



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November, 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE¹

Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing is of aesthetic significance because of its contribution to the Fitzroy River landscape. The view of the crossing from the approaches on either bank, across the sweeping vista that descends to the Fitzroy River bed, is a landmark in the West Kimberley context. (Criterion 1.3)

The place, with the former *Fitzroy Crossing Post Office* and *Fitzroy Crossing Police Group*, forms a significant cultural environment in that these structures are the only obvious visual reminders of the 'old' settlement of Fitzroy Crossing. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

The structure greatly improved transport facilities by providing the first bridge across the Fitzroy River. (Criterion 2.1, 2.2)

The structure was the first large-scale project undertaken by Main Roads in the north Western Australia. (Criterion 2.4)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing is a benchmark site with potential to provide insight into the development of road engineering in the remote north of Western Australia in the early decades of the twentieth century. The construction of the bridge represents an economical solution to the problem of providing a crossing over a river bed that was sandy in the dry season and prone to heavy flooding in the wet. (Criterion 3.1, 3.2)

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing contributes to the community's sense of place by demonstrating the very basic means by which vehicles crossed a major river on Route 1 up to the 1970s. (Criterion 4.2)

¹ For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, Richard; Irving, Robert and Reynolds, Peter *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

The place has potential as a tourist destination within the State. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing is a rare example of a concrete structure built to carry main road traffic across a low level crossing point on a major river. (Criterion 5.1)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

12.3 CONDITION

Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing is in poor condition with evidence of surface erosion to the precast panels and cracking of the edges exposing the steel reinforcement. This has rusted in a number of places causing sections of the upstand along the edge of the crossing to break away as a result of alkali/aggregate reaction (concrete cancer).

12.4 INTEGRITY

Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing still provides a point of vehicular crossing on the Fitzroy River and as such has high integrity.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing remains as constructed in 1935 and 1958 and has high authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Dr Cathie Clement, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Rosemary Rosario, Architectural Heritage Consultant.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Situated upstream from *Fitzroy Crossing Police Group* and the former *Fitzroy Crossing Post Office*, in the locality known as 'old' Fitzroy Crossing, *Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing* comprises a concrete bridge built across the bed of the Fitzroy River. Originally constructed from reinforced concrete slabs (1935), and then lifted three feet (0.9 metres) by the installation of precast slabs (1958), the bridge has steep approaches on either side. Until a major road realignment occurred in the 1970s, it formed part of the section of Great Northern Highway that runs between Derby and Halls Creek. The realignment coincided with the construction of a high level bridge, downstream from 'old' Fitzroy Crossing, and the establishment of a new town adjacent to the new bridge.

The part of the riverbed on which *Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing* is situated has been used as a crossing place since the early years of European colonisation in the Kimberley region. For thousands of years prior to colonisation, Aboriginal people may also have used the spot as a crossing place while travelling around their country. The movement of Europeans through the locality began with Alexander Forrest's exploration in 1879 and continued intermittently when Europeans rode out on horseback in search of pastoral land and/or gold. In 1885, a party led by Charles Hall reported finding payable gold in the Halls Creek locality and, the following year, cattle arrived from the eastern colonies for the establishment of Fossil Downs Station.²

In 1886, the Western Australian Government proclaimed the land surrounding Halls Creek a goldfield. More than 600 kilometres inland from Derby—the first port established in the Kimberley district—the field attracted thousands of gold seekers. The high hopes for its success were unwarranted but, in 1889, the telegraph line linking Perth to Roebourne was nonetheless extended to Derby and, from there, in a generally east-south-east direction, to Halls Creek. Reserves along the telegraph line provided watering places for travellers and travelling stock, and, in May 1890, Reserve No. 1581 was set apart where the telegraph line crossed the Fitzroy River.³ This activity constitutes the first known use of the place that now comprises *Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing*. Situated approximately 170 metres upstream from the line, this place was distinct

² Alex Forrest, *North-west Exploration: Journal of Expedition from DeGrey to Port Darwin*, Government Printer, Perth, 1880, facsimile edition, Corkwood Press, Bundaberg, 1996, pp. 16–17; *West Australian*, 28 September 1885, p. 3, citing a letter written to the Government Resident at Derby in August 1885; *Brisbane Courier*, 20 July 1886, p. 3.

³ *Government Gazette* (WA), 20 May 1886, p. 308; Postmaster General's Annual Report, 1889, p. 6, cited in Heritage Council of Western Australia, Register of Heritage Places, Interim Entry, Data Base No. 1173, Old Halls Creek Post Office Ruins (1889); *Government Gazette* (WA), 12 May 1890, pp. 334–8.

from the downstream road crossing and is referred to in this document as the Telegraph Crossing.⁴

Only a minority of the settlers and government workers who travelled between Derby and Halls Creek in the 1890s would have followed the telegraph line. Most would have taken the longer but better-watered goldfields road which intersected with the telegraph line approximately ten kilometres south-east of the Telegraph Crossing. There, in Reserve No. 1582, Blue Bush Swamp provided water for travellers while the colonial government's telegraph station (1892) provided a much-needed facility for communication with the outside world.⁵ To the east of the telegraph station, the road ran between the telegraph line and the Margaret River, with a branch leading off across the Margaret to Fossil Downs Station. To the west of the telegraph station, the road veered south-westerly for approximately 14 kilometres before passing through Reserve No. 2320, crossing to the north side of the Fitzroy, and following the river to Derby. In this document, this second crossing is referred to as the Road Crossing. A distance of about 11 kilometres (as the crow flies) separated the Road Crossing from the Telegraph Crossing.

In 1895, Constable Pilmer selected a site on the north bank of the Fitzroy and built a police station near the Telegraph Crossing. His choice of site, made to minimise the risk of flooding, meant that the Telegraph Crossing received considerable horse traffic as people—the police included—moved between the police station, the telegraph station and the goldfields road. Formal recognition of the police use of this land occurred in January 1897 when Reserve No. 1581 was cancelled and the much larger Reserve 3779 was set apart covering the land north and south of the Telegraph Crossing.⁶ The small site on which the police station stood within this 1280-acre (518-hectare) reserve was in the vicinity of *Fitzroy Crossing Police Group*.⁷

Six months later, another event likely to increase usage of the Telegraph Crossing occurred when Charles Blythe received approval for a wayside house licence for premises erected at Fitzroy Crossing. Blythe and his father had a homestead on Brooking Creek on the north side of the river.⁸

Over the years, both floods and termites impacted on the government-built structures in the Fitzroy Crossing locality. The police station was replaced in 1906. By that time, the Commonwealth had taken

⁴ Department of Lands and Surveys, Fitzroy Crossing Regional, Crown Copyright Plan, July 1964. It is noted that the positions of *Low Level Crossing*, *Fitzroy Crossing* and the telegraph line are shown on the Fitzroy Crossing Regional plan. While Reserve No. 1581 has not been located on official plans it can be plotted accurately on Fitzroy Crossing Regional from the information published in the *Government Gazette* in 1890 and cited above.

⁵ State Records Office of Western Australia, hereafter SROWA, Lands and Surveys Department, Cons 4898, Cancelled Public Plan 8K, No. 6, catalogue number 505 399; *Government Gazette* (WA), 13 July 1893, p. 715.

⁶ Richard Henry Pilmer (with editing and annotation by Cathie Clement and Peter Bridge), *Northern Patrol: An Australian Saga*, Hesperian Press, Carlisle, 1998, p. 37; SROWA, Lands and Surveys Department, Cons 4898, Cancelled Public Plan 8K, No. 6; *Government Gazette* (WA), 29 January 1897, p. 164.

⁷ SROWA, WAS 211, DOLA, Cons 3640, 6735/1924, File, p. 31.

⁸ SROWA, AN 5/Derby, Police Department, Acc 738/13, Occurrence Book, entry dated 5 July 1897; Pilmer, *Northern Patrol*, p. 37.

responsibility for postal matters and, in 1907, after the Postmaster-General had a new reserve set apart on what became known as Post Office Hill, a new post and telegraph office was built.⁹ Although the government facilities and the wayside house were now all on the north side of the river, the goldfields road retained its earlier alignment to the south of the Telegraph Crossing. It was shown in this position on public plans up to at least 1924.

Until motor vehicles came into use in the Kimberley in the late 1920s there was little need for the West Kimberley Road Board to dwell on either the alignment of the road or the nature of the river crossings in the vicinity of Fitzroy Crossing. With the advent of motorised transport, however, the demand for improved facilities increased and a 'Crossing for Motors' was created on the section of river between the police station and the wayside house, now known as the Crossing Inn.¹⁰ The time for which this crossing served is unknown but, in 1934, it catered only for cars that drove across a short section 'bushed by Messrs. Scott and Gardiner' (the hotel proprietors) and then followed a shingle bed downstream and gradually worked across to the opposite bank. The alignment of Great Northern Highway shown on the public plan continued to depict a crossing in this position up to at least August 1944.¹¹

A matter that did concern the West Kimberley Road Board was the annual expenditure of funds on the creation of these temporary crossings on the Broome–Derby and Derby–Halls Creek roads. Built in the 'dry' season, the crossings were rendered unfit for motor vehicles every time the 'wet' sent water surging down the otherwise largely dry bed of the Fitzroy. Budgetary constraints prevented the road board constructing crossings that could withstand the 'wet' and, in 1933, it urged the Department of the North-West to take responsibility for the construction of permanent crossings at Langi Crossing on the Broome–Derby Road and at Fitzroy Crossing on the Derby–Halls Creek Road. The Engineer for the North-West was of the opinion that the time had not yet come for such costly undertakings, but successive secretaries of the road board maintained the pressure on the government. The most telling argument was that road board funds should not have to be spent endlessly rebuilding a crossing that was on the main road around Australia and carried motor vehicles from outside the district. Apparently sharing this opinion, Alex McCallum, the Minister for Works and Labour, announced in July 1934 that he had arranged for *Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing* to be built at a cost of approximately

⁹ SROWA, AN 5/1 and 5/2, Police Department, Acc 430, 277/1903 and 4051/06, Chief Office Files; *Northern Public Opinion*, 30 January 1897; *Government Gazette*, 27 October 1905, p. 3234; SROWA, AN 5/Derby, Police Department, Acc 738/28, Derby Police Station, Acting Sub Inspector J. McCarthy, Journal, 14 Sept. 1902 – 17 January 1909, entry dated 23 August 1907.

¹⁰ The presence of motor drivers and motor mechanics in Kimberley towns and the Fitzroy Crossing area is evident in the occupations listed in *Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, Electoral Roll, Kimberley Electoral District, 7th January, 1930*.

¹¹ SROWA, AN 213, Main Roads Board, Acc 1140, 795/1938, Fitzroy River Crossing. Derby – Halls Creek Road No. 68. West Kimberley Rd. Bd. District. Parent File, p. 1; National Archives of Australia, hereafter NAA, (WA), K273/44, 1944/35, Fitzroy Crossing – PMG Acquisition of Site for Post Office, p. 2, Drawing WA/S 1344.

£8000. Efforts were to be made to secure funds for construction of Langi Crossing the following year.¹²

Up to this time, *Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing* was 'bushed annually either by the Road Board or natives attached to the Police Station.' Cars and trucks had to negotiate it 'with the aid of donkey teams or natives' and were thus restricted in the loading they could carry. Wagons used a track about one chain (20 metres) upstream. Local residents maintained that the high banks at the crossing had not shifted in the previous 25 years and had 'never been topped by the floods'. In noting this, engineer John Punch observed that the only work required for the approaches would be cuttings in the banks and that, if development happened to result in an all-weather road, a crossing in this spot would be available as soon as the river dropped. Rather than use both existing cuttings, however, he proposed using only the one in the south bank.¹³

Survey information from Punch was utilised to prepare a design and specifications for 'wheelways' with a standard track of 56 inches (1.42 metres). Inquiries then revealed that some trucks using the crossing had double wheels on the back axle so a decision was taken to build a concrete crossing with the top 'just about the level of the existing sand bed'. The two tenders for the project were considerably higher than the Public Works Department estimate and, in September 1935, a government team began construction under PWD foreman Mr H E Hayward. The structure, completed at a cost of £8231 18s 09d only days before the wet season commenced, comprised fifty-two 12-foot (3.6 metre) spans of reinforced concrete with a width between kerbs of eight feet (2.4 metres). Twelve-foot wide concrete abutments linked it to the concrete-floored approaches cut at a 12% grade in the 40-foot (12.2 metres) banks of the river.¹⁴ The project has been described as follows:

Designed to interfere as little as possible with the tremendous water flows of the Fitzroy River, the structure was a 624-foot-long concrete slab supported on 104 reinforced concrete piles driven into the riverbed. At each end was a concrete approach about 250 feet long leading down from the banks to the crossing. Four hundred cubic yards of reinforced concrete were used. Main Roads sent a foreman and a carpenter from Perth and the rest of the labour force came from the local area. The necessary machinery and materials were sent to Derby by sea, and then overland about 200 miles to Fitzroy Crossing. This was the first large-scale project that Main Roads undertook in the North West.¹⁵

Maintenance carried out on the crossing varied according to the height to which the river rose each year. During the first wet season, the water washed a section of sand about two feet (0.6 metres) deep and 60 feet (18.3 metres) wide from under the centre of the bridge. It also deposited silt at the base and on each side of the approaches. The silt had to be removed so the traffic could cross, and experience showed that low levels of water in

¹² SROWA, AN 213, Main Roads Board, Acc 1140, 806/1933, Port Hedland – Broome – Derby Rd. No. 77. West Kimberley Rd. Bd. District. Parent File, pp. 1, 6, 8–12, 16, 17 and 19.

¹³ SROWA, AN 213, Main Roads Board, Acc 1140, 795/1938, pp. 1–8 and 54.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 19, 26, 37–45, 53, 61 and 83; and Main Roads Department of Western Australia, *31st Annual Report: Year ended 30th June, 1958*, Government Printer, Perth, 1958, p. 43.

¹⁵ Leigh Edmonds, *The Vital Link: A History of Main Roads Western Australia 1926–1996*, UWA Press, Nedlands, 1997, pp. 66–7.

the river caused this scouring and silting. Main Roads consequently implemented a practice of placing branches of light scrub under the deck before each wet season, pegging them down on both sides, with the leaves outside, to encourage silt build-up under the deck. When the river ran high, eg in 1942, 1943, 1944 and 1945, a lot of silt and debris had to be removed from both the bridge and the approaches before traffic could cross. The delays sometimes ran into weeks and, in April 1944, the abutment on the south bank sustained major damage when one slab of concrete washed away after being undermined. A second slab subsided and cracked after trucks drove over it.¹⁶

By 1955, the government was looking at options for 'raising and widening' *Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing*. Traffic was being delayed by floods for periods of up to eight weeks and investigations showed that 'a lift of 3 feet above the lowest point would make the crossing trafficable immediately after the main flood waters had passed'.¹⁷ A greater lift was considered too risky and it was thought that:

the stability of the crossing could be in doubt should debris accumulate and the blocking of more than 3 feet of the waterway might induce scour in the coarse sands of the river bed that could undermine the structure.¹⁸

Precast slabs secured to the old slabs afforded the best solution and provided scope for traffic to continue using the bridge and, if flooding occurred, for the precasting to continue on the riverbank. Had provision not been made to keep the crossing open, there would no doubt have been an outcry from the organisers of the Mobilgas Trial in which cars were to complete the Kimberley section of the round-Australia endurance rally at the end of August 1958.¹⁹

The work on the crossing, completed some months before the rally cars went through the Kimberley, has been described as follows:

The old slabs being deficient in bending strength it was found necessary to throw the supports of the new slabs towards the piers. The weight of the precast slabs was limited to 7 tons, the practical capacity of the mobile crane intended for use on the job. Thus it was necessary to use slabs 8 feet long, supported on the old slabs, 2 feet from each pier, with the 4-foot gaps spanned by smaller slabs which for convenience are supported from the larger slabs. These slabs were raised to the correct height on four columns cast monolithically.

For ease of stripping, setting up of formwork and attachment of the galvanised steel base plates, the large slabs were cast inverted.

Holes were drilled through the old structure for bolting the new slabs down and minor variations in level were taken up with sheet lead packing.

Aggregate for the concrete work posed a problem. Samples taken from banks of shingle in the Margaret River 15 miles away indicated that reasonable gradings could be obtained. However, shortly after the job started, the shingle deposit was found to be shallow and deficient in coarse aggregate. Hard rounded sandstone of very suitable grading was located on a "gibber" plain mixed with silt about 7 miles from the job. A sloping screen was set up on the riverbank and the silt easily

¹⁶ SROWA, AN 213, Main Roads Board, Acc 1140, 795/1938, pp. 102–3, 110, 116, 144, 151–5, 160, 169–71, 177 and 180.

¹⁷ SROWA, AN 40/2, Department of North-West, Acc 1302, 24/53, Derby, (no pagination, letter towards the centre of a thick file); Main Roads, *31st Annual Report*, p. 44.

¹⁸ Main Roads, *31st Annual Report*, p. 44.

¹⁹ *ibid.*; *West Australian*, 20 August 1958, pp. 23–6.

washed out by hosing. The cost per ton of washed aggregate was £7 and for the relatively small quantity involved viz., less than 100 tons, it was the most economical means of producing it.

As a matter of interest, cement cost £30 per ton delivered to the site.²⁰

The upgrading of the crossing, despite the forecasts of the engineers, did not prevent traffic being delayed for long periods in the wet season. In 1967, for example, the river flooded on 18 January and *Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing* remained closed until 2 April. During this period, the postmaster noted that, on 12 February, the floodwaters had left the post office, hospital and police houses 'on an island 120 yds wide _ mile long'. Three days later a boat trip was required so that a sick child could be collected and, until early March, boats were the only means by which people could move between the cluster of buildings containing the post office, hospital and police houses and those located at either the nearby Aboriginal Mission, the Crossing Inn or the airport.²¹

In the wet season of the following year, all the roads in the Fitzroy Crossing area were closed on 7 February, the post office was surrounded by two inches (50.8 mm) of water on 6 March, and, although Main Roads allowed 4 wheel drive vehicles onto the low level crossing on 6 April, cars were not allowed to tackle it until the water was shallower and the flow slower. Another downpour on 20 May closed the crossing again and, within a day, 14 vehicles were held up on each side.²²

The number of vehicles using the crossing was increasing each year, partly due to gradual improvement of the northern road system. By 1970, Main Roads had upgraded river crossings between Broome and Derby and had sealed all but 25 miles (40 kilometres) of the road between Derby and Fitzroy Crossing. In the same year, the sealing of road from Perth to Meekatharra was completed and, as a result, more heavy vehicles used the Great Northern Highway, which ran for 1600 miles (2560 kilometres) from Meekatharra to Wyndham. Other government departments were simultaneously looking into ways of solving the problems caused by the position and fragmented layout of the Fitzroy Crossing settlement. It was decided that a new townsite was required and, after the Lands Department surveyed some 60 acres (24.3 hectares) of higher ground to the south-west of *Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing*, all government departments with an interest in services in the locality were advised of an intention to gazette this land as a townsite. The objective was 'to cater for future planning for schools, hospitals and other public buildings, in addition to the residential requirements of the area'.²³

By late 1972, Main Roads had decided to build the new high level bridge adjacent to the area surveyed for the new town.²⁴ The need for the bridge, and the relocation of the settlement, was highlighted by the 1974 wet season flooding, which was described as follows:

²⁰ *West Australian*, 29 August 1958, p. 7; Main Roads, *31st Annual Report*, p. 44.

²¹ NAA (WA), K715/1, NN, [Postmaster's Diary] *Fitzroy Crossing*, 1950 to 1980.

²² *ibid.*

²³ Edmonds, *The Vital Link*, pp. 220–1; SROWA, AN 40/8, Department of the North West, Acc 1591, 44/66, *Fitzroy Crossing*, p. 3.

²⁴ SROWA, AN 40/8, Department of the North West, Acc 1591, 44/66, *Fitzroy Crossing*, p. 4.

Floodwaters caused by four days of torrential rain have stranded about 50 people at Fitzroy Crossing.

The town, about 1800 miles from Perth, has been divided into three islands.

Townpeople are using boats to ferry supplies between the islands.

Five inches of rain has fallen in the town since Saturday night . . .

Last night the flood-waters were lapping against the walls of the town's hotel where 36 travellers are stranded.

Another 12 people are isolated in the hospital, post office and police station which are on another island.

No buildings have been damaged.

Sgt Trevor Sharrett, of the Fitzroy Crossing police, said yesterday that five cars were parked on the third island, on the Derby side of the town.

He expected that the road south to Derby would reopen by the end of next week, but the road to Halls Creek would be closed for at least a month.²⁵

On 28 January 1974, the forthcoming relocation of services to the new townsite was signalled by an announcement that a new Fitzroy Crossing Hospital would be built at a cost of \$250,000. In May, subject to financial considerations, Cabinet approved of the relocation of the Fitzroy Crossing settlement and, in July, it was reported that the first buildings on the new site were 'expected to be the town's hospital and a policeman's house'. Other town facilities, including the police station, were to be transferred at a future time. The new bridge was under construction but, on 11 September 1974, *Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing* was reported to be 'about two metres under water and impassable'. Thirty-five people, mostly tourists, were being held up by the flooding.²⁶ In the circumstances, it is not surprising that an article about the new bridge opened as follows:

Friday, October 18, 1974, will be remembered as an important date in the history of the Kimberley region, especially for the cattle industry.

It saw the opening of the four new bridges in the Fitzroy Crossing district.

The bridges are over the main channel of the Fitzroy River, Brooking Channel, Two Mile Creek and Blue Bush Creek.

All of these bridges have been designed to withstand exceptional floods, and to ensure that road closures at Fitzroy Crossing will be reduced to a minimum. . .²⁷

The new hospital opened in June 1976, to be followed, two years later, by the new police station and court complex. As the new town developed, the government handed *Fitzroy Crossing Police Group* to the National Parks Authority for housing purposes and, after a new post office opened in 1985, the former Fitzroy Crossing Post Office became backpackers' accommodation. In October 1986, a memorial was erected to mark the site

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 37, cutting from *The West Australian*, undated.

²⁶ *West Australian*, 28 January 1974, p. 5; SROWA, AN 40/8, Department of the North West, Acc 1591, 44/66, Fitzroy Crossing, p. 39; NAA (WA), K1209/1, NN, Fitzroy Crossing Post Office – correspondence, cards, photographs, press cuttings, Date Range: 1960 to 1980, cutting from *West Australian*, 5 July 1974, p. 4; SROWA, AN 40/8, Department of the North West, Acc 1591, 44/66, Fitzroy Crossing, p. 213, cutting from *The West Australian*, 12 September 1974. *West Australian*, 12 June 1976, p. 19;

²⁷ SROWA, AN 40/8, Department of the North West, Acc 1591, 44/66, Fitzroy Crossing, p. 251, cutting from *The West Australian*, 24 October 1974.

of the old hospital and, in November, Main Roads bituminised the last section of unsealed road between Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek, thus completing 'a blacktop route, some 16,000 kilometres in length, right around Australia'.²⁸

Floodwaters cut the roads in the Fitzroy Crossing locality in 1986, 1991 and 1993, and wet season flooding continues to cause occasional problems.²⁹ At these times, when the river sometimes threatens to surge over even the high level bridge, *Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing* is a stark reminder of times past. The crossing now caters mostly for residents, vehicles travelling to and from places north of Fitzroy Crossing, and tourists visiting local attractions. It provides a fishing spot for local Aboriginal people and should be included in any heritage trail created to introduce the general public to 'old' Fitzroy Crossing.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing is located on the Fitzroy river to the north-east of the current town of Fitzroy Crossing and adjacent to the 'old' Fitzroy Crossing settlement. The crossing, located on the former alignment of Great Northern Highway, is accessed from Russ Road from the north and Yarabi Road from the south. The buildings and sites of 'old' Fitzroy Crossing, including the former Post Office, former Police Station and the site of the former Inland Mission Hospital, are located on Russ Road on the northern side of the river. Yarabi Road continues from *Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing* as an unsealed road which connects with the new alignment of Great Northern Highway to the east of the current town centre.

Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing is approached by a steep descent down the river banks on either side of the crossing. *Low Level Crossing, Fitzroy Crossing* comprises a concrete structure approximately 160m long and 4m wide which spans the Fitzroy River bed at its lowest point. Each end of the concrete structure is submerged beneath sand that has drifted from the edges of the river and prevents the exact length of the structure being measured accurately on site. The crossing comprises a series of precast reinforced concrete panels of alternating lengths of 1.2m and 2.4m. The panels are approximately 125mm deep with concrete upstands 100mm wide and 130mm deep along the external edges. The panels are clearly those constructed in 1958 as physical evidence matches the description from documentary sources exactly. The bolts cast to attach the 1958 panels to the early 1935 structure are clearly evident and in some cases are exposed and loose with evidence of rust.

The longer panels have been cast with concrete ribs at either end which lift the panels above the ground. These ribs support the smaller intermediate panels. The ribs lift the 1958 structure above the earlier structure and

²⁸ *West Australian*, 12 June 1976, p. 19; Derby Chamber of Commerce / Derby Tourist Bureau, *Derby and Fitzroy Crossing Information Directory*, 1999, p. 23; *Government Gazette* (WA) 2 March 1979, pp. 574–5; Battye Library Oral History Transcript OH1736; Edmonds, *The Vital Link*, pp. 319–20.

²⁹ Edmonds, *The Vital Link*, pp. 319–20 and 391–2.

allow water to flow underneath. There are a series of 75mm diameter drainage holes in the centre of the wider panels on the upstream side.

The precast panels comprising *Low Level Crossing*, *Fitzroy Crossing* are in fair to poor condition. There has been considerable erosion of the surface of the concrete, such that the aggregate is now clearly exposed. The steel reinforcement is also exposed and rusting particularly on the edges of the structure. Rusting of the steel will cause the concrete to crack and break away and there is evidence of this happening particularly on the concrete upstands along the edges of the crossing. The bolts that attach the 1958 panels to the earlier structure are exposed with surface rust in a number of places. This has the potential to cause further damage and cracking if not repaired as rusting to concrete reinforcement and fixings causes alkali/aggregate reaction (concrete cancer).

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

Ivanhoe Crossing on the Ord River in the East Kimberley is a comparative structure of similar function. That crossing was constructed in about 1953 using culvert pipes 'to raise and improve an existing causeway built around 1930'. Like *Low Level Crossing*, *Fitzroy Crossing*, Ivanhoe Crossing was superseded when development called for changes in land use and transport routes.³⁰ Its function as a bridge for local traffic, a fishing spot and a tourist destination also make it a comparative structure.

13.4 REFERENCES

No key references.

13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

Further investigation of concrete crossings may reveal other comparative structures.

A means of restoring the structure in the short term is required urgently. Further research may provide the original specifications and construction documents which would be most useful to this process.

³⁰ O'Brien Planning Consultants, Municipal Heritage Inventory for the Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley, May 1997, Place No. 27.