

VICTORIA RIVER DOWNS



Frank Spencer outside the pre-1930s Victoria River Downs homestead with an embroidered pillow case that was a prize at the 1935 VRD races (Schultz collection).

The original lease for Victoria River Downs was applied for on December 2nd 1879 and received by the Lands Department on December 24th 1879 (Cahill, 8-2-1906). The leases were stocked for CB Fisher and JM Lyons in September 1883 (Parsons, 11-11-1884: 2). Their company, called The North Australian Territory Company, included English shareholders (Stevens, 1891: 27).

According to Paddy Cahill (*The Register* [Adelaide], 18-12-1905):

in the end of 1883 Mr. Lindsay Crawford and the late Mr. Sam Croker were looking out for site on the Victoria River or the Wickham River on which to form a head station. They were riding along the Wickham River, and before they were aware of any danger a shower of spears were thrown at them; but luckily none took effect. This happened before there were any stations on the Victoria River. The country was then almost unknown. The blacks were bad in those days.

‘HTH’ (Hely-Hutchinson), citing Alfred Giles’ diary, said that two early lots of cattle passed Springvale destined for VRD (*The Pastoralists’ Review*, 15-3-1906: 40). The first lot of cattle was brought over by Bluey Buchanan who was on the Roper River with a herd of 7000 in 1882. The second lot was 1500 head of breeders with Drover Farquharson who was on the Roper in October 1882. Alfred Giles’ diary recorded that William ‘Wattie’ Gordon passed Springvale on July 24th, 1883, with another 3,400 head for VRD (Giles, nd.: 187).