

‘The Track: 1000 Miles to War’

Creating a travelling Library exhibition

Over the past five years, the Northern Territory Library has placed more of its time and resources into mounting exhibitions. We have begun attracting them from Museums and cultural institutions around Australia providing a venue for their work. However, we have also been creating exhibitions within the Library. Heritage Services has initiated their development which has been supported by Management and over time staff from other sections of the Library has also become interested in working on exhibitions.

Why did our Library decide to resource exhibitions? They are a great educational tool, packaging information in a visually appealing way, often telling a story about a special event or person. NTL’s exhibitions are primarily aimed at enhancing a visitor’s understanding of Northern Territory history, life and culture. Our Library’s exhibitions are also an excellent way of showcasing material in our collections and raising public awareness of our role as a significant collecting institution in the Northern Territory.

The Library’s exhibition program runs for most of the year. The Mezzanine floor has become our primary exhibition space and we have found a variety of ways to use it, although, we have also used other areas of the Library. For example, ‘Off the Beaten Track’ from the National Motor Museum in Adelaide included the original vehicle that crossed the continent in 1908. We managed to fit it through the Library doors with centimetres to spare and place it in the middle of the Library floor.





Our most ambitious in-house exhibition to date has been 'The Track; 1000 miles to war'. Each year we create an exhibition for the Bombing of Darwin anniversary on the 19th February. The Library has become part of the Veteran's program and not only do we produce an exhibition for this audience and local visitors but we also hold related events such as lunchtime talks.

Heritage Services could not produce such a large exhibition alone (there are only 3 of us) so we called for volunteers from the Library staff. Its production became quite a team effort! The core team for The Track comprised of seven staff, who undertook the research and writing, but there were also a number of other staff who made major contributions.



'The Track: 1000 Miles to War'

CREDITS

Researchers:
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Freighting
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So how did we do it?

Firstly, we selected our theme which was to tell the story of the Stuart Highway during the war. This story would include the building of the road, the establishment of airfields, bases and infrastructure along the highway and the array of activities which accompanied these

military units and structures. At the same time, the format, size and exhibition space needed to be identified so that we knew how much content to create.

Because of its subject matter, the Museum of Central Australia in Alice Springs expressed an interest in hosting The Track which increased everyone's enthusiasm – our first travelling exhibition!

In a previous exhibition, 15 display boards concealing the built-in cabinets on the Mezzanine were used to create a zigzagging wall. Such a wall of boards would provide our means of mounting The Track and also give a road like effect. 15 display boards meant we needed to produce 15 large panels.

Our process for achieving this was to:

- **Research** - We gathered information, stories and photos mostly from the Library's collections but also used other sources such as the Australian War Memorial and the National Archives. We divided the work by each taking a different section of the Stuart Highway to research.
- **Design** - the size, layout and graphics for the panels were created. A panel template was designed to give uniformity to the exhibition.
- **Write** - The content from the research and information gathered was written up. There are published guides available to assist with writing for exhibitions.
- **Edit** - Some rewording was required as we all had different writing styles and the story told needed to be flow from one panel to the next
- **More editing** - Several more people read through the panels checking for grammar and spelling errors
- **Production** - We worked with a printing company to produce the panels, deciding on the material to be used, how the panels could be hung and the type of crate to be built for transporting the panels down to Alice Springs
- **Selecting heritage items** – Items from the Library's heritage collections, which complimented the exhibition's theme, such as driver's licences and motor vehicle manuals, were selected for displaying. They needed to be checked for robustness since they would be travelling. Careful packaging for their protection was also organised when it was time for them to travel.
- **Installation** – Mounting the panels was straight forward. Arranging the heritage items in plinths and making their supports took time.
- All of this was achieved through **regular team meetings**.

So what have we learnt from this experience? Many interesting things such as:

- 350 words are plenty for an exhibition panel. Librarians are excellent at researching and gathering information but our challenge was to select the most interesting facts or stories and then write them in a way that readers would find engaging.
- Great images are as equally important perhaps even more important than words

- Listing sources used in our research are not necessary on exhibition panels. We produced a separate bibliography for anyone who wanted to do their own further research.
- Word storming helped us to finally settle on a title for the exhibition
- You can never do enough editing. Even after many eyes had looked over our panels, we still found a couple of errors.
- Arrange for the printing company to do a small scale mock-up version of one panel. We found our file format had adversely affected the colours in printing so the file needed to be changed.



The Track was well received when it opened in February. Library staff especially enjoyed the conversations with veterans as they remembered their time in NT during the war. The exhibition has now been on display in the Museum of Central Australia in Alice Springs since May. Their exhibition room suits our panels. We also have future plans for the exhibition to travel to Katherine and Tennant Creek and, interestingly, the Alice Springs RSL has asked if it

can go on permanent display in their museum room. Eventually, it will become an online exhibition on our Library's website.

Lynette Aitchison
Manager, Heritage Services
Northern Territory Library
ALIA NT Symposium, Oct 2011

NOTES:

Tennant Creek
Katherine
AS RSL

Items complimenting the exhibition themes were selected from the Library's heritage collections and became part of the display

I really enjoyed , precision to detail is what I learnt and making sure every item was safe. Ines

Marlene:

Thank you for asking me to provide feedback. Here it is:

- Really enjoyed the experience of researching the airfields and cattle stations, interesting times and so much history.
- Hunting and gathering easy, found lots of unpublished and published material in the NTL collection, which of course had to be edited, edited, edited.
- Learnt a lot about writing information boards, thank goodness for Jane, Heather, Mel and you.
- Went from one extreme to another found it hard to get images to fit my story board or found heaps a trying to decide on just on image.
- Enjoyed working as a team and individuals who all had different perspectives.
- More editing, thanks to yourself and Dianne for keeping us on our toes.
- Although I wasn't involved on the side of pulling all the material together and making it flow, I observed, a difficult task thanks to you it came together and was a great success.

The exhibition was amazing it moved NTL into the 4th dimension. I loved talking to clients who visited and hearing about their experiences and memories of relatives and friends who were in the Territory at the time. Very positive feedback.