

Chapter 6

CAPTAIN JOE'S BRADSHAW

It would be no exaggeration to call 'Captain' Joe Bradshaw a 'Colossus of the North' (plates 86, 87). He was one of the great entrepreneurs of early north Australia, standing with one business 'foot' in the Kimberley and the other in Arnhem Land, and Bradshaw station strategically placed below. An unenviable metaphorical position, perhaps, but 'Bradshaw's Run' was to become one of the legendary Northern Territory stations, and would long outlast Joe's other pastoral interests. This chapter is primarily concerned with the origin and early development of Bradshaw station, but this cannot be separated from the flamboyant Captain Joe and some of his other enterprises, and so his biography is also dealt with in some detail. Similarly, I have provided sufficient detail to highlight both the complexity of connections among whites and the often convoluted, problematic and sometimes sinister relations between the whites and the Aborigines.

Captain Joe was born in Victoria on June 10th 1854.¹ He was born into money, the son of Joseph Bradshaw, a wealthy squatter who owned several sheep properties, including Bolwarra station.² As an adult, Joe (junior) was always keen to add to the family fortune. During his life he had interests in mining, railways and shipping, as well as in pastoralism.³ In fact, his business interests were such that he spent comparatively little time living on any of his stations.

Joe's first love appears to have been sailing. He owned a series of yachts and launches, including a schooner named *The Twins*,⁴ a 'steamerette' called the *Red Gauntlet*,⁵ a

¹ T. Willing and D. Kenneally, *Under a Regent Moon: A historical account of pioneer pastoralists Joseph Bradshaw and Aeneas Gunn at Marigui Settlement, Prince Regent River, Kimberley, Western Australia, 1891-1892*, Department of Conservation and Land Management, Perth, 2002, p. 14.

² R. Maynard, Entry on Joseph Bradshaw in D. Carment, R. Maynard and A Powell (eds), *Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography*, VI, Northern Territory University Press, Darwin, 1990, p. 32.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for April 1894. Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 2261.

kerosene launch, the *Wunwulla*,⁶ and another launch, the *Bolwarra*.⁷ These vessels were the main means for transport of goods and people to and from his various stations; at Bradshaw the remains of two landings where these boats moored can still be seen, opposite the sites of the pre-1905 and post-1905 homesteads.⁸ Joe's title of 'Captain' may have been honorary, possibly bestowed by the Sydney Yachting Club.⁹ He certainly was not a qualified ship's engineer because twice in 1894 he had to ask permission to sail the *Red Gauntlet* without a qualified engineer on board.¹⁰

In his schooner *Twins* (aka *Gemini*) Captain Joe explored a long stretch of the north coast and later published several papers on the north¹¹ for which he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.¹² For services to trade between Australia and the 'Netherlands Islands' (modern Indonesia) he was made a Life Fellow of the Imperial Institute,¹³ and he was active in public affairs, writing letters on various topics to Government officials or to

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for January 1894. This vessel is not to be confused with the nineteenth century luxury yacht of the same name, owned by Edward Langtry, the first husband of the famous Lillie Langtry (E. Dudley, *The Gilded Lily: The Life and Loves of the fabulous Lillie Langtry*, Odhams Press Limited, London, 1958); see the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28-9-1880 for a description of this yacht in Sydney Harbour.

⁷ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for June 1897.

⁸ See D. Lewis, *The Boab Belt: A Survey of Historic Sites in the North-Central Victoria River District*. Report prepared for the Australian National Trust (NT), vol. 1, sites 21, 1996, pp. 110-112; D. Lewis, *The Final Muster: A Survey of Previously Undocumented Historic Sites Throughout the Victoria River District*, report prepared for the Australian National Trust (NT), 2000, site 32, pp. 129-141.

⁹ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 26-5-1925.

¹⁰ Under Treasurer T. Stevens to Government Resident Charles Dashwood, Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) – Inwards Correspondence, 1870-1912, Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item 5948; J. Bradshaw to Government Resident, 15-2-1894 and 2-10-1894, Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) – Inwards Correspondence, 1870-1912, Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item 6256; Harbor [sic] Master H. Marsh to Government Resident Charles Dashwood, 2-10-1894, Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) – Inwards Correspondence, 1870-1912, Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item 6256.

¹¹ J. Bradshaw, 'The Future of Northern Australia', *Transactions of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, Victorian Branch*, vol. 9, 1891, pp. 107-16; J. Bradshaw, 'Notes on a recent trip to the Prince Regent's River', *Transactions of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, Victorian Branch*, vol. 9, pt. 2, 1892, pp. 90-103. He also published a paper in 1907, 'The Northern Territory', in the *Victorian Geographical Journal*, vol. 25, pp. 20-28.

¹² C. Kelly, Archivist at the Royal Geographical Society, to N.B. Nairn, General Editor of the Australian Dictionary of Biography, 28-1-1982. File on Joseph Bradshaw at the Australian Dictionary of Biography Centre, Australian National University, Canberra.

¹³ 'The late Mr. Joseph Bradshaw', *The Pastoral Review*, 16-8-1916, p. 725; 'Mr. Joseph Bradshaw', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 19-3-1914.

newspapers. He once advocated the adoption of a uniform phonetic system for the recording of Aboriginal words, but unfortunately the idea was not adopted.¹⁴

Joe was a Justice of the Peace in several states and a Special Justice in the Northern Territory,¹⁵ and in this capacity he had the power to hear court cases, hold inquests, sign warrants, and perform other duties. When Mounted Constable O'Keefe was ordered to close the Gordon Creek police station and establish a new station at Timber Creek, it was Joe who 'held a court at the Depot under a box tree',¹⁶ and 'approved of site for new [police] Station.'¹⁷ Joe laid down the law at the Depot several times over the next four years,¹⁸ but he was not above bending the law a little himself. After one hearing O'Keefe sent a memo to headquarters alleging that Bradshaw and another man attempted to avoid paying the dog licence fee by making out that their dogs belonged to Aborigines.¹⁹

Exactly when Joe first went to northern Australia is unclear, but he soon gained an extensive knowledge of the north Australian coast and its pastoral potential. In 1890 he obtained a lease for over 400,000 hectares in the northwest Kimberley,²⁰ and the following year he led a party overland from Wyndham to examine the leased area more closely. Included in this party were Joe's brother Fred (plate 88), Hugh Young, W.F. Allen, and two Aborigines from Darwin.²¹ Deep in the Kimberley they discovered some finely drafted red ochre rock paintings of human figures. Joe believed these paintings were so different from Aboriginal rock art elsewhere, and so finely executed, that they must have been done by visitors from some ancient civilisation, a theory now long discredited.²² He published a

¹⁴ J. Bradshaw to the President of the Royal Geographical Society, South Australian Branch, 20-4-1900. Manuscript 14c, Royal Geographical Society of South Australia.

¹⁵ 'The late Mr. Joseph Bradshaw', *The Pastoral Review*, 16-8-1916, p. 725; 'Mr. Joseph Bradshaw', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 19-3-1914.

¹⁶ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for 11-5-1898.

¹⁷ Timber Creek police journal, 1-5-1898, Northern Territory Archives, F302.

¹⁸ Ibid: 3-11-1902, 19-4-1903, 29-8-1903.

¹⁹ Ibid: 19-4-1903.

²⁰ T. Willing and D. Kenneally, *Under a Regent Moon*, 2002, p. 1.

²¹ J. Bradshaw. *Journal, 31 Jan – 6 June 1891, on an expedition from Wyndham, W.A. to the Prince Regent River district, W.A.* Mitchell Library B967, CY reel 1515.

²² I. Crawford, *The Art of the Wandjina*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1968, p. 81; D. Lewis, *The Rock Paintings of Arnhem Land, Australia: Social, Ecological and Material Culture Change in the Post-Glacial Period*. British Archaeological Reports International Series 415. Oxford, 1988, pp. 84-85, 94-93, 110-112.

paper on these paintings in 1892 and they subsequently became known as 'Bradshaw figures'.²³

In later years he was one of the directors of the Eastern and African Cold Storage Company which established the massive 51,800 square kilometre Arafura station in Arnhem Land in 1903. This station was stocked with 20,000 head of cattle, and a homestead and yards were built, but in the end it failed, a victim of floods, fever, crocodiles, dense and unpalatable spear grass, and attacks by Aborigines on the cattle and station employees.²⁴

Joe soon reduced his Kimberley holdings to only 60,000 hectares between the Prince Regent and Roe Rivers.²⁵ He named the new station Marigui and began to stock it with sheep in 1892,²⁶ but a number of factors eventually led him to throw up this lease and shift his attention to the Northern Territory. No doubt these factors included the isolation, severe climate, and Aboriginal resistance, but primarily it was the fact that before he could fully stock the lease with a large flock of sheep he had bought from VRD (see Chapter 8), the Western Australian government imposed a tax of two shillings and sixpence per head on all sheep entering the colony.²⁷ This occurred in 1893 and rather than pay the tax, Joe looked for land in the Territory.

In the early 1890s Captain Joe had visited the Victoria River and discovered that a large piece of country across the river from the Depot was still crown land. It was still 'blackfella country', too, the home of the Jaminjung people. On July 27th 1893 Joe applied to the Minister for the Northern Territory to lease '6000 sq' miles on the north bank of the Victoria River N.T. at 6d per mile for 42 years'.²⁸

²³ J. Bradshaw, *Transactions of the Royal Geographical Society of South Australia*, vol. 9, pt 2, 1892, pp. 90-103.

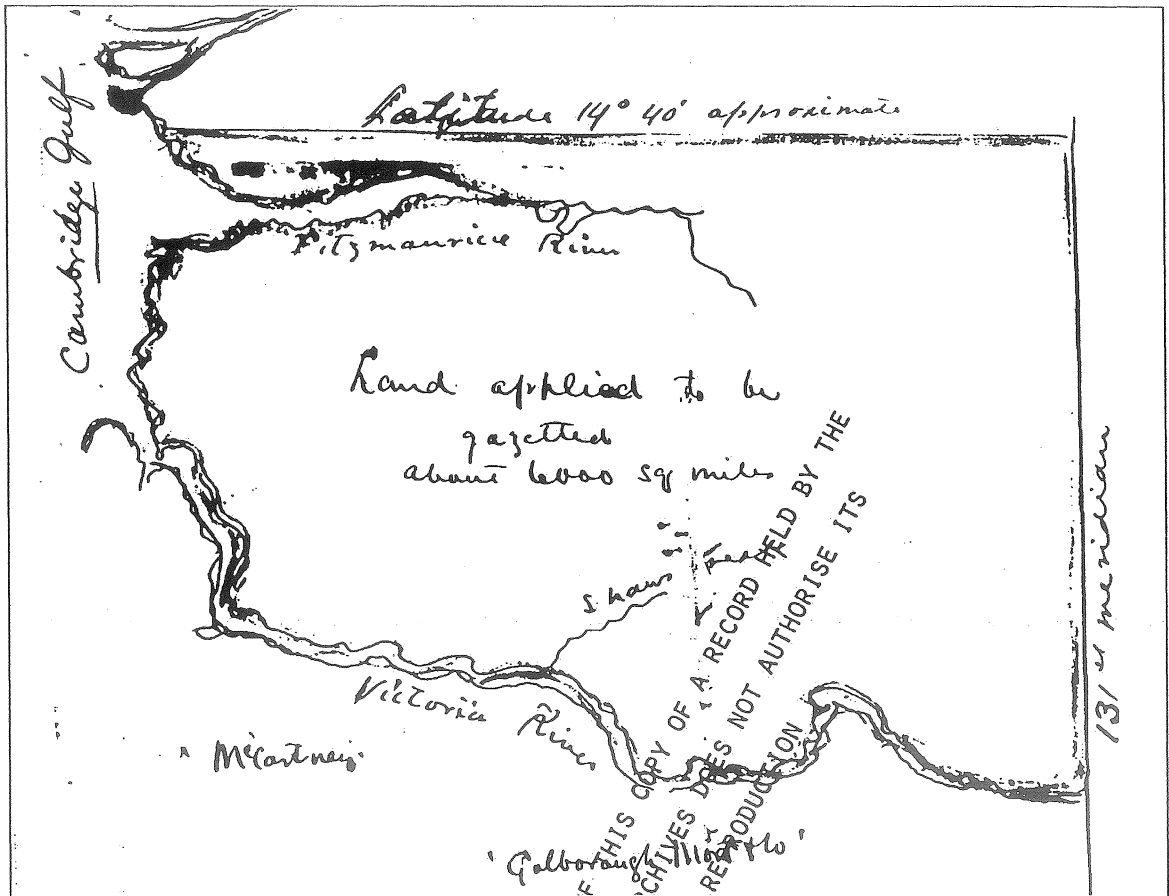
²⁴ R. Donovan, *The Northern Territory Pastoral Industry 1863-1910*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1967, pp.134-135.

²⁵ T. Willing and D. Kenneally, *Under a Regent Moon*, 2002, pp. 4, 6, 7.

²⁶ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 27-5-1892; Aeneas Gunn, 'The Contributor. Pioneering in Northern Australia', *Prahran Telegraph*, 14-10-1899.

²⁷ The tax was thirty shillings per head on cattle and twenty shillings per head on horses (*Western Australian Parliamentary Debates*, Sessions 1893, vol. 2, page 257).

²⁸ J. Bradshaw to the Minister for Lands (NT), 27-7-1893. Australian Archives, A.C.T. CRS A1640, item 93/302.



Map 8: The map Joe Bradshaw sent to the Minister for Lands showing the area he wanted to lease.

The Minister was not impressed – the official rental was one shilling per square mile, so Joe’s application was rejected. On August 16th he wrote again, still offering to pay only six pence per square mile because, he said, ‘From reports at my disposal I estimated that nearly one half of the country I applied for is occupied by sterile sandstone ranges, and that I would be paying fully one shilling per mile for such country as I could use.’²⁹

Joe’s reports were completely accurate. Roughly half of Bradshaw station is within the Fitzmaurice River basin, almost all of which is wild, rough, stony country. The basin is bounded on the south side by the towering, cliff-lined Yambarran Range (formerly the ‘Sea

²⁹ J. Bradshaw to the Minister for the Northern Territory, 16-8-1893. Australian Archives, ACT CRS A1640, item 93/302.

Range' of Stokes³⁰), a range that has been a dominating presence throughout Bradshaw history. Joe also told the Minister that considering how much unoccupied country there was in the Northern Territory the rent was too high, and he appears to have tried some subtle pressure to have the rent reduced:

I would feel obliged for your early decision on this matter as I am about despatching a cargo of sheep to my country in Kimberley W.A. but on receiving a favourable reply from you I would probably alter their destination to the Northern Territory.³¹

It is clear Joe did not receive a 'favourable reply' because when he gave evidence to the 1895 Royal Commission into the Northern Territory, he stated, 'I am paying for a lot of useless land, so that my rental is really 2s. a mile for that which is any good.'³²

Bradshaw's Run came into existence on January 1st 1894 when Joe obtained a lease for 6,800 square miles,³³ and the size of the run was considerably expanded in January 1898 when Joe's brother Fred obtained a lease for 2000 square miles immediately north of Joe's lease. The two leases were run as one station making Bradshaw a massive 8,800 square miles.³⁴ Fred appears to have lived permanently on the station from this time.

Some time after the original lease was taken up a station diary was begun, the 'Log Book of Bradshaw's Run'.³⁵ Initially it was a record of some of the more significant events, quite likely written retrospectively, but from June 19th 1899 it became a day by day account of station activities, finally ending on July 13th 1901. It is a unique document in the early history of the Victoria River region, providing a fascinating insight into the process of

³⁰ J.L. Stokes, *Discoveries In Australia...During the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle in the years 1837-43*, vol. 2, T. and W. Boone, London, 1846, p. 52.

³¹ J. Bradshaw to the Minister for the Northern Territory, 16-8-1893. Australian Archives, ACT, CRS A1640, item 93/302.

³² Joe Bradshaw in 'Report of the Northern Territory Commission together with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices', *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 2, no. 19, 1895, answer to question 3237.

³³ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for January 1894.

³⁴ Ibid: entry for January 1898.

³⁵ Ibid.

exploration and early development of the station, and the complex state of relations between the European newcomers, and the 'bush' and station Aborigines.

The Log Book records that on May 17th 1894, a temporary camp was established at the base of 'The Dome'³⁶ and all the stores and equipment were landed there, but later these goods were moved back onboard a boat to prevent theft by Aborigines.³⁷ On September 22nd *The Twins* moved all the stores and other goods up Angalarri Creek to a place called Kumallalay or 'Youngsford', and a homestead was established there.³⁸ This homestead was visited by a Norwegian zoologist, Knut Dahl, in April 1895 and his description of the buildings and station staff is the earliest on record:

Having rowed for several hours we heard bells and very soon saw the 'station,' an open shed surrounded by some other buildings of still simpler architecture.

Three Englishmen, a Brazilian and a Swede, besides a couple of Port Darwin blacks with their women, occupied themselves in shepherding a few thousand sheep, and appeared on the whole to lead a precarious existence. The Swede got very excited at meeting a Scandinavian. The station itself, as a going concern, looked pretty miserable. The houses were, to put it mildly, very sketchily built, all sorts of implements, as it were, floating around anyhow.³⁹

The supply of freshwater at Kumallalay proved unsatisfactory so in January 1896 the homestead was shifted to a high bank on the north side of Angalarri Creek, close to 'Duetpun spring' which flows from under the cliffs of the Yambarran Range.⁴⁰ In 1905 the homestead was shifted once more to a more elevated site about a kilometre away⁴¹ and this site was occupied until the 1950s (plate 89).⁴²

³⁶ 'The Dome', named by Stokes-Wickham expedition, is a cone-shaped hill about nine kilometres below the Angalarri Creek-Victoria River junction.

³⁷ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for 22-9-1894; H.Y.L. Brown, 'Port Darwin to Victoria River By Sea', in 'Northern Territory Explorations', *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 3, no. 82, 1895.

³⁸ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, 22-9-1894. The exact location of this homestead site has not been determined.

³⁹ K. Dahl, *In Savage Australia: an account of a hunting and collecting expedition to Arnhem Land and Dampier Land*, Allan, London, 1926, p. 190.

⁴⁰ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for January 1896.

⁴¹ G. Le Hunte, 'Northern Territory (Report by his Excellency the Governor of South Australia)', *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 2, no. 37, 1905, p. 6.

⁴² See D. Lewis, *The Boab Belt*, vol. 1, 1996, site 17, pp. 96-103.

Bradshaw station was set up with the help of 'foreign' Aborigines, one from south of Halls Creek⁴³ and others from Darwin,⁴⁴ and at least one from the local area. Although most local Aborigines were still quite hostile to the white settlers at the time Bradshaw station was established, the use of the placenames 'Kumallalay' and 'Duetpun' indicates that within a year at least one local Aborigine was assisting the settlers. This person probably came from the neighbouring Auvergne station which had been established in 1886,⁴⁵ but may have been a bush Aborigine who previously had been in contact with or observed the white people at Auvergne or elsewhere, and who decided to come in to work for the newly arrived whites on Bradshaw. In this circumstance Bradshaw station was different from and more fortunate than other stations in the region. Elsewhere the settlers did not have local Aboriginal guides for many years, and had to find the various waters and access routes for themselves.

As might be expected, when a station was established one of the first actions was to begin exploring, or more appropriately, examining the lease. I say 'examining' because the country was 'new' or 'undiscovered' to the Europeans, but intimately known to and named by Aborigines for thousands of years, and the Bradshaw whites had access to local knowledge. Some trips were made specifically to quickly gain an overview of where the best pastureland and waters were, while knowledge also was gained incidental to other activities.

For Europeans, 'learning the country' was a process that continued for years. In August 1894 'Communication was opened between the sheep party now on the Fitzmaurice River and the station at the Dome'.⁴⁶ This line of communication was through the Angalarrri Valley and if it had not already been examined, this trip revealed the extent of useful land – almost all the good land on Bradshaw. Shortly afterwards Joe Bradshaw and Captain

⁴³ Aeneas Gunn, 'The Contributor. Pioneering in Northern Australia', *Prahran Telegraph*, 5-8-1899; Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for August 8th 1899.

⁴⁴ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 6-7-1894.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*: 28-8-1886.

⁴⁶ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for August 1894.

Lindsay examined the Fitzmaurice River by boat,⁴⁷ and chances are their observations of the generally rocky country there, similar to that along the lower Victoria, deterred them from further exploration for a period. It was not until June 1897 that the Log Book again refers to exploration of the station:

Messrs Bradshaw [...?...] & party made an exploration of the country between the Victoria & Fitzmaurice rivers, discovering good country along the course of the Lalxin creek with many fine pools of water such as Kibura, Dhimon Dhiriji, Laberi, Kokin jerima, Kulindu, Labangula, Dargatchi etc.⁴⁸

This passage documents the first time whites entered the Koolendong Valley, a major Aboriginal access route through the rough ranges between the Victoria and Fitzmaurice rivers.⁴⁹ The location can be identified because some of the placenames are still recognisable today: 'Dhimon Dhiriji' is Jiminjerry waterhole, Kulindu is Koolendong waterhole.⁵⁰ Once again, the recording of Aboriginal placenames shows that the Bradshaw whites had a local Aboriginal guide (or guides), and were not making discoveries for themselves.⁵¹

In the course of examining and moving about the station the white men came across two boab trees marked by Europeans. One found near the Dome bore markings from Gregory's expedition (plate 90), while another found on Angalarri Creek bore the words 'Fred Adams Southhampto' [sic] and a date that appeared to be either 'Oct 15' or 'Oct '75'. The excited station hands wrote to the Government Resident about it, and suggested the inscription had been cut in 1775 or 1815, either by unknown sailors looking for fresh water or 'by some

⁴⁷ Ibid: entry for 4-9-1894.

⁴⁸ Ibid: entry for June 1897.

⁴⁹ Personal communication, Andrew McWilliam, who carried out an Aboriginal sites survey on Bradshaw in the late 1990s.

⁵⁰ I have documented these sites in my 1996 National Trust report, *The Boab Belt*, vol. 1, sites 4 and 5.

⁵¹ Further 'discoveries' were yet to be made; the following year Fred Bradshaw found or was shown, 'a fine spring called Wujemon' about 40 miles from the station.' (Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for 22-7-1898). Other placenames in the Log Book that are recognisable today are Kullajunga Creek (Kurrajungle), Wujemon (Widgeman Spring), Eucumbon (Ikymbon Creek), Angalarri (Angalarri Creek) and Mairanyi (Marani paddock). These placenames are mentioned in entries for September 1897, 22-7-1898, 4-7-1899, 22-9-1899, and 22-10-1899, respectively).

shipwrecked seaman making inland for assistance'.⁵² A similar letter was published in the *Northern Territory Times*,⁵³ but when explorer Augustus Gregory learnt of the discovery he put a damper on these wild imaginings by revealing that Fred Adams had been a member of his expedition and therefore the date was 1855.⁵⁴ Both trees have long since disappeared.⁵⁵

During the time the lease was being explored, Captain Joe was also stocking it and establishing basic infrastructure. Initially he brought in over 4,500 sheep he purchased from VRD. Their fate is documented in Chapter 8 and need not be recounted here. Suffice it to say that the project was a disaster. Less than two years after the station was established moves were made to replace the sheep with cattle and within ten years only three or four sheep were left.

The cattle that stocked Bradshaw came from Willeroo station which had been abandoned after Aborigines killed the manager in 1892 (see Chapter 7). Joe hired Jock McPhee to muster the cattle and bring them to Bradshaw, and over the next five years the Log Book documents the arrival of a total of 1,512 head from Willeroo.⁵⁶ While there were sheep on Bradshaw, one or two yards and paddocks had been built to hold them,⁵⁷ but generally they had been looked after by shepherds.⁵⁸ Shepherds are neither necessary nor practical for cattle, but yards are virtually indispensable, so soon after the Willeroo cattle were bought, work on cattle yards began. At the time the Willeroo brand was 'J41'⁵⁹ – and 'J41 Yard', built during the time that the Willeroo cattle were being transferred to Bradshaw⁶⁰ and still

⁵² Aeneas Gunn, P.C. McDonald, Hugh Young, D. Buchanan and D. Darrock to Government Resident, 20-4-1895. Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) – Inwards Correspondence, 1870-1912, Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item 6525.

⁵³ Aeneas Gunn, et al, 'A Curious Discovery', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 24-5-1895.

⁵⁴ 'Notes of the Week', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 6-9-1895.

⁵⁵ In the course of Historic sites surveys for the Australian National Trust (NT) I have carried out intensive surveys of boabs in the areas where these trees were found. Various historic marked trees were recorded, but not those found by the Bradshaw men.

⁵⁶ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entries for 27-9-1895, 25-10-1895, 30-7-1896 and 15-7-1899.

⁵⁷ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for April 1896 and 20-9-1900.

⁵⁸ Ibid: entries for January 1896 and 22-7-1896.

⁵⁹ Ibid: entry for 23-5-1900.

⁶⁰ Ibid: entry for 5-7-1899.

marked on modern maps,⁶¹ is a reminder of the founding herd. As well as 'J41', by 1901 another eight yards were built, various areas were fenced and several outstation huts built.⁶²

In May 1896 a small dam was built at Deutpun Spring and pipes were laid from there to the homestead.⁶³ The Log Book has many references to these pipes being cleared of blockages, but when it was flowing the supply to the house was up to '1500 gallons per 24 hours'.⁶⁴ For decades Bradshaw was probably the only station in the district to have water on tap, and spring water is still being piped to the homestead today.

In 1900 work began on what is probably the most amazing early engineering work ever carried out on any station in the Victoria River district. On May 23rd the Log Book reported that 'JB [Joe Bradshaw] FMB [Frederick Maxwell Bradshaw], Ivan [Egoriffe] and 3 boys' were 'blasting out a horse track to the top of the cliffs at Tyalutyi Spring.' The next day 'All hands except the cook' were 'making a zig-zag road up the cliffs at Tyuluchi.'⁶⁵ The result of their work can still be seen today; in the 'slot' where a huge section of the cliff was blown out, picks and crowbars must have been used to form a steep one-horse-wide track with two hairpin turns. On part of the downhill side of this track there is a sheer drop of more than five metres so if a horse or person slipped they would suffer severe injury or death. Immediately below the cliff the slope is quite steep so a long sweeping zig-zag track was made until a gentler grade was reached (plates 91, 92).⁶⁶

⁶¹ J41 Yard is located on the Ikymbon 1:100,000 map, sheet 5067, (edition 1). Co-ordinates 949 327.

Though the yard is still marked on this map it was burnt down many years ago.

⁶² The Log Book mentions construction of a stub yard near Mount Panton in November 1895, a stockyard 'beyond Anglepoint' in April 1896, one at the homestead in September 1899, Dusty Camp stockyard in September 1900, construction of a 'draughting yard' between October 1900 and January 1901, of a tailing yard at Larrikin Billabong (Larrung Pool) in May 1901, and tailing yards at Wilsons Creek (Ballan—Gootchee) and Snake Billabong in December 1901. Fences also were built; a horse paddock in January 1896, Wogura paddock in December 1898, Junction paddock in July 1899, a 'division fence' through the horse paddock in June 1899, a division fence 'from Spring to River' and the 'Dome fence' in January 1900, and a 'Drop fence' at 'Myranna' in December 1900. Old photos show that huts were built at Myranna and Larung in the early 1900s (see plate 93), and there were huts at Wombungie and J41 yard at an early date.

⁶³ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for May 1896.

⁶⁴ Ibid: entries for 19-6-1899.

⁶⁵ Ibid: entries for 23-5-1900 and 24-5-1900.

⁶⁶ I have documented this site in my 1996 report, *The Boab Belt*, vol. 1, site 16, pp. 87-95.

Given how relatively few cattle the Fitzmaurice River basin can support, it is surprising that construction of this packhorse track was considered worthwhile. However, built it was. The top of the Yambarran Range is flat and open from one to ten kilometres back from the edge of the cliff line, and then drops away into a network of gullies, the headwaters of streams flowing to the Fitzmaurice River. Once stockmen reached the summit they could ride along the range for over 45 kilometres, and begin a muster down any one of these creeks they chose. How often the track was used is unclear. In the historical record there are only a few references to it being used, including by the Liddy brothers who were stockmen on Bradshaw in the 1930s, and by a police patrol during the manhunt for Nemarluk in 1932.⁶⁷

By the time Captain Joe had arrived to establish his station in 1894 there had been a regular though infrequent presence of Europeans along the river and at the Depot for a decade, and it is clear that hostilities between the Aborigines and whites in the local region were already well established. In 1894 the stores landed at the Depot were being held under guard until the station wagons arrived, and 'the blacks had been so aggressive that the guards had to barricade themselves behind the flour bags and keep up a continual rifle fire all night.'⁶⁸ And there had been earlier, more serious incidents – the spearing of Tom Hardy at Auvergne, the attack on 'Spanish Charley' near the Depot, and the murder of Manton on the West Baines in 1890 (see Chapter 4).

Just as had happened on other stations in the region, conflict with Aborigines quickly became a dominant aspect of life on Bradshaw. Not long after the sheep arrived the Aborigines began to spear them, and consequently the Bradshaw stockmen fired on Aborigines whenever they saw them.⁶⁹ After one instance of sheep spearing a number of Aborigines are said to have been shot dead and their bodies burned by Jock McPhee and Hugh Young.⁷⁰ The original flock of 4,500 had diminished to less than 114 by early 1899 (see Chapter 8), so the shooting and burning of these Aborigines is likely to have occurred in the years 1894 to 1898. After Mulligan and Ligar were attacked in Jasper Gorge it was

⁶⁷ E. Morey, 'Timber Creek Patrols', pt 1. *Northern Territory Newsletter*, Darwin, July issue, 1977, p. 18.

⁶⁸ K. Dahl, *In Savage Australia*, 1926, p. 189.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*: 190.

⁷⁰ Tom Pearce to Billy Linklater, 9-10-1948. Mitchell Library, A1 10/26.

Hugh Young who led a party from Bradshaw to the gorge to secure the loading. In this instance they found matters already in hand so returned within a day or so without violent contact with Aborigines (see Chapter 5).

With the arrival of cattle on Bradshaw in September 1895,⁷¹ the Aborigines soon turned their attention to them. In April 1896, 'The Myalls made themselves obnoxious by spearing horses and cows, so had to be dispersed near the stockyard beyond Anglepoint.'⁷² Possibly the same 'dispersal' was reported by a 'correspondent' to the *Northern Territory Times*:

The niggers have speared a few more horses, and were kind enough to send in word (the messenger standing on top of a cliff and sheltered by a big rock) that they would spear all the horses and then come along and spear all hands. They also tackled me and another man while poking about in the ranges, but they only hurt themselves.⁷³

Shortly after Fred Bradshaw arrived on the station in 1898 he was rudely awakened to the dangers of living in the north when, for reasons that are unknown, an Aborigine named Imgbora (alias Xilla Inixas Farhu) tried to kill him.⁷⁴ In spite of this, Fred later was said to have been very kind to the Aborigines⁷⁵ and there is evidence that in his case this statement may have been correct.

There may have been a camp for bush blacks on Bradshaw by 1899 as the Log Book entry for June 7th mentions that 'Ivan and five myalls went in the launch to Blunder Bay to meet the Sch [schooner] Midge.'⁷⁶ There certainly was one a year later because the Log Book records that, 'During the night the two boys Larraba & Jacky, ran away... Three other myalls vis George, Jacky & Dyrter, were procured from the camp, to fill places of the runaways and were supplied with clothes and blankets.'⁷⁷ There can be little doubt that, as

⁷¹ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for 27-9-1895.

⁷² Ibid: entry for April 1896.

⁷³ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 17-4-1896.

⁷⁴ Timber Creek police journal, 7-11-1900; 'Attack by Blacks at the Fitzmaurice River'. *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 2-12-1898.

⁷⁵ For example, see 'Massacres in the Northern Territory', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 18-12-1905; 'An Alleged Terrible Tragedy', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 22-12-1905.

⁷⁶ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for 7-6-1899.

⁷⁷ Ibid: entry for 28-6-1900.

on other stations in the region, for many years there was a flow of Aborigines back and forth between the bush, the myall camp at the homestead, and station employment.⁷⁸ An instance of this is shown in the story of the killing of Larsen, described below. The Aborigines who killed Larsen were employed as crew on the station boat, and after committing the crime one of them returned to the 'myall' camp at Bradshaw while the other stayed with bush blacks at 'Anglelarry'.

Troubles between the whites and Aborigines on Bradshaw were not restricted to the 'myalls' or 'bush' blacks. There were occasional clashes with Aborigines working on the station, and during the first decade on Bradshaw most of the problems seem to have been instigated by a white employee named Ivan Egoriffe, and fuelled by 'grog'. Ivan worked for Joe Bradshaw as engineer and general hand from at least 1894⁷⁹ until his death in 1905. He was 'a native of Russia or Finland', a powerfully built man with 'a reputation for surliness and harsh treatment of the natives under him.'⁸⁰ It is likely that he was an alcoholic and he certainly was a man who became 'Ivan the Terrible' when drunk. The Log Book entry for October 21st 1899 mentions that 'Larsen and Ivan have been stealing grog out of the store, hence sundry rows', and another entry records that 'Towards evening Ivan was intoxicated and behaved like a madman.'⁸¹

Ivan's behaviour 'on the grog' probably accounts for much of his 'harshness' towards Aborigines (and sometimes towards whites). In October 1899 he went to the Depot, and on his return was seen to be showing the effects of heavy drinking.⁸² The next day Ivan was due to go out to 'Myranna', an outstation about fourteen kilometres east of the homestead (plate 93), but before he left he could not find his revolver. He left without the gun and when he arrived at Myranna, still showing the effects of alcohol, he accused an Aboriginal named Binge of stealing it.⁸³ At the homestead the following day Fred Bradshaw

⁷⁸ M. Richards, *Aborigines in the Victoria River Region: 1883-1928*.

Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies Newsletter, New Series 17, 1980, pp. 26-34.

⁷⁹ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for April 1894.

⁸⁰ 'An Alleged Terrible Tragedy', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 22-12-1905.

⁸¹ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for 23-12-1900.

⁸² *Ibid*: entry for 9-11-1900.

⁸³ *Ibid*: entry for 10-11-1900.

questioned Binge who 'denied having taken Ivan's revolver, and accused Ivan of having fired at him with that weapon.'⁸⁴ The revolver was eventually found in a box in Ivan's room. Fred Bradshaw, Binge and George went back to Myranna the next day, taking the revolver with them, and 'On arriving at Myranna found all going on well, but on seeing Binge Ivan commenced to beat him. FMB interfered, when Ivan became unbearable and abusive, & insulting but subsequently apologised.'⁸⁵

In September or October 1899 Kolumboi, an Aborigine who came from south of Halls Creek and had been part of the team at Marigui,⁸⁶ ran away from the homestead with a 'lubra' named Yanimbella.⁸⁷ The reason why they absconded is unknown, but on October 5th they were captured and chained up for the night. The next day, 'Ivan gave Kolumboi the father of a bumping and sent him and the lubra to glory.'⁸⁸ Being 'sent to glory' would normally be taken to mean that they had been murdered, but it is possible it just meant that they had been told to clear out for good; neither Kolumboi's nor Yanimbella's name appears in the Log Book again.

After a trip to Darwin in July 1900 the Bradshaw launch *Wunwulla* anchored in the mouth of the Daly River, waiting for the tide to rise before moving upstream.⁸⁹ On board were Ivan Egoriffe, the skipper Jan 'Jack' Larsen,⁹⁰ and a crew of three Victoria River Aborigines, namely George (aka 'Josey'⁹¹), Jimmy, and a young boy named Georgie.⁹² Shortly before it arrived there, two Daly River Aborigines were brought on board to act as pilots for the trip upstream.⁹³ At about midnight as preparations were being made to start upstream, someone hit Ivan on the back of the head and stunned him, and then threw him overboard. The water revived him and he managed to clamber into the boat's dinghy which was tied behind, but it was immediately cut loose. Ivan tried to paddle back but a shot was fired at him, so he let the current take him, and as he drifted away he heard Larsen cry out,

⁸⁴ Ibid: entry for 11-11-1900.

⁸⁵ Ibid: entry for 12-11-1900.

⁸⁶ Aeneas Gunn, 'The Contributor. Pioneering in Northern Australia', *Prahran Telegraph*, 5-8-1899.

⁸⁷ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for 6-11-1899.

⁸⁸ Ibid: 6-11-1899.

and then a shot.⁹⁴ It was later learned that Larsen had been shot in the forehead while being held by the neck and his body thrown overboard.⁹⁵

Ivan was rescued the next day by Captain Mugg on the lugger *Minniehaha*. Eventually Ivan and Mugg got word to the authorities in Darwin who dispatched Mounted Constables Stott and Stone from Brocks Creek to investigate.⁹⁶ In an Aboriginal camp south of the Daly River mouth they arrested two Daly River men – ‘Cammerfor’ and ‘Monkgum’⁹⁷ – who were said to have admitted to others in the camp that they had killed Larsen and the three Victoria River men.⁹⁸

The police arrived back in Darwin with their prisoners and three witnesses on August 1st, and they appeared in court the next day. The Aborigines told their stories through an interpreter, and it was reported that, ‘By their own confession the two prisoners appear to have committed a deed unique in the annals of outrages perpetrated by natives for the cool boldness exhibited in its accomplishment’, and the police were ‘congratulated on the clever and prompt manner in which they have succeeded in bringing the offenders to book.’⁹⁹ The congratulations proved a trifle premature, and the court was about to find out how cool and bold these Aborigines really were!

While the police were out looking for the murderers, Ivan had been with Captain Joe looking for the *Wunwulla*. They found the boat partly looted but undamaged¹⁰⁰ and brought it back to Darwin the day after Cammerfor and Monkgum were in court confessing their

⁸⁹ ‘Mutiny of Natives’, The Daly River Murder’, *Adelaide Advertiser*, 24-7-1900.

⁹⁰ Larsen appears to have been at Marigui in the capacity of cook (Aeneas Gunn, ‘The Contributor. Pioneering in Northern Australia’, *Prahran Telegraph*, 10-6-1899).

⁹¹ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for 24-8-1900.

⁹² ‘Daly River Outrage’, *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 7-9-1900.

⁹³ ‘Mutiny of Natives’, *Adelaide Advertiser*, 24-7-1900.

⁹⁴ Telegram from WJ Byrne to Government Resident Justice Charles Dashwood, citing a letter from J. Nieman, 19-7-1900. Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) – Inwards Correspondence, 1870-1912, Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item 9877.

⁹⁵ ‘Daly River Outrage’, *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 7-9-1900.

⁹⁶ ‘Reported Outrage by Blacks on the Daly River’, *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 20-7-1900.

⁹⁷ ‘The Daly River Outrage’, *Adelaide Register*, 4-8-1900.

⁹⁸ ‘The Daly River Outrage’, *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 3-8-1900.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 10-8-1900.

guilt.¹⁰¹ The next day Ivan went to identify the prisoners and declared emphatically that he had never seen them before! He repeated his belief that he had been attacked by the Victoria River crewmen,¹⁰² and this was confirmed the next day when the *Minniehaha* arrived with two Daly River Aborigines, Chatpa and Kadeel, who really had been on the *Wunwulla*.¹⁰³ These men, identified by Ivan, maintained that the crew of Victoria River boys first attacked Ivan and Larsen, and then attacked them and forced them to jump overboard.¹⁰⁴

One of the *Minniehaha* party reported that ‘the natives all along the [Daly] river seemed to be aware of the fact that the two men first captured by the police were entirely innocent of any complicity in the affair, and the mistake was the subject of much amusement among them.’¹⁰⁵ Years later Ernestine Hill was told that the two men arrested by Stott and Stone had lied to the police about their involvement in the murder, and unwittingly placed their necks in a noose, because, ‘that fella too much gammon he savvy eberyting allabout.’¹⁰⁶

As a result of this debacle, Mounted Constable Stott had to go out again, this time travelling to Bradshaw on the *Wunwulla* to search for the missing Victoria River boys.¹⁰⁷ He captured Jimmy and Georgie in camps near Bradshaw homestead, and a few days later George, the supposed ringleader, was found in a group of fifty or sixty Aborigines about 100 kilometres northeast of the station.¹⁰⁸ Some of the Aborigines threw spears at Stott and his Aboriginal assistants as they galloped after George, but none took effect. The police party caught up with George as he was escaping down a cliff, and after he threw spears at them and refused to stop he was shot dead. Five days afterwards it was reported that a

¹⁰¹ ‘The Daly River Outrage’, *Adelaide Register*, 4-8-1900.

¹⁰² ‘The Daly River Outrage’, *Adelaide Register*, 9-8-1900.

¹⁰³ ‘The Daly River Outrage. Contradictory Evidence’, *Adelaide Register*, 7-8-1900; ‘The Daly River Outrage’, *Adelaide Register*, 9-8-1900. Chatpa was also known as Fennem or Datpull, and Kadeel was known as Cockatoo (*Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 24-8-1900; H. Christie to Inspector Paul Foelsche, 29-8-1900).

¹⁰⁴ ‘The Daly River Outrage’, *Adelaide Register*, 6-8-1900.

¹⁰⁵ ‘The Daly River Outrage’, *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 10-8-1900.

¹⁰⁶ E. Hill, *The Territory*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1951, p. 250; this roughly translates as ‘the policeman is a real know-all’.

¹⁰⁷ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 17-8-1900.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Daly River Outrage’, *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 7-9-1900.

number of myalls were coming to Bradshaw to avenge the shooting.¹⁰⁹ Nothing came of it, but five weeks later two horses were speared on Bradshaw and the whites thought it looked 'very much like an act of retaliation on the part of his [George's] tribe.'¹¹⁰

When Jimmy was arrested he denied the charge and claimed that Larsen had objected to Ivan beating Georgie, and that Ivan then 'been killem Jack.'¹¹¹ However, when Georgie was questioned he laid the blame squarely on Jimmy and George.¹¹² At the subsequent trial the charges against Georgie were dismissed but Jimmy was convicted and condemned to death,¹¹³ the sentence to be carried out at Bradshaw station, 'as a warning to the natives of that locality'.¹¹⁴ Nothing was said at the trial about anyone being thrown overboard near the lighthouse in the day or days before the murder took place.

Mounted Constable Thompson at Timber Creek was ordered to go to Bradshaw 'well armed', and to cooperate with Fred Bradshaw 'to collect and secure as large an assemblage of natives as possible' to witness the hanging.¹¹⁵ On April 8th 1901 all available Aborigines, including one from Daly River,¹¹⁶ were 'mustered' to see the execution¹¹⁷ and Jimmy was duly hanged at 6.40 am. Sergeant Waters ordered Thompson and Tracker Gerald 'to remain guard over body' and also 'to keep [the] Myall Natives around the Gallows' while the officials had breakfast.¹¹⁸ Jimmy's body was then cut down and buried behind the scaffold, and tobacco was distributed among the Aboriginal onlookers.¹¹⁹ Later Deputy Sheriff Little

¹⁰⁹ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for 29-8-1900.

¹¹⁰ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 5-10-1900.

¹¹¹ 'Daly River Outrage', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 7-9-1900.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 28-9-1900.

¹¹⁴ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for 5-4-1901.

¹¹⁵ Timber Creek police journal, 4-4-1901.

¹¹⁶ Deputy Sheriff J. Little to Dashwood, 11-4-1901. Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) – Inwards Correspondence, 1870-1912, Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item number not marked on original.

¹¹⁷ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for 8-4-1901.

¹¹⁸ Timber Creek police journal, 8-4-1901; Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for 8-4-1901.

¹¹⁹ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for 8-4-1901.

remarked that, 'These natives will no doubt cause the particulars of the execution to be conveyed to other tribes in surrounding districts.'¹²⁰

In the court it appears that evidence was given that Ivan had hit George on the neck, and may have used a rope to hit him or tie him up, but this was not considered sufficient provocation to reduce the charge to manslaughter.¹²¹ One story which might have shown such provocation never made it into evidence. As the *Wunwulla* was going past the Point Charles Lighthouse on its way to the scene of the tragedy, lighthouse keeper Hugh Christie and another man, 'noticed the *Wunwulla* stop & come back a considerable distance'. Christie later heard from an Aboriginal camped at the Lighthouse that 'Ivan had thrown one of the Victoria River boys overboard off the Lthouse [sic].' The Aboriginal who told Christie this was Datpull, also known as Fennem, one of the Daly River Aborigines who had been on the *Wunwulla* when the attack took place.¹²² Datpull and the other witness, Cockatoo, were on the Daly River when the *Wunwulla* arrived there, so the question is, how did they know the event at Point Charles took place? The most likely explanation is that they were told about it by the man who was thrown overboard, or by the other Aboriginal crewmen on the *Wunwulla*.

Four months after the hanging of Jimmy there were two 'singular occurrences' at Bradshaw. First, on August 11th 1901 a tremendous explosion shook the area. According to Joe Bradshaw, 'It commenced with 'a terrific deafening boom, like the simultaneous explosion of a park of heavy ordinance', and this was followed by 'loud rumbling and violent earthquaking.' A sick man convalescing at the homestead was thrown out of his hammock and a number of myalls rushed up, declaring, 'Alambul was angry and would destroy them unless they got within the protection of the Whitefellow.' F.W. Palmer, a

¹²⁰ Deputy Sheriff J. Little to Dashwood, 11-4-1901. Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) – Inwards Correspondence, 1870-1912, Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item number not marked on original.

¹²¹ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 28-9-1900.

¹²² Lighthouse Keeper Hugh Christie to Government Resident Charles Dashwood, 12-8-1900, Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) – Inwards Correspondence, 1870-1912, Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item 9850, and Lighthouse Keeper Hugh Christie to Inspector Paul Foelsche, 29-8-1900, Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) – Inwards Correspondence, 1870-1912, Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item 9973.

stockman who was with a mob of cattle a few miles west of the Dome, heard a severe explosion to the north which made his horse stagger under him, and his packhorses and bullocks rush. One of Palmer's black stockmen fell off his horse in fright, and a few miles away another black stockman and his wife caught their horses and galloped in terror towards the homestead. Ivan Egoriffe was in his dinner camp about 40 kilometres north-east of the homestead and felt nothing, though his 'boys' said they heard a distant noise. Apparently it was a highly localised earthquake centred, as best could be determined, near a 'twin coned mountain called by the natives Milik Menmir'.¹²³

A little over two weeks later came the second 'singular occurrence'. On August 29th 'a remarkable meteorite' was seen to the west-south-west of the homestead. When first seen at about 7.30 pm it was close to the planet Venus, and had 'Two bright, sharply defined tails' diverging from it. As it moved these tails 'extended in parallel lines over about 15 degrees nearly horizontal'. It travelled in a southerly direction 'at the rate of one degree in forty seconds', and slowly faded over a period of ten minutes.¹²⁴ From this description this object could hardly have been a meteorite, but what it was remains a mystery.¹²⁵

In Aboriginal thinking unusual events are connected to other events – it is a case of cause and effect – and it usually takes some time for a consensus to be reached as to what caused a particular event, or what it signifies.¹²⁶ The initial response of the myalls at Bradshaw was that 'Alumbul' was angry, but why 'Alumbul' was angry would only be determined later. What the Aborigines really thought of the earthquake and of the 'meteorite' is unknown. There is nothing in the regional ethnographic literature about Aboriginal responses to or interpretations of earthquakes and I have not been able to find out who or what 'Alumbul' is. However, in current Aboriginal thinking, when a meteorite is seen streaking across the sky they say that it is 'traffic', a highly dangerous Dreaming snake travelling to deliver

¹²³ 'Singular Occurrences at Victoria River', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 27-9-1901; 'Milik Menmir' is a mountain now known as 'Millik Monmir', located at co-ords 471 189 on the Millik Monmir 1:100,000 topographic map (Sheet 4965, Edition 1).

¹²⁴ Ibid..

¹²⁵ The same 'meteorite' was seen from VRD homestead where it resembled a large comet and remained visible for 'three or four minutes' before fading away (*Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 1-11-1901).

¹²⁶ D. Rose, *Dingo Makes Us Human*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1992, p. 228.

retribution to a human murderer.¹²⁷ It is likely that both phenomena would have been related to recent events and though we can only speculate as to which events might have been involved, the 'Bradshaw massacre', the shooting of George and the hanging of Jimmy loomed large in recent history.

The packhorse track up through the cliff behind the homestead was the next scene of conflict. Some time after it was built, Ivan Egoriffe and a Bradshaw stockman named Ernest Dannock were driving some horses up the track. When they were nearing the top,

they heard a yell and spears and stones began to fly everywhere. They hid for a while; but the Aborigines had the best of it, being higher, and keeping back from the edge of a cliff so that they could throw without showing themselves. Ivan Eggeroffe got hit on the shoulder by a stone and his horse was speared in the leg. The attackers were not the local Aborigines but the Wargite tribe, from the mouth of the Daly river.¹²⁸

Soon after this attack the Governor of South Australia, Sir George Le Hunte, visited Bradshaw on his way to the Depot (plates 94, 95). While at Bradshaw he gave blankets, flour, tobacco and pipes to 'some fine-looking aborigines',¹²⁹ and in return the Aborigines 'gave' a corroboree to him.¹³⁰ Le Hunte heard from 'Mr. Bradshaw' that there were possibly 500 Aborigines between Bradshaw station and the coast, and was told that they 'give no trouble; but those on the high lands above the cliffs, which lie immediately behind the station, are unfriendly, and, to use his [Bradshaw's] words, "chivied" his men away when they went up there after cattle.'¹³¹

On November 24th 1905 there occurred the most infamous event in the history of Bradshaw, the so-called 'Bradshaw Massacre', an incident that seems to have had reverberations around the Yambarran Ranges for years. In fact, the actual massacre occurred on the coast well to the north of Bradshaw station, but the story begins on

¹²⁷ This 'traffic' goes to kill a murderer after some of the victim's belongings are burnt at a site for that Dreaming snake – it is a form of sorcery. D. Rose, *Dingo Makes Us Human*, 1992, p. 153.

¹²⁸ L. Moffatt, *Luck and Tragedy in the New Country*, privately published, Melbourne, 1990, p. 51.

¹²⁹ 'Visit of H.E. Governor', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 2-6-1905.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ His Excellency George Le Hunte, 'Northern Territory: Report by His Excellency the Governor of South Australia,' *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*. vol. 2, no. 37, 1905, p. 6.

‘Captain Joe’s Bradshaw’, and ends there. The event was called the Bradshaw Massacre because one of the murdered men was Fred Bradshaw, he and two others – Ivan Egoriffe, Ernest Dannock – came from Bradshaw station, and the boat involved was the *Bolwarra* which belonged to Bradshaw. The other murdered man was Jerry Skeahan, brother of the manager of Auvergne station. The death of Skeahan was doubly tragic. He had broken his arm in the stockyard at Auvergne and had set out to ride to Wyndham for medical help. Shortly after he left a message reached Auvergne advising that the *Bolwarra* was about to leave for Darwin, so to save Jerry a long and painful ride Jack Skeahan sent a messenger posthaste to bring him back,¹³² a decision that was to cause him much grief in the coming months.¹³³

News of the massacre broke upon the world on December 8th 1905 when Bobby, one of the Victoria River Aboriginal crewmen, turned up at Bradshaw station (plate 96).¹³⁴ Bobby told an amazing tale: after continuing engine trouble the *Bolwarra* had called in at a Government coal-boring camp near Port Keats and discovered that two white men working at a well there had been murdered by the blacks. The other white men had captured and chained up seven or eight Aborigines, and asked Fred Bradshaw to take them to Darwin. The *Bolwarra* took the Aborigines on board and continued up the coast, and the next night Fred, against the protests of the other whites, decided to release the prisoners from their chains. No guard was kept and that night the prisoners killed the four whites, and the other three Aboriginal crewmen. Bobby only escaped the same fate by leaping (or being pushed) overboard.¹³⁵ He described in detail the position of each man as he was killed and later said that as Fred Bradshaw was attacked he cried out, ‘Bobby, get up. Wild blackfellow been killem along you and me.’¹³⁶ After jumping overboard Bobby said he swam to shore and from a hiding place watched as the *Bolwarra* was looted. Then he headed for Bradshaw, arriving there twelve days later.¹³⁷

¹³² *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 12-1-1906.

¹³³ M. Durack, *Sons in the Saddle*, Corgi Books, Sydney, 1985, p. 200.

¹³⁴ ‘Massacres in the Northern Territory’, *The Adelaide Register*, 18-12-1905.

¹³⁵ ‘An Alleged Terrible Tragedy’, *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 22-12-1905.

¹³⁶ ‘The Port Keats Massacre. Bobby’s Story in Court’, *The Adelaide Register*, 9-2-1906.

¹³⁷ ‘Massacres in the Northern Territory’, *The Adelaide Register*, 18-12-1905.

Of course, Bobby's story was rapidly communicated to the Timber Creek police,¹³⁸ the Brocks Creek police¹³⁹ and the Darwin authorities,¹⁴⁰ and caused a sensation there and around the country – 'Massacres in the Northern Territory...Six Whites and three Blackboys Killed'!¹⁴¹ Later investigations showed that the facts were not quite as Bobby painted them. The *Bolwarra* had left Bradshaw on November 12th and as it moved down the Victoria and up the west coast it experienced a lot of engine trouble, just as Bobby described.¹⁴² There was a government drilling rig boring for coal near Port Keats, so when the *Bolwarra* arrived opposite it, Fred, Ivan and Jerry Skeahan took a dinghy ashore to borrow some extra fuel, and materials for repairs. When they arrived they noticed that there were about 100 armed and excited Aboriginal men near the camp of the drillers, but no women or children. Ivan remarked that he recognised several of the Aborigines because he had seen them at Bradshaw, and Jerry Skeahan told one of the bore party they should be on their guard as it looked like there was trouble brewing.¹⁴³

There were no Aboriginal prisoners in the camp and no white men had been killed, but there had already been some trouble with the local blacks. When the bore party first arrived at the site the Aborigines had been helpful and friendly, and formed a camp nearby. However, they became 'cheeky' and began stealing items from the camp, and were now said to be 'rapidly becoming dangerously insolent.'¹⁴⁴ The crew of the *Bolwarra* were four Bradshaw Aborigines – Bobby, Calico, Myabilla and Mud-Blanket.¹⁴⁵ They also came ashore, ostensibly to get water, but instead, at the first opportunity at least three and probably all of them cleared out.¹⁴⁶ Perhaps they, too, had read signs of impending trouble.

¹³⁸ Timber Creek police journal, 9-12-1905.

¹³⁹ 'Massacres in the Northern Territory', *Adelaide Observer*, 18-12-1905.

¹⁴⁰ 'An Alleged Terrible Tragedy', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 22-12-1905.

¹⁴¹ 'Massacres in the Northern Territory', *The Adelaide Register*, 18-12-1905.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ 'An Alleged Terrible Tragedy', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 22-12-1905.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Timber Creek police journal, 28-12-1905, 30-6-1906.

¹⁴⁶ 'An Alleged Terrible Tragedy', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 22-12-1905.

When the Bradshaw boys were missed, Fred had to find replacement crew. Among the Aborigines in the vicinity of the drilling camp he recognised two, 'Cumbit' and 'Mallie', who had previously been on his boat in the Victoria River.¹⁴⁷ At least one of them, Cumbit, agreed to go on board the launch, along with Donah,¹⁴⁸ Wunpungla¹⁴⁹ and Minemar.¹⁵⁰ With its new crew the *Bolwarra* left Port Keats about midday¹⁵¹ and shortly afterwards, Aborigines threatened the camp, and attacked the foreman while he was working on a well near the coal boring camp. Fortunately he was not seriously hurt. Meanwhile the *Bolwarra* moved slowly up the coast, first by engine power and then by sail.¹⁵² It anchored for a night and continued on the next day, anchoring in the evening about 80 kilometres up the coast, near Cape Ford.¹⁵³

In the morning before the boat reached Cape Ford, Donah and Cumbit somehow fell foul of Ivan and he commenced to beat them with a stick. Cumbit ended up with a 'sore head', a 'sore hand' and a cut on his face, and Donah was sore on the top of his head.¹⁵⁴ Why Ivan beat them is not clear – one account says they wanted to go ashore¹⁵⁵ while another says they did not do the required work to Ivan's satisfaction¹⁵⁶ – but after beating them it appears that he then tied up Cumbit, and possibly Donah and the other Aborigines as well. He may have had the help of one or more of the other whites to do this.¹⁵⁷ If Donah and Cumbit were tied up, they were either released later (possibly by Fred Bradshaw), or somehow got

¹⁴⁷ 'Northern Territory Massacre. All the bodies Recovered', *Adelaide Advertiser*, 3-1-1906. Whether 'Mallie' is the same person as 'Donah' is unclear, but certainly possible.

¹⁴⁸ In other documents his name is rendered as 'Donghol' (eg, 'An Interesting Expedition', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 27-4-1906), but Donah' soon became the 'standardised' English version of his name.

¹⁴⁹ Alternatively 'Won-pa-lunga' ('An Interesting Expedition', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 27-4-1906).

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. Alternatively 'Mi-ma'.

¹⁵¹ 'An Alleged Terrible Tragedy', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 22-12-1905.

¹⁵² Statement by Wunpungla at trial of Donah and Cumbit, 25-3-1907. Australian Archives, Northern Territory, CRS A3 N.T. 1918/2640.

¹⁵³ Map of Cape Ford area, Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) – Inwards Correspondence, 1870-1912, Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item 15086.

¹⁵⁴ Statements by Doc Doc and Ned at trial of Donah and Cumbit, 25-3-1907. Australian Archives, Northern Territory, CRS A3 N.T. 1918/2640.

¹⁵⁵ Petition on behalf of Cumbit and Donah asking for remission of sentence, 23-9-1910. Australian Archives, Northern Territory, CRS A3. 1918/2640.

¹⁵⁶ Statement by Wunpungla at trial of Donah and Cumbit, 25-3-1907. Australian Archives, Northern Territory, CRS A3 N.T. 1918/2640.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

free after dark, killed all four men and threw their bodies into the sea.¹⁵⁸ In the morning they each took tobacco, a pipe and a blanket from the boat and went ashore, eventually coming to a large camp of Aborigines where they told people what they had done, saying, 'white fellow all day kill em me, allright me kill em behind.'¹⁵⁹

News of the tragedy reached Darwin on Saturday, December 16th, and the next day a party of police and 'special constables' were dispatched on the steamer *Wai Hoi*, bound for Port Keats. There they learned that no members of the bore party had been killed though there had been the serious assault described above. The police party remained at Port Keats with the intention of searching for evidence of the murder of Bradshaw and his men, and the *Wai Hoi* returned to Darwin. The steamer reached Darwin on Tuesday and almost immediately it was arranged for two launches to be sent out to search the coast from Darwin to the Victoria River.¹⁶⁰ The departure of the launches was unaccountably delayed for several days and eventually it was decided a sailing lugger would be sent instead, to be towed from Darwin to Port Keats by the *Wai Hoi* (plates 97, 98).¹⁶¹ The steamer left Darwin on December 23rd.¹⁶²

Meanwhile, throughout the night of December 20th the coal-boring camp at Port Keats was lashed by a violent storm, and the bore workers and police party there were attacked three times by a large number of Aborigines. Flashes of lightning revealed the attackers as close as fifteen metres away, but gunfire kept them at bay. During the night the police devised a plan to capture some of the Aborigines. Before daylight they moved to a native well about three kilometres away and hid themselves. Later the trackers moved along the beach and forced eight Aborigines to go inland to the well where they were arrested by the police. Taken back to the drilling camp, two were recognised as being among the four who had gone on board the *Bolwarra*, but when the police brought out handcuffs and chains all eight

¹⁵⁸ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 9-2-1906.

¹⁵⁹ Statement by Ned at trial of Donah and Cumbit, 25-3-1907. Australian Archives, Northern Territory, CRS A3 N.T. 1918/2640. roughly translated this means 'the white man beat me all day, so I attacked him later.'

¹⁶⁰ 'An Alleged Terrible Tragedy', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 22-12-1905.

¹⁶¹ 'Northern Territory Massacre. No Trace of the Bolwarra,' *Adelaide Observer*, 22-12-1905.

¹⁶² 'Butchered by Blacks', *The Australasian*, 6-1-1906.

made a break for the bush. Cumbit and Donah were overpowered and two others were shot dead. The remaining four made their escape though one entered the sea and was not seen again.¹⁶³ The two prisoners were subsequently taken to Darwin and charged with murder.¹⁶⁴

A party led by Mounted Constable Kelly arrived at Port Keats on the lugger *Turquoise* on December 26th, and found the *Bolwarra* stranded about eight kilometres south of Clump Point. It had been looted and stripped, and the engine damaged, and there was dried blood everywhere (plate 99). A body identified as that of Fred Bradshaw was found nearby¹⁶⁵ and the bodies of the other men were found a week or so later.¹⁶⁶ All were buried on the beach, with poles set up to mark each gravesite (plate 100).¹⁶⁷ Nine months later Joe Bradshaw bought some coffins and went out to exhume the remains of the murdered men, intending to rebury them at Bradshaw.¹⁶⁸ He found the remains of his brother Fred, Ernest Dannock and Ivan Egoriffe, but the marker over Skeahan's grave had disappeared, so his bones could not be recovered and presumably are buried on the beach to this day. At Bradshaw a vault was prepared about two kilometres from the homestead and when the coffins were carried there, 'A large number of friendly natives followed the remains to the grave, and the native women covered their heads with ashes, in token of grief.'¹⁶⁹ Two years later relays of Aborigines carried the coffin containing Fred Bradshaw's bones to the top of an isolated, flat-topped mountain on the banks of the Victoria River, below the mouth of Angalarri Creek.¹⁷⁰ Known ever since as 'Bradshaw's Tomb' (plates 101, 102),¹⁷¹ this hill has a top of

¹⁶³ Telegram from Government Resident Herbert to the Minister Controlling to Northern Territory, January 1906. Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, Inwards Correspondence, GRS 1 581/1905; 'Butchered by Blacks', *The Australasian*, 6-1-1906.

¹⁶⁴ 'Northern Territory Massacre', *The Adelaide Advertiser*, 4-1-1906.

¹⁶⁵ 'Butchered by Blacks', *The Australasian*, 6-1-1906.

¹⁶⁶ 'Northern Territory Massacre'. *Adelaide Advertiser*, 3-1-1906.

¹⁶⁷ 'Butchered by Blacks', *The Australasian*, 6-1-1906.

¹⁶⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28-9-1906.

¹⁶⁹ 'The Port Keats Massacre. Burying the Remains', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22-10-1906.

¹⁷⁰ Notes taken from the Timber Creek police letter book by an unknown policeman (entry for 14-9-1908). This event is mentioned in the copy of Timber Creek police letter book held at Berrimah police station, Darwin (entry for 1-8-1908), but the last line of the entry is missing from the copy. Several accounts state that the remains of two of the other victims were also placed in this coffin, but this appears unlikely to be correct. Letter Book, 1911-1925, NTRS 2223, Northern Territory Archives.

¹⁷¹ E. Hill, *The Territory*, 1951, p. 253; On the current 1:100,000 topographic map (Millik Monmir, Sheet 4965, Edition 1) the name 'The Tombs' appears at the end of the Yambarran Range (co-ords 300 993). However, early records and photographs show that the correct 'Bradshaw's Tomb' is the hill at co-ords 236 969, since confirmed by the discovery of the coffin handles there.

solid rock so the coffin could not be buried. Old photographs show that some flat rocks were placed on the coffin lid and it was then left to the elements (plate 103). Modern maps have the label 'The Tombs' near the western end of the Yambarran Range,¹⁷² but using one of these photos and armed with some local folklore, in 1984 I relocated the correct 'burial' site. Only the coffin handles, screws and nails remained, and these were later removed to the Timber Creek museum.¹⁷³

As soon as news of the murders reached Timber Creek Mounted Constable Burt went to Bradshaw to interview Bobby. He then asked Bobby to go with him to Brocks Creek, and Bobby agreed, but the first night out he cleared into the bush. Because of his apparently detailed knowledge of events Bobby was already under suspicion of possible involvement in the murders, and by absconding he increased the suspicions against him.¹⁷⁴ Early in January 1906 he was arrested at Bradshaw and taken to Darwin as a witness in the trial of Cumbit and Donah.¹⁷⁵ Mounted Constable Burt went to Bradshaw in March 1906 to try and get statements from My Blanket, Myabilla and Calico,¹⁷⁶ but it does not appear that he was successful. In June the Timber Creek police were advised that 'My Blanket, Calico and Myabilla' were required in Darwin as witnesses on July 23rd.¹⁷⁷

As a result of police investigations it was determined that of the four Aboriginal crewmen on the *Bolwarra*, only Donah and Cumbit had committed the crime. They faced court on February 3rd 1906 and were remanded to appear at 'the next Circuit Court'.¹⁷⁸ They appeared in court again in August but the hearing was held over until the next Circuit Court so that competent interpreters could be found.¹⁷⁹ Witness Bobby (and probably also Wunpulong) was held at Fannie Bay Gaol but on March 1st 1907, less than three weeks before the trial began,¹⁸⁰ he escaped and made his way back to Bradshaw.¹⁸¹ Mounted

¹⁷² Millik Monmir 1:100,000, sheet 4967 (edition 1), co-ordinates 300 994.

¹⁷³ See D. Lewis, *The Boab Belt*, vol. 1, site 10, 1996, pp. 55-62.

¹⁷⁴ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 22-12-1905.

¹⁷⁵ Timber Creek police journal, 1-1-1906, 10-1-1906, 18-1-1906.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid: 10-3-1906.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid: 14-3-1906.

¹⁷⁸ 'The Port Keats Massacre', *Adelaide Advertiser*, 9-2-1906.

¹⁷⁹ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 27-7-1906.

¹⁸⁰ Timber Creek police journal, 14-3-1907.

Constable Artaud left for Bradshaw on March 16th to search for Bobby, Calico and others wanted as witnesses in the case (plate 104), with instructions that no effort was to be spared to catch Bobby and bring him to Port Darwin on the *Wai Hoi*.¹⁸² Artaud couldn't find Bobby or Calico, but he did find 'Mud-Blanket' and took him to Darwin.¹⁸³ He and Mud-Blanket arrived there on April 5th, too late for the trial which concluded on March 20th, with Cumbit and Donah being convicted and sentenced to death.¹⁸⁴ After the trial Captain Joe suggested that if Aborigines were involved in cases of murder or attempted murder and the police were unable to capture them, they should be outlawed.¹⁸⁵ Nothing came of his suggestion.

The sentencing of Cumbit and Donah was not the end of the sad tale. Mounted Constable Artaud left Darwin on April 8th to return Mud-Blanket to Bradshaw, and he had instructions that if 'Mybilla' and 'Kalico' could be found he should obtain statements from them about their desertion of the *Bolwarra* at Port Keats and to send the statements to headquarters.¹⁸⁶ From events that transpired I can only presume that the statements of all three witnesses were required because an appeal was planned for the death sentence on Cumbit and Donah to be commuted. Such an appeal was made and evidence that Ivan Egoriffe had treated Cumbit and Donah cruelly was taken into consideration; in June 1907 their sentences were commuted to life in Fannie Bay Gaol.¹⁸⁷

The hunt for Bobby continued. He was still at large in August 1907,¹⁸⁸ but was eventually arrested on September 27th and taken to Darwin.¹⁸⁹ What grounds there were for his arrest and how long he was held in Darwin is unclear, but he was back on Bradshaw within a

¹⁸¹ Ibid: 30-6-1907; Katherine felonies book, Northern Territory Archives, F616.

¹⁸² Ibid: 16-3-1907.

¹⁸³ Ibid: 27-3-1907.

¹⁸⁴ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 29-3-1907.

¹⁸⁵ J. Bradshaw to the Government Resident, Charles Herbert, 25-4-1906. Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) – Inwards Correspondence, 1870-1912, Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item 151381.

¹⁸⁶ Timber Creek police journal, 12-4-1907.

¹⁸⁷ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 20-6-1907.

¹⁸⁸ Timber Creek police journal, 24-8-1907.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid: 5-10-1907.

year, and he and the other witnesses were once again being sought by the police.¹⁹⁰ Mounted Constable Holland went to Bradshaw on June 17th 1908 but could not find any of the wanted men and later reported that the chances of getting Calico, Myabilla or Mud-Blanket were 'very remote indeed', and he remarked that, 'The Policeman has never appeared as their friend and neither Mud-Blanket or Bobby are likely to forget that the police took them away last Year.'¹⁹¹ With respect to Calico, Holland's pessimism was more than justified. At the time that he was looking for him, Calico had probably been dead for two months, shot near Bradshaw homestead by the manager Walter Wye or one of his Aboriginal assistants (see below).¹⁹²

In November 1909 Mounted Constable Dempsey raided a 'huge blacks camp' in a gorge running off Angalarri Creek (plate 105). The approach was very difficult and most of the Aborigines escaped, but eight women were caught and told the police that the 'notorious Bobby' was one who got away.¹⁹³ Why Bobby was now regarded as 'notorious' is unknown and this is the last mention of him in the historical record.

In 1910 Cumbit and Donah sought a remission of sentence in a petition prepared on their behalf in which they restated their original claim that they had been tied up and beaten, and were not allowed to go ashore.¹⁹⁴ Their appeal was rejected.¹⁹⁵ In September 1911 they escaped, but were recaptured the following day.¹⁹⁶ They appealed again in 1915 and although their appeal was rejected once more, it was recommended that they try again in two years' time. Donah never got the chance – he died in gaol in 1916¹⁹⁷ – and Cumbit

¹⁹⁰ Memo from Sub Inspector Waters to M.C. Dempsey, 4-6-1908. Timber Creek police letter book, copy held at the Berrimah police station, Darwin.

¹⁹¹ Memo from M.C. Holland to Sub Inspector Waters, 1-8-1908, Timber Creek police letter book, photocopy held at Berrimah police station, Darwin.

¹⁹² Memo from Sub Inspector Waters to M.C. Dempsey, 9-6-1908. Timber Creek police letter book, photocopy held at Berrimah police station, Darwin.

¹⁹³ Timber Creek police journal, 5-11-09.

¹⁹⁴ Petition to the Governor of South Australia on behalf of Donah and Cumbit. Australian Archives, Northern Territory, CRS A3 N.T. 1918/2640.

¹⁹⁵ Memorandum, signed by H. Pollard, 10-2-1911, Australian Archives, Northern Territory, CRS A3 N.T. 1918/2640.

¹⁹⁶ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 15-9-1911.

¹⁹⁷ Memorandum for the Minister for Home and Territories, signed by the Northern Territory Administrator (signature illegible), 11-7-1916, Australian Archives, Northern Territory, CRS A3 N.T. 1918/2640.

didn't wait. In May 1916 he and a prisoner named Katerinyan escaped and made their way to the Fitzmaurice River country.



First Mounted Constable Richardson,¹⁹⁹ and then Mounted Constables O'Connor and Cameron, made separate patrols to recapture them²⁰⁰ and after many weeks in the bush, O'Connor and Cameron succeeded in apprehending Katerinyan.²⁰¹ I have found no direct evidence that Cumbit was recaptured, but presumably he was because in November 1918 Atlee Hunt, the Minister for Home and Territories,²⁰² granted him a remission of sentence.²⁰³ As far as is known he was released and returned to his country, bringing to a final end the saga of the 'Bradshaw Massacre'.

On January 15th 1906 something happened to cause all the Aborigines at Bradshaw, 'both civilized & bush', to clear out.²⁰⁴ However, not being at the station meant that they could not get any rations, so some of them decided to help themselves. Two days after they left the lock of the store was picked with a nail and two bags of flour taken, and the door locked up again. Over the next two months the store was raided another four times with a total of nine bags of flour, one bag of rice, six dozen boxes of matches, fifteen tins of jam and honey, five towels, four shirts, about ten metres of 'turkey red' and a small amount of sugar and tea being taken. It was only after the third raid, by which time most of the stores had been stolen, that the station hands decided to remove the remaining stores to the homestead.

¹⁹⁸ Carving on a boab near Bradshaw's Tomb, made during the police manhunt after Katerinyan and Cumbit in 1916 (see plate 155).

¹⁹⁹ Timber Creek police journal, 7-6-1916, 21-6-1916. Photocopy held at Berrimah police station, Darwin.

²⁰⁰ Ibid: 15-7-1916, 16-7-1916.

²⁰¹ Ibid: 21-8-1916.

²⁰² H. Davies, entry on Atlee Hunt in *Australian Dictionary of Biography, 1891-1939*, vol. 9, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1983, pp. 403-404.

²⁰³ Atlee Hunt's secretary to the Northern Territory Administrator, 10-11-1918. Australian Archives, Northern Territory, CRS A3 N.T. 1918/2640.

²⁰⁴ Mounted Constable F.J. Burt to headquarters, 3-3-1906. Timber Creek police letter book, photocopy held at the Berrimah police station, Darwin.

However, because the Aborigines had not previously taken any tea or sugar, these items were left in the store. On March 16th when the fourth raid was made and some sugar and tea was taken, what little remained was removed to the homestead.²⁰⁵

A message from the Bradshaw manager, Charles Webster, reporting the thefts was delivered to the Timber Creek police on February 10th,²⁰⁶ but floods prevented Mounted Constable Burt from leaving to investigate for another month.²⁰⁷ When he finally arrived at Bradshaw and learnt details of the robberies, he was staggered at the stupidity of the station hands: 'It seems almost incredible that 3 white men, were living on this station, & that only after repeated raids, the greater portion of the stores taken, that they should conceive the idea of removing the remainder to where they were living & safety.'²⁰⁸ The offenders were believed to be the 'Cadjerong' tribe and because the deserters from the *Bolwarra* belonged to this tribe they were believed to be implicated in the robberies.²⁰⁹ Burt spent ten days searching for the offenders in the ranges and gorges on Bradshaw, but without success.²¹⁰

While justice may have been served in the white man's courts, it seems that some Aborigines were not satisfied. In mid-1907 Mounted Constable Kelly was told that a 'Beringan' [Brinken] man named Lungmier had been killed by the 'Jumonjoos' [Jaminjung]. The story was that Lungmier had swum out to the *Bolwarra* shortly before the massacre occurred, and the 'Jumonjoos' believed he had helped kill their 'good friend', Fred Bradshaw. As a result, when Lungmier appeared in a 'Jumonjoo camp' on the Fitzmaurice River he was promptly speared and clubbed to death.²¹¹

²⁰⁵ Mounted Constable F.J. Burt to headquarters, 28-3-1906. Timber Creek police letter book, photocopy held at the Berrimah police station, Darwin.

²⁰⁶ Timber Creek police journal, 10-2-1906.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Mounted Constable F.J. Burt to headquarters, 28-3-1906. Timber Creek police letter book, photocopy held at the Berrimah police station, Darwin.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ His lack of success is not particularly surprising as 'Cadjerong' (Gajerong) country is on the west side of the Victoria River, on present-day Bullo River station and Legune station.

²¹¹ 'Aboriginal Justice', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 26-7-1907.

The reign of 'Ivan the Terrible' may have ended (and Donah and Cumbit may have been gaoled), but if anything, violence against Aborigines on Bradshaw appears to have worsened. On July 1st 1908, Mounted Constable Dempsey received several memos from headquarters about 'alleged atrocities [sic] on aborigines at Bradshaw's Run'.²¹² The picture painted in these memos was of a series of murders and brutal assaults, verging at times on mayhem, and it is possible that one incident may have had an element of revenge for the deaths in the Bradshaw Massacre.

First, it was alleged that the Bradshaw cook had shot an Aborigine in broad daylight to get his wife. In the presence of the manager (Webster) the cook then carried the body to Angalarri Creek and threw it in, and later on when Joe Bradshaw, Justice of the Peace, heard about this murder all he did was dismiss the cook.²¹³ A later memo reveals that this alleged killing happened some time before August 1st 1906, that the murdered man was 'Old Fred', and that the cook was Chas Williams, the same cook who was at Bradshaw station when news of the Bradshaw Massacre broke.²¹⁴ Yet another memo alleged that Joe Bradshaw later said to some friends that, 'if ever a man deserved to be hanged it was a cook of mine as he deliberately shot a man for his lubra.'²¹⁵ Not surprisingly, after this shooting all the Aborigines are said to have cleared out.²¹⁶

Second, it was alleged that in about October 1907 Joe Bradshaw, his manager Walter Wye,²¹⁷ and a man named Mullins were involved in a 'big drunk' at the station. Mullins and Wye had a row, and when Joe intervened Mullins turned on him. Joe immediately gave a

²¹² Timber Creek police journal, 1-7-1908. These memos were dated June 1st, June 4th and June 9th, 1908.

²¹³ Memo from Sub Inspector Waters to M.C. Dempsey, 9-6-1908. Timber Creek police letter book, photocopy held at the Berrimah police station, Darwin.

²¹⁴ Memo from M.C. Holland to Sub Inspector Waters, 1-8-1908. Timber Creek police letter book, photocopy held at the Berrimah police station, Darwin.

²¹⁵ Timber Creek police journal, 12-7-1908.

²¹⁶ Memo from Sub Inspector Waters to M.C. Dempsey, 9-6-1908. Timber Creek police letter book, photocopy held at Berrimah police station, Darwin.

²¹⁷ Wye, who had been head stockman on Bradshaw for some time, took over the role of manager on February 15th after Charles Webster committed suicide by shooting himself (Timber Creek police journal, 15-2-1908). He remained in this position until 1910 (Timber Creek police journal, 28-1-1910).

loaded rifle to one of his 'boys' and said to him, 'If that —— comes onto the veranda shoot him.'²¹⁸

Third, in about January 1908 Wye was supposed to have severely assaulted an Aborigine named 'Jack Pur' because he would not let Wye have his wife,²¹⁹ and fourth, it was alleged that in about April 1908 some cattle had been speared near the homestead and that Wye, Larriba and Billy Wheelah had gone out to investigate. As a result Calico, one of the Aborigines who had deserted the *Bolwarra*, was shot dead near the spring that supplied Bradshaw with water, and a man named Tommy and his lubra were both wounded. Later massacre survivor Bobby threatened to tell Joe Bradshaw (who was absent) all about these shootings. Wye heard of Bobby's threat and a day or so later Possum, one of Wye's boys, had a row with Bobby in the Bradshaw blacks' camp. Bobby was 'badly knocked about' and cleared into the bush that night.²²⁰

Finally, it was alleged that blacks' tobacco steeped in cyanide had been kept in a jar in the station store. Not knowing that it had been poisoned, the current Bradshaw cook had given some to an Aborigine who became so ill after smoking it that he fell down four times before reaching his camp. Fortunately he survived,²²¹ and later Wye was said to have ordered that the remaining tobacco be destroyed.²²² Mounted Constable Dempsey was ordered to make 'full and exhaustive inquiries' into these allegations.²²³

Eleven days later (July 12th 1908) Dempsey was able to question Walter Wye and one of his boys, Billy Wheelah. Wye denied the existence of any poisoned tobacco and declined to answer any other questions until he had consulted Captain Joe, but Billy Wheelah made a

²¹⁸ Memo from Sub Inspector Waters to M.C. Dempsey, 9-6-1908. Timber Creek police letter book, photocopy held at the Berrimah police station, Darwin.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

statement in which he apparently claimed to have seen 'Old Fred' shot for stealing flour, rather than for the killer to get his wife, and he named other witnesses to this murder.²²⁴

On July 24th Dempsey went to Bradshaw to question Aborigines there, but they had heard the police horse bells and all of them cleared out into the Yambarran Range, supposedly because they thought they were going to be arrested for stealing from the station garden. One can't help but wonder if Walter Wye hadn't told them the police were coming so that they would clear out and not be available for interview. The only statement Dempsey obtained was that about two years earlier, that is, not long after the Bradshaw Massacre, a cook named Williams had shot an Aboriginal man at a spring near the homestead for stealing flour. It seems likely that this would have occurred in the period when the store was being raided, early in 1906. Williams was the cook at Bradshaw when news of the massacre first surfaced there,²²⁵ and would have had a personal relationship with the murdered men. Perhaps he felt compelled to avenge their deaths. At the time of Dempsey's visit Williams was long gone from Bradshaw, and although Dempsey searched around the spring for human remains, he found nothing.²²⁶

In the following months Dempsey questioned an Aboriginal man named Yama about the alleged shooting, but Yama said he only knew of it as hearsay.²²⁷ In November Dempsey received a memo from headquarters ordering that Billy Wheelah and all other witnesses to the alleged murder be brought to Palmerston when found,²²⁸ but there is no evidence that this ever occurred. Dempsey interviewed Billy Wheelah shortly afterwards to try and learn the names of the Aborigines present when Old Fred was shot, but Billy 'alleged he forgot the names.'²²⁹ In December Dempsey promised Yama and another man a reward if they were successful in bringing in witnesses to the alleged shooting,²³⁰ but nothing came of it.²³¹

²²⁴ Timber Creek police journal, 12-7-1908, 24-7-1908, 9-10-1908.

²²⁵ Ibid: 9-12-1905.

²²⁶ Ibid: 24-7-1908.

²²⁷ Ibid: 9-10-1908.

²²⁸ Ibid: 4-11-1908.

²²⁹ Ibid: 10-11-1908.

²³⁰ Ibid: 2-12-1908.

²³¹ Ibid: 19-12-1908.

On December 27th 1908 M.C. Dempsey finally caught up with the Aborigines in the Bradshaw camp and interviewed twenty-two of them about the alleged murder of Old Fred. None of them could give any information so Dempsey sent two old men out to bring in 'Tommy' or any other witnesses, but on New Years Day they returned alone. For reasons which are not stated, Billy Wheelah and his lubra then asked Dempsey to take them to Timber Creek. They set out on January 2nd 1909 but Billy and his wife ran away that night. Headquarters remained completely unsatisfied with the results of the investigation and late in January sent a memo to Timber Creek, 'directing that nothing is to be left undone to get at the truth re murder of "Old Fred"'.²³² During a patrol to investigate horse spearing on Bradshaw in April, Mounted Constable Holland tried to get information on the murder of Old Fred, but like Dempsey before him he learnt nothing. From this time on there are no further police journal entries or other documents relating to the alleged murder of 'Old Fred' or other Aborigines on Bradshaw, and the matter finally seems to have been dropped.

The allegations of poison being used against Aborigines and the recurrent theft of flour and other food from the Bradshaw store may give some credence to an Aboriginal oral history account of a mass killing of Aborigines on Bradshaw station. Peter Murray, who owned the station between 1958 and 1968, was told by an old man named Johnson that in the early days Bradshaw had continual trouble with bush blacks breaking into the station store and stealing bags of flour, tobacco and other goods. Johnson said that eventually the station whites left a bag of flour laced with poison in the store. The bag was stolen and a 'big mob' of Aborigines was poisoned.²³³

Although investigations into the allegations of murder and assault came to nothing, trouble between blacks and whites on Bradshaw continued. In April 1909 Walter Wye reported that he had 'found a horse dead in a paddock 4 miles from Station with three spear wounds inflicted and supposed to be done by Jumminju Tribe.'²³⁴ The Timber Creek police

²³² Ibid: 27-1-1909.

²³³ Personal communication from Pauline Rayner (nee Murray), whose father was Peter Murray.

²³⁴ Timber Creek police journal, 11-3-1909, 17-4-1909.

investigated and were told by Bradshaw Aborigines that 'the spearing was done by the Cadgeronge Tribe whose country is across the Victoria River from Bradshaw.'²³⁵ In October the same year Wye reported to the police that some seventy kilometres from the homestead about thirty natives had thrown spears and rocks at himself, an employee named Raymond, and a 'blackboy'. According to Wye, all three fired all their ammunition at the natives – 14 rounds – and missed! They then rode off and camped four miles away but were followed by the Aborigines who set fire to the grass, forcing them to make yet another camp.²³⁶ While trying to locate the Aborigines who had attacked Wye and Raymond, Mounted Constable Dempsey came upon 'a huge blacks camp with approach so difficult that all except 8 lubras got away.' He questioned the captured women but learnt nothing of the identity of the Aborigines who had made the attack.²³⁷

According to Surveyor C. Boulter who was at the Depot in 1913, cattle spearing was still rife on Bradshaw and a stockman there had recently been wounded by Aborigines.²³⁸ With one probable exception, this appears to have been the last time that a white man was attacked by Aborigines on Bradshaw until the murder of two prospectors on the Fitzmaurice River in 1932.

The possible exception was David Byers, who replaced Walter Wye as manager in 1910 or 1911.²³⁹ Byers was married and had his wife with him on Bradshaw, and they almost certainly were the 'victims' of the famous 'frogs in the pipes' story told by Ernestine Hill. The homestead at Bradshaw when Byers first arrived was the one that had been built in 1905 (see plate 89). In November 1913 a storm with hurricane force winds hit the station and unroofed all the station buildings, including the homestead, and then drenched the place with five centimetres of rain.²⁴⁰ It may have been this storm, and possibly problems

²³⁵ Ibid: 17-4-1909.

²³⁶ Ibid: 15-10-1909.

²³⁷ Ibid: 5-11-1909.

²³⁸ Diary kept by Surveyor C. C. Boulter, assistant to Surveyor Scandrett in 1914, p. 130. This diary was given to the Northern Territory Historical Society by Boulders' daughter, in 1970, and apparently lost in Cyclone Tracy. I have a photocopy of the Victoria River section of the diary.

²³⁹ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 1-9-1911; Timber Creek police journal, 26-8-1913. Wye was still on Bradshaw in March 1910 (Timber Creek police journal, 26-3-1910).

²⁴⁰ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 4-12-1913.

with termites, that led to the homestead being rebuilt with a frame of water pipes.²⁴¹ According to Hill, when the first wet season came after the pipe-framed building had been erected, hundreds of frogs took up residence in the pipes, and their amplified croaking was so loud that the occupants had to shift into the nearby store.²⁴²

Byers was to become the subject of a strange mystery. In 1921 he and a man named Ford set out to ride from Brocks Creek to Bradshaw. About seventy kilometres from the homestead Byers, who was suffering from fever, stopped to rest and sent Ford on ahead, saying he would catch up later. Ford went on some distance and then waited for Byers, but he never came.²⁴³ He went back and looked for Byers but couldn't find him, so he continued on to the homestead and raised the alarm. During an intensive search by police and station hands, tracks and other signs were found, but lost again in scrub or on recently burnt areas,²⁴⁴ and no trace of Byers' body, or his horse, was ever found.²⁴⁵ Mrs Byers took the disappearance and undoubted death of her husband very hard indeed. The investigating constable reported that, 'It was impossible to obtain particulars of Byers Age etc. from Mrs Byers when I was at Bradshaw as she used to scream & break down.'²⁴⁶

Byers' disappearance was always treated as something of a mystery, but because he was known to have been suffering from fever it was thought he probably had suffered an attack of delirium, become lost and died. However, according to a local Aboriginal oral tradition, an early white manager of Bradshaw had been speared because he was 'too cheeky' – too rough on the Aborigines – and no one ever found out.²⁴⁷ David Byers was the only Bradshaw manager ever to go missing on Bradshaw.

²⁴¹ Report on Bradshaw station, 'Northern Territory Pastoral Leases Investigation Committee', Australian Archives, Northern Territory, CRS F658 Item 25. This report states that the homestead there in 1934 was built in 1913, but other evidence suggests that it was rebuilt at that time.

²⁴² E. Hill, *The Territory*, 1951, p. 254.

²⁴³ Mounted Constable Tom Turner to Superintendent, Darwin, 25-8-1921. Copy of letter from the Timber Creek police letter book, copied by an unknown Timber Creek policeman. Letter Book, 1911-1925, NTRS 2223, Northern Territory Archives.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ 'Tragedy of the Bush', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 16-8-1921.

²⁴⁶ Mounted Constable Tom Turner to Superintendent, Darwin, 25-8-1921. Notes taken from the Timber Creek police letter book by an unknown policeman. Letter Book, 1911-1925, NTRS 2223, Northern Territory Archives.

²⁴⁷ Personal communication, Pauline Rayner.

Bradshaw station remained in Joe's hands until his death in 1916. In June of that year Joe travelled overland to his station, in the company of the Millar brothers.²⁴⁸ The brothers took over the station after Joe died and may have been going out to inspect the station with a view to purchase, although one source suggests that they were already partners at the time.²⁴⁹ Somewhere on this trip, or at the station, an old injury on Joe's foot turned gangrenous. He returned to Darwin by lugger but the trip was slow because of low tides in the river. After five days, the lugger arrived in Darwin on July 19th and Joe had his foot amputated the following day. Initially the operation appeared to be a success, but he took a turn for the worse and died a few days later.²⁵⁰ Joe's dying wish was for his remains to be placed with those of his brother Fred on 'The Tomb' at Bradshaw station, but this never happened. His funeral was held at the 'two and half mile cemetery' (Parap, Darwin),²⁵¹ and the fragmentary remains of his headstone can still be seen there.

In Joe's time Bradshaw's Run had gone from a raw bush block, the home of so-called wild Aborigines, to a working station with a homestead, many yards, huts and a workforce of 'civilized blacks'. This change was achieved in spite of various setbacks and in the face of brutality and murder – if Bradshaw station was born through the vision, hard work and enterprise of Captain Joe, his brother Fred and their various employees, it was baptised in blood. It had seen more than its share of tragedy and violence, but by the time Joe died both he and his station had become legends.

²⁴⁸ 'News & Notes', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 15-6-1916.

²⁴⁹ 'Report on Bradshaw station, Northern Territory Pastoral Leases Investigation Committee', Australian Archives, Northern Territory, CRS F658 Item 25.

²⁵⁰ 'Obituary', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 27-7-1916.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Chapter 7

THE WILD WARDAMAN WARRIORS

Of all the language or 'tribal' groups in the Victoria River district it was the Wardaman – the 'Delamere', 'Willeroo' and 'Gregory' blacks – who put up the fiercest resistance to the white newcomers. For a quarter of a century they were independent warriors, frequently attacking the white men who dared to travel through their territory, or those who took up their land for cattle stations. Indeed, for a while they won the war and drove the settlers from their land, the only Victoria River group to do so, and they gained such a bad reputation that, like some of the famous bushrangers, they were often blamed for attacks that were probably done by others.

For instance, after the murder of Tom Hardy at Auvergne in 1889 it was 'believed by those who know the district that the perpetrators of this crime are half-civilised blacks from the Delamere Downs neighbourhood, who have already gained considerable notoriety for their murderous attacks.'¹ However, Auvergne is well away from Wardaman country and they are unlikely to have been the instigators of the crime. They were also blamed for the attack on Mulligan and Ligar in Jasper Gorge in 1895.² At least one early report says that Jasper Gorge belonged to the Wardaman,³ but more recent studies indicate that the gorge is in the country of their immediate neighbours, the Ngaliwurru.⁴ While it is quite possible that Wardaman people were involved, it is also possible that they were blamed by Aborigines from other groups to divert attention from the real culprits. The Wardaman were even

¹ 'The Victoria River Outrage', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 8-11-1889.

² Gordon Creek police journal, 25-6-1895. Northern Territory Archives, NTRS F302.

³ W. Willshire, *Land of the Dawning: Being Facts Gleaned from Cannibals in the Australian Stone Age*, W.K. Thomas and Co., Adelaide, 1896, p. 85.

⁴ D. Rose, *Hidden Histories: Black Stories from Victoria River Downs, Humbert River and Wave Hill Stations*. Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1991, p. 82; T. Bauman and J. Stead, *Fitzroy (Nungali/Ngaliwurru) Land Claim*, Northern Land Council, Darwin, 1992, map p. 21.

blamed for 'coercing into evil actions' the Aborigines on Elsey station, over 200 kilometres to the east.⁵

So, what was it that made the Wardaman so formidable in defence of their country? The fierceness of Wardaman resistance was due, at least in part, to the natural advantages of their country. Their land straddles the divide between the Victoria and Katherine-Daly Rivers and extends onto the Sturt Plateau, and in rough terms can be divided in three sections. On the south-eastern side about a third lies on the Sturt Plateau, a flat, almost featureless area, largely waterless in the dry season and boggy in the wet. Another third lies to the north within the Katherine-Daly catchment, a well-watered area with many creeks and scattered patches of sandstone, an area where people on foot stood a reasonable chance of escaping from horsemen. The final third lies to the south-west in the catchment of the Victoria River. This is well-watered country with many springs and large creeks, including Dead Finish, Little Gregory, (Big) Gregory, and Sullivans. These streams rise in rough, hilly, basalt country but soon enter a sandstone belt, a complex area of precipitous flat-topped and spinifex covered ranges, often capped with cliffs. Except for a few major valleys this region is virtually inaccessible for horsemen and was therefore a vast natural fortress for the Aborigines.

Another possible factor in the strength of Wardaman resistance is their location in relation to several Aboriginal culture areas. In Aboriginal Australia, culture areas – regions within which there are strong social and cultural links – tend to be defined by major catchment areas.⁶ The Wardaman are located on the divide between three culture areas – Victoria River, Daly River and Katherine River (Arnhem Land). The Katherine and Daly are part of the same catchment but nevertheless form separate culture areas. As might be expected Wardaman people display influences from all three regions, influences first noted by D.S.

⁵ Aeneas Gunn (per Jeannie Gunn) to Government Resident, 28-2-1902. Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) – Inwards Correspondence, 1870-1912, Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item 11226.

⁶ N. Peterson, 'The natural and cultural areas of Aboriginal Australia'. In N. Peterson, (ed.) *Tribes And Boundaries In Australia*. Social Anthropology Series No. 10, Australian Institute Of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1976.

Davidson, an American archaeologist who excavated sites in Wardaman country in the early 1930s:

Like all tribes to their south, their initiation ceremonies are marked by both circumcision and sub-incision. The tribes to their north, however, practice only the former. The northern boundary of the Wardaman also forms the approximate northern limit of the use of the boomerang. Their southern boundary, where they meet the Ngainman [sic] tribe, represents the most northern limit of the shield and the southernmost appearance of...the arm-band.⁷

There appear to be relatively few links in mythology between the Wardaman and groups to their west, and Wardaman language is not related to other Victoria River languages. It is in fact the most southerly member of the Gunwinyguan Family, other languages of which are located in Arnhem Land.⁸ The influence of the three culture areas can be seen in Wardaman rock art. Stylistically this rock art belongs to the Victoria River rock art province, but a few figures have Arnhem Land style X-ray features and there are examples of 'rayed faces' more characteristic of Daly River rock art.⁹ Overall, Wardaman rock art is more elaborate than the rock art of other groups in the Victoria River country, and it may be that their position between three major culture areas has enriched them culturally. It may also have forced them to adopt a more assertive identity and to more aggressively defend their territory. Their rock paintings sometimes depict white men and these provide us with the only glimpse we have of how Wardaman people perceived the settlers (see plates 106, 107).

Early accounts only occasionally mention the name 'Wardaman' or a similar derivative; other names used include the 'Gregory blacks', the 'Willeroo blacks' (or natives) and the 'Delamere blacks'. While it is likely that the majority of the Aborigines living within what is now considered to be Wardaman territory were Wardaman speaking people, it is probable that some were from other language-identified groups. For the purposes of this thesis, if an

⁷ D. S. Davidson, 'Archaeological Problems Of Northern Australia'. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, volume 65, 1935, pp. 145-183.

⁸ M. Walsh, 'Northern Australia', in S. Wurm and S. Hattori (eds.), *Language Atlas. Pacific Area*, The Australian Academy of the Humanities, Canberra, 1983, map 23.

⁹ D. Lewis, "*They Meet Up At Bilinearara*": *Rock Art in the Victoria River Valley*. Unpublished Masters thesis, ANU, 1990.

event occurred within what is now considered to be Wardaman territory, I describe the Aborigines involved as Wardaman.

European knowledge of Wardaman territory began with the explorations of Gregory's Expedition in 1855-56 (see Chapter 2). The Victoria River Gorge marks the western side of Wardaman country, and Gregory rode through this gorge three times. When the expedition broke up in June 1856, he led a party into the northern end of the gorge and soon turned eastward up Gregory Creek and crossed the tableland to Elsey Creek, passing through the middle of Wardaman country. During the time they were in Wardaman territory they saw few signs of Aborigines and had little contact with them.¹⁰

Between Gregory's time and the arrival of the first settlers, several of the land-seeking or prospecting expeditions described in Chapter 2 passed through Wardaman country. Of these, only Sullivan and McDonald in 1878, and A.T. Woods in 1880 met Aborigines. These were the Aborigines near the junction of Gregory Creek and the Victoria River who spoke some words of English and called out 'White fellow Jummy, white fellow Jummy'. Two years later A.T. Woods visited the same area with Aboriginal interpreters and was able to question the 'Gregory blacks'. From the answers he received he concluded there was no 'White fellow Jummy', so it seems likely that the Aborigines met by Sullivan and McDonald had learnt the words from direct or indirect contact with whites on the Telegraph Line, and were trying to entice the land-seekers into an ambush. Of interest here is the fact that in both instances the Aborigines were (apparently) friendly. Unfortunately, such cordial relations were not to last.

In the first wave of settlement three stations were established within Wardaman country – Delamere, Price's Creek and Willeroo. The leases that became Delamere and Price's Creek were in the north of Wardaman country (see maps 3, 4).¹¹ They were taken up on behalf of

¹⁰ A.C. Gregory, 'North Australian Expedition', in A. Gregory and F. Gregory. *Journals of Australian Explorations*, facsimile edition, Hesperian Press, Victoria Park, W.A., 1981, pp. 155-56 (first published 1884).

¹¹ On today's maps Price's Creek does not have a junction with the Flora River but it did so in the past and what is now referred to as Mathieson Creek was originally Price's Creek right to the Flora junction.

Dr. W.J. Brown in 1880¹² and stocked in 1881,¹³ and although the two blocks were contiguous (Price's Creek was north of and adjoining Delamere) they were run as separate stations, each with its own homestead.¹⁴ By 1887 Brown was in severe financial difficulties and he placed the stations on the market.¹⁵ Alfred Giles, Brown's manager at Springvale, bought the three stations, but because of the depression that began in 1890 he could not afford to pay the rents on all three places. He shifted all the stock off Delamere and Prices Creek and relinquished the leases, and he also relinquished Springvale.¹⁶

In the hope that economic conditions might improve he paid the rent on Delamere up to the end of 1892 and paid a man to caretake the homestead for eight months, but finally had to abandon the lease. Price's Creek homestead lay empty for a period and although 'every possible care was taken to protect the homestead buildings...from fire the natives have recently burnt the buildings yards & everything.'¹⁷ The homestead was never rebuilt and from about this time the name 'Price's Creek station' was no longer used, but this is getting ahead of the story.

Willeroo was taken up by Cooper and Stuckey in about 1881 and stocked in 1885 (plate 108).¹⁸ Cooper was born on a property near Lake George, New South Wales, which had been

Today's Price's Creek joins Aroona Creek about 37 kilometres from the Flora River, and Aroona Creek eventually joins Mathieson Creek. In 1999 I relocated the original Delamere homestead site near the Price's Creek/Aroona Creek junction, and in 2000 I relocated the Price's Creek homestead site on Mathieson Creek about 3 kilometres above the Flora River/Mathieson Creek junction.

¹² Acting Government Resident G.R. McMinn's 'Quarterly Report on the Northern Territory', 7-8-1883, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 4, no. 53A, 1884, pp. 1-2; A. Giles, *The First Pastoral Settlement in the Northern Territory*, nd. Copy held at the National Trust of Australia (NT), Darwin, nd, pp. 153-54.

¹³ A. Giles, *The First Pastoral Settlement in the Northern Territory*, nd., pp. 161-64; 'Early Drovers in the Northern Territory: Leaves from the diary of Alfred Giles', *The Pastoralists' Review*, 15-3-1906: 40.

¹⁴ A. Giles, *The First Pastoral Settlement in the Northern Territory*, nd., pp. 181-2; H.Y.L. Brown, 'Northern Territory Explorations. Fountain Head to Victoria Downs Station', *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 3, no. 82, 1895, p. 10.

¹⁵ 'For Sale. The following properties, viz. Delamere Downs', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 11-6-1887.

¹⁶ *Ibid*: 19-6-1891.

¹⁷ A. Giles to Government Resident Charles Dashwood, 15-12-1893. Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) – Inwards Correspondence, 1870-1912, Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item 5889.

¹⁸ 'Notes From Victoria River, *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 29-8-1885; Government Resident J.L. Parson's 'Quarterly Report on Northern Territory, June 30th, 1885', *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 3, no. 55, 1885, p. 2; Notes supplied by Mr Vern O'Brien, former Director of the Northern

granted by the Crown to his father. The property was called Willeroo, the name of the curlew in the local Aboriginal language, and Cooper gave the same name to the land taken up in the Northern Territory.¹⁹ Originally Willeroo was located south of Delamere, but within twenty years the boundaries of both stations had changed dramatically. The Delamere and Willeroo blocks were all relinquished in the 1890s. Later new owners took up leases in different parts of the same general area and the old names were reapplied, but in the process the positions of the names relative to each other became reversed.²⁰

The first hint of problems to come occurred late in 1881. Two stockmen, James Walden and W. Arboin, were camped on Delamere with a wagon load of goods and a herd of cattle, waiting the arrival of the manager, Henry Gosse. In the days before Gosse was due to arrive the stockmen were severely frightened by Aborigines who visited their camp several times, and although the Aborigines did not threaten them the two men panicked, and decided to hide whatever equipment they could and leave. They buried all the harness and a lot of other goods, hid tools and other goods in a spring and threw other items into a waterhole, including a fresh bullock hide and some books wrapped in a new tarpaulin, and a tent containing perishable goods.

Gosse arrived an hour after Walden and Arboin had left but rain had washed out their tracks so he could not tell where they had gone, and he spent the next three days riding around the cattle looking for them. He then decided to ride in to Springvale and went out to round up his horses. While he was gone, Aborigines raided his camp, stealing his hammock, a fly, a mosquito net and some cartridges. When the mess was finally sorted out and a party of men returned to where the equipment had been buried they found 'all the waggon harness dug up and strewn about by the savages' and the leading reins, an axe, a tomahawk, tin plates, pannicans, knives and billycans stolen. In addition, some of the goods secreted in the spring

Territory Lands Department, through the Office of the Placenames Committee, Darwin. According to Vern, only Cooper's name appears on the lease documents.

¹⁹ 'Mr Robert Cowley Cooper' (obituary), *The Pastoral Review*, 15-4-14.

²⁰ Summary of the early history of the Willeroo and Delamere leases, provided by Vern O'Brien, former director of the Northern Territory Lands Department, through the Office of the Placenames Committee, Darwin.

had been washed away or were ruined by rust, bags of flour had gone rock hard and bags of sugar had dissolved into the ground.²¹

For the next four years things seem to have remained quiet. Then at the end of May 1886 a more serious incident occurred. While camping on Willeroo about eighteen miles from the homestead, a stockman named Harry Keane and a 'blackboy' were attacked by Aborigines at three in the morning. Keane was speared in the stomach and received many cuts on the head from stones while the 'boy' was speared in the back. Fortunately both recovered.²² No reason was offered for the attack and it is unknown if any retaliation took place. In September 1886 Mat Cahill was wounded and Fred Williams was killed on Gregory Creek.²³ One account claims that 'A few of the black scoundrels were shot in this case, but the police brought none of them to justice.'²⁴

During the early 1890s the Wardaman were said to have been 'so aggressive as to occasionally spear horses and cattle alongside the [Willeroo] stockyard, and on one occasion they had the cook – a 'Celestial' – besieged for days while the others were away.'²⁵ In April 1892 it was reported that 'One station owner, at least, has of late been seriously contemplating the withdrawal of all his cattle from his extensive runs in consequence of the incessant and increasing troublesomences [sic] of the wild blacks'.²⁶ The station in question was almost certainly Willeroo, still owned by Cooper and Stuckey, and the 'troublesomences' included the wounding of George E. Scott, the brother of the manager.²⁷

In October 1892 the Willeroo manager, William Sydney 'Syd' Scott, was murdered on the station near McLure Rocky Hole, on McLure Creek (plate 109). The story begins on the 10th when a band of Aborigines appeared at the homestead. Scott was planning to begin a cattle

²¹ A. Giles, *The First Pastoral Settlement in the Northern Territory*, nd.

²² *The North Australian*, 4-6-1886; Telegram from Alfred Giles to Government Resident, 29-5-1886. Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) – Inwards Correspondence, 1870-1912, Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item A9093.

²³ 'Victoria River', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 2-10-1886.

²⁴ 'The Aborigines' (Paddy Cahill to the editor), *South Australian Register*, 4-9-1900.

²⁵ 'The Story of a Remarkable Ride', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 15-6-1900.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ 'Murders in the Northern Territory', *South Australian Register*, 17-10-1892.

muster the following morning, so he spoke to the Aborigines and told them to go in the opposite direction to that where the muster was to be held.²⁸ He gave them some tobacco and other items, and they made camp nearby. Later Scott discovered that a little boy named Crawford living with him at Willeroo had gone to the Aborigine's camp so he sent his black stockman, Rollo, to bring him back. Rollo went to the camp but stopped there all night and only brought Crawford back at daylight.²⁹

Scott's mustering team consisted of Rollo, who came from the Katherine area, Rollo's wife Alpha who came from Blue Mud Bay (Arnhem Land), and little Crawford. Normally Syd Scott's brother George would have gone with them, but he had left for a holiday in Darwin a few days earlier. In the morning the team started out and headed in the direction of McLure Rockhole, and while having dinner there (midday) a mob of blacks appeared. Scott asked them what they were doing walking about among the cattle and sent Rollo off to bring in the horses, but the Aborigines began acting aggressively, and scattered the horses and made them gallop. Scott called Rollo back for fear he might be killed, and fired a shot from his rifle to frighten the blacks away. When they had gone he sent Rollo out once more to bring in the horses, but when Rollo returned he found Scott dead, with several spears in his back and his head split down the centre of the forehead. The camp had been robbed, and the blacks had taken Scott's Martini-Henry rifle and cartridges and cleared out. They had also taken Crawford and Alpha with them – they were never seen again – so Rollo packed up what gear was left and rode back to the homestead. There he told the Chinese cook what had happened and they decided to ride in to Katherine to alert the police, leaving the homestead unguarded.³⁰

It is clear that the Aborigines had not gone far and quite likely had followed Rollo back to the homestead, and seen him and the cook leave. They soon realised there was no one else at

²⁸ Scott almost certainly communicated with these Aborigines through his stockman Rollo, who was a native of Katherine district and who therefore almost certainly would have spoken the language of the Wardaman, his immediate neighbours.

²⁹ 'Another Murder in the Victoria River District', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 21-10-1892.

³⁰ Ibid.

the homestead, so they broke in and ransacked the place, taking away most of the wet season loading which had only recently arrived. This included,

about 20 bags flour, 3 bags of rice, all the clothes blankets &c 2 doz pair new boots 60 lb tobacco all matches knives'. They also 'smashed the crockery took four rifles and about 300 rounds of ammunition, killed all the fowls and threw them in heaps and made a regular mess of things'.³¹

The clothes stolen included 'two dozen dungaree suits', and other looted goods included pipes, rugs, a saddle and bridle, and 'other sundries'.³²

It seems likely that as they rode in to Katherine Rollo and the cook met Lindsay Crawford and one of his men who were on their way to VRD, because a party which set out from Katherine as soon as the alarm was raised arrived at Willeroo on November 20th, two days after Crawford had been there. The party from Katherine included Mounted Constable H.P. Browne, Arthur Giles, and F. W. Palmer who later provided a detailed account of his observations and actions at Willeroo. According to Palmer a note from Crawford was found pinned to the door advising that he and his man had gathered up various goods found scattered in the vicinity and cleaned up a lot of mess. While doing this they discovered thirty or forty Aborigines in the horse paddock and 'charged their camp', and found Mr. W.S. Scott's saddle and bridle and some other things'.³³

Palmer says that before he arrived at Willeroo, Crawford and party had left for Victoria River, but he says nothing about what Crawford did to the Aborigines in the horse paddock or anywhere else, and other contemporary documents are similarly mute. However, two early sources suggest that severe retribution was delivered to the Aborigines. First, writing in 1896 Mounted Constable Willshire stated that, 'They were tracked up by an avenging party, and *sic transit gloria mundi!*' ('Thus passes the glory of the world'). A decade later Hely Hutchinson, who passed through Willeroo with drover Rose on his epic trek with cattle

³¹ A Giles to Government Resident, citing information given to him by F.W. Palmer, 2-11-1892. Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) – Inwards Correspondence, 1870-1912, Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item 5861.

³² 'The Willeroo Tragedy', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 11-11-1892.

³³ A Giles to Government Resident, 2-11-1892, NTRS 829, item 5861.

from Lissadell Station in 1905,³⁴ and who met many of the early residents, wrote that Crawford had ‘found the myalls gloriously drunk and capering about the house like a mob of black devils.’ Crawford then avenged Scott’s death,

in a terrible manner, and the “gruelling” he gave the myalls on that occasion is still spoken off by the niggers in those parts as the Israelites of old told to their children the horror of the wrath of the Lord, when he sent plague, pestilence and famine into their lands as a correction for their misdeeds... He and his half-caste dealt out white man’s justice with their Winchesters, and when the police arrived from Pine Creek, a couple of days later, they found plenty of employment burying the sons of darkness.³⁵

The day after they arrived at Willeroo, Palmer and Browne went in search of Scott’s body. When they found it all that remained were bare bones – mid-October is the height of the ‘build-up’ in northern Australia, a period of extreme heat and humidity which makes putrefaction extraordinarily rapid. Tracks, bloodstains and other marks told the story: Aborigines had crept along a creek bed to get close to where Scott was sitting or dozing under a tree, and attacked him. Scott was hit by at least one spear, but managed to run about a hundred metres to another tree where he was surrounded by a large number of blacks. There he was attacked again, and killed. The tree where Scott fell was “bruised with stones” and the ground round about strewn with broken spears.³⁶ Palmer noted that Scott’s body had been, ‘terribly mutilated the arms certainly if not the feet, being chopped off with a tomahawk and the front and top of skull smashed in’, and that ‘One spear had been thrown or thrust with such force as to cause it to pass right through the thigh joint and was with considerable difficulty driven back from its lodgement [sic] in these bones with a stone.’ Scott’s remains were brought to the homestead and buried there.³⁷

On October 24th Mounted Constables Dooley and Freeman, George Scott, and several other men arrived, and two parties were formed to go out after the Aborigines. According to

³⁴ ‘H7H’ [Hely Hutchinson], ‘The Sketcher. Graves of the Outer Edge,’ *North Queensland Herald*, 20-5-1911.

³⁵ Ibid. Hutchinson may be incorrect on one point: F. W. Palmer states that the Aborigines had not taken or consumed any of the alcohol in the homestead.

³⁶ ‘The Willeroo Tragedy’, *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 4-11-1892.

³⁷ A Giles to Government Resident, citing information given to him by F.W. Palmer, 2-11-1892. Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) – Inwards Correspondence, 1870-1912, Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item 5861.

reports at the time, they saw traces of the wanted Aborigines in all directions – spilt flour, bullet holes in trees or bullocks which had been shot³⁸ – and found evidence of several large camps near the homestead,³⁹ but their search for the culprits (other than those who may have been killed by Crawford and his offsider) was unsuccessful.⁴⁰ Perhaps the fact that the Aborigines were armed with five rifles and plenty of ammunition was sufficient to discourage serious pursuit.

Scott's murder appears to have made up the mind of the owners to abandon the station because in June 1895 Cooper and Stuckey sold the Willeroo cattle to Joe Bradshaw for what was said to have been a very low price,⁴¹ and these became the nucleus of the Bradshaw cattle herd.⁴² By August 1895 they had relinquished the lease, and at the time it was recorded that,

One cause of the failure of the station is said to be that the hostility of the blacks has prevented the herd from being systematically worked, and from what we know of the records of that district it does appear as though the natives had particular designs on Willeroo, for their depredations were most frequent. It is possible that Mr. Cooper took very little interest in the station after the brutal murder of W. S. Scott, the then manager, about three years ago, for as far as we can discover operations have since been carried on in a very easy-going fashion.⁴³

The abandonment of Willeroo is one of only two instances in Victoria River district history of a station being abandoned because of Aboriginal resistance. The other instance also involved Willeroo, abandoned soon after it was taken up by new owners in 1900 (see below).

After Joe Bradshaw brought the Willeroo cattle, Jock McPhee, 'Tam-a-Shanter' of *We Of The Never Never* fame,⁴⁴ carried out musters in the area for six or seven years, beginning in

³⁸ 'The Willeroo Tragedy', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 25-11-1892.

³⁹ A Giles to Government Resident, 2-11-1892, NTRS 829, item 5861.

⁴⁰ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 25-11-1892.

⁴¹ *Ibid*: 23-8-1895.

⁴² Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entry for 25-6-1895. Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 2261; *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 23-8-1895.

⁴³ *Ibid*.

⁴⁴ "'Never-Never' People', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21-2-1942.

July 1894.⁴⁵ A report in 1898 says he had taken up the Willeroo lease,⁴⁶ possibly to safeguard rights to the cattle. While working on Willeroo McPhee was not immune from the attentions of the Wardaman who on one occasion attacked him and his boy⁴⁷ and on another ‘went through [his] camp & took away rations & firearms Etc.’⁴⁸ However, if the report of Billy Linklater (aka Miller) can be believed McPhee displayed a remarkable sangfroid in the face of the danger the Aborigines presented. Linklater, who arrived in the Territory in 1887 and worked as a stockman there and in the Kimberley for over fifty years,⁴⁹ claimed that, ‘One day when it was raining spears, McPhee walked out, picked some up, handed them back and told the blacks to go away like good boys or he would have to send the troopers after them. They went.’⁵⁰

J MCPHEE
87-1900

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On May 26th 1894, Joe Bradshaw, Jack Larsen, and a ‘blackboy’, Nym,⁵² set out to ride up the Victoria and Gregory Creek to Delamere to visit the ‘sheep camp’.⁵³ In a ‘narrow defile’ on Gregory Creek just above its junction with the Victoria River they were attacked by a large number of Aborigines ‘securely ambushed in rank dense grass which at this place is

⁴⁵ Log Book of Bradshaws Run, entries for 25-10-1895, 30-7-1896, 8-7-1899 and 7-5-1900.

⁴⁶ Mounted Constable M.J. Kingston, 1-2-1899, cited by Government Resident C. Dashwood in ‘Government Resident’s Report for the Northern Territory, 1898’. *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 2, no. 45, 1899, p. 23.

⁴⁷ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 17-4-1896.

⁴⁸ Timber Creek police journal, 30-11-1900. Northern Territory Archives, NTRS F302.

⁴⁹ W. Linklater and L. Tapp, *Gather No Moss*, Hesperian Press, Perth, 1997, p. 17 (originally published by The Macmillan Company, 1968).

⁵⁰ Ibid: 50.

⁵¹ Carving on a boab on Fitzroy station, directly south of Bradshaw station. This was, of course, the same McPhee who was involved in the burning of dead Aborigines, shot for killing sheep (see Chapters 6 and 8). In McPhee’s time the area that later became Fitzroy station was unleased land and Bradshaw cattle would have ranged over the area.

⁵² The name ‘Nym’ was common in the early years of ‘Top End’ settlement. According to W. Wildey in *Australia and the Oceanic Region* (George Robinson, Sydney, 1876, pp. 108-109), ‘Nym’ was a short version of the Larrakia word ‘Nymgorla’ meaning ‘young man’. The Larrakia people are the traditional owners of the Darwin area.

⁵³ Log Book of Bradshaw’s Run, entry for 26-5-1894; *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 6-7-1894.

fully 10ft high.⁵⁴ Joe escaped unharmed and though one report says that his white companion was severely injured,⁵⁵ Nym 'was fatally speared, death coming a couple of hours after he was speared.'⁵⁶ Joe buried Nym,⁵⁷ but apparently the grave was too shallow because in July Mounted Constable Willshire from the Gordon Creek police station found Nym's bones scattered about by dingoes.⁵⁸ He reburied them but in October they were once again found scattered about on the surface.⁵⁹

An Aboriginal named Mahdi was murdered by blacks at Willeroo in November 1894. Reports at the time said that,

Mahdi was a boy Constable Wurmbrandt brought to these parts from Alice Springs some years ago. Of late he had been employed as a stockman and tracker at Willeroo station. He was noted for his cruelty to the local blacks, and the general impression here is that he played for what he got.⁶⁰

Three Aborigines were arrested for this crime and after they were brought to Katherine an 'aged black who is believed to be father of one of the suspected murderers' came up to the police station. Constable Burt went out to meet him, 'but when [he] had got within fifteen paces of the black fellow the old villain deliberately hurled a barbed spear at Burt, who by promptly ducking, caused the spear to do nothing more than graze his face.' After throwing the spear the old man got away.⁶¹

In November 1895, Paddy Cahill took a mob of horses from Katherine to the Depot where he had arranged to meet the Government Resident, Charles Dashwood. As he was crossing

⁵⁴ Log Book of Bradshaw's Run, entry for 29-5-1894; *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 6-7-1894; Joe Bradshaw in *Report of the Northern Territory Commission together with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices*, 1895, answer to question 3284.

⁵⁵ 'The Northern Territory. Interview with Mr. J. Bradshaw', *The Adelaide Observer*, 7-12-1895.

⁵⁶ Log Book of Bradshaw's Run, entry for 29-5-1894; *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 6-7-1894; Joe Bradshaw in *Report of the Northern Territory Commission together with Minutes of Proceedings, Evidence, and Appendices*, 1895, answer to question 3284.

⁵⁷ Timber Creek police journal, 18-6-1894.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*: 22-7-1894.

⁵⁹ H.Y.L. Brown, 'Northern Territory Explorations. Fountain Head to Victoria River Downs', 'Government Resident's Report on Explorations in the Northern Territory', *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 3, no. 82, 1895.

⁶⁰ 'Black Murderers Arrested', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 14-12-1894.

⁶¹ *Ibid*.

the Little Gregory Creek about fourteen miles from its junction with the Victoria River he was attacked by Aborigines. In his words,

We had just started from the luncheon camp, and had hardly gone 300 yards when I noticed some very fresh black's tracks. Knowing that the blacks were very bad in that part of the country I took my rifle from under my saddle flap and filled it with cartridges. I rode on a few yards when one of my boys cried out, "Look out Paddy!" I knew the blacks must be behind me, so I dodged down alongside my horse's shoulder, and only just in time. A spear struck my hat, going through it, and giving me hard knock on the head. Luckily I am Irish, and a bit thickheaded, so it did very little harm! Before I could say a word I had niggers all around. I could do nothing but shoot as quickly as possible, and I can shoot fairly quickly. I don't know how many niggers I shot – I didn't stop to count them.⁶²

Cahill continued on, and was followed by the blacks for several days and nights, but was not attacked again.⁶³

E.R. Johnston was attacked on Dead Finish Creek in July 1896. Aborigines surrounded his camp before daylight and drove his horses away, but before they launched an attack Johnson and his 'boy' were alerted by their dog. At daylight Johnson tried to make friends with the Aborigines, 'but they showed fight & rushed around the Camp until dispersed by Johnson and his boy.'⁶⁴ Johnson knew that George Ligar was due to arrive later that day – the same George Ligar who had been speared the year before in Jasper Gorge (see Chapter 5) – so he stayed where he was. Skirmishing continued until about midday when Ligar arrived and broke the siege. Johnson and Ligar then tracked the horses for twelve miles over some very rough country to where they found, 'The natives Killed a mare & had the heart taken out to cook.' The other horses had been 'grazed about the front & hind quarters,'⁶⁵ and 'One of the most valuable of the animals had been speared in the jugular, apparently from sheer wanton wickedness and cruelty.'⁶⁶

⁶² 'Paddy Cahill's List', *The Adelaide Register*, 18-12-1905.

⁶³ 'Government Resident's Trip to Victoria River' [1895], Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) – Inwards Correspondence, 1870-1912, Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item 6891.

⁶⁴ Timber Creek police journal, 27-5-1896.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ 'Aboriginal Marauders', F. Burdett to the editor, *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 3-7-1896.

Although few details about Johnson's fight survive, a man named Burdett who passed the spot some time later noted that, 'judging by the heap of broken spears I saw laying on the road...the attack [must] have been most determined.'⁶⁷ Burdett noted that 'the blacks there seem to have some half-civilised ones amongst their tribe who can talk, and certainly swear, as fluently as any white man' and that in the same area there had been 'two other attempts within the last three months to waylay travellers'. He suggested the establishing of police patrols in the area, but nothing was done.

In 1899 drover McLeod was attacked in Wardaman country, but no further details are known, and drover Andison had two horses speared while passing Delamere.⁶⁸ The Aborigines drove one of Andison's horses 30 kilometres before killing and cooking it. When they were tracked up only the horse's head remained.

The Timber Creek police reported in June 1900 that, 'Messrs Littleton and Madden arrived from Wyndham en route for Katherine [they have] taken up Old Willeroo Run, and going to settle there'.⁶⁹ They soon met the Wardaman warriors, and a news report in September 1900 suggests they abandoned their lease almost immediately:

Mr. Madden, who, in conjunction with his partner, Mr. Littleton, has lately taken up some country in the Victoria River District, complains bitterly of the ferocious and mischievous character of the blacks in that neighbourhood. He states that his partner and himself took up this country with the intention of stocking, but after his recent experience of the character of the blacks, he feels rather doubtful as to whether they will proceed with their enterprise.⁷⁰

In May 1900 drover Fred Mork was taking a mob of Hodgson Downs cattle across Willeroo and on to Wyndham for export to Fremantle (plate 110).⁷¹ On about the 10th one of Mork's black stockmen was driving a lame bullock toward the main herd which was several miles

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ 'Katherine River', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 19-1-1900.

⁶⁹ Timber Creek police journal, 22-6-1900.

⁷⁰ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 21-9-1900.

⁷¹ Timber Creek police journal, 9-6-1900; 'Victoria River', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 1-6-1900; 'Another White Man Speared By Blacks', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 22-6-1900; HWH Stevens to Government Resident, 30-3-1900. Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) – Inwards Correspondence, 1870-1912, Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item, 9686.

ahead, when some Aborigines came out of the bush and took the beast off him. A week later one of Mork's white stockmen, Walter Rees, was attacked by Aborigines who showed 'great determination' and called out 'Come on, you white beggars', but he managed to get away.⁷² On the evening of the 19th the cattle were camped on McLure Creek and in the morning Mork rode ahead, probably checking the route he would be taking that day. About ten miles from camp he unwittingly rode into a camp of 'fifty or sixty' Aborigines:

He was no sooner observed by its occupants than a shower of spears was sent flying in his direction. One of these, a three pronged wire-headed spear, struck Mork in the fleshy part of the thigh, going right through to the saddle-flap; another spear struck the horse Mork was riding in the stifle, only just missing the joint by about two inches.⁷³

The spear which hit the horse was tipped with an old sheep shear blade and if it had hit the joint could have crippled the horse, with disastrous consequences. Mork 'wheeled round and galloped away, followed by another flight of spears, which fortunately flew wide, and he and his horse arrived back in camp, both weak from loss of blood.⁷⁴

Harry 'Dutchy' Bening, Billy Madden and others thwarted an intended ambush by about twenty Aborigines near the Gregory Creek-Victoria River junction in August 1900. That night and ten miles further on, Aborigines killed two of their horses and badly wounded another. When Bening's party arrived at the Timber Creek police station they found that 'an old man', a French traveller named Clede Pennaman, had been 'stuck up' on Sullivans Creek and robbed of all his possessions, including a sporting rifle.⁷⁵ Why he was not killed is a mystery.

⁷² 'Troublesome Natives. A Drover Attacked', *Adelaide Advertiser*, 18-6-1900.

⁷³ 'Another White Man Speared By Blacks', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 22-6-1900.

⁷⁴ 'Ibid; H.W.H. Stevens to Government Resident Charles Dashwood, nd. Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) – Inwards Correspondence, 1870-1912, Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item 9722.

⁷⁵ Timber Creek police journal, 15-8-1900, 28-8-1900; 'Further Outrages by Victoria River Natives. Three Horses Speared.' W. Bening to the editor, *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 28-9-1900.

Towards the end of October 1900 a traveller named James Osbourne was attacked and wounded near the junction of Sullivans Creek and the Victoria River. As reported by the *Northern Territory Times*,

whilst quietly riding along about midday, he was suddenly struck by a wire spear in the muscle of the right arm, the weapon being thrown with such force and murderous intent as to pass right through the arm and enter his side between the ribs, thus pinning his arm to his side. Frightened by the yells of the blacks his horses bolted. After galloping some distance Osbourne managed to extract the spear, and then feeling sick and faint from loss of blood, he got off and lay down...⁷⁶

After resting for several hours his horse alerted him that something was wrong, but before he could mount he was again attacked and,

another shower of spears was thrown, one of which struck him in the head, but fortunately glanced off without inflicting more than a flesh wound. With the blood from this fresh wound running down his face and almost blinding him, and the terrific yells of the black fiends sounding all around him, he succeeded in mounting his frightened horse and again making his escape.

Osbourne rode some distance and camped for the night, and in the morning he returned on his tracks to try and retrieve his six packhorses. The heat and his wounds led him to take another rest and while resting he was attacked again, but this time he drove them off with his revolver. He eventually found his six packhorses, all dead, and the pack bags looted. He then rode sixty-five miles to 'McPhee's camp on Willeroo' where his wounds were treated, and eventually he returned to Darwin.⁷⁷ Mounted Constable O'Keefe visited McPhee's camp some time after Osbourne had left and McPhee told him that the blacks who speared Osbourne were the same ones that speared Mork and Cahill, and that they had raided his camp and stolen rations and firearms.⁷⁸

The attack on Osbourne finally prompted the Government to act. At the end of 1900 Mounted Constable Thompson and two trackers were sent to assist Mounted Constable

⁷⁶ 'Another Outrage by blacks', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 9-11-1900.

⁷⁷ Ibid; Timber Creek police journal, 29-11-1900.

⁷⁸ Timber Creek police journal, 31-11-1900.

O'Keefe at Timber Creek, with instructions to carry out special patrols through Jasper Gorge and around through Willeroo and Delamere (see Chapter 4). Over the next three years Thompson or O'Keefe regularly made these special patrols, and while their reports in the Timber Creek police journal make no mention of any serious conflicts with Aborigines, attacks on white people in Wardaman country continued for several years.

By 1901 Delamere was owned by W.F. Buchanan, brother of the famous Nat 'Bluey' Buchanan,⁷⁹ and stocked with cattle from Wave Hill.⁸⁰ Europeans were also active on Willeroo in 1901⁸¹ but what these men were doing there is unknown. However, the men on both stations enjoyed the attentions of the Wardaman. A 'Katherine correspondent' to the *Northern Territory Times* reported, 'I have just received a letter from Willeroo station that one of the mares has been killed and eaten by the blacks quite close to the camp.'⁸²

In August 1902 a man named Smith had 'an encounter' with Aborigines 'between the two Delameres'. He got away unharmed, but a few days later a German traveller, name unknown, disappeared in the same area. This man's horses were found a few days later but there was no trace of the man himself. The police at Katherine were notified and Mounted Constable Kingston spent about a month investigating, but he, too, found nothing. Eventually it was reported that, 'Bush blacks state that the man was killed and his body, and saddles, etc., burnt' but this was never confirmed.⁸³ Late the following year Aborigines entered the camp of C.J. Walker six miles north of the Gregory Creek junction and demanded tobacco, and later they followed him, but no other incidents occurred.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ W.F. Buchanan to Surveyor General, 11-1-1901. Australian Archives, ACT, A1640 Item 1901/46.

⁸⁰ Timber Creek police journal, 30-5-1902; *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 17-2-1905; 'Notice', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 29-5-1903 (advertisement).

⁸¹ Notes on the entry of 7-5-1901 in the Timber Creek police journal, copied by an unknown policeman. Letter Book, 1911-1925, NTRS 2223, Northern Territory Archives; 'Katherine', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 5-4-1901.

⁸² *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 4-10-1901.

⁸³ 'Supposed Outrage by Blacks', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 5-9-1902; *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 24-10-1902.

⁸⁴ Notes taken from the Timber Creek police letter book entry of 9-8-1903, written by an unidentified policeman. Letter Book, 1911-1925, NTRS 2223, Northern Territory Archives; Note: the Timber Creek police journal entry of 21-10-1903 says this incident occurred on the head of the Little Gregory Creek.

In 1905 Wardaman people were involved in a bloody incident with a 'foreign' Aborigine on Willeroo. In August, while the manager and all hands were out mustering, a dispute arose between Nipper, an Aborigine from 'Red Lily' (Elsey station), and someone at the homestead. There is a suggestion that Lee Gunn, the Chinese cook, had taken Nipper's wife, which may have been the cause of the dispute. In any case, Nipper went bush for several days before returning and demanding tucker from the cook. The cook refused, so Nipper stole his rifle and cartridges and shot him dead, and for some reason he also killed an old Aboriginal woman who looked after the Willeroo goats. He then took a horse, the rifle, a blanket and other gear, slung an ammunition belt across his shoulder, and headed in towards Katherine, probably with the intention of returning to Elsey.⁸⁵

By the time Nipper got close to Katherine the alarm had been raised and by chance he was seen. A police party led by Mounted Constable Johnstone quickly got onto his tracks and after a week-long chase in the Katherine area, Nipper doubled back towards Willeroo. Eventually the police party came upon Nipper near the Flora Falls, but Nipper saw them coming, dismounted and hid in a patch of thick, long grass and jungle, laced with small creeks. The police surrounded the area as best they could and began a search. Suddenly Nipper appeared and 'raised his rifle, and was on the point of firing at tracker Jack, when the latter anticipated him by a snap shot...from his revolver.'⁸⁶ Jack missed, and Nipper retreated into the thick vegetation. Johnstone called on him to surrender, but received no response, so, 'The long grass was then set on fire, and being dry soon burnt itself out. But there was no trace of Nipper, who had apparently disappeared like a snake by crawling away through the surrounding grass whilst the conflagration was raging.'⁸⁷

Nipper's horse was almost burnt to death before it was rescued and was found to be carrying 'about 40 lbs of fresh beef', which it was thought Nipper was taking to a 'bush natives camp.' On this occasion Nipper got clear away, but he did not survive for long. After the fire

⁸⁵ 'Alleged Outrage by an Aboriginal. A Chinaman Shot Dead', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 11-8-1905; 'The Willeroo Murder', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 18-8-1905; 'Hunting a Murderer', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 25-8-1905.

⁸⁶ 'Pursuit of a Murderer', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 1-9-1905.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Johnston tried unsuccessfully to find Nipper's tracks, and then had to return to Katherine for fresh horses and more rations, but before he left he met three bush Aborigines and asked them to keep a 'bright look out' for Nipper while he was gone. There are two quite similar versions of subsequent events. In one, the three men soon found Nipper but he was suspicious of them, accusing them of being in league with the police and telling them to keep away from him or he would shoot them. He afterwards joined a camp of Wardaman blacks in the area and, 'very foolishly boasted to them that he had not only shot the Chinese cook, but that he had also shot an old lubra employed as a goat shepherd at Willeroo. This revelation was suicidal on his part, as the old lady belonged to the Willeroo tribe.'⁸⁸

The Wardaman men took revenge by tricking Nipper into leaving his rifle in camp and going on a kangaroo hunt with spears. Not far from camp one of the Aborigines suddenly stopped and called to Nipper, 'There is a kangaroo. Quick! Give me your spears until I spear him!' Nipper did so and was then 'speared to death where he stood.' He was later found by Johnston with, 'two spear wounds in the back, and also a hole in the back from whence the deceased's "kidney fat" had been extracted by his slayers'.⁸⁹

In the other version Nipper had already joined the Wardaman camp before he escaped from the fire set by Johnston to drive him into the open. The three Aborigines met by Johnston found Nipper in this camp, but Nipper must have seen them talking with Johnston because he became 'furiously angry, accusing them of being in league with the police, and 'would have shot them had he not been prevented by the other natives.' While he was in this angry state Nipper revealed that he had shot the old woman at Willeroo, and this led to him being killed by the Wardaman warriors in the manner described above.⁹⁰

The German traveller murdered in 1902 appears to have been the last European killed by 'bush blacks' in Wardaman country and there can be little doubt that soon afterwards a decision was made to stop attacking and killing whites. Within a few years there is evidence

⁸⁸ 'End of a Murderer', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 8-9-1905.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

that a station blacks' camp had been established at Willeroo homestead and possibly at Delamere,⁹¹ and some Wardaman were living elsewhere in the district. For instance, in 1905, four years after an Aboriginal camp was established at VRD, the Governor of South Australia saw a man there wearing 'a large brass plate inscribed "Naaluk, King of the Wattamon."' ⁹² Some diehards kept out of harms' way in the bush,⁹³ but eventually most came in to the homesteads and accommodated themselves to European settlement (see Chapter 4).

As discussed in Chapter 4, decisions about fighting and ceasing to fight appear to have been made universally across the region. Along with the decision of many Aborigines to accept the 'offer' of life in station camps, there appears to have been a parallel decision to stop attacking white men. From the time that the station camps appeared, or shortly afterwards, the rate of attacks against white men dropped markedly, especially in the territory of the Wardaman which formerly had been one of the most dangerous areas. Occasional attacks on or killings of whites still occurred in the district but most of these involved Aborigines who had remained in the bush, or who had experienced minimal contact with whites. Eventually only the largest areas of rough country remained dangerous for white men. For example, in 1922 a prospecting expedition into the Stokes Range later reported that 'West and north of the Humbert River there were tribes not too friendly disposed towards the whites.'⁹⁴ Europeans avoided these areas or took strict precautions there long after other parts of the district had been more or less subdued.

Warriors the Wardaman were and warriors they no doubt remained. 'Soft' resistance such as cattle killing continued for many years,⁹⁵ but after more than twenty years of being a force to be reckoned with, of making their name one of dread to both settlers and travellers, from this time on they no longer applied their fighting skills in violent resistance.

⁹¹ Timber Creek police journal, 10-10-1907; 24-9-1907.

⁹² 'Northern Territory. No. IV. – The Governor's Report', *The Adelaide Observer*, 4-11-1905.

⁹³ J. Wozitsky, *Born Under The Paperbark Tree: A Man's Life*, ABC Books, Sydney, 1996, pp. 20-22.

⁹⁴ 'The Search for Oil', *Adelaide Advertiser*, 27-9-1922.

⁹⁵ For example, in the Timber Creek police journal, entry for 31-7-1917, the manager of Delamere reported cattle killing on Gregory Creek.

Chapter 8

THE SHEEP SAGA

Victoria River Downs, ‘the biggest sheep station in the world?’ Many local cattlemen would probably be horrified to learn that some of the early settlers dreamed of vast sheep empires on the Victoria. These settlers overcame many obstacles and invested a lot of money to successfully bring sheep onto the land, but the only legacy of their experiment is a great tale of dreams that failed.

Sheep first arrived in the Victoria River district with Gregory’s expedition in October 1855, intended as meat supplies for the explorers. The expedition had 161 sheep when it entered the Victoria,¹ but more than a hundred died from the effects of heat and thirst during the prolonged stranding of the ship, another 11 drowned while being taken in a small boat to the new Depot Camp,² and only 44 made it alive to the Depot camp.³

Surprisingly, at least one sheep was loaded aboard the *Tom Tough* when the expedition left in July 1856. The mouths of the crew watered when they saw this sheep – they must not have had mutton for some time – but instead of chops they were offered steaks from a large saltwater crocodile that had been killed that morning.⁴ Baines reported that the men were at first upset about this, but once they had cooked and tasted the crocodile meat they were keen for more.⁵

¹ A.C. Gregory, ‘Report of the Progress of the North Australian Expedition’, p.185. *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, vol. 1, Sessions 1855-6, 1857, pp. 185-191.

² J. Wilson, ‘Extracts from Notes on the North Australian Expedition’. *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, vol. 1, Sessions 1855-6, 1856, pp. 225-231.

³ A.C. Gregory, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, vol. 1, sessions 1855-6, 1857.

⁴ T. Baines. *Journal of the Detachment of the North Australian Expedition left by Mr Gregory at the Main Camp Victoria River 1856*, entry for July 21st, 1856. Mitchell Library, C408.

⁵ Surprisingly, the last sheep, named ‘Tom Tough’, was still alive two months later (R. Braddon, *Thomas Baines and the North Australian Expedition*, Collins, Sydney, in association with the Royal Geographical Society, London, 1986, p. 113).

In December 1877 Alfred Giles set out from South Australia for Dr Browne's Springvale⁶ and Newcastle Waters leases with 2000 cattle and 12,000 sheep.⁷ Near the Devil's Marbles nearly 600 sheep died after eating 'poison bush'.⁸ This happened on the same spot where Ralph Millner had lost nearly 2000 of the 7000 sheep he was taking to the Roper River telegraph camp in 1870-72,⁹ and no doubt these disasters contributed to the ongoing but largely unfounded fears of 'Top End' pastoralists of sheep losses from 'poison bush'. Giles' trek took almost two years to accomplish, with 1800 cattle and 8000 sheep arriving at Katherine in June 1879.¹⁰ What happened to the other 3000-odd sheep is unknown; they may have been left at Newcastle Waters or perhaps sold to the various telegraph stations en route.

It was quickly realised that the grass at Springvale was unsuitable for sheep because of its 'coarse and rank nature at its maturity in the green state, and the total absence of any nourishing properties when dry, it being exactly like crisp and brittle straw.'¹¹ The sheep had arrived in June when the grass was very dry and of the 8000 that arrived at the station nearly 800 died over the next three months.¹² By the end of 1880 there were said to be only 4000 sheep left and sheep raising on Springvale was considered a failure.¹³ The need to find better pasture for the sheep was the driving force behind the establishment of Delamere station.

Giles stayed on to become the first manager of Springvale and when the Delamere leases were taken up for Dr Browne (see Chapter 2) he arranged for them to be stocked with 1100

⁶ Springvale is located a few kilometres out of Katherine.

⁷ A. Giles, *Exploring in the 'Seventies and the Construction of the Overland Telegraph Line*, W.K. Thomas & Co., Adelaide, 1926, p. 167 (Friends of the State Library of South Australia, 1995).

⁸ A. Giles, 'The First Pastoral Settlement in the Northern Territory', nd. State Library of South Australia, V 1082, p. 32. Giles states that Von Mueller later identified this plant as *Gastrolobium grandiflorum*.

⁹ Ibid: 32; H. Favelle, entry on Ralph Millner in D. Carmen, Robyn Maynard and A. Powell (eds), *Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography*, Northern Territory University, Darwin, vol. 1, 1990, p. 208.

¹⁰ A. Giles, nd. State Library of South Australia, V 1082, p. 138; *The Pastoralists' Review*, 15-3-1906; *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 14-12-1894; Acting Government Resident G.R. McMinn's 'Quarterly Report on the Northern Territory', 7-8-1883. *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 4, no. 53A, 1884, pp.1-2.

¹¹ Acting Government Resident G.R. McMinn's 'Quarterly Report on the Northern Territory', 7-8-1883. *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 4, no. 53A, 1884, pp.1-2.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *Adelaide Observer*, 20-11-1880.

cattle and 3000 sheep. These arrived in July 1881¹⁴ and though the cattle did well, the sheep did not. A traveller passing through the district a decade later remarked, 'They tried sheep here in big numbers for which the country from a practical point of view was utterly unsuitable sour bladey rank grass with no herbage whatever.'¹⁵

Apparently Giles realised the shortcomings of Delamere very quickly because when he provided notes on his stations to the Government Resident in 1886 he made no mention of sheep on Delamere.¹⁶ When the station was advertised for sale in 1887 the numbers of bullocks, cows and horses were given, but there was no mention of sheep, sheep yards or anything else associated with them.¹⁷

Giles bought Dr Browne's Delamere and Springvale leases and continued to run sheep at Springvale.¹⁸ In 1891 there were still 200 sheep there, shepherded by 'southern blacks from Alice Springs', but by then Giles knew that, as on Delamere, sheep would never do well, remarking that, 'In its primitive state it is not a sheep country, as proved by Dr. W.B. Browne, but it can be made capable of supporting small herds'.¹⁹ At times the sheep were shepherded by Chinese²⁰ and at other times by Aborigines from Alice Springs. Exactly when the last sheep disappeared from Springvale is unknown, but eventually the Alice Springs Aborigines were sent home, armed with a revolver and ammunition for self-protection during the 1200 kilometre trip.²¹

One positive outcome of the Springvale and Delamere sheep experiments was the discovery that the quality of the wool remained good. The Government Resident reported that,

¹⁴ A. Giles, State Library of South Australia, nd. V 1082, pp. 161-64; 'Early Drovers in the Northern Territory – Leaves from the Diary of Alfred Giles', *The Pastoralists' Review*, 15-3-06: 40.

¹⁵ Report on Victoria River Downs, Robert Everett to Gibbs, Bright & Co., January 1888. Goldsbrough Mort & Co: Sundry papers re CB Fisher and the Northern Australia Territory Co., 1886-1892. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/876/6.

¹⁶ A. Giles, cited in Government Resident J.L. Parson's 'Half-Yearly Report on Northern Territory to June 30th, 1886.' *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 3, no. 54, 1886, p.2.

¹⁷ 'For Sale', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 11-6-1887.

¹⁸ Ibid: 19-6-1891.

¹⁹ J.C. Lewis, 'Veterinary and Stock Report', *NT Bulletin No. 8*, South Australian Government Printer, 1913, p. 7.

²⁰ A. Giles, nd., State Library of South Australia, V 1082, p. 133.

²¹ Ibid: 155.

scarcely if any deterioration in the wool was noticeable. The third clip to be taken off in the Territory was found to be genuine, clean, and good stapled wool? not hair, as many people insisted upon asserting would be the case if sheep were brought to the tropics.²²

Almost as soon as VRD was established there were plans to stock the station with sheep. Perhaps encouraged by Lindsay Crawford's opinion that the Camfield Creek area was 'Splendid sheep Country',²³ Fisher and Lyons had decided to bring sheep to VRD.²⁴ By late 1884 preparations were being made to overland a mob of 5000 ewes from Queensland, but before they could be started the country became so drought-stricken that they could not be moved. The drought had eased sufficiently by the end of 1885,²⁵ but by then Fisher and Lyons financial problems had become so acute that the sheep project was abandoned.

In 1887 VRD was taken over by the English-owned Northern Australian Territory Company,²⁶ but two years later it came under the control of the Australian firm Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Ltd.²⁷ Before Goldsbrough Mort acquired the station there was a prolonged and at times acrimonious series of legal and financial manoeuvres, during which two reports on VRD were commissioned. The first was produced in 1888 by Robert Everett who was sent to inspect VRD by the Northern Australian Territory Company. Among other things in his report, Everett remarked that 'I cannot write too highly of this country which I believe is adapted for either sheep or cattle.'²⁸ When Goldsbrough Mort and Co took over the station they sent B. Blair to inspect the station and write a report. On his return to Darwin he sent the following telegram to Goldsbrough Mort.

²² Acting Government Resident G.R. McMinn's 'Quarterly Report on the Northern Territory', 7-8-1883. *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 4, no. 53A, 1884, p.1.

²³ L. Crawford, cited in Government Resident J.L. Parson's 'Quarterly Report on Northern Territory', 1-1-1885, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 3, no. 53, 1885, p. 2.

²⁴ Government Resident J.L. Parson's 'Quarterly Report on Northern Territory, March 31st, 1885', *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 3, no. 54, 1885, p. 1.

²⁵ Government Resident J. Parson's 'Half-yearly Report on the Northern Territory to December 31st, 1885'. *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 3, no. 53, 1886, p. 1.

²⁶ J. Makin, *The Big Run: The Story of Victoria River Downs*, Weldon publishing, Sydney, 1992, p. 67.

²⁷ *Ibid*: 69.

²⁸ Report on Victoria River Downs, Robert Everett to Gibbs, Bright & Co., January 1888. Goldsbrough Mort & Co: Sundry papers re CB Fisher and the Northern Australia Territory Co., 1886-1892. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/876/6.

Finished inspecting Victoria river property mostly Good Stony Country parts worthless permanent waters Good but not sufficient for Sheep on best Country Cattle doing well sheep would also over Considerable area think Valuable property management Good.²⁹

In October 1889 Blair produced a very detailed assessment of the potentials and limitations of the station for both cattle and sheep. Specifically for sheep he recommended improvement of natural water supplies, the provision of paddocks, and the building of a woolshed at the Victoria River depot, about four and a half kilometres below present-day Timber Creek. Encouraged by Blair's report Goldsbrough Mort decided to trial sheep on VRD, so in November 1890 1,005 picked maiden ewes from James Booth's New South Wales station were shipped to Darwin on the S.S. 'Tsinan'.³⁰

The decision to try sheep was regarded as one of great importance to the future of the Northern Territory. Goldsbrough Mort's general manager in Darwin, H.W.H. Stevens, thought it 'without doubt the most important pastoral experiment that has yet been undertaken' and 'it will be superfluous to enlarge upon the prospects which the successful depasturing of sheep will have upon the enormous area of the Territory suitable for sheep runs.'³¹

Apparently through fear of poisonous plants in the Darwin-Adelaide River area, and to try and shorten the route, Stevens suggested that the sheep could be landed at Point Pearce and the drover could 'Explore the track' from there.³² Clearly he had no idea that for the first few hundred kilometres this would have entailed crossing some of the roughest terrain in

²⁹ Telegram from D. Blair to Goldsbrough Mort, Melbourne, Sept 1889. Goldsbrough Mort & Co: Sundry papers re CB Fisher and the Northern Australia Territory Co., 1886-1892. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/876/22 (65).

³⁰ Earl of Kintore, *Dispatch from the Earl of Kintore, G.C.M.G., Governor of South Australia, Reporting upon his visit to Port Darwin, and upon the affairs of the Northern Territory of South Australia*. Printed for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1891.

³¹ H.W.H. Stevens, cited by J.G. Knight in 'Government Resident's Report on Northern Territory for the Year ended June 30th, 1891', *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 2, no. 28, 1891, p. 6.

³² Report on VRD. H.W.H. Stevens to Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Ltd, 24-7-1890. Head Office, Melbourne: letters received from HWH Stevens, Port Darwin, re NT property and butchering business, 1889-1892. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872.

the Northern Territory, and an area then densely populated with uncontacted and potentially hostile Aborigines. It would also have required crossing both the Fitzmaurice and Victoria rivers, and for all anyone knew the area could have been full of poisonous plants! Fortunately for all concerned, the idea was abandoned.

After discussing the matter with Alfred Giles, the man most experienced with overlanding sheep in the Northern Territory, Stevens decided to land the sheep up the Adelaide River, 'and thus have the advantage of travelling them through the most settled and best Known part of the country.'³³ Still concerned about poisonous plants, Stevens obtained eighteen head of the local butcher's sheep and grazed them on the Adelaide River, and watched for any symptoms of poisoning.³⁴

No poisoning occurred, but when the first consignment of sheep arrived on December 5th 1890 it was too late for them to be taken up the Adelaide River (presumably because of flooding or boggy conditions). Instead they were unloaded at Darwin and immediately sent by train to the end of the line at Fountain Head siding,³⁵ and from there they were overlanded on the hoof in charge of drover Fred Mork (see plate 110).³⁶ Luckily the wet season rains were late so none of the rivers was in high flood. Mork swam the sheep over the 'lowest crossing' of the Katherine River and was then joined by Mick Fleming who knew the road.³⁷ The sheep reached Delamere early in 1891 where they were described as

³³ Report on VRD. H.W.H. Stevens to Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Ltd, 19-9-1890. Head Office, Melbourne: letters received from HWH Stevens, Port Darwin, re NT property and butchering business, 1889-1892. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ H.W.H. Stevens to Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Ltd, 8-1-1891. Head Office, Melbourne: letters received from HWH Stevens, Port Darwin, re NT property and butchering business, 1889-1892. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872; Telegram from H.W.H. Stevens to General Manager, Head Office, Melbourne: letters received from HWH Stevens, Port Darwin, re NT property and butchering business, 1889-1892. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872.

³⁶ H.W.H. Stevens to Goldsbrough Mort & Co., 8-1-1891. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872.

³⁷ Report on NT Stations. H.W.H. Stevens to Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Ltd., 8-1-1891. Head Office, Melbourne: letters received from HWH Stevens, Port Darwin, re NT property and butchering business, 1889-1892. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872.

being in good condition, with the loss of only 47 head.³⁸ The surviving 955 ewes finally arrived at VRD on February 11th.³⁹

Meanwhile, arrangements were being made for a consignment of 56 rams to be sent to VRD. Stevens wanted them to arrive about mid April 'for transhipment Victoria depot'.⁴⁰ At this stage his intention was to transfer the rams from the ship to 'the local hulk' so that there was no risk of them eating any poisonous plants, and then to send them on the next boat going to the Victoria River depot. At the depot they would land only a few rams at first to see if there were poisonous plants in the area, and if so the other rams would be carried to VRD by express wagon. Otherwise they could be walked to VRD, but he warned that 'The Blacks, being troublesome on the Depôt Road, increase our difficulties, & I shall have to provide for all such emergencies.'⁴¹

The rams arrived at Darwin in June and as it turned out they were sent the same way as the ewes. The dreaded poisonous weeds were finally met with near the Douglas River where twelve rams died, and three more died later, but 41 made it to VRD in good condition early in September, 1891.⁴² When they arrived it was noticed that their wool was full of Bathurst Burr, so they were shorn and the wool burnt.⁴³ They were then sent to 'the main branch of the Victoria River' and were reported to be 'doing famously'.⁴⁴

³⁸ 'The Victoria River Sheep', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 16-1-1891.

³⁹ Report by H.W.H. Stevens to General Manager Goldsbrough Mort, 9-2-1891. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872; C. Dashwood's 'Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory', 24-7-1894. *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 2, no. 53, 1894, p 3.

⁴⁰ Telegram from H.W.H. Stevens to General Manager Goldsbrough Mort and Co. Ltd., 30-1-1891. Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Pty. Ltd: Head Office, Melbourne: letters received from HWH Stevens, Port Darwin, re NT property and butchering business, 1889-1892. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872.

⁴¹ H.W.H. Stevens to General Manager, Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Ltd, 6-2-1891. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872.

⁴² H.W.H. Stevens to General Manager, Goldsbrough Mort and Co. Ltd., August 1891. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872; Telegram from H.W.H. Stevens to General Manager Goldsbrough Mort and Co. Ltd., 4-9-1891. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872.

⁴³ Report on NT Stations. H.W.H. Stevens to Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Ltd., 23-10-1891. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Another problem was to find someone who knew how to look after sheep. Although Stevens knew that 'several of the station hands are well accustomed to the ordinary work of a sheep Run,'⁴⁵ he was concerned to find someone with greater experience. On the recommendation of 'the local butcher' and 'Mulligan, the Victoria River Contractor', in March 1891 Stevens hired an old and experienced sheep man named James Mavor in Darwin. He was sent to VRD to look after the sheep and to teach the other station hands about sheep husbandry.⁴⁶ A hut which existed on Camfield Creek in 1891 was probably built for Mavor.⁴⁷

Mavor was impressed with the country's suitability for sheep. In October he wrote to Lindsay Crawford,

Since I came up it has been very dry & was a long time before I came. On all the stations I been on, on the Barcoo, & Flinders River, the sheep here done fully as well as on the best of them and fewer deaths in comparison to most others. The country is free from boggy water holes, and has good clean water. The country is better than it looks Every way but it is bad for timber for making sheep yards. There has been a good shower of rain & the next will make the green grass spring. The Rams are doing very well in the Ewes: I was out yesterday shepherding them & Everything is all right.⁴⁸

Mavor was only hired for a year and he may have decided not to stay longer because by February 1892 Stevens was again talking about the need for an experienced sheep man. He wrote to Goldsbrough Mort that because,

the Manager of Victoria River Downs has only limited Knowledge of sheep management, I would suggest for your consideration, that a thoroughly practical working man should be engaged to accompany the Rams & to remain on the station, at any rate, until after the first lambing.

⁴⁵ H.W.H. Stevens to General Manager, Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Ltd, 24-7-1890. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872.

⁴⁶ Report on NT Stations. H.W.H. Stevens to General Manager Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Ltd., 23-10-1891. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872; Report on VRD by H.W.H. Stevens to General Manager, Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Ltd., 17-3-1891. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872.

⁴⁷ Report on NT Stations. H.W.H. Stevens to Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Ltd., 23-10-1891. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872.

⁴⁸ James Mavor, cited in H.W.H. Stevens to General Manager Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Ltd., 19-12-1891. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872.

By that time Mr. Crawford would be fully capable of working without any special assistance.

This man could also do the shearing in July, and I would ask you to send the necessary gear with him, the same being unobtainable here.⁴⁹

In October 1891 another 1495 sheep arrived at Darwin and were immediately started on the road to VRD.⁵⁰ Of these, 315 died soon after starting out, most from over-eating on board ship and suffering bloat soon after landing. The remainder reached VRD in January 1892,⁵¹ making a total of 2,172 sheep on the station.⁵² All the sheep were pastured on the open downs country south of Pigeon Hole and along Camfield Creek, and sheep yards were built near Red Rock on Camfield Creek, at Longreach Waterhole, and possibly near Ra Ra Spring east of Pigeon Hole.⁵³

The first shearing was done by 'station amateurs' and took twelve days, and the wool was taken by wagon to the Depot and shipped from there to Melbourne (see plate 80).⁵⁴ According to Stevens the 'general opinion is that the wool is good & clean for travelled and shepherded sheep. Unfortunately we could not get sufficient packs out in time so that a large portion had to be compressed into a wagon, and thus brought to the Depot.'⁵⁵

The sheep did well on VRD. The Government Resident reported that by December 1893 there were 3,260, an increase of 50 per cent⁵⁶ (by January 1894 the flock had grown to 3,858).⁵⁷ The Resident said that the wool looked good and clean, and was optimistic about

⁴⁹ H.W.H. Stevens to General Manager, Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Ltd, 6-2-1891. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872.

⁵⁰ Report by HWH Stevens to General Manager Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Ltd, Oct 1891. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872.

⁵¹ H.W.H. Stevens to Goldsbrough Mort and Co. Ltd., 19-12-1891. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872.

⁵² C. Dashwood, 'Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory', 24-7-1894. *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 2, no. 53, 1894, p. 3.

⁵³ Personal communication, Mr. Anzac Munniganyi, who was shown these yard sites by his elderly relations when he was a young man in the 1930s.

⁵⁴ Report on NT Stations. H.W.H. Stevens to Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Ltd., 23-10-1891. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ C. Dashwood, 'Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory', 13-12-1893. *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 3, no. 158, 1893, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁷ C. Dashwood, 'Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory', 24-7-1894. *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 2, no. 53, 1894, p. 3.

the future of sheep on VRD. However, by the time his report was published and in spite of the good increase in sheep numbers, Goldsbrough Mort had decided to do away with sheep on VRD.

Before the sheep had even arrived in Darwin, Stevens knew what difficulties the project faced, because the sheep would be going into what was effectively a war zone. From the time that the station was first settled there had been little contact between the Aborigines and the whites, and a regime of constant reprisals and attacks prevailed.⁵⁸ In March 1890 Stevens reported that only ten miles from the homestead one of the 'foreign' Aborigines employed on VRD was murdered by the 'bush blacks', and expressed concern about what would happen to the sheep when they came.

It is with much regret that I have to report the murder of our blackboy Bob Some ten miles from the Victoria homestead. The wild blacks had speared a beast, & the boys were sent out to drive them away & try to discover the culprit. Our boy Bob got separated from the others who only rejoined him in time to see a spear enter at the shoulder & pass right through to his groin. He pulled the spear out, but died almost at once.

The best & most valuable native we ever had on the runs.

Mr Crawford followed the blacks for some 60 miles into some large gorges, but with a good start, they got away.

I only trust we shall be able to keep them from ascertaining what sheep are.⁵⁹

Concerns about attacks by Aborigines continued, with the *Northern Territory Times & Gazette* reporting in April 1891 that, 'the worst danger now to be feared will be the blacks, who, when once they get the taste of mutton, are bound to become exceedingly troublesome.'⁶⁰ The blacks had long since developed a great fondness for beef and horse flesh, but strangely they do not appear to have ever 'ascertained what sheep are'. It wasn't for want of trying. In December 1892 Stevens wrote that 'the Aborigines of the Victoria River District are becoming so hostile, that it is a most difficult matter for the settlers to

⁵⁸ L. Crauford [sic], cited by Dr Stirling in 'Victoria River Downs Station, Northern Territory, South Australia', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 24, 1895, pp. 180-182.

⁵⁹ H.W.H. Stevens to General Manager of Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Ltd., 3-3-1890, pp. 7-8. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/872.

⁶⁰ 'Another Consignment of Sheep', *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 3-4-1891.

carry on their ordinary avocations'.⁶¹ He went on to cite a letter he had received from Lindsay Crawford which claimed that,

They are Killing a great number [of cattle]... In fact the blacks are too many for us. They have lookouts posted on the hill tops & keep up a system of signaling from one to the other, & if we try to get near them they are off into the sandstone. I am always in a funk about the Sheep Camp. They have been within a mile, but so far have not commenced hostilities.⁶²

When the *Northern Territory Times & Gazette* heard about Goldsbrough Mort's decision to do away with the sheep it expressed surprise and disappointment, and remarked that,

the bulletins which came in from time to time were of so cheerful a nature that we were fully justified in expecting nothing but the very best results. The sheep kept in splendid order, the fleeces showed no sign of deterioration, the grass seeds gave no trouble, and the lambing could not be better.⁶³

The paper posed the question, 'What causes the abandonment?' and gave the answer gathered from 'authoritative sources' that,

the blacks of the Victoria River district are so troublesome and treacherous that sheep-breeding could not under existing circumstances be made a profitable enterprise. It would be impossible, we are told, to shepherd large flocks and keep them free from native depredations except by a very expensive force of shepherds.

The same article went on to remark that that there had never been any reports of shepherds being attacked or of sheep being taken by the Aborigines, and it now came as a surprise to hear this given as the reason for the sheep being removed from Victoria Downs.

Years later, Tom Pearce claimed the sheep were sold because, 'the manager [Lindsay Crawford] was a telegraph operator, managing a cattle station, and did not want the sheep

⁶¹ H.W.H. Stevens to Government Resident Charles Dashwood, 30-12-1892. Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) Inwards Correspondence – 1870-1912. Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item 5151.

⁶² L. Crawford, cited in H.W.H. Stevens to the Government Resident Charles Dashwood, 30-12-1892. Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia) – Inwards Correspondence, 1870-1912, Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 829, item 5151.

⁶³ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 27-10-1893.

there',⁶⁴ and a more recent study stated that the sheep were sold 'for reasons unknown today'.⁶⁵ However, there can be no question that Aborigines posed a continual and costly threat, and while the manager may have had an ambivalent attitude towards the sheep the main reason for abandoning them was financial.

The threat posed by the Aborigines required the sheep to be guarded by armed shepherds at all times. This was a major expense over and above the cost of running sheep in Queensland or the other colonies, and there were other high expenses to be taken into account. In June 1893 B. Blair carried out an audit of the Goldsbrough Mort sheep account and reported that 'From a perusal of the accounts of the above Coy. it is apparent that sheep breeding on the Victoria Downs is proving a costly experiment.'⁶⁶ He found that the cost of establishing sheep on VRD had amounted to more than £5000 and since then 460 of the old sheep had died, including 18 high-priced rams. Strangely, he claimed that these losses were offset to some degree by an increase over two years of 698 whereas other sources indicate a much larger increase.

Blair noted that the working expenses were extremely high with wages for 1893 estimated at £550 and shearing and wool carriage at £250. However, the 1892 clip had netted less than £250, leaving a loss of £550 for wages alone. He discussed various possible changes in the way the sheep were managed which might reduce costs, but concluded all were financially risky. Even if the wool clip could be greatly improved by running the sheep in paddocks, Blair believed that the cost of shearing and transport of wool to the depot would absorb all the gains, and even if transport costs could be reduced by shearing the sheep at the depot, the expense of fencing paddocks was too great. He recommended that the sheep be disposed of as soon as possible, but added,

What to do with the present stock of sheep is a puzzle, it certainly is folly Keeping on shepherding, and if they are turned at large on the country they are now being fed

⁶⁴ 'The Northern Territory', Tom Pearce to the editor, *The Pastoral Review*, 16-9-14.

⁶⁵ J. Makin, *The Big Run*, 1992, p. 71

⁶⁶ B. Blair to General Manager, Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Ltd, 20-6-1893. Reports on station properties, 1890-1897. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/306/146.

over, the chances are, that what with wild blacks and dingoes rushing them about, and not being able to find water, few, if any will be left in a few months.

Blair thought that the only other possibility was to sell the sheep to sheep stations in the Kimberley – if these stations were still in existence.

The Kimberley sheep stations were still in existence, but before they could be approached the problem was solved by an extraordinary stroke of luck. ‘Captain’ Joe Bradshaw, the southern pastoralist who had taken up country in the north-west Kimberley in 1890-92,⁶⁷ was planning to stock his country with sheep (see Chapter 6),⁶⁸ and on November 8th 1893 he signed an agreement to purchase the VRD flock.⁶⁹ One of the conditions of sale was that Bradshaw would own all lambs born after August 8th 1893, which suggests that a verbal deal had been struck at this time.⁷⁰ Other terms were that the purchase would include the wool at the station, that he could leave the sheep on VRD for up to six months, and that VRD would pay the wages and keep of the men looking after the sheep before delivery.⁷¹ Clearly VRD was keen to dispose of the flock.

Shortly after the deal was done the Western Australian Government introduced a tax of two shillings and sixpence per head on sheep entering the state.⁷² Because of this Bradshaw was inclined to get out of the agreement to buy the sheep, but this was not possible.⁷³ Instead of taking the sheep to his Kimberley property, Marigui, Bradshaw decided to throw up that lease and take the sheep to Bradshaw station, the property he had recently taken up on the lower Victoria River.⁷⁴ Aeneas Gunn, made famous in the book *We of the Never Never*, and

⁶⁷ T. Willing and K. Kenneally, *Under a Regent Moon: A historical account of pioneer pastoralists Joseph Bradshaw and Aeneas Gunn at Marigui Settlement, Prince Regent River, Kimberley, Western Australia*, Department of Conservation and Land Management, Western Australia, 2002, pp. 1, 5-7.

⁶⁸ J. Bradshaw to the Minister for the Northern Territory, Adelaide, 16-8-1893. Australian Archives, ACT. CRS A1640, item 93/302.

⁶⁹ A.M.D. Cooper to G.W. Moore, Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Ltd, 6-12-1893. Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Board Papers, 1893-1927. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/124/1092.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² *Western Australian Parliamentary Debates*, sessions 1893, volume 4, 1894, page 257.

⁷³ A.M.D. Cooper to G.W. Moore, Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Ltd., 6-12-1893. Goldsbrough Mort & Co. Board Papers, 1893-1927. Noel Butlin Archives, Australian National University, 2/124/1092.

⁷⁴ *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 10-11-1893.