

CHAPTER 1

THE BEGINNING: CAPTAIN JOSEPH BRADSHAW, 1837-1905

The Victoria River is one of the major waterways in the Northern Territory and has its watershed on Rivern station. From there it flows north, then west, through many stations including Victoria River Downs, Innesvale and Coolibah, before entering the sea at Queen's Channel. In 1837 the 235 ton Brig Beagle came to northern Australian shores. It was the crew of the Beagle who discovered and explored the Adelaide and Victoria Rivers, the largest in the north, and also the Fitzmaurice and Albert Rivers (Powell 1982, 45).

After its European discovery and exploration, the Victoria River became a reliable means of communication and transport for settlers in the region.

In 1894 Captain Joseph Bradshaw took up 4,800 square miles of land (NT Times and Gazette 14 December 1894). Careful research has failed to uncover any evidence of anyone taking up residence on the area north of the Victoria River prior to Bradshaw and his party. Although lease money was paid for that country by numerous people for several years prior to Bradshaw's time, it appears as though none of them were interested in taking up residence on the land and developing it.

Bradshaw had immediate neighbours when he arrived to work his holding. Almost directly across the Victoria River from his settlement was the Auvergne station boundary. Situated on the banks of the Baines River, it was established in 1886 and, according to Duncan (1967, 161), it carried 7,000 head of stock. Other stations in the Victoria River district included Victoria River Downs, Wave Hill and Delamere Downs, all settled and stocked in the early 1880s.

Numerous attempts had been made to settle the Northern Australian coastline, but all had failed. Land was surveyed and a settlement formed in 1869 by G.W.Goyder and his party. This was called Palmerston (later Darwin). Settlement inland was spurred by mineral discoveries and the Overland Telegraph Line. In 1872 the Telegraph was completed and Australia had instant contact with the rest of the world. Some settlements developed close to an Overland Telegraph station; others took shape where gold had been discovered and so, by the time Bradshaw arrived in 1894, twenty two years later, several settlements were established in the area between Palmerston and the good crossing on the Katherine River. But much of the country between his Run and Palmerston remained unexplored.

The Log Book (1) of Bradshaw's Run is full of valuable information regarding the formation of the Run and the exploration of the country between the Victoria and Fitzmaurice Rivers.

Mr. Joe Bradshaw took up 4,800 square miles under pastoral lease of forty two years, dating from 1 January 1894. From one of his established neighbours, Goldsborough Mort, he purchased all the sheep running on their Wickham River station (this property later became known as Victoria River Downs).

Messrs Gunn and Young inspected and took delivery of the sheep on 20th January. Mr. Gunn then returned to Port Darwin while Mr. Young remained in charge of the sheep. Mr. Bradshaw purchased the steamerette Redgauntlet in Melbourne, filled her with a supply of