Chapter 5

Interactions that connect places

Introduction

The previous two chapters focused on histories of interactions between people in one particular location, Charlotte Waters, then broadened to consider people’s interactions with each other through, and with, a range of waterplaces. In doing so, my accounts of each place made reference to people’s actions in other places. For example, people’s ideals of water – whether they were camped on an eastern *mikiri* well dreaming of running water in the Cooper, or living on a failing bore dreaming of a deeper one – referenced their experiences or stories of the comparative potentials of water elsewhere (chapter 4). And while the buildings of Charlotte Waters were solidly fixed in one place, their materials were imported and constantly maintained from elsewhere, then re-distributed to other locations after their demise (chapter 3). They were a domestic base but also a point of arrival and departure for travellers and transported goods (chapter 2 and 3).

A general principle in operation here is that no one place is an isolate. Complex and engaging as any individual place may be, it cannot come into being or continue to exist as a fixed, bounded entity. Connectivity, as I will highlight in this chapter, is a constituent process in the construction and maintenance of places, and another contribution to their entangled status. This chapter asks, what are the practices that connect, how are they lived out, and what traces are
left by them? In it I will track connecting webs of interactions between places, so extending the theme of interaction between people, in and with a place.

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In 1872, the year in which the Overland Telegraph Line from Adelaide to Darwin was completed, the photographer Eadweard Muybridge in California began development of a technique which allowed a rapid series of sequential photographs to be taken by a battery of 24 cameras, fired in quick succession. His aim was to understand the motion of a horse by slowing and recording the moments of its movement passing the cameras. When finally successful in 1877, the technique allowed motion to be made visible in a series of stills showing its components.¹

His imaging effectively broke down the assumed clear distinction between motion and stillness. This connection provides a helpful metaphor for the work in this chapter. It applies not just to understanding or representing motion, but also to the practices of moving between places. There is a relation between stillness and motion; they are not opposites, but phases of the same process of movement.

I will slow down what is otherwise a blur of connections between places in the western Simpson area in order to establish what processes and practices generate them, via a series of engagements with particular examples, below. The interactive components of life which connect places that then show up clearly are: the objects that are circulated between places; the names given to places and the stories told that weave the places together; movement of people between places, and genealogical connections through family. These aspects are explored below. However, to separate these out is artificial and cannot be sustained. Soon their inherent flows and dynamism are reasserted, not artificially fixed in particular times and associations or traditions.

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¹ Muybridge 1955: viii.
Connection made through objects

A fruitful place to start to think about how connections are formed and referenced by objects, is to return to Christopher Giles’ 1870 discovery on the side of the Finke River channel, referred to in chapter 4. In a tree he found in a bundle containing two hundred yards of spun opossum hair and human hair string wound around ‘a glass marble of the largest size used by our boys, and containing the usual strip of tinsel or paper in the middle’ connected to ‘a mother of pearl shell with curious characters or marks engraved or cut upon the inner surface’. He judged this to be used in rain making, and replaced all the objects in their original position. He exclaimed that it was a ‘curious example of extremes meeting’: the marble from the settled south and the pearl shell from the far north.²

This conjunction of objects near Charlotte Waters raises several important aspects of objects which make connections. Firstly, there is the long distance exchange of valuable goods, which is an important feature of central Australian life. Secondly, the redefinition of the role or status of an object such as the marble in an altered context, as discussed in chapter 3, is one part of a broad ethos of recycling and the creation of novel assemblages.

Long distance exchange networks

Archaeologist Isabel McBryde’s work on central Australian exchange networks involving ochre, grindstones, stone axes and pituri has demonstrated their extent, from the Gulf of Carpentaria to the Flinders Ranges and Port Augusta and from the Darling River to Lake Eyre and the Finke River.³ Wankanguru men would travel to the eastern Simpson and south, joining with other groups on the expedition⁴ to acquire the highly prized ochre from the mines at Pukardu Hill in the Flinders Ranges, more than two months journey away. They exchanged boomerangs and spears with the Guyani owners of the mines.⁵ They sang the Pukardu song for setting out and returning along the traditional route, which followed a Story Line or Dreaming track that maintained and

² All quotes from C Giles 1894 Vol 3(6): 44-45.
⁴ Jones 2007: 357.
disseminated their knowledge of the route, and the geography of the landscape." They would also acquire stone for seed grinding from the Reeping Hook Hill quarries in the Flinders Ranges, and carry 30 kilogram cakes of the ochre plus the heavy grinding stone slabs back to the sandhill country."

The people of the Mulligan and Georgina River area produced a superior quality, specially prepared pituri, the highly prized narcotic related to tobacco. In good seasons some Wankanguru men crossed the Simpson to Goyders Lagoon, an intersection of communication routes from north, south-east and west, for large exchange gatherings."

This exchange was a cohesive component of desert life, its travel and ceremonies ‘important episodes in a recurring patterns of contacts and exchanges linking people and materials across great distances’ in a ‘complex web of connection’. The objects referenced far away, yet known places, featured in songs and stories. The travel to acquire them, and the objects themselves reinforced chains of connections between places and groups. They ‘transmitted knowledge, materials and artefacts between local and regional communities otherwise isolated by vast distances’. Journeys to the ochre quarries continued into the early twentieth century, with expeditioners taking advantage of travelling on the train between Marree and Leigh Creek when it went through in 1884. This enabled them to acquire ochre at less risk from pastoralists who were defending their sheep runs in the area. The important movement, stories and return to the place were all maintained, even though the mechanism was altered in the colonial context.

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In terms of involvement in long-range chains of connection, and the embeddedness of social interaction and acquisition of material goods, some parallels can be made with the practices involved in the importation of

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materials into the western Simpson area by the makers and users of the Overland Telegraph Line. Once established, the line became the dominant route-way for transportation and travel. The range and tonnage of late 19th/early 20th century building materials, domestic goods, bottles, food and equipment whose remains still lie on the ground surface of western Simpson homesteads and camps were all imported: the journey from Adelaide to Oodnadatta took three days by train after 1890, plus about a week on a camel dray or horse cart, following the Overland Telegraph Line track north and cross country from the line to a homestead. Families made the journey, combining acquisition of necessary and luxury goods with holidays in Adelaide. A photograph from some time before 1900, shows ‘Mr Hayes a squatter and family who have been to Adelaide for a trip returning to their station [taken by Bailes of Bloods Creek] at Hamilton Bore where we all camped together’ (fig 5.1).12 Its shows the cart piled high with trunks and boxes. Their importation of necessities was integrated with the maintenance of connection with familiar places and family.

**Recycling and novel assemblages**

The redefinition of the use of materials in altered context, such as the rainmaker’s marble, as discussed in chapter 3, is an intercultural aspect of a broader ethos of reuse and recycling in the desert. More prosaically, recycling is especially practical when materials are in limited supply, and have to be imported over long distances, so that they can stay in circulation. The original source is referenced or brought through into its new context by the object itself and its attached stories.

In 1938 the corrugated iron roofing from Charlotte Waters went into the new police station at Finke, and the stone to New Crown Station.13 This reuse would always be mentioned whenever the current ruins were discussed. The Irrwanyere rangers built their mid-1990s temporary kitchen and living area at Irrwanyere spring from spare parts.14 The late 20th century Finke residents knew the locations of all the wrecked cars along the tracks. Like other previously occupied places, they were stores of spare parts. In the same way, many of us

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13 AA Series No D960/0 B1937/2963; Series No. F1 Item No. 1938/592.
14 See fig 4.29, kitchen shelter between work shed and Eco-Cabin.
Fig 5.1 ‘Mr Hayes a squatter and family who have been to Adelaide for a trip returning to their station [taken by Bailes of Bloods Creek] at Hamilton Bore where we all camped together’. n.d. State Library of South Australia B17499
Fig 5.2 Metal Oppenhiemer telegraph pole from the turn of the last century used as a replacement horizontal in the Charlotte Waters stockyard. October 1997

Fig 5.3 An axle used to make a see-saw in the children’s playground at Mt Dare homestead. October 1997
have a kitchen drawer that holds a miscellany of bits of string, scissors,
matches, parts of things that have broken, rubber bands, nails, old washers;
things that you do not use everyday, and you only need in small numbers.
When a vehicle needed new wheel nuts, we drove 50km to an old burnt out
blue car with its wheels still on it, lying by the road to Finke. It had roughly the
right size nuts; they were filed to fit.

Less direct transfers were also common. A metal Oppenhiemer pole installed as
the telegraph line at the turn of the last century was used as a replacement
horizontal in the Charlotte Waters stockyard (fig 5.2). An axle was used to make
a seesaw in the children’s playground at Mt Dare homestead (fig 5.3). And
objects in previously occupied, now abandoned places were also a standing
reserve of useful items, as the following story tells.

The oven story, or when is an object not itself?
The oven in my story was a Simpson oven, made by the Simpson whitegoods
company of Adelaide, imprinted with its name ‘A. Simpson and Son.
ADELAIDE’ on the front, dating to the early 20th century. Rusted, it was a
simple cast iron metal box with a door and a hole for a missing chimney (fig
5.4). In 1996-7 when I recorded it, it was sitting near the side of a track that had
been recently re-bulldozed along the side of the Finke River north to Andado
station.

The oven was the most visible marker of a small early twentieth century
homestead known locally as ‘Tin Shanty’ (see location map fig 1.2).15 I carefully
recorded it in its archaeological site context, with photographs and
measurements, thinking of its iconic status as a Simpson oven on the hot sand
of the Simpson Desert, which was named for Simpson, who contributed part of
the wealth from the sale of ovens to fund Madigan’s explorations of the desert,
earning himself the bestowal of his name over the whole desert in 1929 (see
chapter 2). The informal homestead to which it had been central presented an
informative mix of historic and Indigenous material.

15 Rev. Bruce Plowman, ‘patrol padre’ for the Australian Inland Mission visited this homestead
between 1914 and 1917. It was a three-roomed cottage wholly built of galvanised iron, a few
sheds, a stockyard, the home of a stockman, his wife and eight children (Plowman 1933: 28-29).
Another account by the bushman Walter Smith remembers that ‘there was a lot of natives there
them days’ (Kimber 1996).
Fig 5.4 Simpson oven at Tin Shanty, July 1996

Fig 5.5 Simpson oven in Irrwanyere Rangers’ kitchen shelter, September 1997
The nub of this story surfaced when I returned to the site in 1997 to continue further site recording, and the oven was gone! I was sad, and angry. I felt that a historic site had been looted and an important testimony to a largely undocumented past denuded of its central hearth. I made my way to the Irrwanyere Rangers’ camp at the side of the Irrwanyere springs. A happy reunion followed with the members of the Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation who I had not seen for a year. We went to the kitchen shelter that they had constructed, and there was the oven, with the kettle on, the centre of activity, the hearth, the core of social life (fig 5.5).

My recording focus saw the oven as a connecting reference to the past, rendering it a cold place, suitable for measuring and interpretation. It was no longer an oven, but a representation of what an oven meant in this particular circumstance. This is an abstracting and distancing way of knowing it, whose purpose is to be able to report about it elsewhere, and compare it with others. In contrast, the people living in its neighbourhood saw it as an oven for boiling the billy on. They moved it physically in order to continue the line of its primary purpose, rather than moving it as a representation into a museum-like domain. Its historical ‘pastness’ did not rate for the Rangers as a relevant connection to attend to, whereas its continuing, if rusty, ‘hearthness’ did. It provided the core of the meeting place where we would brew the next billy of tea to fuel the next animated discussion of the connections between places for the history project.

As I had already recorded it as an artefact, part of the complex assemblage surrounding an ephemeral homestead on the river terrace of the Finke, its new location was linked to its prior one, a part of the shifting use of the landscape through the twentieth century. Both ‘cold’ representative oven record and ‘hot’ oven use-value meanings and spatial and temporal connections were simultaneously referenced, by the object itself, as well as by my text.

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‘The Story of the Two Girls’: people, place, things connected through story

On a hot day in late September 1997, we set out from the Dalhousie Springs Ranger station on the next of the program of visits planned by Bingey Lowe with Dean Ah Chee, Harry Taylor and Marilyn Stuart. I was under instruction to follow a bush track, only faintly discernable, which turned off the main track leading to Macumba station. ‘Who used this one?’ I ask. ‘Me’ Bingey said, ‘S my road, brought the Toyota in, rounding up the cattle, then truck ‘em to Oodnadatta’. Before the Toyota, he used a nineteenth century wooden wagon to travel between the station’s widespread stockyards, with his rations on board. He wanted to re-visit this wagon where he had abandoned it about 50 years before. He knew exactly where it was, and we did relocate it later, but on this first try I ‘turned off short’. Instead of hitting the two-wheel-rut bush track, we bumped through crabhole country amongst dense coolabahs and saltbush undergrowth. The bush had grown up thickly since Bingey worked in it. We got a puncture. Harry and Bingey left and headed off in the direction Bingey knew was right, his cataract-impaired vision notwithstanding, while I changed the tyre. I then walked in front of the truck to pick a route to open country again, with Marilyn driving.

This misadventure was rapidly worked up into an elaborate story, ‘The Story of the Two Girls’. This was re-enacted and re-told over and over. I recorded a version of it recounted by Bingey on the verandah at Anniversary Bore, many repetitions later (see box). With much laughter, attention was given to the small stages of unfolding events and actions, acting out the voices, milking the details. Plot-driven, there is no analysis or emotion reported. Noteworthy is the distinctive navigational role way-marking trees play in remembering how to return to a place (see discussion of navigation below).

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16 This rough land surface occurs in floodplains that are intermittently inundated. The dominant soil type is poorly-draining, grey self-mulching clay, which forms holes which are treacherous for travelling wheels and animal’s legs.
Right. Yes. From Dalhousie Springs, with the two girls, we left there, going to a place named Ooloorina, and we left anyway. We went along the road, goin’ on this Birdsville track, this Birdsville road, then turning off Macumba turn off, to Macumba station, Kidman station there. One road turning here somewhere and the girl says ‘I’m looking here along’. We couldn’t see it, too many grass. Kept going and didn’t seem to worry must’ve been thinking to go right along. So we turn off, see big coolibah, one girl says ‘Yes yes, go straight for that coolibah’, pretty bumpy, so we kep’ going, rocking along, go through the bush, acacia tree, get into this big thick salt bush, bumping along.

Go along, driving along rocking along. Gee, how we going to get through here?

Turn around, back back, ‘Oh yeah we can get through here’.

‘Real bumpy place here’.

We swung round here looking for this wagon, this old wagon.

Getting close to this water hole, no water there, water hole dry.

Next minute, I say ‘Think tyre flat’.

One of the girls hop out and say ‘Yeah tyre flat’.

We hop out, two men and two girls pull another tyre out to change ‘em.

Me, my mate walk off, never told ‘em, we just walked off. Old man gone.

Going along trying to find this old wagon. I think ‘Must be here’, all this scrub, long time since I been here. Bit of open there, on the flat, ‘Come around here’.

But the girls wouldn’t listen to me. One stood outside and one got in the car. We sat down and one came up on foot with cold water for us, we had a drink of water me and my mate.

Hop in the car, ‘Just follow this creek along’, we might get across somewhere.

Can’t get out from here; we in the middle.

Other girl didn’t know what to do, go backwards or the other way.
One girl walked off and the other jumped in the car, didn’t say nothing, started the car, backed it out of there, looking around to see if can see that other girl, see that arm waving up in front.
Follow that.
Go around through the lignum.
Onto the flat.
Look along for that road.
‘Alright’ they said, both of them said ‘Alright’.
‘I see ’im now, I see ’im now!’
Going along (laughter). I couldn’t stop, you know, follow along.
No, they reckon its here. I couldn’t tell ’em anyway, I just shut up. Kept going.
They said ‘Bit further’.
Little straight tree there, straight up and down.
Saw the road, ‘There’s the road, there it is!’ Say ‘You know the road, still know the road!’ Their eyes brighten up when we get on the road.

Follow this road anyway. Go around get on that road that we followed, here’s that one coming around here from Macumba station.
Must have been thinking ‘By gee, we’ll never go through that scrub again’.
I give them bit lesson see. [Laughter]

The track itself and the last location of the wagon which rolled along it are both places – significant locations of action, markers of direction, of purpose, part of the way the cattle country worked. They are also part of Bingey’s personal landscape of experience and authority. He had spent much time on this wagon, antiquated even when he was using it, travelling between yards, checking the cattle and the crews. It formed a point of distinction in a landscape that is marked all over by human action. By visiting it, showing it to others, it was reintegrated and animated in the current world of action and story. David Nash, a linguist who has worked extensively in Central Australia, also draws attention to this capacity: talking about places, retelling stories of trips, keeps places alive in memory.17

17 Cited by Hercus and Simpson 2002: 12.
Fig 5.6 Bingey Lowe with his old wagon, near Oolarinna waterhole, October 1997
We did reach the wagon without further complication on our next journey, four days later. Still standing, its wooden wheels and leather seat were weathered dry (fig 5.6). It was hot, so we sought out some shade on ‘clean’ – that is, sandy, non-prickly – ground near the waterhole to boil a billy. There was a white bird in a nearby dead tree that I commented on. Bingey said, ‘You will always remember this crane place’, and I do; such a detail pins down this particular visit from the many to the same area.

In another form of distinguishing memorialisation, Bingey took a Polaroid photograph of our destination that day, to record the pleasing sight of water in the long, narrow, but deep Oolarinna waterhole, and his visit. We then drove up a 1950s stockroad, gouged across the steep side of a sand-drift and gibber covered flat-topped hill, to near the Oolarinna stone arrangement. We kept at a respectful distance from the series of stone cairns, straight and U-shaped lines of stone, and a circular path made smooth by dancing. This is a potent ‘Old Carpet place’, where the ancestral Carpet Snakes camped for a long time, after they ‘came all the way up from Copley way’ (near Leigh Creek). It is associated with the Ewillina Carpet Snake stone arrangement near Anniversary Bore (see chapter 4), and another stone arrangement on a knoll nearby, where the Old Man Carpet is sleeping, curled up.

It was not possible, in a well-balanced learning of the country, to completely dissociate the pastoral-oriented places from the Ancestral places that made the landscape the shape that it is. The cattle and the industry based on them walked into and over this landscape. The cattle and their hooves were oblivious to where they were, but many Indigenous stockworkers were well aware that they were working in and around a landscape inherently full of such connections. In teaching the country, it was important to acknowledge the presence and potency of these places and connections, even if the primary lessons I was taught were not intended to go into the deeper, more restricted levels of meaning of the stories many of the places embody. As we drove through the landscape Bingey made asides about the Ancestral presences in the landscape: ‘That Cadney hill there, that dark one’; ‘that Dingo place’; ‘that Perentie head’; ‘that one Caterpillar place, green one’. It was an integral part of being in the landscape to attend to where these Ancestral beings travelled, creating the
landforms that subsequently mark their passage. However, at the end of the twentieth century, stone arrangements are recognised and retain their potency, but are sites of remembered ceremonial performance, not of direct performance; at least, the performance has become the visit, being there is the important expression of continued connection to the powerful place.

In these elements of a small area selected by Bingey as part of his organised program of place re-visiting, various registers of connection between places intersect. Different aspects are brought to the foreground depending on the story that is being emphasised. A privately evocative object, the wagon, serves as a marker-place that evidences Bingey’s personal history and role as head stockman on Mt Dare station. At the same time, the wagon points to the broader pastoral history of the region, the waterholes where the cattle were rounded up, and brings that history through into the contemporary lived landscape. Importantly, this cluster of associations is introduced by our guide Bingey Lowe in a way that also makes links into the travels of the Ancestral Carpet snakes that link together a chain of ‘Carpet places’. The ‘Story of the Two Girls’, a comedy, has been built into to the cumulative meaning of the place and will always be associatively linked with the collection of locations and stories nearby. Their inter-connections are actively retained through re-telling the stories when the appropriate places are re-visited. It is maintained as a ‘storied landscape’.  

There are three interlinked forms of connection between places in play here. They are based in individual experience, as in the ‘Two Girls’ misadventure; they are historical, as in elements of the pastoral landscape; and they are Ancestral. The landscape itself, its form, establishes integral linkages between the continuous Ancestral presence and places and an individual’s own relations to places.  

As discussed in chapter 1 above, spatial competency – moving through these networks of places – is both overtly taught, and learnt as an integral part of the process of travel between places.

Anthropologist Tim Ingold has a long-term interest in people’s mobility. He succinctly says, ‘Places are the destinations and points of departure of paths’. The two are equally involved components of a lived landscape. James Clifford’s related argument is that thinking about travel is an important component of understanding dwelling. Staying put or moving about are not immutable opposites, but emerge only out of the tension between them. This concept of dwelling-in-travel and travelling-in-dwelling is helpful in unpacking the connections between particular places, and the processes that distinguish them as ‘places’. The same questions need to be asked about the connecting paths as those that I have been concerned with in particular places: what interactions have shaped them, or been shaped by them?

Movement connects: being taught the country and learning to navigate

I was learning the history of the places of the western Simpson area, through being there, and through overt teaching of the technologies, actions and stories of the places. At the same time, I was being taught how to navigate between places; how to orient myself in the world, with each place related to webs of others. Dea Ah Chee would say ‘look at that tree coming up, see that angle in the branch, see, look at that so you remember when you come up from that clear place back there, keep that on your right, head for that next rise, looking at that old tree’.

He emphasised ‘Don’t just go by hills, by trees’ – using what they look like, the distance and direction between them to pin down the route in your memory. They are always testing my recall. When it was woefully less than it should be, Bingey would comfort me saying ‘she only a young girl, she alright’. Bingey would interrogate me about where the hill we had passed last week was in relation to a new place. We were always checking where we had come from, so

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19 Anthropologist Howard Morphy (1995: 187) refers to the ‘triadic relation between an individual, the ancestral past and the physical landscape’.
23 Macfarlane field notebook 1 October 1997: 99.
we could line up where we were going – hill tops, tree forms, land marks. A running awareness of the time taken to get to places, rather than the distance between them, was embedded into an itinerary of successive key features. This formed an ambulatory, progressive inner landscape.

Sailor and adventurer David Lewis, with a life-long interest in navigation, provides descriptions of way-finding by Aboriginal men in the Western Desert and in the western Simpson area. He traveled through this country with Aboriginal Elders in the early 1970s, making observations about the foundations of their profound locational competencies. He calls this picturing of the sequence of landmarks a ‘dynamic directional mental map’. He salutes the ‘almost total recall of every topographic feature of any country they have ever crossed’, especially in country where the variations in landforms were, to an unfamiliar eye, often minimal. This is not some miraculous capacity. It reflects long and intimate knowledge of a place, crossed with stories of others and of the Ancestors, so that no place is empty of meaning, and minor geographic features, including individual sand dunes, and the east and west faces of sand dunes, have distinctive names.

**Placenames**

Placenames are shorthand labels for geographic features which allow us to refer to them, find them again, pass on information about them. As mentioned in previous chapters, white explorers renamed and mapped the unfamiliar landscape they encountered with references to systems of power, funding and influence that lay outside the broad sweeps of country on which they were overlaid, introducing names such as Finke, Dalhousie and Simpson. These were arbitrary referents. ‘Writing and mapping reduced the need to have names that were memorable as having meanings that related directly to a particular place’. In contrast, nuanced Indigenous placename networks acted as ‘systematic mnemonics’, which evoked the specificity of a place through its name in a non-arbitrary relation. Topographic features were linked to webs of story, specific events there, people associated with that place. Placenames were an integral part of unfolding ancestral activities, travels and actions represented

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24 Lewis 1976.
26 Hercus and Simpson 2002: 11.
in story, song, dance, body decoration, sand painting. They formed networks in which sequences of placenames were arranged according to travels of ancestor: ‘by knowing the story one knows something about the place, and about its location vis-a-vis other places. Places are connected by story.’ But not always, as some names were esoteric and not included in common use.

For an example, extraordinary in itself, but not exceptional in the field of detailed landscape knowledge and relations of those who lived them, consider the lone whitewood tree on the escarpment above Moorilperrina (Pmare Ulpwere), near the corner in the Finke River (shown in fig 5.7). Luise Hercus told me that this place, the tree:

> represents the Native Cat *Atjilpe* Ancestor *Malbunga*, the boss of the Urumbula, leading off his mob on their journey. Having heard one of the verses sung by Jim Naylon *Arpili*ndika (who was the father of Linda [Crombie, an elder, living in Birdsville]) at Pandie [station south of Birdsville], recorded by Tindale in 1934,

Bingey led us to this tree and said that this was the place that the verse was about. – Such was the detail of the memory of these older people. I imagine that the Pandie people visualised this tree as they were singing to Tindale.

Embedded in this nuanced knowledge of places is a web of physical paths and conceptual connections between places and between them, people and histories.

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27 Hercus and Simpson 2002: 11.
28 Hercus and Simpson 2002: 12.
29 Hercus and Simpson 2002: 12. This nuanced landscape is only partially reflected in contemporary maps. However, some names have carried through, and are a repository of no longer spoken Lower Southern Arrernte words, such as Oomboomina Creek wet place south of Paradise Bore, which means ‘mushroom’.
30 The Urumbula song cycle and its route cross several distinct social and linguistic groups in its 900km path from Amewara – modern Port Augusta – to the western Simpson Desert. The song is sung in Arrernte, even in areas where that is not the spoken language, as the story relates to places in Lower Southern Arrernte country. The Dreaming, its songs constitute a dynamic link through country (McBryde 2000b: 158).
31 Tindale 1934.
32 Luise Hercus email to I. Macfarlane 28 February 2008.
Fig 5.7 A lone whitewood tree on the escarpment above Moorilperrina (Pmare Ulpwere) on the Finke. ‘It represents the Native Cat Atjilde Ancestor Malbunga, the boss of the Urumbula, leading off his mob on their journey.’ Photo and text courtesy Luise Hercus 28 February 2008
Wayfaring

**Loorka Lilla**
*Go on go on*

**Unya echiniga ooricka aranilla**
*Will you stay with me by and by*

**Unga elirra alpenne elirra pilchalpimia**
*You go quickly and return quickly*

**Tha kilchala linga pilchima**
*Where have you come from*

Lower Southern Arrernte phrases from Gillens’s language list, recorded at Charlotte Waters 1901

The ethos of desert life in which I was immersed as I was being taught the country involved daily travel and the planning of future travels, to check how a place was looking or how family were, for supplies, or to attend meetings and sports carnivals. The movements of others were also vigilantly tracked – the dust and sound of a car was met with speculation about who it could be, where they could be from, why they were coming. When they did arrive no one leaped up to inspect, as the newly arrived would come over if they knew the people in camp, but would stay away if they did not know you. Residual tracks were carefully read to monitor who had been through, and when.

Historian Minoru Hokari, working with Gurinji people in the Western Desert describes their ‘practice of everyday mobility’, as a ‘life of communicating with the country’: ‘their mobility is not for getting out of their home, but … for living in their home’ where ‘home’ is the massive sum of the component places that make up country, where family members live or have lived.

Tim Ingold defines as ‘wayfaring’ this form of movement where the act of travelling plays a part in defining who the traveller is, where ‘he is his movement’. The wayfarer is constantly on the move; life happens while travelling, places are mere pauses in the movement. Such a practice of wayfaring well describes the active daily engagement with country that the history project allowed, and the conceptual frame and life that underlay that. It also describes the actions of the Ancestors as told in their stories, and of the

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33 SLSA PRG 54/2/1-5 Rough notebooks kept by FJ Gillen 1901-2 Charlotte Waters words, dialogue and native names.
34 Hokari 2001: 54-5.
people of the area at the turn of the last century, as portrayed by Baldwin Spencer:

Apart from ceremonies of different kinds in the home camp, the one great break in the monotony of life is paying visits to strange camps. ... the man walks out of camp carrying his spears, spear-thrower, boomerangs and shield; the woman carries the youngest child across her hip, balances a pitchi on her head and, with one arm round the child and a digging-stick in her free hand, she is ready for the road. The girl children and younger women look after the puppies, they are never on any account left behind and, when unable to walk are carried in pitchis like young babies. If anyone chooses to occupy their home in their absence, by looking at their footmarks, they will see at a glance who has been there while they have been absent.37

The Ancestral figure and story to which an individual belonged in Lower Southern Arrernte practice was determined by which path of that Ancestor’s actions crossed through the country of their birthplace.38 Anthropologist Elkin attributes this emphasis on the paths of action rather than on sites to the mobility of desert life and scarcity of water. While this is no doubt true as far as it goes, there is a deeper cosmology at work which Minoru Hokari describes: ‘Dreaming has been active all the time. Dreaming tracks that connect sacred sites are not ‘roads’ that Dreaming beings sometimes travel, but more like a ‘river’ or stream through which Dreaming beings continuously move. Therefore the history of the maintained world can also mean the history of maintained mobility.’39

People who share affiliation with a particular Ancestral figure, who belong to the same track by birth, are identified with one another, with claims to hospitality and protection based on these links being respected.40 Both kin and ritual associations are integrated in a network of reciprocal exchanges. Expectation of these underpins the successful practice of high mobility. It also acts as a contributing rationale for it, with visits maintaining the structure.41

37 Spencer 1928: 238-239.
38 Elkin 1934/5: 171-2.
40 Elkin 1934/5: 171-4. TGH Strehlow also states that ‘the disciplinary measures of social control, the social obligations implicit in the intricate kinship terminology, and the whole system of territorial rights, were given their final shape by the challenges presented by the constant menace of recurring drought years’ (Strehlow 1965: 122).
Working in north-west South Australia in the 1970s, anthropologist Annette Hamilton has argued that there is a common assumption that pre-colonial patterns of Indigenous people’s mobility continued directly into colonial circumstances. This has often been framed pejoratively as a hangover of inevitable tendencies to ‘nomadic’ ‘walkabout’.42 She makes the important point that it was Indigenous people’s adaptations of their prior patterns of life to the early opening years of cattle station life that generated the particular forms of high mobility that were evident in the late 20th century. They were ‘not a direct preservation of “the past”, but the reproduction of an Aboriginal social and political economy which has its roots in “the early days” of European settlement’.43 She goes on to show that ‘two essential elements of this economy are the maintenance of networks of communication across a variety of living-spaces, with associated access to resources at those sites, and the ability to resolve the inevitable structural and interpersonal conflicts thrown up, by moving away from them.’44

Social and ritual requirements for mobility were congruent with the requirements of cattle station employment, as discussed in chapter 4. ‘Wayfaring’, where life happens while travelling, and paths are as important as stopping points, does describe well the form of engagement with country of a working stockman like Harry Taylor and Bingey Lowe. Bingey could travel through his vivid internal stockman’s landscape while sitting by the fire in his house at Anniversary. Eyes half shut, he re-visited in anti-clockwise sequence the 38 stockyards on Mt Dare, summoning up the country they are in as he itemised them all, including the lesser known ones (see Appendix 3). He summed up:

Lot of stockyards on Mt Dare, more than most places. Most places they have to night watch the cattle. Here just about every water hole you yard ’em’.45 ‘I never see any place like this. This got the record for the yard. Kidman, his country, I go there, don’t have many yards. Not even New Crown got that many yards, or Andado. I still backing old Mt Dare. Have a bet, always win; its got the most yards.46
He then went on to remember all the people who used to work in these places (see Appendix 3).

This evocation spelt out the connections running between a suite of deeply known places. Their summoning as a group was triggered by our work visiting stockyards in the south and east of Mt Dare station, reanimating the memories of who built the yards, where they camped, who worked there. The places and then the people who worked there were summoned up in a feast of recollection, one invoked by the other. Places were connected to each other through movement between them, and simultaneously connected to the people who made, used and maintained them. With the declaration of the Witjera National Park in 1985 and the end of the operational station, however, these connections became redundant and began to fall away.

The chains of related actions, people, stories which link places into a landscape are constituted as a network of references that are specific to the person making the links. Redundant, irrelevant or inappropriate points of reference are left out. This referencing is the basic way of distinguishing which of multiple potential landscapes one is navigating through. For example, stone artefact scatters are relevant references for an archaeologist tracing a pre-colonial landscape, but those places and things are no longer active reference points for anyone else. Or, travelling through the country, Bingey would re-locate faint wheel-ruts in the hard ground surface, only visible in the right light, not traveled by anyone else for perhaps 15 years, when the stockyard the route led to was last in use, not remembered by anyone else. These systems of reference are constrained, either actively or passively, by differential access to knowledge and to the capacity to travel.

Hence, in looking at the forms of these connections and how they are maintained, the circumstances in which they may fall away and be lost are also shown up. It gives another way in to this thesis’ theme of the relation between continuity and transformation.

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More than one road

We – the group of Irrwanyere members interested in ‘having a good look around’ the country and I – were comfortably camped in Bingey Lowe’s house at Anniversary Bore. Each morning would start with tea by the fire, which burned in a 44-gallon drum on the verandah, and a vigorous discussion about where we should go that day. One morning, during this debate, Bingey Lowe began to get angry. It emerged that he was increasingly frustrated by the way we kept going along the same track, one which was accessible, to see the same array of accessible places, when there were so many others places that needed to be visited.

For my part, my choices were influenced by what I saw as my obligation to my funding body and to the practices of my discipline. My field books contained lists of places that I needed to return to, in order to carry out more survey, more recording, to see the spatial patternings and contents of sites and capture them in notes and photographs (fig 5.8). I saw this as my job, my role as I didn’t know the places in any other way. I could then take the records away and show them to others who had never been there so that they would know at least something about it, and hear some of the stories. To do so, I needed to go to the same place repeatedly in order to record it. I was ‘not just looking, taking photos’ as Bingey pointed out. There was an incommensurability between the time it took to visit and look at a place and that of recording it. This different orientation in ways of knowing a place was an immediate example of the distinction between engaged, implicit landscape learning and overt teaching that has been a theme seen in previous chapters, and discussed further below.

The range of tracks that were habitually traveled had contracted markedly since the cattle were removed from the station land, and only the main tourist arterial routes were now graded and used. Large areas of the Mt Dare station and surrounds that were equally important to its operation, or integral to the sequences of Ancestral stories, were excluded from inclusion in the network of places that Bingey knew well and wanted to revisit. With his voice getting louder, he pointed south and east and west to clusters of places that we had not even been near. Our program of re-visiting places had reactivated the memories

49 Macfarlane field notebook 26 September 1997.
of further places and stories, and generated an active desire to reconnect with them, after up to 40 years of non-return. Besides, Bingey had taken on the responsibility of teaching me, and wanted to do it well. ‘You’ve got to get to know the country, can’t keep going to the same place’ he said.\textsuperscript{30}

\textbf{Fig 5.8} Recording mode: Ingereth Macfarlane recording a grindstone, with notebook, GPS, compass, colour and B&W cameras, video camera. Near Anniversary Bore, July 1996. Photo courtesy Steve Brown

\textbf{Fig 5.9} Charlie Hodgeson’s site recording form, October 1997
An analogous circumstance, and its ramifications, were recounted by anthropologist Fred Myers in Pintubi country. He tells how an older man wanted to teach some of the next generation about an important place. Two other older men objected, saying the place was too dangerous for the younger men. One of the would-be students replied ‘Then nobody will ever know about this place when you all die. If people don’t travel around out here, they’ll just go up and down this road only.’ ... In other words, his irony suggested, the place would be lost.51

Denis Byrne points out the importance - and mutability - of inter-generational knowledge transmission in maintenance of a landscape with its referents.52 People who know the stories or have permission to tell them die without passing on them on because there is no one suitable, due to other deaths or dispersals or unsuitable changes in circumstance. In the light of the intense and rapid intergenerational changes that followed the Overland Telegraph Line which are discussed in chapter 4, this can be seen as a major source of disruption to maintaining the spread of knowledge. The potency of stone arrangements endured, but other places came to be lost.

Oolita lost

Oolita was a major camp on the Finke River floodplain, the birthplace of many Irrwanyere members’ forebears of their grandparental generation. Raelene wanted to go there, where her great grandfather was born: ‘I will cry when I get there’.53 It features in many stories and is mentioned in Tindale’s 1934 account of crossing the sand desert. Bingey Lowe saw it when he was a young bloke droving:

Still thinking about that Oolita you know. I saw that when I was real young fella. In green time. Cattle settled and me and [? name] now in [?placename], he my witness. He young fella, younger than me. Older than me now, some people get real old real quick. West side of Finke River out from Everglades Bore. We kept looking back you know to see which direction we have to go to get there again. But never found it again since.

50 Macfarlane field notebook 27 September 1997. In response, we began to make journeys to more far-flung, less familiar parts of the region. The report ‘Keeping Culture Strong’ (1999) documents many of these.
51 Myers 1993: 44.
52 Byrne 2008.
53 Macfarlane field notebook 8 November 1996.
We see this place. Cliffs by the waterhole, water coming down the cliffs, rocks, this nice tree in front of the cliff. The old people used it a lot, lots of them things (makes gesture rubbing between fingers [stone artefacts]) and sticks in ground, humpy the old people made to sleep in.\(^{54}\)

Wurleys were still standing, and many hearths and artefacts were present. This important place has been lost for many years, however, as visitation stopped, the paths and connections grown over with dense stands of trees after the large 1973 floods.

**Mikiri wells re-found: text-aided recovery of lost places**

I asked Bingey about a particular named place I had read about. He was puzzled, and asked me ‘How you know that one? – from paper?’ There are cases where ‘paper knowledge’ can form a basis for return to otherwise lost places. Dick Bartell, Peter Clark and Luise Hercus were able to relocate the Simpson mikiri wells using their navigational and archaeological skills, directed by David Lindsay’s 1886 route description (see chapter 4).

**Archaeological sites**

Many of the places I recorded archaeologically in the area were long lost to memory, their connections forgotten. On another hot afternoon in late October 1997, we had travelled 10km into the western side of the 350km dunefield of the Simpson Desert. As a part of the Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation member ranger training program, I was demonstrating how to identify and record archaeological sites in systematic archaeological surveys at regular intervals, up to 80 km into the dune fields of the Simpson.

We soon found flaked stone artefacts, singly and in clusters. They were greeted pleasure and interest and a warm sense that ‘my people lived here’ by the Irrwanyere members participating. This evidence of occupation of a seemingly otherwise undistinguished dune field was cheering and affirming to them.

Filling in the formal site record card as demonstrated, one of the younger Irrwanyere members, Charlie Hodgeson became engrossed in creating an

\(^{54}\) Handwritten transcription of conversation with Bingey Lowe, Anniversary Bore, Saturday 20 July 1996, in Macfarlane field notebook.
evocative picture of the location of the artefacts on the side of the dune. His sketch gives a much better idea of the micro-topography of the artefacts’ location, the lie of the land, than a photograph does. I admired and appreciated it. I then found myself in the uncomfortable position of trying to persuade Charlie to add ‘X’s to his drawing to indicate where the artefacts he had found were specifically located, in order to fulfill the designated official recording purpose of the site form. Charlie was understandably reluctant to spoil his vivid landscape depiction with any such intrusion, and made the ‘X’s as small as possible (fig 5.9).

As John Berger says, ‘drawing is looking’. But he goes on to say that there are two aspects of drawing that sometimes co-exist, and sometimes do not. When looking so as to record, to take away and show others, what is drawn stands for something more than the subject of the drawing only. The relationship is intentionally a tripartite one between the drawer, the subject and an important distant audience. The relationship with the subject is abstracted, and sits in the past tense, that of ‘having been’. Much photography is aligned to this kind of drawing, providing ‘evidence of an encounter between event and photographer’.55

The contrast he makes is with drawing where the drawer enters into the subject, and the subject into them through the process of intent looking. Here a place or an event or person is evoked and the drawer is just as much evoked as the subject, the relationship is much more one of equality. Berger thinks of this as a ‘being there’ relationship.56

This revisits the distinction in forms of knowledge transfer which was raised in chapter 1: ‘explicit recording and teaching was yet another whitefella way of doing things, and in the future its products would be for whitefellas’.57

55 Berger in Savage 2005: 70.
56 Berger in Savage 2005: 70.
This is not an exclusive distinction; one can potentially practice either form of looking at or relating to a place depending on purpose and context. But the propensity for a recording-type relationship is greater for those people who are outsiders to that which they are drawing, or who have a strong interest in creating representations for outsiders.

In this case, as we worked together in 1997, Deane Ah Chee took up the technologies of recording, using the video and the GPS, and Bingey was conscious of my recording efforts, making sure I took photos ‘to prove to those others I had been to this place’, and orchestrating video and tape recording sessions of accounts of the places we were in. In turn, I organised longer journeys to more far-flung less familiar parts of the region. The report ‘Keeping Culture Strong’ (1999) documents many of these.

‘Every arrival is a return’

When navigating to these places, the emphasis in the teaching was always on how to get back to them. Instructions for finding them were always given in terms of return: ‘You’ll know next time how to get to this place’. ‘If you are perishing you will know where to go to get a drink’. This strengthened a future-oriented relationship with the place, based on the assumption of return which was intimate, detailed, recursive. This teaching stressed what I have termed ‘knowing how to return’.

As discussed in Chapter 4, Bingey Lowe’s choice of location of his homelands at Anniversary Bore was a longer-term form of return, referencing all the secular and sacred places of memory and action in the vicinity of the Ewillina waterhole, stockyard and stone arrangement, as rationale for location of his home there.

Luise Hercus says that there is a Wankanguru term meaning ‘leaving by one track only’, referring to the occasion of leaving not to return, in contrast to most leave-takings in which return is implicit.

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58 Hercus in Rothwell 2008.
Anthropologist Deborah Rose, although learning to know very different tropical country near Darwin, has independently identified the centrality of the concept of return, and expresses its moral force and emotional dimensions for the Mak Mak people who taught her. For them, ‘every arrival is a return’ she says.\textsuperscript{59} Further, ‘every return is a moral action, a promise fulfilled’.\textsuperscript{60} She shows that departure and return are a part of the rhythms of life ‘organised into patterns of connectivity that resolve themselves around interconnected ecopaces, and that the meshing of personal, seasonal, ecological, generational and ceremonial rhythms constitutes the heart of life’. In this future oriented mode of belonging, knowledge of one place is necessarily knowledge of how to go to it and from it to other connected places and all that they offer. The rhythms of departure and return, the duration of motion and stopping are not random but are patterned by these interconnections.\textsuperscript{61}

‘Emblems of accuracy and precision’

In contrast, if you do not know the country, another mode of connection between places which is the non-local mode of one way, linear passages through country, generally with no expectation of return, by surveyors, explorers, travellers and tourists.

Thanks to the unusually self-reflexive writing of Christopher Giles, one of the early surveyors to go through this country, we have a first hand account of ‘the method of traversing’:

Having decided on your ‘bearing’ or direction by compass, you proceed upon it, having previously ascertained the waling pace per hour of your horse and noted the time of starting the nearest half minute on your watch. As long as you do not stop and the course is not changed, there is nothing to do but take notes of the country passed through. These notes should be in writing, if you can write when your horse is jogging over stony tablelands at four and a half miles and hour and when the stones are the size of a forty-shilling pot – if you cannot do this, you must commit the features of the country to memory until the next halt. Or stopping … note the time by your watch and book it. Accordingly, my notebook … contains some amusing entries, such as – ‘8.30 halt to kill snake – start at 8.37. 8.45 halt! Stirrup leather broke start 8.48 … on reaching a creek or any

\textsuperscript{59} Rose 2002: 156-8.

\textsuperscript{60} Rose 2003b: 174.

\textsuperscript{61} All citations this paragraph are from Rose 2003b: 178.
natural feature out come the watch and note book ... at night the
day’s work is ‘plotted up’ that is laid down on the plan with the
creeks, hills etc filled in ... check at night with sextant or theodolite
with stars.62

A later surveyor, Charles Tietkins, had more reference points at his disposal
in the form of a network of trig points. He wrote of these cairns with passion
while on the Central Australian Exploring Expedition of 1889, not far north
of Finke:

noticed a trig Station upon a low scrubby hill, and in five miles
reached its foot. Here it may not be out of place to express the
hope that ere long this valuable work may be extended, and that
these beacons, emblems of accuracy and precision, will be seen
upon the mountain tops to the 129 meridian, and this vast
territory accurately placed upon our maps.63

Surveyor EH Lees’ 1885 map of trig points shows that trig ‘piles’ had been
constructed on many of the hills of the Witjera area (see fig 5.10).64 These
display a mix of local southern Arrernte names and surveyors’ namings. He
lists ‘Stations observed’ giving a web-like picture of the surveyed landscape of
the 1880s: Mt Emory, Mt Jessie, Mt Crispe, Mt Attacherrikana, Mt
Onguerrdinna, Mt Altander, Mt Rebecca, Mt Dillon, Mt Yangalee, Witcherrie,
Dalhousie, Mt Hammersley, Mt Dear, see Anacoora, Apperda, Weeahlakininee,
Mt Peebles, Charlotte Waters, Mt Hearne, Mt Anderson, Mt Rundy, Mt Daniel.

The trig piles were not always easy to use, as we can see from Charles
Mountford’s later, 1938 description and photograph (fig 5.11):

Smith, almost all the time since we have made camp, has been
trying to get observations of Mt Alinerta, the place where he and I
climbed to place the trig, and Mt. Etingambra. He has also been
endeavouring to fix his positions by star observations, and in both
methods, he had been more or less unsuccessful. Although he was
on the top of the sandhill at sunrise or before, the horizon, even as
early as this it was ‘dancing’. To my inexpert eyes, I could not
detect anything but an oscillating sky line.65

These were built to formal specifications, being up to eleven feet high with
an inscribed base stone below them, and a pole in the top (fig 5.12). The

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63 Tietkins 1891: 65.
64 E.H. Lees, surveyor, Trigonometrical Observation Book No. 18 1883-4: 53, 55, 56, 61, 62, 68, 95,
98, 101, 119, 131.
surveyor’s log for Mt Yangalee, near Witjera describes the trig ‘pile’ and centre stone as a ‘pole branded with the name of the Station and centered over a flat stone marked with a + in a circle’\textsuperscript{66}, and on Mt Jessie, his description is a ‘Pile of stone diameter base 10’6” and 11’ high. Pole (spliced) 15’ long upper and 4’ above Top of Pile. Branded with name of Station and centered over stone on ground marked with + in circle’.\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{65} Mountford diaries, HL Sheard collection, rare books and special collections, SLSA.
\textsuperscript{66} Trigonometrical Observation Book No 18 EH Lees 1883-4: 53, South Australian Lands Department, DENR Land Information Centre, Adelaide.
\textsuperscript{67} Trigonometrical Observation Book No 18 EH Lees 1883-4: 56.
Fig 5.10 ‘Data Plan’ of trig points spanning the NT-SA border, showing bearings between them, by surveyor Edward Herbert Lees, 6 September 1885. South Australian Lands Department, DENR Land Information Centre, Adelaide 1996
Fig 5.11 Charles Mountford’s photograph of surveyor AD Smith establishing the position of Ritchies’ Ridge, Leichhardt’s camp. Negative no 867-A Mountford-Sheard collection, SLSA
Fig 5.12 Example of official trig ‘pile’, SA Lands Department, DENR Land Information Centre, Adelaide 1996

Fig 5.13 Low stone cairn, 1997, looking towards Dalhousie Springs homestead, November 1997
Fig 5.14 Near Dalhousie Springs, 1926 ‘little heaps of stones places at intervals of two or three hundred yards along a line running roughly east and west across the mound country’ described by Baldwin Spencer as a boundary marker. Photo by Keith Ward, Spencer 1928: fig 31: 31-32
There are today numerous cairns throughout the area. These vary in form and location. At one end of the scale are the large, formal official surveyors’ trigonometrical points. The Dalhousie ‘pile’ is made of 17 drystone courses of the local limestone blocks, with one stone on top, 165cm high, 2m wide at its circular base. But alongside this official ‘pile’ on the hill behind Dalhousie homestead are other forms of cairn. These are much smaller, at less than 60cm high, with square bases, made from regularly sized unworked small local stones. There are a number of these along the high edge of Lowther Creek to the north of the homestead (fig 5.13), above Spring Creek and elsewhere through the landscape. Locations vary, although there is a tendency for them to be on low rises overlooked by higher hills, and often overlooking creek lines. They do not occur on the tops of prominent hills. Some have a few stone artefacts in the area around them. Although they are only 60cm high, they can be seen from a distance, but only if you know that they are there. These are difficult to label. All are now forgotten as active, story-laden places. It seems likely that they were made within a pre-colonial context. Various functions have been assigned to them by various commentators, as grave markers, water markers, place markers, way markers. Baldwin Spencer visiting Dalhousie Springs in 1926 describes ‘little heaps of stones places at intervals of two or three hundred yards along a line running roughly east and west across the mound country.’ This is at right angles to the line of those I recorded, which followed the creek line, and the cluster he depicts (fig 5.14) has a different form, with a large rock standing up in the middle of a circle of small ones. Spencer considered these to be boundary marker stones, marking the limits of different groups’ ‘hunting grounds’. The basis of his attribution is not stated, and should be viewed in the context of Luise Hercus’ informed statement that

Wangkanguru people did not talk about ‘boundaries’, there is in fact no such word in the language. They thought of the matter positively in terms of who ‘owned’ an area. They were conscious of places where their territory ‘cut out’ and somebody else’s began. Another way of talking about it was to say that one was ‘sorry’ because ‘that is the end of the country’.

However, country could have quite definite boundaries, and there were rules governing rights to who could forage where, but these were well known and

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68 Macfarlane field notebook 6 November 1996.
69 Spencer 1928: 31-32.
70 Hercus 1990: 152-3.
would not require marking.\textsuperscript{71} These cairns may have been part of a system of distinguishing parts of the landscape, but the way they operated is not recorded.

\textit{One road only: ‘the telegraph line is the Central Australian highway’}\textsuperscript{72}

The Overland Telegraph Line’s prime intended function was to convey telegraph messages without physical movement of the bearer of the message. But at the same time it was ‘the major central Australian highway’ along which officials, stock, supplies, scientists, padres and tourists travelled. It offered a strip to follow, directing strangers to the area to water and homesteads, the important aspects of the landscape that they needed to be able to find; those who wandered off it could perish.\textsuperscript{73} They could follow it blindly, without knowledge. But as they did, the route became more and more deeply incised into the character of the country and of the people who traveled it repeatedly.

A high degree of mobility along the line was the necessary corollary of the isolation of splinters of families in the region, with members of extended families widespread and distant, not co-resident. They kept in touch by telegraph, and through other travellers carrying messages, and the regular mail carts going up and down the line. There were differing motivations and experiences of mobility, illustrated below.

The Right Reverend Bishop Gilbert White visited the isolated telegraph operators and cattlemen in the Central Australian section of his Diocese of Carpentaria in 1901. He met Spencer and Gillen en route\textsuperscript{74} and gave ‘especial thanks to Sir Charles Todd and the officers of the Overland Telegraph Line, without whose constant and generous kindness to all wayfarers travelling in Central Australia would be most difficult, and without whose aid my own journey in particular would have been well nigh impossible’.\textsuperscript{75}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{71} Hercus 1990: 153.
\textsuperscript{72} Spencer 1896: 23.
\textsuperscript{73} The water map of 1903 offers a similar guide (chapter 4 fig 4.6).
\textsuperscript{74} White 1909: 28.
\textsuperscript{75}
\end{footnotesize}
Gillen describes a horse cart with the mail arriving at Charlotte Waters ‘with three long suffering and bedraggled looking passengers, one being a young woman who is going to act as a companion to the Hotel Keepers wife at Alice Springs… in all probability destined to become the wife of … some bold back blocker’.\(^76\)

In 1925 Albert Wallis in Alice Springs had a telegram to say that his mother was ill in Adelaide. To visit her, he set a record when he rode 560 km to the Oodnadatta train in three days on a camel, and had to be carried onto the train in a stretcher.\(^77\) Two families at Crown Point had their elder children at school in Oodnadatta, and eagerly sought news of them from passing travellers who had seen them.

For others, these journeys constituted life in themselves, in the ‘wayfaring’ way of being.

Allan Breadon describes a grueling pre-train horseback journey to the south, through floods. He says: ‘March 1878 as there was not much doing on the station I thought a trip to Adelaide would do no harm myself and others from Ellery Creek Station started away with enough rations to carry us down to the Peake cattle station. Rain caught us south of Dalhousie Springs.’ He tells how it rained all day and night, and he remembered that the previous year a similar flood had caused the occupants of the hut to spend several days up a tree until the water was low enough to escape. They rode through the night to higher ground, and his group continued south, taking a whole month to get to Adelaide through the floods, swimming the horses across rivers, stopping in stations to get supplies. Once there, he ‘hunted around until I was shin sore and had given up hope of seeing any of our partie’, when he ran into other ‘fellows’ who also did ‘a lot of travelling up and down anywhere between the Peake and Darwin’, at the Exchange Hotel, and with them ‘knocked about town for a few weeks’.\(^78\)

\(^75\) White 1909: 46.  
\(^76\) Gillen 1901 April 4 [1968: 19-20].  
Alexander Ross knew central Australia as well as any incomer - he had been on the survey exploration for the Overland Telegraph Line with his father John Ross, with Ernest Giles on his overland exploration to Western Australia in 1875, and then managed many stations, including Dalhousie Springs. He was then in charge of maintenance of government wells on the Overland Telegraph Line, between 1912-1914. He kept a diary, and although his entries are brief and work-oriented, they provide a glimpse of a working life on the line. He records his birth date as 1 March 1856, so he was 58 years old at the time. It was hard physical work; timber cutting, dressing and carting, stone carting and digging in order to construct or repair the working components of a water point. The new whip well he installed at Goyder Junction took a month to build.

In between works, he was constantly on the move north and south along the line, from one station’s bore to another. It was a one day buggy journey between Federal and Dalhousie stations; ten days to travel from Federal to Adelaide (17 - 27 August 1913). He reports that he had to abandon the bogged buggy until camel came along to pull it out (15 July 1913). He records the constant traffic up and down, up and down the telegraph line by drovers with mobs of cattle or horses, by station managers and their wives: ‘Henderson of Crown Point passed going north’; ‘P Underdown and wife passing going north’; ‘Jack Hayes and family going south’; ‘Archie Giles passed today going south with 700 Bond Springs cattle’ (1/7/1913); Mrs and Miss Hayes passing with mob of sheep for the south; ‘W McDonald arrived looking for work’ (29/10/1912); met Dick Taylor camped for the night. On 19 July 1913 the ‘railway survey parties arrived going north’. The mail also passed by, or ‘arrived and stayed for the night’. Ross also names the Afghan men with their camel loads who pass by, for example, ‘Muda Afghan arrived loaded for Alice Springs.’

He killed goats, which presumably travelled with him, for meat, and sometimes went in to a station for beef (Monday 7 Oct 1912). He sends telegrams for more

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78 Breadon, Allan D. ‘Reminiscences, 1875-1893, Mitchell Library ML MSS. 953 CY Reel 1765 [no page numbers].
79 Adelaide Chronicle 10 February 1938: 16e ‘Mr Alexander Ross dead’.
stores ‘Send 15 pound Tea 5 lbs tobacco 20 pounds Raisons first chance Ross’ (8 March 1913). He provides a list of requirements:

- Half ton flour
- 5 cwt sugar
- 50 lbs tea
- 24 lbs coffee
- 1 case jam, peaches, pears, prunes
- 28 lbs sago
- 50 lb rice
- 2 doz lemon
- 1 case pickles
- 1 case Sydney Assorted meals
- 4 tins Keens Mustard
- 4 doz Baking Powder
- 50 lb raisons
- 50 lb currants
- 1 case tomato + ketup (sic) sauce
- 20 lb potatoes
- 2 case pineapple
- 1 case salmon
- 1 case onions
- 1 case carrots.  

It is not clear how long these stores are intended to last, but this list of provisions caters for more than the bare necessities. It can be compared to Allan Breadon, working as a drover up and down the same part of the line in late 1876, who describes scurvy among the stock drovers as an accepted part of the work:

- In December our camp began to show signs of scurvy especially Warburton ad Campbell. Myself not too bad loose teeth Bleeding a bit. The other chaps were starting to swell in the legs and had to get away. Charlotte Waters was of course now the only place to go where they could get medicine lime juice and that sort of thing and milk.  

Ross felt the physical wear and tear of this life, writing ‘Resting today. I am far from well, something wrong inside. My good health of old has clean gone.’  

And yet the next day he was carting sand and digging out foundations, carting a load of wood and putting up a bough shed at Wire Creek well. He also shows flickers of sentiment towards his distant family, sending telegrams to his wife, presumably in Adelaide: ‘wired the wife about hat’ (Sunday 27 Oct 1912); ‘posted wife 27 pounds’ (6 July 1913); ‘Alice Springs, resting, and wrote to Chief and to my dear girl Ruby’ [wife or daughter?] (29 March 1914 Sunday). The only way to see her was by yet another journey south, ten days unless the track is flooded.

Some wives accompanied their working husbands. The traveller Philippa Bridges, who crossed Australia on a camel in 1920 describes a bore drillers’ wife she met near Charlotte Waters: ‘Mrs Johnson, whose husband is just completing

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81 SLSA PRG 161/6/ Diary of Alexander Ross, 26 October 1912.  
82 Breadon, Allan D. ‘Reminiscences, 1875-1893’, Mitchell Library ML MSS. 953 CY Reel 1765 [no page numbers].  
83 SLSA PRG 161/6/ Diary of Alexander Ross, 13 March 1913.
the new well. They were living in a tent and Mrs Johnson told me that tent life was quite comfortable until the wind began to blow, when the dust distracted her. In that little canvas home she seemed to have everything necessary to civilised life’.\[84\]

In the 1940s, Madigan tells of how those visiting the remote south from central Australia would congregate in Adelaide. He says:

to get information about Central Australia all you need to do is to pay occasional visits to the “Black Bull” in Hindley Street, Adelaide. There you will meet in due course all the cattle men from the Centre, particularly during a good season, for the occasions, too few and far between, when there are cattle fit for the market and cheques are coming in are always the family holiday times, and the “Black Bull” is the Mecca of these far-scattered people ... it is the recognised rendezvous.\[85\]

‘Holiday’ visits from to the capital were common and popular from 1870, for the treats they offered - the Adelaide Horticultural and Agricultural shows, the Botanical Gardens and the Zoological Gardens (from 1883), the art gallery, photographers’ studios, shops, and opportunities to meet friends, family, politicians and business partners.\[86\] Many also visited because they were ill, Adelaide having the main hospital, or to attend secondary school.\[87\]

**Tourists**

Tourists also only follow one route, but to an even greater extent than travellers such as these. Now, most contemporary visitors to the Simpson Desert experience it as tourists. They are destination-oriented, skimming along connectors that link a series of points, not interested in the path between. A characteristic ‘trip’ consists of huge amounts of driving, following maps issued by the Department for Environment and Heritage, stopping at the designated stopping places where water is available. The archetypal unfixed persons, they are defined by their out-of-placeness.\[88\] They approach it as a novel or exotic environment. The emphasis is on the travel, the challenge of that in 4WD country. Difficulty of access and the challenge to the mettle of their equipment

\[84\] Bridges 1996 [1920]: 164.
\[85\] Madigan 1946: 20.
\[86\] Hirst 1973: 31-4.
\[87\] Hirst 1973: 34-37.
is partly what attracts people. There is also the hint of a possibility of purification or exaltation through effort and extremity.

The Overland Telegraph Line offered a challenging drive for motorists almost as soon as there were vehicles to drive. In June 1908 an open-topped Talbot driven by Harry Dutton and Murray Aunger took 52 days to reach Darwin and become the first car to travel across Australia. This was commemorated with a reenactment of the trip, and a travelling exhibition in 2008. In 1925 Philip John Brewer photographed his motoring party at Charlotte Waters (fig 2.31) and Theodor Bray recorded their arrival there in 1927 (fig 2.29). Some of the worst terrain on the track was between Oodnadatta and Alice Springs, with creeks and sand hills to cross. ‘Roads were unformed, maps were incomplete, accommodation sparse, few people were met on the road, medical aid was almost non-existent’. Petrol supplies were sent in advance by camel to selected depots along the Overland Telegraph Line.

Today, the former Mt Dare homestead is a busy stop-over for the crowds of winter-month 4WD travellers heading east across the sand desert to Birdsville, or south from Alice Springs, via old Andado station, or coming north from Oodnadatta, stock up on petrol and stores, have a cold drink, pass on information and traveller’s stories. Self-described as ‘South Australia’s newest hotel’, with its high ceilings and mahogany bar it was completed in 2004. It replaced the old station kitchen that had been a shop and ‘Bingey’s bar’ from 1989, run by Phil and Rhonda Hellyer, but eaten out by termites. Its gibber stone bar still stands, and is now used as a BBQ. The new managers, Mel and Dave Cox from Victoria own the commercial lease. Mel has set up the ‘Charlotte Dreaming Art Gallery’. This displays and sells her own watercolours of local sights such as Dalhousie Springs, stockyards, sand dunes. There is also a large array of paintings, carvings and woven baskets made by local people from Finke and the Charlotte Waters homelands as souvenirs, echoing the purchase of Erlikilyika’s carvings by visitors to Charlotte Waters in the early 20th century (see chapter 3, Appendix 2).

88 Ingold 2007: 77-9. He refers to this mode of movement as ‘transport’.
89 News Release March 11, 2008, Ian Digby, Adelaide Motor Show Executive Director. The same pair had made an earlier attempt the previous year, but reached an impassable bog at Tennant Creek (Wright and Goldman 1993: 9).
90 Wright and Goldman 1993: 9, 16.
Mt Dare also sells tee-shirts and car stickers proclaiming ‘I crossed the Simpson Desert’, part of a long emphasis on ‘crossing’ as a significant challenge. After Colson in 1936 and Madigan in 1939, in 1973 conservationist Warren Bonython and artist Charles McCubbin were ‘the first white men to cross the Simpson Desert on foot’ towing a cart of supplies. They were followed by Paul Sharp, a 22-year-old forestry student who qualified as the ‘first white man to walk alone across the Simpson without assistance’ in August 1983. Hans Tholstrup in 1982 did not make this classification because he took some food from travellers, and neither did surveyor John Gibson in 1970 because he had support vehicles. Bob Beer was heralded in 1980 as ‘the first to run across the Simpson’, 420km from Alka Seltzer Bore to Birdsville. ‘No one had done it before, it was a challenge’ he said. In 1977 Billy and Errol Pinkerton were ‘the first to cross in conventional vehicles’, 1000km from Oodnadatta to Birdsville. ‘Their advice to anyone with thoughts of trying this trip is “Don’t”.’

The emphasis in these conquering accomplishments is on the transfer of the traveller as quickly as possible from one side to the other, alive, with no interest or engagement with what there was in between the points of departure and arrival. Haste is part of this form of relation, and the landscape we see, a ‘view’, tends to be more susceptible to pre-designation, being read as representation of something, in this case the generic ‘desert’, while the landscape we come to know through local practice often challenges that.

One way of increasing that local experience is by providing help in accessing it through interpretative walks and signs. Most of the contemporary 4WDs ‘crossing the Simpson’ start at the camp ground at Dalhousie springs. Because of their numbers, they had compacted the ground near the main Irrwanyere spring and there was excessive run off into the pool. Most who stayed there only knew it as a swimming hole. The National Parks service undertook regeneration of the plants around the spring and a new ablutions block was provided. Members of Irrwanyere provided advice on the development of

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92 The Advertiser 3 August 1983, ‘Paul ends Simpson Desert trek with a cold beer in Birdsville’; Canberra Times 3 August 1983 ‘Forestry student is first across desert’.  
guided or self-guided walks to Kingfisher Spring and around the Irrwanyere spring, giving information about the stories associated with them, the plants and their uses, the Lower Southern Arrernnte language and culture in 1998, offering fast-moving tourists a way to slow down and access more than own experience of the place.
**Fig 5.15:** Lambert Centre, August 2007

**Fig 5.16:** Road sign to the Lambert Centre, with additional comments, August 2007
Fig 5.17: Lambert Centre ash mounds, August 2007

Fig 5.18: Pits and mulga stumps at Lambert Centre, August 2007
Fig 5.19: Lambert Centre logbook holder, August 2007

Fig 5.20: Kunst family monuments, Lambert Centre, August 2007
A conclusion approached through the Lambert Centre

The Lambert Centre is a place that picks up on the themes of connectivity that have been explored in this chapter, in a surprising example.

If you turn east off the Stuart highway just south of the Northern Territory border, then turn left after 130 km, there is 12km of winding sandy track leading to a clearing in the mulga and an unexpected monument. It is a scaled down replica of the distinctive flagpole of the Federal Parliament building in Canberra, built from welded square metal by the Queensland Branch of the Royal Geographic Society of Australia as a Bicentennial project (fig 5.15). It marks the geographic centre of the Australian landmass, as laboriously calculated from 24,500 points at the high water mark of Australia’s coastline, as the plaque attached to it describes:

This plaque was placed on 15th September 1988 by members of the Royal Geographic Society of Australia (Qld) Inc. to mark the geographic centre of mainland Australia.

This point has been calculated on behalf of the R.G.S.A. by the Department of Geographic Information, Queensland, using the most accurate data available at the time of computation. This point is a new geographic fact and is simply described as the planimetric centre of gravity of mainland Australia.

It was opened on 15 September 1988, with guests of honour Bruce Lambert, OBS, former Director of the Division of National Mapping, and Len Beadell, ‘another of Australia’s great surveyors’, plus almost 100 members of the Royal Geographic Society of Australia and the entire population of Finke present. It is located, with the leaseholder’s permission, on Lilla Creek Station.

As a formal monument, it is a heavily loaded signifier. It shouts statements of centrality, territoriality, ownership, and omnipresence. However, beyond these more or less intended outcomes of its construction, are the local spatial and material alterations of the landscape that have followed its construction. These can be observed as they accrue. Firstly, the Lambert Centre was added to maps, and later web pages, and so became a named destination. Numerous bush
tracks have multiplied around it, with new ones added when the old one becomes impassable. Formal and informal signposts have proliferated around these tracks, and have been further annotated (fig 5.16). As people camp nearby, they compact the ground, cut mulga trees for firewood, and leave campfire ash mounds, tins, plastic and bottles, and dig waste pits (fig 5.17, 5.18). A feature of the area around the flagpole is massive ash heaps: in 2007 there were five clustered only 12 – 35m from it. The large ones were about 2.7m across and are spaced only 10m apart. As people prefer not to camp on top of others’ remnants, a pattern of these burnt patches 5-6m apart covers the surrounding orange sand. Some visitors choose to camp further away, and leave smaller discrete hearth remains. There were also pits dug for toilets left open within 50m of the flagpole, and toilet paper blowing around, as it does not rot in the dry conditions if not buried.

Since the initial insertion of the main flagpole in the landscape in 1988, a series of installations have been added on or around it. There is a sign that commemorates Bruce Lambert, put up after his death in 1992. There is small metal sign on a post, several meters away from the flagpole but in sight of it, which reads: ‘This plaque was placed here to commemorate a 4WD survey from Adelaide to the Centre of Australia April 1999, [names of six] – an Australia community research project’. They evidently brought the sign and the post with them ready to install. Another wooden marker retains only four holes where a plaque has been removed.

A Visitor’s Book was established on-site by Toyota Landcruiser Club members from Melbourne, and Alice Springs locals in 16/9/1990. They constructed a special container for it, from a jerry can on a post, the base cut out as the door (fig 5.19). A metal label is welded to the outside: ‘This Visitors Book was placed at the Lambert Centre, [Latitude and Longitude] on the 16th day of September 1990 by the Toyota Landcruiser Club of Australia (Victoria) Incorporated.’ Inside the container people have attached stickers from four 4WD clubs and a tank shop: ‘the big tank for a big country’, and placed their cards inside – Pinky’s Plumbing, SA; Toyota Shop, Vic; Radios SA; ‘L’Abruzzese manufacturers of egg noodles, Glynde SA, say ‘finally made it!’.
In October 2008 I went to the home of the Toyota Landcruiser Club Secretary in Melbourne and studied the six volumes of visitor’s comments that had accumulated to that point.

Visitor characteristics

The visitors came from all states of Australia, including Tasmania – one visitor wrote ‘as usual it [the calculation] doesn’t include Tasmania, all the more reason for succession’ (22/7/96). Approximately 25% of the entries were from overseas – Finland, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, France, Germany, Ireland, Scotland, Belgium, Netherlands, Spain, Italy, UK, Canada, USA, Japan, NZ.

There was a steady trickle of visits by local people as well. They came individually and in groups from Finke, Alice Springs, Andado Station, Kulgera and Lilla Creek - ‘Hi, we live here!’, ‘A small deviation from the bore run’.

Aboriginal groups visited from Mutijulu Community NT, the Kintore Aboriginal Community, and the Mimili mob, SA.

Repeat visits were recorded. For example: ‘My fifth visit from Alice Springs’ (8/5/08); ‘Third visit here, ’94 and ’01. Love it’ (5/6/08); ‘Second visit; company this time’ (9/6/08).

Over 9000 people signed the first visitor’s book, which covered eight years, 1990-97, which averages as less than 100 visitors per month. 5,300 signed the second volume covering four years from 1998-2001, which is 110 on average a month. 4,100 signed the third book dating between 2001-3, only 20 months, an average of 200 visitors a month. This adds up to 18,400 visitors in 13 years; no doubt an under-estimation as many do not make an entry.

What were the motivations for their visits and their responses to this one-off place?

Motivations for visiting

‘Because it is there’ seems to be the underlying reason for people to make the effort to go to the Lambert Centre. For local people it presumably offers a destination for a day trip, somewhere to take visitors. For everyone else the
target is a long journey away. They know it is there because it is marked on maps and appears on web sites describing tours of central Australia. It provokes interest in testing their vehicles. Many mention the kind of vehicle they were driving, which model 4WD, and how well it has performed.

Attaining the centre on other forms of transport was also boasted about, for example: ‘Bike crew from Albury, NSW, two surveyors amongst us’ (4/8/07); and ‘Mini Mokes – we made it. We drove, we came, we conquered. 4WD my ass’ (8/6/08). People travelling across Australia include the Lambert Center in their itinerary, as part of completing their point-to-point traverse (see quotes below).

The remoteness and the character of the surrounding desert country of the Lambert Centre appeal to many:

6/7/07 ‘magnificent desolation’ – Netherlands
25/6/07 ‘remote’
21/7/07 ‘What a privilege to be here’
5/7/07 ‘wow’,
18/7/07 ‘great country’
29/7/07 ‘Fantastic!, Choette!, Vispaniate! (USA)

Individuals associated with the history of the Lambert Centre, or with travel and exploration in central Australia re-visit: Anne Beadell (wife of Len) ‘en route to Giles Meteorological Station 50th anniversary, memories revisited’ (30/7/06); ‘Klaus P. Voigt, Canberra from Auslig (formerly NatMap) that computed the coordinates for this point’ (12/7/91). ‘West to east half way across Australia we made it. 4WD across the heart of Australia, Leyland Bros 40th anniversary tribute, Steep Point WA to Cape Byron NSW’ (9/8/06). A joking reference to central Australia exploring says ‘Maurie Burke here – didn’t bring Wills on this trip, needed to get back’ (23/5/08).

Twenty-five people went to the Lambert Centre to celebrate the new millennium from Sydney, Canberra, and Adelaide. They included Jennifer Lambert, daughter of Bruce Lambert for whom the monument is named. Twenty-three more turned up on January 1 2000, to make a millennial party of 50 people camped around the flagpole. They wrote: ‘great place to celebrate the millennium’ (30/12/99). ‘2300km for a New Years Eve Party’.
‘What a wonderful indulgence to come here - so soft-centered!’ (1/1/00).

The desire to spend the momentous millennial night at the Lambert Centre is linked to the primary motivation for visiting it: the lure of the idea of ‘centrality’ in all its variants. A fugue on the dimensions of a central geographical location, values that are held to be central, and the quality or status of being at the center are worked through in people’s responses. They bring out an array of positive ideas of middle space, prime importance, patriotism to the flag, love of country, democratic government, achieving emotional and psychic ‘centeredness’, and analogies of geography to the body. These are counter-poised by an array of anti-politician sentiments, calls for recognition of Aboriginal presence, complaints about the difficulty of access, niggles about the accuracy of measurement of the site, play on the distance from the sea, and disgust at the mess which follows people’s un-managed visitation, all of which are qualities or positions that run counter to the positive glow and valour of ‘centrality’. The singularity of the monument is such that it can contain all of these readings, often simultaneously. Examples of these reactions and relations to the Lambert Centre taken from the six visitors books 1990 - 2008 are given below. They are a sample I selected as representative of the spread of comments, they are not intended to be comprehensive.
**National pride**  
2/2/98 ‘Core of my heart my country’  
17/7/00 ‘It is an honour to be in the middle of this great country’  
8/9/06 ‘Here from Bendigo, the centre of Victoria. What a great country to be in at any point!’  
7/7/07 ‘not just centre of Australia but centre of the whole universe’  
17/4/07 ‘a great feeling to be in the middle of Australia!’  
6/7/07 ‘I touched the centre of Australia’  
5/7/07 ‘a landmark’  
20/7/07 ‘awesome spot, the real centre’  
24/5/08 ‘center of the universe to us at least. Love the red earth and peace.’  
24/5/08 ‘I went to the middle of the middle’  
25/5/08 ‘Saskia in the middle of everything!’  
9/5/08 ‘great to see the Australian flag flying proudly’

Several visitors saw the symbolism of the flag in a more critical light:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14/8/06</td>
<td>‘put up an Aboriginal flag too’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/4/99</td>
<td>‘how about an Aboriginal flag at the center’.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Achievement of a full set of centers, corners and edges**  
14/9/06 ‘all the extremities, now the centre’  
11/2/06 ‘just five continents to go now’ (from UK)  
14/2/06 ‘the centre on Valentines Day, how romantic. Been N S E and W now the Center.’  
26/3/06 ‘done the Cape. Done Wilsons Prom. Done Byron, done West Cape, now the Center.’  
6/8/07 ‘Made it to the center and now for the rest’  
18/7/07 ‘Been to Cameron, Haddon, Poeppel and Surveyor General’s centre and corners, and this is the last place in the corners and centres – Great spot!’  
8/8/07 ‘completed the 4 corners and now the centre’  
5/6/08 ‘All roads lead to the centre of Australia’  
14/6/08 ‘now only the SW to go.’  
19/5/08 ‘We’ve been everywhere man!! Another tick on the list!’
Psychologically ‘centered’
24/5/08 ‘needed grounding and centering after work so I travelled to the ‘dead’ center. Far more life than anticipated’
21/2/98 ‘For the first time in my life I feel totally centered’
27/5/08 ‘balanced in the center of the Red Center’
30/5/08 ‘we’ve never been so ‘centered’ before!’

Analogy to the body
23/8/06 ‘in the guts of Australia!’
10/1/06 ‘I’ve now seen the bellybutton of Australia’

Humorous variations on the theme of centrality
11/4/06 ‘center of the flies too’
3/4/98 ‘just passing, thought I’d drop in, hope you’re not in the middle of anything’
13/8/06 ‘nice central location but no pub’
8/07/07 ‘I can say I have driven around the centre of Australia’
11/2/06 ‘in the middle of nowhere so it seems’
9/8/07 ‘great for swimming’
7/8/07 ‘its red’
7/7/07 ‘centrally located to all Australian beaches!’
11/3/06 ‘Bulls eye!’
20/5/08 ‘any sensible surveyor would have found a more accessible spot to call the center!’

References and comparisons with Parliament House, Canberra
3/9/00 ‘the centre of Australia is better than the capital of Australia’
30/8/00 ‘been there done that’ - a Canberra visitor
22/4/06 ‘I go around the big one each day but this is way more special’ (from Canberra)
21/2/98 A German visitor suggested ‘build your capital here’
16/5/08 ‘the monument is a great replica of the one at home in Canberra’
17/4 06 ‘a better place for our flag than Canberra’
8/6/08 ‘looks like a good spot for our politicians, nah, would spoil the place!’
A number of visitors picked up on the technical aspects of measurement, and from the 1990s had access to their own GPS measures and quibbled with the official measure and siting of the monument: for example, 29/06 ‘my GPS must be inaccurate’; 11/4/06 ‘I want proof’!

Finally, many had critical comments about the road and the conditions around the monument:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7/7/07 ‘this is Australia, and the road is a disgrace to the country’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/6/07 ‘Dust and more dust’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/8/07 ‘why so many bends in the road!’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20/6/08 ‘its very hard to find the center!’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/6/08 ‘track needs work’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20/8/06 ‘too much rubbish. The site is terrible compared with August 2005. There should be no camping, fireplaces within 50m of the monument.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/7/07 ‘Needs a dunny’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/7/07 ‘good camp site, disappointing toilet paper everywhere! Keep Australia clean!’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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In visitors’ embracing of Cartesian space with its grids, corners and centres and neatly ordered world so enthusiastically there is an extension of the desire expressed early by explorers Charles Sturt and John McDouall Stuart, who were in pursuit of a much desired centre, The Centre.

Charles Sturt famously wrote:

> Let any man lay the map of Australia before him, and regard the blank upon its surface, and then let me ask him if it would not be an honourable achievement to be the first to place foot at its centre. Men of undoubted perseverance and energy in vain had tried to work their way to that distant and shrouded spot.96

But it was Stuart whose foot arrived first at this honour, sixteen years later:

> Sunday, 22 April 1860, Small Gum Creek, under Mount Stuart, Centre of Australia - today I find from my observations of the sun, 111° 00’ 30”, that I am now camped in the centre of Australia. I

96Sturt 1849 vol II: i.
have marked a tree and planted the British flag there ... the emblem of civil and religious liberty.\textsuperscript{97}

‘The Centre’ transcends the everyday, it is the centre of all Australia, not local but national, so the emblem selected for it is the national flag, or the Federal parliamentary flagpole, combining spatial centrality and centrality of values of democratic nationhood. It is a conceptual centrality, as it is central and yet at the same time remote.

An evocative personal take on the concept is that of the Kunst family of Gympie, Queensland. Their entry in the visitors’ logbook reads ‘we placed our family monument here on this day’ (5/09/2000). They have embraced all that the Lambert Centre represents. Away from the main concentration of camping impact, approximately 100m from the flagpole under some mulga trees, a small personal history has been remembered. The Kunst family came well prepared to add their mark of their presence at the Center. They brought the equipment to cast a concrete plaque in a bucket, in which they have inscribed their names – ‘Clyde Esme Kunst Family Gympie Sep ’00’. They then re-visited in 2006, after they had had children, and created a second ‘monument’. It reads ‘Kunst Kayden Declan Abby’, with the handprints of the three children, cast in concrete with a wooden frame, the letters painted in colour, with a metal pipe in the middle to secure it. It has been built to last, with a great deal of care and forward planning (fig 5.20).

The Lambert Centre may be a national monument to Cartesian geography beaming out its symbols loudly, but it has also been cumulatively enfolded in small-scale, lived human worlds. It lies as far on the spectrum of an arbitrary place as you can go, yet it is still capable of being built tenderly and intimately into people’s lives.

The focus here is on the connections being made both consciously and inadvertently by the builders and the visitors to this one-off place.

\textsuperscript{97}Stuart 1865: 164-5.
The Lambert Centre contains these themes of various contrasting forms of connection being made and maintained in a highly concentrated contemporary example. It shows up the non-binary division between external ways of knowing places, related to external systems of referencing and power, and embodied, experiential ones that enfold people into place and place into people directly.

It is not a place whose many dimensions are easily represented in photographs or descriptions. It is somewhere for which the quality of ‘being there’, or of having been there, makes a difference. This derives perhaps from the sheer oddity and unexpectedness of the form of the monument in its location.

It is the ultimate expression of a metrically conceived relation to land. It provides an extreme example of a place whose location has been constructed on ‘ghost lines’ of geography, at an arbitrary geographical point, as opposed to one that is topographically embedded. Its origins are in the abstract world of an ideal smooth surface, which has centres and corners. Its meaning derives from outside its location entirely, and has nothing to do with the place it is imposed upon. These are the face values for which people make considerable effort to visit the place, in a drastic example of a destination-oriented type of travel. The primary ambition seems to be to have been there, seen it, and in some cases collected it as one of a series of corners and centres. And yet even this is enfolded into lived world as some return, more than once, taking their journey further into the realm of pilgrimage, the place accruing meaning as personally central.

It is instructive to look at the effect the presence of this arbitrary place-marker has had in structuring what goes on there next. An intentional monument to cartography, to Australia, to remoteness and being able to overcome that, to Australia’s expansive size, there have been unintended flow-ons from the initial overt intervention of its construction. The physical structure has set off a train of re-configurations of people’s knowledge of the landscape, and actions within it. These actions and their outcomes are changing the landscape, and the people who enact them in ways that can be traced through material and spatial

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98 Ingold 2007: 47, 49.
evidence and the texts. It also shows some of the ways in which people represent place to themselves.

Thinking about the Lambert Center provides an opportunity to review one of the themes of this thesis; the insertion of a new element into the landscape and the processes of reconfiguration that people introduce and maintain around it. By approaching the place through its spatial and material presences the questions asked about it are shifted. A description of the intention behind the monument, or of the finished product is not the endpoint but only the beginning of understanding the continuing reconfiguration of the place and people’s responses to it. What is it about this place that makes the actions there take this form, and in turn, what actions have shaped the place? This is not static thing-based but process-based telling of history.

The Lambert’s Centre is a good example of this shift in interpretative emphasis to consider because it is an unusually short, sharp intervention. Its meaning is all derived from elsewhere, in a previously undistinguished locale. It thus simplifies and makes clear people’s actions in relation to it, and they show up as a clear change in intensity of interaction, from negligible to high density. In contrast, in those places discussed in previous chapters, about 250km to the south-east of the Lambert Centre, the radical interventions of the Overland Telegraph Line, of pastoralism, of a National Park, were made into an already complex, lived and meaningful network of places. They have deeper, multiple histories that I have called ‘entangled’. This thesis has explored their entangled histories in place. The Lambert Centre provides a reminder of the interactive processes involved in that.

Some visitors expressed their disappointment at the progressively more grubby reality of the ideal center, pockmarked as it is with the remnants of other quick visits. The original privately funded installation of the flagpole on private land is unmanaged except by self-elected groups such as the Landcruiser Club and the Royal Geographical Society of Australia. It is seen as a ‘wilderness’ but has thousands of visitors concentrated on one small point. There is national pride expressed, but little respect for or knowledge of the needs of this country,

which does not bounce back from such compaction and saturation with human activity.

The tattered flag on ‘this country’s loneliest flagpole’, as the notice on the front of the visitor’s book describes it, summons up suitable resonances of the Lambert Center’s simultaneous marginality and centrality, engagement with the symbolic via an adventure, but not with the practical aspects of taking care, paying attention to the context, the country, that it is in (fig 5.21). Arbitrariness of the process and history of its creation as a place is underscored by the absence of any association of it with water. The Lambert Centre runs together the forms of connection considered in this chapter: travel, survey, marking travel through objects and stories. It also highlights the qualities that can arise when these are disconnected from the ‘patterns of connectivity’ and the ‘work of the world that ensures that motion is not just random movement, but rather consists of departures and returns’.

With its focus on connection, this chapter has been a lead in to the conclusion for the whole thesis.

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100 Rose 2003a: 178.