked out from established runs around Geraldton and the Irwin River by shepherds. The sheep were later taken back to their parent runs for shearing utilising tracks which became recognised stock routes featuring resting places 10 to 15 miles (16 to 24 kilometres) apart at watering points. Some of these sites were natural springs or rock holes while others were wells dug by shepherds.

In 1895 the Government formally accepted a route through to the De Grey District which had been suggested by station owner George Gooch. This was to become known as the De Grey Mullewa Stock Route .

In 1866, E.T. Hooley had pioneered this pathway through to the north. By the late 1890s, this route was in full use as Government well-sinkers established reliable wells and equipped them with block and tackle pulleys for whipping (drawing) water. When a drover arrived at a well with his thirsty mob and horses, it took many hours of work to whip sufficient water for the animals using the Government issue canvas bucket. These buckets only held 44 gallons (about 200 litres). Boss drovers owned a whip horse or used camels to pull water.

In 1905 the entire network of northern and eastern stock routes, from the Kimberley in the far north, to Perth, became gazetted as A Class Reserves (80 chains or 1 mile wide).

Although not marked and surfaced as modern roadways are, men and animals managed to travel these routes over a vast, arid, open land. In the 1950s transportation of stock in motorised vehicles on a network of roads began. Many of these roads were developed from the old routes, following the most suitable terrain Aboriginal people, then the first Europeans, had travelled many years before.

**The City of Greater Geraldton would like to respectfully acknowledge the Southern Yamatji Peoples who are the Traditional Owners and First People of the land on which we stand.**

**We would like to pay our respect to the Elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of the Southern Yamatji Peoples.**



## Perkins No. 2 Government Well

**Turn into Sutherland Road, west off the Carnarvon-Mullewa Road.**

This was the second Perkins Government Well, which was completed by Frank Field in January 1934. It was dug to a depth of 34 feet (10.4 metres) deep and supplied an average of 16 gallons (73 litres) per hour of fresh water.

An earlier Perkins Well had been sunk and equipped by a Government well-sinker named Straker in 1897 where the main road crosses the Wooderarrung River. However, this later went salty and was unusable. The Perkins Wells were known as Wooderarrung No. 1 and 1A on Public Works sheets.

An earlier water supply was at the Wooderarrung Spring downriver, where the body of shepherd John Lewis was buried in

1864. A stone-lined well near Wooderarrung Spring was sunk in 1861 and used as a base by shepherds in charge of sheep belonging to pioneer settler John Sidney Davis of Tibradden, near Geraldton. At a later period a settler named Sharpe occupied the stone shepherds' cottage at the spring before establishing Wooleen Station on the Murchison River. When this supply turned salty the first Perkins Well was sunk.

This area contains York Gum (*Eucalyptus loxophleba*), Reminder or Waitabit (*Hakea recurva*), Kurara (*Acacia tetragonophylla*) and many wattle species which bloom in the winter months. Wildflowers are abundant in a good season. The importance to Aboriginal people of local plants as sources of food and medicine is well documented by Estelle Leyland in her book "Wajarri Wisdom".



Tallering mustering wagon, 1927. Courtesy State Library of WA.



# Waterfall

**Turn into Nubberoo Road, west off the Carnarvon-Mullewa Road.**

Waterfall is formed by a natural pool which fills from runoff flowing down the creek bed and over a ledge of laterite after rains. Given that the water supply remains fresh during winter this location was used as a resting and watering place on the Stock Route.

In the early years travellers went from Waterfall to Wooderarrung Spring and Well, constructing bush yards (made of scrub laid on the ground to form walls) along the routes to hold mobs of sheep at night.

In 1988 Frank Shaughnessy described an early scene he witnessed as a young man at Waterfall:

***“A mob of 500 bullocks coming down from Byro Station were camped at Waterfall in***

***the early 1900s. The country was drummy (hollow) and full of rabbit warrens. During the night the bullocks rushed. They streaked through the burrows, jumping over mounds as if they were wombat holes.***

***Shaughnessy lost his hat in the mad race through the dark bush to head the mob. In the morning he found the hat, knocked off by a big elbow branch of a York Gum: “I wonder it didn’t knock my head off!”***

Old Man Saltbush (*Atriplex nummularia*) and Samphire (*Tecticornia bulbosa*) grow along the creek, as well as Flannel Bush (*Solanum lasiophyllum*) and Mulla Mulla or Lamb’s Tail (*Ptilotus nobilis*).

Waterfall has been a popular picnic site for locals and visitors for many years



*Picnickers at Waterfall Pool, c1920s. Courtesy Clem Keefe and Tony Critch.*



# White Government Well

## East off the Carnarvon-Mullewa Road.

This well was sunk and equipped in the 1920s due to the insufficient natural water supply available at Waterfall.

A York Gum at the well site bears a blaze which could have held one of the tin identification plates with the well's name, number and distance to the next watering point.

Placed at every well on the stock routes, these identification plates were usually affixed to the whip pole.

Excerpts from a Memorandum of Agreement between the stockowners and a drover in 1942:

**1. The Drover agrees to proceed to Mullewa ... with a complete and capable plant for**

*the purpose of droving approximately 590 bullocks to Mingenew.*

**2. The Drover agrees that he will not include in the mob any cattle other than those the subject of this contract.**

**3. The Drover agrees to conform to all conditions laid down under the Droving Act.**

**4. The Drover agrees that he will keep a careful record of any cattle that may be lost en route.**

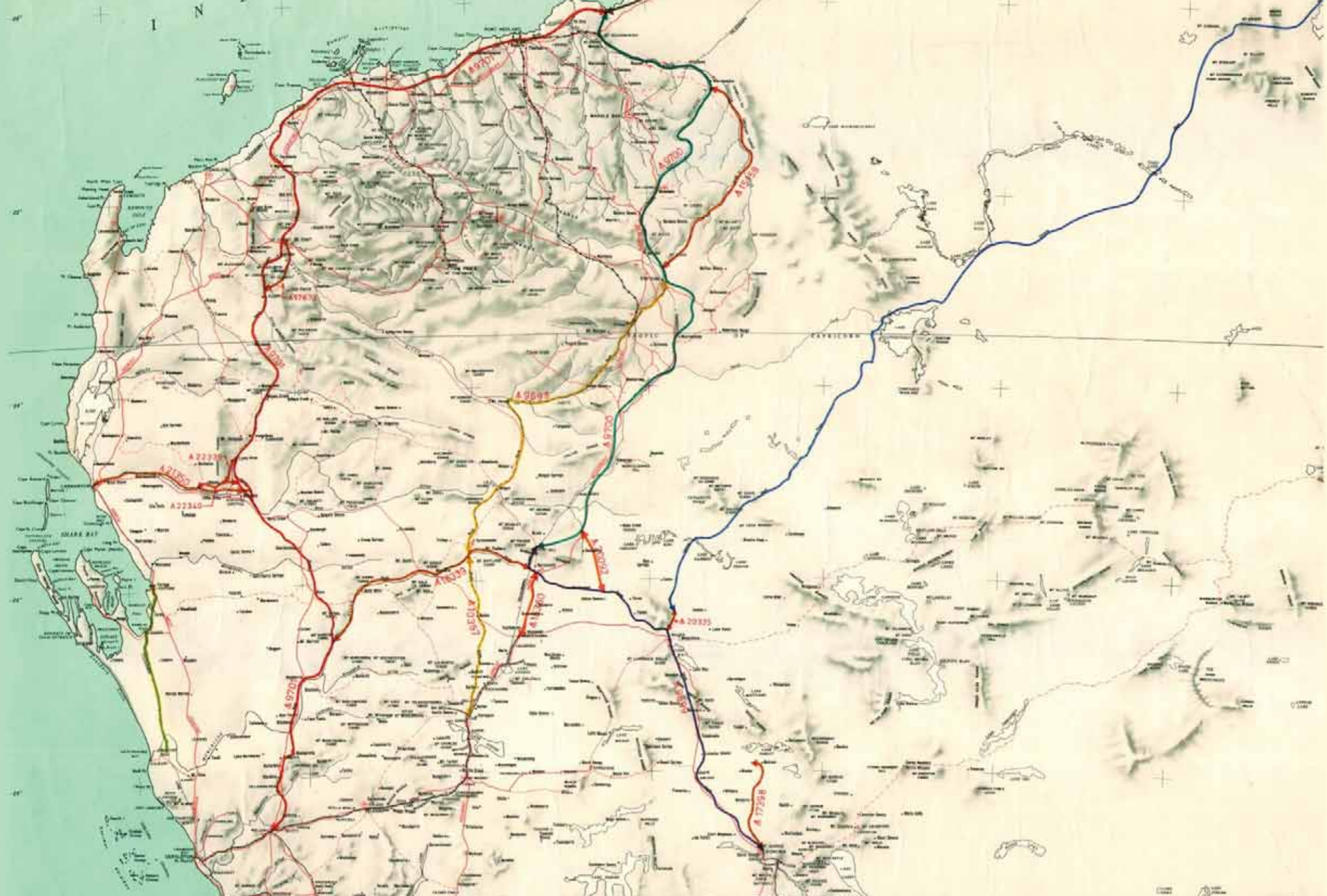
**5. The price agreed upon for droving is to be at the rate of 2/6 per head.**

**6. The Drover agrees to pay for any cattle lost through overdriving, incapacity, negligence or drunkenness on this trip.**



# STOCK ROUTES

Upper Murchison  
and Gascoyne, 1968.  
*Courtesy State Records Office of WA.*





# Woodenooka Government Well

**East off the Carnarvon-Mullewa Road (rough access).**

Built in July 1895, this well was seven feet (2.2 metres) square and 39 feet (12 metres) deep, providing an average supply of 150 gallons (682 litres) per hour of brackish water. The well lies near the Woodenooka Spring and creek bed. Evidence of original stone work still exists.

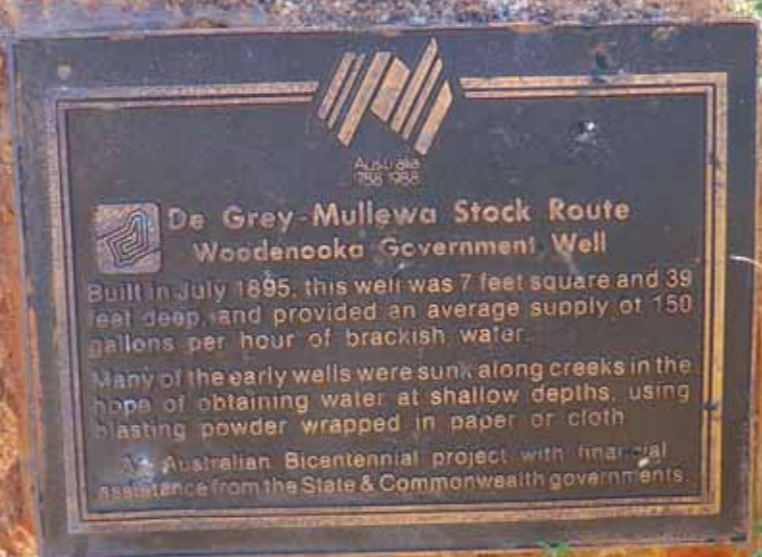
Many of the early wells were sunk along creeks in the hope of obtaining water at shallow depths. Frank Wittenoom (1855-1939) recalled in his memoirs that:

***"It must not be thought this well sinking was an easy or soft job. A spot would be chosen, often by certain plants that grew around, trees, ants and other not infallible***

***signs ... Dynamite was not known, so until water was struck, loose blasting powder was alright. When water was reached, the powder was alright.***

***When water was reached, the powder had to be encased in paper or piece of old moleskin trousers, well buttered with fat, and formed into a cartridge to fit the hole ... Many of these wells were sunk to about 10" without water, when we would leave them then and try another place."***

A reserve was gazetted here in 1891 to protect a well sunk by John Jones near the Woodenooka Spring, situated on the Woodenooka Creek. In 1910 the reserve was enlarged to 10,000 acres (4047 hectares) for the purpose of resting travellers and stock.



Donkey team carting sandalwood, c1920s. Courtesy Clem Keeffe and Tony Critch







# Hughie's Rocks

## East off the Carnarvon-Mullewa Road.

A reserve of 2,000 acres (810 hectares) was gazetted in this area in January 1880, the earliest on the trail.

The water supply lies in a deep pool in Hughie's Rocks Creek, the bed of which holds large areas of laterite rock containing iron ore. Pads (animal pathways) leading into the water are used by sheep, kangaroo and goats in the evenings.

In 1988 John Park recalled his experiences with droving in the district

*"My father had 200 horses but he took 60 on a droving trip and left 40 in Mullewa. He used to take young, freshly broken horses from the farms and return them to the farmers when he finished the trip. He had his own good night horse, Mystery and a*

*day horse, Prince. They fed the night horses with nosebags and sometimes carried lengths of troughing to feed chaff to the rest.*

*I was 12 when I started droving with Dad. I used to take the first watch at night. My father would always take the last watch and move the cattle off camp at daylight by himself while the boys got their breakfast and loaded up. He had nine men plus the horse tailer and cook in a four-wheeled cart.*

*During the 1934 season, from June to November, 43 boss drovers brought 136,778 sheep and 2,666 head of cattle down the stock route. Bert Troy had a mob of 6,500 sheep which he had to split travelling a day or two apart."*



Government Well, c1910s. Courtesy State Library of WA.



# Greenough River Crossing

## Along the Carnarvon-Mullewa Road.

The Greenough River is some 340 kilometres long and empties into the Indian Ocean at Cape Burney, south of Geraldton. It's headwaters are found north of Yalgoo, near the Woojalong Hills and although dry for most of the year, the Greenough is subject to flooding and includes many permanent pools.

These pools provided an invaluable source of food and water resources for Aboriginal people and settlers during the drier months. The river was an important highway during seasonal movement for Aboriginal people and a network of tracks radiated out from the permanent waterholes for food gathering and hunting. From Frank Wittenoom's memoirs:

***"After the heavy rains, and before, the frogs set up a great chorus, they were very clever in locating them and the women soon filled their scoops (dthugga) with them. Bardies, like large silk worms, are quite a delicacy ... the woman collected seeds in large quantities ... food was abundant in good seasons in the old days."***

In 1887 a drover named Thomas Gorman caused a sensation when he recovered a stone from the Greenough River which proved to be corundum, found only in the vicinity of diamonds. To add to the story, some 45 years previously a shepherd named George Coates reportedly found a diamond in the same area. Coates spent his final years in London, the proprietor of a large pub

– a rags to riches story which only fuelled local speculation. However, despite further searching for the diamond field, no further evidence was ever found to support either claim.

In the distance to the north west, Talling Peak stands between two branches of the old stock route. John Forrest, then a young surveyor attached to the Department of Lands, noted Talling Peak during trigonometrical surveys in 1873.

The two peaks consist of a concentrated body of iron ore rising from a series of breakaway gorges. Mining activity began in the area in the 1960s when Western Mining Corporation Limited established a joint venture.

More recently Mount Gibson Iron has mined the Peak, concluding in 2014. Access to Talling Peak is via Wandina Station. Contact the Station Manager on 9962 9597 for more information.



Peter Gerachi transporting Yallalong wool, c1940s. Courtesy Clem Keeffe and Tony Critch.





*Tallering Gorges and Peak (access via Wandina Station). Courtesy Trudi Cornish.*