

POWER AND WATER CORPORATION



Manton Dam

ONE OF DARWIN'S BEST KEPT SECRETS!



PowerWater

Power and Water recognised the heritage value of this special place and has worked to restore and preserve it. We invite you to take a stroll around the precinct and inspect the original WWII Sydney Williams huts, one of which houses the original Whitworth water pump and the 1936 model Crossley diesel engine which drove the pump.

Looking into the second Sydney Williams hut you can see the photo gallery depicting the construction of the dam and pipeline and the display of the wreckage of a USAAF P-40E (Kittyhawk) fighter plane that crashed nearby on 12 July 1942. The pilot, Lt. John. S Sauber, was killed in a mid-air accident that took place during a routine training flight to practice combat and intercepts.

Also maintained within the precinct is one of the original Type "G" (Burnett) cottages, a WWII Chevrolet "Blitz" truck in fully restored condition and another that didn't survive the ravages of time. There is also WWII era industrial machinery including a bench lathe driven by overhead line shafts, a hand-driven drill press and 1940 model fire hydrants.



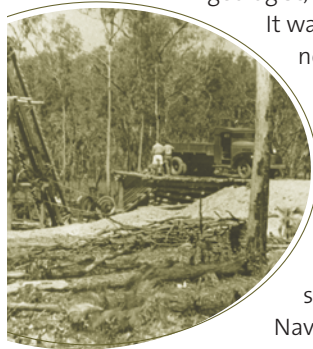
Manton Dam forms part of the traditional lands of the Larrakia Aboriginal people. Its local landscape, wildlife and native plants supported their way of life over thousands of years.

The dam sits across the Manton River, which was named after James T Manton. James Manton was the second Northern Territory Government resident from 1866-67 (South Australian Government's representative) and he is also acknowledged as the person who chose the site of modern day Darwin.



The site for Manton Dam was selected by geologist, Dr. W G Woolnough in 1936.

It was built to not only meet the needs of Darwin's growing civilian population, but an increased military presence as the threat of war drew closer.

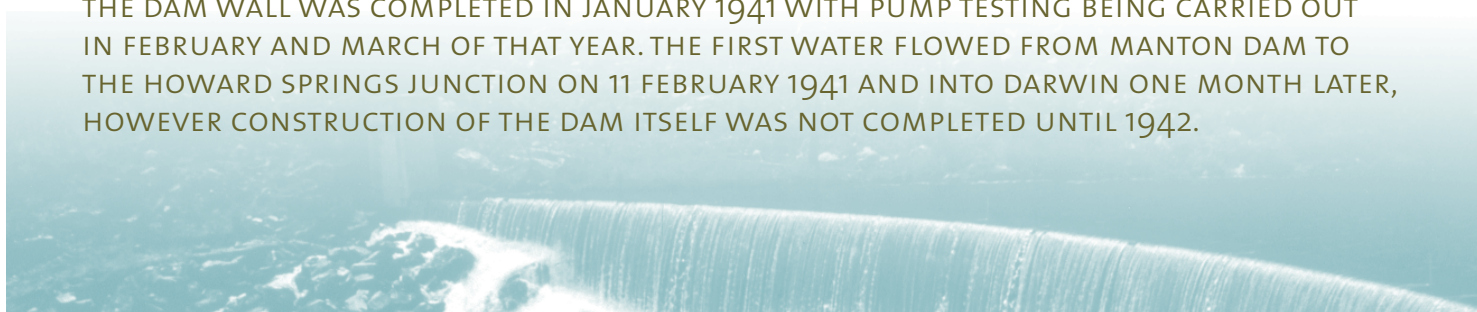


In particular, the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) called for a reliable water supply for its fleet as did the Royal Navy and as it was agreed

that the existing, limited water supply needed to be expanded, this was achieved with funding from the RAN.

Tenders for the construction of the dam and supply and installation of plant and equipment were called for in late 1937. Construction of the dam and the pipeline to Darwin started in 1938.

THE DAM WALL WAS COMPLETED IN JANUARY 1941 WITH PUMP TESTING BEING CARRIED OUT IN FEBRUARY AND MARCH OF THAT YEAR. THE FIRST WATER FLOWED FROM MANTON DAM TO THE HOWARD SPRINGS JUNCTION ON 11 FEBRUARY 1941 AND INTO DARWIN ONE MONTH LATER, HOWEVER CONSTRUCTION OF THE DAM ITSELF WAS NOT COMPLETED UNTIL 1942.



During construction numerous industrial disputes (organised by the North Australian Workers Union) caused the financial collapse of the contractor (Manton Construction Pty Ltd) and there was increasing tension between the defence forces and the civilian administration, mainly over prioritising water supplies between the military and civilians.

The dam wall was completed in January 1941 with pump testing being carried out in February and March of that year. The first water flowed from Manton Dam to the Howard Springs junction on 11 February 1941 and into Darwin one month later, however construction of the dam itself was not completed until 1942.

The entry of Japan into WWII upgraded the strategic value of the dam and military units were assigned to guard the structure. A plan to demolish the dam in the event of an invasion was prepared in 1942 and two torpedo nets were strung across the dam in 1943.

Despite anti-aircraft guns being allocated to defend the dam, guns were not available and while one anti-aircraft searchlight was positioned at the dam, this was relocated to nearby Haycock Hill in October 1943.

In response to further supply requests from the RAN, Darwin's water supply was reassessed in 1944 resulting in the construction of a second pipeline and upgrading of storage facilities in 1945.

The dam, pumping stations, pipelines and storage facilities, which were under the 'ownership' of the RAN, were all handed over to the NT Administration in the early post-war years.

In 1964 electric-driven pumps were installed in No 3 pump house (nearest to the Stuart Highway and these pumps are still in place and remain fully operational today.

Manton Dam was to remain Darwin's main source of potable (drinking) water until 1972 when Darwin River Dam (DRD) was constructed and commissioned. While Manton Dam was no longer in service, it remains the emergency back up water supply for Darwin should it be required.

As such, all equipment has been maintained in a state of readiness and Manton Dam has been put into service twice since that time. Firstly after Cyclone Tracy in 1974 and again in 1992 when a major fire temporarily halted pumping operations from DRD.

In 1989 the NT Government opened the southern edge of the Manton Dam catchment for recreation, setting aside an area for water sports, fishing and family activities that is extremely popular with local residents.



Take a stroll along the boardwalk to the base of the dam wall and maybe throw in a line if the black bream are present in the pools below the dam wall. From Pump house No. 1 take the path to the top of the dam wall and take in the view of the dam, the catchment area, the intake “tower”, the spillway and the remains of the anti-torpedo net foundations.

Take the time to enjoy the well-tended and shady picnic area and utilise the free electric barbeque. Most of all, take time to relax and reflect a little on the history and heritage value of the site.

As Heritage Consultant Bob Alford wrote:

‘Manton Dam, its construction and the historic elements associated with its operation from 1941 provide a significant link to the development of Darwin during a time of international tension, the exigencies of war and the basic needs of a population that were denied until almost mid-twentieth century’.

We hope you enjoy your visit.

For opening times and visitor information call 1800 245 092