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Living the dream



After getting a start on the Ord East Kimberley Expansion Project, James Kruger is now building a career in the mining sector and “living the dream”

BY NATHAN DYER

It is midday on a hot May afternoon in Kununurra, and James Kruger is just back from Darwin with a new turbo-diesel V8 Land Cruiser. In the back tray is a set of new rims for his SS Commodore and a crate of hand reels for a Kimberley fishing trip.

For the 25-year-old from Wyndham, the rewards from a job on Western Australia’s massive Gorgon gas project are obvious. “I’ve made a lot of mates out there, from New Zealand, Scotland and the UK,” James says. “I’ve been at Gorgon for four months now and I think I’m pretty much living the dream.”

But those rewards have not come without hard work. James says after completing high school at Clontarf Aboriginal College in Perth he moved back to the Kimberley and did a number of different jobs and a 12-month stint with the Army Reserve’s NORFORCE regiment before hearing about the Ord-East Kimberley Expansion Project in Kununurra.

“I’d been on Newstart and I had seen my auntie and relatives get jobs on the project, so they helped me out,” he says. After being accepted for a position as a labourer on the Ord-East Kimberley Expansion Project, James later earned his tickets for a number of machines including rollers and compactors. He says other family members are now joining the project. “I’ve got a brother who has asked me about how I got my job and he’s just signing up now for the Ord project,” he says.

James says he worked the remainder of last construction season as an operator before the opportunity arose through Leighton Contractors to work at the Gorgon gas project over the Kimberley wet season. He says working on the Gorgon project – 26 days on and nine days off – has been an eye-opening experience.

Asked what advice he would give to other young Kimberley men and women interested in working in the construction and mining industries, James’ message is simple: “I’d say get up and go out and look for a job, and live the dream.”

Accidental Role Model



After years working in the Kimberley pastoral industry, Bradley Rosewood has found a new calling in civil construction

BY NATHAN DYER

It is early in the Kimberley dry season and water roars over Kununurra's Ivanhoe Crossing. Former stockman Bradley Rosewood is sitting on the bank reminiscing about childhood afternoons spent fishing here.

Now a machine operator on the nation's largest resources project, the 33-year-old father says he relishes the times he spends here with his own family when home from his Gorgon Project swing of 26 days on and nine days off. "I've got a young family so it's challenging for them, but at the end of the day they enjoy the rewards that I bring home," he says.

Bradley's journey from spear fishing at Ivanhoe Crossing to operating million dollar machines on the massive Gorgon Project is a story of success through hard work. Having left school after Year 10, he did a number of jobs before deciding to follow his dream to become a stockman. "That was something I had always wanted to do," Bradley recalls.

But after years working on and off at Rosewood Station, Bradley says his career path took a change of direction after a training course where he gained tickets for a grader, loader and backhoe. That was followed by a job with a local contractor and a stint with Team Savannah upgrading the highway between Kununurra and Halls Creek, earning a Certificate Two in Civil Construction.

Bradley says his big break came, however, when he landed a job on the Ord-East Kimberley Expansion Project working under one of his former Team Savannah supervisors who was then employed on the Ord project. "As soon as he saw my name on the list he jumped straight at it and got me on his crew," Bradley says. Fast-forward two years and the former Kimberley stockman has moved from one nation-building project to another.

Bradley admits one of the biggest surprises from his career change has been becoming a role model. "What I didn't realize was that other young fellas would be coming up to me and telling me that I inspire them by what I am doing, and that it motivates them to get to a level where I am," he says, smiling.



The **Ord-East Kimberley** Expansion Project

New Beginnings



Working on the Ord-East Kimberley Expansion Project has inspired Jubaun Nieass to pursue a career in civil construction

BY NATHAN DYER

Standing beside the smooth steel blade of a Caterpillar compactor, Jubaun Nieass reflects on how his life has changed in the past two years.

The 27-year-old Kununurra father is the first to admit that his life has not been all smooth sailing. “I think I was considered a lost cause before with my family, but now they can see a bit of hope there, that I’ve found something I can stick at,” Jubaun says, referring to his work as an operator on the Ord-East Kimberley Expansion Project.

Jubaun says after years of floating between jobs, picking up tickets for a range of heavy machines and trying to crack into the mining industry, his first season on the Ord project last year was a turning point in his career and his life.

“You’re part of a team out there and you’ve got a purpose, you’re not just sitting around, you’re actually someone important doing something that needs to be done,” he says, “It’s not like you’re just a number and if you don’t turn up to work, or you quit, they can just get someone else; you feel important.”

Although initially seeing the Ord project as a way to earn more tickets and transition to the mining industry, Jubaun says civil construction has now become his career focus. “I realised you get more money in civil construction than in the mines and its a more relaxed atmosphere, and you’re working at home, you’re not working away all the time,” he says. A stint on the Gorgon gas project last Kimberley wet season reinforced those views. “I’d rather make that sort of money at home, and that’s why I’ve chosen to come back to the Ord Stage Two project,” Jubaun says.

Although many people would be daunted by having responsibility for multi-million dollar machines, Jubaun says once you have the training it comes as second nature. “Initially I was fearful of everything being a bit complicated and me not being able to understand it and making a fool myself,” he recalls. “But these machines are automatic, anyone can do this.”

No ordinary grandmother



An operator on the Ord-East Kimberley Expansion Project, Mildred Ward is no ordinary grandmother

BY NATHAN DYER

Standing on the edge of the M2 channel in the Ord River Irrigation Area near Kununurra, Mildred Ward is talking about her children and grandchildren. It's a hot dry season morning and Mildred chats about her family like any other grandmother. "I've got six grand children, five boys and one girl," she says, her face lighting up. But Mildred Ward is not your average grandmother.

A ticketed roller and water truck operator working on the Ord-East Expansion Project, Mildred says work has never been so interesting. After years working across various industries as a bookkeeper, social worker and shop assistant, she says the opportunity to work on the massive irrigation expansion was too good to pass up. "This is a whole new ball game out here, driving machines," she says. "It's something different, and it is exciting."

Mildred says for women thinking about a career in civil construction, there is no need to be nervous about working in a male-dominated workforce. "Being a woman among all those men, they keep an eye out for you, they all look after you," she says. "I was nervous at first but you get over it; and that is what I have told a lot of women in town," she adds. "And with me encouraging them, there have been a lot of women who have put their hands up to come out here, which is good."

After working for Charles Hull Contracting last year, where she gained tickets on a roller and water truck, Mildred this year has her sights set on a dump truck. The Kununurra grandmother says she would like to see more women taking up the opportunities the Ord project offers. "I'd like to encourage other women to do it, and show other mothers and grandmothers that they can do this too," she says.

Asked what her children and grandchildren think about her work, Mildred laughs. "They're over the moon," she says. "They love it; they're proud of their mother and grandma."

Down the road and a world away



For Peter Curtin, a move down the road from the tiny East Kimberley community of Glen Hill revealed a world of opportunities

BY NATHAN DYER

Geographically speaking, the tiny East Kimberley community of Glen Hill, the Ord Irrigation Expansion Project and the Argyle Diamond Mine are not too far removed. In reality, the sleepy indigenous community of 50 people is a world away from the roaring activity at the largest construction site in the Kimberley and at one of the world's largest diamond mines.

Despite the stark differences, 24-year-old Peter Curtin takes the transition from Glen Hill schoolboy to apprentice with Leighton Contractors on the Ord Irrigation Expansion Project and Argyle Diamond Mine in his stride. "You have to get used to the four o'clock wake ups and finishing at 5:30pm, but I'm used to it now and I'm earning good money," Peter says.

Although he makes it sound easy, Peter's journey from remote indigenous community to big time mining and construction has been full of challenges. After completing primary school at Glen Hill, Peter found himself tackling town life at boarding school in Geraldton. "The first time in Geraldton I was homesick and nervous, it took time to get to know new friends," Peter recalls. "But I suppose it comes down to what your parents are like," he says. "If you've got strict parents who want you educated, then you have to listen to them."

He stuck at it, graduated Year 12, and returned home, spending two years contract mustering with his father. But Peter says he realised he wanted something else. "I wasn't making much money, so I decided to look for an apprenticeship," he says.

The Ord-East Kimberley Expansion Project led to an apprenticeship opportunity with Leighton Contractors Pty Ltd through Kimberley Group Training. Peter is 12-months from completing his heavy diesel fitter apprenticeship. Leighton Contracting arranged continuity of Peter's apprenticeship with Argyle Diamond Mine when its construction program on the Ord-Irrigation Project ceased (November - April) for the Kimberley wet season.

Standing in the practice nets at cricket training in Kununurra, the quietly spoken sportsman says success comes to those who seek it out. "You have to put your neck out there, and if you want to learn you have to ask questions," he says. "You can't just sit back and say, 'I can't do that', you've got to actually go out there and do it."

Have skills, will travel



When the Ord-East Kimberley Expansion Project is complete, Rhys Peart hopes to use his skills to move on to other projects

BY NATHAN DYER

There's not a cloud in the sky as Rhys Peart steps down from the air-conditioned cab of his Caterpillar compactor. Behind him, a Moxy water cart sprays great fans of water across a dirt road to suppress the dust kicked up by graders and dump trucks roaring by on the Ord-East Kimberley Expansion Project.

For Rhys, the activity adds to the enjoyment. "I love being out here on the machine," the 27-year-old operator says, looking back at his compactor.

Two years ago, the Kununurra father-of-three didn't have a single ticket for the heavy machines he now drives every day. "Now I have tickets for the rollers, compactors and loaders," Rhys says, adding that he's working towards his ticket for the Moxy dump trucks.

Rhys says working on the Ord project has provided significant benefits for he and his partner and their three daughters. "It's good money, so it means as a family we can get by pretty easy," he says. Another bonus of working on the Kununurra project Rhys says is that the four weeks on, one week off roster allows plenty of family time. "During my time off we head over to see the in-laws in Derby," he explains. "You can't do that sort of trip on a weekend."

Rhys says after two seasons working on the Ord-East Kimberley Expansion Project, initially with Charles Hull Contracting and now with Leighton Contractors, he has a clear idea where he wants to go with his career. "When this project is done, hopefully I'll continue to do the same thing somewhere else," he says. "Maybe I'll try the mines or even Inpex in Darwin, that might be my next project."



The **Ord-East Kimberley** Expansion Project

Persistence pays



For Ryan Walley, the journey to civil construction has been a long road, but ultimately his persistence has paid off

BY NATHAN DYER

It is morning smoko at Area 4 on the Ord-East Kimberley Expansion Project and a row of Moxy dump trucks is lined up beside a small crib room. Inside, workers are making coffees and chatting about their morning. Outside, Ryan Walley is sitting in the shade explaining how he ended up here.

For the 29-year-old father, the journey to operator on the Ord project has been a long road. Ultimately it is a story of persistence paying off. "It's changed my life, really," Ryan reflects. "From being a bit of an outlaw, I suppose, to now feeling like I've found my game and I'm on the straight and narrow."

After growing up in Broome and later moving to Kununurra, Ryan's journey has taken him to boarding school in Perth, to the mines of the Pilbara and finally back to Kununurra. "My first job was working for my uncle in Derby for his business, Marshall's Maintenance and Repairs," Ryan says. "We worked around stations doing fencing, yard building, concreting, or whatever was needed." He says boarding school, that first job, and his time in the Pilbara working for Rio Tinto taught him about hard work and independence.

Ryan says those qualities have held him in good stead for his current role as an operator on the Ord-East Kimberley Expansion Project. Initially working with Charles Hull Contracting, and now with Leighton Contractors, Ryan says a willingness to try new things is also important. "I've got my Moxy dump truck, Moxy water cart, scrapper, compactor and roller tickets, and I'm now in the process of getting my hours down on the grader," he says.

At the end of the day, Ryan says success comes with "having a go". "I'd encourage other young blokes to get up and have a go, you never know, they might find what they're looking for."