Among the camel men

By B. M. FORD

Andy Everett, one of the last of the old camel men, lives in Meekatharra.

He was born in Alice Springs in central Australia. In 1900, he came to Meekatharra at the age of 13, and Arthur Walker, who had been an Englishman named Arthur Monley, was his "inland" partner. They came from Alice Springs to Wiluna at the age of 20.

Andy was a camel man in charge of the ten camels that were used on the trail. Andy describes his camels as being "beautiful animals."

When travelling, camels are tied up with a hide rope, attached to the wooden peg in the nose, to the chariot of the camel in front.

Camels are strange animals, and so were a few in the party, to say nothing of the trail. There were quick sand and other obstacles that made life difficult for the party. Some dried apricots were stowed once a week and eaten to maintain health.

After the camels had been camped at Alice Springs at the end of the summer of 1913, they were loaded with gold and sent back to the west, along with a few other camels.

The last contact with their civilization was at Lynch's cattle station, who gave them 50 north-west of Alice Springs, until they reached Aqua Springs and more than five days later, the other side of the territory in Western Australia.

Men in the party walked most of the way. They were strong bodies, long pants, and bush- man's hats. The weather was sunny, but the nights grew cold.

The Walker brothers were bought an expensive camera, which they used to prospect for minerals in the South Australia. They knew the value of a compass and a map, and continued west until they reached Wiluna.

The party covered about 25 miles a day. When a deviation was made, they invariably returned to that point, and then continued west.

Smoke signals sent up at 6 km intervals in reply, which meant that Aboriginals were in the wood.

"The boss" and Andy, would then set off to locate smoke signals sometimes 20 miles away, with three or four camels.

The Aboriginals were always friendly and allowed the party to water the two 12-gallon drums, brought for that purpose. They were often as naked as possible.

Fresh meat was sacrificed for food on the way, and the camels and some marsupials were harvested. They yielded their unique and edible fruit for the party's enjoyment.

Cooking was done over open camp fires, and with camp ovens.

When the party slept on ground sheets, with one or two blankets, blankets were used by the Aboriginals in the vicinity. No adverse incidents occurred during the entire journey.

MATESHIP

A great spirit of mateship had prevailed throughout, Andy said, and they were happy and cheerful even when shifting sand dunes made the way arduous. Sand dunes moved north and south.

Andy said it was "a happy day" when the sand dunes cleared, 100 miles east of Wiluna.

Aqua Springs was managed by Tommy Melon, who was the Wollongol Pastoralist. They crossed the Red Centre, and then turned south along the road, to 11-mile point, until they reached Meekatharra. Meekatharra was then in its heyday and gold was the "in" word.

The party broke up there, and the faithful Camels were left in Meekatharra. Andy Everett stayed in Meekatharra, droving stock on stations in the area.

At the age of 50, he married Linda Brockman, and they live in a neat cottage near the town. They had no children, but "he says his life has been full of adventure and happy, and he's a born character."

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