

Entangled places: interactive histories in the western Simpson Desert, central Australia



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This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed:

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March 2010

Abstract

Entangled places: interactional history in the western Simpson Desert, central Australia

This work starts with a question: 'what makes a place entangled'? Posing this question implies an understanding that places have qualities that are fruitfully understood in terms of the concept of 'entanglement'. This thesis uses the term to express and explore the inextricably inter-woven temporal components of a place that emerge from stories of its history that were either direct accounts, traces in the patterned objects on the ground, or retrieved from archives. These qualities are interpreted as arising through interactions between people, objects and the physical and historical characteristics of a place through time. It is this relationship between interaction and entanglement that the thesis 'has a good look around'; to use a key phrase used by Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation members.

The threads implicated in the historical entanglement of particular places are traced. These are: experiences as an archaeologist and a historian in contemporary places of the western Simpson Desert, mediated by Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation members who speak for that country; direct stories of the place; texts generated by white explorers, surveyors, scientists, managers and tourists; the enduring presence of the creator Ancestors; and spatial patterns of material objects.

Why is recognition of the processes that generate such entanglement important? It shifts attention. Focusing on their entangled character brings to the fore what are otherwise missing histories of Indigenous labour and concern. Importantly it also disallows unitary categories for places as being either 'Aboriginal' or 'European', 'pre-historic' or 'colonial'; often assumed to be separate components of history. The challenge then is to track the interaction of these histories. The aim is to make the missing stories of western Simpson people in place available, in a way where the place of the story retains its specifics, but is simultaneously stretched into an expanded network of social and historical connections.

Three inter-related themes that emerged as consequential in understanding the dynamics of people and place in the western Simpson Desert are developed.

These are, firstly, cross-cultural interactions during intense and rapid change associated with the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line. Remembered as a technological and political achievement, an agent of modernity from 1872, an unintended outcome of its installation was the incision of a continuous 'contact zone' through the country and lives of the local Indigenous people. The thesis looks at how these large-scale processes of change played out locally in a particular place – the repeater station at Charlotte Waters.

Secondly, the thesis looks at interactions of people and place through the lens of water. Water is vital, especially in the desert. What distinct expectations and understandings do different people bring to their relations with water, as revealed through their practices in relation to it?

Thirdly, the thesis considers what makes and maintains connections between places.

While the interactions explored in this work are specific to the particular places and region, the historical implications and the approach are applicable in any place.

Acknowledgements

Ideally, this thesis should be read under a full moon, as it was the full moon that used to provide enough light for a ceremony, a dance or a race meeting, and this thesis is a gathering together of many people. Like a festival that could not happen if no one came, it only exists because of their many contributions.

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All photographs by I. Macfarlane unless otherwise stated



Fig 1.1: Here is that Charlotte Waters, that Dalhousie Springs, Anniversary Bore. 'I'm going to tell you a story now', stories of these places here.

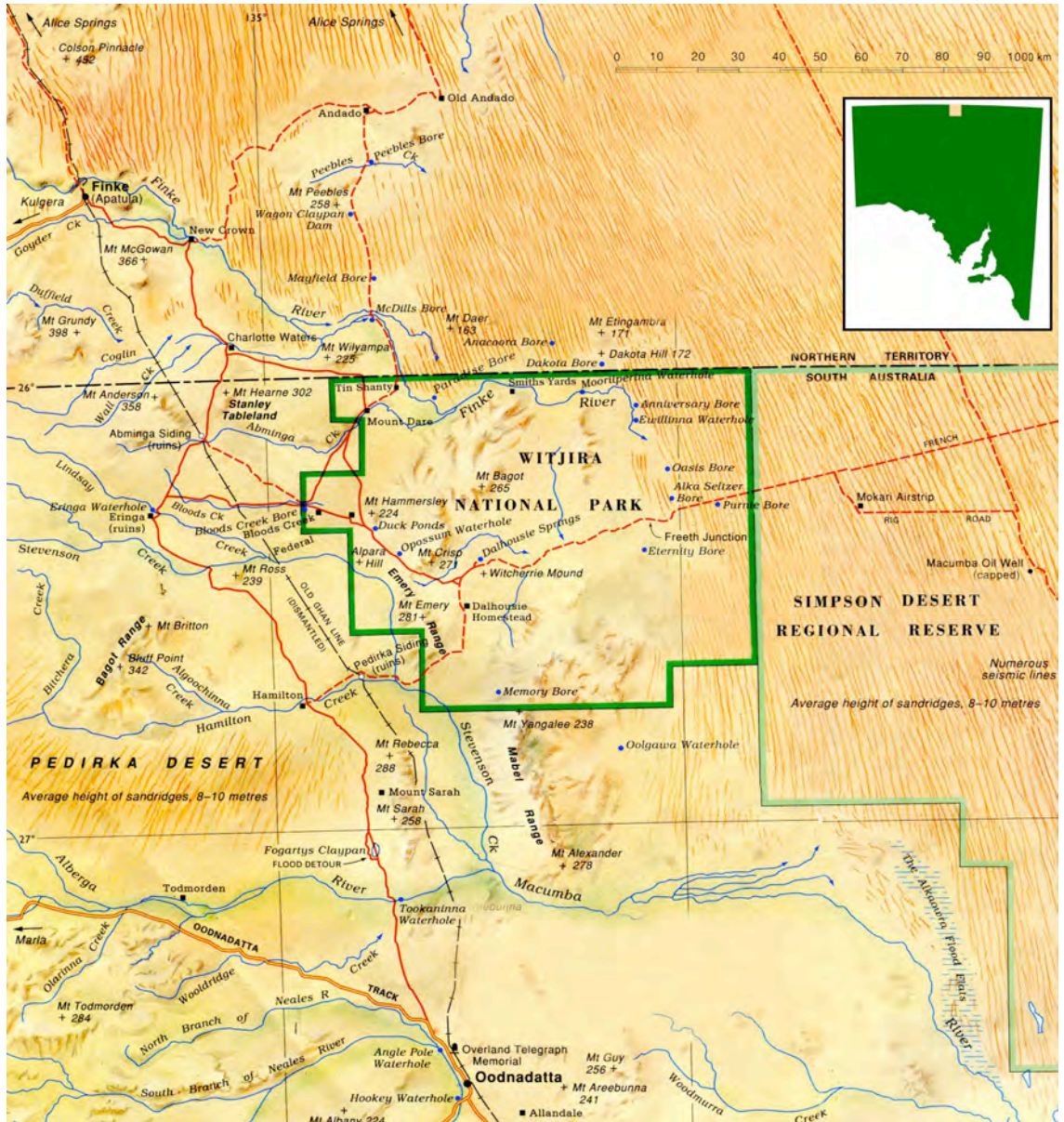


Fig 1.2a: Location map, based on Australian Geographic Cartographic Division *Corner Country* map 1995

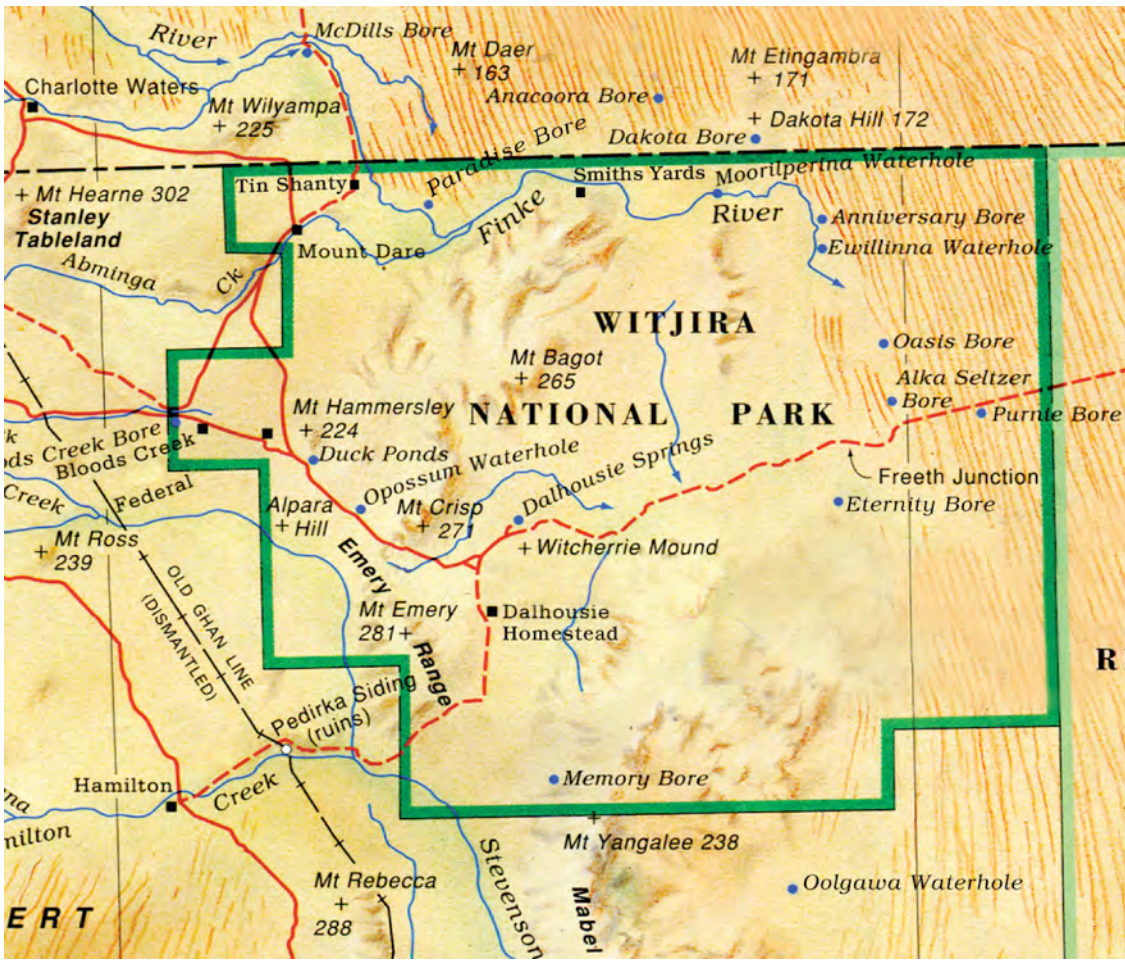


Fig 1.2b: location map detail

Chapter 1

Learning how to know people and places through interaction

'Having a good look around': experiencing an entangled place

What makes a place 'entangled'? How do you recognise this quality in a place? The first part of this chapter describes my introduction to one such place in the western Simpson Desert, northern South Australia. I trace the five threads I find implicated in its entanglement, and discuss what constitutes them. In the second part of the chapter I explore why recognition of the processes that generate such entanglement is important; how it brings to the foreground histories of intercultural interactions of people in place.

We are at Smiths Yards. It is a cloudy Sunday in November 1997, and the muted light brings out the contrasting colours of the weathered gray stockyards against the orange sand. The yards were built from whole coolibah branches,

their Y-shaped joints cut with cross-saws and axes, drilled with augers and ‘twitched’ together with wire.¹ They were first constructed for the cattle which were herded into the lower reaches of the Finke River in the 1870s, here where the channel of the Finke turns a corner to run out into the red dunes of the western Simpson Desert. We are about 250km south-east of the geographic centre of Australia (map 1.1, 1.2, fig 1.3 - 1.5).

The contemporary context for people’s engagement

The **first thread** to trace in thinking about the entangled, ‘many-in-one’ quality of Smiths Yards is the contemporary context in which I experience it, the background of those who are showing it to me, and their relations to it. Being at Smiths Yards with people who know it opens up stories of three generations of named individuals and their relations to the place. This introduces a specificity that kindles the life that is immanent in the place. It goes from being a silent, decaying structure entirely of the past to a place vibrating with re-enacted past sounds and action, and current relevance.

We are visiting Smiths Yards because it is the birthplace of Harry Taylor, son of Dick Taylor, who kept cattle on a smallholding here, and worked maintaining bores in the region in the early twentieth century. Harry Taylor is a member of the Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation. This is an association of people descended from Lower Southern Arrernte, Wankanguru and Arabunna language groups, formally incorporated in 1989. They speak for this country in official fora, such as Native Title proceedings and the Witjira Board of Management. Their Native Title rights were recognised in 2008.² They have a joint management agreement with the Department of Environment and Heritage of the South Australian Government for Witjira National Park.³

¹ By Jack Smith, Bobby Smith’s father, who in turn was the father of Boof Smith, who currently runs the nearby New Crown Station and ‘speaks lingo’ as Bingey Lowe reported (Macfarlane field notebook 28 September 1997: 86). Descriptions of yards Macfarlane field notebook 16 November 1997: 43-53.

² <http://www.nntt.gov.au/News-and-Communications/Media-Releases/Documents/2008%20media%20release%20attachments/PR08-10%20Witjira%20%20background%20information.pdf> accessed 19/9/09.

³ <http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/parks/sanpr/witjira/park.html> accessed 19/9/09; Smyth 2001: 75-6, 81. This was a pioneering land management arrangement, negotiated in 1995 in recognition of the claims to the area by Irrwanyere members. Under this agreement, the land remains state park, but is leased to the Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation and jointly managed by them and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (S.A.), with a separate commercial lease at the Mt Dare Homestead.



Fig 1.3: Smiths Yards, September 1997



Fig 1.4: Smiths Yards (construction detail), September 1997

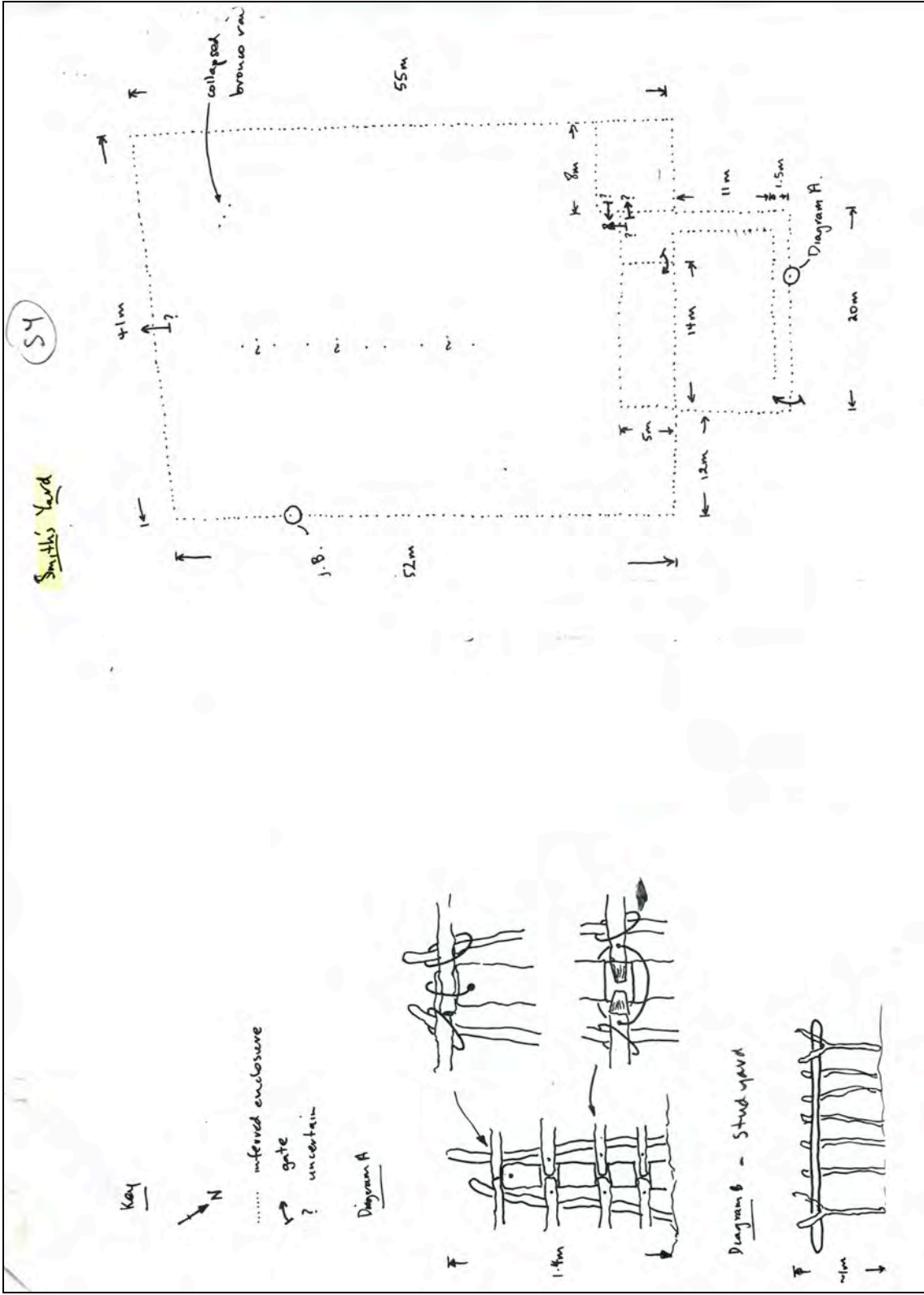


Fig 1.5: Plan showing method of construction and dimensions of stockyards at Smiths Yards. Craig Westell field notes, November 1997.

Witjera National Park was declared in 1985, mainly to protect the large mound springs that are a distinctive feature of the region, together with the areas at the terminal reaches of the Finke River.⁴ The boundaries of the park follow those of the former Mt Dare cattle station, which in turn were the result of amalgamations of smaller pastoral leases. These leases were taken up on the tail of the surveying and building of the Overland Telegraph Line, completed in 1872. The boundaries of the national park, and of my study area, incorporate this succession of land divisions and uses.

Harry Taylor was one of a self-selected sub-group of Irrwanyere members interested and able, in the late 1990s, to spend time in the country now incorporated in the Witjera National Park, sharing and finessing their knowledge of its people and places, and ‘having a good look around’.

‘Having a good look around’ was a phrase my Irrwanyere teachers used repeatedly, referring to both a practical and a conceptual approach to being in country. It reflects an active, monitoring concern for, and vigilance in, the landscape. This landscape knowledge is not fixed; it is kept up-to-date by habitually travelling from one place to another, awake to the dynamics of passing rainstorms, of animals and the tracks and sounds of other people’s movements.

These Irrwanyere members were employed as rangers in the Witjera National Park.⁵ They agreed to take on the job of teaching me, a student in need of instruction, and integrate that with visiting places and re-telling the histories of people in place (fig 1.6). This was an inter-generational transfer of knowledge

⁴ Davey 1985; Management Plan 1995; Ponder and Zeidler 1989. The characteristics of these distinctive landscapes are described in chapter 2 below.

⁵ Harry Taylor, Binge Low and Dean Ah Chee were rangers. Marilyn Stuart was an Irrwanyere member but not a ranger. At other times I also worked with Geoffrey Ah Chee, Raylene Hudson, Ian Hodgson, Charlie Hudson, Rossie Finn, Kay Finn, Elaine Bohning. Other Irrwanyere members who have knowledge and concern for the area did not elect to engage in this history project. Tensions, discontentments and disputes existed between groups with different interests within the Irrwanyere membership, but these did not impact on this history recording project. My work was insulated from these conflicts; I was repeatedly told to ‘just ignore that family business and get on with your work’.

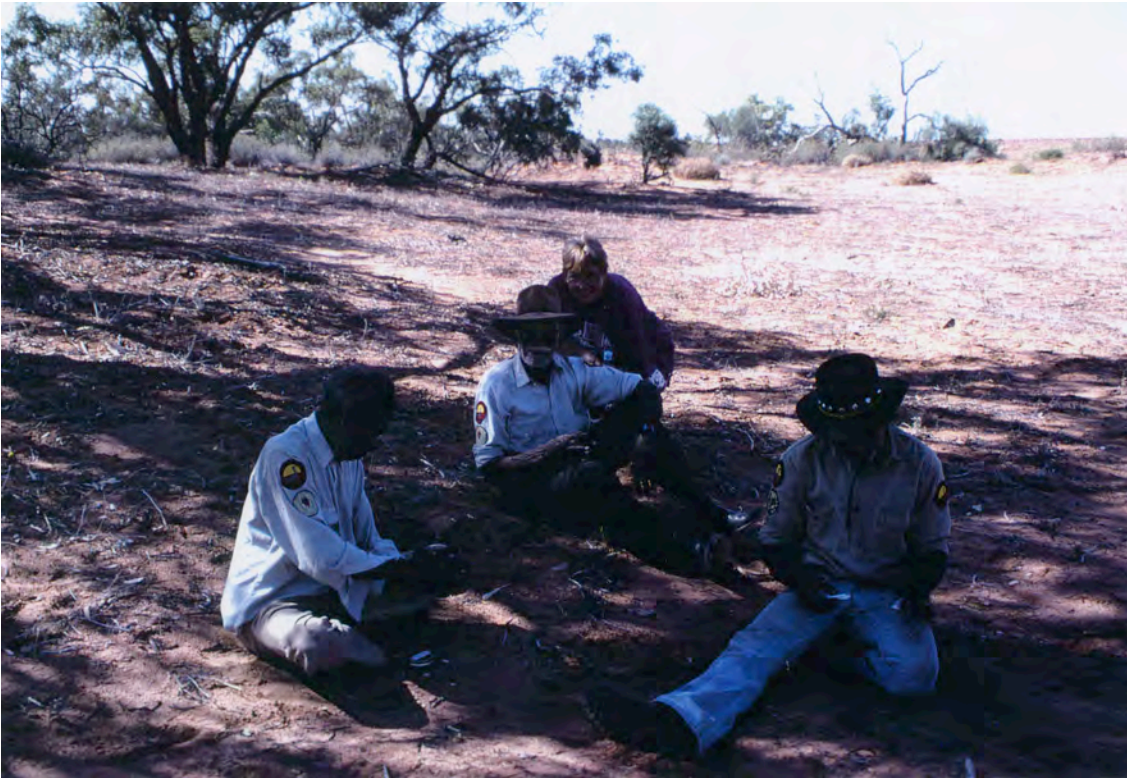


Fig 1.6: Irrwanyere members Bingey Lowe, Harry Taylor, Marilyn Hull-Stuart, Dean Ah Chee having smoko under the trees where the cookies' camp used to be at Smiths Yards, September 1997.

'Cookie says, "Right, dinner time you boys", so we come around and have a feed, salt meat, damper, all kinds. Two cookies for 20 men mustering and horse tailers. 3-400 in this yard and the calves. Stockman camp over there on slope on clear ground there where the sunshine is. This the cookies camp. Room so can walk around doing the cooking.' Bingey Lowe 28/9/1997 videotape.

(see below for further discussion), with all the obligations of responsible teaching and learning that that implies, as well as an inter-cultural one.

In return, I had archaeological skills to offer: impact surveys were requested by some of the Witjera Board of Management in selected areas that were to be developed for tourists. Also, I could show how archaeologists work as part of the ranger training program then in operation. Archaeology generates accounts of an officially recognised, authoritative past. Irrwanyere's agreement to assist in official archaeological work in Witjera National Park gave ethical and political weight to them as park co-managers and to the archaeology practiced. I also had a vehicle and funds for the fieldwork to offer.⁶ All those involved shared a willingness to share our understandings of the past and our various ways into it.

As it turned out, our different starting points, the differences in our understandings of our relations to the past, were as influential a teaching for me as the overt content of the accounts that they passed on to me. It led to a disciplinary shift in my work from archaeology to history, which I discuss further below.

As a part of this program of instruction, we were revisiting Harry Taylor's birthplace, Smiths Yards. There was a plan to build him a house there, so he could live back in his own country after a lifetime of hard work on cattle stations across northern South Australia and the Northern Territory. Harry was taken away as a child from Mt Dare to Colebrook Home in Quorn, and so lost his early connection to his birth language and the stories of his country.⁷ Return is important, and carries hopes of renewal. 'The country is lonely without people there'.⁸

Two 'homelands' or living areas had already been established by 1997, with pre-fabricated houses brought in to Oasis and Anniversary Bores on the Finke floodout. Their locations were selected because of their value to Irrwanyere

⁶ AIATSIS Grant number G96/5214. Ranger training was organised in the late 1990s by the Department for Environment, Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs and Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation with Gary Richardson.

⁷ Macfarlane field notebook 28 September 1997: 90.

⁸ An attendee at a public meeting about establishing and funding homelands made this comment, Oodnadatta 2 September 1997, Macfarlane field notebook 1-2 September 1997: 13-17.

members, with multiple associations that inspired them to return to live there and to establish 'a local future',⁹ with ambitions to grow veggies and have camel rides for tourists (fig 1.7, 1.8).¹⁰ (See chapter 4 for further discussion of the cluster of associations that led to Bingey Lowe's selection of the Anniversary Bore location for his house).

The program of revisiting places was a work of recollection.¹¹ It reanimated and reinforced connections to the place and the histories that made it. Through revisiting, associations of people and place were brought into currency again. It was also a work of record.¹² It fed into a National Estate Grants Program of recording places in Witjera National Park.¹³

My principal teacher was Mr Bingey Lowe, former head stockman on Mt Dare station, Irrwanyere elder and, in the late 1990s, park ranger. Uncle Alex Kruger said he was called 'Bingey' because when he was a small kid taken from Mataranka in the Northern Territory, he had a sticking-out stomach, for which the word is 'bingey' in general Aboriginal English. He was taken away from his country of birth, and brought south to Mt Dare station as a child, in the late 1930s or early 1940s,¹⁴ by the Mt Dare station owner, Ted Lowe, and his son Rex, who also owned properties in the Territory, where Bingey's father Brandy worked for them. So, although Bingey was born Tyingili from around Mataranka, he was taught the Mt Dare country and its detailed stories, songs, connections and proprieties as a child and young man in mustering camps, or out the back of the main Mt Dare homestead near Abminga Creek, as he worked on the station with Lower Southern Arrernte and Wankanguru Old People, or elders, who lived and worked around the station. He explained to me:

⁹ Byrne 2008: 163-5.

¹⁰ This was the first time a park in South Australia made provision for such living areas, under the joint management agreement.

<http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/parks/sanpr/witjira/park.html> accessed 19/9/09.

Macfarlane field notebook 29 October 1996.

¹¹ See also Beck and Somerville 2005; Gill, Paterson and Kennedy 2001; Harrison 2004; Byrne and Nugent 2004; Byrne 2008.

¹² In addition to this thesis - a meta-record of the work - copies of field notebooks, photographs and audio tapes are held in the AIATSIS library. I prepared books of photographs documenting our work in 1996 and 1997 and copies of archival materials for the Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation. I gave these to the members I worked with most closely, with distribution and access to them at their discretion.

¹³ Nicholson and Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation 1999.

¹⁴ Luise Hercus says he was born in 1928 (Hercus and Potezny 1996: 2). He was more than 10 years old when he went south to Mt Dare, which puts his arrival at Mt Dare in the late 1930s (B. Lowe Tape transcript Track 1 Tape 2, 7 October 1997).



Fig 1.7: Bingley Lowe outside the new house at Anniversary Bore, 1996.



Fig 1.8: Preparation for vegetable garden and lawn, irrigated with bore water at Oasis Bore. 'Two houses, grape, fig, passion fruit and gum saplings planted. Lawn under shade cloth at front of the house. Fence not finished, generator not here yet.' (Macfarlane field notebook 9/7/96).

Old Rex Lowe I was his boy, just like I was his son, he brought me up, learn me everything, you know. ... Lively kid I was, like to do things, never standing looking at 'em, I jump in to 'em, I was one of those, I like to learn. After I was in Mt Dare for long time before I was old enough to go mustering.

... see that little tableland, on the hill, that side from Mt Dare, from the house, the old people used to camp along there with the humpies could see them from the house. The camp used to be there. I used to go down there. Never missed, I always go to the old mans, them old fellas used to like me, 'He's a good boy this fella'. I grew up and I was a good boy and they pass on the stories, knew I was going to do the right thing, used to sit like old crows, 'Why don't you come over here', with old fellas, they tell good stories, I used to go down ... Aranda, I started talking lingo with them, that was the first lingo I learned.

When I am grown up, had beard, I was a big fella then, mustering around the desert country, with the old people chasing wild cattle, chasing brumbies, I was a real cowboy then.¹⁵

Bingey Lowe designed our program of visits with applied energy, thought and time, drawing deeply on his stores of experience to pass them on as responsibly as he had absorbed them. So the **second thread** to attend to as it winds through, entangling this place, is that of the direct stories of it that are told in place.

Direct stories told in place

Bingey Lowe was a gifted raconteur and historian. As active interlocutor, he explicated the historical world of people and ancestral beings in the places they animate in the western Simpson area to those who could actively listen, including Irrwanyere members, and the professional linguists, anthropologists and archaeologists who worked with him. He knew the country in several overlapping ways. He was born elsewhere, but was 'like a son' of the station-owner boss; he knew the country as a working stockman; as a trusted and capable holder of Lower Southern Arrernte traditions; and in the late 1990s as a

¹⁵ B. Lowe Tape transcript Track 1 Tape 2, 7 October 1997. Bingey Lowe was loyal to the Lowes, and fondly recalled playing with their daughters when they were all children. This is despite external evidence that Rex Lowe was capable of ruthless brutality towards men working for him at around this time. In December 1945 he was tried in Oodnadatta for assault on six men who had been assigned to work at Mt Dare from Port Augusta 'under arrangement with the police' (*Times* 19/12/45; *Melbourne Herald* 19/12/45; cuttings in AA A431 1946/182). The fact that they were strangers to the country and to the local workers may have exacerbated the situation.

park ranger who drew on all these knowledges to provide advice to the Board of Management.¹⁶

Bingey Lowe was an accomplished teacher of the Ancestral stories of the area. But he rapidly picked up on the idea that my interest was primarily in the traces and stories of human historical action, and warmed to the possibilities of this as a project. He was interested and proud to pass on the pastoral history in places that he knew so well. When we met other members of the community, in answer to their questions about what we were doing, he spoke up for us after our first day out saying 'I'm showing them those places where the cattle was, where we used to be, how we used to do it with them cattle, with Old Mr Lowe'.¹⁷ Telling how to dig a bore with pick and shovel or build a hard mulga wood stockyard with hand tools; the knowledge of 'the pastoral era' – as an interpretative sign labels the Crispe Bore yards, to Bingey's amusement, as he was one of those who built them in the 1960s (fig 1.9). His experiences and knowledge provided accounts of what was otherwise a rapidly contracting store of stockman's lore and practices.

Pointing with arms and face and body, re-enacting the events he describes, Bingey performed for us the way the bronco rail in the centre of the yards was used to handle the cattle, to 'tie 'em, brand 'em, cut 'em and ear mark them cleanskins'.¹⁸ Smiths Yards was 'a good strong yard' when he first came, he used to break horses there.¹⁹ He pointed out the location of the night camp for nightwatching the cattle, and the cookie's camp under trees. He performed private histories in their proper places, evoking the everyday actions and experiences that cumulatively shaped the workers and the country.

'Don't talk while I remember'

Bingey was concerned about proof and veracity, how to ensure responsible story telling and re-telling. Reflecting on his own practice and role from the comfort of the sitting room of his house at Anniversary Bore, he said 'You gotta

¹⁶ This is not an uncommon life circumstance for Aboriginal pastoral workers. See for example Rowse 1987: 82-3; Kruger and Waterford 2007; Beckett 1993.

¹⁷ Bingey Lowe pers comm. Mt Dare, S.A. 8 July 1996.

¹⁸ Macfarlane field notebook 3 October 1997: 106.

¹⁹ Macfarlane field notebook 5 October 1997: 10.

have your memories, speak out proper, think all the time. Just listen, don't talk while I remember'. 'Gotta have good ears and good memory'.²⁰

As Deborah Bird Rose says, 'If we know anything orally, we know because someone chose to tell us.'²¹ Bingege had decided I was capable of appreciating the import of his stories, a responsible listener, but he could see that I needed paper to remember – 'Get out that paper' he would say. So he was conscious of this not being a simple matter of transfer of a composed narrative to a listener but a translation from an oral composition to a written one, with all the attendant ethical obligations of veracity and attention to tone. 'There is a story in everything. It'll come out, maybe with the girls [referring to me and Marilyn Stuart], maybe with old Bingege Lowe, the story teller, the talking ringer from the Top End'.²² In learning how to hear, to recognise and not to obstruct a good story, I was learning how to learn.²³

Anthropologist Francesca Merlan makes an important distinction between two modes of learning. There are relationships in which a knowledgeable person, for example an elder, explicitly 'teaches' another person. Here 'the content could be somewhat independent of its mode of transmission'. In contrast are those teaching relationships where important understandings are 'passed on through the same *kind* of embodied experience' that fostered the original absorption of the content, such as travelling through the country.²⁴

In this way, for Bingege, place, being there, was proof of the veracity of the story. He was against fictions. It was clear to him that an external observer's job – my job – was 'not lying'. He told me: 'You should take lots of pictures, not just of the yards, to show them what it's like, to prove them you've been there'. I argued with him, saying that stories would be good ways to show and to prove, but he insisted that photos are better.²⁵ Indeed, he requested a gift of a Polaroid camera to take pictures of the waterholes we visited for himself (fig 1.10, see also chapter 4).

²⁰ Macfarlane field notebook 5 October 1997: 7, 10.

²¹ Rose 2003a: 123.

²² Macfarlane field notebook 5 October 1997.

²³ Rose 2007.

²⁴ Merlan 2005: 172, both quotes, emphasis in original.

²⁵ Macfarlane field notebook 9 October 1997: 17.



Fig 1.9: Interpretative sign the 'pastoral era' at Mt Dare. Crispe Bore stockyard, built in the 1950s, near Christmas Creek, 1996

Anthropologist Deborah Rose similarly found that place was an important criterion of proof for stories.²⁶ It also indicated the legitimacy of who can tell them. She emphasised two other criteria of reliability – those of presence – being an eyewitness to an event, and genealogy. If the teller had not been there themselves, their account is accompanied by a statement of who originally told the story, and whether or not they were an eyewitness. This accords with Bingeys' strongly asserted sense of those stories which bear weight, that are proper, and 'good'. My own academic concerns with 'proof' were covered in my attention to recording the specificities of dates, names, and relationships in my notes, photographs and tapes, and in my working across diverse sources relevant to a given place (see below).

Conscious, engaged story telling was a defining aspect of being taught the country. It was a recurring element of our work together. It integrated the transmission of Ancestral stories, historical accounts of former lives and personal histories. In performances such as Bingeys' private history became public. As public history, the stories were then available, even for people who might never have been to Smiths Yards. In this way the place of the story retains its specifics, but is simultaneously stretched into an expanded network of social and historical connections.

In being taught the country this way, Bingeys' gave me a considered perspective based on his own experience. It was one person's account but it was not a personal account. There were no life details, nor was it his story alone. Rather, his stories contained those of many other people. They never referred to his own intimate life history; only at the end of our work together did he even mention his father. His stories were about being a stockman in country, the people he worked with and the stories he heard about previous generations. His stories generated a landscape of the pastoral industry.

²⁶ Rose 2003a. Similarly, anthropologist Jeremy Beckett recounts how stories' 'truth was attested for [Walter Newton] by the features of the country where he had lived all but a few years of his life' (1993: 689).



Fig 1.10: Binge Low at Eternity Waterhole with his Polaroid camera in his lap

When pastoral stories were the ones called for in the context of our history recording project, they were the ones evoked. When language and the Ancestral stories were the focus in his work with linguist Luise Hercus and surveyor Vlad Potezny, the landscape was reanimated through them.²⁷ The emphasis was shaped by the job we were engaged in at the time, but the different aspects of the places were simultaneously present. Pull on the thread of one story, and the others associated with that place would be drawn up too. But in the teaching and the telling, in a particular circumstance, there was judgment in the matter of emphasis, and Bingey was highly attuned to the balancing involved. His orientation was very much an integration of his stockman's pride and lore, his historian's interest in the actions of past people, and his responsible custodianship of Ancestral Law.

There has been a body of historical writing about the pastoral industry as an Aboriginal domain of labour and lore, based in the far north of Northern Territory,²⁸ the Kimberley and Western Australia,²⁹ Queensland,³⁰ and New South Wales.³¹ Distinct climatic and environmental conditions obtain in northern Australia, particularly the influence of the wet season on work practices (see chapter 3). There are few accounts based in southern Northern Territory and the north of South Australia. Alec Kruger has written a memoir of his early removal from his family and harsh life on cattle stations in Central Australia.³² Historian Peggy Brock has examined the organisation of Aboriginal labour in pastoral stations, particularly in the Flinders Ranges, as a dependable local casual pool of workers, and the 'minimalist' approach to training and provision of services by their employers.³³ Robert Foster documents the importance of station owners having control of rationing in northern South Australia as a way of retaining crucial Indigenous labour.³⁴ Historical archaeologist Alistair Patterson has written the only study based closely on a northern South Australian station, Strangways Springs. This station was also located on the Overland Telegraph Line, further south near Lake Eyre, so it was

²⁷ eg Hercus nd., Hercus and Potezny 1993, 1994, 1996; Hercus and Simpson 2002; Potezny 1989.

²⁸ Stevens 1974; Berndt and Berndt 1987; McGrath 19887;

²⁹ Jebb 2002; Harrison 2004.

³⁰ May 1994; Wharton 1994.

³¹ Morris 1989; Beckett 2005 [1958]; Harrison 2004.

³² Kruger and Waterford 2007.

³³ Brock 1995.

³⁴ Foster 2000. Discussed further in Chapters 3 and 4.

established earlier, in the 1860s, on Arabana and Kujani land. Paterson draws on archaeological excavation, documentary and oral evidence to trace European and Aboriginal practices in the operation of the sheep station.³⁵

The status of oral history in understanding the historical contributions and circumstances of Aboriginal people's work and life in the pastoral industry was a focus of debate following the publication of both Berndt and Berndt's *End of an Era* and McGrath's *Born on the Cattle* in 1987.³⁶ McGrath aimed to draw out the experience of Aboriginal people in the changing conditions of the early cattle industry of the far north, with an emphasis on gender relations, and drew heavily on interviews as well as documentary evidence. The Berndt's report, published 40 years after their field study, focused on demographic and economic externally observed factors in a circumstance which they understood as clearly 'acculturated'. This difference in starting position opened up discrepancies in the interpretations of the conditions of early 20th century pastoral life, as a 'golden age', or as a time of poor conditions, disease and malnutrition. Reviewing the problematics of these different interpretations, Minoru Hokari points out that involvement in the cattle industry was only a part of wider continued involvement in life in country. There were possibilities for the integration of the two which generated pride and pleasure in cattle work and identification with it, which could only be picked up in interviews.³⁷ Importantly, Hokari also points out comparative differences in conditions under the regime of one cattle station's manager/owner/operator compared to that of another. Generalisations cannot be assumed to apply.³⁸ This reinforces the significance of locally grounded studies which juxtapose various available forms of historical evidence.

Colonial texts encoding cryptic traces of Indigenous actions

The **third thread** that contributes to an entangled place is that of the texts that are generated by white explorers, surveyors, scientists, and official visitors to the place.

³⁵ Paterson 2005, 2008.

³⁶ Berndt and Berndt 1987; McGrath 1987, 1988; Rowse 1988a, 1988b; Attwood 1988; Hokari 2002.

³⁷ Hokari 2002: 25-7.

³⁸ Hokari 2002: 23-4.

They are recovered from unpublished archival journals, reports, images and maps.³⁹ The representations of places that they contain were generated by the activities of these diverse visitors there. They are part of the place. They are extensions of it beyond its specific physical locale. A focus on the place generates fresh questions about it which lead to the recovery of further texts, an expanding field of stories which unfold through their association with the place.

In contrast to archaeological evidences, these textual sources have the potential to name a specific person in a specific place at a specific time, though it is rare for Indigenous individuals to be so named.

In these sources I could read 'countersigns' which lie beyond the primary intentions of their authors. Pacific historian Bronwyn Douglas provides a lively consideration of the difficulties and possibilities involved in developing the necessary 'critical ethnohistorical exploitation of colonial texts'. In postcolonial-informed work using missionary texts, she demonstrates how

the very language and content of colonial representations not only register indigenous countersigns, but are significantly, if ambiguously shaped by indigenous agency and presence. That is, colonial texts encode cryptic traces of indigenous actions, desires and patterns of social and gender relations which, in unintended, muffled, but sometimes profound ways, helped formulate colonial experiences, strategies, actions and representations.⁴⁰

In this way Indigenous histories can be teased out from within better known histories, such as those of explorers, of the Overland Telegraph Line, or the accounts of the area by notable anthropologists Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen. These latter sources are so dominant, both quantitatively and in their influence, that it is easy to get caught in their pull and find oneself reproducing their preoccupations and emphases, their voice. As Dipesh Chakrabarty says 'in telling minority histories, there is a way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called 'the history of Europe'''.⁴¹ Importantly, a resistant grit that counters this slippage arises when

³⁹ These are held in the South Australian Museum Archives, the State Library of South Australia, State Records of South Australia, Australian Archives in Canberra, Adelaide and Darwin, The National Library of Australia, the Oodnadatta Museum and the Alice Springs Public Library.

⁴⁰ Douglas 2001: 42.

⁴¹ Chakrabarty 2000: 27.

these sources are used in conjunction with non-textual sources and the stories they tell.

Smiths Yards were old in the 1940s when Bingey first knew them. They are documented on a map drawn by government surveyor EH Lees dated 10/3/1885, (fig 1.11). They are also documented as the departure point chosen by David Lindsay for his exploration of the sandridge desert in 1886.⁴²

Close by on the old map Neringneringa Well is marked,⁴³ showing that the Lower Southern Arrernte language name was in general use at the time.' Bingey Lowe took us to Neringneringa Well to teach us the stories associated with it. He was vexed by the stands of young coolibah saplings and lignum that had grown up. He said the country was open in the 1940s and 50s when they rode through it, mustering, but on this occasion we had to push through them to get there.

Neringneringa was an important waterhole in the landscape before it was taken over by the cattle. Its importance continued, but the availability of the water was affected when a well, also known as Smiths Well, was sunk into the same water source. The only physical traces left of the well that we saw on our visit were two shallow depressions, now in-filled with sediment, one with four wooden posts still bordering it.

The enduring presence of the creator Ancestors

The **fourth thread** to follow in this place is the enduring presence of the creator Ancestors. Landforms, waterholes, trees, and rocks mark and testify to the actions of the Ancestors in the Dreaming, and stories recall chains of connection with other places associated with these. As Deborah Rose explains:

The term Dreaming connotes both creation and connection. It refers to the beings and actions that made the world, and it further refers to the continuing process of life's coming forth in the world. It thus references both original and on-going creation.⁴⁴

⁴² Lindsay 1886. He was guided by a man he calls Paddy, who was born on one of the permanent wells in the Simpson Desert, Murraburt. He located nine of these wells, and the bearings he recorded were used by Denis Bartel in the 1970s to relocate the wells. See Hercus and Clark 1986.

⁴³ Spelt Iriya Arina by Hercus and Potezny 1996.

⁴⁴ Rose 2004: 36.

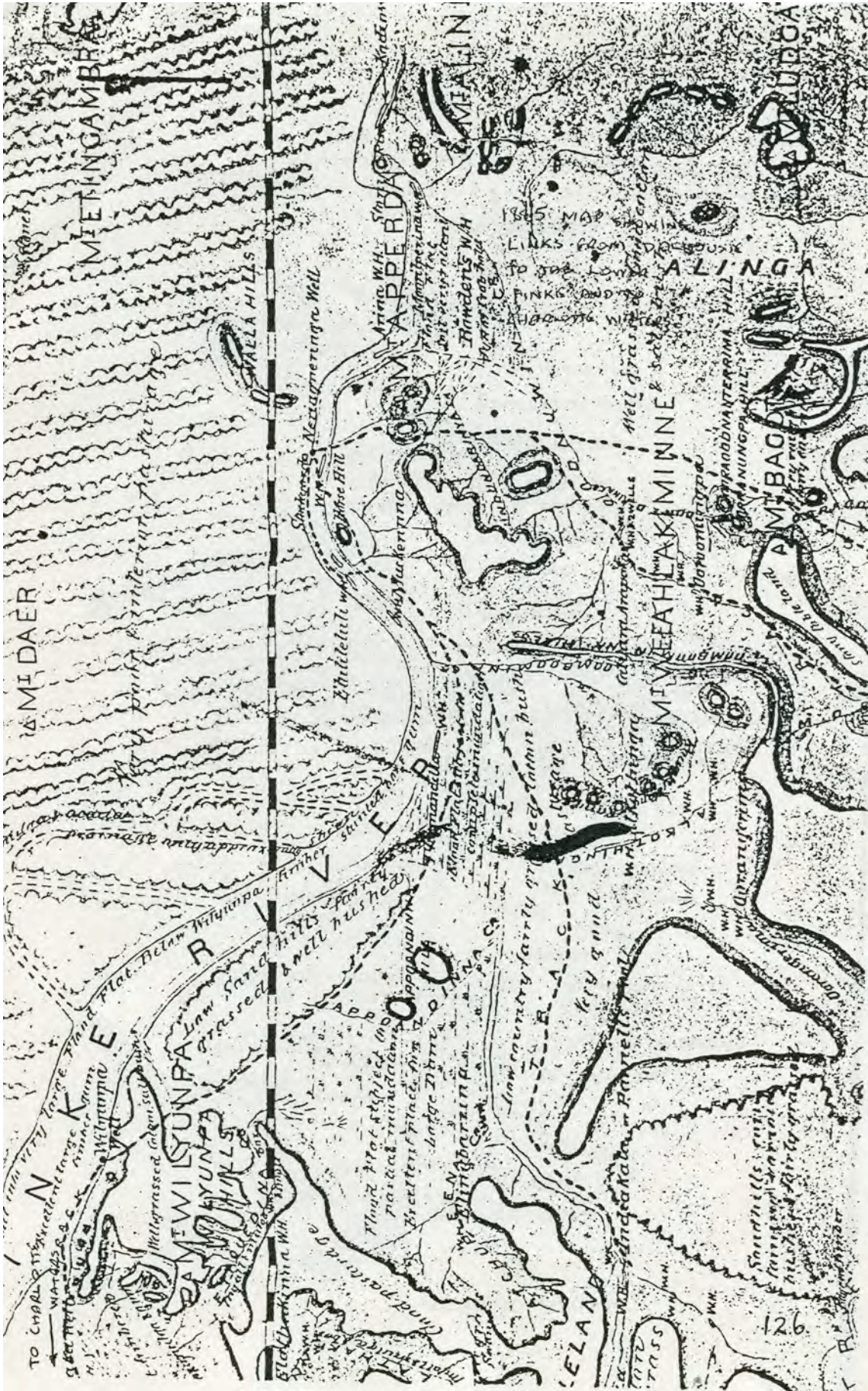


Fig 1.11: 1885 map of the lower Finke by surveyor EH Lees (from Kimber 1992 Finke River survey Part 4: 122)

The recording of these stories was not the primary goal of our project, but they were integral to the landscape for those who had been immersed in learning the references that animated it. Bingey consistently referred to and named them – ‘Dingo place’, ‘this one is Green Caterpillar’, ‘this one Louse Dreaming’ – whenever we were in, or passing, a relevant place.

Bingey told the story of the origin of the Neringneringa water source in language to the other Irrwanyere men visiting the place, and briefly told me in English.

When the Ancestral Two Boys, one left handed and the other right handed, threw boomerangs from a two-peaked hill to the south-east of the well, ‘Right hand threw a boomerang and missed. Left hand deadly. Boomerang stuck in the ground at the well and water gushed up’.⁴⁵ The Two Boys then crossed the sand dunes of the Simpson Desert, chasing birds and playing, travelling east away from Dalhousie Springs and visiting all the major wells to Goyders Lagoon Waterhole. They return to form two hills near the waterhole.⁴⁶

Bingey suggested putting a pipe into the well to get water flowing again for Harry Taylor to use in his proposed homeland settlement. I asked ‘Will that disturb the place?’ but he said ‘Of course not, it is a well, it is supposed to be used by people’.⁴⁷

Objects of archaeological attention

The **fifth thread** in the skein of an entangled place, is contributed by the spatial and material forms and patternings to which an archaeologist is particularly attentive. Bingey Lowe was not concerned with the residual material structures. His stories of people in place are not held in the stuff of the site, but in the witnessing act of *being in the place*. For an archaeologist, however, material and spatial evidences are paramount. They inform stories of past everyday human action that are otherwise invisible and forgotten. They also bring into focus the time depth of Indigenous people’s presence in the place. What people were doing here has changed, as the material traces attest, but there is continuity in their presence and concern for it.

⁴⁵ Bingey Lowe, Macfarlane field notebook Monday 8 July 1996: 17.

⁴⁶ Hercus and Potezny 1996: 13.

⁴⁷ Bingey Lowe, Macfarlane field notebook Sunday 28 September 1997: 87. This is not universally so, however. He strongly rejected the suggestion by park management that one of the mound springs, Rainbow Spring, be used as a fresh water supply for the upgraded camping facilities, as the Rainbow Serpent sleeps curled up in it and it is dangerous to touch that water. The fresh water Kingfisher Spring was recommended instead (Macfarlane field notebook 22 September 1997: 72). See fig 4.30.

The material and spatial evidences do not speak for themselves. But when they are integrated into a broader interpretative narrative, they work to make distinctive practices of the past accessible.

To me, considering Smiths Yards as an archaeologist, they looked like this:

Firstly, there were the details of the methods of construction and subsequent reuse of the yards themselves (fig 1.4, 1.5). Then there are its spatial relations to the rich material scattered over the sheet-eroded ground around the yards. 450m to the south-east are several hearths: 2m wide patches of heat-shattered rock, charcoal, ash and hardened, heated sand with several pieces of burnt cattle and sheep bone and stone artefacts intermingled. The diverse background surface array of stone artefacts includes stone flakes and cores, a hammerstone, grindstones of various stone types, adzes and adze slugs (ie adzes that have been worn out through wood-working). There are small lumps of yellow ochre with flattened sides where they have been ground to make pigment, rarely found in open sites (fig 1.12 and 1.13). Also exposed on the sandy surface were early twentieth century broken green bottle glass, old tin cans, a metal axe head, a kerosene lamp's mesh mantle, small and large horseshoes and twisted pieces of wire. In the sand dune 1.3 km away, there was a place where several chert and silcrete cobbles have been intensively flaked to make numerous blades and points.⁴⁸

This is recorded together with the contextual physical characteristics of the place – the form of the river channel, the surrounding dunes, the sheet-wash erosion, the impact of 110 years of cattle and rabbits, the vegetation changes, the distance to other places. These features and qualities of the place, and the built physical structures, have been active in shaping the ways in which people have configured their lives, and have reconfigured them as the structures and features change. The more general environmental and climatic characteristics which play into these local specificities are discussed in chapter 2.

The five threads drawn out above are each different ways of knowing Smiths Yards historically. The histories made the place what it is now. The place organises the histories.

⁴⁸ Macfarlane field notebook 17 November 1997.

Interpretations of the stories re-told in the reminiscences of Irrwanyere members under a shady tree, of the texts in the archives and of the richly textured ground surface, were triggered and enabled by our being in the place. Coherence amongst the entangled threads is generated by their relationship to and their production within the same place.

This conjunction leads to my posing of historical questions that might not otherwise arise. This in turn leads to further place-related materials being sought and uncovered.

The accretion of diverse human action at Smiths Yards through time attests to its being a focus for people to use and re-use, to visit and re-visit. This density of returns and reuse is the essence of its entangled quality. Our own visit, our attentions to the evidences of that density, is but the latest in this long cycle.

These contemporary scenes from the Finke River floodout take us into the heart of the experience of an entangled place. I am using the term entangled to express the inextricably inter-woven temporal components, or threads, as drawn out above, of a place that may emerge when a curious visitor asks about its history.

Why is it important to attend to this quality of a place such as Smiths Yards?

I consider that the value of such an approach lies in the shift in our attention that it promotes. It requires overt attention to the diversity of people's actions in the past and their traces that have fed into making the place what it now is. We are reminded of the different relations between the present and the past that exist in the place. This is vital because it disallows what has been a dominant tendency in history-making, to fix unitary categories to places, identifying them as either 'Aboriginal' or 'European', 'pre-historic' or 'colonial'.⁴⁹ This is part of a set of entrenched problematic assumptions about the relation between Aboriginal people and history made by white historians, anthropologists, archaeologists. These have been the subject of much review and attempts at

⁴⁹ Byrne 1996, 2008; Harrison 2000; Williamson and Harrison 2002.



Fig 1.12: Yellow ochre on the eroded ground surface near Smiths Yards, showing flattened faces where it has been ground to produce pigment, November 1997



Fig 1.13: Small sandstone base grindstone on the eroded ground surface near Smiths Yards, November 1997

redress since the 1960s, as discussed below, but are still influential, as demonstrated in the formulation of the basis for Native Title claims in the relevant legislation.⁵⁰

Part of the imperialist ethos imported into Australia with the colonists were intellectual frameworks and racial stereotypes shaped by a long chain of influences going back to the 17th century. These judged Australian Aboriginal people to be inhabitants of the 'uttermost ends of the earth' who represented an early stage of human development due to their failure to progress, because of their isolation from God and society.⁵¹ Natural parts of the landscape, trapped in the past, it necessarily followed that they had no history. Indigenous people were fixed as anthropological objects rather than historical actors. History was being made by the explorer heroes, the battling would-be farmers. The responses of Indigenous people to changing circumstances were regarded as degenerative rather than being part of a process of accommodation. This disallowed an active role in negotiation or resistance to the 'contacted' peoples.⁵² Change could only be deleterious loss or 'acculturation' resulting from contact with the society of the European observers. Those who made changes were 'uninteresting' as explorer Winneke pronounced them on the Horn expedition in 1894, referring to the Aboriginal people at Dalhousie.⁵³

The construction of 'traditional' Aboriginality as 'real' provided for a major ambiguity: people of the past were noble, and gone, but worthy of study to salvage fragments of the past, but contemporary Indigenous people were rendered inauthentic and corrupt by comparison. To stress their colonial history was to lose their link to an essentialist past, while to demonstrate continuity of traditions was to submit their present selves to a timeless past with no future.⁵⁴ Defining and representing Indigenous people as of a pre-modern time explained and maintained the distance between colonisers and colonised in a way that helped rationalise dispossession.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Smith 2005; Harrison 2000.

⁵¹ Pagden 1982; Fabian 1983; McGregor 1997; Pratt 1992.

⁵² Cowlishaw 1987: 230-1.

⁵³ Winneke 1897.

⁵⁴ Jones 2007a.

⁵⁵ Attwood 1996b: ix.

There were anthropologists and historians however who saw through the bind that this framework created, and who worked to understand the changing social world of Aboriginal people in south-eastern Australia, dealing with the everyday lives of the people there: the 'non-traditionally oriented' Aboriginal people with 'extensive European associations', to use the terminology of the 1961 Australian Aboriginal Studies symposium.⁵⁶ Their work focused on social change, histories of displacement, and shared worlds of labour. It contributed to a 'series of incremental moves towards an intercultural analysis' by anthropological writers,⁵⁷ and also by historians. These early bodies of work were based on an intellectual framework that ran counter to the then prevailing idea that there *was* no Aboriginal history, only Aboriginal culture, and that that culture was firmly based only in the pre-colonial past.⁵⁸ Diane Barwick *et al* pointed out in a bibliography of published work that there were over 22,600 published papers on the subject of 'Australian Aboriginal people' by 1957, but only 150 papers that took an historical approach, even by 1973.⁵⁹

Aboriginal history as a sub-discipline had a struggle to be established and accepted as a valid form of history, the primary objection being that there were considered to be no legitimate sources. It is telling that it required a lead from historians in the Department of Pacific History, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, to overcome this resistance and foster the establishment of the journal *Aboriginal History* in 1977. Pacific historians in that Department, such as Niel Gunson, Harry Maude and Greg Denning, did not see any such lack of sources, as they had been confidently working with missionary, government, and trade documents since the late 1950s in pursuit of Pacific history that overtly included the perspectives of the Islanders; 'a whole unexplored world of culture–contact and pre-European history in the Pacific with its own methodology and rationale' as Gunson succinctly puts it.⁶⁰ They saw these 'worlds' as additions to the more traditional historical interests in 'colonial history and contemporary politics', and hoped for 'history written by the Pacific Islanders themselves', with 'an emphasis on

⁵⁶ AIAS/Stanner 1963.

⁵⁷ Hinkson and Smith 2005.

⁵⁸ Jeremy Beckett 2005 [1958]; Diane Barwick 1963; Marie Reay 1964; Faye Gale 1972; Judy Inglis 1962, 1963; see Morris 2005, Hinkson and Smith 2005.

⁵⁹ Barwick, Urry and Bennett 1977: 111.

⁶⁰ Gunson 1978: xii.

the importance of Indigenous source material, both written vernacular and oral'.⁶¹

The new journal *Aboriginal History*, with Diane Barwick as its editor, fully embraced this perspective and took on the challenge of undoing this widespread perception of 'no sources' existing for the sub-discipline, in a big way. From the start, the journal placed a heavy emphasis on making access to archival sources as easy as possible. They published guides to their retrieval,⁶² pointed out their locations in review articles, and re-printed primary sources in the 'Notes and documents' section of the journal. They published transcriptions of oral histories. In the first ten years of the journal, one quarter of all the papers were directed to how to find and use the available historical sources.⁶³ The introduction to the 1979 *Handbook* states that it is

dedicated to the proposition that Aborigines and Islanders will write their own history, and rewrite the history of Australia. Many are already at work recording the oral history of their own communities. It is these pioneers who have prompted us to publish this manual.⁶⁴

There has been a great expansion in writing and readership of both academic and non-academic publications in the field of Indigenous history in the last three decades, particularly after the 1988 Bicentennial, the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody, and the *Bringing Them Home* report, which opened up spaces for wider general acceptance.

More recently, archaeologists in Australia and North America have worked in a way that breaks down disciplinary boundaries between 'prehistoric' and 'historic' archaeology, recognizing a past connected to the present, with more than one history.⁶⁵ This is generating a field of archaeology of colonialism, or of 'contact'. I share historic archaeologist Steven Silliman's concerns with the common concept of 'contact' studies which emphasise event rather than process. A longer term approach lends itself not to a study of a 'cultural contact' event but an attempt to see how processes of colonialism played out in a particular area.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Gunson 1978: xiii.

⁶² *Handbook for Aboriginal and Islander History* 1979 Barwick, Mace and Stannage (eds).

⁶³ Macfarlane 2006.

⁶⁴ Stannage 1979: xi.

⁶⁵ Harrison 2004, Lightfoot 2005, Beck and Somerville 2005, Clarke 2000, Williamson 2004, Murray 2004b, Paterson 2008. See also Colley and Bickford 1996.

⁶⁶ Silliman 2005; Lightfoot 2005.

I have also avoided the term 'sharing', as it has too many overtones of choice and implications of equality, which the colonial co-option of land did not offer, and gives an insufficient sense of the processes which led to radical changes for all involved. I have not sought to write a 'shared' history by simply introducing Aboriginal stories into the existing framework of a pre-colonial, colonial, contemporary sequence. I have elected instead to use the term 'interaction', and hence 'interactive history' as it more broadly foregrounds the processes which have led to entanglement.

Historical entanglement

'Entangled' means 'interlaced, complicated, intricate' and 'mixed up in such a manner that a separation cannot easily be made'.⁶⁷ As I was shown the country by people for whom it was alive and a large part of their lives, and as I followed up this engagement with the detail in the archives, an important element of what I learned was seeing that the histories I am considering here are, in these senses, entangled.

The concept has come into widespread use since its insightful and nuanced application by Nicolas Thomas in his book *Entangled Objects: exchange, material culture, and colonialism in the Pacific* (1991). He employed it as a way to counter easy binary oppositions, 'grand polarities', in thinking about the interrelations of colonisers and colonised peoples. One of his stated aims was to get away from metaphors of a one-way 'impact' or 'penetration' or a conflation of diverse colonial processes into a single 'contact' event to describe these relations.⁶⁸ Instead, he adopts the metaphor of entanglement to acknowledge that the struggles to deal with the intrusive interactions which are the essence of colonial relations are active and multiple for both coloniser and colonised sides of the relation.

Almost by definition, colonial entanglement and struggle turn upon the difference between indigenous peoples and foreigners, natives and intruders, but recognition that this axis is fundamental should not obscure or marginalise the crucial fragmentation of knowledge and interests on both sides, the struggles which always take place within both the metropolitan project of colonisation and the

⁶⁷ Oxford English Dictionary 1971, compact edition p 874.

⁶⁸ Thomas 1991: 205.

indigenous project of appropriating or reacting to colonial intrusion.⁶⁹

The concept of entanglement that Thomas develops to re-think what is involved in people's exchanges emphasises the 'mutability of things in recontextualisation', rather than any fixed or single properties of identity or function.⁷⁰ It is an historical and interactive perspective to which my approach to understanding 'a place' is an indebted exchange partner.⁷¹

An 'entangled' perspective also avoids focus on either a global-scale dynamic which determines the possibilities for the form of interactions any- and every-where, or a local scale ethnographic description of those interactions in isolation, as large- and small-scale processes are both at work in shaping the forms of interaction. This is a necessary recognition of local processes implicated in national change in the case of the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line.

I have used both the terms entanglement and interactional history in the title of this work. Places acquire the quality of being 'entangled' in consequence of the interactions in those places, so the two terms are interchangeable. The interlinking of these overlapping concepts draws attention to the practices of place making and place maintenance, and also highlights the inherently social quality of place-related practices.⁷² It is this relationship between interaction and entanglement that my thesis sets out to explore.

The heterogeneous now

There is also a temporal implication which follows from adopting this interactional, non-binary starting point. Starting from a perspective of entanglement disallows easy distinctions between pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. Dipesh Chakrabarty raises a related conceptual point:

the writing of history must implicitly assume a plurality of times existing together, a disjuncture of the present with itself. Making visible this disjuncture is what subaltern pasts allow us to do. ... for instance the writing of medieval history for Europe depends

⁶⁹ Thomas 1991: 205.

⁷⁰ Thomas 1991: 28.

⁷¹ Humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan connects bodies of thought about place and about objects when he refers to a place as 'an object in which one can dwell' (Tuan 1977).

⁷² Myers 2002; Byrne 2008.

on the assumed contemporaneity of the medieval, or what is the same thing, the noncontemporaneity of the present with itself.⁷³

Chakrabarty highlights the lack of acknowledgement of this heterogeneity in the dominant assumption in western European historical thought that there is a uniform, secular, calendrical time which is natural and common to all.⁷⁴ A sense of time is not the same as a sense of the past.

This is not to set up a binary choice, either place *or* history, as Tony Swain tends to, where an emphasis on place excludes a sense of history.⁷⁵ Bingey and his co-workers were aware of a succession of events. They used chronological markers such as the influenza epidemic in 1919, the building of particular yards or bores, and there is an early example of the construction of Charlotte Waters being used to relate other events in time (see chapter 3). Nor do I intend to invoke absolutes. I am not claiming that this is 'the' temporal understanding of all Indigenous people, or that it is exclusive to Indigenous people. It is a particular way of organising the past. It does not erase the original sequencing of events, but it does not pay great attention to that aspect of them. It allows for, or builds in, the overflowing of that sequence that has followed as entangling interactions continue to complicate them. It sits well with a mode of life that integrates places through a web of movement (see chapter 5). The connections between people and events hold in terms of place more than time.

In response, my approach has been to find ways to tell these histories that loosen the grip of a period-based sequence that borrows its apparent naturalness from the deeply embedded western 'metanarrative of progress'⁷⁶ and instead capture the simultaneity, the entangled temporality of the places and people's relationship to them. Rather than the histories being ordered in terms of an externally derived chronological temporal sequence, I have followed the grain of the stories, and told them in terms of places.⁷⁷

⁷³ Chakrabarty 2000: 109.

⁷⁴ Chakrabarty 2000: 74. See also Ashis Nandy 2002 for a discussion of this western European Enlightenment mode of history as *the* past, the only past.

⁷⁵ eg Swain 1993: 4 - 'Aboriginal interpretation of changes to their life-world has been cast in terms of space rather than history.' Swain 1993: 23 - 'Abiding Events [aspects of the Dreaming] and rhythms of daily life are linked not through time but through place.'

⁷⁶ Chakrabarty 2000: 88.

⁷⁷ See Griffiths 1996. This is discussed further in the section 'Place as organising principle' below.

As places are formed through human action, it follows that they are temporally constituted. They are not fixed at a particular time, with a particular identity, but are constantly being brought into being.⁷⁸ The temporality of the place is folded into it as people interact in it and with it. At Smiths Yards for example, time was folded into the people as they cut the coolibahs, shaped them, built and re-built the yards, yarded the cattle over and over, told stories around the campfire, as expeditions departed, as we visited.⁷⁹ Retelling these actions, we unfold that time. It is cumulative, accretionary, unevenly distributed; as the material traces are. So a place is space with history. That is, a place is not a neutral or fixed background 'container' for human action. Rather it is constantly being brought into being *as* a distinct place only through the interactions between people, with each other and the material world of that particular locale through time.

My aim is not to *disentangle* the inherent complexities of colonial interaction, but to find ways of attending to them so that they may be retained, inherent in the texture and character of the stories being related.

Towards writing an inclusive regional history

This thesis tracks the specific interactions that have formed the particular entangled places of the western Simpson Desert area. In doing so, it contributes to the establishment of a regional history in an area where no historical syntheses exist. The area falls between the somewhat better known and studied areas of the McDonnell Ranges northwest in Central Australia, and the Lake Eyre region to the southeast. The western Simpson area sits on the margins of maps of these areas, slipping off their corners.

The dominant image of the western Simpson area is of big bad desert; empty, remote, hostile, unchanging. The sign on the Stuart Highway as you cross into the Northern Territory near Kulgera encourages the sense that there are no people: 'Welcome to nature territory'. For contemporary visitors the Simpson Desert is most commonly envisaged and experienced as a 4WD challenge, with rough roads to endure but the unusual compensation of a hot spring to relax in, rather than a fully lived, historical human landscape. Visitor's comments in the

⁷⁸ See Massey 1995.

⁷⁹ Ingold 1993; Berger 1984: 35.

logbook at the Irrwanyere Spring camping ground expose the limits of their engagement: 'Finally a bath', 'Nice swimming', 'Soothing', 'An oasis in the desert', 'peaceful, unique, great facilities', 'Crowded', 'Just as good the third time', 'A great place but roads are shit'.⁸⁰

Importantly, the historical detail that is brought together is likely to be more readily and willingly grasped by people who have experienced the place, as the history then has a tangible, memorable context, and an increased personal relevance; a foundation for understanding, which can be built on further.

Missing stories

The specificities of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people's lives in the region are frequently surprising and counter to expectation, for example in the Wankanguru people's lives in the middle of the Simpson dune field on the permanent *mikiri* wells⁸¹ (see chapter 4), or the breeding of successful race horses in the early 1900s at Dalhousie station homestead,⁸² in its unequivocal 'badlands' setting (see chapter 5). But even more instructive and revelatory are the untold stories which show the interactions between what are often assumed to be separate components of history. The challenge is to track the interaction of these histories. Brought together, the stories animate the past in unimagined ways, and their conjunction in a particular place is a vivid reminder of the place's diverse origins.

One example of the suppression of the entangled nature of the history of the region, which struck me early in my research, was this memorable photograph of two men at Charlotte Waters in 1901 (fig 1.14). It was taken by Frank Gillen during his year-long anthropological recording journey along the Overland Telegraph Line with Baldwin Spencer. In Gillen's photograph album, held at the South Australian Museum, there are classical physical anthropological framings of front and profile records of individuals captioned 'Type, Charlotte Waters'; 'Arunta (Charlotte Waters)', and scenes of ceremonies and the landscape of the Finke River. Amongst them is this single image of senior men standing beside a humpy. They were no doubt two of the men Spencer and

⁸⁰ Comments from National Parks and Wildlife Visitors' Book, entries from 2004 - 2007, examined at Dalhousie Springs 16 August 2007.

⁸¹ Hercus and Clarke 1986.

⁸² Michael-Podmore 1909: 87.

Gillen worked with when recording ceremonies at Charlotte Waters. This is Gillen's only photograph in the album of a non-traditional Indigenous subject in this region. He labeled it, with irony and perhaps regret, 'The dawn of Civilization, Charlotte Waters'.

In this image we see the flat plain stretching off behind a shadeless and apparently isolated hut, made from short planks. The roof is thatched with bundles of brush and has some bags stored on top of it, away from the dogs. The men are self-contained, at ease, with a watchful expression. They meet the regard of the ethnographer's camera directly, measure for measure.

Spencer and Gillen did not publish this photo. It documents the individuality of the unnamed people that they worked with, and it shows the particularity of the circumstances in which they lived, and hence the context for the performances of songs and ceremonies which Spencer and Gillen recorded. To publish this image would have troubled, or undermined, the status of their information as derived from representatives of the traditional, authentic Aboriginal past. Spencer and Gillen's purpose was to record Aboriginal culture, not history. The history which gave rise to the co-presence of Gillen, the telegraph officer from Alice Springs, Spencer, the Oxford-trained Biology Professor from Melbourne University and the Lower Southern Arrernte people of Charlotte Waters, which made the recording project possible, was not in the frame as a subject for record or discussion - it was self-evident to the point of invisibility, it was not relevant, and it was inconvenient to presentation of an account of authentic Aboriginality. Thus this image is unusual in having escaped the elision of history necessary to carry out their task as they saw it, which side-lined their own role as historical actors, as much as that of the people they worked with.

Yet for the two elders in the photograph, a central experience was the continuity of looking after their country, travelling through it, singing its songs and performing its ceremonies, notwithstanding the context of the radical change in the thirty years since the Overland Telegraph Line surveyors decided on Charlotte Waters as the site for a telegraph repeater station. In chapter 3 I have sought to foreground the perspectives they and others of the Charlotte Waters area may have had on these intercultural interactions.

Intergenerational exchange of knowledge

The elders in this photograph are links in two chains or modes of transfer of knowledge; the two forms distinguished by Merlan as discussed above. The first is the overt, articulated teaching of how the world works, of Ancestral Law and appropriate behaviour to younger men (and women - see Hercus 1989). There is also an implicit practical learning involved, passed on through shared experiences. The importance of both of these forms is discussed by anthropologist Fred Myers. He describes them as a form of intergenerational exchange in Pintubi social life. This is glossed as 'holding' or 'looking after' younger generation members, 'growing them up'; a combination of nurturance and authority that transforms them, spirit and body, into agents capable of acting in the world.⁸³ This is a particularly strongly expressed feature of Pintubi social life, but it serves as a reminder that this is a component for all, in some form, and it will be disrupted when experiences are no longer shared.

Sudden changes in circumstance mean that those growing up amidst the changes are born into a different world of sensation and experience from that of the generation above them. The phenomenon of dissimilar experiences of the same set of events on age-based lines emerged powerfully amongst the 'counter-signs' included in descriptions of the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line, discussed in chapter 3 below.

The second transfer of knowledge referenced in this photograph is part of the inter-cultural circumstances which produced it - the decision to pass on knowledge to external interlocutors and their audio and visual recording methods, in a speedy, one-off way.⁸⁴ What it cost these men, and the other men and women who participated in the transfer of songs, ceremonies, objects, language, but not their own historical lives, we do not now know. In some early exchanges, there are documented cases of severe consequences, with elders

⁸³ Myers 1993: 35-37.

⁸⁴ Luise Hercus says of the time consuming processes of passing on knowledge of songs and ceremonies in north-western South Australia, 'Simple transference of knowledge is not possible: learning has been and probably always will be a long and painful process. ... To learn even one of the *ularaka* traditions would have required months of repetition and study. Moreover, ... learning songs was not just repetition but also creativity ... they were ancient yet living traditions. The study of these traditions required great effort and dedication, and unbelievable feats of memory' 1989: 106. The *ularaka* is the Arabana-Wangkanguru concept glossed as Dreamings in English (Hercus 1989: 102).



Fig 1.14: 'The dawn of Civilisation, Charlotte Waters', 1901, F. J Gillen photograph album no 50, South Australian Museum Archives

being killed for betraying their responsibilities to maintain the secrecy of ceremonial Law.⁸⁵ In 1901, after 30 years of interaction, the hold of Law was less absolute, there was a competing system of authority and power, and compromises to find accommodation within that were being made. Marriage rules and the authority of the elders were shifting. Total control over knowledge was being transformed in transactions with other systems for its storage and transfer, particularly those of anthropology.⁸⁶

It does not require the extreme circumstances of the Overland Telegraph Line for such intergenerational differences to be established. Denis Byrne makes the important point that the passing on of stories and meaning between generations is always a part of learning about a place: 'This is where I used to live when I was young', 'This is where your grandfather died'. Barbara Allen calls this a 'genealogical landscape'.⁸⁷ But the current generation is always adding to that, re-interpreting it and re-structuring it, so that even if living in the same places, they are not experienced in a unitary way.⁸⁸ These intergenerational differences in experience thus generate another form of entanglement in a place.

The other side of story telling

The other side of story telling is listening. It is not possible to listen if you assume you know the answers already. Listening is 'the expression of an attitude that we are incomplete and need to absorb other people's experience'.⁸⁹ Anthropologist Jeremy Beckett points out that 'colonised people have not only to endure their situation but to make sense of it'.⁹⁰ While the colonisers might have created a silence around their intercultural histories, Australian Indigenous communities continued to tell the histories of themselves to each other, resisting the impost of the dominant external representations.⁹¹ The accompanying challenge is how to hear, how to bring into the field of public

⁸⁵ Hercus 1989: 110; Mulvaney et al 1997: 48.

⁸⁶ Strehlow 1971: 493-4; Hercus 1989: 110-116. Spencer 1912: 202 'In 1912, wrong marriages 'would be tolerated' because of lessening in numbers makes it impracticable to carry out marriage laws fully'. Gillen 1968: 23 In 1901, 'some half dozen of the leading men interviewed me and requested that I should nominate a man to be Atalunja or head man of the local group'.

⁸⁷ Allen 1990.

⁸⁸ Byrne 2008: 162-3.

⁸⁹ Theodore Zelmin 1999: 5 (4-6).

⁹⁰ Beckett 1993: 675.

⁹¹ For example, Morphy and Morphy 1984; Beckett 1993; Shaw 1995; Wharton 1994; Rose 1991; Read and Read 1991; Peters-Little *et al* 2006.

awareness, what Indigenous people have said about their lives as they made sense of the changes that colonisation imposed, and their consciousness of those changes.

Openness to the stories which were told in response to visiting places or reading histories of them aloud was important in shaping this work. I tried to avoid being '*binabudi*' a local Luritja word which means 'deaf ears'. I heard the expression used frequently in the context of dealings with white administrators, at meetings about funding or housing, for example. They felt they were not heard in the exchanges, because, the implication is, the authorities do not have the capacity to hear.

Most researchers working with Indigenous custodians in the western Simpson region have been interested in traditional aspects of past Indigenous life – language and ancestral traditions, sacred sites, stone arrangements, stone artefacts. They considered the life stories which surrounded these to be disjunctive and irrelevant. But stories of pastoral life were equally important historically, and telling them gave the pleasure of mastery and strength of legitimation and recognition. Many archaeologists, historians and anthropologists working with Aboriginal people have learnt the need and the benefits of expanding the frame of their research to make what is central to people's experiences central to the research.⁹²

If these interactional histories of the region are not available, there can be no self-recognition, or reinforcement of their identity, by contemporary Indigenous people knowing the lineage of their forebear's engagement in the past, nor can there be the potential for an informed re-imagining of these engagements for a different future.

The heat of historical knowledge, the conflicts over how it is developed and applied, is generated in its powerful political location as an authoritative, official gatekeeper to people's pasts. Our sense of historicity, of past-in-the-present-ness, informs our construction of self-understanding, identity and our envisaged futures. 'The struggle for history is about the present and the

⁹² For example, see Greer et al 2002; Gill, Paterson and Kennedy 2001; Beck and Somerville 2005; Rose 1991; Harrison 2004, Byrne and Nugent 2004; Clarke 2000.

future'.⁹³ The forms in which the relationship of the past to the present are conceived and represented have crucial implications for the construction of Aboriginal identity and more broadly, for the idea that all Australians have of themselves.⁹⁴

Making the missing histories more available gives visitors to the Witjera National Park (and managers and even longer-term dwellers) the capacity to alter contemporary experience of the region and deepen understanding of its people and places. By extension, people's knowledge of poorly articulated aspects of settler Australian history may also be enriched. Rose and Lewis point out that the relationship between dominant white Australian history, and Aboriginal tellings of the histories, is like a painful, unexpected pinch to your skin. There is no alarm when they are kept separate, but when the two lines are brought together, there is a sharp shock. This has the potential to startle Australians into new understandings of ourselves as a nation with a multitude of intersecting histories.⁹⁵

The work of story telling

Marilyn Hull-Stuart⁹⁶ and I were reminiscing on the verandah of Bingey Lowe's house at Anniversary Bore homeland, telling stories, and discussing the finer points of story telling. She said to me with certainty and considerable relish, 'When you've got a good story, you don't just tell it, you str-e-e-e-tch it'. She was affirming the virtue of milking your narrative for all its rich and lively detail, for your audience's sake as well as your own performative satisfaction. If a story is worth telling, it deserves attention to detail. Less reportage than performance, hilarious, tender, tragic by turns as each participant's voice and movements will be acted out. There is usually not a specific punchline or lesson to the story, but a sequence of past happenings. Both the teller and the audience are caught up in the past through shared details of known places or known individuals. A double memory of the content of the story and of the event of its telling is enfolded into their repertoires of experience.

⁹³ Mullings 1994 cited by McBryde 1996.

⁹⁴ Chakrabarty 2007; Rose 2003a: 130; McBryde 1996.

⁹⁵ Rose and Lewis 1992: 27-28.

⁹⁶ Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation member whose grandmother and great aunt, Clara and Sarah Strangways, were born at Charlotte Waters in 1880 and 1889 (Hull-Stuart 1998).

The story can be based on individual experience (e.g. see 'The story of the two girls' chapter 5), or be a re-telling of stories told by and about older generations, or by the creator Ancestors. Representing chunks of life experience as story is a way into understanding what has happened, giving it coherence through the selection and retelling. To ask 'What's been happening?' is not to ask what you have actually been doing, but what selected highlights you have marked, or had marked for you. Neurologist Oliver Sacks says:

each of us constructs and lives a narrative, and this narrative is us, our identity. ... Biologically, physiologically, we are not so different from each other; historically, as narratives – we are each of us unique.⁹⁷

Other ways of telling

The way the stories are told is important. For historians, Hayden White argued that the form of their narratives is not found in the events themselves, but constructed using time-honoured narrative techniques of selection, ordering, tone, point of view.⁹⁸ The structure chosen to develop a narrative expresses the meaning intended by the historian as much or more than any of the constituent historical events.⁹⁹

Dipesh Chakrabarty points out that 'minority histories' unsettle assumptions about acceptable forms of history-telling:

the question of including minorities in the history of the nation has turned out to be a much more complex problem than a simple operation of applying some already settled methods to a new set of archives and adding the results to the existing collective wisdom of historiography. The additive 'building block' approach to knowledge has broken down.¹⁰⁰

If control of construction of the past is handed over to others, or, is the outcome of collaborative work, results are likely to have subjects and forms which differ from those that are dominant and familiar in the mainstream.¹⁰¹ Ann Curthoys summarises this process:

In the last two decades of the twentieth century, Aboriginal people challenged existing Australian understandings of the colonial past by emphasizing their prior occupation, direct experience of invasion and racism, and their ongoing struggles for survival. This counter-history was told especially through written life stories and oral

⁹⁷ Sacks 1985: 105.

⁹⁸ Curthoys and Docker 2006: 191-2.

⁹⁹ See eg Roth 1989; White 1978; Cronin 1999, Ballard 2003.

¹⁰⁰ Chakrabarty 2000: 107.

¹⁰¹ Byrne 1996; Neale 2008.

testimony, and had a significant impact on historians, the law and public life.¹⁰²

An innovative form of counter-history telling is in the form of collaborative 'eye-witness accounts'.¹⁰³ These are historical accounts given in full in their Indigenous language, transcribed and translated. These are a distinctive type of account which finely articulates input from many disciplines. They work in a series of layers – as a record of Indigenous language; as a telling of a story important to the teller in their own terms; as a history with broad significance, such as people moving out of the Simpson Desert for the last time for example, which are made widely available and intelligible.¹⁰⁴

The 1981 Aboriginal working group making recommendations for the preparation of a major bicentennial history for 1988 made a clear statement of 'why Aboriginal history should be written by Aboriginal people'. They state that Aboriginal people are 'guardians and custodians of our history and culture, and it is our responsibility to pass on to future generations our set of truths. ... We, as Aboriginal people, can begin to rectify the white misconceptions about our history by writing it ourselves.' They point to a different, cyclical, temporality in their form of telling history. They highlight their distinctive responsibility as historians to 'family, kin and community' who will correct their accounts in a way that white historians' versions will not be.¹⁰⁵

Aboriginal people will look at documents and come to quite different conclusions, in the main, from white historians, because we are ultimately responsible to 'our own mob' and not to the discipline of history nor the white concept of knowledge.¹⁰⁶

In addition, much Indigenous history telling is conducted in non-textual modes based in art, dance, material culture, film, music.¹⁰⁷

Bingey Lowe's favourite song writers and singers were Slim Dusty and Buck Owen as they sang songs which told of his life. He also sang himself, although in the 1990s he had only a 'little bit voice' left. He said:

Used to be real fun droving. Sit round tell stories yapping away like bunch of old crows. White people too, telling stories cant stop 'em.

¹⁰² Curthoys 2003: 185.

¹⁰³ Tom Dutton and Luise Hercus, editors *Aboriginal History* volume 9 1985: 3.

¹⁰⁴ Hercus 1985.

¹⁰⁵ Aboriginal Working Group 1981: 22.

¹⁰⁶ Aboriginal Working Group 1981: 24.

¹⁰⁷ See for example the collection of papers in the 'Exchanging Histories' volume 30 *Aboriginal History* 2006.

Singing too. All gone now, all them fellas, dead and gone. Cant sing any more - squeaky voice if don't practice.¹⁰⁸

I gave him a cassette player so he could record himself singing the songs of everyday life, and also the country that he had been taught by the Old People. Luise Hercus recorded many of these songs in the 1960s and 1970s. They could be obscene or hilarious, or lullabies which were passed down by the senior men and women. The singers also composed new songs to record memorable events such as the sighting of the first rabbit, the arrival of the first car, and the train.¹⁰⁹

Senior men and women had tremendous skills with words and songs, ... It seemed easy to switch from normal speech to poetry: a person's speech would take on a dramatic intonation and gradually turn into song. The times when this happened were usually moments of great emotional stress. Sometimes however inspiration was more light-hearted.¹¹⁰

These 'olden times chants' were part of the great web of songs which express the actions of the Ancestors which generated the landscape.

'Stretching' as metaphor

Marilyn Stuart's insight about the importance of stretching stories has remained with me as a guide for what I have aimed to do in retelling the stories of the people and places of the area brought out in our work together. I have taken up the idea of stretching in three senses. Firstly, in the sense of **expanding the story telling frame**, to include missing stories – the histories of intercultural interaction. Secondly, in the sense of extending the availability of the stories beyond their local source and context, stretching them to be **accessible to a wider general audience**. Thirdly, in the sense of stretching **the content of the stories**, so as to recover not just the broad patterns but also the smaller-scale, lived, and located details of what has gone on in those places, and so to draw out the dynamic histories immanent in the landscape. Developing a workable approach to doing this was an important part of the development of this work that I discuss below.

¹⁰⁸ Macfarlane field notebook 20 July 1996.

¹⁰⁹ Hercus 1990b; 1994: 94-101.

¹¹⁰ Hercus 1994: 91.

What makes a story 'good'?

Marilyn's statement implicitly raises the question of what is a 'good' story? Tom Griffiths, who is an exemplar of the skills of good story telling in his history writing, says:

Story-telling ... is a privileged carrier of truth, a way of allowing for multiplicity and complexity at the same time as guaranteeing memorability. I would argue that narrative is not just a means; it is a method, and a rigorous and demanding one. The conventional scientific method separates causes from one another; it isolates each one and tests them individually in turn. Narrative, by contrast, carries multiple causes along together; it enacts connectivity.¹¹¹

So, a good story is one that endures. It has the capacity, the holding power, to bring together elements so that they engage the audience, and can instruct. A good story can be surprising, or warmly familiar, but it is always recognised by the audience as having some relevance to themselves. At its best, a story is layered, containing meanings which take us beyond its surface content and plot. So in this way a good story can relate the local, lived scale of experience to the over-arching historical events to which they contribute. After all, it is only locally that global processes can be experienced. The large-scale changes that the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line set off are considered in these terms in chapter 3 below; in particular, how they played out at the Charlotte Waters repeater station.

In keeping with Marilyn's endorsement of stretching stories, Griffith's definition of story telling advocates *verstehen*, or understanding. He has experienced the strength of cumulatively building an interpretation which brings understanding through showing connections. This is in contrast to *erklarung* or explanation, which seeks to strip away connection so as to isolate entities and processes in order to explain them.

Chakrabarty refers to the histories missing from mainstream consideration as 'minority histories'.¹¹² In terms of what makes them good, he writes that "good' minority history is about expanding the scope of social justice and representative democracy' and at the same time, subverting and challenging the limits of mainstream historical practice.¹¹³ He sees the stories that are liberated

¹¹¹ Griffiths 2005: 46.

¹¹² Chakrabarty 2000: see chapter 4.

¹¹³ Chakrabarty 2000: 107.

by this approach as having an active social role. The public recognition of Henry Reynolds' work is a prime example of this, as is the resonance of the stories of children taken away in the 'Stolen Generation' report, which opened up public understanding and a widespread recognition of the need for reconciliation.¹¹⁴ They tell stories that are not widely known, and they often tell them in ways that are not familiar.

Place as organising principle

The places of the western Simpson Desert area are full of good stories. That this is so is not necessarily apparent to those who know the region from the outside as an empty, challenging wilderness. Bringing out these stories, making them more generally available, and so returning the people to the landscape, is one primary goal of the work of this thesis.

Telling stories and learning, and being in a place, are inextricably linked activities. Evoking places and the people in them is a pleasurable and serious work of re-living them through stories, whether they were visited yesterday by us, or a century ago by people you have never met, or one of the Ancestral originators of the land and its interconnections. I found this key link expressed clearly by Michel de Certeau. He says that narrative is a spatial practice.¹¹⁵ That is, we organise experience and memory in terms of where things happen, as itineraries of action in place. Stories link places together, make distinctions between them, and produce meaning by integrating fragments.

We understand a particular space through being able to grasp the sorts of 'narrative of action' that are possible within that space; we understand a place and a landscape through the historical and personal narratives that are marked out within it and that give that place a particular unity and establish a particular set of possibilities within it.¹¹⁶

My Irrwanyere teachers emphasised the importance of visiting particular places in order to know them. Being in the place was the trigger to telling their histories, and was a source of the veracity that made them 'proper' history. This emphasis accorded with my archaeologically-informed interest in developing spatial and material history-in-place, and my place-based organisation of the

¹¹⁴ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997, *Bringing them Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*. Sydney: Sterling Press.

¹¹⁵ De Certeau 1984: 115-6.

¹¹⁶ Malpas 1999: 186.

search for scattered texts associated with these places as I gathered together others' stories to weave a composite. We were all 'involved in the world'¹¹⁷ through our attention to the distinctions that constitute places *as* places. These are the different histories of interaction between people with each other, and with the physical characters of the place and the other living things there through time, varying in their form, pattern and intensity that are integrated through being emplaced.

It is this inherent capacity to hold distinctions together without homogenising them that I called the 'many-in-one' quality of an entangled place such as Smiths Yards examined above. A feature of this kind of complex relation between elements is that while the elements are not singular isolates, neither are they multiple separate elements joined together; distinct, irreducible, but inter-related components, hence 'many-in-one'.¹¹⁸ They are not singular nor a collection of single elements in a multiple bundle, but qualitatively distinct from both. This quality is an aspect of any place, as philosopher of place Jeff Malpas discusses:

The complexity of place does not entail a dispersion of elements, but rather enables their 'gathering together' – their interconnection and unification – in such a way that their multiplicity and differentiation can be both preserved and brought to light.¹¹⁹

Malpas goes further, to assert that this 'gathering together' capacity of places is a necessary pre-condition for human experience: 'The differentiated and complex unity of place ... makes for the possibility of memory, of belief, of thought and experience - only within place is the unity necessary for subjectivity established'.¹²⁰ Place is the frame within which human experience is to be understood, and also the frame in which it can occur.¹²¹ He argues that our encounters with persons and things are always in place and that place is a fundamental part of our way of being, of the character of our human engagement with the world.

¹¹⁷ Here I am referring to Chris Gosden's Heidegger-influenced ideas on being-in place: 'When we say that people are in the world we are not just making a statement about spatial position, like saying that the water is in the glass, but we are talking about involvement, which is closer to the notion of being in love or in business. Being in the world is a state of involvement' (Gosden 1994: 111).

¹¹⁸ Mol and Law 2002: 1, 10-11.

¹¹⁹ Malpas 1999: 174.

¹²⁰ Malpas 1999: 174.

¹²¹ Malpas 1999: 15-16.

The places of the western Simpson Desert integrate the stories of interactions between people there, and between them and the diverse physical features of the place. No single person knows all the stories. But connected through their place-specificity, the multiple histories enacted there may be cumulatively brought together, as in this work. In focusing on their intersections we cannot avoid the interactions that make up the contemporary place, cannot read it as a place with a single history, or with no history at all.

These different forms of story relate to different times and to different projects by different groups of people. They generate different sources of knowledge about a place that do not necessarily overlap neatly, but variously complement, challenge, and certainly complicate, each other. While there is overlap of the various evidences, it is often in the juxtaposition of their differences that sparks of unexpected understanding fly out.

In bringing the stories together, I have tracked the processes of entanglement that are played out in particular locales, as a result of which the contemporary places have emerged. In this aspect, this thesis is a study of processes of place-making. It poses the question: in what ways has this locale that is currently recognised as a distinct human place been produced and reproduced there through time? This shifts the focus away from the physical location to the processes by which the contemporary place has been and continues to be generated.

How did I arrive at the approach set out above, attending to the 'entangled' quality of places and the elements which contribute to that? This approach is best understood by backtracking through the course of my thinking during the work and the changes in orientation that emerged.

When I started fieldwork in 1995/6, there was a perceived need for archaeological work in Witjera National Park. The preliminary assessment of the significance of Mt Dare for reservation as a park in 1984 recommended that survey and evaluation of Aboriginal sites and historical sites be undertaken

without delay.¹²² The Management Plan drawn up in 1995 repeated this recommendation, and called for research on the historic buildings which addressed both their fabric and their oral histories. My fieldwork in the park in 1996 showed that there had been damage to archaeological materials, where tracks had been bulldozed through deposits at Tin Shanty and at Federal station, and due to bottle hunting and removal of material from all the historic places, and removal of artefacts, especially grindstones, from the springs area over a long period. These impacts were expected to accelerate with increasing park usage unless awareness of the less obvious archaeological materials Present, and their import, was raised through research. In this context, my potential archaeological contribution was welcomed by the Witjera Board of Management.

I began this work with ideas based in my undergraduate training in prehistoric archaeology, cross-cut by my post-graduate education in interpretative or contextual archaeology. My initial proposal for this research project in October 1994 sets out my starting position clearly (see box). It grew out of dissatisfaction with the dominant mode of archaeological writing and practice in Australia, developed in my Masters work,¹²³ and saw approaches from interpretative archaeological perspectives as a possible way out.

The starting point of the final thesis, and the backbone of the approach taken can be seen here, in the box below. The theoretical ideas which underlie the proposal have weathered the long process of the subsequent work and learning that followed. These ideas hinge on the key archaeological understanding, developed in the last 20 years, that objects are not passive, separate entities in the socio-cultural world. Rather they are players, actors, in processes of interaction. They contribute to the orchestration, or patterning of what happens. This involves a two-way relationship between people and the objects that they make and use. The relationship is generally invisible to the people involved, as it takes place at the level of habit rather than at a consciously articulated level. For example, the way the chairs are arranged in a seminar room both reflects assumptions about how meetings will be conducted and affects how they can be. Objects make spatial structures that are not merely an arena or backdrop for

¹²² Davey *et al.* 1984.

¹²³ Macfarlane 1994.

social life, but a medium through which social relations are produced and reproduced.¹²⁴

This starting proposal is academically interesting, but it is framed in a way that is distancing and abstract. The ideas in it have a rough road to travel and many conversations to be buffeted by before they began to relate to lived, grounded experience. As I started to be taught the country by Irrwanyere members, it rapidly became clear that framing my research question in terms of archaeological site types cut the place from the connected historical processes that were part of why it was recognised and constituted *as* a place.

It was increasingly evident to me that the surrounding landscape was vibrating with lived and remembered history brought through to the present in stories. The specific archaeological questions which I had brought to it seemed more likely to kill that, in the form of my initial framing anyway, rather than add to it. I thought of Denis Byrne's unflinching observation that prehistoric archaeology in Australia had come to be *the* mainstream accepted Aboriginal past, so contributing to the colonial denial of the histories that link the present into the many pasts that it contains.¹²⁵ While important contributions to dating the deep past have been of political value in establishing undeniable prior possession of the land now known as Australia,¹²⁶ archaeological concentration on these aspects has helped to elide the recent past and its connections to the present. My approach was going to have to shift its focus.

¹²⁴ Barrett 1988: 11; Gosden 1994; J. Thomas 1996.

¹²⁵ Byrne 1996.

¹²⁶ Attwood 1996; Griffiths 1996; McBryde 1996.

'A re-consideration of Australian Aboriginal landscape archaeology'

PhD research proposal, 1994

The archaeology of prehistoric hunter-gatherers has a predominantly 'techno-economic' orientation which tends to be associated with the creation of abstract, de-personalised accounts of the past, located in 'deep time'. ... There has been an active re-positioning of Australian Aboriginal archaeology with respect to Aboriginal heritage and identity, the control of archaeological knowledge and material culture, and associated archaeological work practices, and the implications of the application of ethnographic analogies. It is suggested that

associated changes in the practice of Australian Aboriginal archaeology have not necessarily been accompanied by an equivalent re-thinking of the content of archaeological interpretations.

Recently, writing from divergent positions, a number of archaeologists have begun to explore the application of theoretical standpoints which provide a broader charter for archaeological interpretation. Archaeological theories concerning the active role played by material culture in social reproduction through the everyday interactions of people, place and objects through time are currently being developed in interpretative archaeology, which focuses on Neolithic monuments as the contexts of social processes and has involved reconceptualisations of the nature of engagement of people and landscape.

I wish to investigate the potential for extension of the dominant approach to interpretation of Australian Aboriginal environmental archaeological evidence. This raises questions regarding the applicability of these ideas in a non-European landscape? ...

The planned field research involves survey of stone arrangements and associated sites. The aim is to try and understand how the construction of the stone arrangements and their enduring material presence may have structured people's experience of these places in the landscape, and their role in social reproduction.

While ideas of the existence of a mutual structuring relationship between people and the built environment are relatively common, a question which has been little considered is how applicable they are to interaction with a less or non-structured material presence? What

form would mutuality take in the sites of the everyday, the characteristic open scatters of stone artefacts and shell middens which constitute the bulk of Australian Aboriginal archaeological evidence? ...

The structures and associated sites are to be considered in terms of their form, inter-relationship to each other and to micro-topographic landscape variations as well as to broad scale land unit based variations. ... This fieldwork would only take place following consultation with the local Aboriginal communities, and the Archaeology Branch of the state government. ... it is considered that an understanding of the inter-relatedness of people, material culture, place and time as a core to archaeological interpretation, provides a different place to start in understanding the archaeological evidence for past hunter-gatherer people's lives, beyond a de-populated past, an inventory of dates and provisioning. The continued development of the archaeological discipline requires such cross-fertilisation of intellectual traditions, innovations and evidence.

Doing fieldwork

My learning and recording work in the western Simpson Desert started with a preliminary visit in 1995, followed by extended field seasons in 1996, 1997, 1998, and a one week re-visit in 2001 and again in 2007. During these field seasons my stalwart volunteer archaeological field assistants and companions¹²⁷ and I carried out surface archaeological survey transects in contrasting environmental components of the landscape (see location map fig 1.2). We sample surveyed various types of water sources – ephemeral creeklines (Three O'Clock Creek, Bloods Creek); swampy areas (Duck Ponds and Woodgate Swamp); around the mound springs; on the banks of the Finke River (near Tin Shanty) and the Finke River floodout (near Anniversary Bore); and the margins of Spring Creek (north of Dalhousie Springs Homestead). We surveyed on gibber flats and over hills (Mt Crispe, along Christmas Creek, Appoandina hill east of Mt Dare, along Abminga Creek west of Mt Dare), and in a series of transects along the dunes at various distances into the dune field, at right angles to the French track. We also surveyed the surface materials surrounding several European homesteads or stations, at Dalhousie Springs, Mt Dare, Tin Shanty, Federal, and Charlotte

¹²⁷ Anne McConnell, Steve Brown, Viv Wood, Craig Westell, Keryn Walshe, Jane Lydon, Helen Skeat, Ian Coates, Bill Loftus, Karen Rowland.

Waters, as they represented another form of focus for people's interaction in the landscape.

These surveys were samples, designed to gather representative, comparative information about the range of material culture in the region, and contribute to an understanding of their spatial distribution. Practically, they consisted of walking, looking at the exposed surface, and recording where the stone, glass, ceramic, metal artefacts, features and structures were, measuring their dimensions, and describing their form, from flaked glass to stockyard, stone cairn to standing wooden wiltja. Photography, measurements, mud maps and GPS locations, and video recording were all used. Video film provided a particularly evocative way of conveying the sense of being in a place, but my sound recording and editing were poorly developed skills which made it a haphazard database.¹²⁸

Together with the slow accumulation of grubby field notebooks filled with rough maps and measurements, and an archive of slides, a less obvious long-term outcome of this fieldwork was the enfolding of the landscape into the workers as they spent days and weeks quietly being in it, engaging with its detail, thinking about the connection of the material traces on the ground to the surrounding landscape features, absorbing the textures and possibilities that they presented (fig 1.15).

Michel de Certeau distinguishes between maps and tours.¹²⁹ Maps relate a given place to all other places evenly. They exhibit the products of knowledge of places, but do not retain traces of the travel and measurement operations by which they were obtained. Plans, however, show how to move around the landscape. They leave out things you cannot see or that do not affect your route, and show the easiest access. Developing an orientation in the landscape, a familiarity with the lie of the land, involves investigating how one place relates to others, finding out how it is possible to get between places, what it looks like from different distances and perspectives, and the view from it. You consider lines of sight, and small dips in the land. A lot of such orientation is about dealing with the variability and texture, the lumpiness of the world. For

¹²⁸ Copies of all records have been deposited with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra.

¹²⁹ de Certeau 1984: 120-1.

example, how long does it take to walk from one place to another, if there are ditches or a steep hill. The smoothness suggested in maps and by the repeated use of standard desert images ('a sand dune', 'a mound spring', 'a homestead') is complicated by this direct exposure to the place.

The multiple aspects of a place and the connections between it and people do not, however, necessarily reveal themselves to you just because you present yourself there. The questions you ask will determine what it is you attend to, what will be there in your account – what is not there at the beginning can not magically emerge at the end. For example, if you are not thinking about access, you will not attend to how many tracks there are going to and from a particular place, nor ask about how they were built, when, who put them in.

At the smaller scale of attention there are the details of the material contents of a place and their spatial distribution, which is where many surprises and unexpected aspects emerge. Looking closely prevents you stopping too soon. For example, consider Dalhousie Springs homestead. The station is now a set of ruinous buildings of the local stone, old stockyards, with interpretation signs giving a history of an early pastoral lease taken up on the mound springs.



Fig 1.15: Doing fieldwork, between Red Mulga Creek and Mt Crispe, Vivienne Wood recording surface artefacts, October 1997

Being there, we not only see these physical traces, but we can stop to contemplate the view of the badlands from the doorway (fig 1.16). We carry out a surface archaeological survey around this focal point which reveals a much more complicated picture of life at and around the homestead. There are numerous stone artefacts and a pattern of small hearths of burnt limestone to the north. We measure how far they are away, look at their bone content, document the flaked glass, and several pieces of flaked telegraph insulator brought in from the Overland Telegraph Line. Just out of the direct line of sight, 1.6km away is a group of circular hut bases. There are stone cairns and discrete flaking events, not mixed in with the other occupational debris, where large cobbles of quartzite have been worked. None of this life at the location is remembered by texts or people, only by the material evidence. While it is not possible to date them, their spatial distinctions allow 'themes of material arrangement'¹³⁰ to be derived, which complicate the outsider's story of a lone historic stone homestead. (This assemblage of material is discussed in more detail in chapter 4.)

There are three strengths of an archaeological attention to past materiality and spatiality of a place. The first is its potential for providing evidence for the long term, longer than the usual maximum of four generations of memory and story. The second is its potential for providing both large scale and small scale patterns, sometimes linked – a short moment of shaping a stone artefact, the long term accumulative pattern of many generations extracting stone from the same source. The third is its capacity to access the patterns of life that are invisible to those who made them. This is the emphasis archaeology can provide for a 'bottom-up' understanding of social processes.

Most people can train their eye to recognise stone artefacts from the background of other stone - although even that is not always a straightforward identification in areas where all the stone is siliceous and fine grained, and can be inadvertently pseudo-flaked by cattle hooves. But this identification, while pleasing in itself, does no more than inform the observer that someone was here, a prior presence in the same place, part of a qualitatively different desert life. This may be an important reminder of prior and distinct ways in which the

¹³⁰ Barratt 1994: 15.

same place has been lived in, and for Irrwanyere members it was a heartening confirmation of the extent of their antecedents' activities in the dune field (see chapter 5).

But to read beyond presence, archaeological training brings a set of analytical skills that provide access to the process of production and use of the artefact - its source, exchange, how it was made, used and re-used in its life history, micro-wear and residue analysis, statistical comparison of its location, and its relationship to other artefacts in an assemblage.

However, the narrative tends to stay with the artefacts, or their site. It is rarely that an analysis of these can move through the demanding effort of translation of the material to give an animated picture of the people who were making and using them. The analysis is often so complex and multi-faceted that it becomes an end in itself, or it is routinised in the standard contract public archaeology recording of sites, with the same outcome. Analysis of past material products comes to stand for the people who generated them as part of the pattern of their lives. The resulting stories have tended to be dry and formulaic. This is a problem that has been recognised within the discipline.¹³¹

When the application of archaeological attention is at its best, the results can be potent and revealing – for example, the otherwise unknowable existence and then interpretation of the 'mock' carved pipe stems found in surface survey at Charlotte Waters (see chapter 3). An example of it not at its best is seen in a report on a small survey of Three O'Clock Creek. I carried this out because the Witjera National Park Board of Management planned an alternative camping ground for tourists on this branch of Christmas Creek. The report follows the language and format of a small-scale archaeological Environmental Impact Study, the bread-and-butter of a working contract archaeologist in Australia. It describes the site and the cultural material present in a particular type of environment, and stops. The format is beguilingly straightforward. It is not easy to read, however, and would be unlikely to convince anyone flicking through it in the Irrwanyere office that archaeology is an interesting or valuable discipline. Nevertheless, it meets the requirements of the legislation. I have included the main description and results in the box below.

¹³¹ eg Hodder 1989; Tilley 1989; Conkey and Gero 1991: 20; Spector 1993.



Fig 1.16: View through the doorway of Dalhousie Springs homestead, August 2007

These strictly archaeological surveys were carried out in between my visits to country arranged with Irrwanyere members, depending on their other commitments and their health. With them, video and audio recording as well as some mapping and sampling were carried out at a differently defined set of places, the choice of which grew out of reminiscing about the cattle days. These were the stockyards at Dalhousie Springs and at Paradise Bore, both built by Bingey Lowe, Ambullina, Eternity (Ilarkura) and Woodgates Swamp yards – the latter made of super-hard red mulga wood, at Memory, Dakota, Erina Bores, and the old Ewillina stud yard.

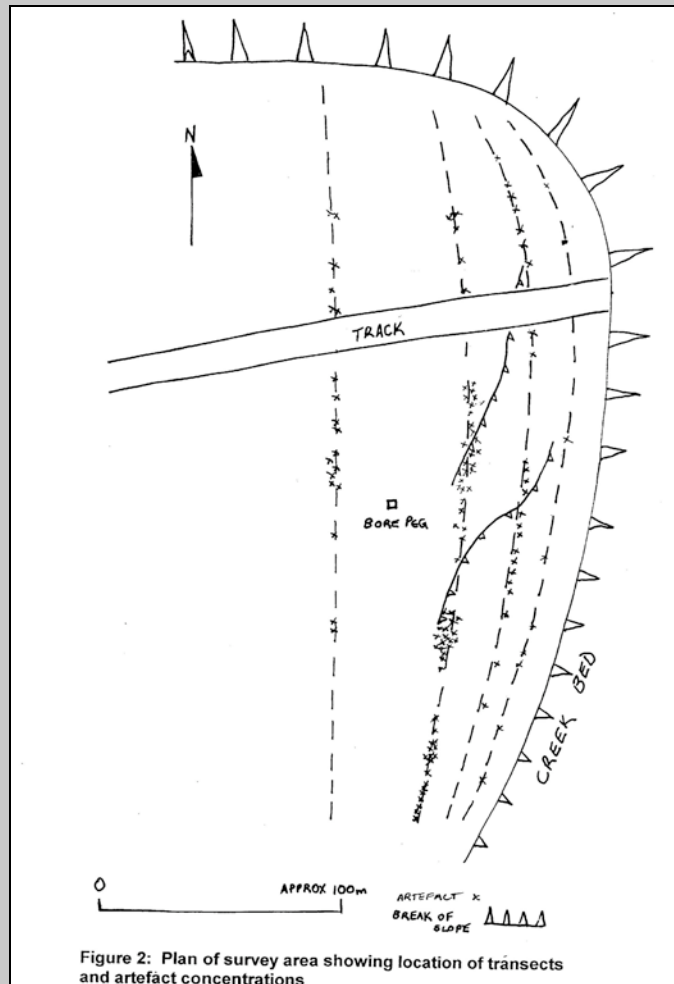
Increasingly, the places we visited and recorded were selected because of their relevance to Irrwanyere members as places of their lives, remembered and celebrated, not necessarily otherwise widely known.

This has parallels with archaeological survey work that was developed to provide evidence in the legal context of a native title claim, at De Rose Hill in north-western South Australia. Such archaeology aimed to show continued connection to places and continuities of practice in the area. To do so, the recording program targeted sites known to the Indigenous group making the native title claim, for which they had knowledge and memory of use.¹³² These were ‘sites known to the claimants and locations that were of contemporary importance to the claimants (mythological, evidence for residence and historic association)’. One of the archaeologists involved, Jo McDonald, is clear that this ‘can be done to the exclusion of basic archaeological frameworks’. ‘The claimants arguably recognise the presence of archaeological evidence distributed more widely across the land but they are only interested in identifying those aspects that had meaning to them and their claim.’¹³³

¹³² McDonald 2005: 41, 31.

¹³³ McDonald 2005: 31.

Report of an archaeological survey of Three O'Clock Creek, Witjera National Park, prepared for the Witjera National Park Board of Management, July 1996



Description of the survey area

The proposed campground is situated on gently undulating stony floodplains to the west of the incised stony bed of the ephemeral Three O'Clock Creek. This runs roughly south-north from the Emery Range to intersect with an east-west running branch of Red Mulga Creek. The wide floodplain displays low alluvial terraces running parallel to the creek, while the ground to the east of the creek rises more steeply. The creek has steep banks approximately one metre high, with deeper 3m banks to the north of the main track from Mt Dare to Dalhousie Springs. The ground between the creek and the north of the track has been cut up by vehicle traffic and has ashes from recent fires. Red mulga and gidgee grow with sparse low scrub in and around the creek channel. Several hundred meters further south, beyond the area surveyed, there appears to be a wider water-hole in the creek channel, which might retain sub-surface water longer than the creek bed.

The survey

In order to assess any patterning in the distribution of stone artefacts at varying distances away from the creek bed, all the stone artefacts observed in four 3m wide transects were recorded. These transects were located 1) beside the creek 2) 20 m west of the creek 3) 40 m west of the creek 4) 100m west of the creek.

The descriptive variables recorded for the artefacts were: size (length, width, thickness), raw material (silcrete, various colours of chert, chalcedony, sandstone), artefact type (flake, flaked piece, retouched flake, core segment, core, grinding stone) and amount of cortex on the flake (percentage of the dorsal surface of flakes, overall percentage of cores).

A range of modified stone from those clearly artefactual to those obviously freshly broken by vehicles was observed. The siliceous rocks in the area have been subject to heat cracking, frost plucking, water rolling, vehicle damage and cattle hoof damage. All of these are capable of creating pseudo-artefacts. Only those with a clear conchoidal fracture were included in the sample, which results in a minimum count of the numbers of artefacts present.

This surface survey method favours the identification of larger artefacts. The presence of small pieces less than 10mm can only be reliably assessed by test-pitting and sieving. This again means that the numbers recovered in the sample are a minimum number only.

Three O'Clock Creek — Combined 3 transects							
Raw material	Flake	Flaked piece	Retouched /Use-wear	Core & core fragment	Hammerstone	Grindstone	Total
Silcrete	55	5	14	19	0	0	93
Chalcedony	13	2	1	1	0	0	17
Chert	18	7	6	1	0	0	32
Glass	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Quartzite	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sandstone	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	86	14	21	21	0	0	142

Results

In the creek bed, three standing red mulgas and one coolibah had had several limbs (diameter ranging from 9 - 20cm) removed with an axe. These were presumably used for cattle station fenceposts.

A total of 142 stone artefacts were recorded in the four transects. The numbers and percentages of artefacts in each transect, their raw materials and types are set out in Table 1.

No stone artefacts were seen in the bed of the creek, although it is highly likely that people have sat and worked stone in the shade of the creek bed in the past. Their absence is possibly due to the coarse alluvial sand and gravel which reduced surface visibility, and/or the removal of an artefacts deposited during channel scouring floods.

Contents of the recorded stone artefact assemblage

Raw materials

The smooth cobble cortex on a majority of the recorded artefacts, and the presence of flaked cobble cores in the assemblage (see below) indicates that the locally occurring siliceous rocks which make up the stony plains are the source of the artefacts. That these provide a source of sufficiently large cores for flaking is demonstrated by a comparative study of the size and raw materials of the background cobbles which make up the stony plains. In a 1m² sample there were 62 rocks larger than 4cm in size, of which all but eight were silcrete, with five conglomeritic chert breccia (buff with red cement), two buff chert, and one sandstone rock. They were rounded to sub-rounded, with a reddish orange weathering cortex.

Similarly, silcrete dominated the sample assemblage of artefacts, with 65.5% made from silcrete cobbles, 22.5% made from a variety of chert types and 12% made from chalcedony. The silcrete was mainly grey, with some artefacts buff or yellow in colour. The range of cherts observed consisted of a buff chert breccia with red cement, a variety of pale coloured buff, cream, and grey cherts and a dark chocolate brown chert.

The dominant use of silcrete to make artefacts in the area is considered to reflect the greater availability of this raw material rather than a preferential selection of it.

Artefact types

No grindstones were recorded in the survey transects, nor were any seen in the area outside the recorded transects. This may be one indication that the area was not a long term or frequently re-visited place, but was subject to shorter term, less frequent visits. The lack of hammerstones in

the area is not unusual - these were rare even in the largest, richest concentrations of stone artefacts examined in the Park.

Eighteen cores were recovered (12.7% of the sample assemblage). These were all amorphous flaked cobbles, with only one to four primary flakes removed, from a cortex platform, unifacially flaked, except for one bifacially flaked cobble core. The abandonment of the cores in an unworked-out state is likely to be a reflection of both the unlimited amount of raw materials ready to hand and the constraints which cobbles impose in terms of size and shape.

The range of size of a 1m² sample of unmodified background rocks was consistent with the size range of the cores in the assemblage, with an unsurprising tendency for selection of the larger rocks for use as cores.

No tula adzes, points, or formal artefact 'types' were recorded in this sample. The presence of secondary flaking on 21 of the stone artefacts recorded (14.8%) indicates that after manufacture, people were using them for various tasks before discard.

Amount of cortex

The proportion of cortex remaining on the back (dorsal surface) of the flakes and retouched flakes in Transect 3 was recorded. Only two of the 57 flakes and retouched flakes had more than 50% cortex remaining. If the main activity relating to the production of stone artefacts on site were the removal of a few casual flakes from the cobble cores, there would be a higher proportion of primary or decorticing flakes with 50 - 100% cortex dorsally. Instead, 36.5% of the 57 have no cortex remaining, 40.4% have 1 - 20%, 19.3% have 21-50% cortex remaining. This low proportion of cortex and the presence of parallel dorsal flake scars on many of the flakes indicates that directed reduction of the cobble cores is being carried out in a repeated pattern.

On initial examination, this creek appeared to have a low density of stone artefacts relative to other areas. Closer examination showed that there was a substantial density of stone artefacts present at Three O'clock Creek. At least some of the assemblage resulted from on-site stone working. There is some patterning in their spatial distribution, with a greater concentration observed on the slightly raised terraces about 40m west of the creek.

The basis for relevance differed. In many cases it was grounded in personal associations, such as Paradise Bore, where the original well was dug by Bingeby Lowe. Or a place such as a waterhole or stone arrangement had strong Ancestral significance. In the case of Charlotte Waters, the place was valued as the birthplace of two sisters, Clara and Sarah Strangways, who are grandmother or great aunt of many of the members of Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation.¹³⁴

But their descendents have no picture, or way of picturing, what life was like there for their forebears. So I set out to recover accounts of the context in which these women were born in the 1880s.

I then ran straight into a major body of historical documentation, concerned with the Overland Telegraph Line. These were accounts told largely by those involved in its planning, building and maintenance, often on anniversaries of its completion. The telegraph line was a capital B Big thing, built in less than two years by the young South Australian colonial government under great time constraints, having only the sketch maps from John McDouall Stuart's crossing of the centre six years before to guide them. It was a major technological achievement, against great odds and hazards. 'Heroic' 'epic' and 'legendary' were the words used both at the time and in subsequent historical accounts to describe the human effort involved. It was one of the foundational narratives for South Australia and the Northern Territory. Historian Ann Curthoys has pointed out that the 'idea of settler innocence remains powerful in Australian popular culture'. History told in this mode 'stresses struggle, courage and survival, amidst pain, tragedy and loss.'¹³⁵ With the notable exception of John Mulvaney's 1986 *Encounters in place*, which was the first account to draw attention to Charlotte Waters as a place of interaction, Curthoys' summary very much describes way the Overland Telegraph Line is depicted in the literature.

In contrast, amongst all their accumulated stories, one thing that Irrwanyere stories never did stress, or even mention, was the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line through the country in the early 1870s. They were apparently not familiar with it, or did not find it sufficiently relevant to their sense of the country's history to include it in their stories. They *did* tell stories of Charlotte

¹³⁴ Hull-Stuart 1998.

¹³⁵ Curthoys 2003: 187.

Waters, the central of the telegraph repeater stations located just on the Northern Territory side of the border. But these stories were smaller, local. Bingey Lowe recalls the time when it was a shop in the late 1920-30s. There were thousands of goats with goat yards to the south-west. The people who looked after the animals lived in the coolibah trees to the west, and some lived under the trees where new homelands now are sited. The yard closest to the house was for horses. There were vegetable gardens at the bore to the north. Water was brought from there in a donkey cart each day. In the 1950s and 1960s, Bingey used the newer stockyard, mended with old metal telegraph poles, to yard cattle on their way to the train. In dry times cattle accumulate in the vicinity as the clay holds more feed.¹³⁶ He told the *Arkaya Kestrel History*, which recounts the story of the ancestral formation of the Finke River that runs nearby (see box in chapter 2). Charlotte Waters is now part of Aputula Aboriginal Land Trust holdings.

The local starting point of Charlotte Waters' importance as birthplace for Clara and Sarah Strangways, in 1880 and 1889¹³⁷ took my research into the mainstream history of the Overland Telegraph Line, but at the same time kept the focus of my narrative on the place as it was experienced by the local Indigenous people.

My project began with ideas consonant with my experience in prehistoric archaeology. I began with questions of how stone arrangements structured people's experience of the place, and their relationships to other sites. Stone arrangements are powerful places, marked by complex arrays of lines and cairns that are part of the actions of ancestral beings and arenas for ceremonial performances. I was interested in how these enduringly potent places structured people's interactions with each other and with features in the landscape over a long time.

A complication of this concept that I immediately encountered was the rarity of sites in the landscape that contained only pre-colonial material. The stone

¹³⁶ Bingey Lowe pers comm. Macfarlane field notebook 25 July 1996.

¹³⁷ Hull-Stuart 1998.

arrangements were one of this rare form of site, as were the stone reduction floors discussed below. However, their use was not restricted to pre-colonial times. They could not be interpreted in isolation from the strong presence of places where the surface materials were a complex mix of materials, historic, recent, pre-colonial and those which could be either or both, at the mound springs, along the Finke River banks, the sides of the Abminga Creek, and all of the bores drilled into existing waterholes.

Reinforcing this complication as I was taught the country, it became increasingly clear that a focus on one type of place was inappropriately exclusive in the context. These places could not be thought of in isolation, but were integrated into a dense network of places. To visit any one place was to set the web of its association to others vibrating.

Different ways of finding history: how to bring divergent sources together?

A small scene played out late in my association with my Irrwanyere teachers serves to illustrate the collision between our distinct ways of recognising the past in the present. It shows up some of the assumptions that underlie these, and the possibilities for their differences to be translated into light of greater understanding not just heat of conflict.

My story concerns a series of discrete locations where a block of quartzite has been reduced, or repeatedly flaked, to form cores from which long stone blades can be struck. They were each made by a single individual at some point in the past, maybe 90 years ago, maybe 900; it is not possible to date them. Their actions have left distinctive patterns of stone flakes on the ground in the process, repeated across the landscape, each separate from other occupation debris and not overlapping with each other. They look like stone flowers, about 1m x 2m in size. A gap where the person doing the flaking had been sitting can be seen in the circle of large flakes of stone, lying where they were abandoned (fig 1.17, 1.18).

I wanted to see if I could find out more about the process of this flaking, and perhaps discover what the final product of it was, that the maker had taken

away, by looking at how the remaining parts joined together; a kind of 3-D jigsaw puzzle called 'refitting', a well known technique.¹³⁸

I picked an accessible example near Dalhousie Springs homestead, with the aim of videoing my attempt to refit the 24 or so large and smaller flakes and one large core (measuring 124 x 140 x 100mm) on the surface. The first three large pieces which were distinguished by having rough cortex on their outer surfaces went together easily. The fourth piece had a large ant's nest under it. The small pieces were quite similar, with no colour variation to guide me, and I found them impossible to place.¹³⁹ It was awkward holding the rocks together, with masking tape and Bluetack, and video-ing at the same time. My commentary on the film gets increasingly despondent as the morning passes, it gets hotter and hotter and I still have only four large chunks dangling together on their melting globs of Bluetack. Finally, too hot, I headed back to camp, defeated.

I tried to convey the possibilities of understanding that had so evaded me to the mob there; Marilyn, Dean, Harry and Bingey and Geoff. At first they looked puzzled, and then greatly amused. They continued to tease me mercilessly for days about my propensity for going off on my own, talking to myself for hours, and sticking rocks together. It did seem a strange project in those terms.

My point here is not that there is something inherently ludicrous in this attempt to establish a way into the actions of people in the past from the outside, via retracing someone's work on a stone cobble. There are no other stories for these potentially telling components of people's actions in the area; no one except an archaeologist can tell this story about the distinctive processes of the making of specific objects. These stories are invisible, hidden, even to the makers, as for them they would have been so self-evident they would not have needed to spell them out. An archaeologist can translate the inanimate cluster of dark stones shown in fig 1.17 into an unusually direct and immediate presence of an individual at work in the past. The archaeologist can show the sequence of decisions and actions – someone's selection of a specific stone and choice of a remote place to flake it, and the resulting intended artefacts and debris, lying undisturbed where they were left, rare in their lack of confusion amongst other

¹³⁸ eg Czesla et al 1990; Hofman 1992.

¹³⁹ Macfarlane field notebook Saturday 13 June 1998.

materials. It is demanding work, the effort to reconstitute the static stones into a reminder of their active past context.

My point, that I learnt in this context, where my recording efforts seemed so remote from the concerns of those around me, was about what is required to tell a good story - a story that is relevant, tells about more than just itself, and is retold, remembered. It is important where you start the story. In this case, the relevant place to start was with the people living in a place and what they did. What was needed from me, as an archaeologist, was to consciously craft a bridge between my own practice of recording - an external way in to the human



Fig 1.17: Stone reduction location, on gibber-covered side of the ridge which runs north from the Dalhousie Springs Homestead, showing its discrete character and isolation from everyday-living locations, November 1997



Fig 1.18: Detail of stone reduction showing large flakes of dark quartzite cobble, November 1997

past in that particular place - and the existing stories that the Irrwanyere members knew of it. After all, their stories were only accessible via a self-conscious performance or re-enactment; neither form of story sits in the place waiting to be read out of it; both have to be actively read into it.

The question addressed through my refitting attempt potentially provided the kind of small-scale detail that is one of archaeological methods' strengths. But the connections into the life that the detail was part of had to be established first. Without that starting point, the account tended to bog down in the artefacts and their story, so turning artefacts into stand-ins for people, instead of illuminating past life through the artefacts. For my Irrwanyere audience, my refitting exercise was funny: - so much effort, for what end? As a story it started in the wrong place. They could not hear it. It could not be heard as a story of past life unless the matrix of its connections was already established, not disconnected from recent history.

The 'pure' archaeological form of recall of refitting or the EIS survey has to a large degree become detached from other forms of recall to which people are more attuned: the personal and social histories and records that are of more direct concern to them. Just as a retina, which helps you to see, obstructs vision when it becomes detached, so mechanisms intended to augment a sense of the past instead obscure it when they become detached from the people using them.

The conscious making of a bridge between these narrative strands makes a way to enlarge the senses of the past from which they originate. It allows these divergent ways of accessing the past to converge and to converse in the present place. This forges a richer account of what has happened in that place, one that no one person's perspective could tell of it. The question becomes one of how to bring the relevance of these into the same field, through the organizing principle of place.

Turning a corner

BL has noticed my obsession with stones. He presented me with a beautiful grindstone from behind his back as a treat yesterday. This contrasts with the first time we came out to Anniversary, when I

enthusiastically told him I had found a grindstone. He thought I meant a knife sharpening stone and was visibly disappointed by the massive old stone version. Archaeology is irrelevant, peripheral anyway, to the story, which is the main thing. Have to make it a good story therefore to make it interesting to others.

Field notes, at Anniversary Bore homeland, 3 October 1997

This cry from my field notes marks my shifting awareness of the task that I was involved in, the change needed in how it was to be defined. Reflecting on this change many years later, after it had found its shape, I saw a parallel in the location of the work and that shape; in the course of the Finke and the course of my thinking.

The channel of the Finke River runs roughly north-west to south-east out of the West MacDonnell Ranges, cutting through sandstone to form deep gorges in its upper reaches. It then runs west to east along the top of the stony hills in the centre of Witjera National Park. But when it reaches the sand dunes, with their regular NNW-SSE grooves, in the 4km stretch to the north west of Anniversary Bore, just before the Ewillina stone arrangement, it turns a corner to run south in multiple channels before it disappears underground. It seems that through my own traverses of the country, rubbing across and along the grain of the country with the people who live there, my thinking also turned a corner, like the Finke River does. The river cannot cut through the mass of the sand and has to follow the grain of the land, and I also found my previous patterns being swung into new alignments.

Working from 2001 as editor of the journal of *Aboriginal History* gave me the scent of a trail into strong narrative as a way to honour the complexity of the entangled places I had previously mapped and measured but never managed to bring to life. A different starting point, that of history, history with a grounding in place, offered a liberating way to balance the distancing weight of analytical detail and the freshness of the stories told without reference to that.

This shift from a primarily archaeological study to a primarily historical one had unexpected implications for my practice. Aspects that had been central became peripheral; others that had been peripheral swam into focus as important. For example, the work of Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen I had

previously regarded as relevant sources from which I would extract information for understanding the area's past. Now, rather than their work, it was them as individual historical actors who were implicated. I needed them to sit down at my desk while I quizzed them about the immediacies of their fieldwork, how they worked, where they camped. They became characters in the story.

I noticed when I first started giving papers to historians that they would ask 'Who are these 'people' that you keep referring to? In describing patterns of material that highlighted distinctions in action in different parts of the landscape, I would write, for example: 'I was interested in how stone arrangements structured people's experience of the place.' Which people, and when, specifically? historians would query. Using solely archaeological recordings, the answer to the first could only be a parsimonious best guess based on likelihood that it was 'Indigenous people' but there was no language group or other identifiers, although it is sometimes possible for distinctions in rock art to give clues to ethnic or group identity.¹⁴⁰ As it is rarely possible to date surface materials,¹⁴¹ there was not much traction on specifying when, either – again, I could offer only a best guess of the last 1000 years. So when I argued that archaeology gave one a fine grained, localized way into understanding the history in place, I referred to the particularities that are not recorded, but not who was carrying the actions out. I continue to talk about 'people' because often that is all I know about them. Historians, it was apparent, worked where possible with more distinctively identified agents – gendered, class-identified, locality-specific if not individually named – in their source texts. Archaeology provides a 'meta' past that is not usually individuated or named, although individuals can and do draw on it selectively in their identity definition.

Refitting was not an appropriate metaphor for the historical task I was involved in. I was not seeking to bring together fragments of something that had been whole and so restore it. It was never a whole. Nor was it deliberately fragmented. Rather, it – the historical past – is of its essence partial, fragmentary, multiple. Recognition, acceptance of that essence rather than

¹⁴⁰ McDonald 2005.

¹⁴¹ Recent research by Fanning *et al* 2009 indicates that the dating of lag deposits in arid zone archaeological sites can be refined and given much greater resolution when combined with geomorphic studies of the associated sedimentary environment.

attempting to smooth it away led to the development of this 'entangled place' approach. I grappled with the bridge-making challenge through working with relevant entangled places.

My approach can be seen as an elaboration or expansion of Hercus and Clarke's (1986) descriptions of the Simpson Desert wells, which were relocated in early 1980s. They draw on explorer's accounts, Aboriginal people's personal memories and translations of recorded History stories of the places, together with archaeological assessments of the material concentrated there, and geomorphological assessments of their forms. These are all acknowledged components of understanding these places. The immense richness of interwoven lives was both enabled and focused by the wells, and those lives in turn brought them into being as 'desert wells', rather than a crack in the geological formation.

The approach I have taken thus is not so much 'new' as infrequently carried out in Australian archaeology. Classically, archaeological studies treat environment, history and linguistics as separate from 'sites'. The sites of a region are lost to statistical averages and to classification into general types. This is necessary to reduce the volume of material. But it is possible then to tack back and forth between the large scale of general regional patterns and the small scale of the qualities of particular areas. They each provide a context for the understanding of the other.

This is not a meta history, it does not aim, or claim, to be 'the' history of the region. It is a partial history, one whose content reflects the starting point of my research in archaeologically framed questions of place-making and maintenance, and the changes in my thinking that followed from my education in history in place. If I had started with a historically-framed question about the inter-cultural social impact of building the Overland Telegraph Line, or with the overt intention of writing the history of Mt Dare station, for example, it would have been a very different thesis. Both these questions are addressed here, but the form and the emphases given are a result of the history of the work.

It is not a heritage study, but shares the place-based concerns that inform significance assessment and the evaluation of social significance of cultural landscape studies. It is not social geography, and deals to only a limited extent with the politics of location and genealogy, and joint land management that anthropologist Kim Doohan and geographer Jocelyn Davies have looked at in detail.¹⁴²

In the end, it was the verve of powerful story telling, the dedication to it, and the vividness of the past world it restored which won out.

It is important to stress that in this work, I have not sought to speak for the Irrwanyere members who have taught me. My syntheses have been profoundly informed by what they taught me or helped me to learn, but they are not what they would say. They are writing their own accounts.¹⁴³ Sadly, Bingey Lowe passed away in 2002, but left a vast legacy of knowledge of the country and its stories and songs that he taught to others.¹⁴⁴ Irrwanyere members generously granted me permission to speak of what we did, where we went, what I was told (see letter of permission Appendix A¹⁴⁵), and I was encouraged to tell others the stories that keep the people's presence vivid in the land.

Marble cake: the gift of a metaphor

We were back at Aputula (Finke) at the end of a crowded month of fieldwork together, travelling the country, recalling the past, yarning around the fire in the rain at Anniversary Bore. Bingey Lowe gave me a parting gift before I left for Alice Springs. His first impulse was to give me some meat from the community store, as this is the standard currency of exchange that flows

¹⁴² Doohan 1992; Davies 1995.

¹⁴³ Hull-Stuart 1998; Ah Chee 2001; Nicholson and Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation 1999.

¹⁴⁴ eg Hercus nd.; Hercus and Simpson 2002; Hercus and Potezny 1996; Potezny 1989.

¹⁴⁵ The main body of fieldwork for this project was carried out in 1996-1998, following the then current Ethical Guidelines set out in the AIATSIS Research Grants Program: Information to Applicants. These guidelines were a 'respected national standard for all research in Indigenous studies' (Michael Davis 2009). See also AIATSIS 1999, Research of Interest to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Australian Research Council, National Board of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra (Commissioned Report 59, especially Chapter 4 on 'The Ethics of Research'), at http://www.arc.gov.au/pdf/99_05.pdf which discusses these ethical guidelines. (In the 1990s when I carried out the fieldwork, I was enrolled at Southampton University, UK, and at that time this institution did not have its own formal ethical protocols.)

between people with involvement or obligation, and it was a mark that we were in an equitable exchange relationship.¹⁴⁶ But with genuine care and tolerance, he remembered my odd vegetarian habits, and instead, with a flourish, brought out from the store a marble cake, a vivid swirling pink, white and brown with pink icing. I was honoured, as the gift marked our relationship, and was a salute to the deep remembering, witnessing and listening that we had shared, and the mutual respect and affection that we had developed.

The import of this gift has reverberated with me more broadly in the years since: *marble* cake! It carries a symbolic load. It is not a layer cake. Nor are the different elements blended to homogeneity. The point of a marble cake is that its various constituents are inextricably mixed, and to try to separate one out would be to deny that together they make it the cake it is, and would destroy it. So is this a good metaphor for the histories we were tracking, and the way to tell them? In such a metaphor, places would be slices through the whole. But it fails because it emphasises the end product, rather than the process by which the cake was made. This emphasis of this work is really on the need to back-track from the existing, contemporary cake to its improvised cooking process, for which there was no recipe. The idea of the cake endures as benign reminder of the form of the entangled nature of the interactions that are implicated in this work. (The cake itself was delicious with my afternoon cup of tea.) But it is not a sufficiently substantial idea to contain the magnitude and gravity of those historical interactions.

However, the gift of cake, the act of exchange, freighted as it was with generosity and goodwill, stands as a powerful sign of the two-way nature of this work. This writing, my bringing together of these stories and sources of stories, is my gift within this open ended exchange relationship, coming out of my obligation to Binge Lowe as my teacher, to the wider Aboriginal communities involved in the region, to my academic community, and to the general audience who can learn to hear entangled histories also; 'a gift to the future in which we are all implicated' as Kim Mahood says of her cultural mapping work in the east Kimberly.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Exchange features as an important part of the discussion in chapter 3 below.

¹⁴⁷ Mahood 2006: 10.

Structure of the thesis

The threads that are entangled in telling these histories are drawn out in the chapters which follow. Chapter 2 takes us into the region, describing its environmental characteristics and giving an outline of its histories, both pre-colonial, colonial and into the twentieth century. This provides background for the more detailed case studies of particular places in Chapters 3 and 4 and the connections between them in Chapter 5. Each of these latter chapters develops one of three inter-related themes which have emerged as being crucial in understanding the dynamics of people and place in the western Simpson Desert. These are cross-cultural interactions in a situation of intense and rapid change; interactions with water; and forms of connection between places.

In Chapter 3 I look at the particular interactions between people and place that were set in train by the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line in the early 1870s. I track the radically changing circumstances that arose from the cross-cultural interactions that were generated, and the various ways in which the people on both sides of the resulting cultural 'contact zones' responded to these changes through time. The study grounds these understandings in the small-scale detail of lived experience in a particular place which was very much on the front-line of interaction, the Charlotte Waters repeater station of the Overland Telegraph Line.

In Chapter 4 I look at interactions of people and place through the lens of water, in its various forms in the area. The meaning of water is not the same in each place, subtle differences in the form of the water, and the history of people's interaction with it, are one of the elements which distinguishes one place from another. The discussion continues the theme of chapter 3, of reconfigurations following new forms of interaction, and takes it into the realm of natural resources, looking at water sources, including the installation of bores. We know that water is a crucial focus for peoples' actions, especially in the desert. How do people live out that focus at particular water-places? To acquire water for practical necessities is at the same time to engage with its accumulated meanings. What distinct expectations and understandings do different people bring to their relations with water, as revealed through their practices in

relation to it? The outcomes of these practices may often be unforeseen, and can provide insights into what is often hidden to the practitioners – their own assumptions and habits, in contrast to what they planned to do. This question has obvious salience in a colonial context. The role of water in the formation of a pastoral landscape is explored in the example of the formal homestead built at Dalhousie Springs and in the more marginal settlement at Anniversary Bore.

In chapter 5, my emphasis is on what makes connections between places. Places are not bounded entities, but the destinations and points of departure of paths.¹⁴⁸ It is not just the places themselves that are constantly being produced by interactions, but the connections between them, and these are also constituted in distinctive ways at different times in changing contexts. Navigation and negotiation of routes between places and forms of landscape knowledge – and its maintenance or loss – are brought out in this chapter. In bringing out aspects of connectivity, this chapter leads into the conclusion of the thesis.

¹⁴⁸ Ingold 1993: 167; 1986: 147-155.



Chapter 2

Interacting with the desert in the western Simpson

Introduction

The first chapter introduced the interactions that shaped my thinking, and re-thinking, in this thesis. This chapter continues the introduction to the work, in terms of its regional context; the physical characteristics of the region as a desert, and the over-arching historical contexts of the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line and establishment of pastoral land use. These have played an active role in shaping the forms of interactions that have taken place in the region. The grain of the land, the climatic exigencies and prior histories are the circumstances in which local histories were lived out. The characteristics of the western Simpson landscape as a desert are understood as no mere colourful background 'out there', but are integral to the interactions that take place. Its dynamics enable some practices and choices and resist others. They provide context, but in the process are incorporated into the lives lived through them. The physical characteristics and historical context are in turn shaped by the interactions in which they are implicated. For example, as will be discussed further in chapter 4, attitudes to water are derived from both historical/cultural expectations and from experience of the local conditions; alterations to

waterplaces to make them more compliant with expectation lead to reconfigurations of the density and forms of interaction there by people, plants, cattle. These in turn alter the local ecosystem and the ongoing historical role of the waterplace.

In this chapter I will show how ideas of historical entanglement can be usefully applied to any landscape. The particular characteristics of those landscapes are contributing parts of the particular forms of historical entanglement that are set in train. In Chapter 1 I discussed five threads that contribute to the entangled skein of a place. The physical characteristics and historical context are not additional to those, rather they are implicated in all of them. I have separated them with reluctance, for clarity.

The descriptions of the physical desert that follow are based in one way of knowing the desert; one that is available to outsiders, involving comparison with non-desert, non-local attributes of land and climate. I draw on literature that defines what a 'desert' is, and set out the distinctive features of the Simpson Desert's climate and location, in order to orient people who do not know the region. I then describe an over-arching historical scenario that takes in the distinctive historical characteristics of the region. Again, this is a framework derived from outsider perspectives, and again I provide it to give a context in which to ground understandings of the specific histories of interaction that follow in later chapters.

These are not the ways that people who live there – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous – would necessarily choose to describe the qualities of the country they know. Finer grained, local descriptions of how people lived through and with the qualities described here are the substance of the following three chapters.

Extremes not averages

The country now known as the western Simpson Desert is big country, silica rock and sand country. Here stony desert meets the red sand of the Simpson's vast 300km wide dune field (fig 2.1, 2.2). At the same time, it is pastoral

country, a national park, and a tourist stop-over. Ancestral stories tell of it as Perentie country, Two Snakes, Grub, Kestrel, and Kingfisher Dreaming country. It is the most easterly of Australia's wide core of continental deserts, and in the records it is the most arid part of the world's driest continent.¹ Rainfall statistics in the western Simpson exemplify aridity, with a low annual median of 100-150mm of rain, and high rates of evaporation of 30 times that amount.² Unlike the rainfall to the north of the Simpson, which is highly seasonal, there is no clear wet or dry season. So rainfall is erratic, variable, unpredictable and unreliable, whereas evaporation rates are relentlessly high.

Temperatures also vary hugely, from the high 40's to -6°C on frosty mid-year nights. On any one day, there is a marked diurnal variation in temperature. There are long droughts and extensive floods. The country is best understood in terms of extremes rather than averages. All who live there must find ways of dealing with, or avoiding, these extremes.

One of the principal qualities of the desert is thus its variability and unpredictability, which has both spatial and temporal dimensions: at different times the same place can present very different prospects. While big rains are rare,³ they structure the characteristics of the environment, recharging the aquifers and sub-surface flows, including the permanent *mikiri* wells in the

¹ Arid conditions prevail when the amount of rain falling is less than 20% of the potential moisture loss through evaporation under normal climatic conditions, according to the United Nations Environment Program definition (Veth et al 2005: 2-3).

² For comparison, the median annual rainfall for Canberra ACT is 604mm, and for Alice Springs is 258mm (<http://www.bom.gov.au> accessed 3/12/09).

³ Mt Dare has been a weather station since January 1950, and its records show big rains and flooding in 1955 and 1967, 1979, 1984, 1992 and 1997-8, with record floods in 1974-6 (Bureau of Meteorology www.bom.gov.au/climate/averages). Madigan, writing in 1946 (1946: 159-160) examined the rainfall records from Charlotte Waters, which kept records from 1874, moved to Finke in 1938. He summarizes: Exceptionally good, wet years were 1877, 1889, 1909 and 1910. Good years that follow exceptionally dry seasons were in 1877, 1885, 1889 and 1904. The worst, driest years were 1876, 1900, 1929 and 1940. 'There have been eight good seasons in 62 years ... and eight bad seasons.'



Fig 2.1: Simpson dune with cover of Yellowtop (*Othonna gregorii*), 1995



Fig 2.2: Gibber plain south of Mt Dare, looking NW across Abminga Creek towards stony uplands of the Stanley Tableland, 1996

dune field, so allowing a greater standing biomass of perennial plants than might otherwise be predicted.⁴ That is, the Simpson has a surprising coverage of trees and bushes. After a big rain, most water quickly evaporates or runs into the sand, although on its way through it 'wakes up' the country's seed store of grasses, herbs and wildflowers. For example, after rains in 1997 the usually bare gibber covered slopes of the residual hills west of Paradise Bore were transformed to green, and pelicans swam on the corridors between sand dunes near Woodgates Swamp (fig 2.3). These claypans, swampy areas such as Duck Ponds and Woodgate Swamp, and chains of waterholes in river channels, then hold water for months (fig 2.4).

These rapid transformations are part of a 'pulse and reserve' pattern. This describes the dominance of water events in controlling biological processes in arid ecosystems, more than other factors, such as inter-species competition and predation.⁵ A rain event activates the reserves of seeds or root stores and triggers a pulse of active vegetation growth, some of which is lost to death and consumption, but part is put back in reserve for the next rain. The magnitude of the pulse depends on the extent of the trigger event, and other variables such as soil type, nitrogen, and micro-relief.

Distributions and densities of vertebrate animals show a follow-on spatial and temporal variability, as their presence, survival and breeding is also dependent on water and vegetation. They have behavioural and physiological adaptations to this variability. They may move long distances to escape drought and to follow water, they may have the ability to aestivate, to shelter in moist refuges or deep underground, or to postpone reproduction until there is plentiful food, or adopt a non-restrictive, wide-based diet.⁶

⁴ Stafford Smith and Morton 1990: 261.

⁵ Whitford 2002: 12-21.

⁶ Eldridge and Reid 1998: 3-4; Robin 2008.



Fig 2.3: Green desert after rain, east of Mt Dare, June 1998



Fig 2.4: Ewillina waterhole full, inspected by Bingey Lowe and Harry Taylor, October, 1997

Writing of the US Sonoran desert, naturalist and philosopher Joseph Wood Krutch reminds us that

neither the plants nor the animals live under what is, for them, painfully difficult conditions. ... Only to those who come from somewhere else is there anything abnormal about the conditions which prevail.⁷

Desert conditions may be extreme, but the scale of that is accentuated if it is framed in terms of a comparison with other conditions, familiar from elsewhere, that do not share these variabilities. For those who are acclimatised, they have a less daunting valency.

Diversity, variability and unpredictability

The word desert commonly conjures up a picture of one vast homogeneous field of sand-dunes. However, as well as spatial and temporal fluctuations in rainfall and temperature, 'one of the surprising characteristics of deserts is their environmental diversity'.⁸ The Simpson presents a mosaic of sediments, vegetation and animal distributions, variations in drainage, and forms of permanent water.⁹ Attention to the dimensions and implications of this diversity is a current focus of desert ecological research and 'detail is the new big picture'.¹⁰

An influential characteristic of the western Simpson area, responsible for a suite of these important 'details', is the presence of the Finke River floodout. The Finke River channel, having worked its way south-east from its headwaters in the McDonnell Ranges and east along the northern edges of hard silcrete-capped residual tablelands, turns in a right-angle in its final reaches as it hits the mass of NNW-SSE oriented sand ridges, and runs out into the dunes. The *Arkaya* story of the Ancestral Kestrel hunting of the two Rainbow Serpents or 'Stranger Snakes with the pretty markings', gives the history of the formation of the Lower Finke River (see box).

When the river flows, any sediments suspended in the water are deposited in this floodout area, enhancing its nutrient levels as well as its moisture. It thus

⁷ cited by James F Reynolds in Whitford 2002: preface.

⁸ Hiscock and Wallis 2005: 34.

⁹ Hiscock and Wallis 2005: 34.

¹⁰ Robin 2008: 121.

provides a biological refuge in dry times, with enhanced levels of water, nutrients and food, which supports a high diversity of vegetation and fauna especially relative to the surrounding land.¹¹

Finke River floods are typically slow-moving, shallow and wide. Most of the sand they were carrying has already been deposited upstream. This kind of flooding would not have a great effect on surface archaeological material.¹² In contrast, shorter, local rivers carry large amounts of sand which is deposited over wide areas during floods.¹³ Small local dune fields occur downwind from these sandy stream channel sources, east of Pedirka, at Woodgate swamp, and near Federal and Bloods Creek. In the Eringa bore area, north of Spring Creek, flat bodies of yellow sand, much more gypseous and calcareous, have their source in the water flowing out of the mound springs, and grow distinctive cottonbush and bluebush stands (fig 2.5).¹⁴

The major field of parallel sand ridges of the Simpson Desert is popularly claimed to be the world's largest.¹⁵ Its dunes are 10-35m tall and up to 200km long, running parallel in a NNW-SSE direction, forming part of a continent-wide swirl of longitudinal sand dunes. Standing on the top of one of these dunes, an analogy with the sea feels appropriate, given the scale of the orange vastness and the magnificent symmetry and rhythm of the rise and fall of the dunes. From top of a 'wave' you can look out across the ridges into the horizon, but in a swale you are contained in a linear corridor, cut off from the others. Canegrass (*Zygochloa paradoxa*) stabilizes the dune crests, and spinifex (*Triodia basedowii*) covers the dune flanks.

¹¹ Eldridge and Reid 1998: 4, 8.

¹² Geo-archaeologist Anne McConnell pers comm. 1996.

¹³ Davey et al 1985: 21.

¹⁴ Davey et al 1985: 25-6.

¹⁵ For example, in the Australian Geographic Corner Country map (1995) and many desert tourist program websites, for example, Hinterland tours, http://www.hinterlandtour.com.au/simpson_general_english07.html; Oz Greetings <http://www.oz-greetings.com.au/geology/article/54/SIMPSON--DESERT>. Accessed 10/1/10.



Fig 2.5: Bluebush and cotton bush on calcareous sands, Spring Creek delta, north of Ambullina waterhole



Fig 2.6: Dune vegetation after rain, parakeelyas (*Calandrinia* spp)

Arkaya

Rardi tyurarda yalpardnai
Yanata pangkilyai ya
Radi tyurarda yalparladnai
Ya mirlkente nalanalura

Rardi tyurarda yalparladnai
Yanata pangkilyai ya
Rikurata yalparladnai
Yamirlkente nalanura

Rardi tyurarda yalparladnai
Ymirlkente nalanalura
Rardi tyurarda yalparladnai
Ya milkente nalanalura

Nata pangkilya
ya radi tyurarda yalparladnai
yanata pangkilyai

Langattanta Rata turupere
Ya Rarta tumpere
Yepinyalananta la Rata turupere

Lararulpakara Riwewerlanai
Yantyalparantya
Warakararupakara Riwewerlanai

[They (the two Serpents) have come back down here in this tunnel!
Ah, the two of them have come back here, travelling back inside this
tunnel!

Then he (the Kestrel) jumped right down (into the tunnel)
Ah, they (the Snakes) have gone back to Iwirla!]

These sung verses of the much more extensive Arkaya History are those for Abmakilya [waterhole near Charlotte Waters] and the [Finke] channel to Irwila [Ewillinna water hole], as recited to linguist Luise Hercus, partly in English and partly in Wangkangurru, with verses predominantly in Arrernte in 1967, 1968, 1972 by Wankanguru elder Mick McLean Irinyili. Mirlkinta means looking (Hercus and Potezny 1993: 8-10).

Luise Hercus' introduces this History (1993:2 -3):

The Kestrel, Kirrki, hunts down and kills the two Kanmarri, (Rainbow Serpents or 'Stranger Snakes with the pretty markings', sometimes

also Carpet Snakes). The Serpents make tunnels and the Kestrel digs in after them, giving rise to the course of Coglin Creek (which runs by Charlotte Waters to meet the Finke) and the lower Finke River. Where the channel disappears in stony or swampy country, that is where the Kestrel lost the Serpents. The channel reappears where he found them again. This process ceases at Ewillinna waterhole where the Finke channel breaks down into a series of flood-outs and small channels. The Arkaya is thus the History of the formation of the Lower Finke River. The song story was cherished by Wangkangurru and lower Southern Arrernte people. It was part of an advanced form of initiation involving acquisition of specialised knowledge, and sung only by those with this knowledge, but could be heard by everybody.

‘Arkaya, the Kestrel History’ translated by Luise Hercus, Site Information by Vlad Potezny, National Estates Grant Program, 1993, Australian Heritage Commission

These plants provide habitat for a great diversity of lizards, ‘very successful in this nutritionally poor and rare-event driven environment’,¹⁶ and small mammals such as the Ooldea Dunnart (*Sminthopsis ooldea*) Sandy Inland Mouse (*Pseudomys hermannsburgensis*), Spinifex Hopping-Mouse (*Notomys alexis*) and the Desert Mouse (*Pseudomys desertor*).¹⁷ Acacias (especially *Acacia ligulata*, also *Acacia aneura*, *Acacia ramulosa*) and Hakeas grow in the dune swales, and a great variety of grasses and flowering herbs and daisies, including yellowtop (*Othonna gregorii*) and purple parakeelyas (*Calandrinia* spp), appear after rain (fig 2.1, 2.6).

Stony tablelands, flat-topped hills and breakaways form a boundary with the dune field. These form from a capping layer of resistant silcrete rock which erodes, developing steep-sided buttes and mesas. These formations stand out, yellow and pink, clear-cut against the sky. They are drained by short channels

¹⁶ Eldridge and Reid 1998: 22.

¹⁷ Eldridge and Reid 1998: 24-5. Many of the type specimens for these desert rodents and marsupials were collected by Baldwin Spencer and PM Byrne at Charlotte Waters: *Dasyuroides byrnei* is named after him (Kemper 1990).

which run across gently sloping plains, surfaced with characteristic pavements of evenly compacted red-brown polished stone gibber (fig 2.7). Reading the newspaper in the Ranger's camp at Dalhousie Springs in September 1997, the first images of the surface of the planet Mars were published on the front page. They looked uncannily like the gibber plains we had been exploring that stretch away south of the Dalhousie homestead ruins.

The minor watercourses encourage the growth of sparse *Eremophila* and *Cassia* (fig 2.8). They converge to form larger coarse gravelled creek-lines, where same-age stands of young Minnarichie or Red Mulga (*Acacia cyperophylla*) saplings grow. These trees only grow in restricted patches on the western and eastern sides of the Simpson Desert. They have needle-leaves and distinctive red bark that curls like delicate wood shavings (fig 2.9, 2.10).

You can see a long way in this silica-dominated country, heat haze permitting. The horizon simmers and glints white in the heat of the day, but flushes pink and softens in the cooler mornings and evenings. The sky is large and its clouds are particularly noticeable as they pass.¹⁸ In rain storms, you can see rain falling from individual clouds in long streaks in the distance (fig 2.11).

Another consequential and distinctive feature of the western side of the Simpson is the presence of Australia's largest group of more than 60 active artesian mound springs, now called Dalhousie Springs. These springs form the only permanent surface water for 150km in any direction. They are so isolated they contain small endemic fish species – a goby, several hardyheads, a catfish, a gudgeon and a perch – the latter grows as big as 20cm in length.¹⁹ The individual springs are of different sizes, with varying temperatures from cool to

¹⁸ Wankanguru elder Mick McLean Irinjili who taught linguist Luise Hercus (see below), had another name, Palku-Bula-Thanckaiwarnda which means 'two banks of cloud sitting down together' (Rothwell 2008). Another elder Ben Murray Palku-nguyu's name translates as 'one mass of clouds' (Hercus 1987: 150). This reflects the importance of paying attention to the sky-scape and forms and behaviour of clouds in the 'thought-world' of a Simpson dunefield dwelling people.

¹⁹ Zeidler and Ponder 1989.



Fig 2.7: Gibber pavement near Abminga Creek



Fig 2.8: Water courses across gibber slopes of Mt Crispe picked out by *Eremophila* and *Cassia* bushes plus four acacias



Fig 2.9: Minnarichie, or Red Mulga tree in bed of Stevensons Creek, with Gidgee mulga and coolibahs behind



Fig 2.10: Detail of Minnarichie bark



Fig 2.11: Rain storm northeast of Mt Dare, July 1996



Fig 2.12: Aerial photograph of Dalhousie Springs, Peter Caust c1995

hot, each with a Lower Southern Arrernte name and associated stories which recognise fine distinctions between them. They provide rare permanent watering points in this most arid region of Australia for birds, dingoes, people, and, between 1872 and 1986, for cattle (fig 2.12, 2.13).

In August 2007, beside the main Irrwanyere spring, a baby mound spring was forming. Less than two years old, it was only 10cm in size (fig 2.14). The processes that have formed the extensive Dalhousie Springs over 1-2 millennia²⁰ are still active. Mound springs form as ancient groundwater that has travelled underground from eastern Australia escapes under pressure to the land surface from the deep artesian basin through fractures in the overlying rocks. Sand, clay and dissolved chemicals are deposited around the spring vents, building up mounds, until the water cannot rise any higher. The high rims of inactive mounds are more prominent than those still seeping or bubbling. They have the same raw newness as an active volcanic landscape. In recognition of all these rare qualities, the Witjira- Dalhousie mound springs were included on the National Heritage List in 2009.²¹

Clusters of reeds and melaleucas grow at the active spring vents, marking them with patches of green against the white and khaki mineral salt surface. Walking on this surface is like walking on the moon; every footstep leaves an indelible impression. Any rain turns it into a bottomless mud hole. Spring Creek, a largely dry, braided channel, carries the main spring runoff out to the west, towards the Finke floodout and the dunefields.

The convergence of these major landscape elements of the western Simpson area – the Finke River floodout, the major complex of mound springs, and the conjunction of these water sources with the boundary between stony desert and the vast sandy desert dune field – especially in contrast to the relative homogeneity of the adjacent sand desert and stony desert – give it a relatively

²⁰ Krieg 1989.

²¹ <http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/national/witjira-dalhousie-springs/index.html>, accessed 5/2/2010.



Fig 2.13: Irrwanyere Spring, showing fringing reeds and *Melaleucas* (with two Spoonbills), 1997



Fig 2.14: Baby mound spring, near main Irrwanyere spring, August 2007

high biological diversity.²² They also distinguish it from other deserts, and from other parts of the Simpson Desert.

Unlike the more westerly deserts, the Simpson lies within the Lake Eyre drainage basin. Along the northern edge of the Simpson, a series of more or less parallel river channels – the Todd, the Hale, the Plenty, and the Hay Rivers – run into the dunefield from the northwest. They do not reach Lake Eyre.²³ In the eastern Simpson, the channels of the Georgina and Diamantina Rivers and Coopers Creek, on the eastern side of a major watershed, drain not Northern Territory but central and western Queensland into an extensive system of playa lakes, including Lake Eyre in the south. This low-lying part of Australia dominates the eastern half of the Australian arid zone, producing its distinctive aridity.²⁴

These physical characteristics of the desert are defining attributes, actively involved in all lives lived there; plant, animal, human. In turn, the land is affected by these lives.

The landscape we see today is one that has been altered to an unknown, but major, extent by the changes introduced through colonial landuse since the mid 1870s. Most of these impacts were unforeseen or unintended. They were profound and enduring. The areas which were beneficial to native fauna and flora as refuges were also targeted by introduced animals – cattle, horse, goats, donkeys, camels and rabbits, and new predators; cats and foxes. Allan Breadon's reminiscences of the 1870s record this process, though he attributes it to rabbits alone, not the stock themselves:

the Finke was considered good or fairly good for 18 months or two years with stock on the Finke country in those days and for years after would carry five times more stock than it can now [1933]. Rabbits of course is the trouble. They have ruined the country lock stock and barrel ... they undermined the ground and killed young timber to say nothing about grass.²⁵

They entered into direct competition for water sources and feed, especially in times of environmental stress, with subsequent extinctions of mammals and

²² Eldridge and Reid 1998: 4, 38, 42.

²³ Kotwicki 1986: 42.

²⁴ Smith and Hesse 2005: 6.

²⁵ Breadon, Allan 'Reminiscences' ML mss 953 p 42.

birds.²⁶ Baldwin Spencer records that there were no rabbits in Central Australia when he first crossed it in 1893 and 1897. But in 1901 they were spreading rapidly, and in 1923 they were present in thousands. 'To judge by the results of collecting, they had almost completely exterminated not only the smaller marsupials, such as the rabbit-bandicoot but also the jerboa rats. In 1896 and 1901 the latter were abundant, even a nuisance to the collector because the natives caught them so easily'.²⁷ Hoofed animals and vehicles churned up water holes and caused compaction of top soil, and gully erosion where tracks cut into the gibber pavement.²⁸ A large group of Minnarichie trees in Red Mulga Creek stand dead as a result of the saline bore upstream being left to run. On the other hand, for zebra finches, birds dependent on standing water, the introduction of bores allowed these once wholly nomadic species to remain in one area.²⁹ Similarly, Purnie Bore, drilled in 1963 by French oil explorers, has created a permanent artificial wetland many kilometres into the dune field, and now supports a wide range of wildlife, including an isolated population of water birds.

People's interactions with the characteristics of the land have been active in shaping the country and the histories of people's lives in the area, from their pre-colonial configurations into the late twentieth century. The land is an active element in those histories, shaping and being shaped by them.

The 'ugly desert': marginality as a characteristic

The western Simpson Desert area sits at the edge of the few wider regional histories that have been written. Accounts of South Australia and the Northern Territory (which was part of South Australia from 1863 to 1911), either focus on the Top End, and have limited reference to places and events south of Alice Springs, or are concentrated on the 'settled districts' south of Clare (see fig 2.15,

²⁶ Morton 1990; Eldridge and Reid 1998: 5.

²⁷ Spencer 1927 vol II: 562, footnote.

²⁸ Mulvaney 1996: 10-11; Davies et al 1985: 48-9.

²⁹ Eldridge and Reid 1998: 29.



Fig 2.15: Map of Goyder's line and settled areas of South Australia in 1870 (from Hirst 1973: 4)

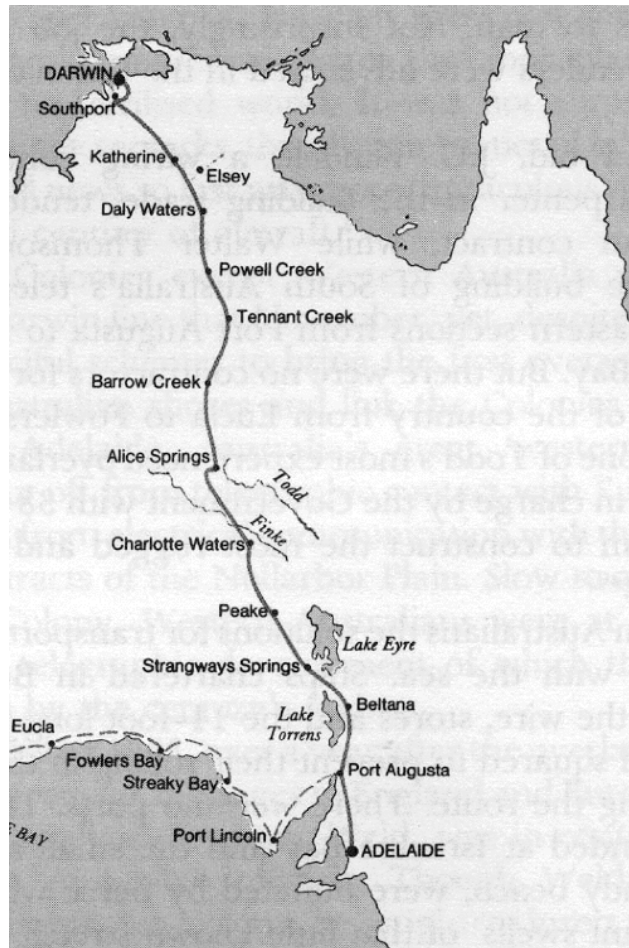


Fig 2.16: Map of Overland Telegraph Line repeater stations



Fig 2.17: Telegram dispatch box from the Alice Springs repeater station museum, Northern Territory, showing the sequence of repeater stations, 1997

2.16) with few references to what was officially known as 'the Far North', beyond Goyder's Line.³⁰

While the western Simpson area shares such elements as the Overland Telegraph Line and rangeland cattle production with the areas north and south of it, it has distinctive features and dynamics that cannot be understood by simply stretching these histories over it. The marginal position of the region, at least from the perspective of centres of population elsewhere, is an important one of these features and dynamics, added to the physical characteristics described above.

Many of the existing accounts of the area come from travellers and expeditioners who came to it from elsewhere and did not stay long. They convey their resultant sense of remoteness and alienation, as they return to the settled south with reports of excessive magnitude, monotony and emptiness. For example, Baldwin Spencer described his travel northwards from Oodnadatta during the 1894 Horn Scientific research expedition:

We travelled, until evening set in, over dreary parched-up flats and between low lying flat topped hills ... not a speck of water nor a sign of anything green - nothing but white and cream and pink and lilac coloured sand and stretches of hard quartzite stones ... away from all sign of human habitation.³¹

Doris Blackwell described her journey north from Adelaide in 1899, when she was eight years old, in similar terms. She was accompanying her father, who was the Telegraph Officer at Alice Springs from 1899-1908. The tone of her memory is lonely, with a child's eye for the detail of the repetitive pattern of sand in the wheels, and an adult writer's attention for the symbolism of the telegraph line:

We bounced over gibbers and other protrusions; the harness creaked and flapped and the buggies rattled ... we had the smell of sweating horses constantly in our nostrils ... Surrounding us now for as far as one could see there was absolutely nothing that was man-made. The flat floor of an ugly desert stretched out on all sides until it disappeared where the earth met a cloudless sky ... On and on, walking and trotting, the wooden spokes casting moving images, the

³⁰ eg Powell 1996; Donovan 1981, Donovan 1984; Hirst 1973. Goyder's Line followed the 12 inch (30cm) annual rainfall boundary. After a devastating drought in 1864-5, Goyder, as Surveyor-General in South Australia, advised against agriculture (cropping) north of this line (Jeffrey 2001: 232).

³¹ Spencer 1928: 22.

sand adhering to the iron tyres until halfway up the wheel, there to curl over and be taken down by gravity in a spiral of flying drift that never failed to fascinate me. In all that vast land there was not one fence, or any track other than the one we used. But we knew that civilisation was ahead of us, for we followed the slender iron poles supporting the two wires of the Overland Telegraph line.³²

But the route was not empty except in the travellers' comparative perceptions, and the way only interminable because it was taking these writers far from their familiar homes. For those who lived there, the desert was not defined by extremity or marginality, but was home. The forms that 'home' could take there is one of the themes that develops in the following chapters.

There are two senses of the word 'desert' in the English language; one is this technical, quantitative measure of aridity, the other is concerned with potential habitability and emptiness – a desert island, for example, is one empty of people and 'civilisation'. In common usage there is a bleeding of this second meaning into the first, which has led to a recurring generic sense of deserts being unoccupied; the home of no-one.

It is significant that there are no English language or Judeo-Christian derived metaphors for desert as 'home'. For those inculcated with Judeo-Christian traditions, deserts have always had a potent dual resonance, as both fearful, unblessed, howling wastelands, but also as places capable of providing spiritual elation, as for prophets. They are simultaneously wicked and godless, and pure and innocent, offering simplicity and with that, intensity.³³ But neither sense accommodates a feeling of domesticity or rootedness in the desert.

Recent in-comers to the region have defined it in these marginal terms, lacking in economic usefulness from a European economic perspective, which they have read as linked self-evidently to a lack of people. For example, the 1880s explorer Charles Winneke wrote of the northeast of the Simpson that 'This country is perfect desert, and I am afraid will never be of much use to the squatter. I am almost certain that this country has never been visited by natives'.³⁴ South Australian 'heroic exploration geologist'³⁵ Cecil Madigan

³² Blackwell and Lockwood 1988: 29-31.

³³ Tuan 1993: 143-4; Haynes 1998: 26.

³⁴ Winneke 1884: 4.

expressed the same view 50 years later: 'the high temperatures, low rainfall, absence of water and of fodder, the sand itself, and the mechanical difficulties presented by the sand ridges, make the sand ridge country absolutely useless. It is as profitable to discuss the value of the Grand Erg ... of the Sahara as to consider the settlement of these Australian deserts.'³⁶ He considered the sand ridge country to be 'quite useless and entirely unoccupied'.³⁷ He may have been writing to counter the boosterish tendencies of nineteenth century explorers' reports, discussed below. But in the process, he emptied the desert of people and wrote the long-term Aboriginal occupants and their histories out of consideration.

Madigan organised the first aerial survey of this 'great ribbed desert' in 1929.³⁸ He had previous experience in the deserts of Antarctica and Sudan,³⁹ and was able to draw on the support of Defence Department aircraft and crew, flying '4,000 miles over country mainly unknown and uninhabited'.⁴⁰ Their Flight 6 took in the area that is now in Witjera National Park.⁴¹ From this most remote aerial view, the ultimate outsider's perspective, he concluded

we have satisfied ourselves that nothing lay within the borders of the Unknown area other than what is to be seen round its margins; that there are no ranges or lakes, nothing but a continuation of the everlasting sand ridges, with variation only in the nature of the clay flats between them, being more subject to inundation in the northern parts and near watercourse, where pastoral possibilities are greater. ... we saw nothing to warrant further investigation by prospectors, in fact I would recommend that no more human effort be expended on the region, and that the somewhat melancholy satisfaction be left to us of having at least saved the danger and expense of further exploration.⁴²

³⁵ Parkin 1986.

³⁶ Madigan 1938: 6.

³⁷ Madigan 1938: 6. Later, however, in his crossing of the northern Simpson dune field in 1937, Madigan was surprised to 'discover ... signs of the former presence of aboriginals, the only such indications seen in the whole desert crossing' in the form of chalcedony artefacts, with an outcrop nearby, east of the Hale River, west of the Hay River. He conceded that 'This disproved my theory and Winneke's that aboriginals never entered any part of the desert. It was the natives of the east, west and south who had denied all knowledge of the desert, but it was now obviously no more than the southern parts that could be quite unknown to any aboriginal' (Madigan 1946: 64-5).

³⁸ Madigan 1929: 14.

³⁹ Parkin 1986.

⁴⁰ Madigan 1929.

⁴¹ Madigan 1929: 7, 19-22.

⁴² Madigan 1929: 25.

He named it at this time the 'Simpson' Desert in deference to the then President of the Geographical Society, a key cultural institution of Adelaide, Allen A Simpson.⁴³ In doing so, he over-rode the descriptor 'Arunta desert', which acknowledged Indigenous occupation and priority. This name was used by Griffith Taylor in 1926, perhaps reflecting wider usage, and anthropologists TGH Strehlow and NDB Tindale continued to use it in the 1940s.⁴⁴ Madigan's and Winnecke's way of knowing the desert is one that sits most easily with those who know it from the outside looking in. Madigan's choice of name honoured a set of references and hierarchy based beyond the desert, where land is alienable and water flows across the surface. From that perspective deserts are hostile and waterless, a challenge to be overcome; an explorer's perspective, that is examined further below.

Archaeological linguistic and anthropological perceptions

The construction of the desert as marginal is not sustained when it is placed in a longer term perspective. Archaeological, linguistic and anthropological researches are based on knowledge traditions and perspectives imported into the desert, too, but their various orientations can provide ways towards a translation that puts the desert centrally, not as a comparison with elsewhere, and accepts the life within it as a given.

Anthropological research

Linguist and anthropologist TGH Strehlow was born at Hermansburg and much of his research was focused in western Arrernte country. But he did travel through the western Simpson area with Wankanguru men, Tom Bagot *Injola* and Mick McLean *Irenjeli* (who later worked extensively with Luise Hercus), recording place names. He passed through Charlotte Waters several times on his journeys visiting pastoral stations and Moorilperinna (Pmar' Ulbura) at the bend in the Finke River in 1955, and Goyders Creek in 1965.⁴⁵ In 1969 he located

⁴³ Simpson was a longstanding manufacturer of metal goods in Adelaide and socially active leader and benefactor there (A. Simpson and Son Ltd 1954: 44-45). He provided financial support for this and Madigan's follow-up 1937 expedition across the sand desert from Andado Station to Birdsville with a dozen camels (Madigan 1946).

⁴⁴ Strehlow 1947: map 'Simpson or Arunta Desert'; Tindale 1940 Map showing the distribution of the Aboriginal tribes of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.map-gmod91>; Griffith Taylor 1926: map.

⁴⁵ Summary information provided in a letter from David Hugo, Research Director, Strehlow Research Centre, Alice Springs, 5 February 1998, written to me in response to a research query

sites that were 'necessary for the definition of the old boundaries between the Lower Southern Arrernte and their neighbours such as the Arabana, and the Ankekerinja', and sites in the Lower Southern Arrernte area, which he describes as stretching from southern Northern Territory to near Oodnadatta.⁴⁶ He gives an account of the language markers for a break in the Arrernte dialect at about the area of Old Crown Point on the Finke Rover. The southern dialect is distinct from that of the western and northern Arrernte. He also documents a discontinuity in social relationships between the southern and the western and northern Arrernte at Old Crown Point.⁴⁷

Anthropologist AP Elkin also worked with Lower Southern Arrernte people. He camped at Macumba in 1930 with people who 'remembered Spencer and Gillen's journeys through their country.'⁴⁸ He describes the social organisation of the Arrernte subgroups, including the Lower Southern Arrernte, providing detailed accounts of the specificities of their kinship and totemic affiliations.⁴⁹

The work of Luise Hercus

An exceptional body of documentation and translation of stories of places in the Simpson Desert and Lake Eyre region has been built up through the work of Wankanguru, Lower Southern Arrernte, Dieri, and Arabunna people with Luise Hercus over the last 47 years. Luise is a pre-eminent linguist of Aboriginal Australian languages. In South Australia she worked with a surveyor, Vlad Potezny, enabling accurate records of the locations of places and the routes of the stories through the country. The records that resulted from these collaborations are a storehouse of interconnected language, human history and precise, place-based knowledge of the country and stories of the Ancestors that acted in it to make it and maintain it.

Archaeological research

about where Strehlow went in the area and what he describes, as I could not view the primary material due to restricted access.

⁴⁶ Strehlow 1969 Unpublished Report to AIAS on field trip to Central Australia. Doc 64/103 69/881. AIATSIS library, Canberra.

⁴⁷ Strehlow 1947: 69-72, 81.

⁴⁸ Elkin 1939/40: 439.

⁴⁹ Elkin 1939/40a, b, 1934/5.

The Australian deserts were widely, if patchily, occupied by 40-30,000 years ago.⁵⁰ The evidence for people's occupation of the western Simpson region is much more recent. Radiocarbon dates on charcoal from hearths indicates that people were at least intermittently present there for at least 3000 years. The dated hearths are at Oolgawa swamp, on the eastern edge of the dunefield, at Marapadi, the western-most of the *mikiri* wells in the dunefield, and an open site on the Rodinga Range in the northern edge of the Simpson.⁵¹

Archaeological research in the Australian arid zone has built up a picture of the adaptations people made to desert living in the increasingly arid conditions of the late Pleistocene-early Holocene. These were the establishment of long distance socio-economic networks and trade routes, the development of seed grinding technology which allowed intensive processing of seeds, and low densities of people. These are considered to be 'risk reduction responses'.⁵² Based on evidence of increased rates and intensity of deposition of stone artefacts in excavated sequences, archaeologists propose that these social networks that make desert life more possible have been established for at least 1000, and possibly 5000 years.⁵³ These they attribute to altered patterns of regional human interaction, perhaps associated with the establishment of patterns of land tenure and associated beliefs and ceremonial life that are recognisable in contemporary Aboriginal practices.

It is a struggle to obtain dated sequences in rock shelter-free areas such as the western Simpson. While the old and erosive surfaces of the stony desert provide favourable visibility for locating archaeological material, they hold lag deposits that are difficult to date.⁵⁴ In contrast, for historical archaeological materials, marginal pastoral areas such as the western Simpson retain more extensive evidence for early forms of European landuse than the more successful areas, where continued usages obliterate earlier archaeological traces.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Smith *et al* 2005.

⁵¹ Smith and Clark 1993.

⁵² Smith *et al* 2005: 42, 46-7.

⁵³ Smith 2005; Veth, Smith and Hiscock 2005.

⁵⁴ But see Fanning *et al* 2009.

⁵⁵ Connah 1993: 85.

There is widespread surface archaeological evidence for people's use of the different types of environment in the region. Archaeological ground surveys show that the silica rock that covers the stony desert surfaces of the landscape has been used opportunistically to make stone flakes, perhaps to sharpen a wooden artefact or cut some fibre, then abandoned. Isolated stone artefacts are found at a low density on gibber pavements, dune fields, ridge lines and beside ephemeral creek beds.

Compared to this background widespread use of stone, larger, denser concentrations of stone artefacts accumulate in locations of more intense human occupation. Reliable water sources near the mound springs and on the terraces beside larger creeks and the Finke River are an obvious place where repeated visits by more people make for accumulations of more types of artefact, including grindstones, ground-edged axes, ochre, hammerstones, and delicately shaped formal artefacts – tula adzes and pirri points. These sites contain a greater diversity of stone raw materials, plus bone or emu egg shell in rare cases. They may be associated with features such as a hearth or a wurley or a stone arrangement. These denser scatters have a wide variety of stone raw materials used in them, including more fine grained materials - chalcedony, chert and silcrete as well as quartzite.

There are also numerous stone procurement and reduction sites in the landscape, in locations that are separate from the sites of built up occupational debris. Ceremonial stone arrangements are an important feature of this region.⁵⁶

The historical framework for unheralded interactions

The physical characteristics of the Simpson Desert were one of the active, shaping elements in the interactions that have taken place there. The other element required in the framework for understanding those interactions is their broad historical character and context.

⁵⁶ McCarthy 1940.

The western Simpson is the site of early – relative to the western Australian deserts⁵⁷ – and intense interaction between the Indigenous people of the centre and white in-comers⁵⁸ from the occupied south, due to the surveys and construction of the Overland Telegraph Line, completed in 1872. Charlotte Waters was built there as the central of the line's eleven repeater stations. These boosted and re-sent morse code messages along the 3000km of wire that was the core of the telegraph operations (map fig 2.17, and see chapter 3).

The line opened a bridgehead into central Australia, rapidly becoming the line for all transport and the stock route. The Dalhousie Springs station lease was to the east of the line, centred around the surface water of the mound springs, an apparently prime selection taken up by a quick-acting surveyor who had overseen construction of the southern part of the line, EM Bagot (see chapter 4). Abminga and Finke were the closest rail stations on the Ghan railway line that ran through the region from Oodnadatta to Alice Springs after its completion in 1929.

A distinctive aspect of the area is that there was no mission or reserve established for the Indigenous people dispossessed as seizure of pastoral land increased. Indigenous people camped around the bores and waterholes on the stations, or near the homesteads, or the official government outposts of the Telegraph station or the railway stations, which operated as ration stations from the 1880s.⁵⁹

“Developing nature’s gifts”: state expansion

Explorers ‘haunt’ the desert according to Roslynn Haynes, in her study of representations of central Australia; ‘we cannot see the desert without their

⁵⁷ See Smith 2005. Explorers Warburton (1872), Ernest Giles (1872), Gosse (1873), Forrest (1874) left from the Overland Telegraph Line to ‘feel their way’ into the western desert areas. They were avoided by the local Aboriginal people, although they saw their fires everywhere (Smith 2005: 11).

⁵⁸ The most appropriate term to refer to ‘in-comers’ to the area is controversial, and varies in differing circumstances. They were mainly ‘white’, although people of ‘Afghan’ and Chinese origin were also prominent. Most were of English, Scottish or Irish origin, although there were also German descendants. By the 1870s many of the people involved were born in Australia rather than overseas. I use specific descriptors where possible, or the generic term ‘white’ where that is all that we know about them. This term draws attention to their distinction in relation to the Indigenous people. I refer to Indigenous people in terms of their language group where possible, or call them ‘locals’ in contrast to ‘incomers’ for the early phases of their interactions.

⁵⁹ Doohan 1992; Rowse 1998; Foster 2000.

influence'.⁶⁰ She points out that their accounts were 'the first and most influential literature to emerge from the desert'.⁶¹ Explorers created journals knowing they would be published and read by members of government and by investors as well as the public. They drew maps that would be used by others to reach the same areas. Their reports had a difficult double role, ideally describing favourable land for expansion and at the same time not underplaying their own sufferings in the capricious desert.⁶²

Explorers were involved in commercial ventures as way-makers for colonists. The land they described and mapped was freighted with future potential, taken to be empty 'wasteland', and alienable. The colonialism that shaped Australia was of the 'terra nullius' form, in archaeologist Chris Gosden's classification based on his long-term global comparison of forms of colonialism. As distinct from earlier colonial forms, this most recent type of colonialism 'ignored and despised all foreign modalities of sociability'. The acquisition of new land was a crucial element in its workings.⁶³ Taking this land out of native hands into immigrant possession distinguished modern settler societies from all other types of colonialism.⁶⁴

The governor of South Australia from 1855-62, Sir Richard MacDonnell, fostered exploration in order to expand his colony's territories and foster closer settlement.⁶⁵ Closer settlement was that belief, and government policy, that ideally all land should be used intensively, for agriculture not pastoralism. Agricultural smallholdings 'supported a more populous, more civilised and more democratic society, with its wealth more equally distributed'.⁶⁶ This was ardently held to be a realisable and necessary goal for the young South Australian colony. Improvement of the land was a moral requirement: in the colonial ethos, 'planting a population on uncivilized soil was an act of

⁶⁰ Haynes 1998: xi.

⁶¹ Haynes 1998: 57.

⁶² Haynes 1998: 44-5, 58, 59, 66.

⁶³ Gosden 2004: 28.

⁶⁴ Gosden 2004: 116.

⁶⁵ Donovan 1981: 29-33.

⁶⁶ Gammage 2001: 112.

cultivation, designed to create model societies'.⁶⁷ It also improved and enriched the land.⁶⁸ After the 1869 Waste Lands Amendment Act, buyers were required to cultivate and reside on the land, not be absentee land owners.⁶⁹ Alfred Giles, early explorer and resident in Northern Territory (part of South Australia until 1911) for 50 years, expresses this vision of inevitable succession for the land, still held strongly when he wrote in 1926:

For the past 40 years, millions of these acres have been used for purely pastoral occupation, and that of cattle only, but this is only the customary procedure in opening up new areas. The pastoralist is always the advance guard, making the rough bush roads and finding the waters, and years afterwards is slowly but surely followed by the agriculturalist. And so it will and must be in regard to the Northern Territory ...⁷⁰

As an early inducement, the South Australian government had offered a £2000 reward for the first crossing of the continent from the south to the north coast. This was won by John McDouall Stuart. His explorations, or at least the uses to which his descriptions of grassy plains were put, were 'primarily responsible for stimulating South Australian interest in the north'.⁷¹

Stuart advocated the formation of a colony on the Adelaide River in the Northern Territory. He saw it as a viable port for trading with India, exporting beef and mutton, importing ponies.⁷² South Australians saw expansion of their colony as an inherent good, 'a vast field for future speculation and settlement'.⁷³ Arguing that the explorers' work gave them rights to it, the Northern Territory was made a part of South Australia (rather than NSW) in 1863.⁷⁴ The principal aim was to colonise the Victoria River District. A poorly informed, optimistic view prevailed, that the economic advantages of pastoralism there would offset the disadvantages for the colony in its taking on responsibility for the arid land that lay between the settled districts of the south and the VRD.⁷⁵ This was a major misunderstanding of the characteristics and capacities of the land, and

⁶⁷ Gosden 2004: 126.

⁶⁸ Griffiths 1996b: 14-15.

⁶⁹ Goyder 1875: 10; Gammage 2001: 112; Cathcart 2009: 150-1.

⁷⁰ A. Giles introducing his account of 'exploring in the 'seventies' 1926[1995]: xi.

⁷¹ Donovan 1981: 27; Powell 1996: 67-8. See map of Stuart's western Simpson area exploration chapter 3, fig 3.1.

⁷² Stuart 1865: xviii.

⁷³ Powell 1996: 70.

⁷⁴ Donovan 1981: 33, Powell 1996: 69-70.

⁷⁵ Donovan 1981: 35, 37-9.

settlement of the north by South Australian colonists was to follow a torrid history, so drawn out, fraught and costly that the Northern Territory was resumed as part of the Commonwealth in 1911.⁷⁶

Notwithstanding the non-ideal prospects for pastoralism, let alone agriculture, in northern South Australia, land development did follow on the tail of exploration. The editor of Stuart's journals, W Hardman, noted that

Hergott Springs were only discovered and named by Stuart three years before, yet we now find a station close by them. The explorer is not far ahead of his fellow-colonists, as is well remarked by the *Edinburgh Review* for July, 1862: - "Australian occupation has kept close on the heels of Australian discovery".⁷⁷

This was encouraged by favourable reports, such as Hardman's assessment that through Stuart's journey:

One of the great problems of Australian discovery was solved! The Centre of the continent was reached, and, instead of being an inhospitable desert or an inland sea, it was splendid grass country through which ran numerous watercourses.⁷⁸

Stuart had successfully acted for the public good.

On July 25, 1912 a public banquet was held in the Town Hall, Adelaide, in celebration of the 50th anniversary of 'the day on which John McDouall Stuart planted his flag on the shore of the Indian Ocean, having conducted his expedition across the continent of Australia'.⁷⁹ His Excellency the Governor presided, with the State Premier, government ministers, the Mayor, several justices and 200 'other gentlemen' present. Four of the five surviving members of the original expedition were honoured guests, together with several 'later explorers' of Central Australia.⁸⁰

The speeches made by these gentlemen spell out their formal view of the significance of the major phase of explorations in South Australia; the view that they wished to present at a time when the longer term influences of the

⁷⁶ See Donovan 1981, Powell 1996.

⁷⁷ Hardman in Stuart 1865: xix.

⁷⁸ Hardman in Stuart 1865: x.

⁷⁹ Royal Geog Soc of Australia 1912: 29.

⁸⁰ Royal Geog Soc of Australia 1912.

expedition's work could be gauged, but the expeditions were still within living memory.

John McDouall Stuart is held up in pride of place as 'the prince of explorers', a 'man of real true grit' as he was the first white explorer to 'fix the centre of the continent' and cross it 'from sea to sea', in the words of John Lewis, land owner in South Australia's Far North, including Dalhousie Springs.⁸¹ The Governor of South Australia recalled how banners hailing the 'band of heroes' greeted the returning expedition in Adelaide, January 1863: 'Here the conquering heroes come'; 'Honour to the South Australian pioneers'. Mr AW Piper, President of the Royal Geographic Society said that they had 'successfully passed through the hitherto unknown wilds of the Australian interior' 'making known the mysteries of this great continent', and were 'part of our national inheritance'.⁸² Mr Piper reviewed the changes that followed Stuart's opening of a route through the centre, making it possible to 'develop the advantages and resources of nature's gifts, which Stuart and his followers have unfolded to our knowledge.'⁸³

Unsurprisingly, there is no reference to the train of failed expansionism in the Northern Territory in the celebratory speeches made so soon afterwards in 1912. Instead they emphasise the utility of the established transport and communication route following the Overland Telegraph Line through the centre. Mr Piper states with confidence that in 1912:

we have cablegrams and telegrams coming across Australia every moment. We know that one can ride, drive, motor, or cycle from one end of the continent to the other, and never a day be without water.⁸⁴

The building of the Overland Telegraph Line

The Overland Telegraph Line followed Stuart's route through central Australia. Stuart himself had been 'anxious to direct attention to the establishment of a Telegraph line along his route' and had made notes about the availability of

⁸¹ Royal Geog Soc of Australia 1912: 42. Stuart (1815-1866) had been dead 46 years, and mention of his anti-social behaviour when not exploring (see Bailey 2006) was obviously uncalled for.

⁸² Royal Geog Soc of Australia 1912: 32, 34-35.

⁸³ Royal Geog Soc of Australia 1912: 38.

⁸⁴ Piper in Royal Geog Soc of Australia 1912: 37.

suitable timber, rivers and high country crossings.⁸⁵ He was clear about the connection between his route-finding and the developments which would follow, wanting to 'confer the benefit on my fellow-men of opening up a line for rail and telegraphic communication with England'.⁸⁶ In turn, the orchestrator of the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line, Charles Todd, always saw the line as having the dual purpose of 'opening up the unknown interior' to land speculation and development and the 'formation of settlement on the north coast' for the benefit of South Australia, as well as providing communication. Todd advocated the land route even before Stuart had made his way through it.⁸⁷

Without Stuart's lead, it is likely Queensland would have won the competitive construction contract for meeting the undersea telegraph line from the UK instead of South Australia. The line would have come ashore at Normantown and gone overland through Far North Queensland. If it had, we can assume that official settlement in central Australia, in the form of the Alice Springs hub that came into existence in the 1870s, would not have taken off until a much later date, perhaps the early 20th century, if it did at all. Thus the Overland Telegraph Line had a major impact on the spatial history of Australia.

Physically, the first telegraph line was a 3000 km long single strand of No. 8 galvanised wire. Despite the apparent simplicity of that single strand, it was a technological achievement to construct it through difficult and unknown territory, in only two years. The continuity of the strand of wire depended on the line of supporting poles with insulators that connected Port Augusta in South Australia and Port Essington, now Darwin, via eleven repeater stations. Each station had a bank of batteries to power the morse code receivers and transmitters, and a staff to read and re-send the messages and to maintain all these structures. This major construction was also a political and territorial coup for the young colony of South Australia. The route and its attendant buildings, tracks and workers established a bridgehead into central, northern and western Australia.

⁸⁵ Stuart 1865: xiv.

⁸⁶ Stuart, cited Royal Geog Soc of Australia 1912: 36.

⁸⁷ Notes from October 1860, cited in a public lecture by Todd in July 1873, SRSA 194/ A2.

In its connection of Australia to the world, it was also a 'great national work'.⁸⁸ On Thursday 22 August 1872 when the line was joined, Australia entered the modern world. Until then, communications took the same time as the travel between two places - three months for a letter from Sydney to London in the 1850s. With the continuous 'thin streak of wire'⁸⁹ came the capacity for instantaneous transmission of a message anywhere between Adelaide and Darwin, and seven hours for one to reach London.⁹⁰ Remoteness was now not necessarily isolating, news could travel, commercial and familial relations with the rest of the world and British 'Home' could be fostered without the distortion of timelags.⁹¹ Distance was disconnected from time.

Under Charles Todd's meticulous direction, responsibility for building the line was divided into three sections. The northern and southern sections were to be built by private contractors. The southern section from Port Augusta to Alberga Creek was contracted to Edward Meade Bagot, who took up the lease at Dalhousie Springs in December 1872. The central section, which was the least known and most difficult with the furthest cartages would be constructed by Todd's government department. This started 100 miles north of Port Augusta and went to Attack Creek, so covered the western Simpson area. Several of the surveyors kept accounts of their experiences surveying for the line, amongst them Alfred Giles (1926 [1995]) and Christopher Giles (1894-95).

In Christopher Giles, there is an unusually sensitive observer (fig 2.18). He was a cadet on the Northern Territory Survey Expedition of 1868-70, and a surveyor in the central section of the Overland Telegraph Line and later worked on it as a telegraph officer. He published a long account of his work in the *South Australian Public Service Record* in the 1890s, based closely on his journals he kept while working on the line in the 1870s. He has a good eye for telling details and quirks of his work in general. He has an evident sense of humour about its difficulties. He also conveys unusual details concerning the colonial encounters in which the work implicated him and his fellow workers. He is noticeably free from prejudices of his times regarding Aboriginal people, providing amiable,

⁸⁸ Richards 1914: 5.

⁸⁹ *Advertiser* 31/1/1910, Charles Todd's obituary.

⁹⁰ Taylor 1980: 159, 160.

⁹¹ See Taylor 1980: 9-16.

unjaundiced accounts, in which the full humanity of Aboriginal people registers. An explanation for this tone may lie in an early familiarity with Aboriginal people. He says he was 'Accustomed to the natives from my boyhood and able to speak at least one dialect fluently', that of 'the Purrinjee west of the bend of the Murray River', who taught him about their rain ceremonies.⁹²

Images of Charlotte Waters

Throughout its 56 years of official service, Charlotte Waters was a necessary way-station for travellers of every kind. The building was a major feature in what was experienced as an otherwise hostile part of the landscape for travellers, who found it an oasis. It was a key point of entrance into the lower Finke area for non-Aboriginal observers and reporters. The nature of the place and of the visits to it set up a form of interaction between them that was conducive to documentation of those interactions. Clusters of photographs, sketches and diaries were made by those who travelled through, and letters and collections made by those who were longer-term residents of the area. Looking at how people have represented Charlotte Waters can reveal not only how it looked but about how it was seen at various times.⁹³ It is noticeable that the sketches and photographs repeatedly record the same prominent aspects of the place – its public front aspect from which horses, camels and bullocks approached, together with the primary operational wires of the telegraph line. Some images show the sides of the building, the outbuildings, and the later photographs start to show it from the back.

The earliest available image is from 1875. It is Frank Gillen's sketch in the journal he kept when travelling north for the first time as a 19-year-old.⁹⁴ His 'plan' (fig 2.19) gives priority to the single telegraph pole carrying its all important single wire. It stands prominently at the front of the solid stone building with its steeply pitched galvanised iron roof, a large chimney, and a series of windows and air vents. At the back an equally solid wooden stockyard is shown. This simple 'plan' gives the raw, core image of the place as a building

⁹² C Giles 1894 Vol 3(6): 44.

⁹³ See Lydon 2005: 3, 5, 6 and references, for a discussion of the status of photography in modern Western vision and Victorian approaches to photographs as impartial witness, depicting a transparent realism, at the same time being recognized as more intimate, personal objects.

⁹⁴ Gillen 28 May 1875[1995]: 66, 68.

that supports the line, in a bare location, with its ancillary working structures, especially the stock yard. Photographers repeatedly focus on these details through the following decades. The images show modifications to the set-up of the station, however, which tell of the continual maintenance and technological upgrades undertaken for the upkeep of an operational station.



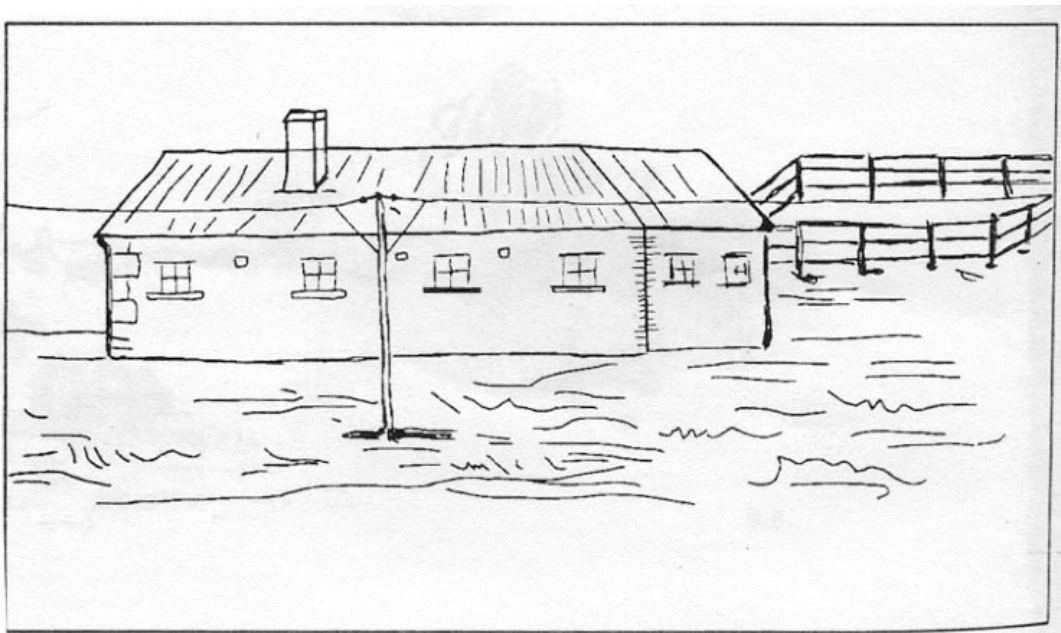
Fig 2.18: Portrait of Christopher Giles SLSA B 11348/28

A group of photographs of the station were taken by HYL Brown, the first South Australian Government Geologist, who was appointed in December 1882, so they date to later than that. He had a 'passion for fieldwork' which took him on extensive surveys and 'pioneering explorations',⁹⁵ 'accompanied only by a black boy', 'which would have done credit to any explorer'.⁹⁶ These journeys would necessarily have taken him repeatedly through Charlotte Waters. His image SLSA B9848 (fig 2.20) shows the same perspective as Gillen's sketch, with rough gibber-covered surface in the front, plus the details of a verandah with ornamental supports showing, a pair of water tanks at the end and a solidly built – perhaps camel proof? – wooden fence enclosing the station building. There is one metal telegraph pole, as in Gillen's sketch. However, there are now two doors rather than only windows at the front, which was initially built with doors only opening into the defensible courtyard.

Brown's photograph SLSA B11607 (fig 2.21) shows a 'Group of officials and staff of the Telegraph Station'. The nine people, posed by Brown the official visitor, are grouped outside the home fence. A small gum tree has been planted behind them, in an effort to encourage something to grow nearby. The single telegraph pole has had a bulky protective fence built around it. On the verandah behind them can be seen a clerk's desk, a drum and some boxes. The group shows the array of staff involved in running the station - a bearded Aboriginal man who would probably have looked after horses and stock, two young Aboriginal children who may have helped with herding the goats, a cook, wearing cap and apron, who looks Chinese, two European linesmen and the 'officials' - P.M. Byrne in white on the right and F.J. Gillen on the left. The verandah posts now have plain tops, with no decorative brackets.

⁹⁵ O'Neil 2007.

⁹⁶ Poem and comment by Robert Bruce in *The Quiz* 26 July 1900; cited by O'Neil 2007: 16.



CHARLOTTE WATERS

Fig 2.19: Frank Gillen's 1875 'plan' of Charlotte Waters telegraph station, 1875, drawn in his journal of his first journey north as a 19-year-old to start work as a telegraph operator in Alice Springs. Gillen F. J. (1875)[1995]: 66.



Fig 2.20: Front view of Charlotte Waters telegraph station, c1880s, (after December 1882) taken by HYL Brown, SLSA B9848

A camel train transporting characteristically large loadings along the telegraph line track between Oodnadatta and Alice Springs stands in front of the building in another picture of this 1880s period, (SLSA B20979, fig 2.22). There is now a solid wooden pole taking the line into the building. The number of above-ground tanks has tripled, with an array of two lines of three galvanised tanks now at the side of the main building, to augment the original underground tanks. The bases of these are still extant on the contemporary site, having been cut down to form garden beds later, presumably because they rusted (fig 2.35). Taken from a similar angle, SLSA B22568 (fig 2.23) is dated to 1900. A drum and boxes stand on the verandah as they did twenty years before, with a trestle. A significant alteration, reflecting change in telegraph technology from one wire to two, is that there is now a pair of substantial double telegraph poles at the front. The insulators entering the telegraph office can be clearly seen on the roof. A ladder lies at the foot of the twin poles, for maintenance or perhaps completion of the poles. In his survey of the technology of the Overland Telegraph, FP O'Grady of the Australian Post Office states that it was in 1898 that 'a copper wire was erected alongside the old galvanised iron wire between Adelaide and Darwin'.⁹⁷ Also, a window at the northern end has been blocked in, implying a change in the use of the rooms there.

A 'panoramic view' taken from further away is given in SLSA B1429, showing the complex of outbuildings as well (fig 2.24). It is dated 'ca 1880'; it must be the late 1880s as there are two wooden poles at the front, carrying two wires into the repeater station, and the trees around the station have grown. A white paling gate has been added, to allow easier access through the fence line to the front door. The path from this can still be seen on the surface of the contemporary site. Again the foreground shows a large expanse of rough gibber. At the far left there is a wooden fence – possibly around a water trough. The whole array of outbuildings can be seen to the left: A wooden slab hut with galvanised iron roof (cart shed), a stone 2 or 3-roomed building with a wooden lean-to (men's quarters), a dog kennel, three small huts including one with a

⁹⁷ O'Grady 1972: 26.



Fig 2.21: 'Group of officials and staff of the Telegraph Station', c1880s, (after December 1882) taken by HYL Brown. PM Byrne (in white) on the right and FJ Gillen sitting on the left. SLSA B11607



Fig 2.22: A camel train transporting large loadings along the telegraph line track from the railhead at Oodnadatta to Alice Springs, 1880s, outside the Charlotte Waters repeater station. SLSA B20979



Fig 2.23: Charlotte Waters repeater station 1900. There is now a pair of substantial double telegraph poles at the front. SLSA B22568



Fig 2.35: The cut off bases of the bank of water tanks, used as garden beds in the 1930s, presumably because they had rusted, on the site of Charlotte Waters, 1997

large low roof, the blacksmith, and the meat house and the meat-hanging gibbet. The picture is an informal snap, apparently un-posed, as it includes the intimate detail of a load of washing hung on the fence. Two camel carts can be seen at the far right. This image shows the same details of the back buildings that Spencer has drawn in his 1928 sketch (fig 2.25). These give a picture of the domestic life taking place around the repeater station, carting wood, doing the washing, preparing meals, looking after dogs and stock. Charlotte Waters was more than an official government outpost, at the same time it was home base to approximately five white and several Indigenous employees.

The domestic details of the lives of the Indigenous people who were camped around the station, but were not employed, are only shown in Gillens's 1901 photograph (fig 1.14) and Theodore Bray's 1927 images⁹⁸ (see chapter 3 for further discussion).

The focus is broadened from the isolated station buildings in photo SLSA B1418, which shows a well-filled waterhole on the Coglin River which runs to the north Charlotte Waters (fig 2.26). The trees along the creek provided rare shade, and were the camp place chosen by the Horn Expedition, and one of the camps for local Aboriginal people. As Gillen notes while staying at Charlotte Waters in March 1901:

The thin green streak of the *Eucalytus microtheca* which grows along the banks of the Coglin Creek one mile north of the station relieves the aspect in that direction and appears to mark a distinct change in the character of the country and its flora.⁹⁹

Better vegetated low sand ridges and mulga stands start to replace the flat gibber country beyond the water hole and the bore. Photo SLSA B19830, taken in the 1920s, shows the Charlotte Waters bore and water tank, on the other side of this creek, 1.6km from the station (fig 2.27). Water had to be carted to the station from here on a cart.

⁹⁸ These images were taken by Theodor Bray (photographer 1905-2000) in 1927. They are held by the SLSA, and can be viewed at http://images.slsa.sa.gov.au/mpcimng/64500/B64383_69.htm, http://images.slsa.sa.gov.au/mpcimng/64500/B64383_71.htm, http://images.slsa.sa.gov.au/mpcimng/64500/B64383_72.htm. The SLSA did not give permission to reproduce the pictures here.

⁹⁹ Gillen 1968: 14.



Fig 2.24: A 'panoramic view', showing the complex of outbuildings, 'ca 1880'.
SLSA B1429

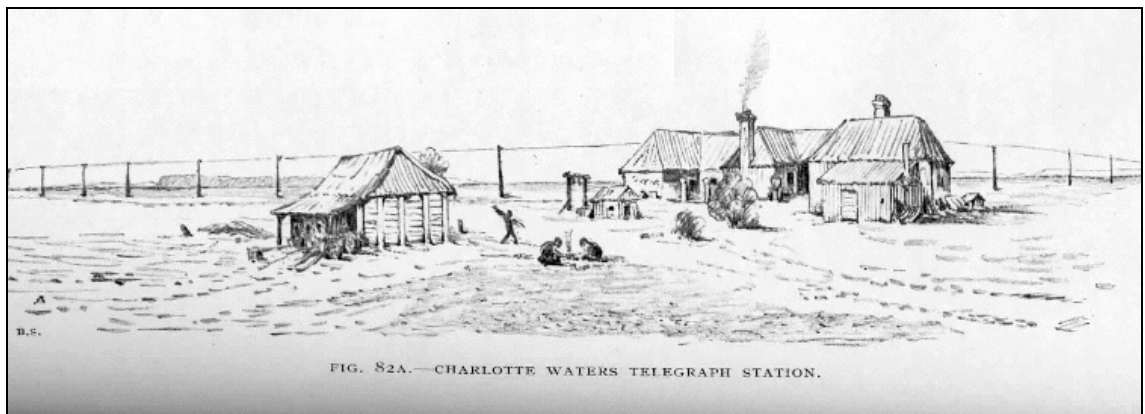


Fig 2.25: Baldwin Spencer's sketch of Charlotte Waters in *Wanderings in Wild Australia*, 1928, fig 82A facing p137

There is a gap in the run of photographs, with the next cluster dating to the 1920s. By this time Charlotte Waters was a post office and store. SLSA B45180 shows the back of the building (fig 2.28). An additional galvanised tank has been added. The elaborate finish to the courtyard gates, the stone work pointed and dressed, topped with ornamental spheres and decorative as well as strengthening rounded piers bonded into the walls at the corners can be seen. These testify to the superior finish and attention to detail invested in the initial building. It was not a vernacular building, but was the result of investment of extra effort, skill and quality materials. The detail of the courtyard construction is clear in two photographs taken by Theodor Bray, a photographer who journeyed up the telegraph line in 1927 with a party of tourists. A preferential use of the back entrance by vehicles is demonstrated.

This suggests a less formal use and approach to the building, the more private and messier out-buildings and courtyard now being in full public view, part of the main entrance. Yet another galvanised water tank has been added inside the courtyard – it is not there in 1925 (SLSA B64383/64 fig 2.29; B64383/66 fig 2.30).

The 1925 photograph (SLSA B62538, fig 2.31) was taken by Philip John Brewer, again travelling by motor car with a group of tourists, again shows the back. A standard view from the front of the building, dated to ca 1924 (SLSA B15448, fig 2.32), taken from further back shows that the outbuildings and the tanks at the north side are still present. The verandah post decorations have been replaced since the late 1880s, and painted. But the two prominent wooden telegraph poles have now gone, replaced by a thin pole to the northern end of the building. This is also visible in B45142 (fig 2.33), which gives an unusual view from the north side. This shows that the double row of water tanks is still in operation, at the attributed date c1928.



Fig 2.26: Coglin River waterhole near Charlotte Waters, nd, SLSA B1418



Fig 2.27: The bore on the Coglin River that provided water for Charlotte Waters, 1920s, SLSA B19830



Fig 2.28: Back of the telegraph station, a post office in c1920, SLSA B45180

The window behind them, blocked in 1900, has been reopened, again implying changes in the use of interior spaces. An additional pair of tanks has been added to the front of the building for the first time, underlining the shift in orientation of use of the building to the back courtyard entrance. The fence has also been altered, now running from the side of the house not beyond the tanks as it did in the 1880s. An unexpected alteration is to the large front chimney – it no longer has the four decorative finials at the corners. This may indicate that the chimney had been repaired after almost 60 years. In an undated photograph possibly taken by John Flynn (NLA 597467 fig 2.34) from the south side, the chimney is similarly without decoration, and the struggling tree at the south side has become a stump. The two c1928 tanks are not present here, so it may be earlier.

Single photographs of the repeater station tend to emphasise its lonely isolation. Those photographs taken by people who knew the place better, who re-visited, show it more as more lived in, with inhabitants and their domestic detail. Only Brewer and Gillen took photographs of the Aboriginal camp in the creek line half a mile away (see chapter 1 and 3).

Looking at the whole run of photographs generates a sense of the building in active use, being maintained with the investment of energy, planning and money, appropriate to its importance, and the imperative of keeping it in good operational condition – there was no redundancy in the repeater station system. It is modified according to changing technologies – two wires instead of a single wire – and to changing transport needs. In the 1920s, the orientation of the building altered, the courtyard used as the public entrance to the post office and shop, not the front path, perhaps because that is where cars parked. The constant battle to provide enough water is seen in the ever-increasing population of tanks in addition to the distant bore and an underground tank. All the materials for these alterations had to be brought in on camels or horse carts, and later train and trucks, from Adelaide.

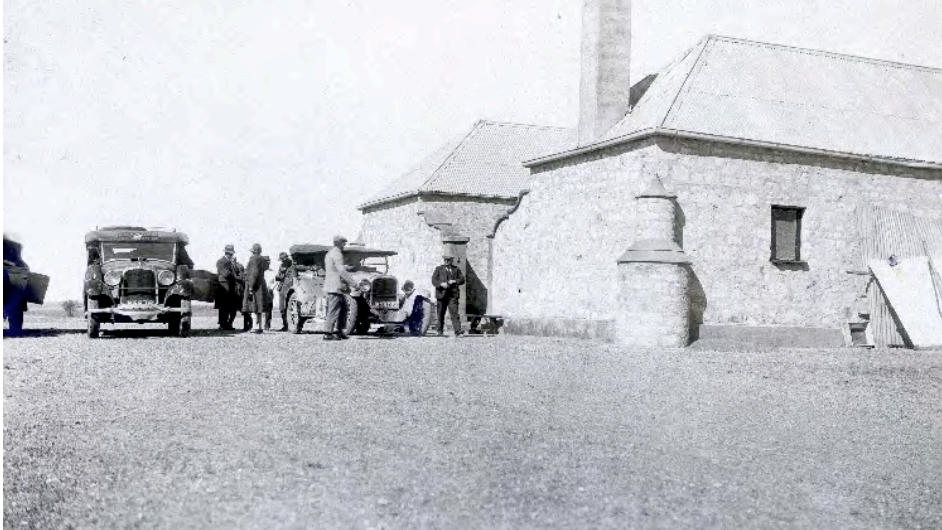


Fig 2.29: Back of the telegraph station showing courtyard detail, SLSA B64383/64, by photographer Theodor Bray, 1927



Fig 2.30: Back of the telegraph station showing courtyard detail, SLSA B64383/66, by photographer Theodor Bray, 1927



Fig 2.31: Back of the telegraph station, taken by Philip John Brewer. 'Staff and visitors outside travelling by small truck and car' SLSA B62538, 1925



Fig 2.32: Front view of Charlotte Waters c1924 SLSA B15448



Fig 2.33: An unusual view of Charlotte Waters from the north side, SLSA B45142 c1928



Fig 2.34: Homestead, Charlotte Waters Overland Telegraph station, NT, lantern slide used by Rev FH Paterson, north South Australia, part of Australian Inland Mission collection, possibly taken by John Flynn, undated, dates between 1905 -1920. nla.pic-an24165519. NLA 597467

There are undoubtedly further details of construction and use that are not recorded in the textual descriptions and files that can be gleaned from these photographs. The overriding impression that the photographers caught, and pass on to contemporary viewers, is of the solidity that the construction presents. Fuelling that was the confident intent on the part of its planners and builders that the building would be as strong, enduring and commanding as it was functional.

Further explorations from the Overland Telegraph Line

In 1870 the closely settled districts were almost all within a 70 mile radius of Adelaide, south of Clare (fig 1.16). It was a time of radical demands for land reform.¹⁰⁰ The sale of lands was an important part of government revenue – they needed more, cheaper land to sell, and there was demand. Exploration continued, a series of explorers using the Overland Telegraph Line as a launching place, going west and east into the remaining ‘great spaces on the map’.¹⁰¹ Several of these journeys took in or bordered the western Simpson area. David Lindsay (1856-1922) was a South Australian explorer, surveyor, draftsman, land, stock and station agent, and later broker on the Adelaide Stock Exchange, whose occupations follow the links between exploring and land development profits. In 1885, accompanied by a Wankanguru man, Paddy, he went eastward across the dune field on camels from Smiths Yards via *mikeri* wells that he was shown, to the Queensland border and back.¹⁰² His description assisted in the wells relocation by Denis Bartell and visitation by Mick McLean, Luise Hercus and Clark in the 1980s. He later summarised that ‘even with camels it was difficult to cross’ this country.¹⁰³ Winnecke had certainly found it so in 1883. He explored a route across the northern Simpson from Beltana, Farina, Coopers Creek to the Hay and Mulligan Rivers, and Mt Hawker, which he considered the centre of Australia. He describes how ‘our camels are completely done up. I am not at all surprised; no other living animal could travel over such a stretch of barren sandridges as we have come over the last week or two. ... the camels always lie down as soon as they come to a sandhill,

¹⁰⁰ Hirst 1973: 81.

¹⁰¹ David Lindsay in Royal Geog Soc of Australia 1912: 45. See Jones 1996: 20 and Smith 2005.

¹⁰² Lindsay 1886.

¹⁰³ David Lindsay in Royal Geog Soc of Australia 1912: 45.

and generally require a good deal of persuasion before we can induce them to cross over.¹⁰⁴

His sentiment was exactly echoed by Madigan, who after his 1939 crossing of the Simpson from Andado Station to Birdsville defined a desert as 'any area that is difficult and dangerous to cross with camels'.¹⁰⁵ He made his difficulties publicly available in a newly immediate way, pioneering the use of mobile radio communication to broadcast on national radio from Simpson Desert dune camps.¹⁰⁶

However, Mr EA Colson who lived locally, at Blood's Creek station, made his self-funded crossing with five camels and 'a black boy' Peter Aines, to Poeppels Corner and Birdsville after the drought had broken in 1936. He reported that 'so green and succulent was the feed that my camels, after being eight days without water on my eastern journey and twelve days on my western return, only took quite a normal drink on coming to water'.¹⁰⁷ 'All things considered I had a most interesting and pleasant crossing both ways. I was agreeably surprised at many conditions I noted.'¹⁰⁸

HV Barclay initially sought to open a stock route across to Queensland in 1904-5, going east from Anacoora bore, but due to the sea of sand dunes he was turned northwards, where he mapped the Plenty, Hay and Hale Rivers.¹⁰⁹ Recent explorations continued with oil exploration in the 1960s which led to the creation of the French track across the dune field that 4WD travellers now follow, and the establishment of Purnie Bore. Mineral exploration was active in the 1990s, Bingley Lowe, Brownie Doolan and other Irrwanyere Elders providing advice on the locations for drilling that would not disturb significant places.

¹⁰⁴ Winnecke 1884: 4.

¹⁰⁵ Madigan 1937: 6.

¹⁰⁶ Madigan 1946.

¹⁰⁷ Colson 1936: 1211.

¹⁰⁸ AA A1 1938/961 Correspondence relating to Colson's crossing of the Simpson.

¹⁰⁹ Barclay 1916; Madigan 1929: 4.

Revival in camel exploration

When Robyn Davison trekked from Alice Springs to the western Australian coast with a dog and four camels in 1977,¹¹⁰ it was an unusual decision, not just because she was travelling alone, but because camels had been used less and less since the 1930s, replaced by rail and roads built in the 1920s. They were declared a pest in 1925 due to the numbers of released camels going feral.¹¹¹ But as travel through the desert has become increasingly reliable and widely available using 4WDs, in the 1990s there was a revival in popular interest in camel travel through the Simpson Desert.

For example, The Outback Camel Company currently offers a string of pack camels to carry supplies and equipment, appealing to the historical resonance of travelling in this way, which 'enables us to travel almost anywhere in the true style of the explorers of the 19th and early 20th centuries'. They 'honour the tradition of the pioneering 'Afghan' cameleers who played such a crucial role in the exploration, development and sustenance of inland Australia. Our camels represent the last living link to the golden days of exploration by camel in Australia.' Madigan's west to east dunefield journey is reprised, but without the anxiety of unfamiliarity and finding water, camel feed and the correct direction. The Outback Camel Company is a commercial business, but its goals are personal engagement with the desert and with its camel-associated travel-based history, minus the hardships of lack of water. The organisers display an atunement to the desert based in having developed a contemporary familiarity with it. The experience of the travel itself is the goal, they are not aiming to extract profit from any other property of the desert:

The ultimate Australian desert experience would have to be our Simpson Desert Expedition – a complete west-east crossing of the Simpson Desert. This magnificent journey, the world's longest and most challenging commercial camel expedition, takes 28 days to cross the over 1000 sand ridges from Old Andado Station in the Northern Territory to Birdsville in western Queensland. ...

Trekking with the amiable, charismatic camels offers an intimacy with the soul of the country that is completely absent when travelling by vehicle. You will discover that the pace of nomadic life will re-awaken your senses as they become attuned to the life, beauty, diversity and moods of the surrounding desert. You will not forget

¹¹⁰ Davidson 1995.

¹¹¹ Stevens 2002: 267-284.

the camaraderie, the seemingly endless vistas, the brilliant evening glow of the stars, the captivating serenity of the day and pure silence of the night, and of course the remarkable attributes of the camels.¹¹²

'New forms collected and facts noted'¹¹³

There has always been a fuzzy divide between land exploration and the pursuit of scientific description and knowledge. Inland explorers and surveyors 'made up the forward guard of observational scientists whose notes and specimens so greatly extended the knowledge of the country's physical and organic life'. They made their own records and brought back collections. They needed to know geology and botany in order to assess the mineral and pastoral prospects of the country they passed through.¹¹⁴ The earliest descriptions of rocks and botany written by authorities in the UK are published as appendices in explorers' journals.¹¹⁵ For example, Stuart's expedition was accompanied by Mr George Waterhouse, who was the founder and curator of the South Australian Museum (established 1856). He was 'a clever naturalist' who collected fossil *Diprotodon* bones at Hergott Spring, birds, freshwater snails and plants.¹¹⁶ The Overland Telegraph Line opened a ready route into central Australia, and acted as a magnet for exploratory, scientific and welfare-oriented expeditions. As well as the impetus for a new phase of central Australian exploration, it formed a data collecting frontier.¹¹⁷ Most of these expeditions had to pass through Charlotte Waters. Each expedition or investigator produced a flurry of text, sometimes with illustrations and photographs, which provide differing perspectives and descriptions of the region, often amidst long periods where no one mentions the area. Each expedition was shaped by its driving cluster of expectations and the interpretative skills and background of its members. These generated differing sets of preferred places selected to visit, and of ways of reading what was encountered. They organised what people paid attention to, and how they considered it was appropriate to behave there. In my own journeys in the area, depending on who was with me and their specialist fields of knowledge, and hence the particular kind of pattern recognition that they

¹¹² <http://www.camelexpeditions.com/Home.htm> accessed 20/1/2010.

¹¹³ Spencer 1896: 23, commenting on the work of the Horn Expedition 1894.

¹¹⁴ Jones 1996: 23.

¹¹⁵ Moyal 1976: 54-5.

¹¹⁶ Stuart 1865: xxi.

¹¹⁷ See Mulvaney 2000: 1-15.

brought to the area with them, I would see the glitter of tiny spider's eyes in the dune fields where an entomologist shone a torch, or the silhouette on a branch of a rare grey falcon pointed out by ornithologists, or old flood levels in a soil profile with the geo-archaeologists.¹¹⁸

These were shaping influences on the historical sources relating to the region; one which underlies the diversity and patchiness of those sources. In turn, the resulting 'sources' often had a broad impact on the national image and popular understandings of the region. Roslyn Haynes points to Gregory's 1906 *The dead heart of Australia* as being especially influential, as his writing was both scientific and personal, and provided an opening for public cultural reassessment of the desert and of Aboriginal people.¹¹⁹ Spencer and Gillen's anthropological publications were globally influential (see chapter 3). The Horn Expedition reports both fuelled and reflected a growth in popular interest in Australian natural history and the distinctive qualities of central Australia.¹²⁰ At the same time, local stories also continued to be told. Occasionally these have been captured in published local histories;¹²¹ they rarely contain Indigenous perspectives or accounts.¹²²

The Horn Expedition 1894: scientific not fiscal gain

The Horn Expedition was unusual in that it was funded as a philanthropic exercise on the part of William Austin Horn, a wealthy South Australian pastoralist and mining magnate, with no primary goal of land profit or mineral prospecting.¹²³ It was the first primarily scientific expedition to study the natural history of central Australia. Rather than individual explorers trekking across the desert, for ten weeks in 1894 five scientists: Professor Tate (geology and botany); Dr Stirling (anthropology); Professor Spencer (zoology and photography); Mr Watt (geology and mineralogy) and Mr Winnecke (surveyor and meteorologist)¹²⁴ travelled 3000km on camels from Oodnadatta through the

¹¹⁸ Robin 2007 also describes this phenomenon in a team of specialists travelling in the eastern Simpson area.

¹¹⁹ Haynes 1998: 147-8.

¹²⁰ Griffiths 1996.

¹²¹ For example, the stories of the Overland Telegraph Line in Hollitt's 'History of some of the early settlers and pioneers of South Australia' nd: 145-160.

¹²² Shaw (1995) overtly set out to counter this.

¹²³ Mulvaney 1996: 4.

¹²⁴ See Mulvaney 1996: 5.

Finke River basin to Alice Springs and the Macdonnell Ranges. They were assisted by two collectors and taxidermists, a camp cook, four cameleers and Aboriginal guides. The Expedition's findings were described and illustrated in a four volume report, published in 1896.¹²⁵ They made a quick pass through Dalhousie Springs, stopping at the homestead and the springs close to it, camping at the way-station that Charlotte Waters offered.¹²⁶

One of the most significant outcomes of the expedition was the meeting of Baldwin Spencer, the Oxford trained biologist from Melbourne University with Frank Gillen, then Post and Telegraph officer at Alice Springs. They formed a lasting and rewarding working partnership, and friendship. With the assistance of Patrick Byrne, telegraph officer at Charlotte Waters, they collected and studied the fauna of central Australia, and wrote their seminal series of books about the Aboriginal people in Central and Northern Australia.¹²⁷

Spencer and Gillen organised a year-long journey in 1901, taking advantage of the transect through central and northern Australian Indigenous countries that the Overland Telegraph Line presented. Logistically it was a great boon, providing ease of access and communication, and postage for returning their collections.¹²⁸ Their work on this expedition and the involvement of the two men from Charlotte Waters who accompanied them, Erlilikilia and Purunda, is discussed in chapter 3.

Other scientists organised their own specialist explorations along the line. The ornithologist S.A. White travelled on camels with his wife from Oodnadatta, through Dalhousie, Charlotte Waters and the western Simpson area in 1913, collecting birds and observing aspects of the social life along the line.¹²⁹

A special South Australian government expedition was mounted to Mt Dare station in 1938 to investigate a report of a group of human skeletons found near the Finke River floodout. Popular belief alleged that these might be the remains of Leichhardt and his party, lost in 1848. In the Adelaide newspapers, amongst

¹²⁵ Spencer 1896.

¹²⁶ Spencer 1896: 16, 23.

¹²⁷ Spencer and Gillen 1899, 1904, 1912, 1927. See Mulvaney and Calaby 1985; Mulvaney 1996; Mulvaney et al 1997; Mulvaney 2000.

¹²⁸ 'Our work was much facilitated by the existence of the isolated telegraph stations on the overland line to Port Darwin' (Spencer and Gillen 1904: ix).

¹²⁹ White 1914.

the news of the late 1930's gathering global calamity, are reports of this minutely planned inter-disciplinary scientific expedition

Skeletons of eight men, believed to be possibly those of the members of the Leichhardt expedition, which left Moreton Bay 90 years ago to cross the Continent from east to west, have been found in the Simpson desert by Mr Edwin Lowe and his son Rex of Dalhousie Springs and Mt Daer stations. ... Adelaide authorities were unanimous last night in saying that an inspection by experts would be the only way of deciding the matter.¹³⁰

The State Government was besieged with applications from interested organisations asking that their representatives should be allowed to join the party, but the Government intends to keep the number to a minimum.¹³¹

The team of experts and luminaries that was assembled was led by Archibald Grenfell-Price, the president of the Royal Geographical Society of South Australia, with AD Smith (surveyor), TD Campbell (physical anthropologist), CP Mountford (ethnologist), AC Kinnear, (a press reporter), George Ritchie (state parliamentarian) plus a radio operator. They travelled by train to Abminga siding, where they and their mound of boxes and equipment were collected by Edwin and Rex Lowe, and taken to Mt Dare homestead, at that time a homestead built of split logs. They then travelled on camel and horse across gibber and sand dune to the site, east of Ewillina waterhole and Anniversary Bore, and the Finke River where it turns south (fig 2.36).

Like Spencer and Gillen's expedition in 1901 (see chapter 3), the expedition made the most of all the latest 1930s technologies. Mountford recorded songs with recording equipment in three large cases that needed to be moved on a donkey cart, and filmed the work with a cine camera as well as prolific still photographs. Noteworthy for the time was the expedition's direct radio broadcasts from the field; the spectre of Leichhardt had captured great public interest in the expedition's findings. Their broadcasts stressed the remoteness and difficulty of access of the location 'situated as it is, just inside the first sandridge in the unexplored Simpson desert'.¹³²

¹³⁰ Adelaide *Advertiser* Thursday 3/8/1938: 25-26.

¹³¹ Adelaide *News* August 4 1938.

¹³² Transcript of national radio broadcast from Finke River camp, Thursday Aug 25th 1938, Mountford diaries, 'Leichhardt expedition 1938 Vol 37 - press cuttings and diaries in two volumes', H.L Sheard collection, Rare Books and Special collections State Library of South Australia.

The team were not successful in finding the bones of Leichhardt. On inspection, it was immediately clear that the much discussed 'bones' were merely calcified tree roots. However, they had come a long way and brought a huge amount of equipment and expectation with them, so they set out an excavation grid in 10 x 10 foot squares regardless. They dug in six inch spits, sieving the sand, cursing the flies and the heat. Amazingly, in this randomly selected site, they did find a cluster of objects: human tooth fragments and other post-cranial bone fragments, an iron packsaddle ring, steel fragments and some pieces of stitched boot and saddle leather. Even more remarkable was their recovery of a 1841 Maundy Thursday threepenny bit, dating to the year that Leichhardt left England, and a 1817 half sovereign, which had been used as a pendant. These, particularly the Maundy money, were rare coins anywhere, let alone on the edge of the Simpson Desert, with only a restricted number specially issued each year.¹³³ 'All of this required explanation. Nobody in the expedition could provide it, nor could anyone else in Adelaide, and nor has anyone satisfactorily since.'¹³⁴

¹³³ Grenfell Price 1937-38.

¹³⁴ Jones 2007b.

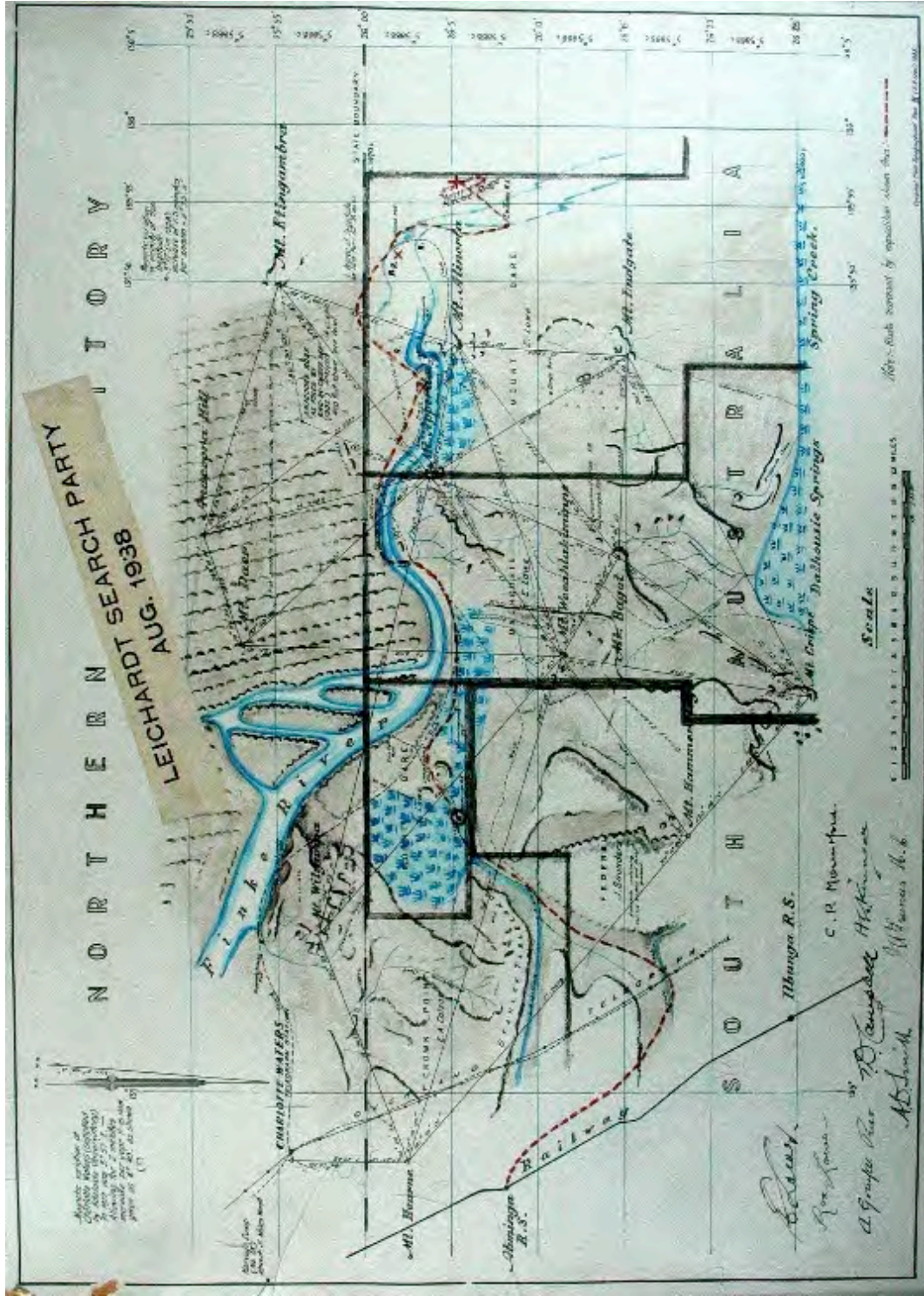


Fig 2.36: Map of the Leichhardt Search Party expedition, from TD Campbell's papers donated by Bob Edwards to the South Australian Museum. Courtesy of Philip Jones, South Australian Museum

The presence of these objects does testify to the cumulative density of human life taking place in the dunes, particularly in the Finke floodout area. Philip Jones, in his review of the expedition, concludes that it may well have been the historical burial place of an Aboriginal person.¹³⁵ It is puzzling that no one considered this possibility at the time. That they did not underlines the overriding strength of their pre-conceptions.

Mountford's diary accounts of the expedition are full of descriptions of food, from a detailed account of the table settings at the Governor's luncheon held for the team to descriptions of how to cook steak on a shovel on open fire. He also 'visited the native camp' at the back of Mt Dare station.¹³⁶ He was told about the stone arrangements at Ewillina, related to the Carpet Snake, and at Moorilperinna, related to the Urumbala, by the Lower Southern Arrernte station workers.¹³⁷ The party travelled to see these, photographing and mapping them.¹³⁸ A valuable by-product of the visit to the area was Mountford's recordings of crayon drawings by Lower Southern Arrernte men, a series of ceremonial songs and the 'explanation' of two stone arrangements at Ewillina and Moorilperinna.¹³⁹

Bingey Lowe remembered stories of the 'dead bones', when I asked him about the expedition. He said that they were found by Aboriginal stockman, who took Ted Lowe out to see them. Bingey told stories of the people on the expedition, and the finding of parts of a buggy and a sovereign. He mused:

Just like that Cap'n Cook, that Leichhardt, he in Townsville, he everywhere, how many Cap'n Cooks, how many Leichhardt's?¹⁴⁰

His observation captures the mythic quality attached to early explorers, or to the idea of them, which was sufficient to invoke a major Leichhardt Search Party from a scatter of calcified roots in a Simpson Desert dune. At the same time, his wry reflection breaks down the absoluteness of this foundational

¹³⁵ Jones 2007b.

¹³⁶ Mountford diaries 1938, H.L Sheard collection, Rare Books and Special collections State Library of South Australia.

¹³⁷ The Urumbala brings to life a whole line of country from MacDonnell ranges to Pt Augusta through the lake Eyre Basin to the Finke floodout area (Hercus and Potezny 1996: 10).

¹³⁸ Mountford and Campbell 1939. Mountford's photographs in the H.L Sheard collection, Rare Books and Special collections State Library of South Australia.

¹³⁹ Mountford and Campbell 1939.

¹⁴⁰ Macfarlane field notebook 28 October 1996: 45.

myth. Re-interpretations of Captain Cook stories in Indigenous perspective fracture Cook's unitary hold on the origin of nationhood,¹⁴¹ and here show up a disproportionate interest in lost explorers over the broader history of the western Simpson area, which was rarely the subject of enquiry.

This lack of enquiry was targeted in a distinctly non-mythical, pragmatically investigative expedition on much the same scale as the Leichhardt Search Party, organised in 1985.¹⁴² Like the Leichhardt Search Party, this left the Overland Telegraph Line and focused on the Dalhousie Springs. A comprehensive multi-disciplinary study, with only scratch funding, it reported on the geology, hydrology, botany and zoology of the springs to provide a baseline of information for future management and conservation in the newly declared National Park. It included an account of an Ancestral Perentie story, part of which is closely associated with the landscape features of the springs.¹⁴³ A useful background European history was written by Cohen, a Scientific Officer with the South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service.¹⁴⁴ A preliminary archaeological assessment of the Dalhousie springs, setting the rich evidence of late Holocene stone artefact types and sediments there in the broader context of arid zone archaeological sites and paleo-environmental information for the arid zone, was undertaken by Ron Lampert.¹⁴⁵ This set of studies remains a solid point of reference for any research on mound springs in general or the Dalhousie springs in particular.

Apart from science, the other primary motivation that led to expeditions into the area and the recordings that they generated were those concerned with documenting the conditions of Aboriginal people. The Presbyterian minister Reverend James Robert Beattie Love, (1889-1947) had a teaching job at Copley, north of the Flinders Ranges which took him into arid South Australia, and in 1912 he accepted an honorary, unpaid commission from the board of missions of the Presbyterian Church of Australia to investigate and report on the condition of the Aborigines and possible locations for mission work among

¹⁴¹ Rose 1984; Williamson and Harrison 2002: 3-4.

¹⁴² Zeidler and Ponder 1989, published by the South Australian Museum.

¹⁴³ Potezny 1989.

¹⁴⁴ Cohen 1989.

¹⁴⁵ Lampert 1989; also Lampert 1985.

them.¹⁴⁶ He was a missionary in Western Australia, where he learnt the local language and wrote a number of books, and in Queensland. In 1937 he returned to South Australia to help establish the mission at Ernabella in the Musgrave Ranges, where he lived from 1939-1946.¹⁴⁷ Although only 23 years old when he travelled through the western Simpson area, he gives specifics of living conditions and rations, and the views of pastoralists, that are rarely recorded in the area.

Another traveller in the region at this time was the Reverend Bruce Plowman. A self-described 'itinerant preacher', he was a bush Padre for the Presbyterian Church's Australian Inland Mission. He travelled on a camel between Beltana in the Flinders Ranges and Tennant Creek in the north, a six-month round trip, made repeatedly between 1912 and 1917, when he was in his late 20s.¹⁴⁸ His work was part of the vision of Rev. John Flynn, providing pastoral care for the 400 members of the Central Australian white population at that time.¹⁴⁹ His expenses were paid, but his labour was given voluntarily:

He gave people whatever help they needed at the time of his visits: he was barber, nurse, stockman, school teacher, piano tuner, furniture maker, companion and friend; he also baptised, married and buried those who needed such services whatever their denomination. He also conducted church services.¹⁵⁰

His journals provide a lively and affectionate anecdotal picture of the lives of people in the area and descriptions of the country in the early twentieth century. He had no maps to follow, but steered by pastoral tracks and mud maps between one place and the next.¹⁵¹ His 'ports of call' included Dalhousie homestead, Federal, Tin Shanty, Mt Dare, and Charlotte Waters.¹⁵² His charter did not extend to the Aboriginal people as Flynn and the church considered that they were catered for by the existing missions.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁶ Love 1912-14 PRG 214 Series 6. See also Love 1915, but this published version of his report is less useful as it summarises and generalises his observations for broad regions rather than locating them in specific places. His moral judgments are dominant, for example: he advocates the need for 'rescuing and uplifting boys and girls ... doomed to a life of vice, sloth and disease' 1915: 32.

¹⁴⁷ JH Love 1986.

¹⁴⁸ Plowman 1992: 283.

¹⁴⁹ Introduction by Plowman's daughter Jean Whitla in Plowman 1992: v.

¹⁵⁰ Whitla in Plowman 1992: v.

¹⁵¹ Plowman 1933: 30.

¹⁵² Plowman 1933: 60.

¹⁵³ Whitla in Plowman 1992: v.

Very little was known about the health of Aboriginal people on South Australian pastoral stations north of Marree to Charlotte Waters. Dr Herbert Basedow was commissioned by the Federal Minister for Home and Territories to report on their status in 1920.¹⁵⁴ He and his wife, a nurse, travelled in a camel-cart owned by the Department of the Engineer-In-Chief. Basedow had recently been reviewing the health of people in the north-east of the state for the South Australian government, and on the Nullarbor to the Western Australian border, and offered to continue the work. He visited Dalhousie Springs, Bloods Creek and Federal stations amongst many other Far North stations. The influenza epidemic of 1919 was 'disastrous', with a high death rate. Basedow treated cases of many diseases, with eye conditions being the most common, many chest infections, burns, breaks and venereal diseases. He records serious injuries received by employees on pastoral stations in the course of horse breaking, having with no compensation in return but 'prompt dismissal'.¹⁵⁵ To improve these conditions, Basedow made recommendations for 'systematic medical control of the aboriginal population' and for more reservations to be set aside 'for the exclusive use of the aboriginal owners of the land'.¹⁵⁶

Artists seeing the desert

The many photographs of Charlotte Waters examined above are a reminder that textual descriptions are only one part of the body of representations of the western Simpson Desert. Roslynn Haynes' *Seeking the Centre* reviews the history of representation of central Australia by artists and writers.¹⁵⁷ She points out the visual emphasis in European culture, which uses surveys, maps, pictures to represent and eventually to own the land, rather than understanding it through involvement in it.

¹⁵⁴Kaus 2008: 125-6; AA CRS A3 item 22/2805 Report on the third medical relief expedition among the Aborigines of SA 1921; SRSA GRG 23/1 330/1921 Third and final report on Aborigines north of Hergott.

¹⁵⁵ AA CRS A3 item 22/2805 1921: 59.

¹⁵⁶ AA CRS A3 item 22/2805 1921: 50, 30.

¹⁵⁷ Haynes 1998.

Certainly, when talking about the past, I repeatedly found myself asking Bingey Lowe what the country 'looked like' to him when he first saw it or when he returned to it after travelling. He had no aesthetic answer, instead a qualitative judgement. He would say it was 'good country, hard, but good'; aesthetics was not a relevant criteria for assessment. I was inadvertently focussed on surface appearance rather than lived experience.

The aesthetics of the desert are now an important part of the draw of the country for tourists, but were slow to emerge from expectations based in very different concepts of landscape. Haynes says that the European landscape tradition lacked ways of depicting the desert, which was experienced as a series of absences, of people, history, civilisation. It did not offer recognisable sites for identification, and it all appeared the same (as discussed in chapter 1 and 2 above).

It was Hans Heyson in the 1930s, painting in the Flinders Rangers who began to lead a shift to a greater familiarity with arid scenery and the ability to see 'barrenness as beautiful'.¹⁵⁸

Portraitist Violet Teague hired a Studebaker and driver in 1933 and travelled from Melbourne to Hermansburg via Oodnadatta and Charlotte Waters, producing an exhibition of sketches and water colours, her work being the earliest production of such art seen by Albert Namatjira.¹⁵⁹

In 1993, John Wolseley, who has worked extensively in Central Australia, created a series of lithographs called 'The Simpson Desert Survey', printed at the Australian Print workshop, Melbourne (fig 2.37).¹⁶⁰ They incorporate notes on the process of dune formation; geological notes on stratigraphy; depictions of rocky ridges; camel's tracks; archaeological stone artefacts and hearths; vivid drawings of trees with solid pools of shadow; delicate studies of the structure of *Zygochloa* cane grass; plots of the path of a bird's flight; and hand-written notes from his own observation, such as the poetic simile of 'Stream of budgerigars – more like an electric current than anything physically solid'. In his study of the artist's work, Sasha Grishin says a watercolour in the same series called 'A

¹⁵⁸ Haynes 1998: 162-4.

¹⁵⁹ Hoorn 1999.

¹⁶⁰ An edition of these prints is held at Araluen Gallery, Alice Springs where I saw them.

natural history of sand dunes - Arrernte Desert, 1992-3' is 'on one level a documentation of various types of sand dunes ... but on another level, is an investigation into the life of the dunes and life in the dunes.'¹⁶¹

It is significant that Wolseley has selected the anthropologist's Indigenous presence-oriented name for the desert over the geographer's expeditionary name. He says:

I have hoped that in my attempts to map certain ideas about the desert I can produce works which subvert the traditional strategies of map-making. The cartographic devices and methods used by earlier explorers – whose aim was to colonise and find uses for the country – I have appropriated to de-claim the desert; to find out what the desert does to me rather than what I or my sponsors can do to it.¹⁶²

Wolseley spends long periods camped alone in the desert while he works on these records and images, physically excavating through the surface of the dune to expose and explore the fossil dunes, calcified tree roots and the burrows of scorpions and birds beneath. 'Sand as a metaphor for the palimpsest of life, concealing earlier layers of existence yet preserving their traces, is a constant recurring theme in Wolseley's work.'¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Grishin 2006: 85.

¹⁶² John Wolseley's journal March 1993 vol 20: 64-5 quoted by Grishin 2006: 85-6.

¹⁶³ Grishin 2006: 86.



Fig 2.37: John Wolseley 1992-3 watercolour 'To reveal and conceal, Arrente Desert', from Grishin 2006: 52

His work is at once delicate and tough. His involvement brings to his images of the desert understandings of its character that 'contradict the anticipated image of barren desolation'.¹⁶⁴ They trace the 'many interweaving lines of movement'.¹⁶⁵

His vision is inclusive of the traditions of the lone explorer, the observing scientist and the engaged desert dweller. For me, he comes as close to bridging the insider-outsider relation to the desert as an outsider can, or at least to depicting the elements that are involved in building that bridge. He understands, and has found ways to represent, the flows, multiplicities and dynamism of entangled places.

Simpson Desert as home

The Simpson Desert was 'home' for thousands of generations of Wankangurru *mikiri-nganha* 'people from the wells' and Wankangurru *mungathiri-nganha* 'people from the high sandhills', who were permanent residents of the Simpson Desert. In 1901, the last people born and living there walked out to Kilalpanina mission, on the eastern side of the Simpson sand desert (see chapter 4).¹⁶⁶ Luise Hercus is clear when she says the Wankanguru 'had total occupation of the area, they made use of every possible resource, there was no wasteland, no empty country, no "desert". Everything "belonged" both in practical terms and in mythology'.¹⁶⁷

The western Simpson is still home, emotionally, spiritually, to Aboriginal people descended from people of the Wankanguru and Lower Southern Arrernte language groups.¹⁶⁸ And, in distinct ways, it is also a home to European pastoralists such as Molly Clark of Old Andado, the station located deepest into the western side of the Simpson dunefield, or Boof Smith, third generation pastoralist at New Crown station. Even late arrivals such as the Mt Dare lessees, artists such as John Wolseley or researchers such as myself might claim affiliation and emotional bonds to the place. But it is not home to us. Our

¹⁶⁴ Grishin 2006: 85

¹⁶⁵ Grishin 2006: 86.

¹⁶⁶ Hercus 1985; 1990a: 154.

¹⁶⁷ Hercus 1990a: 149.

¹⁶⁸ eg Ah Chee 2002.

affiliations stem from different systems of valuing the country, different expectations of it derived from our available knowledge bases, and experience.

The next chapter works at a smaller, local scale and a finer level of detail. The varying textures of interaction with the desert and with other people that are created by the application of the differing knowledge bases they bring into the western Simpson are my focus below. While still based largely on accounts from outsiders looking in, I have sought details that move closer, go deeper into forms and processes, hopes and sensations of life in the western Simpson Desert, especially in the context of the changes that followed from the incision of the Overland Telegraph Line through it.

Chapter 3

Interactive histories at Charlotte Waters Overland Telegraph Station

Introduction to interaction on the line

The ambitious Overland Telegraph Line construction project was designed to connect Australia to the rest of the modernising world, via central Australia and what was then the northern end of South Australia. In doing so, its proponents had the further overt intention of opening up the centre, 'selecting that route which will traverse, for the greater part, country suitable for occupation, the settlement of which the line will so greatly facilitate', as its director, Charles Todd reported.¹

The first lease in the area was the prime Dalhousie Springs lease, taken up by 1872 by EM Bagot, one of the surveyors on the line.² Thus, built into the telegraph line project at its foundations was, inevitably, some form of

¹ Todd 1885: 140.

² SRSA GRS 3570/1 unit 42 lease No 2213. (See fig 4.16).

'interaction' with the local country and the Indigenous people whose home it was. This interaction was first with the explorers of the region, then with surveyors for the line, followed by the construction teams, and then those who maintained and used the telegraph line and its associated tracks. The line was a fast 'long fuse laid'³ from the southern white 'settled areas' into the centre, burning into the networks of the lives already being lived there. Together with the Morse code signals that sped along the wire, the Overland Telegraph Line transmitted change, fuelled by intercultural interactions of diverse forms.

However, not everything changed, even in the heat of the sudden, indelible rupture of the patterns of life that the line wrought. There were also continuities. Continuity and transformation are not clear-cut opposites but are inter-related. Both dimensions can co-exist, with a constant tension between them. In this state of tension sits a latent ambivalence that 'the transformation of a culture is a mode of its reproduction'.⁴ That is, the form or process of change is contiguous with, and coherent according pre-existing expectations, understandings and forms of practice. WEH Stanner grapples with 'what changes and yet stays itself' in his 1958 essay 'Continuity and change'.⁵

Continuity in social and material forms and in practices is not a static state, an absence of change, but is equally a dynamic state. In order to stay more-or-less the same requires active monitoring and maintenance. People's actions may be just as much directed towards maintaining relations and social reproduction as towards altering them.

Anthropologist Francesca Merlan argues that a focus on intercultural interaction forces us to look at how people may reproduce or change relationships, depending on circumstances. She interprets interaction as the interplay of different expectations, understandings and forms of practice where every interaction has the potential to be a zone of reproduction and change.⁶

³ Judith Wright's term from 'Sanctuary' 1955, used by Mike Smith 2005: 11.

⁴ Sahlins 1985: 138 cited Sewell 2005: 202.

⁵ Stanner 1979: 42. See also Read and Engineer Jack Japaljarri 1978: 147-8.

⁶ Merlan 2005.

What forms of interaction were set up by the intervention of the Overland Telegraph Line? How did the local people respond to them? What difference to their response did the age and gender of those involved make? What elements changed and which were maintained and reproduced? To what degree were there choices available? These questions are the central theme of this chapter. I track expanding dimensions of interaction in the Charlotte Waters area. In these is a shift from circumstances which generate points of interaction that constitute an interface between two separate cultural entities, through to increasingly intricate interactions. The latter involve the emergent mutual production and reproduction of all those involved in the dialogue, and are capable of producing new forms, while old ones also continue to exist.⁷

Interaction as framework

‘Interaction’ is the blanket term I have used, in the broadest sense of ‘an action or influence of persons or things on each other’. It does not necessarily imply direct two-way exchanges, and includes everything from overt physical violence to appraisal at a distance, or avoidance, or encounters with a footprint rather than a person, for example. It is the shorthand for the multiple processes which generate the entangled historical quality of contemporary places.

‘Exchange’ – ‘to give and receive reciprocally’ – is one potential component of an interaction that has a slightly narrower, though related, sense. Exchange can be of goods, commodities or services, and includes knowledge exchanged for goods, or one service exchanged for another, for example. It is not always involved in an interaction.

To trace the mechanisms by which transformations or continuities were generated, we need to get closer to the processes of interaction than is allowed by the official or dominant published stories of technological achievement and heroic endeavour such as those by Charles Todd (1885), Richards (1914), Frank Clune (1955), Peter Taylor (1980). In order to get closer, I focus on a specific

⁷ See Hinkson and Smith 2005.

context of interaction. This is the Charlotte Waters repeater station, the most central of the eleven repeater stations on the telegraph line.⁸

Charlotte Waters is a key context of interaction in which to follow change through time: - in the form of interaction, what is emphasised by those interacting, in the occasions when they occurred, and in the materials involved. The form and location of the buildings as they were initially established (described in chapter 2 and briefly below) was the setting for the interactions that followed. The configuration of the place influenced how people interacted. This socio-spatial organisation can be followed into the present. As archaeologists Robin Torrence and Anne Clarke point out 'the social, economic and political trajectories initiated by the enforced colonisation and settlement of Indigenous lands did not stop ... but the processes and consequences of historical cross-cultural encounters continue into the present day'.⁹ In this approach, the place, Charlotte Waters, acts as a kind of fixed-lens camera, with the local aspects of large-scale processes seen through it over time. Other examples of a long term historical approach based in a single location are the work of McBryde and Smith: Archaeologist and ethno-historian Isabel McBryde carried out one of the few such studies of the changing practices of exchange during the first forty years of European-Aboriginal interaction between the Aboriginal people and the colonists at Port Jackson, early Sydney.¹⁰ She argues that 'exchange continues as a vital part of the process of mediating survival for indigenous and settler participants'. She demonstrates that for the Aboriginal people involved, despite the 'dominant alien social system acquiring permanence', exchange 'maintained its role of negotiating difference and facilitating social co-existence and preserved cultural identity in a landscape no longer theirs to control'.¹¹ Looking at these exchange processes in central

⁸ The basis of the 1870s telegraph line was a 2000 mile long open iron wire, resting on insulators attached to poles. The morse messages were made by closing and opening an electrical circuit - generated by a cluster of glass cell batteries - with a transmitter. There was leakage of the current along the wire, and mist, dust, spiders, cracks in the insulators, solar flares, all acted to reduce the amount of current conducted along the wire. Repeaters were therefore necessary. An incoming message was read by an operator there who wrote them down and re-sent them, or, later an electro-magnetic relay repeated the incoming message (O'Grady 1972: 20-23).

⁹ Torrence and Clarke 2000: 1-2.

¹⁰ McBryde 1989, 2000.

¹¹ McBryde 2000: 245.

Australia, another archaeologist writing history, Mike Smith, pieced together the history of several generations of interactions between the Kukatja families of western Central Australia with white explorers, administrators and pastoralists. He frames this long term history around one locale, the large rock shelter he excavated, occupied for 22,000 years.¹²

The events and processes I draw out around Charlotte Waters are particular to the western Simpson Desert area. They are comparable to those in other areas along the telegraph line, but not representative of them. The impact of, and responses to, major influxes of unprecedented people, objects and practices were not homogeneous, either spatially or temporally. Each of the eleven repeater stations, on average 250 kilometres apart, had a differing environmental context. Each was inserted into the land of a different Indigenous language group. In each, its presence initiated distinctive accretionary and contingent histories of interaction.

Each repeater station was a particularly concentrated circumstance for interaction. As well as being the base for a staff of six white telegraph workers, they were also official centres for regional government with responsibilities for customs and for collecting votes, supporting regional policing and distributing rations.¹³ They were also crucial way-stations for all travellers along the lone arterial route across the continent, which was followed by all non-locals - travellers, stockmen, officials such as police, inspectors of land, scientists and welfare inspectors, suppliers of stores, administrators and maintenance crews. The track was thus another focus for interactions, as discussed below.

An individual telegraph station was not a single, unitary place. This is clear from the surface archaeological record and the existing textual descriptions of where people lived. Rather, it was made up of a heterogeneous network, or cluster, of distinct configurations of different people, different ways of using the spaces, and satellites of associated places around the main station. These spatial

¹² Smith 2005.

¹³ Gillen 1968: 15, 18; Mulvaney 2000: 33-4, 186.

patterning, which constituted the place along lines of social distinction, are explored further below.

In this chapter, I examine different aspects of interaction and the specificities of the change and continuity as they were lived out near Charlotte Waters, slowing the blur of these continuous dynamics so that they can be seen more clearly. Recent historical analyses have shown that it is possible to extract telling details embedded within white observers' descriptions of early cross-cultural interactions to gain insights about the performance of meeting and response, the interpretation of responses and the situated nature of the practices of social interaction.¹⁴ I have also drawn on material evidence and spatial configurations to discover elements of interaction that were not necessarily articulated by those living them out in the place.

PART I: Expanding dimensions of interaction in the Charlotte Waters area

There is a rapid, uneven escalation in the dimensions of interaction in the Charlotte Waters area. The rate, duration and form of interactions alter as explorer and then settler incursions intensify. Initially there are short, localised and disbursed points of encounter between John McDouall Stuart and the local people in the 1860s. These extend into a more two-dimensional continuous chain or line of more frequent encounters, as the survey teams move through in the 1870s. The participants tend to bring more prior experience to the encounters. These extend yet further into a three-dimensional surface or topography of interaction as the repeater station is established and pastoral leases such as Dalhousie Springs are taken up on the back of the bridgehead that the telegraph line cut into the area. At the same time as these structural intensifications, the specific locations of the encounters and the individuals involved also play into their outcomes and tenor.

¹⁴ McBryde 1989, 2000; Nugent 2005, 2008; Shellam 2007.

1 Points of encounter

John McDouall Stuart favoured small parties for his explorations, lightly supplied, without wagons. As part of his fifth expedition in 1860-1, 10 men and horses passed along the edge of the western Simpson, through the Bagot Range to the Stevenson on 1 February 1861 (fig 1.2 and 3.1). They named Lindsay Creek, and encountered a large waterhole there where 'many natives, tall powerful fellows, were seen, but we did not speak with them'.¹⁵ They crossed the creek they named the 'Coglin', north to the Finke River.¹⁶ They dug into its broad, sandy bed to find water, but were unsuccessful. However, they then 'discovered six native wells' near 'a large camping place of the natives', where the ground for 100 yards was covered with 'worleys, and at one spot they seemed to have had a grand corrobberie, the earth being trodden quite hard, as if a large number had been dancing upon it in a circle'. They describe a spear left behind '10 feet long, with a flat round point, the other end for throwing with a womera'. After they made another hole for water here, 'the natives annoyed them much by setting fire to the grass in every direction'.¹⁷

We can suppose that Stuart had intervened inappropriately in an important gathering place, a profound breach of the local people's rights to be acknowledged as the holders of that country and of the expected etiquette for strangers. The local people took action to drive them away by burning.¹⁸

They were defending their country, as is clearly described in an Indigenous account of Stuart's travels through the area. The account was recorded by Charles Mountford in 1938, told to him by Tim, who was a local, presumably Lower Southern Arrernte man, working as an employee on Mt Dare station.

¹⁵ Stuart 1865: 248-9.

¹⁶ Stuart had named the Finke River, further north, on his fourth expedition, in April 1860 [1865: 249, 149].

¹⁷ Stuart 1865: 250.

¹⁸ They had taken similar action earlier, south at Neales Creek where due to dysentery Stuart had stayed several days, and 'during his stay, the natives, while studiously keeping themselves out of sight, set fire to the surrounding grass' 21 January 1861 [Stuart 1865: 248].

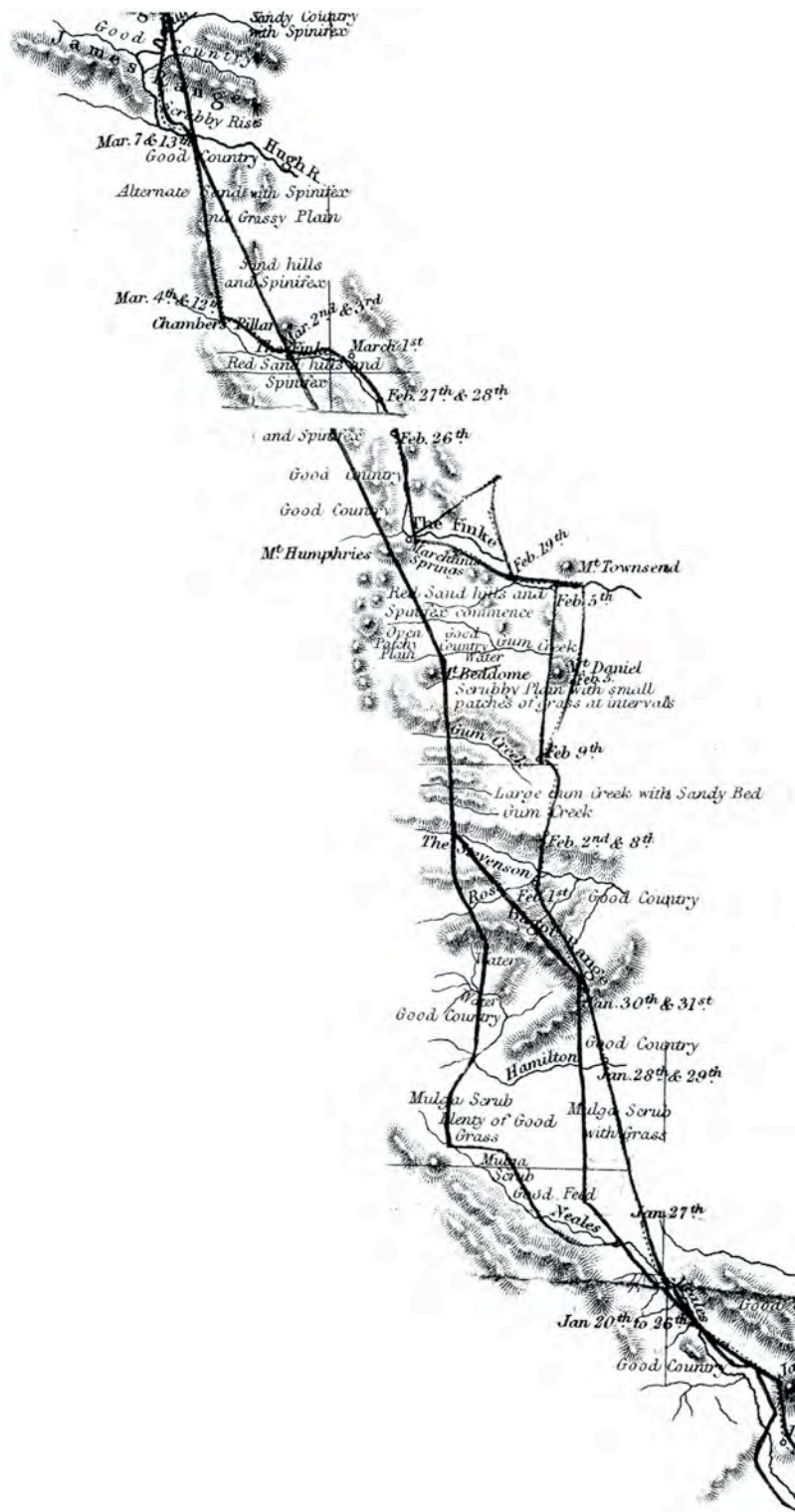


Fig 3.1: Detail of western Simpson area from 'Map of Stuart's discoveries in the continent of Australia from 1858 to 1862 also fixing the Centre'. Track of the 1861 and 1862 expeditions shown. From insert map in Stuart 1865.

He was 'an Emu man' who knew the songs for the country, including those for Charlotte Waters. He was aged about 60 according to Mountford, so was born when the telegraph line was in full operation. His 'old people, mother and father' had 'given him' this account of their interaction with unprecedented forms of tracks, with white men and horses, the explanations they arrived at for what they saw, and its partial accommodation in their own world view. They would have been children when Stuart came through if Mountford is roughly correct about Tim's age. Tim's account of the use of fire to drive away the incomers, below, overlaps directly with Stuart's described experience above.

Stuart (according to Tim) came from 'Melbourne' travelled west of Charlotte Waters where he made a camp and looked around the country. The natives were very afraid of the white men and particularly the horses, when the natives saw these strange long legged beasts, they ran away and after a long talk among the old men decided to scare both the human and animal intruders away by a large number of smoke fires. This was unsuccessful, but they did notice that the white man left his camp to travel north almost immediately.

The first time the natives saw the boot tracks of white men, they were sorely puzzled as to what kind of animal made the tracks but decided that it was that of some malignant spirit which they called Agnura.

The natives were afraid of the horses on the first journey north, would not even approach the tracks, thought the beast would follow them, even if their tracks were adjacent.

Stuart returned through the country some time later. The natives considered the cause of his return was the bush had torn their clothes and they had to go back for more and horses as well.

On Stuart's return journey the natives were not as afraid, and actually approached the camp. Stuart or his men gave the natives some food, which although they took it politely, threw it away as soon as the donor's back was turned. Stuart returned after having reached the 'Top End'. He did not shoot anyone or cause any trouble.¹⁹

TGH Strehlow provides a parallel account of local people's reactions to the sighting of unprecedented footprints, at Burt Plain, further north of Alice Springs. Old men in 1933, they reported to Strehlow that

¹⁹ Mountford's diaries of the 'Leichhardt expedition' 1938 held in the H.L Sheard collection, Rare Books and Special collections, State Library of South Australia.

The boot tracks looked as though they had been made by human beings; but what kind of creatures could men be who had broad, flat, toe-less feet, and a heel that was a hard lump, sharply edged from the main part of the foot? As for the horse tracks, we could tell that they must have been made by huge four-legged creatures, larger than any we had ever seen before. These creatures, too, had no toes, and their heavy feet had cut their way even into hard clay ground, and left their scars on the rock plates. Surely, we thought, both these kinds of creatures must be evil man-eating monsters! Perhaps they were some of those man-eating monsters that prowled about at night and normally attacked men without leaving any tracks behind.²⁰

What do you do when the unprecedented walks through your home?

That these oral records have been retained for over 70 years,²¹ handed on to two generations, is as telling as their content. This was a memorable event for the Indigenous people involved. Here we see people in a quick, contained encounter. They speculate about each other, and set up the expectations which will feed into later encounters. The stress in the story for both parties – in both senses of the word – lies in the external details and unfamiliar elements.

Both Indigenous accounts associate the novel and intimidating experiences described with the name of Stuart. They recognise his role as prime mover in bringing the unprecedented into the country. The storytellers have refreshed their accounts as further information concerning the events was acquired, actively up-dating them. They describe their earlier incomprehension at the point of contact with a knowing, post hoc, almost humorous edge from the position of their 1930s immersion in the outcomes of the enormity of the change that those encounters set in train.

For the local people, the first and most startling manifestations were the footprints. The ground is an active social surface for them, no mere neutral backdrop. Both as hunters and as holders of the stories of the Ancestors whose

²⁰ Strehlow 1967: 8.

²¹ Stuart's passage through the country appears to have been a constant in the local repertoire of stories. It is also told by Jim Kite, or Erilikilyika, in 1913 (see below). One of his carved boomerangs shows Stuart's party on horses and a group of the locals creeping up behind them. Kite interprets this depiction to a journalist, who focuses in his record on fear of the horses: 'when the riders dismounted, the natives set up a withering howl of fear. Mercy! The apparitions had spilt in two!' (*Adelaide Observer* July 26 1913: 36, 50).

actions produced signs in the surface of the land, that surface is constantly being scanned and read as an index to what has taken place. The ground surface is the repository of imprints of action. There is a binding connection between the print and the Ancestor, or person or animal that makes it, and so the imprint is an equal carrier of whatever power its maker carries.²² A print with such unfamiliar features had no referent, except, speculatively, the supernatural. Thus the unknown tracks were as dangerous for their observer as their unknown maker. The unprecedented cutting of hard ground and rock by iron-shod hooves was especially intimidating for the local observers of the detail of the ground. Now, it stands as an uneasy harbinger of the rapid compaction of the ground by hard-hoofed stock that would soon follow. The meaningful, story-laden surfaces of the ground were being irreversibly transformed. But not the local people's capacity to read them, remembered in their history of minute attention to the observable forms of cultural difference.

The terms of engagement were inherently incompatible. In their attention to the unprecedented, the local people were brought up against a sudden, intrusive apprehension of other forms of life, radically different and yet, in the end apparently human, and requiring speculation regarding how this difference could have come about. This required modification or extension of their existing theories of difference to explain expectation of distinctions from other social groups.²³ In contrast, the surveyors and construction team members knew why they were there, they considered that they had a right to be there, their concepts of difference were laden with assumptions of technological and social superiority, and they were in a hurry. They expected to see 'natives' and approached the prospect of encounter with wariness, varying degrees of curiosity and a preparedness to shoot.

For the local people, meetings with strangers were governed by protocols. Baldwin Spencer describes the ceremonies required by such a meeting in Alice Springs in the 1890s.²⁴ But in the absence of appropriate understanding of the

²² See Munn 1986: 181-2.

²³ Sewell 2005: 10.

²⁴ Spencer 1928: 239-245.

gestures and performances being enacted, but not shared, and with neither party registering what was being offered or expected, these were inevitably misread.²⁵ Historian Maria Nugent draws out the important role of the performance of avoidance, nonchalance, retreat in early encounters at Botany Bay where 'speed was never a priority'.²⁶ In contrast, Stuart went directly into core places such as the cluster of huts and ceremonial ground described above, and targeted prime water places. Their haste and indiscretion, and the fact they were all men, marked the surveyors and construction team members as hostile. Baldwin Spencer says any party of men without women 'is always looked on with suspicion'²⁷ and TGH Strehlow points out:

the very mode of progress practiced by the white foreigners was one that was normally adopted in [A]boriginal Australia only by roving bands of avengers when they were stealing their way through hostile country in order to surprise and slay their unsuspecting victims.²⁸

Rejection of the first exchange, the gift of food, that Tim's account records, is significant. Similar accounts of early rejection of gifts are familiar elsewhere in Australia. For example, Isabel McBryde shows that in early encounters at Port Jackson, gift exchange was an important means of communication, an element of greetings and farewells, or negotiations of political dealings.²⁹ Refusal of a gift, while attributed to simple distaste for strange food, is potentially also a demonstration of non-reciprocity; an expression of unwillingness to enter into an open-ended relation of indebtedness. Exchange is always 'a political process, one in which wider relationships are expressed and negotiated in a personal encounter',³⁰ as will be discussed further below.

At Port Jackson, the members of the First Fleet, with prior experience in the Pacific and North America, came expecting to engage with 'the natives' in exchange. They arrived with trade items at the ready, wanting to establish

²⁵ Nugent 2008; Mulvaney 1989: 2-3; Shellam 2007; McBryde 2000.

²⁶ Nugent 2008: 202.

²⁷ Spencer 1928: 239.

²⁸ Strehlow 1967: 9.

²⁹ McBryde 1989: 175, 2000a: 248.

³⁰ Thomas 1991: 7.

peaceful, close relations. Governor Phillip's stated intention was to 'give them a high opinion of their new guests'.³¹

There was no similar provisioning of the survey teams for the Overland Telegraph Line.

Building the line: "In less than 18 months 2000 miles of telegraph through the wastes and solitudes of a vast unknown interior"³²

In the account given to Charles Mountford by Tim, there is a clear association of Stuart with the massive influx of the people, objects and practices that followed soon after along the same route:

Sometime afterwards, a big mob of people with sheep goats and wagons came along and put up the overland telegraph line. There was no trouble here, everyone was quiet, both black and white. Some of the natives even worked on the line, cutting poles. ... The old abos [sic] did not attach any importance to the telegraph line, just thought it was something belonging to the white man, like his wagons, boots and other paraphernalia.³³

The South Australian government's agreed timetable, to complete a line to Port Darwin through central Australia by 1 January 1872 in order to meet the undersea cable being built from Singapore via Indonesia, was a punishing one. To meet it, Charles Todd, who orchestrated the project, took care in selecting good officers and men with 'zeal and intelligence', and providing 'efficient transport power' of 'thoroughly good staunch horses and bullocks'.³⁴ Many of the surveyors and overseers were Lands Department employees who had prior experience working in arid Australia and the Northern Territory. However, for the central section of the line, from north of Port Augusta to Attack Creek, crossing the western Simpson area, they had only Stuart's recent exploration map (fig 3.1) and the follow-up 1870 survey led by John Ross to go by.

They expected harsh conditions: 'we heard that the whole country for miles north of the Peake was one mass of stones, on which our vehicles would

³¹ McBryde 2000a: 249.

³² Giles 1894 Vol 2 (8): 60.

³³ Mountford's diaries of the 'Leichhardt expedition' 1938, held in the H.L Sheard collection, Rare Books and Special collections State Library of South Australia.

³⁴ Todd 1885: 143.

inevitably be smashed to pieces before we got half through ... terrible accounts also of the dense rolling red sandhills and spinifex country and the impenetrable mulga, the intense heat, the flies, ants etc etc' wrote surveyor and sub-overseer on the central section of the line, Christopher Giles.³⁵

They feared 'native' attack. Todd's instructions on how to carry out the construction of the line for the overseers in the central section included directives regarding those natives the party might meet. The men were to treat them 'kindly but firmly'; native camps were not to be visited; there was to be no communication with the women; native property was not to be touched; and they were only to fire on the natives when attacked, when it was necessary for their safety.³⁶ Alfred Giles, Christopher's brother, employed on the initial survey for the route of the line in 1870, wrote

The best way to handle wild blacks is never to allow them within spear distance of the camp. We could have got rid of them quicker by sharp and rougher methods, but our instructions were to treat them as peaceably as possible everywhere, especially, as the first party through, we should set the best example possible for the sake of those to follow.³⁷

Christopher Giles, following with a telegraph construction team was 'Well armed although we scarcely expected to meet with hostile natives for the first hundred miles'.³⁸ The Peake station, west of Lake Eyre, was considered the edge of the frontier.³⁹

No overt provision was made in the extensive lists of stores and equipment carried for diplomatic gifts for the 'natives' encountered. However, one incident described by Christopher Giles suggests that exchange was assumed to be a valid form of interaction by members of the survey team.

2 The line of interaction is incised

Near the locale that was soon to become Charlotte Waters repeater station, Christopher Giles records an encounter by his surveying party, late in 1870:

³⁵ Giles 1894 vol 2 (11): 83.

³⁶ cited by Gooley 1972: 14, 16.

³⁷ A. Giles 1926[1995]: 60.

³⁸ C. Giles 1894 vol 2(11): 84.

³⁹ Gillen 1995: 63 footnote 99.

We ran short of provisions and worst of all, tobacco! I had been for some time using the dried leaves of the native tobacco plant (not pitcherry) which grew luxuriantly in some of the creek beds ... a wretched substitute for the real article ... we obtained relief, however, in a somewhat novel way. On the afternoon ... we saw a tribe of blacks crossing a flat, as they didn't run away on seeing us, I felt sure they had mixed with whites before, and consequently must have - tobacco! ... without waiting for them to approach nearer, I rode towards them as fast as my limping horse could carry me, and brandishing my empty meerschaum, I went full tilt up to the astonished savages, and by signs with the empty pipe demanded an immediate surrender of what they might possess of the inestimable narcotic. I was referred to the ladies of the company, who were still some way to the rear. On their arrival they put down their loads, and their worthy spouses immediately began a search among their treasures for the coveted weed, and oh, joy! Nearly a whole stick!

Two minutes more and three ardent devotees were ecstatically 'burning the idol' and distributing pieces of dry damper and some flour amongst our benefactors, who seemed very pleased to render us the service as well as amused at our extravagant behaviour. They had news for us too, for amidst cries of 'Whitefellow! Whitefellow!' they pointed to the smoke of the expedition camp fires a couple of miles ahead ...⁴⁰

From this humorously framed anecdote, we gain a detailed picture of a group of traveling local people, the women and the men walking separately. The women are carrying sticks of tobacco that they must have obtained from some other exchange: either a direct one-off acquisition from other construction teams, or perhaps through a chain of exchanges with other Aboriginal groups who had been in contact with whites further south. Their existing exchange networks were long-range and active, bringing goods to the centre from the south coast, the east side of the Simpson and the Gulf of Carpentaria,⁴¹ and new goods entered into these networks immediately.⁴²

Commercial tobacco has a direct parallel with native tobacco or *pituri*, as the four species that grow in Central Australia share its *Nicotiana* genus. The dried leaves were mixed with ash and chewed as a mild stimulant and to reduce

⁴⁰ Giles 1894 vol 3(4): 30.

⁴¹ McBryde 1989.

⁴² Kimber 1996: 99.

hunger. It was a highly valued and widely traded item in the Simpson Desert⁴³ as elsewhere.⁴⁴ Speculatively, part of the local people's willingness to enter into this exchange may have been because it was an appropriate action for this substance. From their point of view the exchange may have fitted better with 'conventions and expectations of pre-contact practice'⁴⁵ and was less ambiguous than other items offered for exchange. It may have carried less onerous implications for establishment of a continuing exchange relationship.

The group accept, or appear to, the food offered on this occasion. The women are happy to be involved in the dealings. They have acquired the English word 'whitefellows' for the incomers.

Giles draws his humour in this encounter from the irony he sees in its departure from the standard assumption that the whitefellows would be the benefactors in any such encounter. That they are the mendicants here is embroidered as an amusing one-off story against himself. That he has a positive attitude towards Aboriginal people (see chapter 2) also flavours this particular episode.

It is clear that the local people are attentively watching every action of the intruders in their country, aware of where they are and what they are doing. This is a friendly interchange. Presumably the survey team did not trespass in any key places, and behaved within the acceptable Indigenous parameters for groups on the move at this early stage of interaction. This acceptability would soon change.

3 Establishment of Charlotte Waters as a topography of interaction

Five telegraph construction working parties, roughly following Stuart's track north to the central section of the Overland Telegraph Line, left Adelaide in early September 1870. Each party consisted of 19 men, 15 horse wagons, 17

⁴³ Latz 1995: 62-3, 230-236.

⁴⁴ Read and Engineer Jack Japaljarri 1978 describe the efforts made by a western desert group in 1928, recently exposed to European tobacco, to acquire more through negotiation and unprecedented travel routes.

⁴⁵ McBryde 2000a: 242.

bullock drays and one bullock wagon, plus five express wagons. Two thousand sheep travelled with a separate party. The wagons were loaded with rations, medical drugs, telegraph materials – 1500 metal poles, wire, insulators – firearms, canteens and fishing gear, ironmongery, saddlery.⁴⁶

In contrast to the nuanced Indigenous reading of the tracks on the ground, the telegraph line construction party sent a mobile 'wagonette on ahead to find the best route and watering places and to make a track for the others to follow slowly behind'⁴⁷: one recognisable track in an otherwise blank ocean of the unknown. The only meanings the ground bore for them were those they brought with them.

For the local people tracking them, it would soon have become obvious that while previous strangers had kept moving, these cumbersome invaders were behaving differently. They began quarrying rock and cutting trees to build solid structures, running stock in the waterholes, flattening the grass, planting seeds in the bank of the river.⁴⁸ The options for contexts of interaction were suddenly shifting into an entirely new configuration. They were altering the landscape on a wide and enduring scale. They were not going away.

In January 1871 the construction party arrived at the site selected for the Charlotte Waters repeater station by Ross' 1870 preliminary exploring expedition. Construction commenced.

It is January 1871: The recent summer rains had been good, although the builders were unaware that they were exceptional, describing grasses 'as green as emerald' available for horses and 200 sheep.⁴⁹ A horse cart bumps noisily over the distant ironstone covered hill as it carries white sandstone from a quarry 12 miles away for the walls of the main building, and for the smith's forge.⁵⁰ Trees are felled along the Finke River for the mess store and the smith's

⁴⁶ Todd 1885 143; SLSA PRG 161/1.

⁴⁷ Giles 1894 vol 2: 84.

⁴⁸ Giles 1894 Vol 3(5): 38.

⁴⁹ Giles 1894 Vol 3(5): 38.

⁵⁰ Giles 1894 Vol 3(5): 38.

and carpenter's sheds of the emergent Charlotte Waters repeater station, and for the many telegraph poles. The site was chosen due to the water present in a dry area. 'We solemnly filled our pannicans with water and named the 'waters' Charlotte Waters after Lady Charlotte Bacon, sixth daughter of the Earl of Oxford (Byron's Ianthe)'.⁵¹ In such re-naming lies a whole history. This set of references, to a relative of their own team, to English aristocracy and to its high culture was a first step in tying intractable, unfamiliar landscape into the known; the start of the effort to domesticate it. This new placename and 'Coglin Creek' displaced that of Kirrki-idningkala waterhole, which is associated with the *Arkaya* or Kestrel History, which tells the History of the formation of the Lower Finke River⁵² (see box in chapter 2), and the name for the place which Gillen gives in his diary: 'Alknulurilirra', an important rain centre.⁵³

The chosen site was on the highest ground above the waterhole, thought to be defensible against anticipated attack by local Aboriginal people. Its treeless surrounds were always spoken of in terms of isolation, dreariness and shadeless heat. The building was constructed to be defensible, with a walled courtyard at the back and no doors at the front initially. Photographs show that it was not only solidly built, with well-dressed stone, but built to impress, with attention given to decorative detail, such as on the top of the large front chimney, and in the surrounds of the back gate and side piers (see chapter 2).

Part II 'Playing at telegraph lines'

The construction of Charlotte Waters stayed in the memory of local Aboriginal people watching it to such an extent that it stood as a significant temporal marker 34 years later. The explorer Henry Vere Barclay records a local Indigenous man saying that a claypan that was encountered as a dry swamp in

⁵¹ Lady Charlotte was the mother of Bacon, the man in charge of stores for the central section of the line. She was a friend of the poet Byron, and he dedicated his poem 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage' to her (Richards 1914: 15).

⁵² Hercus and Potezny 1993.

⁵³ Gillen 1968: 13, 14.

1905, held 11 feet of water at the time of the construction.⁵⁴He was a child at that time and the advent of the Overland Telegraph Line had made a lasting impression.

We have an insight into the process by which such a lasting impression would be imprinted on a child growing up in the vicinity of the repeater station's construction. Christopher Giles' remarks that he has 'several times been amused by seeing where the native children had been playing at putting up telegraph lines on the broad sandy bed of the river by ranging long sticks in a line'.⁵⁵ Not just once, note, but several times.

This observation is arresting, in the same way that the description of the dancing with the troops with Darug people of the NSW coast in 1788 is unexpected and surprising.⁵⁶ It introduces us to a dynamic that calls for close attention. It is not a familiar scenario within standard accounts of the frontier. It performs that deceptively simple service of giving the past its present, a present in which there is childhood, learning, surprise and the detail of what it is like to experience these. I will attend to the detail here, as it enters into the heart of what we trying to understand; it offers a way of witnessing the personal, intimate daily context of a grand, national-scale historical event.

First of all, there is the unexpectedness of the manifestation of a child's perspective – which was sufficiently unexpected to 'amuse' Giles and cause him to record the child's eye view of his work. Their attention to the events in their home ground, and the form that it takes are noteworthy. That it was recorded as happening is equally so.

Imagine the children hanging back, hidden behind some available cover, watching the strangers.

⁵⁴ Barclay 1916: 16.

⁵⁵ Giles 1894 Vol 3(6): 44.

⁵⁶ Clendinen 2007: 8-9.

In the river bed, the men would have been cutting gum trees for the seven-metre high telegraph poles, the sound of chopping filling the air as they shape them, cart them on wagons, attach insulators and metal foot plates and strain to pull them up with ropes, shouting and clanging (fig 3.2). All this would be repeated over and over again, one pole every 80 metres. Giles says the children were 'playing at telegraph lines' but of course they did not know that was what they were playing at. They were playing at imitation - perhaps parody - of these strange, perplexing, even funny novelties. Without any inkling of the purpose of these actions, what would they make of all this repeated activity, one pole after another, over and over again? No women. Strange animals. Strange coverings on pale bodies. Strange words and sounds from strange materials. We can imagine the children imitating the mannerisms and behaviour of the men as they placed their sticks, making what Nicholas Thomas has described as a 'material expression of the foreign'.⁵⁷ In doing so, they were creating a narrative for themselves of what they saw. They thereby began to accommodate the confronting strangeness of it, and to build it into their own bodily sense of what the world now contained.

This rarely articulated perspective of a local child provides a chink in the dominant framing of the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line as an epic feat of endurance and courage and technical achievement.⁵⁸ In the children's play we can see how the seeds of radical change could come to be incorporated into people's lives. It reminds us to pay close attention to the mechanisms by which social and material transformations and continuities could be lived out in the area.

The ethno-botanist Peter Latz who grew up with Arrernte children at Hermansburg in the 1950s remembers a series of forms of play from his own childhood. He says 'for desert Aboriginal people much of the children's play was connected with everyday adult activities and was a learning process encouraged by adults'.

⁵⁷ Thomas 1991: 109.

⁵⁸ eg Taylor 1980; Clune 1955; Richards 1914.



CONSTRUCTION OF THE OVERLAND TELEGRAPH TO PORT DARWIN.—FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY J. H. NIXON.—SEE PAGE 94.

Fig 3.2: Process of construction. 'Construction of the Overland Telegraph to Port Darwin', wood engraving from a photograph by J.H. Nixon, Melbourne, 1870?, from an illustrated newspaper, by Calvert, Samuel, 1828-1913

Girls made dolls from branches tied together with plant fibres, and intricate fibre string games were played by both adults and children. Boys made toy spears from grass stems and cut disks from bark as rolling targets, and toy boomerangs were made from gum tree bark. Winged seed capsules and seeds were flown in play, vines used for skipping, and toy boats were made. Latz also describes a girl's 'story game' where sand is smoothed out to form an arena and leaves are used to represent people in action,⁵⁹ which seems to display the same elements as the game Giles observed.

Another glimpse of the forms of children's play comes from an Aboriginal satellite camp at Finke Well, nine miles from Charlotte Waters. In 1912 James Robert Beattie Love, carrying out an 'enquiry into the conditions of life among the Aboriginals of the interior of Australia under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church' observes that '... One small boy used nightly to resort to a sloping sapling, where, perched ridey-horse fashion, he would away in glee. Two others seemed great chums, and spent most of the day in throwing small spears at each other or practicing throwing the boomerang'.⁶⁰

Spencer also notes the form of children's play:

Out in the scrub with their tiny digging sticks they mimic the action of their mothers and at an age when the white child is learning to read books, they are busy, all unconscious to themselves, learning to read the book of nature. They gradually come to know where to find bulbs and seeds that are good to eat, and to recognise the tracks of every animal, large and small, that burrows in the ground or nests in the trees.⁶¹

In this play there is observation and imitation, modelling of the adult world, and in modelling, incorporation of it. The children Giles observed had drawn away from the main centre of the action they are imitating, to a familiar, safe space. They can play because they are confident enough to do so, in their as-yet intact, coherent social world. At the same time, they may well have been picking up on their parent's negative reactions to these intruders, and playing to allay their fears.

⁵⁹ Latz 1995: 71-2.

⁶⁰ Love 1912: 25.

⁶¹ Spencer 1912: 190.

Theirs was a performance involving startling novelties, but carried out in the context of their known place and the familiar act of playing in it. Through that continuity, they were making a way to build new actions, materials, animals, words, concepts, and expectations into their own world of experience. In observing and representing change to themselves they were taking it in, finding a way of joining the story of it into the stories of themselves through action, as they did not have words for it.

A key distinction here lies in the difference between representation to oneself of others' actions, and representation by others of ones' own actions. These both involve translations across the gulf of cultural differences, but the power differentials mean that we most commonly have only the latter, as recorded by colonial observers of local people. The creative representation of others to oneself is a theme seen again in the life of Erlikilyika, born in the vicinity of Charlotte Waters and one of the two Aboriginal men who accompanied Spencer and Gillen on their year long ethnographic expedition. His creative responses to rapidly changing circumstances are discussed below.

The children's reactions highlight the diverse array of responses to the interactions set in train in the locale that was fast becoming Charlotte Waters. The children would be the transitional generation that grow up incorporating more than one source and structure of experience. Compare the children's reactions with those of the adults. For those who were already adult in 1860, there would always be the tension of necessity to translate experience gained in an intact, coherent 'one-hundred-year-present'⁶² of experience, memory and connections in which they could be confident of their own centrality, into a world that was uncertain and differently premised.

⁶² Rose 1999: 4 -: 'The period I call a one-hundred-year present can be understood precisely as a practice of 'now' - a set of transitions and transactions. Memory, expectation and attention are brought to bear in social life as tools for understanding the meaning of events, for determining their moral valence, if any, and for finally determining whether they are to endure or to be left to wash away.'

This is not to suggest that the incursions by explorers and the telegraph line were a 'frontier Year Zero'⁶³ of change for the local people. These adults had dealt with previous interactions with other groups. There is evidence of marked dynamism in population movements in central Australia in the recent decades before the colonial incursions. Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara groups moved from the north-west of South Australia eastwards to the Finke and Oodnadatta, and southwards towards the Bight, with inevitable re-negotiation of relations to lands and to each other.⁶⁴ The Southern Arrernte language and kinship group 'apparently spread down the Finke at some time in the past, probably not very long ago' according to the anthropologist AP Elkin working in northern South Australia in the 1930s. He describes their distinctive Arrernte kinship terminology and marriage rules compared to the groups around them, retaining qualities of Arrernte groups to the north.⁶⁵ Luise Hercus says:

People were acutely aware that there could be changes: thus the Ngamini [to the SE of Wankanguru] were frequently accused of being expansionist, and there is clear evidence of Western Desert people displacing Lower Southern Aranda to the west of Oodnadatta.⁶⁶

But this latest colonial interaction ramped up the experience, and the stakes, of inter-group interaction to a new, even higher order of intensity. A division between the generations opened up; between those born into the ferment, and those already adult who had to find other ways of dealing with it. This highlights the non-unitary impact of changes – they had different effects for different people, ages, genders. Differences in experience are then a source of cultural transformation – children experience the changes differently from adults, and use that experience in novel ways.

⁶³ Rose 1999: 9.

⁶⁴ Elkin 1939/40: 295; McConvell 1990; Bellwood 1997: 132-4.

⁶⁵ Elkin 1939/40: 196-198. He writes: 'Just as the Dieri have a tradition of being pushed south to their present location by the Wongkonguru, and as, according to one of my Aluridja informants, the Aluridja people moving south, displaced a portion of the Arabana tribe from the Oodnadatta district, so in between these two movements of peoples, the Aranda spread down the Finke south of Horseshoe bend and Charlotte Waters and so across into South Australia. Their movements may even have been a contributory cause of the southern migrations of the Wongkonguru and Aluridja, their eastern and western neighbours respectively.'

⁶⁶ Hercus 1990a: 154.

Pilfering and stand offs

Imagine the adults watching the same construction activities, discussing the possible explanations for them amongst themselves, and testing their ideas by coming closer to the camp. Giles gives his account of their reactions:

At first we saw but little of the natives, although we had good reason to know that they saw a great deal of us. Axes began to disappear ... and the men's clothing hung out on bushes to dry, near the camps, would be missing in the morning. ... saw traces of the missing axes - I frequently found the natives had been there before us, cutting down saplings with our own axes, to make weapons with. ...⁶⁷

There is righteous indignation here about goods being stolen, especially when they were all selected to be 'of the best materials and kind' and personally packed in Adelaide,⁶⁸ in limited supply, essential for the success of their project, and value-added by their laborious transportation. This is mixed with a weary tone of expectation that this would inevitably happen, a part of the assumption of the self-evident attraction of what are assumed to be superior western goods.⁶⁹ 'This view takes the properties of artefacts and introduced items as self-evident: it is assumed the advantages of new items were immediately manifest to natives'.⁷⁰ Food was not self-evidently valuable; tobacco rapidly was, as discussed above. Certainly metal axes were immediately sought after because of their utility and value.⁷¹ They were not 'spare', however, having a high use-value for the construction party, with no extras having been provided for trading. So they were not offered voluntarily, and were taken. At Port Jackson, local Aboriginal people similarly removed metal items in particular - axes, spades, knives and hatchets from huts and tents.⁷²

Giles also describes the removal and reinterpretation of the construction team's clothes in the Finke River channel, where he discovered a 'native granary' consisting of:

⁶⁷ Giles 1896 3(6): 44.

⁶⁸ Giles 1894 Vol 2(9).

⁶⁹ Thomas 1991: 87, 103.

⁷⁰ Thomas 1991: 87.

⁷¹ See Jones 2007a: 112-129. Alfred Giles describes an Aboriginal man's first reaction of 'astonishment and wonder' and eagerness to seeing the way a metal axe cut through a branch, north of Charlotte Waters in 1870 (1926[1995]: 29).

⁷² McBryde 2000: 250, 1989: 179.

bags of different kinds of grain, stored up for the winter, or rather the dry season. The bags were of various sizes, and consisted of the legs of our trousers and the sleeves of our shirts, tied up at each end, and filled with seeds. This was too much for the patience of my men, who were for forthwith confiscating the whole lot. But I would not allow this, nor permit anything to be removed ...⁷³

Here we have an insight into the unstable identity of objects and their value in cross-cultural exchanges.⁷⁴ The uses to which things were put is not inscribed in them, an object is not necessarily the same thing in a different context. Their 'value' depends on cultural knowledge. To say what was given 'does not tell us what was received'.⁷⁵ Here, the recognition of the utility of a tube of finely woven fabric for holding grain is a re-definition of its function, clothing *per se* not being of any value.

As in the initial exchanges of bread, in this 'pilfering' of valued items, is enacted a disparity of values, and a mis-match of expectation of appropriate actions to match the attributed values. As Nicolas Thomas says:

Evaluations of particular artifacts will often conflict: a situation of exchange, or one in which one party attempts to impose exchange upon another, is thus inevitably a politicized field entailing compromise, subordination, acquiescence, refusals and so on. In cross-cultural exchange on colonial peripheries, in particular, the discrepancies between estimations of value are one of the crucial sources of conflict.⁷⁶

Changes in raw material use

More broadly, the array of new materials of metal, glass, ceramic and fabric were incorporated into existing forms of use for containers, as cutting or digging implements or as the raw material for flaking artefacts. In 1901 Gillen, at Tennant Creek wrote:

In a very few years the stone weapons of these central tribes will be a thing of the past and I am afraid we shall contribute very largely to their extinction by distribution of iron tomahawks and knives.⁷⁷

It is not at all an easy matter to get hold of stone implements even here ... Old knife blades, pieces of scrap iron, shear blades and even telegraph wire are being used instead of stone by the natives who

⁷³ Giles 1896 3(6): 44.

⁷⁴ Thomas 1991: 187.

⁷⁵ Thomas 1991: 108.

⁷⁶ Thomas 1991: 31.

⁷⁷ Gillen *Camp Jottings* July 29 1901 [1968: 186].

also make use of glass bottles for manufacturing spear heads, they chip the glass beautifully but it is too brittle to be of much service.⁷⁸

Stirling⁷⁹ reported that the telegraph insulators were used for 'the manufacture of beautifully made spear heads'. On the ground surface surrounding the telegraph station at Charlotte Waters I recorded flaked white ceramic pieces that appear to be made from the telegraph insulators, although they could have been worked at any time since, not necessarily when the insulators were in active use (fig 3.3, 3.4, 3.5). I also recorded flaked glass artefacts, particularly the bases of bottles, throughout the background scatter of stone artefacts on the surface of the ground at Charlotte Waters (fig 3.6, 3.7). Glass bottles make excellent scrapers for shaping wood and continue to be used in the same way in contemporary times: in 1996 when I visited Bingey's house in Finke, I found him and Harry Taylor on the verandah smoothing a wooden branch with a glass scraper to make an artefact for sale in the shop.⁸⁰

New materials do not just replace old ones for the same purpose, but have the capacity to transform the way in which old materials are regarded and used. Stone artifact production is not simply replaced by new materials that enter the production system, the system continues in a way that has been reset by the new materials. Not all stone working was pre-colonial. Archaeologists Graham and Thorley have proposed that the traditional production of powerful, ceremonial large *lelira* stone blades was accelerated to feed into an intensified pattern of trade distribution.⁸¹ They make the intriguing suggestion that the Overland Telegraph Line offered a corridor for freer movement with less friction with other language groups, and made possible longer range and greater rates of mobility amongst Indigenous people, which in turn made possible larger gatherings of people. They go on to suggest that this enabled the increased spread of the existing trade networks and increased demand within those networks for introduced goods. They argue that this was a driver for accelerated rate of production and range of distribution of the valuable large

⁷⁸ Gillen *Camp Jottings* August 3 1901 [1968: 194].

⁷⁹ Stirling 1896: 95.

⁸⁰ Macfarlane field notebook 7 July 1996.

⁸¹ Graham and Thorley 1996.

lelira stone blades. These were exchanged together with the introduced materials.

Violence, twice recounted

The Charlotte Waters telegraph station had been under construction for 14 weeks. The majority of the team working on it went north to continue building the line. Giles writes that “‘War’ was declared and hostilities commenced on 18 April 1871’.⁸² For the first time the local people brought their weapons into camp. The past months had been full of watchful wariness on both sides. Now the white incomers read the locals’ taking axes and a tarpaulin as treachery. On the other side, the builders had failed to meet any of the requirements of strangers’ etiquette, and were out-staying their welcome. Frustration was notched up to the point of physical violence when the base camp was left under the watch of only two of the white men.

Two accounts of the events that followed are given by the overseer of this part of the line, surveyor Randall R. Knuckey. He was a key participant in the interaction. The first of his accounts was taken from his own journal from the time and published 24 years later by Giles. The second is an alternative written account, published 43 years later. The degree of detail included in the accounts is one of their characteristics, with every move and counter-move narrated in an immediate style of reportage. At the same time, the detail differs. The first account downplays the force involved, the second emphasises the recall of the events by an Indigenous combatant. For this reason, in order to give the texture of the accounts as much as the sequence of events, I quote them at length.

⁸² Giles 1895 Vol 3(6): 45.



Fig 3.3: Abandoned ceramic insulator on the ground surface, near the waterhole, Charlotte Waters, recorded July 1996

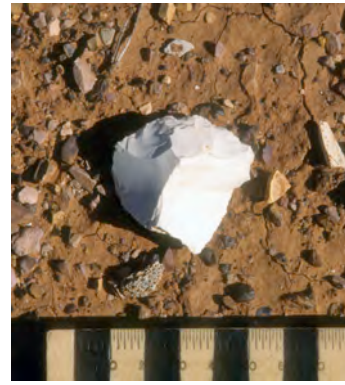


Fig 3.4: Flaked insulator ceramic on the ground surface, Charlotte Waters, recorded July 1996



Fig 3.5: Flaked insulator ceramic and retouched brown chert flake close together on the ground surface, near the waterhole, Charlotte Waters, recorded July 1996



Fig 3.6: Flaked bottle base Charlotte Waters, recorded October 1997



Fig 3.7: Brown chert retouched artefacts on the ground surface Charlotte Waters

Knuckey's journal records his view of the action:⁸³

About 300 yards from the store, and having hid their spears, nine of the blacks came up the bank, and began making signs to us to come down. As they did not succeed, they sent two of their number up to us with the intention probably of making us think it was a friendly visit, in order to throw us off our guard; and as there were only three of us in camp, they seem to have thought they would be able to plunder with impunity as soon as night set in. The fact of their having brought their spears, and shields and other weapons with them, induced one to think they meant mischief, as this was the first time they had brought weapons into camp.

I tried to make the two natives understand about the stealing of the tarpaulin. I think they did at last, for they pointed down the creek, and made signs that it was in their camp. We kept a good lookout all day, never allowing any of them to come within 100 yards of the camp, and when the sun had set I motioned them off. They went away and camped about half a mile off. I determined to watch the stores etc and see if any of the natives attempted to steal, as I felt pretty sure they would try it. I gave Davis the first watch, from 8 to 11, about 9 he saw a native creeping up towards them, followed by others at about 50 yards distance. Davis gave a low whistle to apprise me, and this gave the alarm to the natives, who at once scampered off, and I saw no more of them that night.

Wed April 19, 1871 - This am at sunrise the whole lot of natives came up again in a very threatening manner, and drew up about 150 yards from the store.

They commenced a kind of war dance, and then made signs for us to be off and leave the place, or they would spear us. One of them in particular, a savage-looking black, and evidently a chief-man was very demonstrative and [seemed to be] urging his men to attack us. He several times placed his spear in his 'wommera' or throwing stick, and shook it at us, at the same time dancing and making an unearthly noise. I got out my rifle, and the men also got their arms in readiness, for we thought every minute they would be upon us. I motioned them to go away, at the same time presenting the rifle to them. They laughed at this, upon which I walked towards them, keeping my rifle in readiness. The chief then shook his spear at me. I once more waved them off, and some of them took the hint, but the chief commenced singing out to them in a loud voice, and stepped out from their midst aiming his spear with the evident intention to throw.

As I thought this had gone on long enough, and being afraid, as we were so few, that we might be overpowered, I reluctantly fired at him; the bullets went very close to him, and hit a small tree near him.

⁸³ included verbatim by Giles 1895 (Vol 3(7): 53).

This evidently frightened and astonished him and his party, for they at once took to their heels and bolted down the creek. About half an hour afterwards I saw them again rounding up our horses; I at once ran towards them when seeing me come, they made off, setting the grass on fire as they went, in order I suppose to prevent us following. I hope they will not take to spearing our stock; it is bad enough as it is, but if we have to watch the stock likewise, it will place us in a fix. I am determined, if they come again, to use no half measures with them.

They have had no provocation whatever from us, and no encouragement. If we ever came to one of their camps we scrupulously avoided taking anything that we saw in it. Evidently they are getting accustomed to us, and seeing that we are on our guard against thieving, think they can conquer us by force, I hope for their sakes that they will not try it on again.

The detail in this account indicates that the local men, having taken the major tactical decision that it was going to be necessary to escalate interactions to a show of overt defensiveness, bring their shields and spears and clearly signal that the incomers are unwelcome and should leave, and give them the opportunity to do so. They do not seem to have seen guns in action before at this early stage. Knuckey attributes their aggressive display to their desire for European goods, not to territorial propriety. Having taken none of their goods he feels they have no grounds to feel provoked. We see the local men going through a managed, staged succession of actions, reminiscent of Spencer's description of extended protocols for dealing with armed strangers.⁸⁴ In these there are many gestures and pauses which offer opportunities for appropriate response, none of which were picked up by the incomers who viewed it all as a stark threat, and responded in kind, arguably underestimating the communicative potential of the terms of engagement.

Knuckey's later written account, as printed by Richards⁸⁵ tells a different version of this story, one in which the first shot is fired by the local 'chief' and where neither his spear, nor Knuckey's returned fire miss.

... just after daylight 20 or 30 of them appeared on the opposite bank of the creek with all of their warpaint on. ... They were led by an old chief who tried his best to make them rush us, but they hung back.

⁸⁴ Spencer 1928: 240-245.

⁸⁵ Richards 1914: 16.

The three of us were armed with revolvers and I had a snider carbine. I walked towards them and made signs of peace; the old chief walked to meet us and when about 80 yards distant he fixed his spear in the woomera and threw it at me and struck me on the right elbow, so I thought it was my turn then. I fired and hit him in the shoulder. He jumped in the air and they all ran down the creek like a mob of wild goats. The injured black came into the telegraph station subsequently and died about 12 years afterwards.

In 1911, after an absence of forty years, I was again at Charlotte Waters, and when in conversation with the Postmaster (Mr Kearnan) an old blackfellow came up saying he knew me, and told the Postmaster that I had built his wurly (the telegraph station). He also gave a very graphic description of the fight, how I had hit the old chief in the shoulder, and how frightened they were. ... he recognised me at once.

Recall of the events, as reported, is detailed on the part of all participants. These engagements were frightening brinkmanship for both surveyors and locals. Personal safety now rested on the outcomes, and any precedents set would have repercussions in the future. The sequence and form of actions was not forgotten. They were probably retold many times at many get-togethers in the years afterwards. It is telling that the local participants recognised Knuckey as an individual, whereas he gave the generic designation 'natives' to his acute observers. Such detailed recall may also indicate an uncommon status for this engagement, rather than both sides living in a continuous condition of threatened violence. There are no records or oral traditions of massacres in this part of the country.

When Charlotte Waters was fully operational, but still new, the young Frank Gillen in May 1875⁸⁶ reported that 'the Police Trooper here informs me that while he was absent a few days ago, the Natives mustered in large numbers, all painted up and fully armed with Spears and Boomerangs as if meditating an attack on the Station, directly they saw him retuning, they dispersed'. This may have simply been a story to frighten a 'new chum' to the line, or it may genuinely indicate that such skirmishes continued at least in the early establishment phase of the station.

⁸⁶ Gillen 1995: 68.

Movement along the line

As the main artery of travel through central Australia, the track which serviced the Overland Telegraph Line was not only a place where white travelers of various sorts – explorers, stockmen, linesmen, scientific parties, tourists – met each other, but was immediately a linear contact zone for them and the local Indigenous people. For those travelling through, it presented a narrow line of safety and familiarity and they risked getting lost if they left the track. For the Indigenous people of the area, the track which cut through their country can be imagined as a river of wagons, horses, stock and camping people. From their wide network of lines of travel and water places, not bounded by one available route, they would come and go and visit those passing through, checking who was in their country. This started immediately, but remained a part of travel along the line. In 1901, for example, when Spencer and Gillen reach Stevenson's Creek they camp by a good waterhole. Several drovers passed by with cattle, and then 'by good luck a few old natives turned up, so we persuaded them to camp nearby ... with the aid of flour and tobacco' and 'this gave me the chance of experimenting with our phonograph, ... we managed to get the natives, who were naturally frightened of the machine, to sing near enough to the trumpet to catch their voices'.⁸⁷

The raw reminiscences of Allan Breadon, a stockman who drove cattle to newly establishing stations along the line convey a sense of pervasive anxiety and distrust of Aboriginal presence by white travellers in early encounters along the line. In Breadon's anecdotes are hearty and aggressive, telling tales of one-upmanship. He tells a story of one white stockmen frightening 'Blacks' on the Finke by letting off explosives in a tree, and another by using a trick of ventriloquism to throw their voice. He stresses the importance of never being left alone:

I noticed signal smokes rising in different places right down the Macumba as far as I could see. I knew the sign. Something was up with the Blacks and sure enough I was right. ... a man came rushing

⁸⁷ Spencer 1928: 354-6.

out armed with two revolvers and a rifle and in a great state of mind. He had the wind up properly and could hardly speak. My God he said I am glad you came. ... Just before you came eight or 10 Niggers came across the creek all with spears and demanded Flour, Tea and Sugar. Why didn't you shoot? I was too frightened. I had no cover a spear could come through these bushes anywhere. I said yes but you should have stopped them before they crossed the creek. Oh I didn't think of that. Well, I told him they would have got you tonight if no one had turned up Flour and All.⁸⁸

Three years earlier, in November 1872, when the line had been cutting the landscape for under two years, Ernest Giles⁸⁹ describes a noteworthy, eventful encounter initiated by an Aboriginal boy on the Finke River to the north of Charlotte Waters. It contains many of the elements that shaped interactions along the line. The unnamed boy came into Giles' camp and made it clear he wanted to ride Giles' horse and go south with him. His family and their wider group – dozens of men, women and children – joined them. Giles gives the boy's father damper. The group camp 100 yards away, but the boy and his brothers camp with Giles. He 'was not quite sure whether to expect an attack from such a number of natives. I did not feel quite at ease; though these were, so to say, civilized people, they were known to be great thieves; and I never went out of sight of my belongings, as in many cases the more civilized they are, the more villainous they may be.' In the morning, the boy's father agrees, using sign language, that he can go south with Ernest Giles, who comments that 'nearly all the civilized youngsters, and a good many old ones too, like to get work, regular rations, and tobacco, from the cattle or telegraph stations, which of course employ a good many'. He goes on 'I gave the old fellow some old clothes (Tommy I had already dressed up), also some flour, tea, and sugar'.⁹⁰ The boy rides off happily with Giles, but the horse bolts, the boy falls off and breaks his arm on 'stumps of timber cut down for the passage of the telegraph line'.⁹¹ Giles goes to retrieve the horses, and returns to find another youth tending to the wounded boy. He too was 'evidently bound to seek his fortune in London – that is to say, at the Charlotte Waters Station'. There, Giles 'got the

⁸⁸ Breadon 1875: 15.

⁸⁹ E. Giles 1889 [1995]: 68-70.

⁹⁰ E. Giles 1889 [1995]: 69.

⁹¹ E. Giles 1889 [1995]: 70.

little boy regular meals at the station; but his arm was still bad. I never saw him again'.⁹²

In this series of approaches and negotiations we can see the intensification of established themes. We can see inter-generational nuances, with the young boys keen for immersion in the new possibilities of horse riding, travel, English words, clothes. The older adults are more wary, but ready to make what they can from the opportunities that have opened, from a bargaining position grounded in their own pre-existing value system. The exchange of everyday goods and rations for services has rapidly found a place in the deployed array of cross-cultural exchanges. The injured boy, like the wounded man shot by Knuckey, 'comes in' to the Charlotte Waters telegraph station. An element of dependency enters the range of potential relations, in addition to the possibility of choice.

Labour and rations

Aboriginal labour made a major contribution to the running of the telegraph stations, not just to the cattle stations that rapidly followed the establishment of the line (see chapter 4). Indigenous people provided support for running the telegraph station's stock, managing horses and domestic tasks. We see glimpses of these roles in the journals of those who traveled along the line. In 1875, on Frank Gillen's first visit through Charlotte Waters as a young man, he asks Aboriginal women to wash his clothes, and Aboriginal men are responsible for bringing his horses in.⁹³ Returning in 1901, Spencer visits the waterhole half a mile away to the north of the station where the 'natives attached to the station' had 'built a few little huts out of old boxes and kerosene tins', which are very hot.⁹⁴

These natives are employed as 'general helps' at the station. Three of the women take charge of the goats, of which there is a herd numbering about 400. ... invaluable as supplying both milk and meat ... Early in the morning they are taken out, miles away across the plain where they can feed, and at night time are brought back to a fenced yard near the station.⁹⁵

⁹² E. Giles 1889 [1995]: 70.

⁹³ Gillen 1995: 68.

⁹⁴ Spencer 1928: 358.

⁹⁵ Spencer 1928: 358.

In the 1990s, a bough shelter built by the sheep- and goat-herds was still standing near post-and-wire goat yards on the banks of Abminga Creek (fig 3.8, 3.9). Bingey Lowe said ‘many people camp along there. Yes. They had lots sheep there then. People camped with the sheep along there, Aboriginal people’.⁹⁶

One woman who is described in unusual detail by both Spencer and Gillen as a strong character, was named Charlotte after the station, and was employed as ‘kitchen-maid and assistant to the cook ... She is as good-natured as she is stout and can do anything from peeling potatoes, when there are any to peel, to driving a team of bullocks’. She is ‘seldom without a pipe in her mouth’ and ‘has strong views on women’s rights’ (fig 3.10).⁹⁷

In 1913, Aboriginal men ‘Moses’ and ‘Jim’ were assistants to Alexander Ross, then responsible for maintenance of wells and bores along the line. They carted wood and took messages to and from the nearest telegraph stations. They were paid in cash and goods. Ross gives a list of ‘requirements from the Government’:

for ‘a/c paid Wallis and Co. a total of £4/19/6, 1 pr boots, 3 shirts, 1 Handkerchief, 1 hat, 1 glass, 1 belt, tobacco, £7/6 in cash, for Jim - Aboriginal Df [?](assistant)’.⁹⁸

In 1912, Love mentions that of the 50 or so people camped at Finke Well, 10 miles east of Charlotte Waters, ‘Several of the men do occasional work such as horse tailing for government parties camped at the well, or assisting at the windlass and shovel’.⁹⁹

So while originally built to be defensible against attack from the natives, within at least two years the station was drawing on Indigenous labour, and seems likely to have become a ration distribution centre following the droughts of the 1880s, although there is no direct textual evidence for this until 1891.

⁹⁶ Macfarlane field notebook 20 July 1996.

⁹⁷ Spencer 1928: 358-9; Gillen 1968: 16-17.

⁹⁸ SLSA PRG 161/6/ Diary of Alexander Ross, 10 February 1913.

⁹⁹ Love SLSA PRG 214 Series 6: 25.

Issuing rations is a way of provisioning large numbers of workers from a central source. The South Australian Telegraph Department issued rations for the builders of the Overland Telegraph Line, for example. However, for Indigenous people, rationing was more than this, operating as 'a pervasive institution of Central Australian colonialism'.¹⁰⁰ Defined as 'the non-Aboriginal practice of providing food, clothing and other goods (such as blankets and tobacco) to Indigenous people',¹⁰¹ it was almost ubiquitous in Central Australia from the 1880s on: 'few, if any, families were not subject, at some time to one of the regimes of rationing'.¹⁰² In the full range of institutions where Indigenous people interacted with the incomers, be they scientific researchers, pastoralists, missionaries, official government officers or police, – rationing was part of these cross-cultural relations.¹⁰³

The issue of blankets and food to Aboriginal people was established as the major work of the early protectors of Aborigines appointed in the first decades of the South Australian colony as land was taken up in the south. In 1860 there were 12 ration stations in action, but all in the southern districts.¹⁰⁴ By 1887, this had expanded and included the Far North. A handbook of South Australia describes the organisation of the system in operation then:

The protection of the aborigines is provided for by the State. A special department watches over their welfare and interests, consisting of a protector, who has the disbursement of the annual vote, £5/10/4, and the control and supervision (assisted by a sub-protector in the Far North), of the depots (about 50 in number), for the distribution of rations, clothing and medical comforts.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Rowse 1998: 4.

¹⁰¹ Rowse 1998: 3.

¹⁰² Rowse 1998.

¹⁰³ Rowse 1998: 5.

¹⁰⁴ Gale 1972: 44.

¹⁰⁵ Scott 1887: 21 cited by Gale 1972: 45.



Fig 3.8: Bough shelter at Abminga Creek, recorded July 1996



Fig 3.9: Goat yards Abminga Creek, recorded July 1996



Fig 3.10: Spencer's 1901 portrait of Charlotte, employed at Charlotte Waters repeater station. Spencer 1928: fig 195 facing p 359

A folio-sized leather-covered ledger that bound together elaborate forms provided for the tabulation of the 'Cost of stores and other expenses in connection with Aborigines Depot' at various rations stations throughout South Australia, for the years 1924-1932.¹⁰⁶ Those in the far north include Oodnadatta, Killalpinina, Dalhousie Springs, Mt Dare and Macumba. Charlotte Waters is not listed, as it is then in the Commonwealth Northern Territory.

These forms allow for the documentation of the weight of flour, sugar, tea, rice, tobacco, soap and sago issued, although in the far north rice, soap and sago are not recorded as ever being issued. The forms also have columns to show 'No. of natives at Depot' and 'Births' and 'Deaths', and 'Remarks'. These columns are only sporadically filled in. Medicines are listed under 'remarks'. There is also provision on the form for a cornucopia of potential stores that itemizes the basic survival kit of the time: blankets, shirts, dress stuff, tomahawks, netting twine, fish hooks, fishing lines, needles, thread, axes, spoons, quart pots, pannicans. In these far north ration depots, few of these items were ever issued.

For the years 1910-1927¹⁰⁷ there are less structured forms which just ask for 'particulars' to be recorded. There is only one of these filled in for Charlotte Waters, for 1909-1913.¹⁰⁸

Cost of Stores and other expenses in connection with Aborigines Depot at Charlotte Waters N.T. for Year ending June 30th 1910

<i>Date</i>	<i>Particulars</i>
<u>1909</u>	
<i>June 21</i>	<i>Cartage stores AA Bagot</i>
<i>Sepr 27</i>	<i>280 Sugar 74 Tea 12 Tobacco</i>
<i>Oct 18</i>	<i>2100 Flour</i>
<u>1911</u>	
<i>Jan 28</i>	<i>50 Blankets 1 Case</i>
<i>April 18</i>	<i>3000 flour</i>

¹⁰⁶ SRSA GRG 52/27.

¹⁰⁷ SRSA GRG 52/25.

¹⁰⁸ SRSA GRG 52/25 p 13.

1910

Sepr 22 280 Sugar 58 Tea 15 Tobacco

2100 Flour

Dec 8 280 Sugar 58 Tea 15 Tobacco

1911

Feb 3 2100 flour

Station transferred to Northern Territory 1.1.11

October 10 56 Tea

March 12 12 Blue serge shirts

" 7 Stores etc

" 6 " "

1912-13

October 11 1380 lbs Sugar 2 Bags

4050lbs Flour

24 1 lb Volatile Sal 1 lb Camphore Co. P.B. Bottles 8 Case 6

Nov 8 2 lb Eucalyptus Bottle 6, 28 lbs Tobacco, 1 case 6

Northern Territory Commonwealth

We have a snapshot of the arrangements at Charlotte Waters in 1925, then a Post Office. The staff consisted of a Postmaster, a linesman and a laborer. The Postmaster, in addition to postal and telegraph business and meteorological duties, had to

supervise the work of the linesman and the blackboys, the latter are employed for shepherding the Departmental stock, which are yarded each night, distribute Government rations to the natives who number approximately 60 ... [and] prepare meals for the blackboys, thus conserving rations ...¹⁰⁹

What rations were issued prior to 1909 at Charlotte Waters is unknown, with the only other specific listing of particulars for Charlotte Waters given in the Aboriginal Office Parliamentary Papers for 1891, listing the 'number of natives receiving rations' from MC Daer as 14, and the 'number of natives in the district' as 46. The rations given are not itemized.¹¹⁰ In 1912, James Love says

¹⁰⁹ AA 659 1944 / 1 / 2894 24 June 1925 Memorandum to the Secretary, Postmaster-General's Department, Melbourne, p 3.

¹¹⁰ SAPP No 93 1891.

that 'government rations are distributed at Charlotte Waters while the blacks supplement these by hunting for such lizards and birds as they can catch'.¹¹¹ In 1920, Herbert Basedow praised the postmaster Mr HH Peek and Mr P Byrne 'who do much in a private capacity to better the misery of the locally resident groups'. One obvious source of their misery was minimal rations in combination with a lack of any other source of food, as even rabbits were scarce after successive droughts. There were 40 aged people and six women with 'about a dozen' children resident at Charlotte Waters at the time. Basedow itemizes the rations issued during 1920 in detail, presumably having asked the post master for information directly:

Blankets 50
Galatea 50 yards
Flour nearly 2 tons
Sugar 600lbs
Rice 112 lbs
Thread 1 lb
Pannicans 24
Shirts 24
Tea 110 lbs
Clay-pipes 1 gross
Eucalyptus 2 lbs
Epsom salts 3 lbs
Eye water 12 bottles
Cough mixture 12 bottles
Soap 112 lbs

The weekly rations distributed amount to only 4 lbs of flour per head and enough tea leaves and sugar to make two quart-pots of tea. Many of the natives have now left Charlotte Waters and gone to New Crown Point where they can obtain more to eat both at the Point and in the adjoining sandhills.

On most of the stations 'Killing day' brings a windfall to the aborigines who come from miles around to receive the head, the gut, the pluck, the bones and often pieces of carcase [sic] which the proprietors as a rule present to them.¹¹²

The medicines issued reflect the many chest infections and eye disorders that were prevalent. Basedow also says 'Both Syphilus and Gonorrhoea are

¹¹¹ SLSA PRG 214 Series 6: 25.

¹¹² AA CRS A3 item 22/2805 Report on the third medical relief expedition among the Aborigines of SA 1921: 27-28.

unfortunately much in evidence along the Overland Track',¹¹³ adding to the misery.

The basic goods involved in the economy of rations were iconic items of colonial trade – sugar, tea, tobacco. Only the flour was produced in Australia, probably in South Australia. The means of production is detached from the site of consumption, there is no control by the recipients over what comes in, and little by the local distributors, who are forced to send pleas for extra supplies.¹¹⁴ The terms of exchange have become highly unbalanced with respect to the ownership of and access to resources. Only 25 years after bread was being rejected as unpalatable or unacceptable for exchange, these resources were being turned into the substrate for Indigenous life on the western Simpson Desert. This edge of the desert was being established as one the extremities of colonial market forces, and the Aboriginal population were inexorably being implicated in the global market economy.

We have a rough indication of the amounts that were issued in 1929.¹¹⁵ They work out at approximately 1.0-0.55lb flour, 0.13-0.25lb tea and 2.0-0.5lb sugar per week per person. As Heather Goodall says about the NSW rationing system, these rations provided 'by no means enough to feed the group, but enough to ensure their continued presence', which was needed for labour.¹¹⁶ Historian Robert Foster shows that the South Australian pastoral stations that issued government rations were effectively having the cost of their labour subsidised, while those who did not had to provide them from their own supplies, or risk losing their workforce.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ AA CRS A3 item 22/2805 1921: 32-33.

¹¹⁴ For example, in ration records GRG 52/26/2:

To Chief Protector of Aborigines

Sir In view of this depot now supplying rations to 36 Aborigines I respectfully ask that larger supplies of Flour, Sugar, and Tea to be sent. Approximate rations to be issued for month = 600lbs (4 bags) of flour, 19 lbs tea, 75 lb sugar (over 1 bag), I am Sir, Your

Obedient Servant, EJ Williams

Flour required as soon as possible. Rec'd 15 Dec 1929

¹¹⁵ This calculation is based on the enumerated request in footnote 3 and the memoranda [AA Series A1 Item 31/1718].

¹¹⁶ Goodall 1996: 62.

¹¹⁷ Foster 2000: 12.

There is a moral emphasis on 'the able bodied' providing for themselves.¹¹⁸ This was in direct contradiction to the evidence that the condition of the country was changing so as to make it increasingly difficult to find sufficient food. Rabbits and cattle were in competition with native animals for feed, the waterholes were degraded by cattle and the local ecology disrupted. The land holder at Dalhousie Springs, John Lewis, reported to the Pastoral Lands Commission in 1898 that the condition of the land in the area was 'cronk' - overstocked, and eaten out by rabbits 'the only pest we have to fear',¹¹⁹ and Spencer reports that in 1923 rabbits were present there 'in 1000s, and to judge by the results of collecting, had almost completely exterminated not only the smaller marsupials, such as the rabbit-bandicoot but also the jerboa rats' which were important in the diet.¹²⁰ The rabbits could of course be eaten.¹²¹ But within 20 years of the Overland Telegraph Line being established, the local Indigenous people's choices of food were already far less discretionary, with less diversity and less volume available. When this was combined with the effects of drought, having to 'come in' for rations became a necessary mainstay.

There were general pleas for more rations for the indigent, the old and infirm and children, and also for additional or continued support when there was a drought, as in the 1880s, 1890s and 1930s. There are also appeals to justice, for due recompense for the labour provided by Aboriginal people in general. For example, Frank Gillen, in his evidence given to the Pastoral Lands Commission 1891 said:

Have the natives in your opinion rendered material assistance to the squatters in this outside country? – 'Yes; I do not know what they could have done without them.'

Are you of the opinion that the provision made for the Aborigines is equivalent to the service they have rendered to the squatters and the country? – 'I think that the squatters have given them enough to eat, but have not always treated them as well as they should have done. I also think that the government should provide rations for the old

¹¹⁸ Rowse 1998; Foster 2000.

¹¹⁹ SAPP No 77: 250.

¹²⁰ Spencer 1928: 562 footnote.

¹²¹ eg Lennon and Madigan 2000: 14-5. There were 'vast amounts' of rabbit bones at the Murraburt *mikiri* well, the one nearest Dalhousie Springs, accumulated by people re-visiting after 1900 (Hercus 1987: 68).

and infirm natives who are not able to work all along the telegraph line. A number of them are in a chronic state of starvation.¹²²

Each person in employment would in turn be passing on food and supplies to family members, supporting at least five others outside in the camp with their rations. For example, Love describes this down-the-line support as he observes it at the 'Black's camp' at Idracowra cattle station, further north (200km south of Alice Springs). It

contained about 30 people of all ages, most thin and poorly fed. No government rations are distributed here, and to walk to the nearest ration depot is for the old and infirm out of the question. Several lubras are employed in the kitchen, and in their turn, feed about half a dozen others. The station employs about five 'boys' who feed a fair number of relatives. The remaining blacks depend on the bones of the beef killed on the station, occasional generous gifts of flour, tea and tobacco from the station and their own hunting. As they are strictly controlled in their hunting, being permitted to hunt only in certain directions, it will be seen that their life is not an easy one, game being of poor quality chiefly lizards and birds with various plants having edible roots, leaves or seeds. Of course the station must restrict the hunting, or the blacks would spear the cattle.¹²³

There was a long-running anxiety about who was a deserving or legitimate recipient of rations. The administrators are clear that the able-bodied should support themselves. Between 1929 and 1931 the Commonwealth Department of Home Affairs engaged in a series of memoranda in pursuit of standardization of the weekly ration allowance to Aboriginals in Northern and Central Australia. The latter included the ration issue by the Protectors of Aboriginals at Charlotte Waters.¹²⁴ This correspondence gives a clear outline of the government aims and ethos with regard to rationing, and of the amounts of rations involved. The South Australian government's Aboriginal Department form was used as the basic guide for establishing what these should be (see box below).

¹²² SA Parliamentary Papers 1891 No. 33, Report of the Pastoral Lands Commission 1891: 125.

¹²³ Love 1912: 25.

¹²⁴ AA Series A1 Item 31/1718.

**Instructions to Issuers of stores at the
Aboriginal Depot**

Aboriginals' Department,

Adelaide, _____ [date]

1. Rations to be issued regularly - only to the sick, the old and infirm, orphan children, and women with infants under twelve months. All healthy and able Aboriginals should be encouraged, as far as possible, to provide for their own and the wants of their families; but occasional supplies may be given to the able-bodied Aboriginals when there is reason to believe that they are in want, and unable to obtain employment or procure their natural food - in every case the reason to be entered in the column "Remarks".

2. The rations or weekly allowance to each person receiving relief, not to exceed -

Flour 7 lbs.
Sugar 2 lbs.
Tea 1/4 lb.

To be entered in Monthly return

Rice or sago, as medical comforts, may be substituted for the flour.

Tobacco is not to be considered a regular ration, but is given as follows, at the discretion of the Issuer, as a comfort for the aged and infirm. Aged and infirm men 2 sticks weekly, and women one stick weekly.

3. The usual medical comforts may be issued when required, and also such other articles as may be certified by a qualified Medical Practitioner, or a Justice of the Peace, to be absolutely necessary, the accounts for which are to be certified by the Issuer and forwarded to this Office.

The Issuer, when distributing Stores, should

caution aboriginals against selling or bartering their clothes, &c., for intoxicating liquors.

The Monthly Return of 'Receipts' and 'issues', 'Births and Deaths', &c., to be regularly kept according to the forms transmitted, and forwarded direct to this Office not later than the seventh of each month. Any circumstances which may be thought worthy of mention - such as, whether the Aboriginals are employed by settlers, to what extent, and for what wages; whether there have been any disturbances, &c. - should be entered in the column 'Remarks'.

Receipts for Stores to be forwarded direct to this Office, as soon as possible after the arrival and inspection of the goods.

All returns to be signed and dated

Care should be taken to make requisitions for fresh supplies in sufficient time to secure their dispatch and arrival at depot, prior to the stock on hand being exhausted.

Chief Protector of Aboriginals¹²⁵

This form was copied for use in Central and Northern Australia, but the amounts were reduced to 5 lbs flour and 1 lb sugar, and the proviso that:

'4. A monthly return must be forwarded to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals showing stores on hand and total issues for the month. This return must be supported by a statement showing the name of each Aboriginal who has been issued with rations, together with the quantity issued during the month to each person. Where rations have been issued to able bodied natives, special mention of the reason for such issue should be included in the monthly returns.'¹²⁶

Such records were not kept - the archived South Australian records rarely have any entry in the 'remarks' column.

¹²⁵ AA Series A1 Item 31/1718.

¹²⁶ AA A1 31/1718.

As rations became more and more part of the basic food supply, they bound the people receiving them more and more into patterns of contact with the stations and the white workers there. However, the inevitable sexual interactions are not overtly mentioned by anyone. There is one mention of a person of mixed descent in camps, made by Reverend Love. At the Finke Well camp he says: 'I saw only one half-caste in this camp, a woman of about 30 years'.¹²⁷

But there were few white women in the area,¹²⁸ and short or long-term relations with Aboriginal women can be assumed to have followed patterns described elsewhere. As Ann McGrath says: 'Aboriginal women's availability, their willingness to perform arduous work, and the advantage of using them in the dual roles of worker and sexual partner made them an extremely valuable asset for white men'.¹²⁹

William Henry Willshire was characteristically outspoken and blunt, with a degree of bravado, when he broke the discursive silence around this topic to speculate in 1896 of the early frontier that 'men would not remain so many years in a country like this if there were no women and perhaps the Almighty meant them for use as He has placed them where ever the pioneers go'. 'What I am speaking about is only natural especially for men who are isolated ... where women of all ages and sizes are running at large'.¹³⁰

A softer 'insider' view is that of Fred Ah Chee:¹³¹

It was the Aboriginal women who did all the washing, all the house work, and this is where the part coloured originated. ... a lot of them were contractors and well sinkers, that type of thing ... Ninety percent had Aboriginal wives. A lot of them did marry their wives. A lot wanted someone to live with them and bring their children up.

¹²⁷ Love 1912: 25.

¹²⁸ For example, in 1894 when the Horn expedition travelled north in the area of the Overland Telegraph Line, there were only three adult white women in the 1000 miles between Oodnadatta and Pine Creek: Mrs Ross at Crown Point, Mrs Gillen at Alice Springs, and Mrs Kell at Powell Creek. By 1901 there were still only nine white women in Alice Springs (Mulvaney 2000: 5).

¹²⁹ McGrath 1987: 68.

¹³⁰ Wilshire 1896: 18, 6, cited by Mulvaney 1989: 126-7.

¹³¹ An Arabana/Wangkangurru/Chinese man, 1927-1987, based in Oodnadatta at the time of Shaw's interview in 1986.

They needed someone to cook for them and naturally they brought children to that person. You can't knock it but its just the situation. ... and there were ones that just moved on.¹³²

Aboriginal workers may have been increasingly constrained to stay in one place, but they were not provided with housing by their white bosses in exchange for their services. Spencer's dismal descriptions in 1901 of huts near Charlotte Waters, built from flattened kerosene tins by the 'the natives attached to the station' where 'the heat and smell inside these was overpowering'¹³³ was an enduring standard, as there are pictures of a camp near Charlotte Waters in 1927 made of canvas draped on boughs and metal sheets propped against eucalypt branches, with metal boxes for stores.¹³⁴ Gillen's 1901 photograph of one of these structures (discussed in chapter 1) is his only photograph of a non-traditional Indigenous subject at Charlotte Waters (fig 1.15).

Archaeological surface remains of two, possibly three circles of stones 2 - 2.5 m in diameter indicate the location of round hut bases, where the stones would have supported the struts of a bough shelter (fig 3.11).¹³⁵ They are on the flats closer to the waterhole, out of direct line of sight of the station buildings. Love describes such bough shelters at Finke Well, 'made of green gum boughs leaning against each other, forming a protection against the sun but not against the rain';¹³⁶ a cooler choice of shelter when there were enough trees available.

Charlotte Waters was thus a formal, official place, being used in unofficial ways. The Indigenous people 'poached' from the proper spaces the telegraph station's establishment imposed, and used them in their own way, clandestinely, without ever directly challenging the formal organisation.¹³⁷

¹³² Shaw 1995: 59.

¹³³ Spencer 1928: 358.

¹³⁴ These images were taken by Theodor Bray (photographer 1905-2000) in 1927. They are held by the SLSA, and can be viewed at http://images.slsa.sa.gov.au/mpcimg/64500/B64383_69.htm, http://images.slsa.sa.gov.au/mpcimg/64500/B64383_71.htm, http://images.slsa.sa.gov.au/mpcimg/64500/B64383_72.htm. The SLSA did not give permission to reproduce the pictures here.

¹³⁵ Macfarlane field notebook 26 October 1997.

¹³⁶ Love 1912: 25.

¹³⁷ de Certeau 1984: xii-xiv, 31.

Spatial distinctions

The main point that emerges from these patchy descriptions of living arrangements is the spatial distinctions that are being set up, with Aboriginal people basing themselves in clusters at varying removes from the telegraph station, and actively coming and going from these into the surrounding country, between the Coglein, the Finke, the Abminga and the Stevenson Creeks, and into the ration station and centres for work at Dalhousie Springs and Charlotte Waters, and further up and down the telegraph line.

But more vital than these basic forms of life-support, Aboriginal people's labour gave them a firmer purchase in their own land, a way of staying where they wanted to be, and of moving to where they needed to be to keep their relations to country and kin active. In this way they maintained both social and material support.¹³⁸ Ann McGrath describes a similar convergence in established Northern Territory station communities where 'kin and country were both close, providing a positive sense of self-identity often sanctioned and recognised by ritual'.¹³⁹ This congruence of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interest allowed, or encouraged, co-residency.

Importantly, in northern South Australia there was not the Northern Territory's discontinuous wet and dry season pattern of labouring on a station and moving off for ceremonial and social life on 'holiday' or 'spells' when the rains made it impossible to work the cattle.¹⁴⁰ In northern South Australia, the rains were not seasonal and the rounds of pastoral work went on throughout the year, over a wide range of country. However, visits to country, teaching and ceremony could be incorporated into the full pattern of station work as it was carried out.

¹³⁸ Heather Goodall describes a similar system in the NSW pastoral districts (1996: 61-2).

¹³⁹ McGrath 1987: 168.

¹⁴⁰ McGrath 1987: 158-160, Harrison 2000: 48.



Fig 3.11: Hut bases north of Charlotte Waters near Coglins Creek waterhole, recorded October 1997

PART III New alignments: recording and representations at Charlotte Waters

In the previous section I outlined the changing forms of interactions between Indigenous people and the incomers around what was now well established as Charlotte Waters repeater station. I now move to 30 March 1901, the day of the first Federal election.

Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen arrive at the telegraph station on a horse-cart full of collecting bottles, cameras, notebooks and state-of-the-art moving film and sound recording equipment. Baldwin Spencer, Oxford biologist and Professor of Biology at Melbourne University, had been firmly converted to the task of ethnology by his meeting with Frank Gillen, telegraph officer at Alice Springs, when he was on the Horn Expedition in 1894. They were commencing their year-long anthropological research trek along the length of the Overland Telegraph Line from Oodnadatta to Borraloola.

Their ethnographic recording work at Charlotte Waters is a particularly significant episode in the history of interaction. On the surface there is an exchange of standard trade goods for intangible knowledge. However, the lack of shared perception of what was being undertaken by the two parties – the recorders and recorded – gives this encounter an enduringly rough edge.

Nine days after leaving Oodnadatta, Spencer describes arriving at Charlotte Waters in the heat, with a mirage creating ‘what appeared to be a great shimmering lake with the little station buildings glorified into almost a mystic city, hanging in the air, and a line of huge poles and lofty trees’.¹⁴¹ They stayed in the telegraph station with ‘Pado’ Byrne, the resident telegraph officer and their friend, at what was their ‘Camp No 9’ from 28 March to 9 April 1901.¹⁴² It

¹⁴¹ Spencer 1928: 357.

¹⁴² Gillen 1968: 13-24.

was a familiar place to them both, as Gillen had lived at Charlotte Waters as a telegraph officer for 12 years, and Spencer had been there for research during the Horn Expedition in 1894, and again for three weeks in 1895.

They enjoyed being in each others' company and in central Australia together, and they relished the ethnographic material that they were 'getting'. They had already published the classic, internationally influential anthropological monograph *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* in 1899, based on their three months recording at Alice Springs in 1897.¹⁴³ The extension of that research, in their commitment to a whole year of comparative study of the different language groups along the telegraph line, was a major undertaking. With it they helped pioneer many of the techniques of modern anthropological fieldwork.¹⁴⁴ Their stated goal was 'detailed accounts of the habits, manners and customs of the native tribes inhabiting the central and northern central parts of Australia, and of the main features in regard to the natural history of the same area'.¹⁴⁵ Their business was detailed recording. They were assiduous note takers. They also took great pleasure in skilled photography and were innovative in their integration of images in the documentation of the ceremonies they describe in their published work.¹⁴⁶ Spencer was also a skilful draftsman, 'always fond of using his pencil' who completed a course at art school after leaving school.¹⁴⁷ Gillen was no mean draftsman himself (fig 3.12a, b). Spencer and Gillen had one set of field books for their ethnological observations, and another for personal accounts that they kept for their far-away children. These are written with an eye for amusement and instruction, and illustrated with portraits, biological specimens, ethnographic objects. Spencer also drew scenic views. These are drawings of being there, rather than 'scientific' and remote (eg fig 2.25, 3.10, 3.13).

When they arrived at Charlotte Waters, Byrne 'sent out' for Aboriginal people to come in from the surrounding area for Spencer and Gillen to work with:

¹⁴³ Mulvaney *et al* 1997: 9.

¹⁴⁴ Morphy 1997.

¹⁴⁵ Spencer 1912: 5.

¹⁴⁶ Peterson 2006: 15; Morphy 1997: 45.

¹⁴⁷ Mulvaney and Calaby 1985: 28-9.

'Very few blacks here Pado sending out messengers to summon them in'.¹⁴⁸ In his diary Spencer says

April 1 the natives are gradually coming in ... they have promised to give us a corroboree tomorrow so that I will have the chance of using the cinematograph for the first time' April 2 'The natives came in bringing some special sticks like huge bull-roarers from a place about 25 miles off. They are now decorating them with designs in red ochre and charcoal and white clay in a quiet spot down by the waterhole so that the women cannot see them. They are going to perform tomorrow.¹⁴⁹

In the published version of these events, Spencer says that there was 'a native camp out in the scrub, about a mile away from the station containing some thirty or forty men and women, who had come in to perform a rain ceremony'.¹⁵⁰ Here his published retrospective elides the mechanics of arranging ethnographic record-making, giving the initiative to the Aboriginal people, presumably to maintain an impression of an unmediated flow of the ceremony for his readership. In the official census taken at the time, police trooper Cowle 'mustered and counted natives total 45 including only 4 children' in the area;¹⁵¹ presumably the same group of people plus some of those already resident at Charlotte Waters. The children that Christopher Giles saw in 1870 were mature adults now. Spencer and Gillen would have talked to them, but mainly worked with adults who were a little older, born well prior to the line.

During the next 12 days Spencer and Gillen recorded ceremonies and collected ethnographic and natural history specimens. The collections and recordings and the work of processing them filled the telegraph station. Gillen wrote: 'Pado is a long suffering creature we have taken complete possession of his house and our photographic work has produced a scene of chaos on the premises which would drive an ordinary man to drink ... but Pado assured me that he would rather have our mess than our absence'.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Gillen 1968: 14.

¹⁴⁹ 1901 unpublished papers Mitchell Library, cited in Moyle 1959: 10.

¹⁵⁰ Spencer 1928: 359.

¹⁵¹ Gillen 1968: 23.

¹⁵² Gillen 1968: 22.

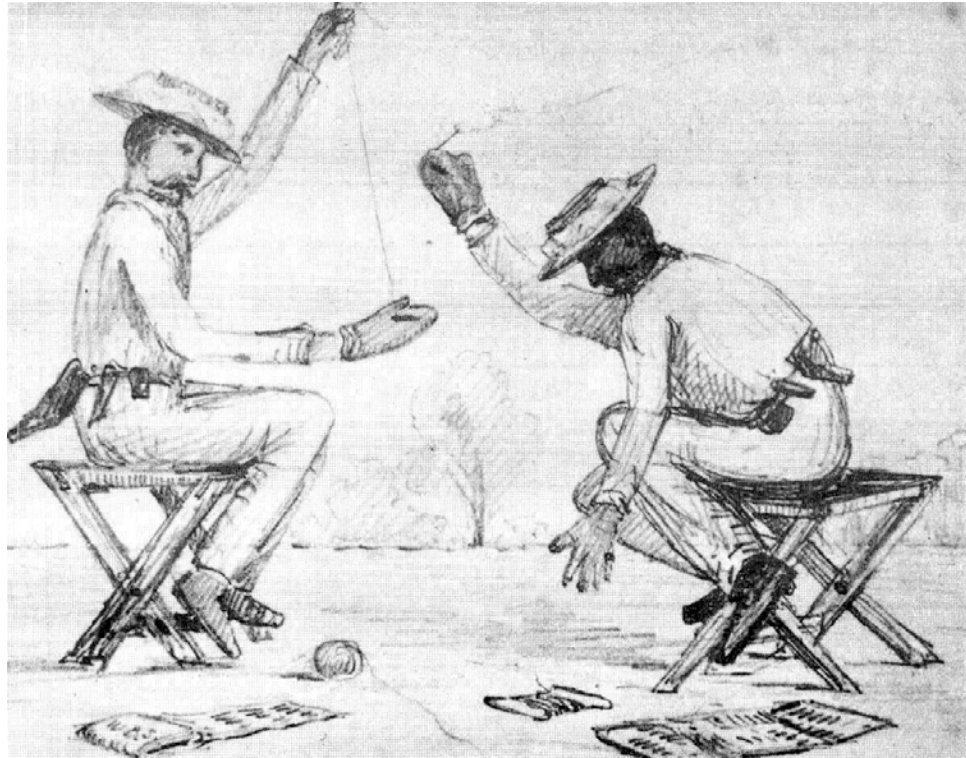
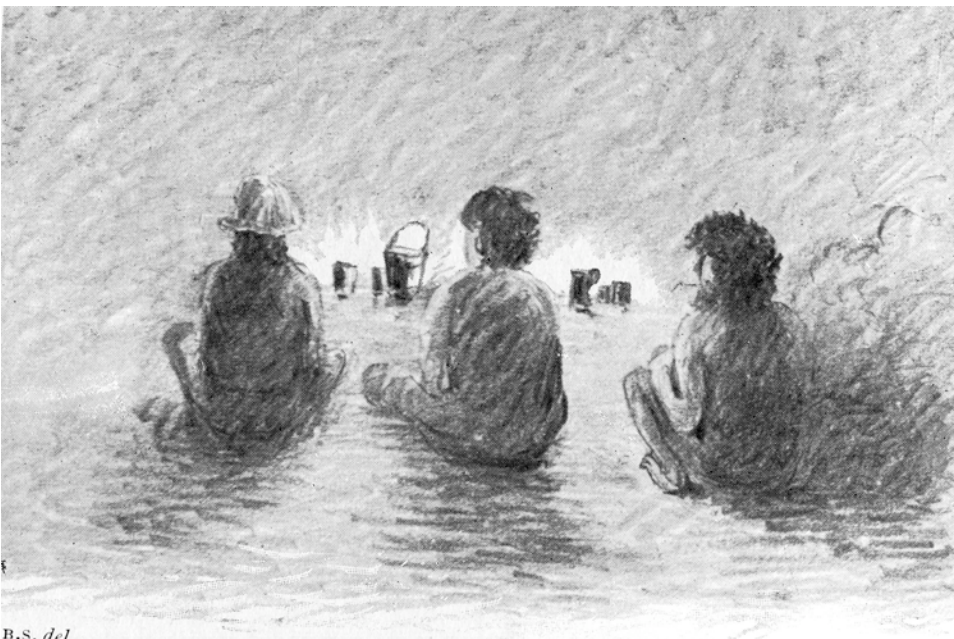


Fig 3.12a: Gillen's sketch in camp, Spencer and Chance mending their socks. *Camp Jottings* 1968: illustration No. 81 opposite p 302. '... there is always something to do in camp and an hour of this afternoon is spent in making some much needed repairs to our socks or rather what is left of them. ... if only all Bachelors were forced to mend their own socks there would be more marriage ...' *Camp Jottings* 1968: 302-3, 21 October 1901



Fig 3.12b: Gillen's sketch of girl in profile, *Camp Jottings* 1968: illustration No 39 opposite p 159. This is but one example of many such portraits in Gillen's journal



B.S. del.

FIG. 193.—OUR BOYS WATCH THEIR BILLIES BOIL.

Fig 3.13: 'Our boys watch their billies boil' Spencer's sketch 1928: fig 193 facing p 351
200

The natural history specimens were brought in by the Aboriginal people, especially the women. Marsupials and lizards, water-storing frogs, beetles and an edible tuber 'called Ilya-Kamana – probably a fungus – very palatable' were presented.¹⁵³ On the 1895 visit Spencer itemises the rate of exchange for the specimens brought in: a pen knife for valuable, rarer animals; a half stick of tobacco for a common one; a pipe plus flour and tobacco, and sweets for all the children for a 'new' or rare marsupial such as the pig-footed bandicoot, an echidna, or a *Dasyuroides byrneii*.¹⁵⁴

In the same way 'type specimens' of material culture were obtained. The elaborate head-sticks used in the Rain ceremony were acquired 'in return for a bag of flour and some tea sugar and tobacco'.¹⁵⁵

Following the recommendations of AC Haddon,¹⁵⁶ they used not only still photography and field notes for their records, but pioneered state-of-the-art field ethnographic recording. They '[a]rranged with the blacks to do some corroborees in a day or two we undertaking to find them in food. We are most anxious to procure kinomatographic records before leaving here'.¹⁵⁷ Spencer gives a vivid description of the practicalities of this:

A diagram showed how to fix the film in the machine ... but no instructions had been sent out as to what rate to turn the handle, so I had to make a guess at this. ... when the performers came on the ground I was ready for them, and started grinding away as steadily as I could at the handle ... The chief difficulty was that the performers every now and then ran off the ground into the surrounding scrub...¹⁵⁸

This was, as Spencer claimed, the first use of film for ethnographic recording in Australia.¹⁵⁹ If awkward, it was a serious, expensive undertaking made in difficult field conditions. With these various methods, they recorded a Rain ceremony, a Kangaroo ceremony, a Snake ceremony and a 'lubras' coroboree'.

¹⁵³ Gillen 1968: 17.

¹⁵⁴ Spencer 1928: 149-50, 154.

¹⁵⁵ Gillen 1968: 18.

¹⁵⁶ Mulvaney and Calaby 1985: 197-8.

¹⁵⁷ Gillen 1968: 16.

¹⁵⁸ Spencer 1928: 359-60.

¹⁵⁹ Mulvaney and Calaby 1985: 359-60.

They make the important distinction between what are ordinary 'open' ceremonies and those that are secret-sacred and restricted ceremonies.

With the phonograph and wax cylinders they made sound recordings of songs, men and women's (staged) quarrels, a series of local place names and a wide selection of language sample sentences in Lower Southern Arrernte.¹⁶⁰ These give a vivid sense of the immediacy of the exchanges, and makes the people involved close and real. Spencer's choice of illustrative sentences, for example on Cylinder No. 12 of the 23 below, casts a strong light on the spectrum of concerns that they were sharing:

Cylinder 12. Spencer introduces the recording: 'Ceremonies of the Arunta tribe by men who are dancing round the performers'. Written notes with the cylinder say 'special exclamations used at sacred ceremonials by men dancing round the performers'. Then Spencer announces a series of sentences, which are then restated by a man in Lower Southern Arrernte.

Spencer says: 'The emu will soon lay eggs'.
'The Dalhousie blacks are making rain today and the creek will run tomorrow.'
'The wild ducks are laying eggs.'
'The pelican is too thin to eat.'
'Fat snakes make us fat, lean snakes make us thin.'
'My father was a snake in Alcheringa.'
'I have one wife but no piccaninnies.'
'I have seen a kurdaicha.'
'The old men are wise.'
'The old men are the masters of the young men.'
'We want you to come and see us again by and by.'¹⁶¹

The film and sound records were sent back to Adelaide on wagons, together with photographic glass plates and the cinematograph and the phonograph machines, as they were considered too fragile to travel further. Thus these innovative methods were used at Stevenson Creek and at Charlotte Waters to record local language, songs and ceremonies for the first time. But this specific documentation, so rare in its evocative, vivid, personal detail, became generic in translation. Its specific origins within the sphere of the people of the Charlotte Waters area are lost. The handbill for Spencer's 7 July 1902 Melbourne Town

¹⁶⁰ Gillen 1968: 15; Moyle 1959: 9-10.

¹⁶¹ AIAS Archive Tape No 9206 'Dubblings of Australian Aboriginal recordings on the Edison Concert five inch cylinders, at least those that are repairable.'

Hall lecture 'on Aboriginal life in Central Australia' advertised 'scenes and ceremonies which have been selected as typical of savage life. The various ceremonies will be illustrated by lantern slides, cinematograph views and phonograph records' and '... the ordinary life of the Natives; their dances or Corroborees illustrated by cinematograph views and phonograph records of the Tchichingala Corroboree, as performed by the Arunta tribe'.¹⁶² So they came to stand for the iconic 'Arunta', who in turn 'became the best known Australian Aborigines, the type specimen of the "desert nomad", whose society was interpreted as an unchanged relic from the dawn of the stone age'.¹⁶³ Spencer was aware of the distinctions between different sub-groups of Arrernte,¹⁶⁴ but does not emphasise these.

The details are in the unpublished field notes, but very little of the mass of recorded ceremonies or language samples from Charlotte Waters were published. *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia* 1904 contained the results of the 1901 journey. There is a reference and photograph of the women's dance performed for them there given in a general description of an 'Arunta tribe' women's corroboree, with no location specified.¹⁶⁵ It is significant that they chose to include this, however, as other ethnographers such as Strehlow did not pay attention to the women's ceremonies.¹⁶⁶ Spencer also refers briefly to the Charlotte Waters Rain ceremony in *Across Australia*.¹⁶⁷

For those who performed for the record, they gained food and tobacco, and no doubt considerable entertainment from acting out the arguments and singing for the phonograph. They were certainly willing participants in the process. In part this may have been due to respect for Gillen and his reputation, stemming from his attempt to prosecute Mounted Constable Willshire for the murder of Aborigines in 1891.¹⁶⁸ His status as someone of influence is seen in an incident Gillen records:

¹⁶² Mulvaney et al 1997: xviii.

¹⁶³ Mulvaney et al 1997: 14.

¹⁶⁴ Spencer and Gillen 1899: 8-9, 1912: 198, 1927: 62-4.

¹⁶⁵ Spencer and Gillen 1904: 720-1.

¹⁶⁶ Luise Hercus pers. comm. Canberra 2008.

¹⁶⁷ Spencer 1912: 200-1.

¹⁶⁸ Mulvaney et al 1997: 10.

some half dozen of the leading men interviewed me and requested that I should nominate a man to be Atalunja or head man of the local group. It appears squabbles have arisen since the death of the old Atalunja as to who should be headman and the deputation said that if I definitely nominated a man he would be loyally supported by the rest. I nominated Arlinka otherwise Alick an old man of the rain totem – this is a great rain centre – who appeared to me to have the best right according to their own laws ... this is the first time I have acted in the role of king maker! The fact of the blacks calling in my assistance I think points strongly to the decay of their old tribal organization.¹⁶⁹

Rather than simply 'decay', this move can be seen as a calculated effort to incorporate the alternative power base that Gillen represented into their own structures of authority, drawing the lines of authority through a doubled pedigree.

Their choice to participate in recording activities may also been because it fitted with traditional protocols for younger men (such as Spencer) to provide food to the elders in exchange for teaching.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, their teachings of the Alcheringa have continued throughout the twentieth century and into the next, to a wider audience than they could ever have imagined, leading to problems of sanctions and legitimacy of who can learn.

For the elders at the time, there may well have been dignity and kudos derived from being consulted by these external men of authority. Most white people were not interested in their core beliefs and practices; it may have been refreshing and salutary to have their importance acknowledged by men with good credentials such as Gillen, requiring their serious attention in return.

But no matter how willingly and fully they participated, the elders could not have an informed capacity to assess the degree to which their own values, as vested in their language, ceremonies and sacred objects, would be radically transformed. It was a co-production whose terms were very unequal. The process of translation into anthropological and deeply colonial frames transferred their independent authority to that of Spencer. They could not

¹⁶⁹ Gillen 1968: 23.

¹⁷⁰ Jones 2007: 334.

provide informed consent to that translation. The stories are told by Spencer. He becomes their broker, and we know them only through his and Gillen's perspectives. Their voices are the ones we register, not those of the nameless, lively, knowledgeable individuals on the tapes. The latter have no way to gauge the magnitude of the exchange to which they have been party. Twelve days of interchange it may have been, but it is an exchange that is still being negotiated now.

This interaction took place three decades after the establishment of the telegraph station on the rise above the Kirri-idningkala waterhole. But, focused on recording traditional ethnographic forms of life, Spencer separated these from the processes of historical change in which they are embedded.

Travelling in the same party with Spencer and Gillen, however, was one person whose active presence ran counter to the dominant framing they generated. He shows up the oversimplification of attempts to separate the 'traditional' from the 'historical'. The choices made by Jim Kite, or Erlikilyika, emphasise the creative responses possible in the field of changes that was the Overland Telegraph Line.

Why did Erlikilyika draw? – choosing to represent change

Erlikilyika was a middle aged man when he was employed by Spencer and Gillen in March 1901 as one of two 'boys' who would accompany them from Charlotte Waters to Borroloola. The other was Parunda, also a Lower Southern Arrernte man. Both were born near Charlotte Waters and would have been children when the line was new, and so were of the first generation to grow up within that change, and to be actively absorbing it (fig 3.14).

He worked up and down the line in his youth, learning English and Kaytitja, a northern Aboriginal language, taking the opportunities for mobility, and the freedom from the dominance of the old men that came with these rapid colonial changes.¹⁷¹ So we see that he is flexible and capable.

¹⁷¹ Strehlow 1971: 493-4.

In the employ of Spencer and Gillen, he and Parunda were responsible for finding water, making camp - including shelters and two fires, assisting with food preparation, shooting game, mail collection and packing up, and the arduous task of relocating the horses each morning.¹⁷² Gillen describes one camp scene evocatively:

Chance smokes contemplatively, watching the flames ... Parunda swiftly kneads a monster damper while Erlikilyika [sic] occasionally chips in a word of advice ... Spencer busily plies his facile pencil transferring this scene to his note book. Would that I had his skill.¹⁷³

Spencer and Gillen were totally immersed in the hard work of their recordings. In such an environment, where observation, commentary, recording and sketching were the core of each day's activities, an interest in 'having a go' would be both possible, with materials and time being made available in a manner not common at the time, and, to an unknown extent, encouraged. As Andrew Sayers says, not every Aboriginal person with opportunities to do so saw this as an activity worth pursuing.¹⁷⁴ Parunda did not. Erlikilyika did.

Erlikilyika was nicknamed 'the subdued' by Gillen, who gave everyone on the expedition evocative nicknames. The policeman accompanying them as a general assistant, Chance, was 'the old geezer', Spencer 'the Prof' and Gillen 'the Pontiff'. Even the expedition's horses were named after anthropologists (Fison, Howitt, Fraser, Tylor, Lubbock and Lang).¹⁷⁵ 'The Subdued' may have been a contrast with Parunda, who is described by Gillen as 'the gay Parunda'.¹⁷⁶ But it may have been his quiet and watchful approach: Erlikilyika was evidently a thoughtful and observant man. Unusually for an Indigenous person of his time, he had the opportunity to represent what he saw in ways that have survived.

After a month travelling together, about half way through the expedition's work at the Alice Springs Telegraph Station he seems to have expressed interest in Spencer and Gillen's habitual note-taking and sketching.

¹⁷² Gillen 1968.

¹⁷³ Gillen 1968: 42, April 19.

¹⁷⁴ Sayers 1996.

¹⁷⁵ Gillen 1968: 10, 12.

¹⁷⁶ Gillen 1968: 94.



Fig 3.14: At Alice Springs 18 May 1901. Back row L to R: Parunda, Mounted Constable H Chance, Erlikilyika. Front: FJ Gillen (L) and BS Spencer (R).
Museum of Victoria.

Gillen offered Erlikilyika the use of two blank, missed pages in his 'modest record' the lined note book which he wrote up each night for his family.

Erlikilyika went on to fill eleven pages, much to Gillen's (pretended) chagrin (fig 3.15 - 3.20):¹⁷⁷

Alas for the modest record. But at last you will find something in the volume true to nature. ... I intended 'the Subdued' to fill in the skipped pages, he thought I wanted him to fill in the whole book and has spent the whole day industriously trying to do so - it is an example of original drawing by our Australian natives the pictures are not without interest and I have decided to let them stand but in future I shall not entrust this modest record to the tender mercies of my friend Erlickilyika.¹⁷⁸

There is a slippage here, an oscillation in Erlikilyika's status, with the camp 'boy' entering into the role of the ethnographic subject who is 'natural'.

The ambivalence of Erlikilyika's role in the expedition increases as the expedition goes further north, outside his own country. Here, with his language and observational skills, he was actively involved in recording the meaning of

¹⁷⁷ Erlikilyika's drawings appear carefully, even painstakingly, executed, but the images are not stiff: they give a lively, energetic impression of involvement with his subjects and with the act of drawing. He uses single, unelaborated, firm outlines. All the pictures have a background of either hills and/or trees and grassy ground. The ground is shown as an oval drawn around the feet of the animals and people. Smears of ink, in which finger prints can be seen, have been turned into a background infill in one instance. The drawings are circumscribed in terms of the space they occupy on each page - only the first drawing, of a eucalypt, fills the page between the upper and lower margins, the rest are carefully placed well within the borders of the page.

The eleven images depict a wide range of topics, from a eucalypt with a small bird perched in the branches, to the enactment of a ceremony and scenes of hunting. Here action is indicated via the men's bent knees and arms, or with sloping ground to underline the sense of a chase. Jones (1992:136 footnote 83) suggests that there is a broad consistency of form of depiction of hunting scenes in diverse early Aboriginal works on paper, including that of Namatjira, which he suggests express 'entrenched aspects of their culture and history'. Sayers (1996: 5) also comments that the hunt and the ceremony are widely shared concerns in Aboriginal artists' works in media of non-Aboriginal origin. Three of this group of studies are of non-human subjects, a tree, an emu, a wild dog. The remainder are all of Indigenous men who have beards, headbands and various combinations of items of traditional material culture: hair waistbelts, spears, spearthrower, shield, headdresses, body paint, stone knife, decorated poles. All have been given modest loincloths except the first man, who wears a pubic tassel, and the last set of men engaged in a ceremony who have body paint only. The men all have characteristically short legs and short stubby feet. The majority are shown in three quarter face, as is the standing wild dog. This is an unusual angle for a beginner drawer to depict, profile and full face being easier and more common.

¹⁷⁸ Gillen 1968: 75-6.

others' ceremonies, although this was never fully acknowledged by Spencer, as John Mulvaney has shown (2001). Erlikilyika was thus an unacknowledged contributor to the environment in which Spencer and Gillen developed their understandings set out in *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia*.

E has entire charge of the Ethnological branch today and is on his own account digging up a Kaitish tradition which he has carefully recorded in paper in his own peculiar fashion tomorrow we will check and record it in the official journal and his original drawing illustrating the tradition will be attached to these pages as an example of native skill.¹⁷⁹

At about this time, at 'Woodforde Creek June 1st 1901' Erlikilyika is given a book of his own to draw in, which Gillen intends to give to his sons. Indeed it was retained in the Gillen family until recently, and these pictures have not been published.¹⁸⁰ The names of Gillen's children are inscribed on the front page together with an inscription stating 'Spencer Gillen Expedition Journal of Erlikilia, known as the "Subdued"'.¹⁸¹

In these 27 drawings there is a marked elaboration of Erlikilyika's interest in depicting his everyday circumstances, extending the ethnographic and natural history topics of the first set. There is exact attention to details of the minutiae of camp equipment, of the arrangement of buttons and belts, of the manner of tying a load on a camel. In the representation of these there is not only a pleasure in drawing, but a reinforcement of Erlikilyika's daily experience as camp assistant. There are portraits of 'the Prof' Spencer, and Parunda, making damper and smoking a pipe, as well as natural history studies, and only two with a man in 'traditional' dress or in a hunting scene. There are pages where the same picture is re-worked several times, Erlikilyika practicing his representation of a woman and a stockman (fig 3.21 - 3.28).

¹⁷⁹ Gillen 1968: 152.

¹⁸⁰ Now held in the National Museum of Australia, Canberra Acc No 2001.0026.000.

¹⁸¹ See Appendix 2 Inventory of Erlikilyika's work - exhibitions and museum collections of carvings and drawings.

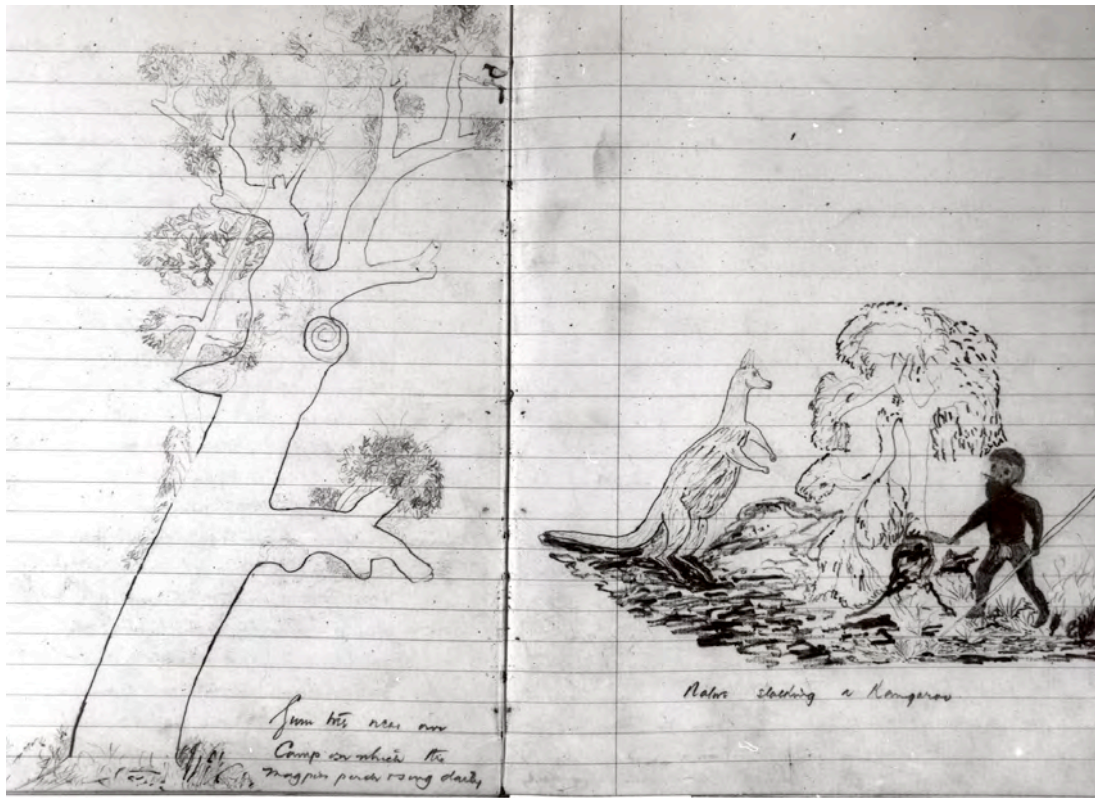


Fig 3.15: Erlikilyika's two drawings in Gillen's journal. Mortlock Library, Adelaide PRG 54

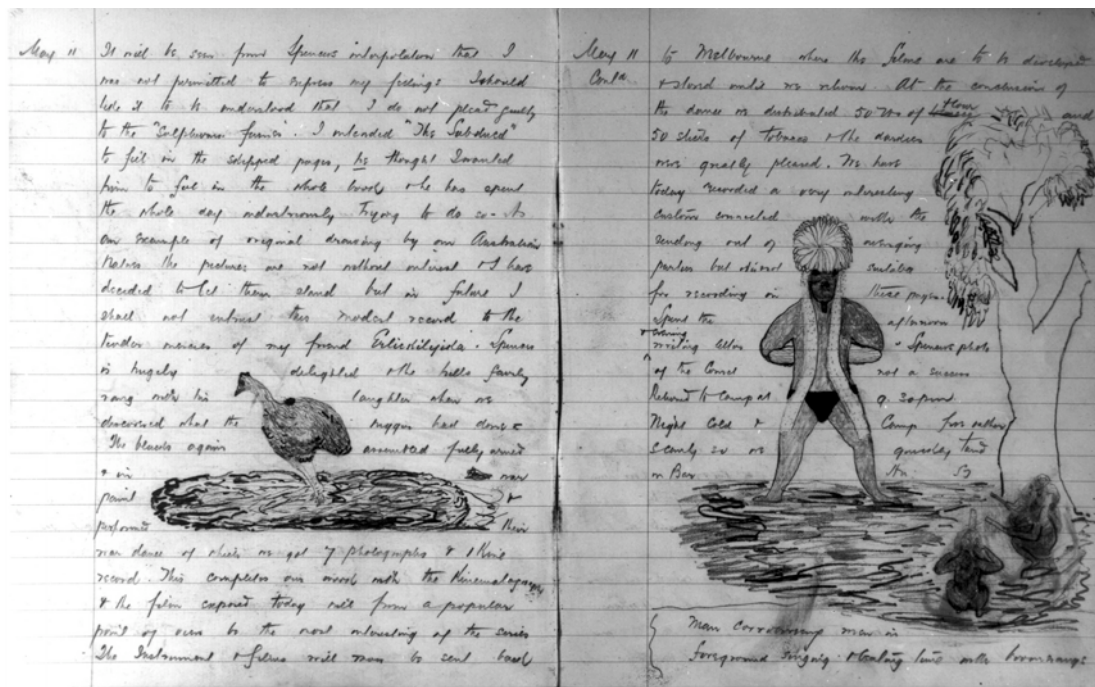


Fig 3.16: Erlikilyika's drawing in Gillen's journal May 11 1901. Mortlock Library, Adelaide PRG 54



Fig 3.19: Erlikilyika's drawing in Gillen's journal May 12-13 1901. Mortlock Library, Adelaide PRG 54

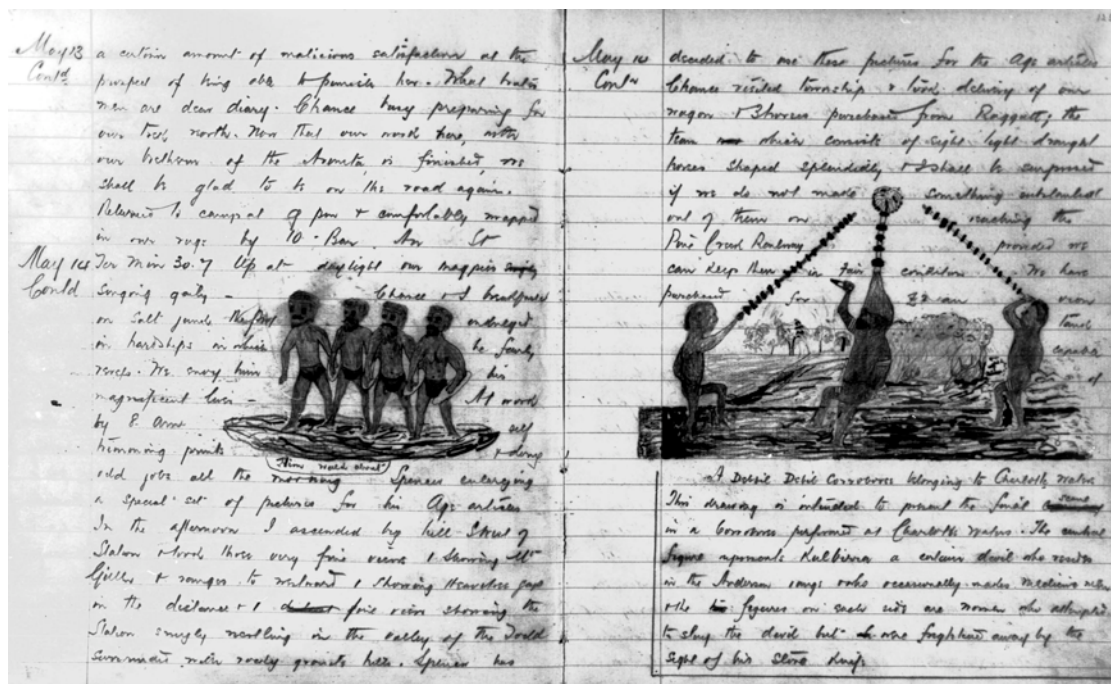


Fig 3.20: Erlikilyika's drawing in Gillen's journal May 13-14 1901. Mortlock Library, Adelaide PRG 54

He shows action sequences or stories – shaking hands, chopping tree, making damper, mending a rail, the standing man being given orders by the seated one. He sketches temporal sequences, like a comic strip: a man in a wurley is shown; in the next picture he has gone to sleep, his fire going out.

These action scenes, the whole body portraits, the attention to details of dress and behaviour of stockmen, depiction of Afghan cameleers, of ‘the Prof’ himself, Parunda all are departures from the subjects of Spencer and Gillen’s sketches. He enumerates the intimate detail of his daily life, the material culture of their camp.

There is a third set of 24 botanical drawings attributed to Erlikilyika.¹⁸² Their attribution to Jimmy Kite/ Erlikilyika is less certain than that for the other two sets of drawings, as it is based principally on notes added to the front cover of the folio in four different handwritings, and the origin of this information is uncertain. They are distinctive relative to the other two sets of drawings in both their format and their content, and, I would argue, in their intention.

John Mulvaney thinks Erlikilyika may have drawn them when he was in Adelaide in 1913, for the South Australian Museum, which is possible.¹⁸³ Philip Jones speculates that this body of drawings may have been produced by Erlikilyika in c.1899 ‘while living near Gillen’s base at the Alice Springs Telegraph Station’.¹⁸⁴ Against this is the absence of any hint from Gillen that he already knew Erlikilyika when they met up with him at Charlotte Waters, as arranged by Pado Byrne. A close examination of the form of the drawings is warranted to see what clues they contain about provenance.

This series of drawings is presented in a scientific mode. There is a single plant form shown on each page. In fourteen of these there are extra studies or details of unattached leaves arrayed around the central plant, in the style of botanical illustrations. There is a caption added to sixteen of the drawings in what is

¹⁸² In the South Australian Museum archives (SAM Acc No AA298).

¹⁸³ Mulvaney 2005.

¹⁸⁴ Jones 1992: 106-7.

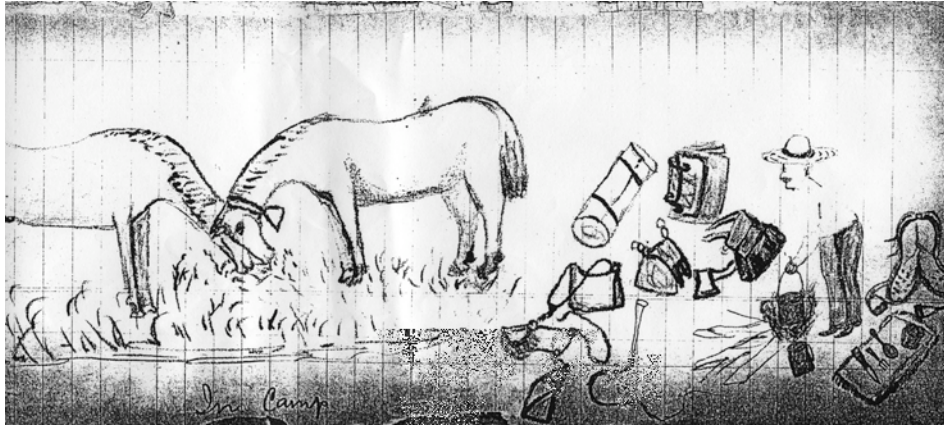


Fig 3.21: Erlikiyika's drawing of camp scene and equipment, no 14. Caption 'In Camp'. National Museum of Australia, Canberra Acc No 2001.0026.000.

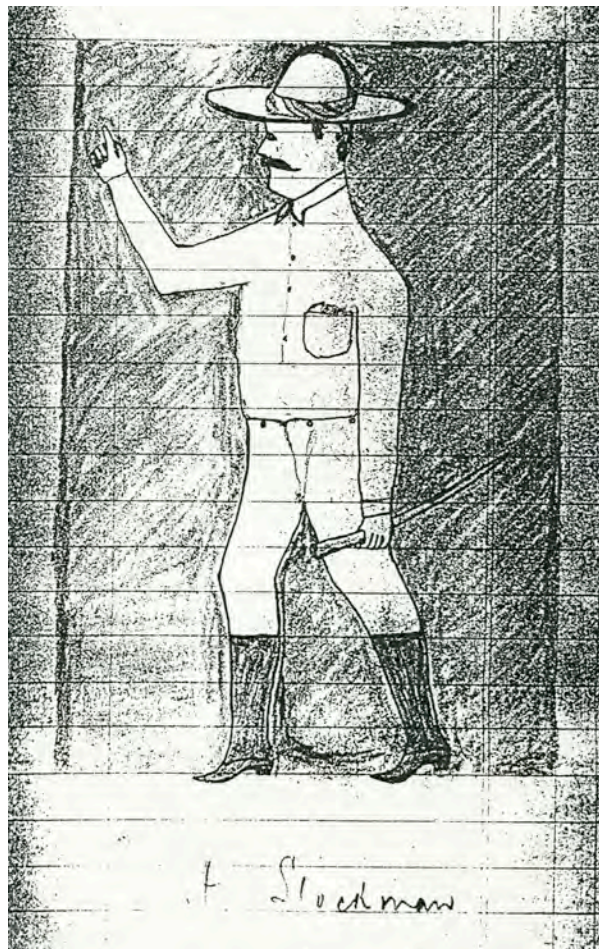


Fig 3.22: Erlikiyika's drawing showing detail of clothing, no 21. Caption 'A stockman'. National Museum of Australia, Canberra Acc No 2001.0026.000.

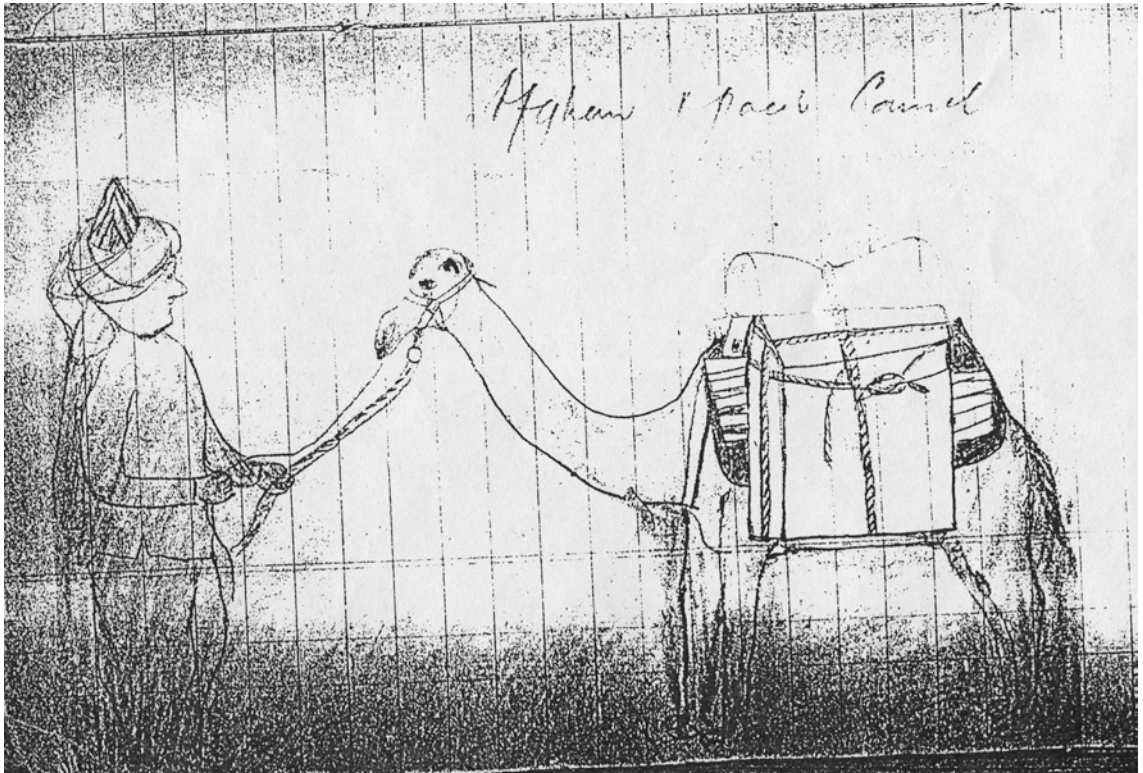


Fig 3.23: Erlikilyika's drawing of camel with loading, no 12. Caption 'A camel'. National Museum of Australia, Canberra Acc No 2001.0026.000.

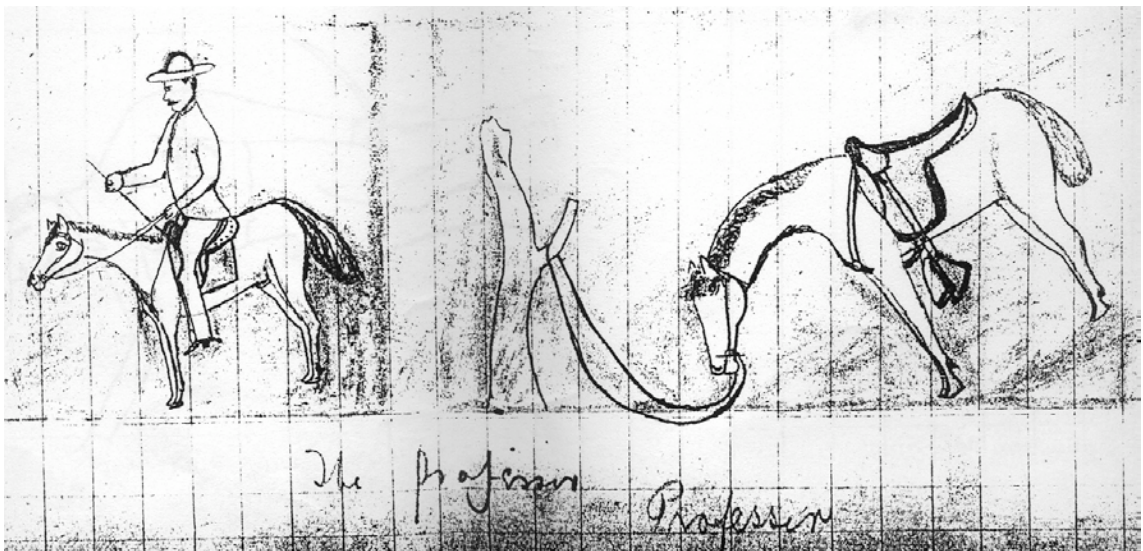


Fig 3.24: Erlikilyika's drawing of 'The Professor' on a horse, no 19. Caption: 'The Professor'. National Museum of Australia, Canberra Acc No 2001.0026.000.

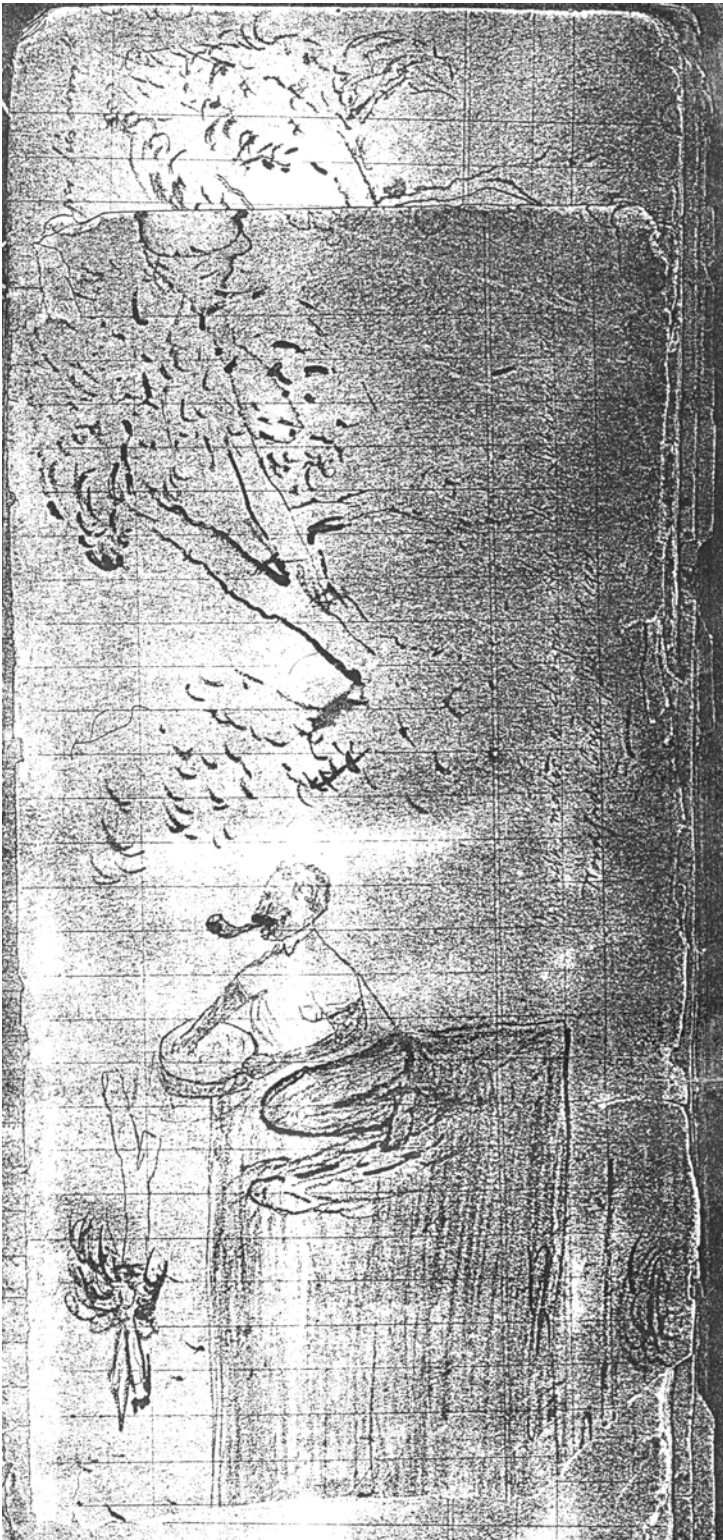


Fig 3.25: Erlikilyika's drawing of camp scene with Parunda making damper, no 1, caption: 'Parunda makes a damper while the Subdued sketches', Woodforde Creek 1 June 1901. National Museum of Australia, Canberra Acc No 2001.0026.000.

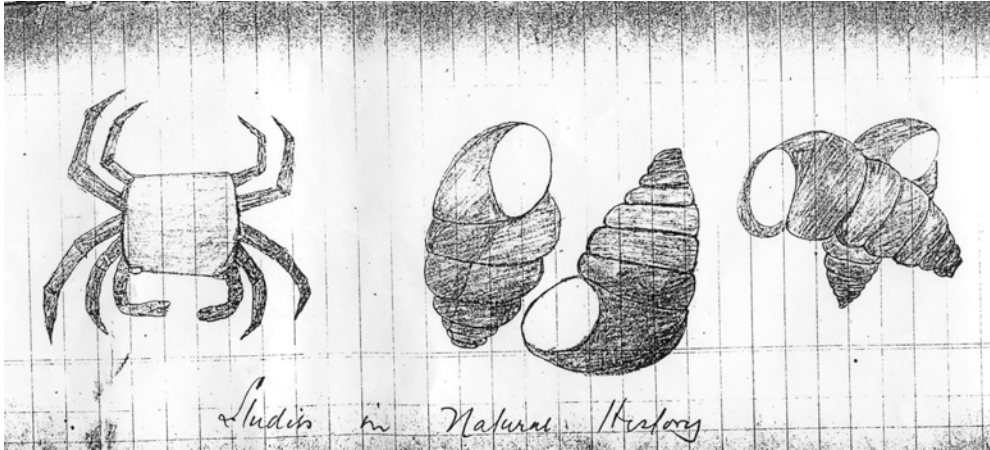


Fig 3.26: Erlikilyika's drawing of 'natural history', no 25 Caption: Caption: 'Studies in Natural History'. National Museum of Australia, Canberra Acc No 2001.0026.000.



Fig 3.27: Erlikilyika's drawing 27 Caption: 'Alligator we did not get'. National Museum of Australia, Canberra Acc No 2001.0026.000



Fig 3.28: Erlikiyika's drawing of man in traditional headdress and waistbelt, in notebook, no 9, Caption: 'Hunting the wallaby. Hurrah I'm on top'. National Museum of Australia, Canberra Acc No 2001.0026.000.

presumed to be Gillen's handwriting. These are difficult to transcribe with any certainty. The captions give 'native names' and some comments on the location in which the plants occur. There are four broad groupings of the plant forms as depicted which can be discerned: The seven plants labelled 'germulla' or 'gumulla' are all large leaved, with their leaves growing opposite each other on the stem (Numbers 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 14). The rest have either smaller, more numerous leaves (4, 7, 15, 17 and 20, two of which labelled 'illumba'); groups of three leaves (13 and 23); are associated with vines (1, 9 and possibly 18). The remainder have other, distinct leaf patterns. The captions thus have some loose connection to some of the depicted plant forms, but it is not clear what they mean.

There is no scale indicated in the drawings. I think it is possible that these are drawings of a series of botanical samples rather than as the title page states a '*Series of drawings of trees (with native names)*,' That is, they appear to be sketches of leafy twigs or small branches rather than of whole trees. The scale of the leaves relative to the stems is then correct, the inclusion of numbers of loose leaves accumulated in the collecting bag is understandable and the straight base of the stalks with which all of the plants are depicted can be taken to be cut stems. This would be consistent with the absence of depictions of background or a ground line, with the exception of No.18, which has a clear ground line drawn in, and No. 7 which has a single line drawn under the plant base. (In other pictures Erlikilyika characteristically indicates the ground as an infilled oval around the feet of the subject).

Not all the drawings are necessarily at the same scale, however. Those in No. 18 and possibly No. 7 with ground lines shown, and those in No.19 may be whole shrubs or trees. But I think that the forms of the remainder of the drawings are more readily understood as representing plants at a small scale.

A plausible explanation for the production of this 'themed' series of drawings, with the addition of the captions in Arrernte, and the scientific mode of presentation is to presume that they were drawn in response to a request for a

scientific documentation of plant samples of different species. This was possibly a commission by Gillen. Although plant collecting was less a priority for Gillen and Spencer than zoological and ethnographic collecting, they did undertake to gather samples for other natural scientists. For example:

It is, with us, a season of 'after rain' and I feel that for the Credit of the Country I must send you something and I am also trying to raise a rare weed or two for the old savage [ie Prof Ralph Tate, prof of Natural Science Adelaide University].... - We are getting a very nice collection of plants tog but I am afraid nothing new. My wind is not good enough for climbing the high ranges...I am however anxious to get a good collection from the Mt Gillen Range and with that purpose in view I sent one of my Boys out the other day and instructed him to fill a bag with all sorts of different flowering plants and pretty grasses. He did so and, upon returning, emptied the whole contents of the bag into the horse yard ...¹⁸⁵

and;

Am sending the old savage [Tate] a good assortment of plants this mail, all my collection in fact.¹⁸⁶

We can imagine a non-systematic group of plant samples in various bags being presented to the artist (Erlikilyika or other) for recording in the large folio book, perhaps during Gillen's time in Alice Springs. An extended time and some considerable undisturbed space would have to have been made available to the artist, given the size of the folio and the number of drawings.

John Berger points out the deceptive simplicity of drawing.¹⁸⁷ Drawings are a tree, a cloud, yet they simultaneously remain a sheet of paper with lines drawn on it: 'this is both so obvious and so strange that it is hard to grasp' says Berger. We can ask then, how do we learn to read such things? especially with no prior experience. What visual references might Erilikilyika have grown up with that he could have brought to this engagement?

To consider fully what an innovation it is, we need to step back into the more or less traditional context of Erlikilyika's childhood experience where he learnt

¹⁸⁵ Letter to B. Spencer from F. Gillen AS 12/10/1894 (Mulvaney *et al* 1997: 54).

¹⁸⁶ Letter to B Spencer from Gillen March 9 1895 AS (Mulvaney *et al* 1997:71).

¹⁸⁷ Berger 2005: 50-51.

how the world worked, especially the place of a representative practice in it, where what Bourdieu refers to as 'the mind born of the world of objects' was shaped.¹⁸⁸

The only other extant drawings from the area are three crayon drawings and tapes made by two Lower Southern Arrernte men at Mt Dare, the station close to Charlotte Waters, with the encouragement of Charles Mountford 'Wednesday Aug 24th 1938 '... I took sheets of brown paper and crayons and set the natives to work making drawings'.¹⁸⁹ They drew concentric wavy lines, described as 'marks on chest', 'marks on boomerang', 'clouds and creek running', 'boomerang', 'breast woman and girl', 'tjuringa used in non-secret ceremony', 'alina sun', 'boomerang'. They use red, yellow and white lines. These indicate a tradition of decoration of body and object with incised or drawn lines in this area.

There is no rock art known in this area, instead a vast array of powerful places marked by complex arrangements of stones where ceremonies were held, associated with vibrant performance experiences. We know from Spencer and Gillen's descriptions and the objects in museum collections that the ceremonial items and people's bodies were elaborately decorated. These ceremonies continued at least into the 1920s, and Erlikilyika would have had that knowledge.

These drawing acts, as part of performances, are made so as to emphasise the co-occurrence of place, song, and people over the finished product. They are necessarily social actions, not purely individual. This is a different context for representation compared to an individual sketching their own images with their own pencil, in their own book, in their own time. There is a qualitative, quantum leap to start drawing figurative, detailed pictures of your own daily life from experience when your prior experience comes from a field of mark-making which is social and ritual in context and purpose.

¹⁸⁸ Bourdieu 1977: 91.

¹⁸⁹ SLSA Sheard collection.

Story telling accompanied by drawing pictures in the sand remains a common element in conversations now, and we saw it earlier as part of children's play. This may be another model available to Erlikilyika in making the transition to personal drawings, as the narrative element that drives those images in the sand can run onto those drawn on paper.

In answer to the big question of why Erlikilyika drew, it would be easy to say that Erlikilyika's drawings were simply imitative, generated by the example and atmosphere of the year he spent in Spencer and Gillen's recording world. But the important counter to this easy answer lies in what Erlikilyika did after the telegraph line trek ended.

He kept going.

Spencer and Gillen took the boat back to Melbourne. They thereafter more or less forget the 'boys', even though Spencer returned to Charlotte Waters in 1926¹⁹⁰ at a time when we know Erlikilyika was there, an old man, as documented in a newspaper article.¹⁹¹ Spencer gets their names wrong in his publication,¹⁹² and he makes no mention of Erlikilyika's works, even though he was by then a patron to Australian art.¹⁹³ The only glance he gives towards such work is his comment regarding production of '... various objects, such as sticks with knobs, carved so as to resemble natural objects, are occasionally manufactured by members of some of the very tribes with which we are dealing, who have been in contact with white men, and are even finding their way into museum collections'.¹⁹⁴ In contrast, Spencer does speak with affection and concern of the men involved in the Engwura ceremony, with whom he spent five months in 1895, when he revisited Alice Springs in 1901.¹⁹⁵ Gillen mentions Erlikilyika in his letters once after the end of the expedition, a year

¹⁹⁰ Spencer 1928: 370.

¹⁹¹ *Daily Telegraph* August 9, 1926.

¹⁹² Spencer 1928: 351.

¹⁹³ Mulvaney and Calaby 1985.

¹⁹⁴ Spencer 1899: 568.

¹⁹⁵ Spencer 1928: 370, 386-7.

later, reminiscing about northern part of journey when horses were lost for days.¹⁹⁶

After the ethnological journey was completed, Erlikilyika and Parunda rode from Boroloola back to Charlotte Waters, a long and hazardous journey out of their country. At some point in the next eight years, and I would suggest soon after his return, he started to make relief carvings on small plaques, statuettes, decorated vases, and many forms of pipes (fig 3.29a, b, c, 3.30, 3.31, 3.32. See also fig 3.33). These works are first documented in March 1910, when several examples were taken to Adelaide, exhibited, and the petrology of the stone analysed.¹⁹⁷ His carvings were next recorded by Reverend Love, during his visit to Charlotte Waters, in March 1913.¹⁹⁸ In July 1913 Erlikilyika or Jim Kite is pictured surrounded by an array of 26 of his works in an *Adelaide Observer* article (fig 3.33, 3.34).¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Letter 146, 26 Oct 1902 Mulvaney et al 1997: 408.

¹⁹⁷ *Adelaide Advertiser* 24 March 1910.

¹⁹⁸ Love 1912-1914: 24. See Appendix 2.

¹⁹⁹ *Adelaide Observer* Saturday 26 July 1913: 36, 50. Many of the works taken for exhibition in Adelaide are described and interpreted by Jimmy Kite in the accompanying text, see Appendix 2. They are now held in the National Museum of Australia, Canberra. They seem to have been purchased by Dr Herbert Basedow from Mr Kearnan and Kite either during or after this 1913 visit to Adelaide.



Fig 3.29a, b, c: Erlikilyika's carved pipe with three faces combined - a man's face, a dingo, a bilby on each side. (SAM Registration Number A46850). Photographs courtesy of the South Australian Museum



Fig 3.30: Erlikilyika's carving of a frog, probably a water-holding desert species, on a decorated circular base (SAM Registration Number A45087). Photograph courtesy of the South Australian Museum



Fig 3.31: Erlikilyika's carved vase with flower design. (SAM Registration Number A45088). Photograph courtesy of the South Australian Museum



Fig 3.32: Erlikilyika's carved plaque showing a long tailed lizard. (SAM Registration Number A35743). Photograph courtesy of the South Australian Museum

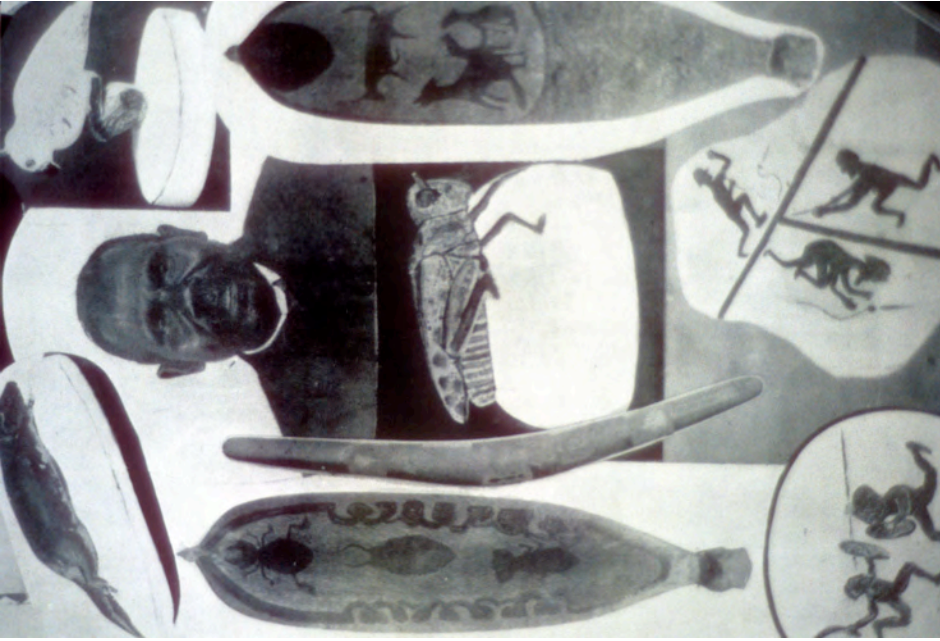


Fig 3.34: detail of image in Adelaide Observer Saturday 26 July 1913: 50 showing portrait of Erikiyika



Fig 3.33: Erikiyika surrounded by a montage of his kaolin and wooden carvings. Adelaide Observer Saturday 26 July 1913: 50

So Erlikilyika went back to Charlotte Waters and started his own representational practice. To do so required determination and ingenuity, if we consider the living conditions for an Aboriginal person at Charlotte Waters at the time, as described above. Erlikilyika would have had little access to paper to draw on, and nowhere to store it away from dogs, dirt, children and disruptions. I suggest that, having discovered the pleasure and the strengths of a representational practice, he swapped media, turning to carving the suitable, and readily available soft, local white kaolinite stone.

The connection between the two bodies of work has not been made by many, presumably because the drawings were in private hands and not widely known, but it is clearly made in the 1988 South Australian Museum's *Dreamings: the Art of Aboriginal Australia* exhibition.²⁰⁰

This continuance in a new medium I interpret as a wish to sustain a representational practice: I would suggest that it was important to him, and so he invented a way to maintain it. He did develop what Sayers calls a 'sustained, expressive and personal statement' within the upheaval of a colonial world.²⁰¹ His carving practice made him some money, and he gained local fame for his work. Examples of his carvings were displayed in the houses of local families, who later donated them to the South Australian Museum (see Appendix 2). He gained a reputation as a maker of collectable tourist souvenirs for the intrepid tourists who made it up the line to Charlotte Waters. His work is held in the National Museum of Australia, the South Australian Museum and the Australian Museum collections (see Appendix 2).

His practice of depiction disrupts an overarching colonial idea of a doomed and passive Indigenous people, unable to represent themselves at all, particularly in this changing colonial context. Erlikilyika entered into the field of recording; the observed observing. In so doing, he ran a tremor through the expected power balance: it is less easy to forget the presence of someone who is actively seeing you.

²⁰⁰ Sutton, Jones and Hemming 1988: 198-199.

²⁰¹ Sayers 1996: 4, 10.

Putting Erlikilyika's representational work back into the context of his country provides it with a grounded context where the underlying historical contingencies and influences that gave rise to it take on a greater resonance than any that is available when admiring the finesse of the carvings in isolation in a museum case. By the same token, the re-location of this particular individuals' cultural responses to his changing circumstances brings the detail of the lived experience of that place into sharp relief.

He was not an isolate, an exception, a one-off genius. Amongst the debris recorded by our archaeological surface survey at Charlotte Waters were recovered a set of quirky objects (fig 3.35, 3.36, 3.37). They are related to smoking pipes, but they are hand carved from soft white stone, and non-functional, as there is no hole in the stem. Having seen these, the meaning and origin of some other enigmatic objects also became clearer, as square shaped carving precursors or off-cuts of the soft white stone shaped with rasps. Further examples of these were found in a nearby early twentieth century minor homestead site 40km away, called Tin Shanty, together with a small hand-carved animal (fig 3.38, 3.39, 3.40). So, like Namatjira after him, Erlikilyika either established a new practice, or elaborated on an existing one that may have been in existence to some extent already around the campfires.

I think that in the context of the massive dislocations of the line, combined with exposure to the potentials of a representative practice with Spencer and Gillen, and the idea of practice as more important than product, an answer to the question of why Erlikilyika wanted to draw emerges.

I would suggest that it helped him. It did so in a more elaborate form of the potent moment in the history of cross-cultural interactions – the children's play described by Christopher Giles. There, children playing in the riverbed helped themselves to understand change through their own observations and representation of what they saw. In the observation and representation of change to oneself, it is possible to actively incorporate at least some of the content of that change. As Nicolas Thomas points out 'creating resources which



Fig 3.35: Carved 'pipe', example 1, white kaolin. Surface find, Charlotte Waters, October 1997



Fig 3.36: Carved 'pipe', example 2, white kaolin, showing coarse file marks. Surface find, Charlotte Waters, October 1997



Fig 3.37: Carved large 'pipe stem', white kaolin. Surface find, Charlotte Waters, October 1997



Fig 3.38: Precursors or off-cuts from carving the soft white kaolin stone, shaped with rasps. Surface find, Charlotte Waters, October 1997



Fig 3.40: Small hand-carved animal, head broken off, on square base, kaolin. Surface find, Tin Shanty, October 1997



Fig 3.39: Precursors or off-cuts from carving the soft white kaolin stone, shaped with rasps. Surface find, Tin Shanty, October 1997

did not before exist is not just a matter of using guns, adapting to European interests in local resources for doing things in European ways – its also a matter of establishing a narrative or interpretation of events²⁰² – in this case by Erlikilyika for himself.

Demise of the telegraph line

After its grand beginnings, the Overland Telegraph Line ended with a whimper. In 1923 it was still used ‘extensively and continuously’ by drovers and pastoralists, for arranging the watering and sales of stock in advance.²⁰³ The bore was still an important watering point on the stock route.²⁰⁴ But alternative routes for telegraph then telephone reduced its centrality,²⁰⁵ and both the railway and the highway routes bypassed Charlotte Waters, as the route it was built on was both prone to flooding and too waterless. The telegraph buildings became the police station and telephone office from 1930, but were abandoned to the white ants and officially closed in August 1938, the building materials having been recycled to the new police station in Finke and to New Crown pastoral station.²⁰⁶ It had lasted in its primary form for 60 years, becoming the foci of intense, concentrated interaction, leaving permanent changes to the shape of central Australia and the people who lived there. It is physically still there, as a distinct place. The buildings are only footings, but the wider complex around these retains overlays from all the various ways in which it has been lived in: Ancestral stories, re-namings, cattle and goat yards, ration depot, telegraph centre.

It is possible to see within the array of forms of interaction played out there four dimensions on the spectrum of possibility of continuity and transformation. Pre-existing or ‘old’ elements - something that is already known - can be maintained (for example songs, stories, place names, stone arrangements). Or old elements can be used in new forms, new ways - what Nicolas Thomas calls ‘categorical extension’ – for example places, place names; stories; exchange relations between people, large stone blade production, forms of representation.

²⁰² Thomas 1991: 108.

²⁰³ SRSA GRS 870/00009/124/09/00031.

²⁰⁴ AA A659 1944/1/2894 N.T. 25/2623 Memorandum re Charlotte Waters Bore: 17/9/25.

²⁰⁵ Powell 1996: 83.

²⁰⁶ AA Series No D960/0 B1937/2963; Series No. F1 Item No. 1938/592.

Or new, unfamiliar elements can be incorporated into familiar, old uses, such as new forms of labour – and exchange and the incorporation of new materials, and food, the availability of new watering points at bores. Or new elements can be taken up as complete innovations, such as new animals, new forms of labour, new social hierarchies, sexual partners, forms of self-representation, and rations.

The small-scale history of interactions I have drawn in this chapter would not necessarily be familiar to descendants of either the Indigenous or the white people who knew the line as workers, witnesses or visitors to it, but nonetheless that history is threaded through the place.

Continuity of song

New interpretative signs have been put up for the first time recently at Charlotte Waters by the Apatula Aboriginal Land Trust with the Heritage branch of the Northern Territory Government. They welcome visitors to Arleyernpe or Charlotte Waters in Arrernte and English:

Welcome, my name is Brownie Doolan.

I belong to the Lower Southern Arrernte people, traditional owners of the Apatula Aboriginal Land Trust, on which the heritage site of Arleyernpe is situated.

We welcome you to this site and hope you enjoy visiting the area. We hope that when you leave this site you have acquired a little more knowledge about Arleyernpe and its history. We also ask that you keep to the pathways and parking areas. Thank you

This situates Charlotte Waters squarely on Aboriginal land, and frames its history firmly under the aegis of a continuing Lower Southern Arrernte presence in the area. The old disconnect between the white histories of the Overland Telegraph Line, and the histories experienced by local Indigenous people of the interactions it initiated, is brought into a new alignment.

In 1901, 30 years after the establishment of the Overland Telegraph Line, Spencer and Gillen recorded at least 23 songs at Charlotte Waters, sung by men

and by women. The wax cylinders were re-recorded in the 1950s,²⁰⁷ and can be listened to now. They crackle and blur due to old fractures and fungal growth. But the chants are still potent and resonant. The singers' intakes of breath at the end of each verse can be heard. The imitation of the cry of plover in the Rain song is undiminished by the three decades of change to the moment of record in 1901, and 108 years of storage since.

In 1998, 97 years after Spencer and Gillen's recordings, linguist Luise Hercus played them to three old men of the area, one of whom was Brownie Doolan, the others Laurie Stuart and Bingey Lowe. They laughed uproariously at the women and men quarrelling, refusing to translate the insults as they were too rude, with the women worse than the men! Then they started to sing together with the Lower Southern Arrernte ceremonial songs. They learnt the songs from the Old People as stockmen on the cattle stations, in camp behind Mt Dare station, and out at the widespread yards and bores.

In this moment, there is a folding together of transformation and continuity. There is a conjunction between long-lasting learning in country by station cattlemen, and a sideways slippage into long-term record through the impersonal, external form of the wax cylinder. The two distinct forms of learning and teaching, referred in chapter 1, meet. Both are stirring in their endurance. Where younger generations of local Indigenous people have not followed in the full intergenerational transmission of this knowledge, the external records, direct inter-cultural products of the ruptures of the Overland Telegraph Line that they are, might fuel forms of future continuities. For local white people, the transmission of the stories might transform how they learn, and so how they can understand the history of people and places of the desert.

²⁰⁷ Moyle 1959.



We often used to say ‘where there is smoke there is fire, and where there is fire there are blacks, and where there are blacks there is water’.

Alfred Giles in the region in 1870,
Exploring in the ‘Seventies (1926[1995]: 24).

Chapter 4

Water to think with: a water history of interactions in the western Simpson Desert

The matrix of Simpson country is rock and sand, but the scarce water that does exist there shapes the heart of the life in it. The specific forms of people’s interactions with those waters, how they deal with their variability and unpredictability, are keys to understanding the histories of the region.

In the previous chapter the focus was on interactions between people – the local Indigenous people and the incomers, white explorers, settlers and scientists – in the particular context of Charlotte Waters. In this chapter, the focus, and the exploration of the concept of ‘entanglement’, broadens to consider the relations of people to the water places that make their lives possible in the western Simpson Desert area.

At one level it is blindingly obvious that water is vital for life, and especially so in a desert, so that any understanding of peoples’ relationships to places in a

desert will need to be grounded in thinking about water. But this very obviousness can lull us into thinking that we know what water *is* in all contexts: that is, a practical necessity, a universal resource, with all water the same. But this generalised notion of water is insufficient, as anthropologists and cultural geographers working from a starting point of the inter-connectedness of water have argued.¹ A de-contextualised notion of 'a water source' as a neutral point in the landscape 'out there' is only sustainable if we assume that people's relationship to water is a direct or biological one only, not one mediated through learnt cultural knowledge, inculcated in people's habitual understandings as they grow up involved in the world around them.²

The obviousness of water diminishes when we start asking different questions about it – what does interaction with water look like at the small scale of historical lived time?

A 'water place' may be understood to possess the same active capacities as an object. Objects are not passive, separate entities in the socio-cultural world, they are players, actors in the process of interaction. They contribute to the orchestration, the patterning of what happens. This is generally invisible to the people involved, taking place at the level of habit, rather than at a consciously articulated level. For example, the way the chairs are arranged in a meeting room both reflects assumptions about how a gathering will be conducted and affects how it can be. So objects which make spatial structures are not merely a backdrop for social life, but a medium through which social relations are produced and reproduced.³

This way of thinking applies also to water places. They share the property of actively orchestrating people's interactions, and in turn being affected by them, as the locale accretes personal histories, stories of the Ancestors, and objects, which distinguish it and through which it is remembered. Attention to this process expands the aim of focussing on water. The water, a particular place where water is or has been held, is specific and meaningful. It is not simply a

¹ See Rose 2004; Strang 1997, 2005; Toussaint, Sullivan and Yu 2005; Gibbs 2006, 2010. See also reflections on the meaning of water and the marking of distinct and venerated natural places by Richards 1996; Bradley 2000.

² See discussion of modes of learning in chapter 1.

³ An approach developed by interpretative archaeologists such as Barrett 1988: 11, 1994; J. Thomas 1993a, b; Bradley 1993; Gosden 1994: 16, amongst others.

neutral substance and object of economic exploitation, but a cultural actor.⁴ We already know the obvious necessity that the water will be a key focus for peoples' actions. We can turn the question around to consider not 'how far away is the water' but 'what it is that happens at this particular water focus'? Water then is a lens to examine the different histories of relations to places enacted by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the region. Inevitably, it also provides another way of looking at the interactions between people as they find ways to live with and around each other in the same country. In this way we can think *with* water rather than *about* it.

In this chapter I have assembled historical descriptions of Indigenous and white interactions with water, to gauge the forms that they take and the implications they have in turn for the interactions between people at the same place. What aspects of water do people pay attention to, value. What expectations do they have of it? What stories do they tell of it? What are their practices in acquiring, maintaining and using it? The outcomes of the practices may often be unforeseen, and can provide insights into what is often hidden to the practitioners – their unexamined assumptions and habits, in contrast to their overt intentions. This provides another way into exploring the processes of entanglement of places.

Digging deeper, or moving on

One way to tell a 'water history' of the interactions of the Simpson land and people would be through a neat story of **digging deeper**. Such a story would track the importation of colonial technological capacity for drilling into artesian waters to provide ever more reliable access to deeper underground aquifers. As the Minister for Mines wrote in his introduction to the Department's non-technical *Groundwater Handbook*, 'in South Australia lack of rainfall has necessitated wide-scale development of underground sources of water'.⁵ This development is taken to be a self-evident good. A *vertical* story, it makes the error of isolating water from its landscape and involvement in histories of people and living things, and overrides local Indigenous people's knowledge of the behavioural dynamics of water in the region. The latter involves a more *horizontal* approach to the uneven distributions of water, as it is based on the

⁴ See Richards 1996; Bradley 2000.

⁵ Department of Mines South Australia 1959: 4.

capacity to **move on** from one water place to another. This draws on knowledge and experience of the country's responses to rain, and the locations of rare potable permanent springs and other available water. Water 'does not happen by chance, but rather exists through the creative action of Dreaming beings. ... localised water sources form part of the subsistence geography of country and almost invariably part of the sacred geography as well'.⁶

Told in this way, a water history taps into contrasting attitudes to, and policies of, land acquisition, management and development. By placing water at the centre, my aim is not to separate it out as a stand-alone element, but to refine attention to it and re-integrate the action of particular waters in the stories of the country. Thinking of water as separate and generic is a hallmark of the 'vertical' story. It is a story worth telling, and is outlined below.

But flowing through its main trajectory of technological replacement, and disrupting it, is a counter story. This one recognises the spatial and social renegotiations that necessarily followed the reconfiguration of pre-existing water places and the insertion of new water places⁷ into an existing cultural landscape.

Forms of water

The forms of surface water available in the region are the permanent mound springs, temporary waterholes in riverbeds and creeklines, the sand desert *mikiri* wells and claypans, and wetlands (see chapter 1 and 2 for details). However, most desert water is covert, not found on the surface at all, but largely below ground. Surface water that does not rapidly evaporate percolates or migrates into underground sediments and the joints in rock to form ground water, lying at a depth of less than 'a few' hundred feet.⁸ It also forms sandhill soaks, where rainwater seeps readily through the sand to form a layer of fresh

⁶ Rose 1996: 52, 2004: 36.

⁷ I use the term 'water place' in preference to 'water source', in order to emphasise and give conceptual space to the multiplicity of interactions that the water is part of, not just serving as a resource.

⁸ Department of Mines 1959: 17-18; Ward 1923: 5-13. 100 feet converts to 30.5m, 10 feet to 3.5m.

water perched above saline groundwater, generally at a depth of less than 20-30 feet.⁹

In contrast, 'pressure waters' or artesian waters will 'rise to the surface, or even flow, when penetrated' either by drilling or by natural outlets such as mound springs.¹⁰ This water is often very hot at the surface because it has been heated in the earth's interior. Artesian waters provide large volumes of flow from great depths of several thousand feet. Thus they require the use of drilling plants to extract them.¹¹

Variability: 'a great disappointment'

Because rainfall in the region does not follow seasonally predictable patterns, availability of surface waters is patchy and variable.¹² For this reason time becomes a critical element in living strategically with the way desert water behaves – this is what makes it distinct from the water of temperate areas. Outside deserts, a thirsty person must concern themselves with where a body of water is located, not how long it will last. The experienced explorer John McDouall Stuart wrote of his disappointment with the Finke River:

very much surprised to find so little water. I had no idea it would have gone away so soon. The bed is very broad and sandy, which is the cause of the rapid disappearance of the large quantity that I saw when I crossed before. This is a great disappointment, as it was my intention to run it down, in the hope that it would take me into South Australia (Sunday, 5th August, North of Chambers Pillar, 1865).¹³

Baldwin Spencer draws a detailed word picture of the contrast in the country near Charlotte Waters when he visited in the dry season after drought in 1894, when 'everything was parched and silent with no sign of animal life' and then again in 1895 after heavy rain when 'everything was green and bright and teeming with life'. 'The whole change from sterility to exuberant life had taken place as if by magic within the space of only a few days.'¹⁴

⁹ Department of Mines 1959: 16.

¹⁰ Department of Mines 1959: 9.

¹¹ Department of Mines 1959: 25.

¹² See chapter 1 and Gibbs 2006: 206-264.

¹³ Stuart 1865 [1984]: 236.

¹⁴ Spencer 1896: 17-18, 22.

Ambitious squatters, wise after the event, also learned this lesson about the temporality of water, telling doleful, wry accounts of buying land in the region, only to find that 'the waterholes which eighteen months before were two hundred yards long were dry'.¹⁵ This tug-of-war between the white incomers' hopes and expectations and the variable environment is a theme of this chapter.

Living with variability

In marked contrast, for at least 3000 years,¹⁶ the Lower Southern Arrernte and Wankanguru, Arabuna and Luritja people of the region have accepted and learnt to live with this characteristic variability of water at a number of levels. In terms of supply, intimate systems of knowledge broadened the bases of water supply available to them. When travelling, or in exceptionally dry areas or seasons, sections of roots of water-bearing plants, such as *Hakea leucoptera*, *E. opaca* (desert bloodwood) or *E. socialis* (water mallee) could be drained into a bowl to provide a drink.¹⁷ Water-storing frogs *Chiroleptes platycephalus*¹⁸ could be dug from their burrows. Waterbags made from hare wallaby, rat kangaroo, kangaroo or wallaby skins were carried:

The skins were taken off without cutting them and the leg and arm holes were tied up. They turned the skins fur -side in and filled them with water at the neck aperture. The bags would hold from two to four gallons, according to the size of the animal. The water was perfectly clean and good and the bags lasted a long time with care.¹⁹

'Native wells' were formed by digging access holes into the shallow ground waters, and, in some cases covering them and maintaining them over long time periods. Many of these are still marked on contemporary topographic maps, in 'gum creeks' (i.e. the better supplied watercourses that support coolibah eucalypts), wide river beds such as the Finke, and on the edge of some sand dunes. Bingley Lowe described the process of their construction:

When the country was wild the Old People would look at the sand and dig maybe nine, twelve feet to get water, let it stand, get rid of all that dust and dirt, get clean water. Would dig down maybe to here [indicates his elbow] and if sand a bit damp, means there's water underneath. Use them little coolamons and sharp stick, dig a bit, then scoop it out. All this country [near Mt Dare station has]

¹⁵ Whittington 1897: 4-5.

¹⁶ Smith and Clarke 1993.

¹⁷ Latz 1995: 209, 190, 194; Magarey 1895.

¹⁸ Gillen 1968: 21.

¹⁹ Alfred Giles in late 1870, 1926[1995]: 28. Also Hercus 1985: 35.

waterholes. Always same place. Only place no water is round Purni [Bore, on western edge of the dune field], and high country, too high.²⁰

These wells were ardently sought by white explorers. John McDouall Stuart, in his first-through-the-Center single-minded explorer's pursuit of any water at all in order to keep his men and horses going, records all 'gum creeks' sighted and the small native wells they harbour. The more scarce the water, the greater the impact of his party with their horses' relatively great thirsts, draining the rare, fragile waters they found. For example:

Tuesday, 1st May, North-west Side of Mount Barkly. On examining the water, I find it is only a drainage from the rocks, and there is not more than two gallons for each horse. ... I do not like the appearance of the country before us. Started on a course of 335 degrees, and at six miles and a half came upon a large gum creek divided into numerous channels: searched it carefully, without finding any surface water; but I discovered a native well about four feet deep, in the east channel, close to a small hill of rocks. Cleared it out, and watered the horses with a quart pot, which took us long after dark - each horse drinking about ten gallons, and some of them more. Natives have been here lately, and from the tracks they seem to be numerous.

Friday, 4th May, Gum and Spinifex Plains. At times this country is visited by blacks, but it must be seldom. ... at thirty miles came upon a native well, with a little grass round it; the bottom was moist. ... Commenced clearing out the well the best way we could, with a quart pot and a small tin dish, having unfortunately lost our shovel in crossing the McDonnell ranges. We had great difficulty in keeping the horses out while we cleared it. To our great disappointment we found the water coming in very slowly. We can only manage, in an hour and a half, to get about six gallons, which must be the allowance for each horse, and it will take us till tomorrow morning to water them all.

Stuart took the water as a right, with no attendant responsibilities for the disproportionate cost his needs imposed on the supplies. In contrast, Alfred Giles, part of the first survey team for the Overland Telegraph Line, following Stuart's track in 1870, expressed his awareness of the care the local people had taken to establish wells, and that his party's presence was something of a threat to their precious water supplies, maintained in an area where it was especially scarce:

We surprised a mob of blacks - five men, two or three women, and about a dozen piccaninnies - but their only water was a muddy

²⁰ Macfarlane field notes 26 July 1996.

claypan, and they had most ingeniously made the water to filter through sand by digging holes on the upper side of the claypan. ... the fact of about a dozen blacks subsisting on so precarious a water supply proved beyond doubt its scarcity in their neighbourhood, and the hostile attitude in which they placed themselves can be attributed solely to that cause, and not to any hatred, but to guard their precious supply, which was threatened by an enormous animal and its rider which they had never previously looked upon.²¹

Charles Winneke, although expressed in the characteristically grudging tone he uses to describe Aboriginal people, gives a broad description of the ways people modified waterholes in the area:

These are merely small holes, from a few feet to perhaps 20 feet in depth, scraped out with the aid of sticks and pieces of bark or other wooden utensils, and containing at most but a small supply of water; sufficient perhaps for the requirements of three or four natives for as many months during the year. ... I have discovered many hundreds of these wells in my travels, and have arrived at the conclusion that some are of great age, or, more correctly speaking, have been reopened for a great number of years by different generations of aboriginals. ... In many places the natives seemingly take the utmost care to preserve these insignificant wells from evaporation by carefully covering them over with rubbish. ... they only use the water for drinking purposes ... they are also opened to entrap game.²²

No one of these wells could support permanent Indigenous occupation. They did so only as a network linked through people's movement and knowledge of where there was available water, around which the Indigenous people organised their lives. Knowledge of country was saturated with knowledge of water location and duration, and with the obligations and responsibilities accessing it entailed. Monitoring where rain was falling and how many people had used it previously, for how long provided a guide to how much water could be expected in a given place. This was part of the reason for the intense scrutiny of others' movements. Big gatherings could only happen when there was the water to support them.²³

'Wake up that green grass'

Rain water is also available indirectly, taken up by plants, generating pulses of grasses and forbs, as it 'wake up that green grass', as Bingey Lowe said (fig 2.3,

²¹ A. Giles 1926[1995]: 27.

²² Winneke 1886: 629.

²³ Kimber and Smith 1987.

4.1). In Australian prehistory, the development of methods for harvesting seed and processing it by grinding it between abrasive stones to provide a low-calorie and labour-intensive but reliable food is considered to have been a technological/economic/social change in response to increasingly dry and variable climatic conditions in the late Pleistocene: a specific semi-arid and arid zone adaptation.²⁴

The suite of practices required to process seed show the many linked generative forms and phases of water as it diffuses through the life of the region. For example, five kilometers west of the banks of the Finke, I recorded a cluster of eleven hearth mounds of burnt and heat shattered rock. These were associated with a number of grinding top-stones and at least ten different grindstones, including one approximately 12kg in weight, used for seed processing; a large amount of processing and baking was going on in this locality. Also in the vicinity was an assemblage of tula adzes used in wood-working on site.²⁵ So, seeds were generated from the rain-fed grass, the standing water in the local claypans was needed for the grinding process, and allowed a leisurely stay in the locale by a substantial group of people (fig 4.2-4.5).

A record by Overland Telegraph Line supervisor Christopher Giles takes these connections further. 1870 was a good year, the best year for the next 20 years in fact.²⁶ While collecting poles for building the telegraph line in the Finke River bed, Giles encountered a tree platform on which was a 'native granary'. In it were stores of different grass seeds in bags made from the ends of shirt sleeves and trouser legs that had been appropriated earlier from Giles' survey team's washing line (see chapter 3). Together with them, Giles also recorded a 'rain maker's equipment' – a bundle of hair string, with a pearl shell ornament at one end and a large marble at the other, traded from great distances to the north and south.²⁷ The ceremonies of rain-making were an important element in

²⁴ The timing of this change is debated, and seems to have varied in different parts of the arid zone, but was definitely broadly well established in Australian desert cultures by the mid-Holocene, i.e. around 5000 years ago, with an increase in intensity of use between 1400 and 600 years ago. Smith 1986; Fullagar and Field 1997; Veth, Fullagar and Gould 1997; Hiscock 2008: 207-8.

²⁵ This is a Wankanguru word for this type of artefact. They are semi-circular in shape, thick, fastened by resin to a wooden handle called a *koondi* to form a composite wood-working tool (Hiscock and Veth 1991: 333).

²⁶ P. Byrne to Pastoral Land Commission 1891: 112.

²⁷ C. Giles 1894 Vol 3(6): 45.

people's relationship with plentiful grass-seeds. Spencer and Gillen recorded such ceremonies at Charlotte Waters in 1901:

While we were at Charlotte Waters the natives performed an especially interesting rain ceremony, as it was a time when rain might fall. As can be easily imagined, the water supply is a very important matter to the native. Without water there are no animals and no plants for him to feed upon, and in all of the tribes there are special groups of individuals who are known as rain-men, upon whom devolves the duty of seeing that the supply is maintained.²⁸

During his 1938 visit to Mt Dare, Charles Mountford recorded 'Southern Aranda Rain songs associated with Erina waterhole on Mt Dare station' sung by Ilayarinika whose father as a member of the Rain totem, accompanied by sticks being beaten, and another sung by a group.²⁹ He noted that the women in the camp near Mt Dare had put out pans of water for the diamond sparrows (diamond firetail finches) to get a drink. 'The women said that they were the rain makers in the "dream" time'.³⁰ Mountford also encouraged two of the Southern Aranda stockmen working on the station to draw pictures using red yellow and white crayon on thick brown paper, which Mountford annotated. Boxer chose to represent 'clouds', 'creek running', 'Tiajilpa rainbow' which he would usually have made as a 'mark on chest' and 'marks on boomerang', probably in ceremonial contexts.³¹

²⁸ Spencer 1912: 200-201.

²⁹ SLSA Mountford-Sheard Collection, A2901 Side 3 side 42, A2912 Side 1 (not restricted). List of Mountford's sound recordings for 1938/9 Index compiled by Grace Koch and Audrey Jones at AIATSIS.

³⁰ Mountford 1938 diary of the Leichhardt Search Party, Sunday August 28 1938.

³¹ SLSA Mountford-Sheard Collection, North South Australia, Aboriginal crayon drawings, 1935, 1938 Vol II. 3 Crayon drawings, 1938 Mt Dare. Rainbows are associated with Rainbow Serpents, and they with permanent waters and connections between subsurface and surface waters and rain (Rose 2004: 39).



Fig 4.1: Grasses with seeds flourishing after rain, growing near the cluster of hearths on the Finke River flats, October 1997.



Fig 4.2: Hearth - heat shattered stone on the Finke River flats, October 1997.



Fig 4.3: Large grindstone close to the cluster of hearths.



Fig 4.4: Smaller array of grindstones showing diversity of sandstone types.



Fig 4.5: Tula adzes and large flakes.

In 1968, Mick McLean recorded the dramatic ‘Seed song’ from the *mikiri* well Pulawani, on the eastern side of the Simpson dune field, where his sister Topsy was born. The song was used in the increase of hard acacia and pigface seed in the face of the ‘searing heat and desperate drought’ of the central Simpson sand desert.³²

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| 1. | Thruku thurkungaya
Thruku thurkungaya
raliyariljai | Dry leaves everywhere
Dry leaves fallen on the ground. |
| <i>[this verse is sung in a whisper, repeated five times, it is a spell to turn what is dry green]</i> | | |
| 3. | Ngarditjita ngaljuruka
Ngarditjita ngaljuruka | Dry stumps grow green!
Dry stumps grow green! |
| 5. | Thakata wirthiwirthe ya
Thakata wirthe ya
Thakata malurka maluru | Roots are growing
Roots are growing
Roots are swelling with sap. |
| 9. | Kuna kuna katayaltu
Pakatayaltu
Panji thirra | Green, green colour all around
Green plants in vast numbers
Are standing up straight. |
| 13. | Parriye manta,
yantaraya paltheiye manta
Paltheiye ngutha
(uta nhukulu karinha
tharnira-ik’ arniri) | They take the seed, with a stone they pound it
They pound it, they smash it.

(now tomorrow we will eat them) ³³ |

Seed and the water for growing and processing it are not restricted within economic and practical spheres, but are embedded in the shared labour of production, the eternal of ritual and in wide-ranging social exchange networks stretching to the north coast for the pearl shell, and the south for the marble. Water in this dynamic, connected sense breaks down false divisions into ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’. It is a ‘nexus of relationality’, that ‘makes visible the relations between things, where people act to make the world work’.³⁴

³² Hercus 1990b: 118, whole song p117-125.

³³ Hercus 1990b: 117-121. My transcription is of only a selected few of the verses, which is a poor practice known as ‘frog-hopping’ (Hercus 1990b: 127). It is also given without the diacritics in the original, to at least evoke the sense and the power of the song, but with apologies to the singer and recorder.

³⁴ Strathern 1995: 179.

Mikiri-nganha 'people from the wells'

The capacity for local Indigenous people's informed mobility to respond the temporality of desert water is exquisitely demonstrated in the network of paths and places of the Wankangurru, who were permanent residents in the vast Simpson dunefield. Rare, reliable soakages known as *mikiri* were the bases of their residency. These hold water in a shallow aquifer on underlying stony or clay pavements. They were reached by narrow underground passages, up to seven metres long, which reduced evaporation and spoilage, and required regular clearing and maintenance.³⁵ They were a final reserve when the more variable supplies of surface waters in swamps on the edges of the dune field and in claypans throughout the dunes had gone. People knew how to locate and navigate back to them, predicting the amount of water that they would contain and keeping them clean and silt-free. 'The soaks were always there when all the surface water had dried out: there was no reason to leave the desert'.³⁶

Like the permanent mound springs, the wells were refuges that enabled people to continue living in the area rather than abandoning it in times of drought. They would soon exhaust the food supplies in the vicinity of the water however, and so would move between springs or wells, and when drought was over, would disperse to take advantage of other sources, and to allow the food sources in the refuges to regenerate.³⁷

Their stories and our archaeological research at the wells make it clear that 'the wells are different from each other in their physical environment and also in their mythological associations. They varied in relative importance as habitation sites and ritual centres and each has its own archaeological significance.'³⁸ 'Each well means something': they are not 'just water'. Nor are they the same as each other; each is historically distinguished.³⁹

The descriptions below bring out the web of elements that are involved in living on the wells that make the distinctions between them: knowledge in the

³⁵ Hercus and Clarke 1986.

³⁶ Hercus 1985: 25.

³⁷ Hiscock 2008: 204.

³⁸ Hercus and Clark 1986: 62.

³⁹ Hercus and Clark 1986: 62.

form of Ancestral stories, observation and learnt practices, details of how to live and how to navigate between places, visiting and trading to the west, east and south, and crossing the dunefield.⁴⁰ Throughout these bodies of knowledge there flows a substrate of water references and insights about how to get to it and what to do with it.

Murraburt *mikiri*⁴¹ well was the furthest to the west of the twenty or so *mikiri* soaks, and so the closest to the Finke and Dalhousie side of the desert. This important place was a one key node in the network of places on the western side of the desert, linked to the Finke River places and those between. It was the first place the Ancestral Two Boys stop as they cross the desert from Kingfisher Springs (of the Dalhousie group), going through all the major wells to Goyder Lagoon, their mother following them with a wooden dish full of water.⁴² It is also part of the Rain story from Ilbora on the lower Finke.⁴³

Stone artefacts with gibber cortex located at least 50km into the dune field mark the passage of people from the Finke area into the dunes, claypans, soaks, and *mikiri* wells.⁴⁴ The artefacts are less common and smaller in size as the distance from the gibber stone sources increases.⁴⁵ A ceremonial stone arrangement with a complex of stones in straight lines, cairns and circles located on a cluster of three claypans 100km into the dune field testifies to the movement of people into the depth of the dunes after rains, for ceremony.⁴⁶

Archaeological evidence shows that Murraburt was repeatedly re-visited. As a result, hearths, stone artefacts used for woodworking and seed grinding, fragments of edge-ground axe, and bone – including rabbit bone, five human burials, two small stone arrangement cairns, and a clay tobacco pipe accumulated on the ground surface around the well.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Hercus and Clark 1985: 25, 32.

⁴¹ Given as Marubardi in Tindale 1934.

⁴² Hercus and Potezny 1996: 13.

⁴³ Hercus and Clark 1986: 52; Hercus 1989: 104. This place is where the Finke River channel, after running underground, becomes visible in a deep, eucalypt-filled cutting below the surrounding gibber covered ground surface. There are several stone arrangements here, associated with formal stone artefacts – pirri points and microliths (Macfarlane field notebook Friday 14 November 1997).

⁴⁴ Macfarlane field notebook 31 October 1997.

⁴⁵ Hercus and Clark 1986: 53.

⁴⁶ Tindale 1962.

⁴⁷ Hercus and Clarke 1986: 53.

In 1965 Linguist Luise Hercus recorded three Wangkangurru people's nostalgic childhood memories of what it was like to live on a soak. Mick McLean *Irinjili*, Maudie Naylor Akawiljika and Topsy McLean Ikiwiljika were born on one of the eastern wells.

Being so rare, surface water drawn from the *mikiri* well could be used as bait for a trap for accumulating numbers of small birds. The process is described with relish by Mick McLean:

we all used to dig holes in the loose ground (by the soak) so that we could kill 'sparrows' [Orange chats]. We used to pour out water that we got from a wooden dish and put the water into the hole, we filled the hole right up to the rim. Then a mob of 'sparrows' would come. ... they would flock together to drink the water inside the hole. Two of us would be watching that hole all the time, there might even be a top-knot pidgeon! We used to break off branches and brush the birds into the hole. Then we killed them all in the hole. That was good meat, only a tiny amount on each, but it was sweet. We would take them back to our humpy and cook them.⁴⁸

They were content on the *mikiri*, but they remember the adults starting to reminisce and imagine the water flowing in the eastern creeks, and the pleasure of eating boney bream. So they decided to leave their country to go south-east to an outstation at Poonarunna – there was a drought, but good rains in south-eastern Queensland feeding the rivers there.⁴⁹ They travelled 'over sandhill after sandhill'. They slept in a different camp every night.⁵⁰ On the way they dug carpet snakes from the dunes, caught bilbies, lesser bilbies, hare wallabies, and collected grass seed and pigface seed, which the women carried on their heads.⁵¹ The babies were carried in a wooden dish. The women left their big nardoo grinding stones behind, and instead carried water in waterbags made from hare wallaby and rat kangaroo skin, containing 'good, cool water' from the soak. It was enough, after all 'you don't want to drink all the time', Mick McLean mused.⁵²

⁴⁸ Hercus 1985: 27-8.

⁴⁹ Hercus 1985: 31.

⁵⁰ Hercus 1985: 37.

⁵¹ Hercus 1985: 37.

⁵² Hercus 1985: 35.

In 1934 anthropologist Norman Tindale recorded one of the 'people of the wells', Ngaltjagintata's description of how to travel across the sand desert between Pandi Pandi on the Diamantina River near Birdsville, to the big and ceremonially important waterholes on the Finke River and Dalhousie Springs, through the high sandhills, via several *mikiri*.⁵³ This is a two to three week journey; 16 days to the Finke, a further 5-6 days to 'Eweila' [Ewillina waterhole] and Dalhousie springs. The instructions for travelling include 'good water here, spell 2-3 days here', and 'camp in bush, no water' overnight – a dour instruction that is repeated nine times:

Leave Pandi Pandi, walk 1 day WNW to east channel of Georgina River NE of Alton Downs HS (Tikeri).

Walk half day NW to Nela Naranji on W channel of Georgina above old Alton Downs HS c15 miles N of Queensland border.

One day sleep in bush; no water.

Half day NW to Puramana mikari, in Queensland. [This soak is one of several timbered by the Surveyors who surveyed the borders (Reese) [includes LA Wells 1883 – 1886 Madigan 1946: 10]].

Half day Jalkeri mikari (= Jelkerran of LA Wells see NT map of 31 March 1925). Sometimes no water don't camp then, go on half day no water camp in bush. Half day Tjilparta mikari = kilpara of LA Wells. Spell 2-3 days here. One day camp in bush no water.

One day to Pulubutu mikari (Poolabunda of LA Wells, see NT map). Spell here for several days. It is real Wonkanguru country. The only 'gibber' hill is '2 miles' southwards from the soak. It is a mura place where a hut is kept prepared so that the mura of Pulubutu may remain there. This place seems to be the same as that called Purabata.

One day SW, sleep in bush, no water. Wonkanguru, 'a little bit' Aranda country.

One day W to Walparuka mikari

One day W Parabara mikari

One day W 'travelling straight' 'bloody water long way you know' sleep in bush; no water

One day to Pilpa mikari, a real Aranda mikari; only a little bit Wongkanguru

Half day to Marubadi mikari, somewhat N or W a proper Aranda mikari; spell here several days

One day NW sleep in bush

One day NW dry sleep in sandhills; no water

One day NW 'perish for water, hungry, see stones [eg hills] now, my country close now, go on'

One day to Elikarta, a Finke Creek clay pan 'have a drink clay pan water sleep and spell one day'

Half to one day NW to Ulura waterhole on Finke, get water there

⁵³ Hercus 1987: 67-8 discusses Tindale's record. She considers it 'very reliable'. She gives more detail about Ngaltja-kintarda; his name means 'throwing spit', he was the father of Johnny Reese Njanpika, still living in 1987.

Sleep in bush W to Dalhousie Springs
 One day to Dalhousie Springs 'reach there, drink water'
 One day NE sleep in bush
 One day NE to Oleita waterhole, Finke Creek waterhole, stay there
 awhile
 One day NNE to Eweila waterhole a big waterhole on the Finke
 Creek
 One day NNE to Murulura, 'waterhole, my ularaka there'⁵⁴

In this unadorned but graphic recitation of the known, used travel route across the Simpson dunes, the graded references as the traveller moves further west from 'real Wonkanguru country', through 'Wonkanguru, 'a little bit' Aranda country', into 'a real Aranda mikari; only a little bit Wongkanguru', reaching even further west 'a proper Aranda mikari' illustrates the other major aspect of adaptation to desert conditions, implicated in such movements; that is, social reciprocity. 'Indigenous people's main adaptation to uncertainty was to develop social ties that enabled people to move to resources as they became available. ... the social organisation of sharing was utterly essential'.⁵⁵ They made it possible for people to move to better favoured areas during droughts.⁵⁶ In this case, there was agreement between Arrernte and Wankanguru groups that such crossings were acceptable, not an infringement of territorial integrity. It was important for the traveller to inform their 'hosts' of their travels, so that they could maintain a gauge on the use of water where it was scarce. The account also makes clear the crucial role of specific known, named water places.

Song cycles associated with particular wells and with the tracks between them, give a vivid glimpse of the fine details and inflections of living with the extremities of the dunes.⁵⁷ One tells of the Crane, *Wurru*, who lusts after two young women and decides to kill the others in his group so he could have them to himself. He sings songs 'to make the weather hotter and hotter, to make searing winds blow from the north and to make the sun glow like fire ... and to bring up a huge dust-storm.' The others burrowed down into the deep sand to get away from the heat. There are limestone boulders at Beelipa well where they did this. He repeatedly sneaks off to have drinks of water while the rest of his mob are perishing from thirst. 'Cover me over with cool sand' he says in 'falsely

⁵⁴ 'Native Route across the Arunta Desert'. SAM AA 338/1/24 'Journal of Field work in and near the Simpson Desert (Arunta Desert) Central Australia by Norman B. Tindale. Adelaide. 1962 - [1963]': 65-7.

⁵⁵ Rose 2004: 37.

⁵⁶ Rose 2004: 37, citing Gould 1982: 73.

⁵⁷ Hercus and Clark 1986; Hercus and Potezny 1996.

pathetic tones'. Because of the wind they could not smell the water nearby. When they finally do, they turn into waterbirds.⁵⁸

The last resident Wankanguru people walked out of the desert to Kilalpinina Mission from one of these wells in the summer of 1899-1900.⁵⁹ Despite being homesick for the wells, they did not return to them, except to the western-most, Murraburt, leaving a vast amount of rabbit bones.⁶⁰ In a landscape which allows archaeologists and historians to establish minimal chronological control, these places present a rare bracketed time frame. Archaeologists Mike Smith and Peter Clarke collected charcoal from hearths at these wells for dating. The dates obtained showed that Murraburt well was first occupied 2500 to 3000 years ago, at least. This correlates with first occupation dates of about 3000 years ago at Oolgawa swamp, on the south-west edge of the Simpson dune field (see map 1.2). Smith and Clarke argue that 3000 years ago was a maximal dry period, and so the water table is likely to have been available there during the earlier, wetter periods also, although there is no available evidence for people accessing it earlier.⁶¹

Without constant maintenance, the *mikiri* silted up. They were thus difficult to relocate in the 1980s. Several of them had been driven over by the French Oil exploration lines of the 1960s.⁶²

If these inconspicuous but critical water-places had been seen as able to support the demands of cattle, they might have been taken up into the landscape of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century pastoral industry. The principle for dealing with water supplies for droving cattle was to keep the cattle moving from well to bore to bore, with an associated constant call for increasing the number and density of bores available for use by the stock (see below). The new water places were integrated into a mobile line and sometimes network of travel, which echoes the practice for people crossing the desert described above. In a direct duplication of that description, in 1903 the South Australian Minister Controlling the Northern Territory published a map showing the route to the

⁵⁸ Hercus and Clark 1986: 52-5.

⁵⁹ Hercus 1985.

⁶⁰ Hercus 1987: 68.

⁶¹ Smith and Clarke 1993.

⁶² Hercus 1990a.

goldfields in the MacDonnell Ranges for prospectors, who were unfamiliar with the water locations and regimes of the country. This included 'the waters &c, between Oodnadatta and the field' with the added 'NOTE: - in times of drought, water is only procurable at the Wells, Bores, &c. After good rains it is plentiful in Waterholes and soakages along the course of the Rivers and Creeks'⁶³(fig 4.6).

It was the distance between waters that was the make or break factor, that led to stock being trapped at Dalhousie Springs for months, as described below, and this was the imperative behind drilling more bores in the cause of extending and hastening travel through the country. There was even an overconfident early twentieth century plan to build a line of bores which would open a stock route from the west to the east across the dunefield. However, the country was 'so inhospitable' that after the first bore was sunk at Anacoora in 1903, the project was abandoned.⁶⁴ Obviously, running stock and sinking bores immediately changes people's relations to water, as examined in the next section. It can be seen that the intent behind the bores was to exploit any available water - generic water - for profit. However, an unintended outcome of this effort was the establishment of new places which people could incorporate into the network of places around which they based their lives, and so were enfolded into people's lives and local histories.

Wells and bores: extractive technology and a place to live

In the late nineteenth-early twentieth century officials expressed a bullish optimism about the need to 'just add water' for the desert to bloom. Governor MacDonnell of South Australia in 1864 considered that 'dismal, parched, and impracticable as much of the country looked, cattle are now reared there which would be considered fat and good anywhere. ... [W]e may possibly yet kill beef fattened on the 'stony desert.'⁶⁵ Meteorologist CL Wragge, wrote 'It is impossible to over-estimate the good effect of the bore in developing the

⁶³ Sketch plan (revised) by HYL Brown S.A. Government Geologist 30/6/03.

⁶⁴ Madigan 1946: 11.

⁶⁵ MacDonnell 1864.

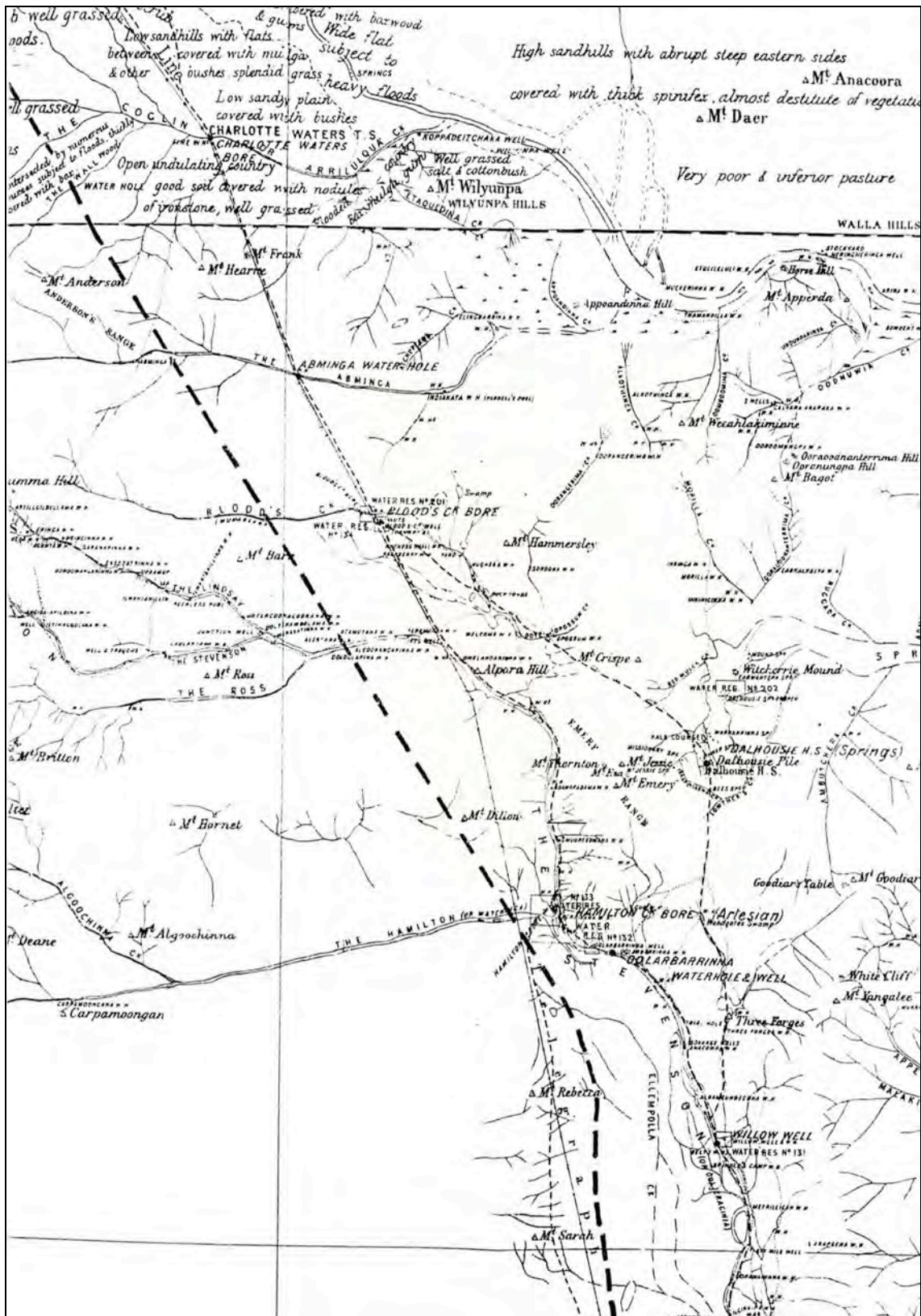


Fig 4.6: Sketch plan (revised) showing Altunga and Winnecke's Depot, Goldfield, in the MacDonnell Ranges, also the route waters & c, between Odnadatta and the field. Published by authority of the Hon the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, HYL Brown S.A. Government Geologist 30/6/1903

interior of South Australia. It is now beyond doubt that the subterranean water-supply is *enormous*. Climate may be modified and arid deserts made important centres of civilisation'.⁶⁶ As late as 1925, the then South Australian Governor Tom Bridges maintained this hype: 'the truth [is] that, given water ... the possibilities of the Australian hinterland are boundless'.⁶⁷

This is the 'absence model' of water in the desert. It is a seductive narrative form that assumes that the desert offers untapped potential and is changeable through human intervention, 'a resistant landscape which will be finally transformed through technological innovations'.⁶⁸

The wells in use in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were generally less than 70ft deep, sunk into the pre-existing surface soakages. Pastoralists attested that water could always be dug down to in the lower Finke channel, for example, if you sank wells from 8 to 40ft deep into the sand.⁶⁹ Otherwise 'well-sinking is quite a lottery in the north' as pastoralist HJ Richman stated to the Pastoral Land Commission,⁷⁰ with the effort to dig frequently producing only low flows or excessively salty water. The state government Conservator of Water and state Geologist believed that tapping into the deeper artesian water table would provide fresh water, but at that time these waters lay beyond the reach of the drilling equipment that it was physically possible to bring into the area.⁷¹ In 1886 there were only five flowing artesian wells in the colony of South Australia; more had been sunk but they were not productive. The first productive bore was sunk near Hergott (now Marree), dug to a depth of 353 feet with a daily yield of 7000 gallons.⁷²

Larger drills soon did become available. In 1901 Gillen gives a full report on the recently completed bores of the area.

April 8th Charlotte Waters Camp 9. John Bailes the Artesian well contractor who has sunk most of the bores in this country arrived this evening from the south he tells me that Anacoora bore lately

⁶⁶ Wragge 1886: 626.

⁶⁷ In foreword to Bridges 1925 [1996].

⁶⁸ Cronon 1999: 1355.

⁶⁹ eg Pastoral Land Commission 1891: 110, 123, 124, 128; SRSA GRS 1 1903/33.

⁷⁰ Pastoral Land Commission 1891: xxvii.

⁷¹ Pastoral Land Commission 1891: xxiv, 112.

⁷² Wragge 1886.

sunk by him to a depth of 1,250 ft. yields 700,000 galls per 24 hrs; the water when flowing from the bore has a temp of 136°. The bore is situated approx. 65 miles east of here and is in desert sandhill country. The bore at Bloods Creek is 2,002 ft. and the water rises to within 140 ft. of the surface, temperature 85°. This well is being fitted with a windmill and tank which when completed will raise the water to the surface. Charlotte Waters bore is 1,474 ft. water rises to within 160 ft. of the surface temperature about 80 fitted with windmill and tank and troughs for watering stock.⁷³

This followed a campaign for more wells south of Alice Springs. In 1892 there was a letter to the newspaper from J Angus, C Giles, MP and W Magarey, Minister for Education, regarding the poor state of the wells on the route between Alice Springs and Adelaide. They argued that the 20,000 bullocks in the region could not be moved to the Adelaide market because of the lack of water. The wells that did exist had inadequate fittings – troughs and pumps – so that it took two to three days to water a mob of cattle, and none of the wells between Alice Springs and Charlotte Waters yielded enough supply. A reliable stock route between Oodnadatta and Alice Springs could only be achieved by opening a line of artesian wells.⁷⁴ A new trial bore for artesian water was ordered for Charlotte Waters on 19/9/1892. The Engineer-In-Chief of the South Australian government prepared a delicate set of sketches for the construction of the bore, following Laming's Patent, parts made in Adelaide, in January 1900 for Charlotte Waters bore (fig 4.7).⁷⁵

Charlotte Waters' bore is only one of those along the stock route, but its history illustrates the massive investment in planning, labour and money required to deal with the recurring problems of keeping water supplied.

Regular maintenance and inspection of the artesian bores along local stock routes was crucial to their continuing operation⁷⁶ but problems with maintenance remained intractable. In 1923 Keith Ward, the Government Geologist, reviewed the scope of the problem in his 27 page-long 'Report on the possibility of providing satisfactory water supplies on the stock route between

⁷³ Gillen 1968: 23-4.

⁷⁴ Un-labelled news clipping in file 6/9/1892 AA Series A1640/Item 92/410.

⁷⁵ SRSA GRG53 166/3 Book 93 'Windmill for bore' 25/1/1900: 40-49.

⁷⁶ Waters on stock routes vol 1; Pastoral Land Commission 1891: 124, 127; SRSA GRS 1 1903/33; AA Series A1640/ Item 92/410.

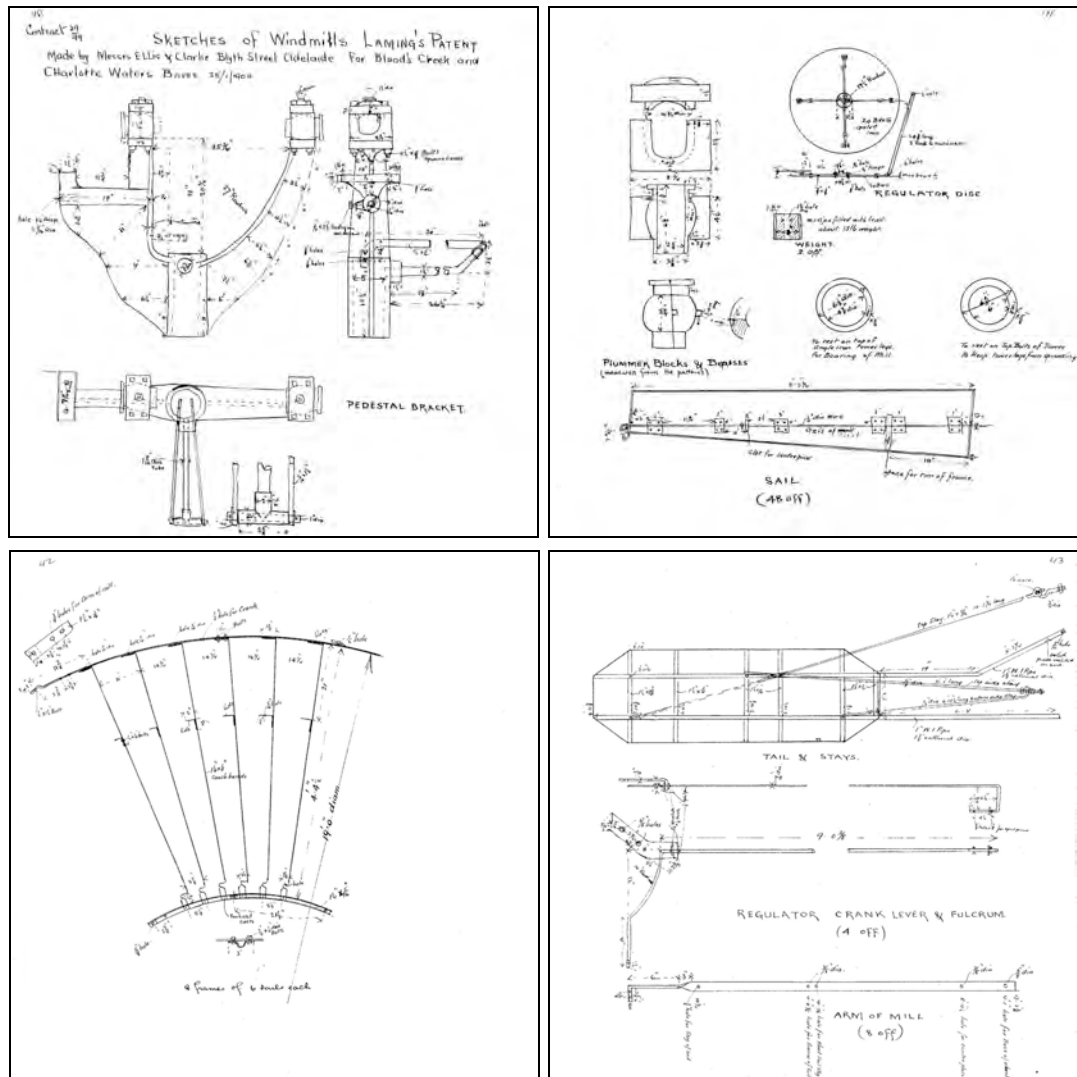


Fig 4.7: Sketches of Windmills Lamings Patent made by Messrs Ellis and Clarke Blyth Street Adelaide for Blood's Creek and Charlotte Waters Bores 25/1/1900. SRSA GRG53/166/3 Book 93 Sketch books Property and Survey Branch Engineer-In-Chiefs Office

Alice Springs and Charlotte Waters'.⁷⁷ Besides recommending a new bore hole at Charlotte Waters, as the 'existing borehole has fallen into disrepair' (it was built in the early 1890s), plus another at 10 miles and one approximately 20 miles NNW, he concluded that the users of the facilities were part of the problem: 'users of public water supplies are improvident and very careless of the rights of others',⁷⁸ and he recommended some form of monitoring.

An earlier report from the South Australian Engineer in chief to the Minister controlling the Northern Territory regarding the state of the track from Bloods Creek to Charlotte Waters provides a vivid picture of the kind of 'carelessness' that Ward referred to, in the context of congestion of diverse users at any single watering point. It tells of the tensions and prejudices that existed amongst them:

from information which I have gathered from the blacks and on travels south and up the track, that [the poor condition of the fences] is largely due to the Afghans with camel teams who camp right up against the wells where in most cases there is little timber for firewood and in consequence they help themselves to any posts which can be easily removed. On the other hand, Afghans with camel teams camping so close to the wells are a great nuisance to the traveling public in this I am speaking from personal experience I have seen 30 or 40 camels hanging about a trough all day long with their loading stacked up more than a chain away and travelers coming to the well with horses sometimes find it impossible to get their horses to drink as they are frightened of the camels and also of the loading ... recommend prohibit from camping within half a mile of any well or water hole and in my opinion there is no doubt that the conditions of the buckets is largely due to the manner in which the Afghans knock them about.

Yr obedient servant
EC Grundy 16 March 1903⁷⁹

The new Charlotte Waters bore was built. In 1925 Philipa Bridges, sister of the then South Australian State Governor, on tour on a camel, passed through Charlotte Waters, and described the family of Mr Johnson camped where he was 'just completing the new well'.⁸⁰ The water had to be brought from the bore to the telegraph station on a donkey cart.⁸¹ Rainwater collected from the roof and collected in a large underground tank remained a precious resource,

⁷⁷ SRSA GRS 8702/00009/124/09/00031.

⁷⁸ Ward 1923: 27.

⁷⁹ SRSA GRS 1 1903/33 State of the track Bloods Creek – Charlotte Waters.

⁸⁰ Bridges 1925: 164.

⁸¹ Bingey Lowe pers comm., Macfarlane field notebook 25 July 1996.

however. Travelling ornithologist SA White comments in 1913 that Cox, the telegraph officer at Charlotte Waters, 'provided a cup of tea with milk in it [from the goats], and made from rainwater which is valued like gold in this country. We will never forget Cox's cup of tea.'⁸²

The telegraph line passed from the Telegraph Office to the control of the Post Office in September 1924 and there followed a flurry of correspondence about responsibility for the Charlotte Waters bore. The provision of water for travelling stock was a duty of the staff. Large numbers of cattle, camels and horses moving along the route and the Post Office's own goats and horses relied on the water. An idea of the constant maintenance involved in ensuring they did not silt up and the pumps were working and troughs intact, the costs and labour required, is given in a series of inter-departmental negotiations and a litany of gallons and flow rates:

24 June 1925 Memo to Post Master General's Department

... when the surface waters are finished, stock travelling south water at Old Crown Point, the water at which is very brackish, a distance of 50 miles, and no further water is available until they reach Charlotte Waters. The nearest water south is at Bloods Creek a distance of 33 miles. In addition to providing water for travelling stock the bore at present provides water for the Postal Department's horses (11) and 550 sheep and goats. Other than the bore the nearest water is at Finke Well nine miles distant. Between this well and Charlotte Waters the road is very heavy due to drift sand. The rainfall at Charlotte Waters is most uncertain.

A temporary worker has been employed at 259 pounds per annum in connection with the bore since 9/4/25 and he has performed no other station duty as he is required to effect repairs to and keep engine, pump, and troughing clean when not engaged in pumping or watering stock. In 2 months 952 camels, 264 horses and 4998 cattle were watered.

From 6/9/24 the date the Postal Dept took over the control of the bore, to 8/4/25, the following travelling stock were watered – 860 camels, 573 horses 1150 cattle (charged per drink) as well as the Department's own stock.

This required 58 hours of pumping, and attending the bore for 16 hours stock watering as well.

It was personally observed on 4/6/25 a string of 76 camels arrived at the bore at 8pm. and as they had come over a very dry stage it

⁸² White 1914: 56.

was necessary that they should be watered on arrival. Again on Sunday 7/6/25 a mob of 546 cattle arrived at the bore at 10am. And as these cattle had previously watered at Old Crown Point, the water at which is very brackish, the watering of these could not be delayed, further there is no feed available at the bore, and for some considerable distance surrounding it, and in consequence cattle cannot be camped at the bore waiting for water.

The memo makes a case for employment of a labourer whose entire responsibility is with overseeing the bore, rather than the postal officers having to do this work in addition to their other duties:

N.T. 25/2623 Memorandum re Charlotte Waters Bore: 17/9/25

The bore is equipped with a 7 horsepower oil engine, pump, two 10,000 gallon tanks and two lengths of troughing laid side by side, each 73 feet long. The bore is 624 feet deep and the water rises to within 140 feet of the surface. The pump is sunk 44 feet into the water and therefore has a pumping depth of 184 feet. The pump raises the water at the rate of 1000 gallons an hour, therefore to fill both tanks would take 20 hours continuous pumping ... a bullock or camel consumes about 10 gallons of water at one drink, therefore, with both tanks full there would be sufficient water to give a mob of 1000 bullocks one drink each. The troughs when full hold about 400 gallons of water and when a mob of cattle is being watered it is necessary that someone should be on the spot to prevent waste. Further in order to keep the pump valves clear of sediment it is essential that the engine should be run for a little while daily, even when the tanks are full.

At the present time stock travelling from Alice Springs to Oodnadatta practically follow the Telegraph Line route. ... any failure on the part of the authorities to maintain a water supply at Charlotte Waters whilst travelling stock are on the road would mean that such stock would have to face a dry stage of about 83 miles. The result would undoubtedly be a very bad smash. The responsibility for which would in all probability have to be borne by this [Postal] Department.⁸³

Within only five years however, the pressure was off Charlotte Waters. In 1930 the Post Office wrote that 'since the establishment of rail communication with Alice Springs the number of travelling stock passing Charlotte Waters and requiring water has considerably diminished, and the necessity for the retention of a pumper has disappeared.' Care of the bore was taken over by the Police Department in 1930.⁸⁴

⁸³ AA A659 1944/1/2894 N.T. 25/2623 Memorandum re Charlotte Waters Bore: 17/9/1925.

⁸⁴ Memo from Post-Master General's Department to Department of Home Affairs, 8/9/30 S.A. 323/30, AA A659 1944/1/2894.

The context of this continual effort to provide adequate bores is an official government policy which follows uninterruptedly from the principle of 'just add water'. There was an imperative, tinged with moral purpose, about working bores, and their increase. Bores were 'monuments to enterprise' as ornithologist Captain SA White, collecting and travelling through the country, enthused:⁸⁵

One can see at a glance what a great boon this artesian water is to the country. These bores are veritable oases in the desert, where the weary traveller can feast his eyes on an abundance of water ... the desert cattle can suck at the water all day long and wander far back at night to feed having no fear of the pools drying up ... and left to die a lingering death.⁸⁶

The storage of water in the form of vegetables grown in homestead gardens was widely emphasised and admired, part of the evidence for the potential the deserts held. Vegetables grew well in the sandy soil given plentiful bore-derived water, provided it was not too salty. At Oasis Bore homeland Irrwanyere residents planted an orchard and there were on-going plans for vegetables there, and at Anniversary Bore. In 1889 explorer Tietkens describes the cabbages, turnips and cauliflowers of the Eringa station with appreciation.⁸⁷ The Federal Homestead garden, with its beds marked out with bottles was impressive. Bingey Lowe remembers it: 'Federal, that's a good place. I been in that house many times. One with the bottles; good garden full melon, cucumber, pumpkin. Lots of nanny goats.'⁸⁸ (fig 4.8, 4.9). Planting gardens may be seen as a bore-water based parallel to the practice of storing water in the form of grain in a granary on the Finke River, as described by Giles (above).

'Just add water' was an internally consistent perspective. It made sense as far as it went; adding more water until variability in supply was ironed out did work

⁸⁵ White 1914: 39.

⁸⁶ White 1914: 39.

⁸⁷ Tietkens 1891: 67.

⁸⁸ Macfarlane field notebook 20 July 1996.



Fig 4.8: Federal Homestead garden in late 19th century. 'Old Timers' collection. Alice Springs Library, no date.



Fig 4.9: Federal Homestead garden beds, 1996.

to an extent. But following a vision of how things should happen made it unresponsive to what did happen, particularly the disconnection of provision of stock feed from provision of water.⁸⁹ In its instrumental push, the approach failed to deal with the gap between expectations and experience of the early applications of pastoral procedures in the arid regions of South Australia. As early as 1891 local pastoralists' testimonies presented to the 1891 Land Commission hearings reflected their ambivalence. At that time, after 20 years of pastoral activity, there had been no increase in numbers of cattle and sheep for many years, and in extensive stretches of country the would-be pastoralists had abandoned their leases.

The Pastoral Commission summarised the causes of these failures as out-competition by adjoining colonies that 'enjoyed a heavier rainfall'; the expenses of dealing with rabbits that had rapidly diminished the carrying capacity of the land; prohibitive distance from market with no train or reliably watered stock routes; an underlying mistrust by the pastoralists of the Parliament's management of leases, plus 'the omission on the part of the Legislature to offer sufficient inducements for the development of country by searching for water'.⁹⁰ Experienced locals talked of the bush being killed by stocking rather than being 'improved' by it.⁹¹ Nevertheless, solutions to this were sought in terms of greater government investment in fencing and especially in bores.

The continued imperative drive for development through water provision is illustrated by the terms set out for McDills pastoral lease, at Andado to the north of Mt Dare:

Agreement with McDill Bros of Andado re bore leases 8 July 1925⁹²

The Commonwealth Government agreed to sink two bores in the said lands incidental to the development of the Northern Territory.

The State Geologist is to determine the position of the windmill and receiving tanks and troughing and such other equipment as is

⁸⁹ See Ratcliffe 1936, 1937. Specifically: 'Whenever and wherever pastoral settlement is imposed on semi-desert areas with a variable and uncertain rainfall, the problem of the survival of certain components of the vegetation is automatically raised, and the species that are threatened happen to be those fodder plants on which the stability of pastoral enterprise largely depends; that is the long-lived drought resistant plants on which the stock fall back when the shorter-lived feed fails (Ratcliffe 1937: 24).

⁹⁰ Pastoral Land Commission 1891: xx.

⁹¹ eg Pastoral Land Commission 1891: 112.

⁹² AA Series A 3280 Item P8420 McDills bore agreement.

necessary or convenient for the proper extraction and utilisation of water from the bore.

Supply of good stock water not less than 7000 gallons average daily to be repaid and maintained by lessees.

The lessee is to keep such bore in thorough repair and order and its equipment (if any) sufficiently oiled and all bolts and fastenings of such equipment tightened up and all tanks properly tarred and will take every other possible care of and give every other necessary attention to such bore.

The terms agreed regarding the continued development of the land revolved around the provision of water – the Commonwealth was prepared to invest in water, promising money in the expectation of returns. But these returns in this area constantly fell below expectations, as the ensuing review of the terms of the McDills lease shows:

The bores were placed in charge of the former lessee from 1 April 1928. The land was resumed in 1935. George Thomas McDill transferred his interest to Robert David McDill in 1938. Only 300 pounds of the rent due were paid by 1926. The lessee has represented to the Commonwealth that owing to droughts and adverse seasons he is unable to pay any further amount in respect of the cost of sinking and equipping the said bores. The Commonwealth releases the lessee from obligation to pay the Commonwealth 5700 pounds. The lessee will pay 25 pounds per annum for use of the bore on the lease to be made concurrently with the rent. The bore is the property of the Commonwealth and the lessee has no claim or right thereto or therein.⁹³

This attitude and policy continued unaltered into the 1940s:

The Government has decided to assist new settlers and particularly returned settlers by providing water on their holdings where adequate surface supplies are not available. The Government will determine the number of watering places to be provided and will bore for water. The cost of all unsuccessful bores will be borne by the Government. The successful bores will be equipped and handed over to the lessee, who will be required to repay the cost involved on easy terms over a fairly long period.⁹⁴

⁹³ Extract from the Commonwealth of Australia Gazette 119, 3 June 1943 regarding the McDill lease, AA Series A 3280 Item P8420.

⁹⁴ AA A431/1 1948/378. Letter 4/9/1946 from Commonwealth Department of Interior to Assistant Manager of Southern Cross Engine and Windmill Co.

Windmill wars

This government policy meant that a large number of bores and associated equipment were needed. Providing them was a competitive business.

The windmill is an icon of inland Australia. Although it is such a familiar shape on the horizon, few non-pastoralists think about its explicit function; using wind power to raise artesian water into surface tanks and troughs for stock to drink.

In 1944, Southern Cross Engine and Windmill Co. Pty Ltd of Sydney NSW, the manufacturers of 'the Rolls Royce of windmills' as their advertising flyer says, instigated a vigorous two-year long letter campaign targeting the Department of the Interior, Commonwealth Government, Canberra. This was the department responsible for managing government stock routes in the Northern Territory. Southern Cross demanded what they saw as a fairer share of the Department's business. They claimed that Comet had an unfair advantage, having made a deal with the government earlier, and that an inappropriate standardisation of equipment was being practiced, when instead there should be different equipment for different needs and depths of artesian water. They wrote 'the Northern Territory is the only part of Australia where Southern Cross windmills have not been predominant, but that position is fast changing. 'Comet' were first in the field ... owners have used them for so long there is a natural reluctance to make a change. Without change there can be no improvements.'⁹⁵

At the same time, as part of the same principle of boosting the available watering points on stations, private wells continued to be dug into the shallower ground waters. On Mt Dare station, 38 had been sunk by the 1950s, for example.⁹⁶ The common pattern of development was for a known existing 'native well' or soakage to be dug out by hand and shored as a well. Later an even deeper shaft would be dug nearby with drilling equipment. For example, Bingey Lowe took us with pride to Paradise Bore (fig 1.2b). He dug this well himself with two mates, probably in the 1940s, using a pick and shovel and a

⁹⁵ AA A431/1 1948/378.

⁹⁶ See Appendix 3.

scoop pulled by a camel.⁹⁷ They chose a place near the Finke River channel where there was an existing native well. The first two shafts they tried had no water and they had to start again. Later a deeper bore was drilled (fig 4.10, 4.11).

Bingey Lowe reminisces:

Built this long time ago, when a young fella. ... This tank, when this one no water, have this dam down here. I was using that scoop on the ground down there. You got camel in front, or horse, and you come around and hold on, got to be careful all the time or you get [acts out being hit on the chin by the pole flying up. Laughter.]

Dig down 100 yard, old Bingey Lowe. ...

That one with the pulleys that's another bore there, engine on this end, and this is bore with windmill. 2 bores. When no wind, have the engine. I was out here nearly 4-5 months. Hard work digging well. Camped here, just out from tree. No small trees around then, good open country. That was all clear.

So you seen Paradise now.

This bore and that one with cap on, H[?] Smith done them, the bore man, after.

300 feet. Pick and shovel all the way until you finish. And windlass (acts turning handle of windlass) on top. Man go down there and fill up the sand and water mix. Whip wheel with camel or horse to pull it up. Empty one goes down, full one up. That's what you call 'whip'. Everybody young fella, you know. Just working. Happy. As long as get enough bullock meat!

You can go round and take a picture after lunch.

Paradise Bore 28 September 1997

B. Lowe, H. Taylor, M. Stuart, D. Ah Chee present.

Transcript of video recording

Attachment to such a place is palpable in Bingey Lowe's personal history of labour and involvement. This construction was a historical modification that simultaneously left its imprint on the builder as much as it changed the land.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Macfarlane field notebook 28 September 1997.

⁹⁸ See Bradley 1993.



Fig 4.10: Paradise bore fittings. September 1997



Fig 4.11: Scoop dragged by horse or camel in digging the Paradise well. 1997

The labour of Indigenous people built the bores and associated stockyards and worked the cattle.⁹⁹ But only a minority of them were supported by the formal station economy or rations. For most, the impact of cattle and rabbits on the limited, richer parts of the landscape¹⁰⁰ and overall reduction in diversity and productivity of the land between, meant increasingly restricted access to the full range of potential water sources and livelihood of the area, either because they were occupied or depleted.¹⁰¹

For Aboriginal people not directly employed on the stations there were few choices, especially when there was a drought: either move off to other stations for work or for rations, or base themselves at remote wells and bores. The terms of land leases in South Australia allowed for Indigenous peoples' unimpeded access to lands, including 'springs and surface waters' and ensured the 'unobstructed right' to 'use, occupy, dwell on and obtain food and water' from the land.¹⁰² The people who informally lived at the latter were opportunistic occupants, not employed by the station, out of sight, their presence not officially sanctioned. In Michel de Certeau's terminology, they were practicing *la perruque*, or 'poaching'.¹⁰³ That is, they were 're-introducing' techniques drawn from their previous experience and knowledge into the new order of the pastoral industry. They utilised the standing infrastructure of water provision at no cost themselves, but with no accumulated gain to themselves either. Kimber's discussion of 'claypan squatters' indicates that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people lived on these margins of the stations.¹⁰⁴ The terms of their exchanges were mixed, but Indigenous men and women again provided labour, working possibly for themselves, possibly for, or with, the small-holders, and at least some Indigenous women were sexual partners to white squatters.

⁹⁹ Pastoral Lands Commission 1891 testimonies of FJ Gillen, AD Breden, WG South 1891: 112, 125, 127.

¹⁰⁰ Smith and Morton 1990: 271.

¹⁰¹ Foster 2000: 15-16.

¹⁰² See Foster 2000 on terms of leases.

¹⁰³ de Certeau 1984: 25-6, 30, 36-7.

¹⁰⁴ Kimber 1992: 128ff.

In order to explore the local details of particular interactions between people with each other and with water places in this context of a pastoral landscape, I have focused on two contrasting local examples: Anniversary Bore and Dalhousie Homestead.

Associative clustering at Anniversary Bore

Bingey Lowe's selected a difficult-to-access spot on the lower Finke for the location of a new Irrwanyere homeland where he would live in 1997. His reasons behind his choice are revealing. He was influenced by strong past associations with a cluster of structures and the people's stories that they held, located nearby. Firstly, he had spent many nights looking after the cattle in the yards he helped build beside the newer Anniversary Bore (probably in the 1950s). Secondly, these yards stand near an earlier whip well, known as Taylor's Well, after Dick Taylor, Harry's father, who lived there with his family off and on in the early twentieth century (fig 4.12, 4.13). Bingey Lowe remembered stories of them and their flattened kerosene tin dwellings. Archaeologically, their residence is remembered in a characteristic mixed assemblage scattered over a compacted area of sand, including twisted wire, clay pipe stems, tobacco tins, a liniment jar, a teacup fragment, olive glass 'Pick axe' beer bottle (dating between 1912 and 1921¹⁰⁵), a saddle pommel and hobble chain, food tins and two metal wash tubs. Sixty metres away was the goat yard, with the dunes rising behind them. A grave marked by wooden posts lies to the east. Prior occupation of the area is attested to in the scatters of stone artefacts recorded on the sandy ground.¹⁰⁶

Thirdly, the area's associative cluster for Bingey Lowe continued with a 'stud yard', a basic form built from posts driven into the ground close together (fig 4.14). This is close to the nearby Ewillina water hole, narrow and steep-sided, which can stretch to four miles long. There is an unusually rich scatter of pre-colonial material in the form of numerous grindstones, varied flaked stone artefacts and well-preserved non-introduced animal bone. Finally, the powerful Ewillina Carpet Snake ceremonial place lies on the other side of the waterhole. It is marked by many stone arrangements on a low gibber covered rise – lines,

¹⁰⁵ Reed 1977.

¹⁰⁶ Macfarlane field notebook Friday 3 October 1997.



Fig 4.12: Bingey Lowe, Harry Taylor and Deane Ah Chee at Anniversary Bore, October 1997



Fig 4.13: Stockyard at Anniversary Bore, October 1997

cairns, upright stones, circles. Bingey Lowe was a custodian of the songs for this place.

An important question here concerns whether there is a difference between organising life around a technologically derived water point and basing it around an autochthonous, long-term water hole or well? They have different ontologies – a different status in the world. For one thing, new water points have no direct reference within the stories of the Ancestors which weave the country together. However, it seems that, through usage, the area's stories have informed the various additions by association. The additions have been incorporated as elaborations of an already extant focus in the landscape. This has ameliorated their potential contrast in status. An additive process can be identified. Novel forms that were congruent with existing landscape elements that already 'made sense' were able to be taken up within the corresponding set of ideas and practices.¹⁰⁷

Anthropologist Bill Sillar talks of 'technology as philosophy'.¹⁰⁸ He makes the strong point that 'technological traditions are fully embedded within their cultural and historical contexts'.¹⁰⁹ He uses the example of the primacy of weaving in Andean society, which is a kind of theme or metaphor for appropriate ways to do things: so people weave and tie wood, rather than cut and nail it, and developed the quipu notation system. These underlying metaphors run through all aspects of the lived world, and affect choice of what will be construed as appropriate technology.¹¹⁰ And so novel technologies which are construed as congruent with what already 'makes sense' will lead to their incorporation: conceptual links make transfer of technology possible.¹¹¹

In this case, it can be argued that people's prior experience of wells and their maintenance was congruous with the establishment of the new bores. The

¹⁰⁷ Anthropologist Howard Morphy, talking of his experience with Yolngu people, says that identification of country can be stretched, based on extension to places with similar form. Even where people have died and the knowledge of a place is attenuated, such extension allows them to act properly, if uncertainly. They are 'continually interpreting signs in the land that could link it with the mythological past, which ... remained very much part of its present'. This is a mechanism for recreating linkages. It is not a reinterpretation, but a process of discovery or revelation (Morphy 1995: 184, 186).

¹⁰⁸ Sillar 1996: 274.

¹⁰⁹ Sillar 1996: 283.

¹¹⁰ Sillar 1996: 274, 283.

¹¹¹ Sillar 1996: 282.

network of new bores unintentionally replicated the pre-existing pattern of known water points and flexible movement between them. The cattle industry 'worked' here, and was able to endure, because of the congruence that existed between their management with already well-established practices and knowledge. Indigenous people who provided the knowledge and labour that kept the cattle industry running could continue to visit the important places in their country and teach it in their language.¹¹²

As part of establishing the new 'homelands' at Anniversary Bore (as well as at Oasis Bore, and the tourist camp ground at Three O'Clock Creek), in addition to rain water tanks, new bores with solar panels to run the pumps, were sunk at each (fig 4.15). In an example of the two-way relationship of agency between waterplaces and people discussed above, Bingey Lowe described his plans for a garden and chooks: 'black ones, like me! I like black chooks they have the most eggs', and camels – he wanted to put out a trough so dingoes and camels could come and drink.¹¹³ The residents at Oasis Bore had planted a grape, fig, passion fruit and gum saplings, and a lawn under shade cloth (fig 1.8).¹¹⁴ They had provided a water trough for the birds to drink from (fig 4.16); there was now a bounty of water and food for all to be shared on the western edge of the Simpson dune field, and no need to trap the birds now.

¹¹² They had legislated access rights to the land under the terms of the pastoral leases (see Foster 2000: 13). In the Dalhousie Springs lease, issued 1/5/1873 it excepts from the lease given 'for pastoral purposes' 'out of the said to the aboriginal inhabitants of the Province and their descendants during the continuance of this demise, full and free right of ingress egress and regress into upon and over the said Waste Lands of the Crown hereby demised and every part thereof and in and to the springs and surface water thereon and to make and erect such wurlies and other dwellings as the said aboriginal natives have heretofore been accustomed to make and erect and to take and to use for food birds and animals *ferae naturae* in such manner as they would have been entitled to do if this demise had not been made ... SRSA GRG 3570/1/42 Lease No 2213 Issued under Waste Lands Act of 1867.

McGrath (1987: 106, 158-9) discusses the maintenance of traditional life and associations to land in the Northern Territory cattle industry.

See Ferguson 1991: 29 regarding cultural incongruity, Head and Fullagar 1997 regarding congruity.

¹¹³ Macfarlane field notes 29 October 1996.

¹¹⁴ Macfarlane field notes Tuesday 9 July 1996.



Fig 4.14: Stud yard near Ewillina waterhole and Anniversary Bore, October 1997



Fig 4.15: New tank with solar panels at Anniversary Bore, October 1997

Novel forms of objects, or in this case, of water provision, can be assimilated into existing categories and in the process they may create a new order, a changed context; one which has a doubled quality of mobilising prior conditions, at the same time as introducing novelty and distinctiveness. The way they are used, grounded in prior experience, twists and extends the meaning of the water places.¹¹⁵ The domesticated water of a bore, in this area at least, becomes neither a pure object of European permanence, nor one of Indigenous mobility.

Whatever grief and hurt was felt at the trampling of waterholes and springs by cattle, and the disruption of access to them that was suffered in the process of these reconfigurations was not captured in the texts, nor in the reminiscences I was told. However, the available texts do provide a glimpse of duress experienced by some managers of the Dalhousie Springs station, below. The springs had no voice, but the declaration of the Witjira national park in 1986 was a recognition of need for an altered land use, made in the context of shifting land values in the 1970s which favoured conservation.¹¹⁶ The Dalhousie Springs were eventually included on the National Heritage List in 2009 for their 'outstanding heritage value to the nation'.¹¹⁷ It is 25 years since the cattle were removed from Dalhousie/Mt Dare station, and the increasing numbers of tourists are now managed so that the ecological diversity of the Dalhousie springs and water holes may recover.

¹¹⁵ Thomas 2002: 196.

¹¹⁶ Cohen 1989: 3-4; Davey et al 1985: 7.

¹¹⁷ <http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/national/witjira-dalhousie-springs/index.html>, accessed 4/2/2010.



Fig 4.16: Water trough at Oasis homestead with Zebra Finches drinking, 1996

Dalhousie Homestead: a case of mistaken identity

Dalhousie was the earliest established station homestead of the region. It was built in the 1870s from the local limestone, at the southern end of the Dalhousie Springs. There are no direct records of the intentions of the original lease holders in their choice of location, but all the indications point to their choice being a case of mistaken identity: the ‘singular spectacle ... welcome sight!’ of the first sight of the springs by the Overland Telegraph Line surveyors in 1870¹¹⁸ was over-optimistically misinterpreted. The original lease title captures the focus of this hopefulness evocatively. It shows the 10 miles by 10 miles of the leasehold centred squarely on the springs. These are depicted with a pen and wash picture of green reeds (fig 4.17a, 4.17b).¹¹⁹ A descriptive newspaper article from 1905 clearly articulates this perception of the springs as central:

The huge natural reservoir is situated almost in the centre of the run, and the stock can patronize it from all points with ease, while in lean seasons the reeds and rushes are their main subsist.¹²⁰

The solid homestead was built according to a set of imported expectations that valued permanency, fixity, and tried to construct it on the promise of the apparent abundance of the springs. Like the call for more bores, however, the vision of the springs’ potential was a selective one. It did not attend to the context – the saline and erosive sediments that turned into a bottomless bog after any rain, and their isolation. As Mike Smith points out that the presence of permanent water is not sufficient in itself to sustain occupation. It is the *density* of water sources that are accessible that counts, and the resource base which they support.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ C. Giles 1894 3(3): 21.

¹¹⁹ SRSA GRS 3570/1 unit 42 Lease No 2213.

¹²⁰ *Adelaide Observer* 23 9 1905 cited by Kimber 1992: 123.

¹²¹ Smith 1989.

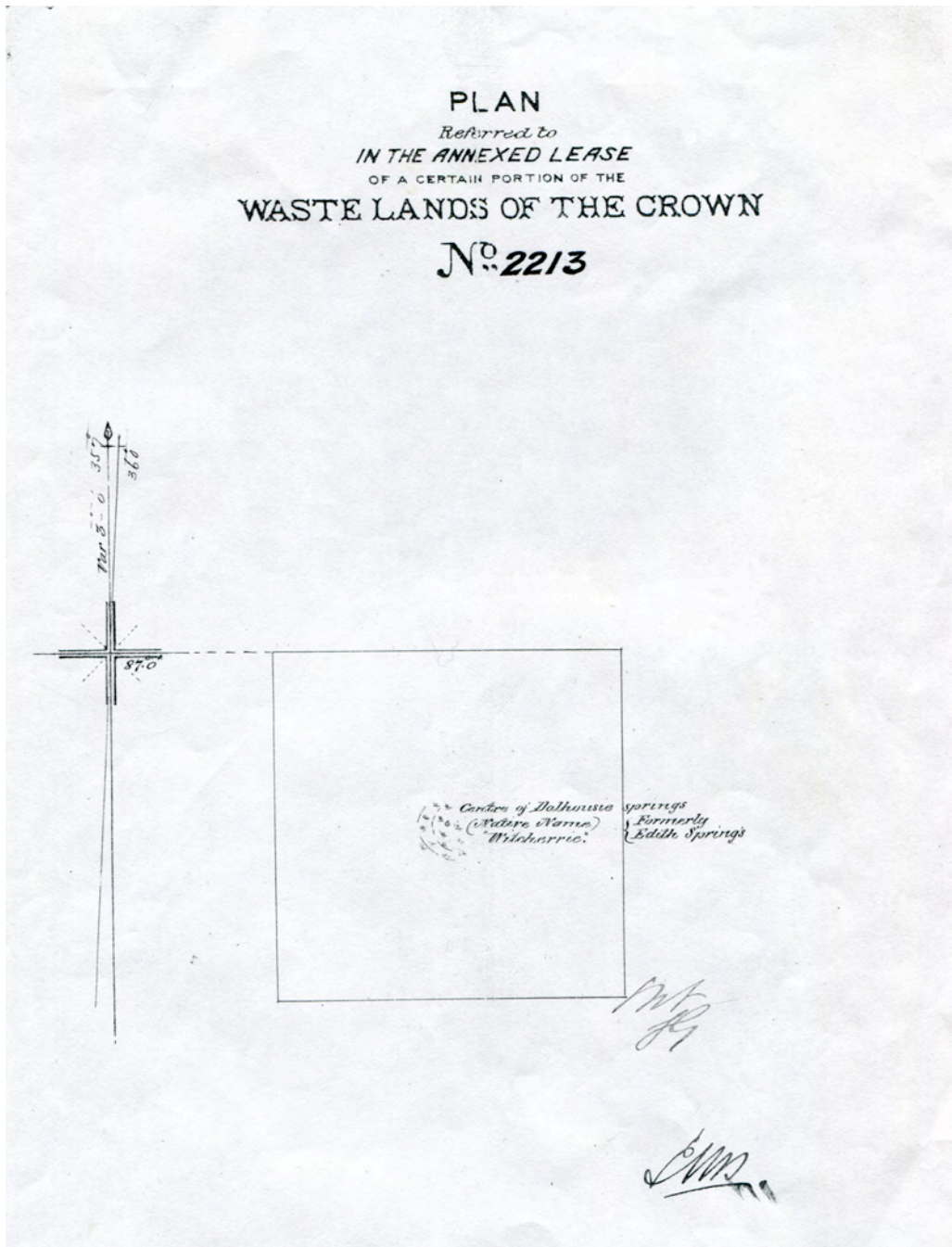


Fig 4.17a: Dalhousie Springs station lease, No 2213 issued under the Waste Lands Act of 1867, 1/5/1873, SRSA GRG 3570/1/42

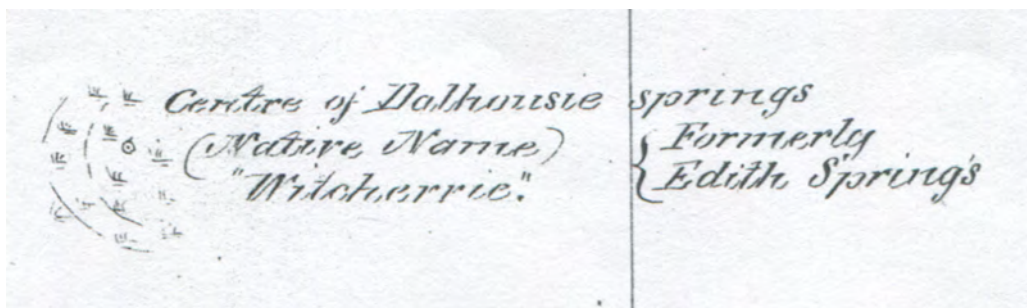


Fig 4.17b: Dalhousie Springs station lease 1873, detail

Attempts were made to irrigate with the water, unsuccessfully (fig 4.18) and hopes for the potential of the bounty of the water persisted:

I have been out with Mr Hill the Botanist of the [Barclay exploring] party through the Springs. He says the water from the hot spring would grow anything – especially lucerne. – there are a few nice flats that the water could be drained onto – Of course it would need making rabbit proof. He also says that cocoanuts would grow splendidly. If you would send me two or three cocoanuts and some lucerne seed I will plant them out there. ... If this would grow and be a success it would be a great thing, and could be carried on with very little expense.

I will send you some lucerne seed up but I doubt very much whether you will get much out of it, because the soda in the water will be rather too much for the lucerne seed. The same remark would apply to your garden. You want to keep changing the locality every season.¹²²

The springs were a regular watering place on the stock route in the late nineteenth century, with accounts of many mobs of sheep and cattle coming in from 'dried out' stations for water, as a last refuge for stock, even though the feed around the springs was eaten out.¹²³ Drover Allan Breadon describes successive droving parties plus a party of Lutheran missionaries, en route to Hermansburg to establish the Finke River Mission, all 'hung up' at Dalhousie due to lack of water for their travelling stock in May-June 1876:

... Dalhousie Springs. The cattle mob had got a couple of days ahead of us and had already been let go in the big springs to Flounder about 20 miles of High Reeds. The Lutheran Mission party were also camped there and had been there some time camped on a spring on the West Side of the main road. All the big springs being on the east side of the road. The Mission Party were bound for the Finke River to form what is now the Hermansburg Mission Station and like the rest of the parties were hung up until rain come. Their stock were mostly sheep a few head of cattle and Horse to draw their wagons. There was over 16 Hundred cattle on the springs and a few months later the Aringa Station 35 miles south west of Charlotte Waters had to shift their cattle on to Dalhousie Spring. The big main water hole at the Station was almost dry. A fish was caught in this Hole at low water that its weight 22 pounds. About the first week in May we had about 1 1/2 inches of rain and our General Manager Mr RE Warburton rode North. He came back in a few days and reported Bloods Creek had run and filled Hughes Hole but from there on only shallow claypan

¹²² PRG 247/11. Letter from Dalhousie Springs Manager FC Reid to leaseholder J Lewis 15 Feb 1910 and reply from Lewis 9 April 1910.

¹²³ Scherer 1975 [1963]: 40.

water. This cut the stage to Finke Crossing down to 90 miles. The Drover got orders to start muster at once as most of the cattle were out on the Tableland. He was to pick up all the cattle he could get handy and start on. He got away with about 600 leaving about 160 behind ...¹²⁴

Archaeologically, on the flats to the west of the homestead, where they are out of sight, we recorded at least 35 burnt limestone hearths, 0.5-1m in diameter. Four of these contained burnt bone, all of which was from cattle. These were surrounded by a dense scatter of nineteenth and early twentieth century ceramics, tobacco tins, ointment jars, an axe head, buttons. There was a kerosene tin modified to hold a fire, and a wash tub with square holes punched in it (with a pick?) presumably for use as a shower. These hearths, distributed in a patterned 5m or so apart, are interpreted as the remnants of regular camps by transiting stockmen and possibly Afghan camel train drivers (fig 4.19- 4.21).

It may have had permanent water, and been famous for the horses bred there, with its own racetrack.¹²⁵ But the view from the door of the homestead was bleak (fig 1.16). In 1913, ornithologist S.A. White visited the homestead, and recounts stories of one Manager's wife stationed there being driven nearly mad 'with the fearful solitude, the inexpressibly uncanny aspect of the country, and the graves of former residents always before her'. Another former Manager found that 'the depressing aspect of the place "got on his nerves"' to the extent that he 'sat and cried like a child'.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Breadon, Allan D. 'Reminiscences, 1875-1893', ML MSS. 953 CY Reel 1765 [no page numbers]. See also Scherer *Venture of Faith* 1975 [1963]: 40-1. The missionaries were trapped at Dalhousie Springs for almost 11 months.

¹²⁵ Michael-Podmore 1909: 87; Cohen 1989: 14.

¹²⁶ White 1914: 42, 44.



Fig 4.18: Abandoned agricultural machinery at Irrwanyere spring campground, 1997

White's impression of the 'badlands' setting of the homestead, immediately surrounding the green of the spring's palm trees, reeds and pool was most unfavourable.¹²⁷ For the Indigenous people forced to reconfigure their lives around the intervention of the pastoral enterprise in their springs, however, it was the homestead that was the source of dislocation. Looking at the contemporary ground surface shows spatial distinctions in the rich lag deposits accumulated through time which surround the homestead. These give evidence for some of the details of the form of these reconfigurations.

Just out of line of sight from the homestead, under a low ridge 600m west of the homestead was a cluster of nine stone circles, which are interpreted as the bases of huts or wurleys (given as 'iltha' in Lower Southern Arrernte in Gillen's Charlotte Waters language list)¹²⁸ (fig 4.22 - 4.24). These are associated with twentieth century ceramic fragments, a metal pannikin, several clay pipes – objects which reference those key elements of rationing and products of empire - tea, sugar, tobacco. There is even a washtub in which to bring water to this remove from the springs. There is a dense background scatter of a wide range of stone artefacts and of flaked glass: discarded whiskey bottles, imported to Adelaide from Glasgow and then brought 200km from Oodnadatta on a camel in the late nineteenth century, were redefined as a raw material for flaking (fig 4.25-4.27).

¹²⁷ White 1914: 42-3, 48.

¹²⁸ PRG 54/2/1-5 [Rough] notebooks kept by FG Gillen 1901-2. 'Fragments of native language as spoken at Charlotte Waters'.



Fig 4.19: Hearths north of Dalhousie Springs homestead



Fig 4.20: Hearth north of Dalhousie Springs homestead



Fig 4.21: Wash tub with holes for shower north of Dalhousie Springs homestead

Indigenous people were employed on the station.¹²⁹ Large numbers of extended family, probably about 50, camped on the margins of the main homestead, which was a ration station until 1921.¹³⁰ A photograph of their camp was taken in 1919, empty of the people and dogs who lived there; a still and quiet museum piece (fig 4.28). Comparing the background in the photo, these are likely to be the same huts as those we recorded archaeologically in 1997, enlivened by the associated materials.

“The Dalhousie blacks are making rain today and the creek will run tomorrow.”

‘The Dalhousie blacks are making rain today and the creek will run tomorrow’ is one of the sentences recorded on wax cylinders by Baldwin Spencer in March 1901 as a sample of Lower Southern Arrernte.¹³¹ The inclusion of this resonant phrase may suggest that the holding of a Rain ceremony by the people based around Dalhousie homestead was a current topic of conversation amongst the men he met at the Stevenson River. They were still performing ceremonies near the homestead in 1913, witnessed by the visiting ornithologist White. A large group of men and women, and dogs, were gathered, chanting, accompanied by tap sticks through the night, and on previous nights. White was told the ceremony was to mark a secondary burial, and those participating had gathered from Crown Point to Charlotte Waters – Lower Southern Arrernte country – at this southern spring.¹³²

After a life-span of 50 years providing what emerges as a tough and remote base for the pastoral operations of the springs, Finke floodout and stony tablelands, Dalhousie homestead was abandoned. The base, and the ration

¹²⁹ Foster 2000: 12.

¹³⁰ SRSA GRG 52/26/1. There are no systematic figures of the number of Aboriginal people at or near Dalhousie Station, only sporadic references: In 1898 a former manager complained that Dalhousie Station ‘only employed blacks’, and two white stockmen (Foster 2000: 17). In 1911 in letters between manager Reid and leaseholder John Lewis, Reid writes ‘The Blacks have all cleared out and I am now left without boys or lubras. One reason is they are scared of another tribe’. (May 10 1911 SLSA PRG 247/11). In 1921 Dr Herbert Basedow reported that there were 15 individuals at Dalhousie Springs, 8 at Bloods Creek and 13 at Federal homestead in 1921, and approximately 300 people in the central settled districts of northern SA between Hergott Springs and the NT border (AA CRS A3 item 22/2805).

¹³¹ AIAS Archive No 9206, recorded from wax cylinders, Cylinder No. 12, no date or location given in introduction, but follows from cylinder 11 which was ‘Sung at Stevenson River, March 22nd, 1901 by a member of the Arunta tribe’.

¹³² White 1914: 45-47.

station, was shifted away from the mound springs to a good bore and water holes on Abminga Creek, the current location of Mt Dare homestead.¹³³ Bingey Lowe remembered that as stockmen [in the late 1940s?] they ‘camped there, in the kitchens, smithy and big house, still had roof on, we went in in rain times’ and continued to use the stockyards.¹³⁴

The presence of permanent water was not sufficient in itself to sustain permanent occupation; a one to one match of the two elements did not follow. However, the descendants of the people of the area who camped on its margins are living there still, now Rangers in Witjera National Park (fig 4.29): an enduring presence.

In both of these examples, Anniversary Bore and Dalhousie Springs homestead, the story and the ethos of ‘digging deeper’ and of ‘moving on’ through a subsistence geography that is also sacred co-exist. Although starting from distinctly different understandings of relations to water, the sets of associated practices borrow from each other. They become entangled. They emerge not as mutually exclusive and successive stages, but as simultaneously implicated in the way all people now live in the region.

¹³³ The ration book heading for 1921 says ‘Dalhousie Springs now issued at Mt Dare’, an alternative existing station. SRSA GRG 52/26/1.

¹³⁴ Macfarlane field notebook 25 September 1997.

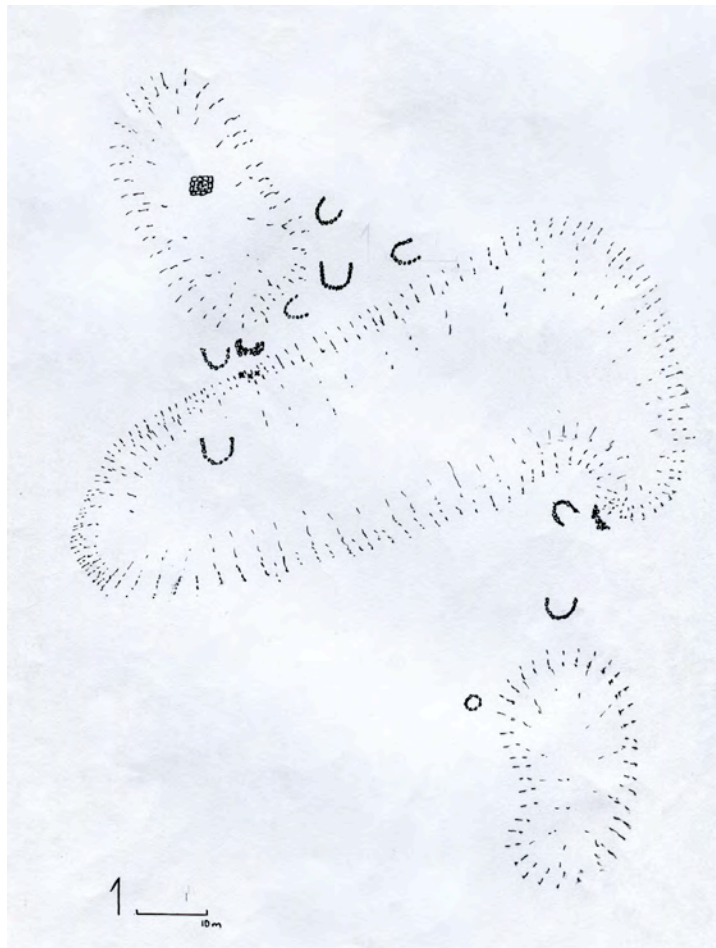


Fig 4.22: Plan of the cluster of hut bases 600m west of Dalhousie homestead, showing low rise and locations of stone bases (indicated by **U**)



Fig 4.23: One of the hut bases, November 1997 (scale = 30cm)



Fig 4.24: Looking east towards Dalhousie Springs homestead from the cluster of hut bases, November 1997

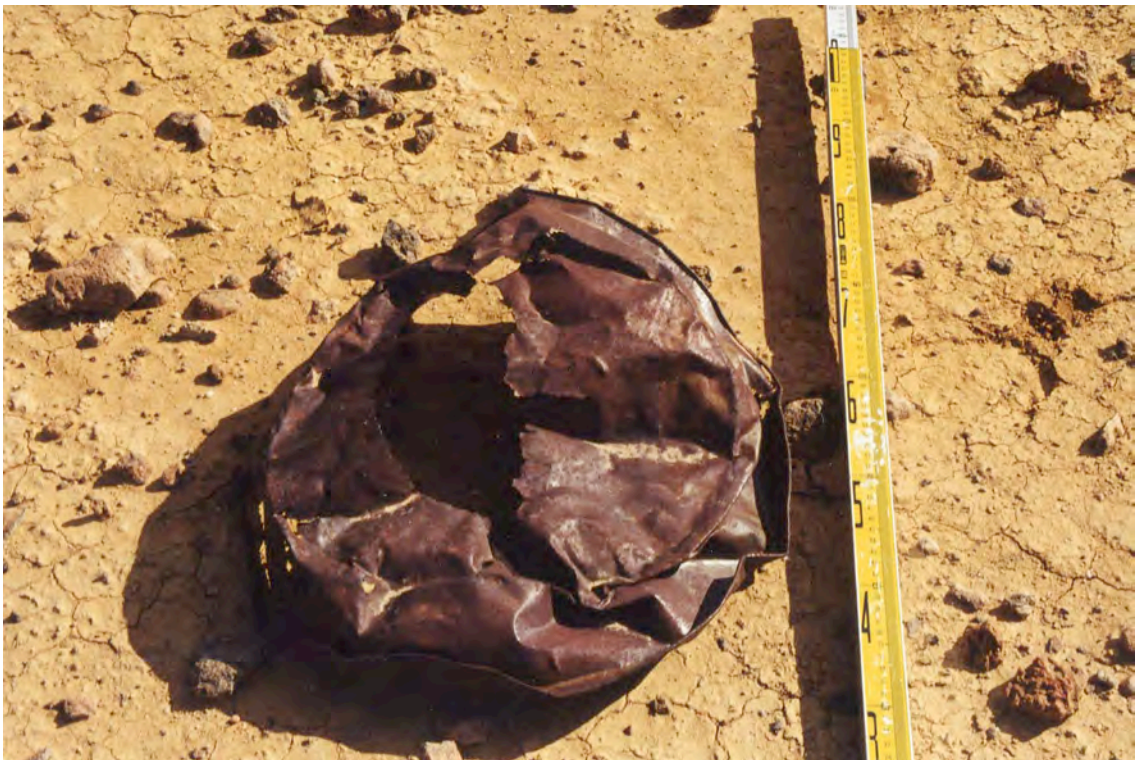


Fig 4.25: Wash tub on the ground surface close to the cluster of hut bases, 1997



Fig 4.26: Clay pipe associated with one of the hut bases, 1997



Fig 4.27: Flaked Glasgow whiskey bottle base on the flats north east of the hut bases, 1997



4.28: Photographs of Aboriginal huts at Dalhousie homestead, T Gill 1919, Royal Geographical Society of South Australia collection, Adelaide.

Water to think with

The Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation took their name from Irrwanyere, the name of a large hot spring of the Dalhousie group, which is a healing spring, both generative and regenerative. People with lung problems would bathe in its steamy 36 degree water, ringed with melaleucas and noisy with galahs and waterbirds, small fish nibbling the hairs on their legs. They also infused 'minty bush' leaves in the hot water.¹³⁵ The Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation have chosen to identify themselves with this core place and its associations (fig 2.13).¹³⁶

Each of the other more than 60 springs in the group has its own qualities and relationship to people's lives. They vary in size, temperature, mineralogy. Each is named. Some must be avoided, some were for drinking or fishing, some were swum in by all. They were associated with differing Ancestral actions. The springs are the meeting place of numerous Ancestral lines of travel and actions: Perentie (*Irunpa/Ngintaka*), Dingo, Cadney Lizard (*Angkarda*), Kingfisher (*Idnjundura*) and his sons the Two Boys, the Rainbow Serpent, and others.¹³⁷ As Deborah Rose summarises it, 'most of the "really important places" focus on water', and these are often 'places where a number of Dreamings meet up or cross over',¹³⁸ as they do at the Dalhousie Springs. 'Water, according to Indigenous accounts, does not happen by chance, but rather exists through the creative action on Dreaming beings'.¹³⁹

On a hot and cloudless day in October 1996, we have two Toyotas taking Irrwanyere members to visit various others of the springs in the area. First we go to Duck Spring, where Bingey Lowe used to go fishing. There is a dense curtain of reeds, behind which lies a large expanse of green, cool water. An old vehicle track to the pool is now indented below the surface, like a creek bed. The surface around the springs which we drive across under Bingey's direction is hard and compacted. Bingey uses trees and the relation, the shape of the path

¹³⁵ Macfarlane field notebook Sunday 14 June 1998.

¹³⁶ Ah Chee 2002; Kimber 1985.

¹³⁷ Hercus and Potezny 1996; Potezny 1989.

¹³⁸ Rose 2004: 38, also citing ethno-botanist Peter Latz 1995.

¹³⁹ Rose 2004: 36.

between them to navigate, re-locating springs he has not been to since the 1960s, despite his cataracts and the changes in the vegetation and land since the cattle were taken off in 1985.

Next he re-located a hot, blue green spring with bubbles rising from deep below and effervescing on the surface. He explains that this is due to a firestick, put into the pool where mosquitos went in; it is this which makes the spring hot.

Ilypikwa is the bubbler spring. Here is where Ancestral children were drowned after they teased the Perentie, 'laughing at him, te he, and touching his feet, he say 'leave me alone', and drowned them. You call out to them and they rise up, the bubbles. Men women and children used to swim in that one' Bingeey says. There weren't any reeds there in the 1960s, eaten out by the cattle. He checks to ensure we know the story - we repeat it back to him.¹⁴⁰ Rossie Finn's auntie was born here, and I see a broken clay pipe, glass fragments and old tins on the surface where people were camped in historic times. These are mixed with the dense scatter of pre-colonial stone artefacts on the sheet-eroded surface around the springs: grindstones, many flakes of chert, silcrete and quartzite, and formal flaked tool types - adzes and microliths.

¹⁴⁰Macfarlane field notebook 28 October 1996.



Fig 4.29: Irrwanyere Ranger's camp at Irrwanyere Spring, 1997

At the southern end of the group, near Dalhousie Homestead ruins, is a cluster of low hills covered in dark ironstone. The mound springs there are associated with the *Angkarda*, or Cadney lizard, on his way north into the Northern Territory. These springs are also surrounded by stone artefacts - grindstones, hammerstones, flakes and adzes, plus some animal bone fragments, and broken bottles and a clay pipe bowl. There are heat-shattered stones from hearths, with burnt emu eggshell in one of these. 'The old people who lived around Dalhousie homestead used to spend time here.'¹⁴¹

The Kingfisher Spring *Idnyundra*, is a freshwater spring, the agreed source for the new campground near the Irrwanyere spring. The Two Boys leave from here to cross the Simpson Desert east to Goyder's Lagoon, their mother following with a dish full of water.¹⁴² The surfaces around it are densely covered by a scatter of finely worked stone artefacts, flaking debris, grindstones fragments, and historic glass fragments.¹⁴³ These are evidence of its long term and repeated use from pre-colonial to historic times. The Rainbow Spring (fig 4.30, 4.31) is also fresh water, but is dangerous because of the Rainbow Serpent coiled within it, and was not, and is not, a source of water.

Through the lens of water, we see white explorers' and pastoralists' interests in water revealed as unitary and instrumental, directed towards making water as predictably and regularly available as possible. Their expectations of it are retained, despite experience, in a mode which disconnects water from its environmental and historical context, from the wider needs of other plants and animals.

Conclusion: Bingey Lowe's Polaroid photographs

In 1998 Bingey Lowe asked me for a Polaroid camera. He wanted it so that he could take pictures of the waterholes in the country he speaks for. It was the second year of big summer rains and the country was green, the waterholes full (fig 4.32). We went to Lalkara, or Eternity waterhole, on the south-western edge of the Simpson dune field. This is the picture Bingey took of that water (fig 4.33). There are no people or birds in his picture, only the waterhole, filling

¹⁴¹ Nicholson and Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation 1999: 16.

¹⁴² Hercus and Potezny 1996: 13.

¹⁴³ Macfarlane field notebook 31 October and 5 November 1996.

the horizon of the photograph. To my eyes it shared the formal simplicity and informed intensity of one of Rover Thomas' paintings.¹⁴⁴ Like Thomas' images, it captures the connections and affinities with the land. It does not 'simply depict the surrounding geography, but instead embraces its entirety through the spirituality of the *Ngarrangkarni* (Dreaming) and the events of the physical world'.¹⁴⁵

As discussed above (page 12), Bingey Lowe regarded photographs as proof – not just of the existence of the thing photographed, but of the occasion of the photographing, in this case our visit at a time of plenty. In his making a proof or record of water, I read an assertion of Bingey's attunement to the extreme dynamics of water and its crucial implications for living in that country.

Water is good to 'think with' rather than just 'about' because it is *vital* in the dual sense of being indispensable to life, and also invoking the presence of life, being 'full of life or activity', as the Oxford English Dictionary defines it. It is 'the source of all possible existence'.¹⁴⁶ Living water flows in the Bible¹⁴⁷ and in Australian Indigenous understandings of water.¹⁴⁸

All water is not the same. Its form and the history of peoples' interactions with it, stories of it, are important in distinguishing one place from another. Acquisition of water for practical use necessitates engaging at the same time with elements of its accumulated histories and meanings – it cannot be separated from its context.

¹⁴⁴ Macfarlane field notebook 12 June 1998. Rover Thomas was an East Kimberly stockman whose art, based in his knowledge of country, its form and Ancestral and human history, was internationally renowned. His life spanned approximately the same times as Bingey Lowe's (brief biography of Thomas given in the National Gallery of Victoria http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/rover_queenie/rover.html accessed 20 January 2010).

¹⁴⁵ *Rover Thomas: I want to paint* catalogue Art Gallery of New South Wales 2004

http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/media/archives_2004/rover_thomas, accessed 20/01/10).

¹⁴⁶ Eliade 1958: 188 cited by Strang 2005: 105.

¹⁴⁷ Strang 2005: 105.

¹⁴⁸ Rose 2004: 39.



Fig 4.30: Rainbow Spring, 2007

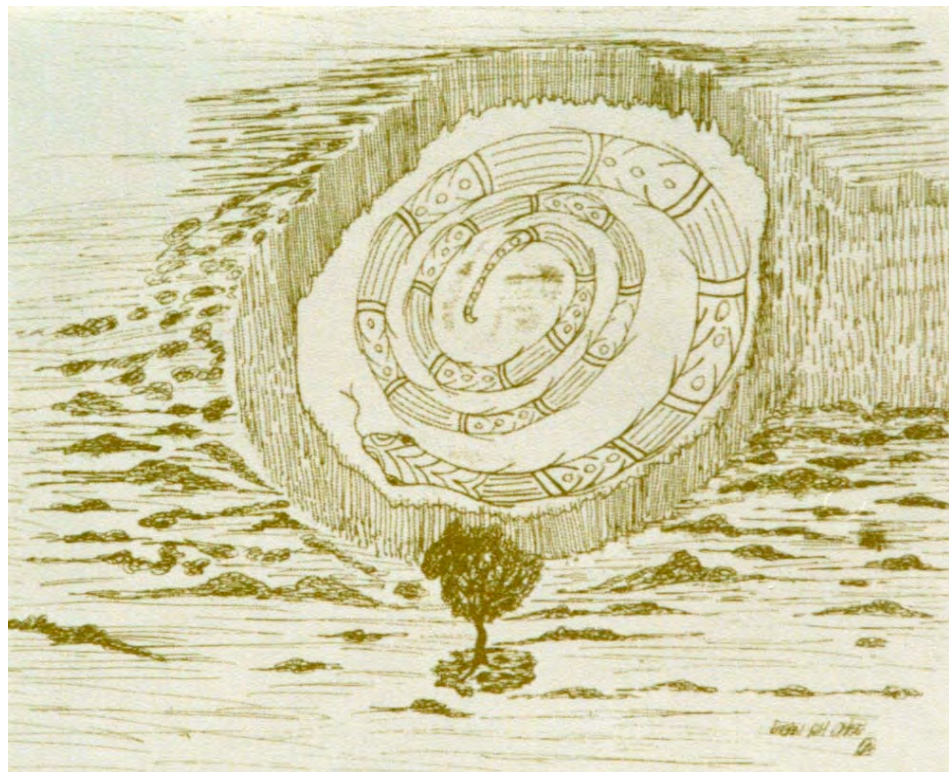


Fig 4.31: Drawing of the Rainbow Spring by Dean Ah Chee, used on the interpretation sign at the Irrwanyere spring camp ground, 2007



Fig 4.32: Lalkara waterhole full, at Eternity Bore, 2008



Fig 4.33: Bingey Lowe's Polaroid Polaroid photograph of Lalkara waterhole, 1998

To think about water as generic, as a resource, and to stop there, is to stop too soon. A 'resource' is more than a substance separable from its context. As well as providing basic requirements, it has a history and is an historical actor. It acts as part of the network of relationships through which people's lived experience constructs a meaningful world. There is not a clear binary division between water as a natural feature as opposed to objects which are cultural – water is cultural, not simply because it can be controlled and modified, but because it is woven into people's understandings of the world. A historical perspective on the specificities of people's relationship with a particular body of water through time allows a deeper appreciation of the dynamism of these relations, and how prior practices contribute to contemporary patterns.

Water places assemble memories and encourage renewal, not simply of bodily needs but of stories and connections, of identity, of the past, and of future possibilities. This sense is captured in Bingey Lowe's photograph, and the act of his taking it, at an intimate scale. 'Water' is not just for drinking, but for thinking with.



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.

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.

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.

³ McBryde 1987, 1993, 1997, 2000b.

⁴ Jones 2007: 357.

⁵ McBryde 1987: 259-262; Jones 2007: 353, 360.

disseminated their knowledge of the route, and the geography of the landscape.⁶ 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.⁷

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.⁸

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'.⁹ 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'.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ The important movement, stories and return to the place were all maintained, even though the mechanism was altered in the colonial context.

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

⁶ McBryde 2000b: 157; 1987: 269-71.

⁷ McBryde 1987: 261, 271-2.

⁸ McBryde 1987: 267.

⁹ McBryde 1987: 261, 268.

¹⁰ McBryde 1987: 267.

¹¹ Jones 2007: 370, 375-6.

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 It 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

¹² n.d. State Library of South Australia B17499.

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.

'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 country¹⁶ 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).

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.

**The Story of 'The Two Bush Girls and the Old Men Who Ran Off' told by
Bingey Lowe, 5 October 1997 at Anniversary Bore**

Right. Yes. From Dalhousie Springs, with the two girls, we left there, going to a place named Oolorina, 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 Bingeey'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'.¹⁸

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.¹⁹

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.

¹⁸ McBryde 2000.

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'.²⁰ 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-dwelling²¹ 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. Deane 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.²² 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'.²³ 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

¹⁹ Anthropologist Howard Morphy (1995: 187) refers to the 'triadic relation between an individual, the ancestral past and the physical landscape'.

²⁰ Ingold 1993: 167; 1986: 147-155.

²¹ Clifford 1992.

²² Macfarlane field notebook Sunday 28 September 1997: 90.

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,²⁴ 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.²⁵

Placenames

Placenames are shorthand labels for geographic features which allow us to refer to them, find them again, pass on information about them.²⁶ 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’.²⁷ 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

²⁴ Lewis 1976.

²⁵ Hercus 1990, Hercus in Rothwell 2008.

²⁶ Hercus and Simpson 2002: 11.

in story, song, dance, body decoration, sand painting.²⁸ 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.²⁹

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.³⁰ Having heard one of the verses sung by Jim Naylon *Arpilindika* (who was the father of Linda [Crombie, an elder, living in Birdsville]) at Pandie [station south of Birdsville], recorded by Tindale in 1934,³¹ 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.³²

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

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 *Atjilpe* Ancestor *Malbunga*, the boss of the Urumbula, leading off his mob on their journey.' Photo and text courtesy Luise Hercus 28 February 2008

Wayfaring

<i>Loorka Lilla</i>	Go on go on
<i>Unya echiniga ooricka aranillia</i>	Will you stay with me by and by
<i>Unga elirra alpenna elirra</i>	
<i>pilchalpimia</i>	You go quickly and return quickly
<i>Tha kilchala linga pilchima</i>	Where have you come from

Lower Southern Arrernte phrases
from Gillens's language list, recorded at Charlotte Waters 1901³³

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.³⁴

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.³⁵ 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,³⁶ and of the

³³SLSA 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.

³⁵ Ingold 2007: 51.

³⁶ Rose 2003b: 166, 168, 171.

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.

³⁹ Hokari 2001: 57. Rose 2003a makes a similar point.

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

⁴¹ Hamilton 1987: 49.

⁴² Hamilton 1987: 47-49.

⁴³ Hamilton 1987: 49.

⁴⁴ Hamilton 1987: 49, and see case study p50-55. See also Doohan 1992 and Davies 1995.

⁴⁵ Macfarlane field notes 2/10/1997: 104

⁴⁶ Bingey Lowe, in Macfarlane field notebook 2/10/1997: 2-3.

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.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸

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.

⁴⁷ Gosden 1994.

⁴⁸ Tilley 1996: 161-2; Cresswell 2001: 24-5.

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.⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰



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

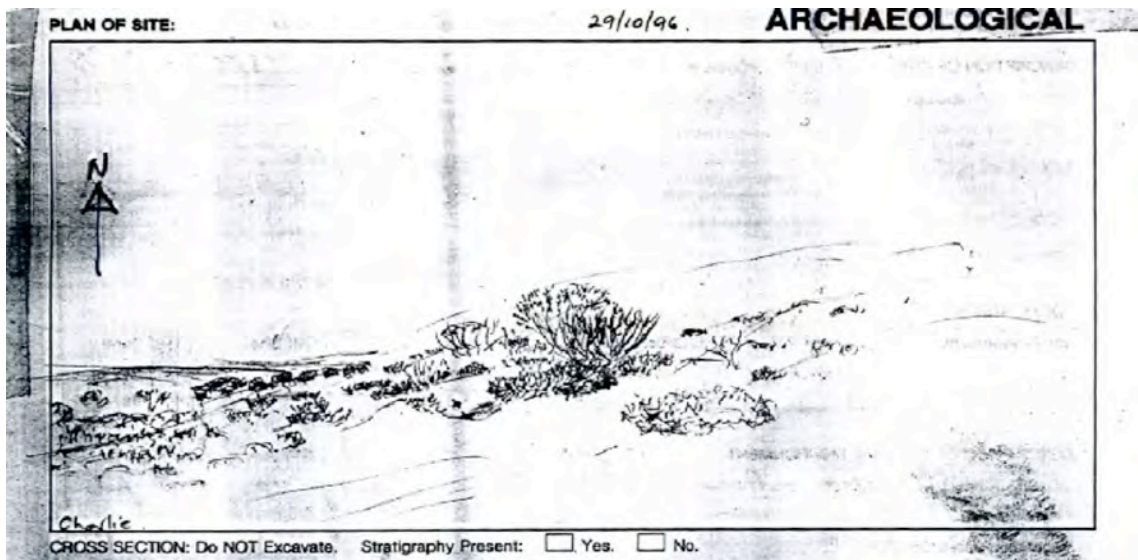


Fig 5.9 Charlie Hodgeson's site recording form, October 1997

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.

⁵⁷ Merlan 2005: 172.

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,⁵⁸ in contrast to most leave-takings in which return is implicit.

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.⁵⁹ Further, 'every return is a moral action, a promise fulfilled'.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 eco-places, 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.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

⁵⁹ Rose 2002: 156-8.

⁶⁰ Rose 2003b: 174.

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, Witcheririe, 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 inexperienced 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

⁶² C. Giles, 1894-1895, vol 2(12): 90.

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'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'.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Mountford diaries, HL Sheard collection, rare books and special collections, SLSA.

⁶⁶ Trigonometrical Observation Book No 18 EH Lees 1883-4: 53, South Australian Lands Department, DENR Land Information Centre, Adelaide.

⁶⁷ Trigonometrical Observation Book No 18 EH Lees 1883-4: 56.

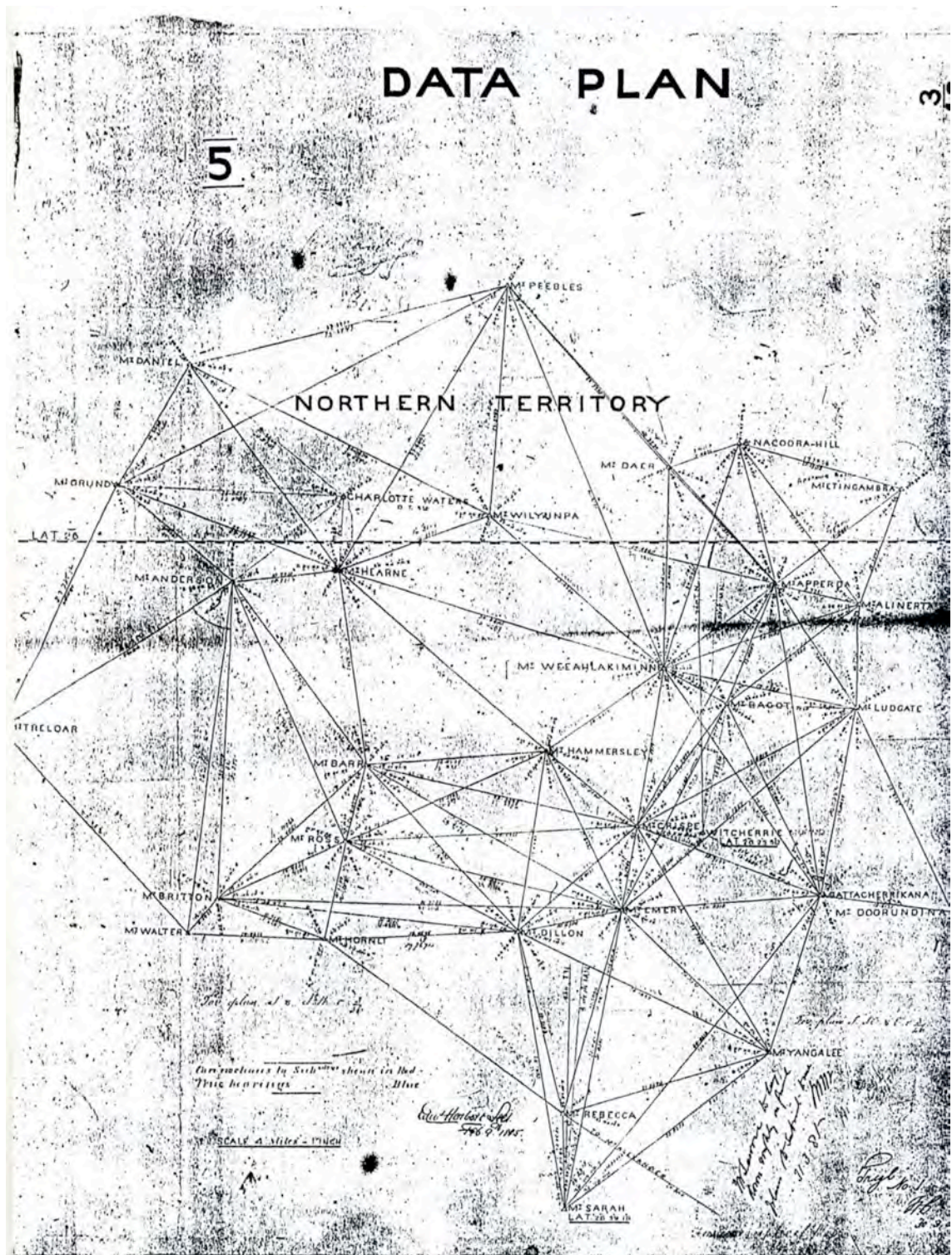


Fig 5.10 'Data Plan' of trig points spanning the NT-SA border , showing bearings between them, by surveyor Edward Herbert Lees, 6 September 1885. South Australian Lands Department, DENR Land Information Centre, Adelaide 1996



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

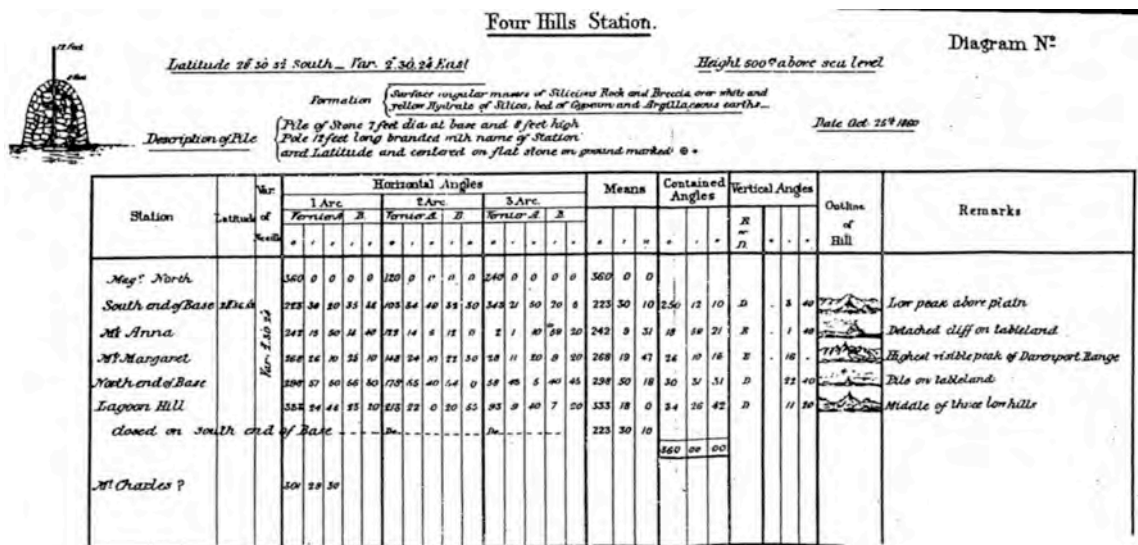


Fig 5.12 Example of official trig 'pile', SA Lands Department, DENR Land Information Centre, Adelaide 1996



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.⁶⁸ 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'.⁶⁹ 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'.⁷⁰

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

⁶⁸ Macfarlane field notebook 6 November 1996.

⁶⁹ Spencer 1928: 31-32.

⁷⁰ Hercus 1990: 152-3.

would not require marking.⁷¹ These cairns may have been part of a system of distinguishing parts of the landscape, but the way they operated is not recorded.

One road only: 'the telegraph line is the Central Australian highway'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.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 route⁷⁴ 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'.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Hercus 1990: 153.

⁷² Spencer 1896: 23.

⁷³ The water map of 1903 offers a similar guide (chapter 4 fig 4.6).

⁷⁴ White 1909: 28.

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].

⁷⁷ Kimber 1996: 37-8.

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.⁷⁹ 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.⁸⁰ 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

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.⁸¹

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.⁸²

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.'⁸³ 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

⁸⁰ SLSA PRG 161/6/ Diary of Alexander Ross, in charge of maintenance of government wells on the Overland Telegraph Line 1912-1914, 18 January 1914.

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 2008.⁸⁹ 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.⁹⁰

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.⁹¹ 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.⁹² 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.⁹³ 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"'.⁹⁴

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.⁹⁵

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

⁹¹*The Advertiser* 9 August 1973: 1.

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'.

⁹³*Sydney Morning Herald* 24 July 1980: 1.

⁹⁴*The Advertiser* 18 August 1977.

⁹⁵Hirsch 1995: 2.

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 Arrernte 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 Centre 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'.

'Q: where did you spend New Years Eve? A: the middle of Australia!' (31/12/99).

'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:

14/8/06 'put up an Aboriginal flag too'

18/4/99 'how about an Aboriginal flag at the center'.

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, Pooppel 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**:

Critical comments

7/7/07 'this is Australia, and the road is a disgrace to the country'

12/6/07 'Dust and more dust'

10/8/07 'why so many bends in the road!'

20/6/08 'its very hard to find the center!'

12/6/08 'track needs work'

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.'

18/7/07 'Needs a dunny'

5/7/07 'good camp site, disappointing toilet paper everywhere! Keep Australia clean!'

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.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 memorialised. 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.

⁹⁷Stuart 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,⁹⁸ 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

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?⁹⁹ 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,

⁹⁹ See Barratt 1994.

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'.¹⁰⁰

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

¹⁰⁰ Rose 2003a: 178.

'... in time, nothing can be without becoming'

Ursula le Guin, *Tehanu* 1990

Chapter 6

A conclusion, a line in the sand

This thesis opened with a mud map showing a location – a pebble dot in the centre of Australia, representing contemporary places of the western Simpson Desert. The work that followed has expanded that isolated point, by finding ways of telling the histories that made it; ways that give sufficient space for the locale's diverse constitutive threads to be traced and shaken out. The story that accompanied the mud map began with a rhetorical question, 'what makes a place entangled'? This introduced my proposition that the places involved have qualities that are fruitfully understood in terms of 'entanglement'.

The concept of entanglement that I have explored in places of the western Simpson Desert encompasses the inextricably inter-woven temporal components of a place that arise from interactions between people, objects and the physical and historical characteristics of a place through time. It is this relationship between interaction and entanglement that my thesis has explored.

In the final phase of drafting this thesis, I had a much-needed hair cut. The lively and intelligent hairdresser asked me what I was writing about. I gave the pared-down 'dinner party' answer that I had developed over the years, that it looked at the relationships between Indigenous people in central Australia and the people who built the Overland Telegraph Line in the early 1870s, and the changes that followed after it was built, through to recent times. She immediately asked 'So what were their relationships?' I paused. After all this time spent listening to, researching and synthesising the diverse accounts that offered considered scrutiny, glancing observations, or incidental perspectives on this question, did I have a direct answer to this central question? A slideshow of vivid images flitted through my newly kempt head, with part of the answer in each: a man galloping towards a travelling group of Southern Arrernte people in desperate need of tobacco; children lining up sticks in the sand; families camped out of the line of sight of the station homestead organising ceremonies; stock workers mustering the station cattle through the Finke floodout country; Erlilikilyia watching and recording lives along the line; the late Bingey Lowe singing the songs that animate the country.

'It wasn't all massacres and violence' I murmured. 'But it did begin very suddenly, the history of interactions in this area, it began with dramatic change, and it never stopped, right through to now. That pulse of change shaped how things are now, and part of that shape is that many things did not change', I ventured, grasping at a way to explain what is contained in the important theme of continuity *with* transformation, in the people, in the country, in their relationships.

Seeing how they were maintained and how they changed was what I had aimed to see. But in answer to the question, had I actually seen what the relationships *were*? By looking at their actions and the context in which they were enacted, as described or implied in the various texts and spatial patterns and stories, could I see if they loved each other, were they wry, telling jokes, wary, or full of revenge? Occasionally this emerged, when the humanity of observed and observer was fully recognised, such as in Christopher Giles' account. But the gravitational pull of the dominant white story is strong. It is hard for the interactions that are present in the texts, the 'counter narratives' of water practices, working with the cattle, learning the country, not to get

overwhelmed in a single story, or to be drawn into a binary, Indigenous *versus* white understandings.

A distillation of the implications of what has emerged in this work is that that *no thing is only one thing, and no place is only one place*. I had this pointed this out to me early on in my research by Raylene Hudson, a member of the Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation, granddaughter of Mick McLean, the Wankanguru man who was such a repository of knowledge of the Simpson Desert. I was sitting with her under a shady tree on the fringes of the car park at Mt Dare Homestead in 1996. We had spent time together at Irrwanyere spring, now she was waiting for a tyre to be fixed for 'Mad Max', the blue Kingswood that went where most would think only 4WDs could.

Raylene was a 'native' of the country who had not lived in it, and whose memories of it come from songs her grandfather sang to her when she was a child on his knee.

'I realise now he was singing songs of his country. I was too young. But I'm going back there now, as near as I can get to where he was born in the desert.' ... 'I've been to Czechoslovakia, India, Europe, Canberra but I have to come back here because this is home, this is the place, nowhere else feels like this.' She announced: 'This is a historic moment. My grandfather and his people left the desert of their free will' – she draws a firm line in the sand from left to right – 'and now their grandchildren are returning there of their free will' – a line from right to left – 'There's just this missing generation ...'. She scrubs out the area in between the two lines. The history of assimilation and forced movements or removals is a present absence in everyone's lives. I ask if she is making a choice about where she lives, about which grandparent she follows. (I was thinking of Charlie Hodgeson's kids who have a Torres Strait Islander mother and an Arrernte/ Arabuna father). Raelene draws hard straight lines in the ground. 'Here's South Australia, Northern Territory, Queensland, New South Wales. White people, they think it has to be either one or the other, these lines, but its really like this' – she draws a series of intersecting circles in the middle of the map of Australia. 'Yes' I say. I can only agree with reminder that nothing is

singular, fixed. Categories that work to impose this *or* that are not helpful, those that take in part of this *and* part of that fit better.¹

The various interactions examined through this thesis have demonstrated the idea that places emerge dynamically from the interactions that are enacted in and between them, in the same way that an object is not necessarily the same thing in shifting contexts.² No place, no thing is fixed in one form; its qualities are emergent from the interactions between its elements and people, and other living things. They are always emerging, becoming.

The question then becomes what *are* those interactions? I have traced the interactions that have contributed to the overlapping circles of people's lives in the region since the surveyor's first added their lines of sight to the mix. Three themes of interaction – intercultural interactions between people set in train by the Overland Telegraph Line; interactions with waterplaces; and connective interactions between places – emerged as important ongoing features in all places, in varying combinations. These three themes and the places that exemplify them have been considered separately for clarity in the chapters of the thesis. But they are interrelated.

In telling its distinctive histories I aimed to draw the western Simpson Desert area into the centre of maps, away from the margins where it has commonly been depicted. In doing so I have reanimated the richness and significance of the human encounters that have shaped this area. In re-telling its stories, the lived human history of the land has been reasserted over its popular image of as an empty wilderness.

These histories in place referenced and evoked pre-colonial, colonial and contemporary pasts simultaneously. Being in a place generated a simultaneous heterogeneous awareness of place-related stories of the Old People (that is, of previous generations of people); of the creator Ancestors; and of more recent histories of their own lives. Thus the changes that have shaped the place and its history are intermingled additions, not sequential replacements; 'the past and present moving on the same polyvalent site' as Michel de Certeau puts it.³

¹ All quotes Macfarlane field notebook Friday 8 November 1996.

² Strathern 1995; Thomas 1991.

³ In *Writing Histories* 1970: 317, cited Aherne 1995: 43.

Starting from the interactional, non-binary perspective of entanglement disallows a clear distinction between pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. This accorded with the understanding that I cumulatively grasped as I worked with the members of Irrwanyere, that their relationship to the temporality of a place was not described in terms of a linear or sequential chronological series of events.

In the blurring of archaeological 'site type' forms and materials, this non-sequential chronology was also present physically in the landscape. For example, a stone reduction event is not purely 'prehistoric' when it is flaked in 1920; a demountable house is not purely 'modern' if it is sited due to its associations with historic actions and a powerful Ancestral place; a stockyard is not purely 'historic' if it is still used, and significant to both Aboriginal and white people. Rather than fitting them to a reductive fixed category of date or type, the actions which generated these structures require definition by process and associative context.

By focusing on the entangled nature of the histories, the missing histories of Indigenous labour and concern cannot be ignored. This focus makes impossible the sleight-of-mind that slips 'stockyard' under the category of 'white history' and stops there without further examination.

However, more than making missing histories visible, the approach I have worked through offers a way of enlarging the experience of what history can be. It is not history as any one of the contributors to the composite would, or could, tell it. It is an otherwise unavailable place-based form that emerges from the juxtapositioning of different constellations of attention, concern and experience.

Raymond Williams talks of 'experience' as 'a lived contact with the available articulations, including their comparisons'.⁴ Hence, if the articulation of particular pasts is not 'available' they will be missing from potential experience. Unless a history starts from the position that multiple inter-cultural threads are there, the work to find the counter contributing elements will not be done, and the narrative will slide along familiar lines, the already available articulations. It

⁴ In *Country and city* 1981: 165.

must do more than simply add and interweave the Aboriginal story into the pre-existing master narrative.⁵ Histories that are not restricted to texts but juxtapose them with oral accounts and material and spatial evidences can crack open limitations on the kinds of history that it is possible to tell, and the practices of history-making that it is possible to enter into.

A strong theme which emerged in the course of this work is that of teaching and learning, and the different modalities of relationship to country that were bound up with modes of transfer of knowledge. A tension between these modes ran through the work. Learning is implicit in maintenance of a place, a tradition, a practice. It involves intergenerational transfers of knowledge. The criteria for who are suitable recipients for the knowledge is one of the areas severely disrupted by the colonial process.

I went to the western Simpson Desert primarily to record the long term history immanent there, so it could be more widely known and valued. But it was what I was given the opportunity to learn, effectively in the periphery of this project, that altered the way I saw that history and its relation to the recent past and the present, and the course of the subsequent work.

This recording mode is deeply and rightly distrusted and politically suspect for Indigenous communities who have suffered from its bad history of appropriation, where knowledge and objects have been taken away and not returned. But records can travel too. They remain one part of the place that they record and that connection can be reopened. Something happens when they are returned to their place of origin. Cross fertilisation is possible. For example, Erlikilyika's work is reanimated when it comes out of its museum case and is returned to the stony ground and improvised humpies around Charlotte Waters where it was originally carved. Places such as the *mikiri* wells can be relocated using old map references, songs sung in Stevensons Creek 97 years ago can be heard and sung there again. Places known only archaeologically, or texts which record partial perspectives of the place can be reanimated by connecting them into the local history. Although originating in a recording mode, they can be reconnected with the mode of integrated learning that I have

⁵ Williamson 2004: 198.

termed 'knowing how to return'. I have set out to provide these kind of reconnections of knowledges locally, in particular, known places in the western Simpson region, such as Charlotte Waters, Dalhousie Springs, Anniversary Bore.

Scale has been important guiding principle in framing of this work. I wanted the focus to be on the small scale of a lived place, the grounded spatial and material history that archaeology enables, while retaining the tension between that and the large scale historical processes in which they were lived out, and to which they contributed to shaping.

But I think this still provides only an outline mud map of what it was like, what happened in particular places, an external history. An emotionally informed history remains inaccessible. I do not know what people felt as their carefully nurtured, intimately known waterholes were heedlessly sullied and breached by hard hoofed horses and cattle, as diversity in the land died. Even for white people the white histories are silent on the affect of their lives in these contexts. We have the one line reference by Captain White to a manager's wife going mad at Dalhousie Springs homestead; we do not have her diary that might reveal those things that so got under skin.

Cultural geographer Edward Casey points out that 'situs', the Latin for site, is closely related to 'thesis', which is Greek for position. This led me to consider how I would sum up my thesis in spatial terms: what kind of place is this thesis? It is the kind of place that is depicted in the photo collages that I have included in my thesis. I made the first of these inspired by frustration with my photographs of the landscape, which were unable to catch the range in scale and texture from vast to minute that was such a feature of being in those landscapes for me. Close-ups of the textures could work, but they were then cut off from their locale. The collages successfully evoke the multiplicity of textures, the diverse sources, temporal components and perspectives involved in any one place. They provide a visual metaphor for both the process and the outcome of the thesis, where rich, inherently partial stories have been brought together in a composite history that is different from any of the contributing parts, and that does not pretend to add up to a seamless unitary story.

At the end of a day of fieldwork we would sometimes sit on the verandah at Anniversary Bore and tell stories. I would throw in second hand stories 'from paper' that would trigger the recall of names of the people who worked at the places mentioned, where they came from, expansions and personalisations of the records.

I hope that this new text that I have brought together could also be read out in this way, be a trigger to other expansions, further recollections and layers of entanglement of understanding of what it is to live in the places of Australia. I would like to hope that it was sufficiently 'marbled', like the cake that Bingeby Lowe so generously gave me, that such expansions beyond would escape the grip of the dominant stories.

A promising prospect, a line in the sand, is that there are countless pebble dots of location in Australia. These can each be drawn out into their immanent skeins of entangled people, objects, routes, places. The capacity for expansion is a general property that applies as much to the original Parliament House in Canberra, or your own back yard as to the places of the western Simpson Desert.⁶

By taking the dominant, prominent histories as insufficient, it becomes possible for unrecognised histories to be brought into the realm of available experience.⁷ These go beyond merely adding to what is already known, but can transform the way a place is understood and its inhabitants understand themselves. Every recognised place in still-colonial Australia contains this expansive capacity for retelling the interactional histories that made them.

⁶ as John Mulvaney showed 20 years ago, and as Mark McKenna and Christine Hansen have demonstrated in the settled south-east of Australia (Mulvaney 1989; McKenna 2002; Hansen 2009).

Bibliography

List of Abbreviations

AA	Australian Archives
AIAS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
NMA	National Museum of Australia
NSW	New South Wales
SA	South Australia
SAM	South Australian Museum
SAPP	South Australian Parliamentary Papers and Proceedings
SLSA	State Library of South Australia
SRSA	State Records of South Australia

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On-line resources

<http://www.bom.gov.au>

http://www.hinterlandtour.com.au/simpson_general_english07.html (accessed 20/1/2010)

<http://www.oz-greetings.com.au/geology/article/54/SIMPSON--DESERT> (accessed 20/1/2010)

<http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/national/witjira-dalhousie-springs/index.html> (accessed 4/2/2010)

<http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/parks/sanpr/witjira/park.html> (accessed 19/9/2009)

http://images.slsa.sa.gov.au/mpcing/64500/B64383_69.htm (accessed 20/06/09)

http://images.slsa.sa.gov.au/mpcing/64500/B64383_71.htm (accessed 20/06/09)

http://images.slsa.sa.gov.au/mpcing/64500/B64383_72.htm (accessed 20/06/09)

<http://www.camelexpeditions.com/Home.htm> (accessed 20/1/2010)

http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/media/archives_2004/rover_thomas, (accessed 20/01/2010)

http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/rover_queenie/rover.html (accessed 20/01/2010)

<http://www.nntt.gov.au/News-and-Communications/Media-Releases/Documents/2008%20media%20release%20attachments/PR08-10%20Witjira%20-%20background%20information.pdf> (accessed 19/9/2009)

http://www.arc.gov.au/pdf/99_05.pdf (accessed 20/02/2010)

APPENDIX 1

IRRWANYERE ABORIGINAL CORPORATION



IRRWANYERE ABORIGINAL CORPORATION
P.O. BOX 2414
ALICE SPRINGS N.T.
PH: (089) 530 255
FAX: (089) 532 120

To Whom It May Concern

The Bearer of this letter *Ingreth Macfarlane* has the authority of the Irrwanyere Executive to undertake archaeological studies on the Witjira National Park.


She has our sanction to talk with Traditional Owners and if required employ these people as cultural informants.

By authority on behalf of the Irrwanyere Executive.

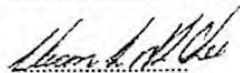

.....
Geoffrey Ah Chee
Chairperson

Executive Members


.....
Faron Peckhara

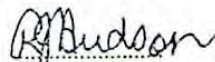

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Ian Hodgson


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Elaine Bonning


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Dean Ah Chee


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Paul Ah Chee

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David Doolan


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Raelene Hudson

APPENDIX 2

Inventory of Erlikilyika's work – exhibitions and museum collections of carvings and drawings

Documented exhibitions

1910

Mr JM Johnston of the Telegraph Department brought 'an excellent piece of carving, a pipe, which had been done by Jimmy Kite, who was employed at Charlotte Waters telegraph station since he was a boy' to Adelaide. Together with two other pipes sent from the telegraph station and a block of the raw clay sent for sampling by the state Geologist HYL Brown these were to be displayed in the tourist department of the Government display at the Chamber of Manufactures Exhibition, Adelaide.

(Adelaide *Advertiser* 24/3/1910)

1913

Twenty six examples of carvings were seen at the Selbourne Hotel, Adelaide, in the company of 'Mr HO Kearnan the telegraph station master at Charlotte Waters' and 'his "boy" Jim Kite', floridly described by a reporter for the *Adelaide Register* (Friday July 18 1913), reprinted with a photograph in the *Observer* (Saturday July 26 1913: 30, 50). (An abbreviated version of this text, which does not mention the exhibition, with a different photograph of nine examples from the same set kaolin carvings, is reproduced in *The Australasian* 2 August 1913: ii, iv.)

Captain SA White mentions having seen Mr Kernan (sic), the officer in charge, and Jim Kite's work in Adelaide before he left in July 1913.¹

The Rev JRB Love was shown examples of Kite's work by a linesman at Tin Shanty, the small homestead about 40km east of Charlotte Waters, when he travelled north in March 1913 (that is, shortly before the Adelaide exhibition).

¹ White 1914: 4, 56.

He showed us some carvings executed by a blackfellow 'Jim Kite' of Charlotte Waters in a kind of white stone found there. This stone, resembling meerschaum, polished beautifully. This blackfellow carves pipe-bowls in imitation of horses' hoofs, claws, and whatever takes his fancy. Native birds, insects, and animals he has carved with astonishing accuracy, and further completes his work by colouring the creatures with ochre and various pigments he obtains from plants known perhaps to himself alone. His creatures are recognisable at once. I was particularly delighted to see a most lifelike imitation of *Amytornis merrotsii*, [a grass wren] a bird made known to the scientific world last year, but evidently well known to this blackfellow. I would have like to obtain some of this carving, but could not.²

1921

Dr Herbert Basedow arranged an exhibition in 1921 at 'Mr F.J. Koehnecke's establishment in Grenfell St, Dr Basedow is at present displaying many illustrations of the artistic handiwork of the tribes and they form a revelation to the uninitiated. Beautifully carved birds and annuals done in pipeclay, obtained near the Finke River, and charmingly coloured with natural ochres, show remarkable talent, and there are finely cut and polished wooden paper knives and weights.' (*Adelaide Register* 18 August 1921).

1953

In December 1953 there was a 'special exhibit at the [South Australian] Museum', which included a frog carved in meerschaum. 'The artist, who died in the early 1930s, was Injarupma, of the Aranda tribe. At the time of his productive art period he worked on cattle stations at Charlotte Waters under the name of Jimmy Kite. The museum ethnologist (Mr N.B. Tindale) said this week that Kite's work was particularly interesting because it showed what could happen to a primitive artist when he came into contact with modern civilisation. "He made about 70 carvings in his lifetime", Mr Tindale said, "but only a few survive. This particular example was presented to the Museum by Mr CE Klotz at the wish of his deceased wife". The meerschaum used for the carvings is a form of kaolin. The Aborigines mine it from a 400 ft hole inside a cave about a mile west of Charlotte Waters.' (*Adelaide Advertiser* 26 December 1953).

² Love 1914: 24-5. March 1913 PRG 214 Series 6 Journal of an expedition undertaken for the purpose of enquiring into the conditions of life among the Aborigines of the interior of Australia under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church of Australia 27 December 1912 - 29 March.

1988

Several of Kite's carvings from the South Australian Museum were included in the international touring Bicentennial exhibition '*Dreamings: the art of Aboriginal Australia*', (P. Sutton (ed) 1988). Illustrated on p 198 is the double faced pipe bowl, SAM A52940.

Inventory of South Australian Museum collection of 'Jim Kite' carvings³

In the South Australian Museum collection there are 27 carved kaolin pieces by, or attributed to, Jim Kite. There are 11 pipes, 11 plaques or flat relief carvings, three vases, and two 3D figurines.

Of the pipes five are of the eagle claw pattern, standardised, with the same bark pattern on each stem (SAM A29400, A35745, A61585, A63601, A54494). The eagle claw was a common form of pipe bowl, illustrated in numerous catalogues of the time. Two pipes have bowls in the form of a human hand holding an egg (SAM A42985, A52942), another is in the shape of a horse's hoof (SAM A45089). Both of these forms are common in mail order catalogues. (They differ, however, from the forms of clay pipe found in the surrounding homestead sites, which are smaller 'cutty' pipes, not the larger meerschaum form. They are plain, or have raised edge dots, wickerwork or thistle-leaf patterns, one has a female face). There is one plain unadorned pipe (A52941).

Unprecedented in commonly available pipe forms, however, is a pipe which shows a dingo (?) and a human face on two different sides, (A52940), and another that has a triple figure, with a human face at the front, a dingo (?) below it and two bilbies (?) on the sides (A46850). In both, the various faces are cleverly melded into one another.

The three vases have elaborate finely engraved patterns covering their surfaces and rims. The engraving is symmetrical, with lines in-filling the background around leaf shapes (SAM A58992); complex chevrons and squares combined with clover leaves (A41325); and flower shapes and leaves on the other (A45088).

³ Descriptions based on information contained in the South Australian Museum Register plus my own observations of the collection in June 1998.

The eleven plaques are diverse in their themes. There is a version of the Australian coat of arms, with a heraldic standing kangaroo and emu with a shield and star between them (A35734); a man with a stick, his legs crossed looking at bird in tree (A35735); a lizard with the detail of its scales shown in detail, and file marks from shaping the sides of the stone block clearly evident (A35736); an eagle with a fish in its claws (A35737); an insect and lizard divided by a line across the plaque (A35738); a hunting scene incorporating kangaroo, a tree and bushes, and a man running with spear and woomera (A35739); a cricket (A35740); a man sitting making fire with a display of material culture items - a digging stick, a shield, a boomerang, a spear and a woomera (A35741); two lizards in separate frames on one block, with detailed treatment of toes, and one with a re-grown forked tail (A35742); a lizard with a very long tail (A35743); a kangaroo standing with legs apart, above a dingo with its tongue hanging out (A35744). File marks are often evident in the shaping of the blocks, where they were ground flat.

There are two carved figurines. One is a female human figure standing on a block decorated with a bush, coloured with a brown pigment. It was donated on 1 June 1934 by the Commonwealth Government (ex Basedow collection). (SAM Registration Number A21580). The second is a carved frog, probably a water-holding desert species, on a decorated circular base - the one mentioned in the 1953 news article above (SAM Registration Number A45087).

The carvings were donated by a wide range of people, but most of those for which the source is documented come from the mid-north of South Australia (ie Gawler, Angustown) or near Charlotte Waters (Bloods Creek, Crown Point). The donors presumably visited Charlotte Waters or knew people who had done so, or had connections to people living in the area. Several well-known collectors donated pieces - Ramsay Smith, Basedow, AF Mitchell. One of the vases came from Gillen's house after his death. They were given at the time of Kite's apparently most active production, 1910 to the early 1920s, although they continued to be donated from estates in the 1930s and into the 1960s.

Adelaide Observer, Saturday 26 July 1913: 36 photograph

There is a full page photograph in the *Adelaide Observer* Saturday 26 July 1913 p36 of a portrait of Jimmy Kite surrounded by the items described in the article 1913: 50. The caption to the photograph reads:

Aboriginal art carvings in kaolin by Jimmy Kite, a full-blooded native from Charlotte Waters. It has been urged by experts that the exhibits should be secured for the national collection. The black has been brought to Adelaide by the telegraph station master at Charlotte Waters (Mr Kearnan) with a view to bring the native's skill before the public. The whole of the work was done with a knife and a piece of fencing wire.

These objects are the best provenanced collection of Jimmy Kite's works, as they are associated with an unambiguously identified photograph of the man. The similarities in this portrait to that of the man standing on the right of Spencer and Gillen in the 1901 photograph taken at Charlotte Waters early in the expedition (fig 3.x), allows confirmation that Jimmy Kite is the same person.

In the image he is surrounded by photographs of 29 of his carved works - 21 in kaolin, eight in wood. Nowhere else are his wooden carvings mentioned. Many of them are given descriptions and interpretations by Jimmy Kite in the accompanying text of the 1913 article. The objects are now held in the National Museum of Australia, Canberra. They seem to have been purchased by Dr Herbert Basedow from Mr Kearnan and Kite either during or after this 1913 visit to Adelaide. Some of them are reported as being exhibited by Basedow in 1921. They were purchased by the Australian Institute of Anatomy, Canberra in 1934.

The following description makes correlations where possible between the objects in the newspaper image and the objects in the Basedow collection of the National Museum of Australia attributed to Erlikilyika with the Object Numbers given by the National Museum of Australia. There are some objects in the newspaper picture that are not in the set of museum objects attributed to Erlikilyika, and some in the museum's collection that are not shown in the image.

a) The wooden objects

These are less well known than the kaolin works. Nine are shown in the photograph. There are 16 wooden objects attributed to Erlikilyika in the National Museum of Australia; the photograph does not show a number of unadorned boomerangs that are in the collection. It is difficult to match the objects in the newspaper image with the museum Object Datasheets. The Object numbers for the NMA wooden artefacts are:

1985.0060.0135
1985.0060.0146
1985.0060.0147
1985.0060.0148
1985.0060.0149
1985.0060.0150
1985.0060.0152
1985.0060.0154
1985.0060.0155
1985.0060.0156
1985.0060.0157
1985.0060.0167
1985.0060.0597
1985.0060.0598
1985.0060.0686
1985.0060.0687

The 1913 article says of the wooden artefacts:

...Spread on the ground were wondrously ornamented boomerangs and richly designed tinnas (introducing butterflies, kangaroos, lizards, emus, dingoes, dog ants, scorpions, and centipedes) ...

- Pictures on Boomerangs-

'Now fetchum up boomerang.'

The aborigine gathers up such a collection of instruments from the floor as shall make Professor Stirling and Dr. Ramsay Smith's mouths water when they see them. These are not boomerangs. They are more pictures. Jim's knife, obeying the brilliant originality of his mind, and the infinite labour of his wonderful fingers, has imprinted on tinnas and woomeras and other articles of the wurlie strange and beautiful devices. Here, for instance, in a striking conception, is the coming of McDouall Stuart in the spacious hunting grounds and arenas of the startled black. This was too long ago for Jim to have witnessed, he must have remembered the stories of the old warriors around the camp fires in the days when he was emerging from the piccaninny stage. He has written the romance in a daring scheme of illustration. Blacks are creeping up behind the new and pale-looking pioneers on their packhorses, challenging, wondering, mystified. You can get the story from Jim only in patches, but it is good to hear

him relate how, when the riders dismounted, the natives set up a withering howl of fear. Mercy! The apparitions had split in two!

A 'tinna' is a hooked boomerang - language group unknown.

1) Boomerang

Single hopping mouse (Jerboa, *Notomys sp.*)

Shown light in strong contrast to dark background - coloured?

2) Tinna (? Hooked boomerang)

Bird? And three other figures in line? Not clear from photograph.

Shown light in strong contrast to dark background - coloured?

3) Tinna (? Hooked boomerang)

Two hopping mice, (*Jerboa, Notomys sp.*) brush on end of long tail. Star shape, or crossed spears and shield? Pale stripes over width of 'beak'.

Shown light in strong contrast to dark background - coloured?

4) Woomera/spear thrower

Floral? Border, symmetrical pattern. In centre, three beetles in line - a stag horn type, a slater type and another. Beetles are dark surface wood in relief on light wood background.

5) Boomerang

pale decoration, not clear from picture? Seems to have small figures in line along centre - the JM Stuart theme referred to in the article text?

6) Woomera

Dingo with narrow tail up, on four legs. Behind three howling dingos, two sitting with muzzles raised, with bushy tails. Shown as dark surface wood in relief on light wood background.

7) Tinna (Hooked boomerang)

Two lizards facing each other. Shown light on dark background

NMA 1985.0060.0147

8) Boomerang

9) Oval dish.

Incised complex pattern of lizards, arranged in pairs, side by side or facing, long tails arranged in semi-circles around them, black stripe on backs. Emu or bustard in centre. Possibly a gecko in centre. Six striped linear shapes, grubs? at the right hand end. Dark background with pale incised figures. Elaborate - seems different in composition from the other objects, although the depiction of the lizards is consistent with those on kaolin plaques in South Australian Museum.

b) The carved kaolin objects

Twenty kaolin objects are shown in the newspaper photograph. The following descriptions are based on the photograph, with the comments from the article text matched to the relevant object.

The 1913 article describes them:

The table was spread with perhaps a score of valuable and diversified creations of the black's extraordinary intellect. All the creeping and jumping things of and peoples of the bush were there fixed on the immaculate white background of kaolin ornaments.

1) Flat backed figurine / 3D carving. Shows Indigenous man with beard, headband, tomahawk in one hand in relief on kaolin block. Undulating edge of the block portrays tree branches which the man is climbing, with a hole cut for steps shown. Tree and figure coloured.

NMA 1985.0060.0787

2) Symmetrically shaped kaolin block with three concave curved edges. Surface coloured. Sets of animal tracks run across it in black on white background, going in different directions, as see on sand: goanna tracks, bird, emu - three single tracks, two sets of insect tracks, human footprints - four lines of single tracks at different angles: two from left to right, two from right to left, snake or legless lizard, pale on dark background, two mouse tracks, one single, other in pairs.

NMA 1985.0060.0801

3) three figures arranged symmetrically - central figure has short hair, sitting feet together, knees out, pubic tassel, sitting on hillock with arms outstretched and a hand on the head of two others who lie on either side of a small hillock,

decorated with symmetrical pattern of flowers and leaves, two branches, offset leaf pattern.

NMA 1985.0060.0795

4) Eagle claw pipe bowl. A standard form. Most common form in South Australian Museum. (Not held in NMA collection)

5) Curled snake, cross-hatched body, dark head with tongue protruding, on square kaolin block with dark and light 'double diamond' geometrical border.

There were snakes twisted in dark-patterned ribbons between quaintly conceived borders...

NMA 1985.0060.0792

6) semi-circular kaolin block. Indigenous man, bearded, standing, part of a complex heraldic symmetrical form. His arms are outstretched to touch an emu on left side, and to hold up a wallaby / kangaroo on his right arm. Coat of arms form. Coloured with pale background.

Not in the NMA Object data sheets attributed to Erlikilyika.

7) semi-circular kaolin block. Possibly life history of beetle - caterpillar, larvae, moth, beetle depicted within 'key-hole' shaped border, with another beetle, moth, lizard - gecko? to RHS, and a third beetle to the LHS. Coloured on pale background.

'Irramoortina' ejaculates Jim, 'all along a Finke River. Across a brown stained symmetrically fashioned block of kaolin is shown the life history of a grub. First 'Oolamunga' a sort of caterpillar. 'He go down in ground, walk about. Rain come, then undea. He fly. All the same this way.' The black finger points to the undea, which appears to be winging its course from prison to the unfettered freedom of the world, seen through the tiny hole. Then there is shown a beetle. 'That fellar chatchum and eatum up.' So ends the tragedy of the oolamunga.

NMA 1985.0060.0800

8) Mammal. In relief on block. Back and fore legs are stretched out in front and behind. Looks as if modelled from a dead 'specimen'. Looks like the illustrated *Phascologale macdonnellensis* depicted Plate VI Spencer and Gillen 1899 opp p 154, later renamed *Pseudantechinus macdonnellensis*, Fat-tailed Antichinus).

Not in the NMA Object data sheets attributed to Erlikilyika.

9) Bird, carved in 3-D perched on a log which rests on a disk-shaped pedestal.
Coloured beak and crest.

Carrying the gifts of his art to the feathered kingdom, Jim Kite's graphic knife had carved birds with such delicacy of form and such a superb sense of rhythm, that they might have been flying in the trees of the romantic Finke, and perhaps caught and imprisoned in kaolin as they enjoyed the domestic felicities of the nest.

The birds are masterpieces, all of them. Mr Kearnan has refused pounds for one specimen. Jim calls it 'Oolaburra', we, a scrub pigeon. The pencilling of the wings and graceful 'throw' of the body command attention at once. The black artist must be a keen and retentive observer to be able to embody traits of character that have made sojourners of the wild identify the bird at a glance.

Not in the NMA Object data sheets attributed to Erlikilyika.

10) Plaque, curved top, straight sides. Head and shoulders portrait of an Indigenous woman, maybe a particular person. In relief. Hands clasped. Three hair bands, short hair. Prominent round ears and painted face: dotted line over nose and cheeks, thick white squares in line over chest and shoulders, parallel lines/cicatrices on sacrum. Neckband/radial lines around neck. Plant background, four branches, leaves opposite on stem, flowers - same treatment of leaf form as No. 3.

NMA 1985.0060.0802

11) Cricket in 3D sitting on rounded block. Striped abdomen, spotted wings, back leg folded, front legs grasping carved stone base.

locusts almost hopping across the brown wastes...

Grasshoppers are revealed in glossy coats of faint green, touched here and there with brown.

NMA 1985.0060.0788

12) hopping mouse (Jerboa, *Notomys sp.*) in 3D, sitting on block with radial flower decoration (same as in No. 16 - possibly desert plant 'silvertail')

'What this fellar?' asks Mr Kearnan, picking up a rat mounted on a white pedestal.

'Yacurta' says Jim, flashing his pearly teeth in an ample smile.

'Him carry pouch, picaninnie inside' suggests the boss. The artist nods, rattles off 'Yacurta' and other Maximlike explosions in euphony, to say that this is a marsupial rat. The modelling of the head and body and the shading of the skin, are presented with consummate finish.

I saw marsupial rats with life so realistically suggested that they appeared to be scampering away among the undergrowth or poised tense for attack, or complacently enjoying a newly won banquet.

Not in the NMA Object data sheets attributed to Erlikilyika.

13) Oval plaque. Symmetrical composition. Indigenous man with body decoration - dark circle on stomach and lines on shoulders and neck/clavicles. Beard, headband. Forearms outstretched. Surrounded by four round inset depictions of Indigenous men's faces, all with beards and headbands, in circular frames. A boomerang above and two plant branches symmetrically arranged below.

Not in the NMA Object data sheets attributed to Erlikilyika.

14) Circular plaque, two Indigenous men fighting, in relief, headbands, one holds shield and boomerang, the other shield and spear. Legs raised - action depicted. Coloured on pale background.

You transfer your admiration to the carvings of aboriginal figures, and laugh with the artist at a bit of pictorial melodrama. He has portrayed by the point of his knife and subtle manipulation of Nature's paints two blacks in deadly combat. Blood is spurting from their wounds and they seem locked in a fatal, gory embrace.

NMA 1985.0060.0794

15) Asymmetric shaped plaque, three concave sides two straight sides. Divided into three sections with strong black lines showing three bearded Indigenous men conducting three different ceremonies or stages of a ceremony involving string and sticks.

Then, too, aborigines in the picturesque raiment of corroborees or, naked and unashamed, standing majestic in the garb Nature gave them.

Not in the NMA Object data sheets attributed to Erlikilyika.

16) Square plaque. Three round flowers on stem, in relief, possibly 'Silvertails' (similar form to those shown in No. 12). Dark coloured on pale background.

NMA 1985.0060.0791

17) Crouched hopping mouse (Jerboa, *Notomys sp.*) in 3D, coloured, sitting on pale carved kaolin rock/support.

Not in the NMA Object data sheets attributed to Erlikilyika.

18) Bird, 3D on pedestal, detailed feathers, coloured.

Perhaps the finest expression of Jim's art in feathers is a plump little thing on which he expended an undulation of sound. Candidly I cannot repeat it, for I was reclining in the exquisite reproduction of the plumage when the load slipped of the native's tongue. The neck feathers are like those of the closely packed texture of the quail, and you are surprised not to feel the silky softness instead of the solid surface of the clay, and Jim manages to elucidate the mystery a bit. 'He fly up big trees, crawl alonga ground, too.' Well, at least, this is no member of the quail family, and we are still puzzled over the crawl.

Not in the NMA Object data sheets attributed to Erlikilyika.

19) Uneven edged small plaque showing plant with five symmetrically arranged rounded 'pods' and two leaves. Shown in colour on pale background.

Not in the NMA Object data sheets attributed to Erlikilyika.

20) Small square plaque with one corner cut out, plant with asymmetric leaves and 'pods'. Shown in colour on pale background.

NMA 1985.0060.0799

Two further items described in the 1913 article which are not depicted in this photograph -

1) Combined man's face and dingo face pipe bowl (the item in the SAM collection).

2) Plaque with 'mass of snakes'

Here is a massed effect in snakes, and when you look into the detail you see the minute markings of the skin.

This is probably NMA 1985.0060.0793

There are three items in the NMA Object data sheet attributed to Erlikilyika that are not mentioned in the article: 1985.0060.0797, two grasshoppers on either end of a block; NMA 1985.0060.0786 relief depiction of a snake on a square plaque; 1985.0060.0789 carved 3D possum standing up against a tree trunk.

The Australian Museum collection, Sydney

The Australian Museum, Sydney, holds six kaolin figures attributed to Jim Kite, Registration Numbers E53247 - E53252. In the catalogue they are mistakenly referred to as 'plaster cast figures', and said to be carved with a stone scraper which does not accord with the more direct evidence of the 1913 newspaper report: wire and a knife are more likely to have been used.

The figures are said to be from 'Crown Springs, Central Australia', which may be a mislabelling of Crown Point, north of Charlotte Waters. They were purchased from Basedow's wife, and registered on the 1 March 1949.

Erlikilyika's Drawings

1) Eleven drawings in FJ Gillen's 1901 journal 18 March - 5 June 1901

Mortlock Library, SLSA, Adelaide PRG 54

See discussion of these images in chapter 3

Captions written presumably by Gillen:

1. Gum tree near our camp on which the magpies perch and sing daily
whole page
2. Native stalking a kangaroo
3. no caption
4. no caption
5. Man coroboreeing, man in foreground singing and beating time with boomerangs
6. Wild dog walkabout look out
7. Him seeum old man lizard close up alligator!
8. Him chassum wilddog
9. Him lookout longa tree mightum possum sit down
10. Him walk about

11. A debil-debil Coroboree belonging to Charlotte Waters. This drawing is intended to present the final scene in a Coroboree performed at Charlotte Waters. The central figure represents Kulbirra, a certain devil who resides in the Anderson Range and who occasionally makes medicine men, and the figures on each side are women who attempted to slay the devil but were frightened away by the sight of his stone knife.

2) Twenty seven drawings in Gillen family's narrow lined notebook

In the Robert Gillen Collection, NMA, 2001.0026.0001, donated by FJ Gillen's grandson Dr Robert Gillen in 2001.

Gillen 'supplied Erlikilyika with a book which he is going to fill with original sketches for my boys' (1968: 102) at TiTree Well, three weeks after the previous 11 drawings were made. He drew 27 pictures in this long narrow lined notebook, usually on the right hand page leaving the left hand page blank, using pencil and ink.

Inner front page

'6 eggs' faintly written at top - beginning of a list - a book present in the field, not used

Title, crossed out a number of times:

'Spencer Gillen Expedition

Journal of Erlikilia, known as

the "Subdued"

List of names, all in different (apparently children's) handwriting

Brian Gillen

Pamela Gillen

R[onda?] Gillen

Jack Gill

Twenty seven drawings in the following pages, consecutively as follows:

1) Caption: 'Parunda makes a damper while the Subdued sketches'
Woodforde Creek June 1st 1901. Caption presumably written by Gillen, the handwriting is similar to that in the *Camp Jottings*.

Detailed study / composition in pencil and ink: Profile of Indigenous man (face and arms shaded) with large meerschaum pipe in his mouth mixes damper in large bowl with one hand. He is kneeling on a square blanket or ground cover, shaded infill. The fire beside him burns brightly. Trees on a hill behind, leaves and ground not shown in detail. The man - probably Parunda - has short hair, moustache, shirt sleeved shirt with pocket, done up at the collar, long trousers and boots.

2) Caption: ' At Barrow Ck Kaitish damsel who admires Parundas moustache'
Pencil and ink - ink has blotted on to the previous blank page after closing the book. Face shaded in pencil. Full length, full-face picture of Indigenous woman in long striped skirt, long sleeved dress with 'leg-of-mutton' sleeves, high neck. Hands behind back. Bare feet, toes clearly shown. Ground shown by curved lines around the woman's feet.

3) Caption: 'Whitefellow shaking Hands'

Pencil? and ink pen. Similar to picture no 22.

Full-length, profile, European man in wide-brimmed hat, rounded high crown, moustache, large nose, facing right, offers left arm outstretched. Artist has had problems with the fingers on both hands - too many shown, then corrected the line. Eraser not used.

Detail of clothing shown - coat with high collar, done up with 6 buttons, side pocket, shirt cuffs shown, long trousers, high heeled boots. Ground shown by curved lines around the man's feet.

4) Caption: 'An old man in his wurley at Barrow Creek'

Ink pen - ink has blotted on the picture and on the facing page

'U' Shaped wooden hut, fire of large crossed branches burning just outside the door, lots of smoke blowing to the right, bearded Indigenous man standing behind it in the hut. Three-quarter face. Has long, full beard, headband, lion-cloth shaded in. Hands on thighs, fingers not clearly shown. Small bare feet.

Long pair of parallel lines runs through the centre - an error, not correctable.

Ground shown by curved lines around the base of the hut.

Three-quarter face is an unusual perspective to depict for a beginner drawer.

5) Caption: 'The same old man having a snooze'

Ink - has blotted the image onto the opposite page.

Same 'U' Shaped hut. Inside lies a man with beard, headband, his head resting on a round object. His arms are crossed over his stomach, fingers well shown on one hand, other covered, legs crossed at knee, toes not shown. Legs shaded in. Fire has burnt down - small flames burn along the length of one of the branches, thin line of smoke blows to the right. Ground around the base of the hut uprights shown by series of lines.

6) Caption: 'Frogs in a Waterhole'

Drawn to use the long axis of the narrow notebook, shows two frogs in full, upright, (not in perspective) surrounded by rocks and plants with leaves depicted with single lines. Two inkblots.

7) Caption: 'Little Jack Named after John Besley Gillen who was the first white man born at Alice Springs in N. Australia' - written in a different hand, less formed, more copperplate - a later addition.

A horse in a shaded background framing square.

8) 'Blackfellows climbing rocks'. Three naked men on a rugged rock outcrop, actively climbing, full face and profile. Shadow is shown with pencil shading. The form of the men is similar to those Erlikilyika drew in the earlier Gillen journal.

9) Caption: 'Hunting the wallaby. Hurrah I'm on top'

Pencil with some ink overlay. Bearded man, shown full face, in traditional headdress, arm- band and waistband, with woomera and spear, on a rock outcrop with grasses at its foot.

10) Caption: 'Chopping boughs to build a wurley'

White man in broad brimmed hat, shirt, belt with buckle, trousers holding tomahawk in one hand. Ground shown as a ring around the base of the tree. Tree has single line leaves, grasses single lines. Having trouble depicting hands - a circle with finger lines, and the ends of leg which are re-drawn over a number of times.

11) Caption 'Fixing the rail'

Drawn on long plane of the page. One man sits on a four legged chair. He has a moustache. The buttons and button-holes in his coat are clearly shown, his hands are better executed. A structure with walls and a roof is shown with scribbly lines infilling the roof. Shadow is shown with shading on the ground. A second man stands talking to him in stiped jumper, holding a high wooden rail. His belt and belt buckle are shown in great detail.

12) Caption: 'A camel'

All four feet shown, from slightly above. Detail of camel's genitals and wool on its front legs well shown. Shadow on the ground shaded.

13) Caption: 'Afghan and pack camels'

Two camels on ropes led by an Afghan man, the second camel sitting down with folded legs. All shown in profile. He has a turban, a beard and long shirt and wide trousers .The camel's loadings are drawn in careful detail

On left hand page

14) Caption: 'In camp'

An acutely observed portrait of camp life. Two horses graze in grass drawn in the usual style, with single lines and a surrounding circle. One has a bell. A white man with moustache bends over to put a carefully drawn billy on to the fire. He is surrounded by all the material items needed for camp life on the road laid out and shown in detail - bridle, stockwhip, saddle bags, saddle, swag, hatchet, knife fork spoon and quart pots with folding handle.

15) Caption: 'Afghan and pack camel'

Afghan man, no beard, detail of turban carefully observed, facing a camel led on a rope. Both in profile. The ropes tying the loading and the load carrying baskets depicted in great detail.

16) Caption: 'The artist is unable to say what this was intended for'

A white man with a moustache, shown in profile, sits on the ground, legs out, a knife in one hand pointed at the ground, the other hand raised.

no caption

page with no picture. In the unformed handwriting of the 'Little Jack' comment: 'All the drawings in this book were done by the natives during the expeditions of Gillen and Spencer'

17 and 18) No Caption. On right hand page a frontal view of a bearded man with hands folded together, shirt collar and buttons carefully drawn, small brimmed hat shaded in, with a white band. Hands drawn with fingers. Background shading in a 'halo' around the figure.

An unrelated picture of a man lying face down, resting on his elbows, with a large brimmed hat - a difficult pose to draw, some lines redrawn. At the top of the page a first attempt at drawing a profile of a woman in profile.

On left hand page, second attempt at profile of head and body of a woman, elaborate bonnet and hair, earring, all shown, and sash and bow of her dress. Had trouble depicting the wide sleeves of her dress. This portrait is larger and fills the page to a greater extent than the others.

19) Caption: 'The Professor' 'Professor' written again in a different hand. Two drawings of horses. One, saddled, is tied to a tree, shown on an angle to the ground in an effort to show position. Background is shaded. The left hand horse has 'The Professor' riding it, with a brimmed hat, a moustache, a long cane. Detail of the bridle and saddle are clearly shown.
On left hand page

20 and 21) On left hand page is a first attempt at drawing a man in profile, one hand up, the other carrying a stick. Done quickly, single line outline, fingers just lines - a working sketch.

Caption: 'A Stockman'. On the right hand page, this is worked up in detail, in a framed shaded/infilled box. Clothes, boots, buttons, fly of the trousers are all carefully drawn, fingers are clear.

22) and 23) On left hand page, a practice attempt at drawing the right hand man with hat, abandoned after bare outline of head only drawn.

On right hand page, Caption: 'How do old Chappie'. Two men, in profile, waistcoat and tie of one and coat with buttons carefully drawn, waistcoat shaded, style of boots developed to a formulaic pattern. They are holding each other by the arm, in an active pose.

24) No caption

Campsite. Fly net tent on top of a hill, three gum trees with bending branch structure carefully depicted, low outcrop of rocks in the foreground.

Background shaded.

25) Caption: 'Studies in Natural History'

a crab, detail of sections of legs drawn, and two pairs of shells, carefully drawn in 'scientific' mode, shaded inside the outlines.

On left hand page

26) Caption: 'The turtle we got at Kirriabubba' 'A crab'

Turtle's feet with toes, pattern of shell and two eyes shown. Crab's eyes, the sections of its legs carefully drawn. Both infilled with shading.

On left hand page

27) Caption: 'Alligator we did not get'

Great attention to the detail of the scales, the toes and claws, regular infill of single) lines for the scales. Shadow shown with shading.

On left hand page

3) Botanical pictures

Large folio book, album of 24 pencil drawings found in HK Fry's⁴ papers. No date, provenance uncertain.

AA105 in the South Australian Museum Anthropology Archives.

Title page reads 'Series of drawings of trees (with native names) by "Jimmy" a native of Alice Springs, C.A.'

See discussion of these images in Chapter 3.

⁴ 1886-1959 South Australian anthropologist and medical practitioner, 1913 chief medical inspector of Aborigines, based in Darwin. One of the inaugural members of the Board for Anthropological Research in 1925. He made many research trips to central Australia with the Board in the 1930s. Jones, Philip, 'Fry, Henry Kenneth (1886 - 1959)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 14, Melbourne University Press, 1996: 230-231.

Appendix 3: the yards and workers on Mt Dare station

Sunday 5 October 1997⁵

Talking with Bingeby Lowe by the fire inside his house at Anniversary Bore, its raining outside, has been for three days. Rained in. Telling stories. He recites in anti-clockwise sequence the 38 stockyards on Mt Dare, summoning up the country they are in as he lists the lesser-known ones:

List of yards on Mt Dare station

1. Bloods Creek yard
2. Federal
3. Opossum Bore – old one, few posts standing
4. Crispe Bore – Bingeby's yard that one
5. Dalhousie Homestead. Old People putting it.
6. Woodgate Swamp
7. Memory Bore
8. Irrwanyere. Bingeby Lowe and Harry Taylor put that one. Well there too, little engine
9. Ambitchera
10. Anvil Hole – that's Harry's yard.
(Don't put Witcherrie – its only just the posts.
11. North of Anvil Hole – Alinga Bore – not seen yet, in hill country ...
12. ...three yards there ...
13. ... on one bore, not far apart.
14. Eternity dam and stockyard on Macumba road
15. Ambulina
16. Oolarina – we didn't go and see
17. Oasis
18. Everglades
19. Muckarina yard
20. Anniversary bore
21. Round the corner, stub yard at Ewillina, another old Bingeby yard
22. Paddy yard beside Mooroolpera, all bushy now
23. Mooroolpera yard

⁵ Transcript of conversation at Anniversary Bore in Macfarlane field notebook 5 October 1997.

24. Dakota bore
25. Erina. Two yards there
26. Erina
27. One north, [of the border] Anacoora – where Brownie Doolan wants to get that place
28. Smiths Yards
29. Arltillera – Louse Dreaming, west of the Louse, stock yard there
30. Kathleen yard, old well there too, on sand dune side
31. Paradise yard, beautiful country, all green and all. I started that one
32. Alkothinka, south-west side from Paradise. Old one. Like Woodgate swamp, Jack Underdown put that one up.
33. Mt Dare station, old yard, finished now
34. Portable yard near Mt Dare
35. Straight west from Mt Dare – Sugarloaf yard
36. Ludgate yard, towards Bloods Creek on Abminga Creek
37. Christmas yard
38. Inninika near Cliffs Hole. Used to be one there at Cliffs Hole but all finished now.
Was a yard at Tin Shanty over the sand dune where house used to be on the west side. All rotted. Just stumps when I went there, when grown up, all gone there.

He then went on to remember all the people who used to work in these places.

BL: 20 people, 10 each in two plants worked the cattle. Old people passed away, left with young people, had to train them.

Used to have 12 men in camp, 13 with myself.

Most from Finke, Oodnadatta, country running a bit short of the men.

I went around slowly, white fellas came here to learn. If don't like the job, 'here's your cheque and you can go'. Some young people like it and they stop out. In Quorn, lives a good little stockman I trained up, old man now, Pod Vivian, good stockman. After learned here, Tiyon and Mt Owen, Kenmore. Stick to job and know what to do.

People who used to work on Mt Dare

Tim Doolan - father to Brownie Doolan, Paddy Doolan's brother. Aranda man.

Middle aged then old, not working.

Tim Tjimbuluka - died Macumba. Aranda man.
Drummer
Billy William
Billy Barlow
Belong to Mt Dare country, Mooroolperina country.
Long Jack man from Mt Dare
Wagon Jack
Johnny Cadell
Tom Inula
Madigan
Andrew Davis, went with Colson across the desert
George Underdown came from Oodnadatta
Lindsay - went to Taylors Well
Old Ah Chee - another one finished at Macumba. Ah Chee rainmaker
Nelson - Brownie Doolan's uncle
Albie Futton
Tom Cowell - Brownie Doolan's uncle
Tim half-caste fella, old fella
Telegraph - a worker, on wagon cutting wood from Mulga Creek and Gidgee
Creek for the housing, some goes to camp to Aboriginal camp for their wood.
Old Jimmie - Brownie Doolan's grandfather
Tommy Tosslong - good worker. Name because hip down, limping
Old Carbine. Died at Mt Dare, buried other side Mt Dare, Sugarloaf. Used to
camp there. Used to be goat shepherd and sheep
Old man at the Possum Junction - grave down there too.
He passed away Ted Ibe when I was down at Dalhousie. Wife named Dolly.
Abminga - cousins. Buried there. Willie Doolan, Tim and Paddy - two brothers
Now only two there Eddie Doolan and Brownie Doolan. Margaret Doolan
daughter to Brownie, Gloria her daughter, and hers are Irene and Maureen.
One old fellow buried at Mt Dare worked Bloods Creek for Ted Colson. From
Mt Dare Manbull, or Anvil Jack.
Ruby Colson, mother to Dean. Ted her father. Sister to Danny Colson, married
Gloria, Ernabella side, daughter of Arthur Warren, nickname Jo Warren.
May, Nellie, Fanny, Ruby - girls used to work in the house. Jemima Copper,
Topsy from this country working around the station. Some sit down and some

work, then swap round, take it in turns working all the time. Rest time, camp out, get rabbit.

Another old woman, Mabel. Lots of working girls used to be there, change over all the time, take it in turns with old Mrs Lowe.

Old fellow had that Tin Shanty first, the old Mt Dare, Dick Sandford shifted from there when drought was on, got away from the creek bed, Finke River, built that one up. Then Lowe came down and bought place from him - Sandford walked away because drought was on and lost all the cattle. I was only a little baby.

Jock Marks, Anna Creek. Brian Marks - Maxine, Rossie's sister Dorothy, passed away in Pt Augusta.

Laughton on Mt Dare, wife called Nora. Happy fella, good country and western singer, guitar, from around Alice Springs. Father Mick Laughton

Another half cast Willy Munduloon, part Afghan

Dick Taylor worked on the station when he wanted to, hard worker. Dug out the well, Taylors well, now Anniversary, father of Harry Taylor, born at Smiths Yards, his place. Grand father at Taylors well.

(Smiths Yards built by Jack Smith, father of Frank and Bobby Smith, Bobby father of Boof Smith. Was a good strong yard when I came, used to break in horses there.)

Old people used to tell me to shut up, not tell yarns. You gotta have good ears and good memory. No lose.

You gotta have your memories, speak out proper. Think all the time.

There's a story in everything. It'll come out.