

## WELLS IN THE WYALKATCHEM DISTRICT

**Benjaberring** On private property (Darryl Stratford) Benjie crossroads An important source of water for early settlers. There is some doubt as to whether the stone well s/e of the intersection was the source of water in the very early days. Soaks existed north of the road there was a deep well just inside the fence n/w of the intersection. The Lions Club did some work on the stone well.

Explorer AC Gregory has been credited with noting it in 1846 but it is now believed that it was in fact Robert Austin in 1854 that made the first mention of the site. Neither of the explorers actually visited the site and Austin was informed of its significance by native guides travelling with him. Both Gregory and Austin followed the south shore of Lake Cowcowing

**Wyalkatchem.** Across the road from the golf club house. A rectangular stone tank in good order. Significant as the origin of the towns name. The Lions also cleaned out the tank and erected the fence. Signage has been placed in recent times which states that it was once 60 feet deep but that is a mistake. That was a another well located 200 mtres N/E that has been filled in.

**Korrelocking.** There were once two wells at the reserve. The existing one is 200 – 300 mtrs east of the parking area in the centre of the reserve. The stone work is in fair condition and is a good example of dry walling. There used to be another near the entrance to Gary Ashelford's property. It was destroyed by the Road Board when the road was upgraded. Mavis Bookham remembers it happening.

**Monembudding.** Referred to as a tank but it is more like a small earth walled dam faced with stone fed by runoff from sheet granite. Not in good shape. Now only 20 acres of reserve that was once 640. Not easily accessible. Nembudding siding which is some distance away took its name from this place. The story goes that the Railway Department considered the name too long so they shortened it.

**Elashgin.** Obviously of some significance in the early days. In the middle of 640 acre reserve. A small stone well that takes some finding located in the center of the reserve.

**Derdebin.** Surrounded by private property. Stonework in good condition. In recent years with funding from NRM, the Mens Shed fenced the well. Adjacent is a most impressive gnamma hole that was cleaned out by NRM.

There are obviously other wells in the district but I do not have enough information to be able to comment on them.

**Ross Crute**

## WELLS ALONG THE GOLDFIELDS TRACK

The North eastern wheatbelt from Slater Homestead in Goomalling, over several hundred kilometres to Eenuin in the Yilgarn Goldfields, has a rich and varied history that weaves elements of survey, exploration, pastoralism, gold rushes, agricultural and entrepreneurial interests.

The potential for pastoral interest in the north eastern wheatbelt was recognised as early as 1837 when surveyor J. S. Roe traversed the area from York eastwards and recorded springs at Mangowine and Yarragin. Surveyors Hillman and Lefroy recorded the springs at Goomalling (Slaters) in 1847 and A.C. Gregory at Benjaberring.

The first settlement in the pastoral area beyond the Avon Valley was by George Slater at Goomalling Spring in 1857, at which time he sank a well. Only a few years later a considerable distance further east, at Mukakine, Charles Glass sank a well on his property. By 1869 a road was constructed from Slater Homestead in Goomalling to Yarragin where Charles Adams had taken up his land and also constructed a well.

The Forrest expedition of 1869 to find the remains of Ludwig Leichardt, camped at the homesteads and wells along the Yarragin road: Slater homestead, Nenin Well, Benjaberring Well and Yarragin homestead.

In 1869 James Sinclair constructed a well at Benjaberring for pastoral purposes. In 1872, George Lukin and B.D. Clarkson took up a pastoral lease and constructed a well at the eastern outpost at Eenuin, at about the same time that Charles Adams constructed a well at Wilgoyne for the same reasons. Over the following years Charles Adams constructed a well at Mangowine (1874) and Lukin and Clarkson at Elachbutting (1875)

Wells were commissioned by the Toodyay Roads Board: Trayning Well by Charles Adams (1879) Monembudding Well (1881) and Wyalkatchem Tank (1881) by John Haywood. In 1884 five reserves were designated as stopping places for teams and travellers at Trayning, Moonerbudding, Namelcatching, Corrolonging and Wyalcatching.

In 1887 after Charles Glass discovered gold at Mujakine the Government offered a grant of 300 pounds for further research to find gold; as a consequence gold was discovered in Eenuin,

The Parry Survey of 1887/88 reports on wells at Slater Homestead, Namelcatching, Benjaberring, Wyalkatchem, Korrelocking, Monembudding, Yelbeni, Trayning, Mangowine, Wilgoyne, Elachbutting and Eenuin.

In 1888 gold was discovered at Southern Cross and the Yilgarn Goldfield was declared. Gold seekers trekked to Eenuin along the Yarragin Road, camping at the wells and homesteads along the route. In 1888, a map was published to provide prospectors with details of water and provisions along the route.

By 1889 George Slater at Goomalling and Charles Adams at Mangowine had established inns for the gold seekers and an inn was also established at Yarragin.

In 1890 Toodyay Road Board repaired Yarragin Road and built rock catchments for extra water reservoirs along the route. At that time Namelcatching Well was constructed by Charles Adams for the TRB.

In 1892, with the Coolgardie Gold Rush, the focus moved to the rail route between Northam and Southern Cross and that track became the goldfields road (now Great Eastern Highway) and Yarragin Road was relegated to "old goldfields road" The only traffic on Yarragin Road from that time was pastoralists. When agricultural development took place it was supported by rail transport. Over the years the wells and homesteads along the Yarragin Road and beyond to Eenuin have fallen into various states of disrepair. . However there is no denying the significance of the wells and other elements along the old goldfields road and their associations with the history and development of the north eastern wheatbelt.

**Ross Crute**

