



Kimberley Society

Book Note

***The El Questro Story* by Meg Hornabrook. Private publication, 2012. Soft cover, 304 pages, illustrated, ISBN: 978-0-646-58079-1, RRP \$34.95.**

El Questro resort and cattle station – a high profile tourist destination – is situated west of Kununurra and accessed via the Gibb River Road. Occupying 1,000,000 acres of pastoral lease, it encompasses the Cockburn Range, part of the Durack Range, and sections of the Pentecost, Chamberlain, Salmond and King rivers. Magnificent scenery abounds, and *The El Questro Story* begins with magnificent colour photographs and an explanation of the station's landscape and geological features. Brief chapters titled 'Human Migration', 'Rock Art' and 'Early Exploration' follow. Having thus set the scene, Meg Hornabrook then moves into detailed coverage of her favourite piece of country, the place in which she enjoyed eleven treasured seasons working as a ranger.

The book grew out of a manual of information that Meg created for her work as a ranger. Pages 51 to 140 document the exploration, speculative leasing, and land use that preceded the creation of El Questro Station in the late 1950s. Here we read about the Durack expedition (1882), the arrival of cattle in the East Kimberley (1885), the establishment of Wyndham and Halls Creek (1886), and further exploration by Joseph Bradshaw (1891) and F. S. Brockman (1901). The Wyndham meatworks (1919), transportation, and stock routes are discussed, with a handy sketch map of early roads, tracks and stock routes provided by John McMicking. Segments of his recollections are included to show how the Gibb River Road came into being and which stations it served. Prior to the construction of the eastern end of the Gibb River Road, pastoral leaseholders on the land that eventually became part of El Questro used tracks or the stock route for their access. Some of those people are discussed in the book, the most memorable name being that of one of the earliest – George James Williams – who was known as "Cockitup" and "The Mountain Devil".

Pages 141 to 256 cover El Questro Station, with another batch of great photographs. In this section, Meg Hornabrook documents ownership, use, and development, starting with the lease application lodged by Charles Torrance MacMicking in 1958. Known as Torrance or Torry, he was the older brother of John McMicking for whom an obituary appears in the October 2004 newsletter. Readers interested in stations and tourism will appreciate the detailed account of one of the East Kimberley's stellar successes. Told by someone who sought information from books, archives and people who preceded her at El Questro, it gives an informative and balanced overview of fifty years of development and change. The book is rounded off with general information that includes bird sightings, origins of placenames, and a chronology for the station.

The El Questro Story is available from [Kununurra Historical Society](http://www.kununurrahistoricalsociety.org), Wyndham Historical Society, Kimberley Bookshop (Broome), Lane Bookshop (Claremont, WA) and [Bookpod](http://www.bookpod.com.au). The Bookpod postage is \$12.20 or \$12.85 for express post (up to 4 books within Australia).

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