



Kimberley Society

Book Note

As the river runs by Stephen Scourfield. [UWA Publishing](#), Crawley (WA), 2013. Paperback, 336 pages, ISBN 9781742584904, RRP \$26.99.

Described as Kimberley adventure and set in the fictitious Duncan River valley, *As the river runs* occasionally harks back to the author's first novel, the award-winning *Other County*. That work was the subject of a previous book note (written by Hamish McGlashan and published in the *Boab Bulletin* in February 2009). In *Other County*, the young pastoralist Billy Parkes visualised a time when he might combine cattle raising with conservation and eco tourism. Two decades on, he is doing just that in *As the river runs*. There, however, he remains largely in the background.

The Kimberley has long captivated Stephen Scourfield, who, after [a 2009 talk](#) to our Society remarked that brief conversations with the members had 'added to what I fondly think of as the northern encyclopaedia growing inside me'. His work, as travel writer, photographer, and editor of the 'Travel' section of *The West Australian*, frequently takes him to the Kimberley, resulting in a familiarity that underpins his writing.

While both of his novels examine the relationship between people and the land, the emphasis in *As the river runs* is on the importance of water in semi-arid country that is reliant on monsoonal rains. The Duncan River valley cuts through limestone ranges and has boab trees dotting its wispy grassland. On a high plateau above the river, Billy Parkes's friend Dylan Ward is working at the Scimitar Project mine site and liaising comfortably with Vincent Yimi who represents the traditional owners. When his contract at the mine ends, Dylan is sought out by a powerful Perth group keen to bring Kimberley water to the city. With that objective, the ambitious Kate Kennedy (Chief of Staff to the Minister for Water Resources) asks him to take her and Jack Cole (a political fixer) on a fact-finding trip that supposedly relates to a plan to supply solar power to the Duncan River communities.

It would spoil the story to say much more than that the book turns a serious environmental topic into a good read. Readers who know the Kimberley might find additional interest in reflecting on the role played by 'the northern encyclopaedia' in the author's selection of names and backgrounds for his regional characters and locations. Also relevant is that, in his 2009 talk, Stephen Scourfield made a comment about *Other County* that is equally true of *As the river runs* – 'The title is about the Kimberley, of course, but as much about the possibility of migrating within ourselves, of finding other country, of moving on.'

As the river runs is available in numerous outlets. Readers who do not have access to a bookshop or newsagent will appreciate UWA Publishing's offer of free postage within Australia. There is also an e-book at \$9.99 or thereabouts. [UWA Publishing](#) has extracts online and provides Book Club Notes for both [As the river runs](#) and [Other Country](#).

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