



# Kimberley Society

## Book Note

*Close Calls in the Kimberley* by D.M. 'Mick' Driscoll. [Hesperian Press](#), Carlisle, WA, 2015, 43 pages, ISBN 978-0-85905-614-4. Soft cover, A 4, stapled, illustrated. RRP \$22.

Known as 'Mineral Mick', the author of these reminiscences died in Fremantle Hospital in 2003, aged 63, but his final resting place, in accordance with his wishes, was Halls Creek. After leaving his Perth home at the age of 17, he worked his way to the Kimberley to become a cowboy, bushman and prospector. He tells 15 stories about his adventures, and then relates 11 tales that were told to him by others.

The book, despite lacking flow and style, will appeal mostly to readers who know the Kimberley and its station people, and/or have an interest in the days when mustering was still done on horseback. The names of the locals are used—sometimes with surnames and sometimes without. Paddy Le Lievre, as the manager of Kimberley Downs Station, appears in the first two stories with his son Phil. Jackie Dann, one of their stockmen, is introduced in the second story, and, in the next, is credited with saving the author's life. Then comes another lucky escape, involving a close encounter with a bull on the original Silent Grove Station, which was worked by Len and Bill Connell. When it came to mustering, Driscoll noted that the Connell brothers' infinite patience made them the best he saw. Further along, a casual comment—the sort relished by people who enjoy piecing together history—mentions the brothers speaking of their father living in a stone hut on Milliwindie Station. Such snippets allow links to be made and sometimes illuminate other periods of history.

Some of Driscoll's adventures involve water, e.g. seeing crocodiles while fishing with Ron Ah Chee (story five) and rafting down swollen rivers from Napier Downs to Kimberley Downs (story six). There is even a reference to walking over glacier tracks near Mornington Station (story seven).

Dick Robertson, one of Derby's early private aircraft operators, pops up here and there, flying his small plane out to stations to deal with dramas and emergencies. One of those involved a life-threatening bite from a Redback spider (story seven).

Frank Bridge—'an honest and straightforward man'—is mentioned in his role as manager of Mornington Station (stories seven and eight). The stories in this section ramble but offer insight into country on various stations and the droving of cattle to the Wyndham Meat Works from Mornington and Tableland stations. There are also observations about natural history, tobacco, living off the land, and Driscoll attempting to put cattle onto a small block of his own (stories nine and ten). The fate of the block is revealed in story eleven, where we see the author having to find work operating a bulldozer on the Gibb River Road. That, too, brought close shaves.

More water-based activity follows, this time with failed fishing ventures. There are also further anecdotes about road works and prospecting. Few of the stories are dated but the first mentions a trip to Napier Downs in 1958 while the last mentions prospecting and incidents on Alice Downs Station in the early 1980s.

The 11 tales at the end of the book are from the Connells, Frank Bridge and others. Concern about possible litigation led Driscoll to suppress most of the names in his telling of them. That and the vagueness of some of the tales lessens their appeal but I found the first two interesting. One is about self-administration of strychnine as a medication.

While a manuscript as raw as this is seldom published, there is merit in making the stories available to a wider audience. The publisher is to be commended for that.

*Cathie Clement*