‘No more head stockman, he’s a chairman now’:
The Making and Breaking of the Pastoral System
in the Kimberley Ranges, 1903-1972

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Bachelor of Arts (Hons)

This thesis is presented for the degree of
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I declare this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

Mary Anne Jebb

Warning.

The following contains the names and images of deceased Aboriginal people from the north and central Kimberley region of Western Australia. It is not to be published without the permission of the author. Some informants contributed to this research on the understanding that it would be seen only by examiners and supervisors and that publication to a wider audience would occur after further consultation with the informants or their representatives.
Abstract

‘No more head stockman, he’s a chairman now’:
The Making and Breaking of the Pastoral System
in the Kimberley Ranges, 1903-1972.

This thesis examines Aboriginal pastoral workers’ life stories in the context of the
two mass movements in Kimberley history: the move toward pastoral stations in the
‘early days’ of this century and away from them in the 1960s and 1970s. In the
northern ranges region of the Kimberley pastoral settlement began in 1903, with a
second phase of intense settlement from 1920. The recency of settlement in this
region meant that in the late 1980s people were alive who had experienced both
‘first contact’ and the arrival of ‘Welfare’. This study places Aboriginal life story
narratives in a wider historical context, drawn from written archives and a range of
oral testimonies about the origins and development of the pastoral system in the
north and central Kimberley. The broader economic and political context which
affected the process of incorporating northern ranges people into the Australian
nation is examined through individual contacts and biographies to develop the
patterns of alliances with ‘Bosses’ and the impact of Welfare on those relationships.

In 1971, small reserves on the outskirts of Kimberley towns which catered for 20
to 40 people in the 1950s, held up to 300 residents who were previously living on
pastoral stations. The overcrowded and unserviced fringe camps were thought to
contain people displaced from station employment by the decision to enforce equal
wages for Aborigines in the pastoral industry. It is one of the contentions of this
thesis that the social and economic foundations of the old rationing system on most
of the stations in the northern Kimberley were crumbling before the award wages
decision and its application to the Kimberley in 1969. The ‘eviction after award
wages’ theme underestimates Aboriginal agency in the migration process, fails to
take account of their changing social and economic requirements and the pull of
Welfare support, glorifies the period of ‘settlement’ on stations and reinforces the
‘myth of the lazy native’ which underpinned public debate and Arbitration
Commission discussions in the 1960s about the inclusion of Aboriginal workers
within the Pastoral Industry Award.
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td>Aborigines Departments files (including Native Affairs and Welfare)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AADL</td>
<td>Aboriginal Affairs Department Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARAD</td>
<td>Annual Report Aborigines Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATSIC</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWU</td>
<td>Australian Workers Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BL</td>
<td>Battye Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAR</td>
<td>Commonwealth Arbitration Commission Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNA</td>
<td>Commissioner of Native Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNW</td>
<td>Commissioner of Native Welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoP</td>
<td>Commissioner of Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPA</td>
<td>Chief Protector of Aborigines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Colonial Secretary’s Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Col Sec</td>
<td>Colonial Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOLA</td>
<td>Department of Land Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSS</td>
<td>Department of Social Security (Commonwealth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GG</td>
<td>Government Gazette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NB</td>
<td>Researchers Note Books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDG</td>
<td>Northern Division General (Native Administration files)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>Police Constable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Police Department file, Battye Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGA</td>
<td>Pastoralists and Graziers Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM</td>
<td>Resident Magistrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSP</td>
<td>Social Security Age Pension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAM</td>
<td>United Aborigines Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>Under Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>The West Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAPD</td>
<td>Western Australian Parliamentary Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAVP</td>
<td>Western Australian Votes and Proceedings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some of the people

Allenbrae, Campbell. Born about 1925 on Kurunjie station. Father and mother worked with Afghan sandalwooders. Head stockman at Kurunjie late 1940s and early 1950s. Wife Dargie, stockwoman on Kurunjie.


Howendon, Harry. Born about 1914 in the bush. Fred Merry named him about 1922 at Mt Barnett station camp.


Karraworla, Mary. Born about 1905. Taken from the bush by Jack Carey after her father was shot in about 1919. Accompanied Carey throughout the violent 1920s in the Mt Barnett and Gibb River region.


Maggie Ghi. Born in the bush around 1920. Father and mother removed her from the Kurunjie homestead and hid her in the bush. Around 1930, captured by Rosie Mumungulya and Jack Campbell from Kurunjie station. Camp cook and
stockwoman, worked contract musters to Wyndham for Scotty Salmond in the 1940s and 1950s.

**Martin, Scotty.** Came in to Mt Elizabeth 1947 aged about eight. Became head stockman in the 1960s. Chairman of Dodnun Aboriginal Community.

**Midmee, Barbara.** Born on Tableland station late 1920s. Stock woman and cook. Sister of Mick Jowalji.

**Mobby, Larry Murphy.** Born about 1900. Father speared and killed. Jack Carey’s assistant. Stockman at Gibb River station until his death in the late 1960s.

**Mordingali, Morndi Munro.** Known also as Billy Munro. Born at a muster camp on Napier Downs station around 1912. Father captured by police in the 1880s and mother captured at the Barnett police station about 1908. Munro became head stockman of Napier Downs, Kimberley Downs and Meda between 1955 and 1972.

**Mamangulya, Rosie.** Born in the bush. Mother captured for work at Kurunjie where Rosie grew up in the 1920s. Worked as a stockwoman and homestead camp boss at Kurunjie station. Acted as a tracker for Jack Campbell in the 1920s when he explored the Drysdale river region looking for people to work at Kurunjie.

**Ngulit, Fat Paddy.** Born 1890s near Mount Barnett. Confronted and escaped from Jack Carey about 1919. Stockman at Mt Barnett and Napier Downs.

**Umungul, Susie.** Born in the bush about 1910. Rescued from a massacre of her family group by Mary Karraworla. Built the first bark hut on Gibb River station. Noted horserider and saddler.

**Weeda Munro (Nyanulla).** Wife of Mordingali. Born in the bush near Mt Joseph in the King Leopold Ranges about 1915. Grew up and trained for stock work on Mt Hart station. Renowned stockwoman. Father Wundigul.

**Wundigul, Police Paddy.** Captured near Mt Hart by police about 1905 to become tracker at Mt Barnett. Stockman and assistant for Mick O’Connor, Fred Potts, William Chalmers and Felix Edgar. Convicted for murder and galed 1927-1932.
Acknowledgments

I thank the many people from the Derby community, from Murdoch University; the Derby, Battye, Kimberley Land Council and Aboriginal Affairs Department libraries, and especially my family and friends who went out of their way to assist and encourage me to undertake and complete this research. I acknowledge the following people for their contributions:

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Carol Warren and Patrick Sullivan for their help in the early stages of this project, especially their advice and interest in the field work process and ethnographic research;

Gus Bottrill and Ailsa Smith for helping me to beat the tyranny of distance between Perth and the Kimberley, by copying, reading and posting some materials from the Battye Library;

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Simon Neville for help with formatting and preparation of the map; Craig Chappelle for helping to proof the final product.

The people who shared their life stories with me -

Special thanks to Betty Walker, Beverley Treacey and Barbara Midmee for introducing me to their old uncle and father, Morndi Munro.

I am particularly appreciative of the understanding and encouragement from Malcolm Allbrook which, coupled with his editorial skills, knowledge of the Kimberley and historical interest provided the foundations for this project.

To my children, Charlie and Sarah Jebb and Nick Allbrook, who lived for periods without me while I wandered the northern ranges or sought peace and quiet for writing, thank you.
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Introduction

On 15 October 1994 the Dodnun Aboriginal community of about thirty five adults and fifteen children held what members called a 'party', to celebrate their new houses and the opening of their own settlement. This party was a turning point in the history of the community, signalling the end of the central positioning of the Boss and the Missus as protectors of a station 'mob'. The people of the Dodnun community were moving from a position of belonging to the station and the Boss as a work 'mob' to becoming a separate Aboriginal community. With this transition former head stockman Scotty Martin became a chairman, while his wife Maisie Jodba and sister Jilgi Edwards, who once were the two head 'girls' of two homesteads, 'retired'. This change represented a shift away from the overarching authority of station managers and towards the outside world of land claims, 'Welfare', tourists, missionaries, contemporary indigenous politics and a cash economy. Work also began to change from musters and stock work into a round of meetings and negotiations with people who wished to consult community members, photograph them or record cultural information.

Change had been slow at Mount Elizabeth (see map over page) partly because of the physical isolation from towns and government 'Welfare' agencies. The 35 kilometre stony track from the Gibb River road 380 kilometres north east of Derby was not accessible for five months of the year. But a range of other factors, including the nature of the industry, government policies and the social organisation of the indigenous people also contributed to the conservative nature of the community and their Bosses. The Dodnun community's station experience encouraged them to retain a style of living which fitted well with elements of traditionality: their language was strong, they relied on bush tucker to supplement store food and they practised ceremonies and rituals associated with their land. It is this capacity to give information about 'traditional' practices, Nganinyin language, beliefs and knowledge which attracts outside experts, workers and brokers for mining companies and museums, private researchers, linguist missionaries, photographers and many others. It is also this store of cultural information which is becoming the community's primary commodity to supplement its welfare-based economy and further the separation from the Mount Elizabeth station economy.
In 1989 when I began research in the north and central Kimberley, Mount Elizabeth presented many likenesses to the living and working conditions on other stations across the Kimberley until the 1970s. Physically, the station was dominated by a homestead, with a nearby store and what was once called ‘the blacks’ camp’ made of small corrugated iron sheds. Just beyond the workers’ camp the tiny pensioner huts were all empty; all the old pensioners who had come to the station as young men with the old manager had died. The middle-aged ‘girls’ wearing loose printed cotton shifts were quietly sweeping the house while an older woman swept leaves and watered the garden. They all addressed Pat Lacy as ‘Missus’ and Peter Lacy as ‘Boss’. Men in cowboy-style clothing moved amongst horses at the yards just metres from the homestead, watched by young children swinging from the yard rails. At four o’clock people began to move toward the station store where the Missus booked up food, tobacco, cool drinks and clothes. The women who worked in the house washed every afternoon before they visited the store, then moved on to the late afternoon housework. The smell of scented soap filled the storeroom verandah. In the evenings, small groups sat by camp fires while an old ‘bushman’, Dicky Udmorrah, and the traditional owner for the homestead area, Harry Howendon, sang songs and recounted stories to whomever was listening. The air was permeated with the scent of local pine split from old fence posts and placed on milk tin lids near each camp to keep them free of mosquitoes. The inevitable camp dogs moved about in search of scraps or plates left on the ground, or on the old wire beds which doubled as shelves.

Before my first visit to Mount Elizabeth in 1989, I telephoned to request permission to come and discuss my research with Aboriginal people and management. An anthropologist who had worked in the area had laughed at the idea of working with Mount Elizabeth people. He retold a story of being chased off the property by a gun-wielding manager in the early 1980s. This information was a little worrying; there were numerous stories of station managers locking gates and being rude to outsiders who were potential ‘white stirrers’.¹ My own experience included some

pretty rude comments from white townspeople about ‘stirring up the blackfellas’ and southerners getting it all wrong ‘as usual’. But a telephone call to the station was met with cordiality and the response that the manager’s wife would discuss my visit with the people and let me know. This was no gun-wielding maniac. However, the threat of eviction or open resistance which had been flagged by the anthropologist was real. The manager discussed his protection of the group in the face of incoming anthropologists. His rationale was that the group had asked him to keep out ‘gardia’ or (‘whitefellas’) who might make ‘trouble’. Only a few years earlier, cave paintings on Mount Elizabeth and the neighbouring Mount Barnett lease were damaged by a state government project to rehabilitate them using young Aboriginal trainees and elders, some of who lived in Mowanjum reserve near Derby.2 This project so alarmed local Aboriginal people and lease holders who were taking tourists to the caves that it confirmed the need for extreme caution when dealing with outsiders. Community and management were joined in their desire to limit outsiders’ access to sites on the lease and keep the gate to the community and the land guarded.

At Mount Elizabeth the managers were the contact people for the group for all outside services including mail and telephone. The physical layout of the station was such that visitors had to drive directly past the homestead to the camp one hundred metres away. Although this reinforced the managers’ role as physical gatekeepers to the property and the people, the inter-relationship between management and mob was paramount in my observing the ‘manager first’ protocol. Had I gone straight to the camp I would have risked offending management, and creating tensions and conflicts for the group and individuals in the camp which they would have to carry in my absence. Sensitivity to outside influences and contacts is an enduring characteristic of the station system.

During my research it became clear that many of the station people also saw Mount Elizabeth as a refuge from the social problems of town and they shared some of the manager’s resistance to outsiders. While this resistance can be viewed as enhancing

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2 The paintings were altered in the process. There were serious and long term repercussions for David Mowaljarlbai who helped to establish the cave painting project, which were mentioned by other Aboriginal people at Mowanjum and the northern ranges communities until and after his death in 1997.
management’s control of ‘their’ group, indigenous people also had an investment in it. After sitting through the noise, confusion and frequent violence of Derby town reserve, I was impressed with Mount Elizabeth and its huge shade trees, peacocks, children and teenagers playing loud music and old people with their packs of dogs. The storytelling and music at the camps was also regular and spontaneous. In addition to this picture of comparative peace and cultural self-sufficiency, when Social Security representatives came to the station they went to the Missus, not to the camps and she provided the necessary information. Unlike many of the station managers in the Kimberley who eventually came into conflict with the Social Security or Native Welfare officers and told Aboriginal groups to leave, Pat Lacy put time and effort into managing Social Security and a range of service deliverers to enable them to make the transition from rations to a Commonwealth-funded Aboriginal community.

At the end of 1991 the group incorporated as the Wah community, the name of the homestead site, and applied for Commonwealth funds to establish a community at Pijilli, a waterhole, dancing ground and painting site, also on the station access road but just outside the Mount Elizabeth lease and on the Gibb lease next door. When I first drove by Pijilli in 1989, Harry Howendon, who also worked with me as an informant to this research, was camped on his own there about two metres from the track, sleeping under a piece of canvas over a bush pole frame and waiting to establish his community. This did not eventuate because of concern from members of the Gibb River station community about a permanent camp near a significant site. The Pijilli camp was also prone to flooding and was a main waterhole for cattle in the dry season.

When I greeted Scotty Martin at the beginning of a field visit in April 1992 and asked him if he would be head stockman for the coming muster, I was told by his ‘off-sider’ and vice-chairman, Campbell Allenbrae, that they did not work in the cattle any more, ‘just tourists’. He added emphatically of Scotty Martin, “No more head stockman, he’s a chairman now.” By that time the older generation of workers and the very old pensioners had moved to the camp at Dodnun on the station access road. Dodnun, Pijilli, Wah and the old Mount Elizabeth homestead sites are all connected in an indigenous storyline, but the leases cut across this. Huts had been built on the Dodnun site with a central ablution block. It was called the pensioner
camp by management and younger workers who continued to stay at the homestead camp during the work season. The community had ‘an agreement in principle’ from management that they would be permitted to occupy a one square kilometre living area at Dodnun. Water was not connected for fifteen months, nor was there any power. Within six months of moving to Dodnun, they received funding for their first community Toyota, which was always driven by the chairman or the vice-chairman.

There was regular contact between the homestead and Dodnun. The store remained the main outlet for food and clothes, and the homestead and the Missus were still the points of contact for Social Security payments and all contacts from government agencies. The community nurse from Derby set up a day clinic at the homestead and all medicines were kept in the homestead cooler. The Missus gave out most of the medicines because she had a cool room, could read and had clean spoons and measures. All mail came through the homestead and the Missus read and interpreted it. Whenever station work was required, the Boss could call in at Dodnun for a small number of temporary full-time and part-time workers. Senior men and women were also paid a small wage, mostly through the store book-up system, to assist with tour groups to fishing places and cave paintings. Each muster season, a senior man assisted the younger men to break a fresh group of horses.

The younger workers tended to stay at the homestead camps where there was a public telephone and power for a washing machine and a television and videos. They were on wages and various Social Security allowances, coupled with a meat ration from the station. During the wet season, only two or three people remained at the homestead camp; the social life of the community shifted to Dodnun with a growing number of visits to town and nearby communities at Gibb River and Mount Barnett stations. The group at Dodnun also began to receive an increasing flow of visitors from surrounding stations and from the northern coastal mission, Kalumburu and the Mowanjum reserve outside Derby. The Toyota had greatly increased contacts with Gibb River and various people began to appear in other community vehicles for visits to relations. Old men like Dicky Udmorrah who walked about the camp naked with his long bush walking stick, travelled constantly along the Gibb River road from Mowanjum to Kalumburu. He had been chased away from Mount Elizabeth on more than one occasion from 1945 to 1965 by the
old manager Frank Lacy and his wife Theresa, and later by police, for terrifying Aboriginal station girls, sneaking into the camp to steal tobacco and spearing cattle and other men. The mobility and accessibility of the Aboriginal-owned vehicles and new Aboriginal communities allowed him to call in for two or three week visits at Mount Elizabeth, Gibb River, Mount Barnett and Mowanjum without having to walk in the bush and avoid managers. Harry Howendon had also returned after a life of moving from station to station in the region over the Napier ranges.

Howendon’s presence in the early 1980s gave the Mount Elizabeth people a leader with traditional rights to claim a small piece of land for ‘pensioners’. But some members of the Mount Elizabeth group were in the process of negotiating access to country they called their own on other pastoral leases nearby. Campbell Allenbrae, for instance, explained in 1992 that he and his brother were helping Howendon to build up his community while they were locked out of Kurunjie station where he was born. Attempts to claim land or demand a greater share of economic developments on the lease tested their relationship with the Boss and placed them under pressure to negotiate the land claim process, with which they were unfamiliar. Conflicts had occurred during the early 1980s when discussions arose about cave paintings, access to the lease for anthropologists and land rights, placing pressure on the managers and the group to define and separate their interests in the lease. At one meeting in 1992, the ex-head house-girl tried to impress upon the old men that they could not have a ‘war’ with whitefellas, there were too many of them. I was asked to say just how many people there were in Australia, which was taken as ‘a million’ by these senior men and women who could not count, read or write and who had never been ‘down south’. The outcome of entering a claim process could mean going against the Boss and losing their place on the station for at least some time, perhaps permanently. Instead of leaving or challenging the Boss, the community stayed. Their access to the land was enhanced by their Boss; if he left, the next manager might get rid of them. They also had a shared history on the lease which complicated any moves which might lead to conflict. The Boss had been

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3 Harry Howendon, Dickie Udnorrah, Tapes (41 and 42) 5 April 1992; Frank Lacy Diaries 1923-1970, Mount Elizabeth Station, 14 May 1949; Theresa Lacy, Interview notes NB12a, 17 December 1994; Scotty Martin, Interview notes, NB8, pp. 52-56.

4 Scotty Martin moved to town for a period in 1981 and refused to work. He returned and was joined by Harry Howendon.
'grown up' on the lease by deceased Aboriginal men and he shared the community's concerns for the paintings and sites on the lease.

With people's access to vehicles and increasing amounts of cash from Social Security, card games also became a regular event, and younger relations from other stations found their way in the most extraordinarily precarious-looking vehicles across the streams and through the black soil to the huts. The Boss still went out with the muster camps, still picked up workers and sat at the sheds with the 'boys' tinkering with vehicles, plaiting nylon ropes and hat bands, and talking about the weather and the stock. He had significant knowledge of sites on the lease, told to him by old Aboriginal men. But Pat Lacy was expressing profound doubts that the group would survive contact with the outside world, particularly grog. She gave many examples of the deterioration in living standards, health, the decline in group discipline and a new language of greed and violent conflict which came with the shift away from the station manager's protection and their now unrestricted access to a vehicle. She was distressed at the changes which were occurring to people whom she had 'looked after' and managed for twenty years and her husband had known intimately since he was a small child. With the provision of outside services, management's protective and domestic role began to alter and they were faced with the possibility that they were now only a temporary resource about whom the community was ambivalent. The managers at Mount Elizabeth, especially the Missus, were confronting the double-edged sword of paternalism built on acts of kindness within unequal power relations and distinctive cultural systems. Pat Lacy's statements echoed those of the plantation owners in America over one hundred years before: 'It is the slaves who own me. Morning, noon, and night, I'm obliged to look after them, to doctor them, and to attend to them in every way.' The Missus was struggling to reconcile underlying tensions and conflicts which had been created by the pastoral system in the northern ranges since first contact in 1903. These tensions and conflicts provide the subject matter of this thesis.

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6 Eugene Genovese, Roll Jordan Roll: The World The Slaves Made, New York, Pantheon Books, 1972, p. 79; This point is more explicitly made in the book by the manager of Louisa Downs' station west of Fitzroy Crossing, which stated that it 'seemed we actually worked for them and were employed as managers to look after their well-being.' L.A. Schubert, Kimberley Dreaming: The Century Of Freddy Cox, Words Work Express, 1992, p. 67.
By the October 1994 ‘party’ for the new houses, Mount Elizabeth station had not experienced the struggle for power which elsewhere set management against mob and turned paternalism sour. The Boss and the Missus continued to negotiate with the community and the community with them. The party marked a shift in control over cultural information and outside contacts; it had as yet not threatened the economic viability of the station or the Boss’s authority over land and station work. The Boss still held the land lease while the Dodnun community provided a pool of labour with social welfare support from the Commonwealth and funding from tourist enterprises. The horse musters were part of the station’s tourism potential, along with Aboriginal cultural artefacts. The Missus continued to run the community’s finances, and received and read mail.

With relations and friends housed ten kilometres away at the pensioner camp, the homestead and station workers could retire at night to their own community. The old people could instigate dances and stories with the retired or outgoing generation of workers. There was a sense of security once the houses were built. But the people did not have secure title to their small living area, or unrestricted access to the land. They still went to the station store for their food and clothes, and rang the homestead once a day for messages, news or advice. They assisted management with tourism but did not instigate their own tours. The gate to the main hunting and tourism sites was locked and the key kept at the homestead. Only the ex-head stockman, Scotty Martin, or ex-head girls, asked for the key.

But there were many changes by this time. The community had a Toyota and a truck, which enabled members to travel to towns and nearby stations at will. The children were schooled at Gibb River station; the manager no longer brought them back or sent them away. The community had its own telephone and office, doubling as a health clinic and members had their own individually-designed houses and a power source for refrigeration and lighting. There was also a linguist missionary resident at Dodnun.\(^7\) Now that they were a government-funded

\(^7\) The appearance of a Protestant missionary caused some concern because the station had always been Catholic. The manager did not intervene directly, but Scotty Martin was asked by a Catholic Church representative if he wanted the missionary to stay. He was not easily moved and decided that the missionary would stay because he wanted to create a language bible which would help the children at their schooling and help them to write their own language. The
community, a school, a paid administrator and economic enterprises might be forthcoming. They might also try to gain secure title to some of the land on which they live. This could signal the next phase of development and a potential struggle with management over land.

From 1989 until the time of the party, I visited Mount Elizabeth station where the Dodnun community live, as well as other stations and communities along the Gibb River road, to research the subject of changing social relations on Kimberley pastoral stations. Pastoral paternalism framed the majority of indigenous people's experiences in the Kimberley and much of the Pilbara, and other parts of northern Australia. In the 1960s and 1970s mass migrations occurred, transforming most station 'mobs' into unemployed or underemployed town camp dwellers. These northern communities offered an opportunity to examine the multifaceted interactions between Aboriginal people, management and government which developed on pastoral stations from first contact to the 1960s, when Welfare and wages reached Kimberley stations. Significant changes in social relations were occurring at Mount Elizabeth while I was conducting my research. Although the Aboriginal residents were voting, receiving housing grants and utilising other resources which signal a material shift to a modern and civic community, they remained socially and economically vulnerable, and reliant on their unspoken alliance with the Boss. Although this research does not use Mount Elizabeth as a case study, the very recent transformation in relations between management and mob and provides a contemporary context from which to analyse the practice and

missionary also had a vehicle and could help out with the stores and other matters which might require literacy or transport.

complexities of paternalism on pastoral stations. Importantly, these northern stations like Mount Elizabeth also acted as a reminder that many of the participants in the region’s contact history were alive or only recently deceased, and their children continued to manage social and economic relations forged on a very recent frontier.9

**Analysing pastoral paternalism**

To Charles Rowley, pastoral paternalism in northern Australia was exploitative, based on race prejudice and tied to an enduring Australian colonialism.10 His survey of Aboriginal employment, living conditions and administration in Australia to 1967 suggested that Aboriginal people were trapped on pastoral stations in a paternalistic relationship which was encouraged by government inaction, suited employers’ economic needs and denied Aboriginal people equal living or working conditions to Europeans. For chapters on Western Australia Rowley utilised research by Peter Biskup which was later published as a comprehensive study of Aboriginal affairs policy and administration, *Not Slaves Not Citizens: The Aboriginal Problem In Western Australia, 1898-1954.*11 Biskup did not focus on Aboriginal people’s views or responses to administrative strategies, nor on the dismantling of the station system which his research precedes. He relied on A.P. Elkin’s model of phases of cultural interaction whereby survivors of the second phase, culture clash and the establishment of European dominance, entered the third phase, ‘intelligent parasitism’.12 In this phase, indigenous people struggled to accommodate to work and over a generation lost their own cultural and religious integrity in return for a place in the white economy.

To Elkin and Biskup government policies were required which would force Aboriginal people and pastoralists to move from intelligent parasitism to the next

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phase, assimilation and active participation in mainstream society. The dismal picture of Aboriginal people's inevitable demise into welfare dependency through lack of employment and reversion to inflexible cultural traditions was encouraged by the public debate over the introduction of equal wages to Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry. Elkin's model of cultural change was presented sentence by sentence for three days in August 1965, by John Kerr, the lawyer presenting the case against the introduction of equal wages for Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry. Kerr argued that the eminent Professor of Anthropology had shown in his article on 'intelligent parasitism' that Aboriginal people co-operated with pastoral Bosses as far so they were culturally able. He also argued that they did not actually 'desire' European material objects, nor did they wish to place pastoral work above their own religious and cultural interests. Aboriginal people were actively engaged in the pastoral industry because they had to be. Kerr told the 1965 Commission that parasitism represented an adjustment from one form of parasitism to another, but it is intelligent because those who engaged in it, whilst wishing to preserve their own way of life, depart from it only in the most limited way, depart from it only to an extent which is just sufficient to enable the settler or pastoralist to carry on his property and to give them certain articles which they desire in return.

Elkin's analysis was used to support Kerr's argument on behalf of pastoral interests that in Aboriginal culture there was a 'lack of interest in consistent work' and an 'inability or unwillingness to look after the future'.

After the hearings, the editor of the Australian commented on how this case, more than any other in the history of arbitration involved 'fascinating' anthropological and cultural information which had not been heard before by the majority of white Australians, and which demonstrated convincingly that Aboriginal people were not worth equal wages. Cultural traditions had been interpreted publicly and

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13 'Cattle Station Industry (Northern territory) Award 1951, CAR case no. 830 -f 1965, evidence Kerr, 10 August 1965. See especially pp. 527, 576, 1144 and 1173;

14 'Cattle Station Industry (Northern territory) Award 1951, CAR case no. 830 -f 1965, evidence Kerr, 10 August 1965, p. 527.


politically to the disadvantage of Aboriginal people. The 1965 wage hearings and later amendments, and related hearings in 1966, 1967 and 1968 received extensive press coverage.\textsuperscript{17} The ensuing debate turned on arguments which undermined Aboriginal people's economic importance to the industry which, unlike \textit{terra nullius}, are yet to be discarded.\textsuperscript{18} Rowley, Tatz and Stevens (and Schapper in WA) were significant contributors, promoting economically based critiques of worker exploitation on pastoral stations.\textsuperscript{19} The analytical focus on economics and workers' rights also underestimated the importance to indigenous people of cultural and social continuities which survived as a component of pastoral paternalism and the system of administrative support for the pastoral industry. They reified wages and worker's rights as \textit{the} factor which would bring about a 'crisis' of Aboriginal unemployment and subsequent dismissal, rather than social and religious dislocation from pastoral stations.

The problem of using a political economy analysis to explain change in peripheral situations like Africa, South America and the northern Australian pastoral industry, relates to well-documented debates over the marginalisation of indigenous systems of cultural reproduction.\textsuperscript{20} Research by Peter Willis, Dawn May, Anne McGrath, Deborah Bird Rose and Tim Rowse has furthered the understanding of pastoral paternalism as a complex social relationship in which Aboriginal people were engaged as interested and active participants. Rowse's, Willis's and Rose's research, in particular, questioned the significance of award wages and purely economic factors in precipitating and driving the migration process to towns in northern Australia.\textsuperscript{21} Willis' sociological study of the east Kimberley showed that

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} AD62/1965. Whole file provides press clipping coverage.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Ann Curthoys and Clive Moore, 'Working for the White People: An Historiographic Essay', pp. 1-29.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Sharp and Tatz (eds) \textit{Aborigines In The Economy}; F. Stevens, \textit{Equal Wages For Aborigines: The Background}, Victoria, FCAATSSL 1968; H.P. Schapper, \textit{Aboriginal Advancement To Integration; Conditions and Plans for Western Australia}, Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1970.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Terence Turner, 'Production, Exploitation and Social Consciousness in the "Peripheral Situation", \textit{Social Analysis}, no. 19, August 1986, pp. 91-115.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Nicolas Peterson, 'Capitalism, Culture and Land Rights: Aborigines and the State in the Northern Territory', \textit{Social Analysts}, no. 18, December 1985, pp. 85-101; Willis, 'Patrons And Riders: Conflicting Roles and Hidden Objectives in an Aboriginal Development
Aboriginal people began to move into Kununurra before 1969, when award wages were applied in the Kimberley, and that they resisted changing their patron and client relationship with the manager by transferring it to development workers and Welfare officers. He suggested that east Kimberley Aboriginal people managed the system of patronage on the stations and in towns by incorporating the patrons into their own system of exchange which did not allow for accumulation of debt.\(^{22}\) Thus the clients were materially in a relationship of disadvantage but when circumstances altered they could engineer their own transfer to town without acknowledging a debt or loyalties to the patron. Willis termed this ‘kinship riding’.

Willis was critical of analysis which placed too much emphasis on the constraints on Aboriginal people but acknowledged that the station system in the east Kimberley was based on fundamental inequalities of power and that there were indications that patronage was reinforced by indigenous people’s fears of violent repression. He did not acknowledge that Aboriginal people may have known that they owed the Bosses nothing. Rather than having no concept of debt in their own value system, they might not have had an opportunity to express it as such. There was no room for debt in a relationship where work was exchanged for survival or rations. The language of dissent and managerial or European debt might not have emerged until there were opportunities to speak.\(^{23}\)

Tim Rowse has extended Willis’ sociological research and arguments, suggesting that moves away from pastoral stations included the analytical possibility that Aboriginal people grasped the change in living and working conditions and access to civic ‘freedoms’ in towns.\(^{24}\) Rowse and Sullivan, in a separate study of contemporary political institutions intersecting with Aboriginal community

\(^{22}\) Willis, ‘Patrons And Riders’, pp. 239-242.


\(^{24}\) Rowse, ‘White Flour White Power?'; Sullivan, “All Free Man Now”: *Culture, Community and Politics in the Kimberley*. 
organisations, have not produced an assessment of Aboriginality but of resistance to government attempts to dominate and control Aboriginal people in the name of 'tutelary philanthropy' or 'rational bureaucracy'. Rowse's work on central Australia has shown how the state's clumsy endeavours to order pastoral station relationships altered the parameters of the transactions between managers and Aboriginal people. Like Willis, Rowse concluded that the process of transformation of station relationships from patronage and paternalism of the Boss, to Welfare began before the introduction of equal wages in the Northern Territory pastoral industry.

As Rowse acknowledged, the state is not monolithic in its intentions. Its role is to give authoritative meaning to varied and conflicting transactions between a variety of interest groups. To examine the processes of state intervention and the emergence of the welfare system after 1930, state power needs to be conceptualised as dispersed and enacted, contingent upon a series of actions by a number of people in a variety of situations, with a variety of points where ruptures and resistances can occur. Local interests conflicted with government policies, while government agents also rejected and tried to transform policies. In the process of setting goals for Aboriginal people, the diverse practices of peripheral state agents and their clients created a context for continuity and change. Following Foucault, Rowse suggested that a transition in the form of colonial state power occurred from the 'frontier' to state intervention and an interest in Welfare, which was a move from punishment to an interest in the perpetuation of life. This interest is also a move into the realm of everyday activities, training the family, the children and the men for citizenship:

It is no longer a matter of bringing death into play in the field of sovereignty, but of distributing the living in the domain of value and utility. Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, rather than display itself in murderous splendour...²⁵

Rowse suggested that the shift from the 'sword' to the 'norm' occurred after 1930 in the Northern Territory, with the emergence of 'Welfare' itself. The period of the 'sword' accords with the frontier, when policies provide for private and state intervention which are matters of death not the enhancement of life. Welfare enters

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²⁵ Rowse, 'White Flour White Power?', p. 27.
to ‘normalise’ Aboriginal values and the conflicts between Bosses and Aboriginal people.\textsuperscript{26}

Rowse connected these periods through critical points of interaction and interest of Aboriginal people, white pastoral workers and government agents involved in the frontier and the assimilation project. He focussed on the rationing relationship between Aboriginal people and whites as the symbolic and physical point of interaction where power was negotiated and dispersed into different systems of meaning. ‘Coming in’, was a process of active movements into a ration relationship which permitted Aboriginal people to distribute food according to their own social obligations. Rowse’s analytical position suggests that food is the main incentive and transformative mechanism for entering a rationing relationship with bosses.\textsuperscript{27} He states that there was not an intense period of deaths and violence in central Australia which could account for coming in and staying. He questions whether violence, fear and coercion are as important as suggested by other analysts of frontier relations. This research shows that a climate of fear and coercion developed in the north Kimberley, framing and containing Aboriginal people’s access to rations and to each other, particularly to women and children.

This thesis is particularly concerned with the interactions between pastoralists, Aborigines and the state, in an area where Welfare arrived only recently and where white station personnel wrote very little. Consequently, oral sources are vital for understanding what happened. Anne McGrath’s work is an important precedent for this research in its substantial use of oral historical sources and its development of similar themes of Aboriginal people coming in to the stations, learning to work and maintaining settled relationships up to 1940.\textsuperscript{28} While referring to the often violent circumstances which surrounded Aboriginal people’s entry into station relationships, McGrath has not analysed the possible impact of the frontier on later relationships with Welfare and white people in general, or the process of state

\textsuperscript{26} Rowse, ibid. pp. 26-27.

\textsuperscript{27} Rowse does not emphasise tobacco or its special qualities, this fits generally within the model of ‘rationing’.

\textsuperscript{28} Ann McGrath, \textit{Born in the Cattle}. 
intervention in station relationships after 1940. The break with the station, which is mentioned by her as occurring in the 1960s is not central to her study but is presented as a forced break with a comfortable situation: a conclusion which the employers and some Aboriginal people would share but one which needs to take into account the age and disillusionment of informants with their current landless situation. An overriding sense of nostalgia for station life permeates the reminiscences of McGrath’s informants, supporting the idea of a ‘golden era’ of settled relations with Bosses, predictability of food and work, access to land and social and religious continuity.

Deborah Bird Rose’s research into post-contact relationships on pastoral stations in the Northern Territory suggests that the ‘golden era’ and Aboriginal people’s lack of a feeling of resentment or exploitation underscores the advisability of treating generalisations about station life with caution.29 The overriding impression from stories told to Rose is one of survival often through intense cruelty which is acknowledged by informants as cruel. There was more knowledge and understanding amongst Aboriginal people of bad behaviour than has been acknowledged by police at the time, or historians and anthropologists since. The station experience has many of the attributes described by McGrath, yet Rose finds in informants’ narratives explicit expressions of a sense of injustice within which accommodations were made. Nostalgia for certain aspects of station life are subordinate to a sense of collective struggle to survive oppressive controls. The stories collected by Rose are expressions of the collective knowledge of the possibility of breaking the repressive control that had

long existed, expressed as a secret hope and taught through stories which so undermined the status quo that they allowed resistance to flourish beneath a facade of submissive acquiescence.30

In Weapons of the Weak, James Scott analyses the gradual integration of capitalism by peasant societies in Indonesia. He is concerned with the theoretical and thus practical marginalisation of everyday forms of resistance within frameworks which


30 Rose, Hidden Histories, p. xxi.
conceive of resistance only as active challenges to authority; the ‘properly’ political.\textsuperscript{31} He shows that beliefs or ideas that, at a particular historical moment are transformed into active challenges, are present in dominated cultures but are not practical to pursue. It is not that the dominated group is incapable of conceiving of change but that historical moments rarely present themselves where action would be anything but suicidal. Not demanding changes of a Boss should not be mistaken as an ‘apolitical’ cultural characteristic; it was common sense and politically necessary.

There are similarities here with the work of Louisa Passerini\textsuperscript{32} and Eugene Genovese\textsuperscript{33} both of whom chose to use oral accounts to show how autonomous sub-cultures interact with repressive regimes. Passerini’s study of people’s experiences of Italian fascism, based on oral testimonies, found a pattern of ‘silences’ in memories of the era, matching contemporary notions of what was ‘political’. Consequently, certain organised actions against regimes were ennobled, while manifestations of resistance on the everyday level were marginalised as regressive.\textsuperscript{34} However, it is at this level that dominated groups are most likely to express resistance for it is here they reproduce their own system of meaning. Passerini proposes that by focussing on the area of discourse - what people say and in what context - the complexity of individual experience can be assessed as a political strategy. Her work shows that contradictory and ambiguous attitudes from the less powerful in chaotic or extreme situations should be expected, for that is the most likely way people survived.

These studies suggest that traumatic pasts are often incompletely understood and partially remembered. Attempts to retell from individual experience can involve delicate political representations and assessments of right and wrong actions. They also show that external and internal factors which facilitated greater Aboriginal


\textsuperscript{34} Passerini Louisa, ‘Oral Memory Of Fascism’, p. 188.
autonomy in contact and station relations include the intensity of initial conflict, the
nature of the industry, socialisation of individual whites, the impact of the state and
the capacity of the indigenous group to accommodate to the imposed changes. More
importantly for this research, they also show that there is no need to concede to
oppositional modelling of contact relations which relegates indigenous people to
either victim or resistance status. Equally, it is fruitful to view the emergence of
Welfare in the north as an extension of a colonial relationship. The image of
successful colonising needs to be seen as functional to the project itself. It may not
be reflected in the practice; the balance of forces of colonial history vary and within
them indigenous people can find they have few choices. However, in the sphere of
local relations and representations the colonising project is never complete
domination nor entirely successful: 'distinctive forms of indigenous sociality and
politics contribute in a crucial way to the dynamics of accommodation and
resistance constitutive of colonial history.' 35 The broader economic and political
context which affected the process of incorporating northern ranges people into the
Australian nation can be understood by examining, through individual contacts and
biographies the patterns of alliances with Bosses and the impact of Welfare on those
relationships. The impact of 'welfare' and bureacracy on Aboriginal people's
capacity to speak about traumatic pasts is also taken into account.

Gardia coming: oral history and 'field work'
By far the majority of the people who lived in the north and central Kimberley and
formed the station communities were Aboriginal. Their oral testimony forms the
basis for this research. While attempting to show the importance of oral sources to
include Aboriginal people and poor or fringe whites in Australian history, I am not
assuming that one form of information is inherently more authentic than the other,
or more or less reliable. 36 Aboriginal oral sources require analysis and
textualisation, just as written documents do. I have drawn on information from
twelve key informants who have worked on stations north of Derby. Extensive
taped interviewing, notations on discussions and observations were recorded in

35 Nicholas Thomas, Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the

field note books and collated to build select biographies. By ‘select’ I mean that I have had specific questions which I wanted to answer, dealing with recollections of the period of meeting a white Boss, becoming a worker, the introduction of Welfare and wages, and the move off the stations.

Working with older Kimberley Aboriginal people means that complex rules of ownership of information govern who will tell stories and what they will tell. Not all information was easily understood - in fact, a great deal was inaccessible. Where there has been significant changes in information or apparent contradictions I have sought clarification from other informants, as well as making comparisons with written archival information. Some of the contradictions became devices for discussing and analysing different points of view.37 This ability to include and broaden the base of historical evidence as research is being undertaken is a characteristic of oral history which is both lauded and derided. The benefits of the additional realm of information offered by oral historical sources for peripheral regions are clear. However, reinterpretation of past events can also lead to increasingly political perspectives emerging.38 Diversity of memory is also a reflection of experience and role and status within Aboriginal society. It is also partly explained by distinctions between people which arose as a consequence of the imposition of power relations on the stations and the available discourse within which Aboriginal people express themselves.39 While there are some songs and creation stories which are immutable, oral testimony is very much alive and dynamic in the Kimberley region. Some narratives recorded for this research related to events or activities without having a chronological or temporal frame. Most, however, had names of characters, events or places which, through juxtaposition


with written records and other oral interviews could be placed within a chronological frame.

The standard oral history ‘interview’ is complicated by the cross-cultural context. Many tapes have more than one speaker and alternate between discussion and one person narrative. Others were conducted under trees, near rivers or in camps with dogs and children walking, playing and fighting nearby. I advocate this approach for working with Aboriginal informants because it enables speakers and their peers to overcome different cultural modes of expression, language and uses of oral narratives which exist between Aboriginal informants and a European academic researcher. They help to provide culturally appropriate questions and responses to storytellers, and to hand on stories to other Aboriginal people within the research process.

Working with older Kimberley Aboriginal people also meant that terms like ‘half-caste’ and ‘full-blood’ were used often but without the prejudice with which they were imbued by the system of laws and institutions which spawned them. Throughout the thesis I have continued to use these terms where it is necessary to describe differing experiences or policies based on caste, without always placing them in parenthesis. Aboriginal people also used ‘Welfare’ to mean all outside government agencies - the Aborigines department, Native Affairs, Native Welfare and Child Welfare. Bosses and the Missus are also capitalised because they are used by informants as titles for the manager and his wife, throughout the period on which the study focuses.

Throughout my field work I found that a tape recorder also provided a greater degree of freedom on the part of the interviewee to refuse to share information, as well as providing me with a record of interactions. It became a formal sign that

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40 Some tapes provide a sound bite of community life as well as samples of the difficulties of oral history recording in isolated Aboriginal communities. See further for standard interviewing techniques, Ronda Jamieson, How To Interview For Family History; For Young, Old And In Between, Library Board of Western Australia, n.d.; and Ronald J. Grele (ed.) Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History, Chicago, Precedent Publishing, second edition 1985.

41 Mixing narrative storytelling and interview is also discussed by Cruikshank in her work with Yukon native women. Julie Cruikshank et al., Life Lived like a Story, University of Nebraska Press, 1990, pp. 1-20.
information was about to be exchanged and made it easier for informants to refuse to impart information to a machine than if I had been sitting and writing notes. The tape, once transcribed and re-checked with informants, increased their control over what information was to be made public. Re-checking was often done with a small group and provided a forum for discussion and elaboration of the information on the tapes.

All tapes recorded were subject to written or verbal contracts which allocated copyright to the speakers, outlined a procedure for transcribing and checking the taped information and designated whether the information could be made available to people other than my research supervisors and examiners.\textsuperscript{42} Not everyone wished to sign contracts and many did not want payment of any kind. For some, the written contract was insignificant, a mere piece of paper in which they had little faith or understanding. This placed the onus on me to honour the original verbal contracts I had made with them. The idea of controlling information told to white people and influencing its dissemination was new to many of the people with whom I worked. Few people ever saw the product of discussions or contacts with white visitors and had only a limited conceptualisation of where it might be going or what impact it might have on their lives. Aboriginal people have a highly complex system of information control. I saw it as my role to provide a range of alternatives to informants which encouraged their control over our working relationship.

The referencing style in this thesis follows standard empirical systems. With oral information and observation, I have indicated names and dates of taped conversations or names, page numbers and dates from my field note books. Names of people are included in the text unless I have been instructed by the informant or their immediate family to delete them. This capacity to control elements of the product was part of the research contract with informants. All taped information is copyright by the speakers but the researcher has the right to use it for the purposes of this study. Publication will require further consultation. Copies of all tapes and note books referred to in the study will be held by the researcher and are available for examination.

\textsuperscript{42} I recommend that the copyright 'contract' be spoken into the tape as the introduction. This avoids written 'contracts' disappearing in the copying process.
Throughout the research I have returned to informants with information from written sources. The documents were evidence which helped to establish their date of birth or helped stimulate their memories and historical narratives. Constructing genealogies and biographies is part of the current land claim process and is very popular and significant for children removed from their families over the past sixty years. But most older informants were not interested in the archival documents as primary evidence to support their stories or a line of argument. They were tied to an oral tradition and the ‘truth’ of their stories was not relevant to what a policeman or Welfare officer thought.

By utilising oral testimony and working with Aboriginal people in a collaborative manner, I was consistently drawn from a narrow period and focus - the social impact of equal wages on station workers in the Kimberley in the 1960s and 1970s - towards a wider range of life story narratives. Storytellers told and retold stories of an earlier period, when they were children or before they were born, as explanatory devices for their collective history. People also told of aspects of their work on the stations, ‘holidays’ in the bush, living conditions and their contacts with the Native Welfare Department in the 1950s. These were key aspects of their lives and the changes which occurred in their relationship with Bosses and the pastoral system on which this research focussed.

I have followed Rose’s suggestion that early days narratives are used by informants to explain a significant relationship in their personal and collective history.43 I have also researched these stories to date them and to establish the identity of some of the people involved. The research is drawn together around a small group of individuals who shared relationships and experiences described in the study, despite not being personally engaged in every event. This study shows how individuals struggled to negotiate and manage their interactions with Europeans and the various government agencies associated with the pastoral industry. It also shows how individuals continued to negotiate and manage their economic dependency, so that they were ‘waiting’ at the reserve in the 1990s rather than being ‘stuck’ there.

Ngarinyin station people and the Gibb River road
The Gibb River road runs north-east from Derby to Kalumburu on the north coast, with a right turn 400 kilometres from Derby at Gibb River station to Wyndham. It traverses the north and central Kimberley region, with its geographically distinctive and spectacular ranges crossing from east to west, broken only occasionally by deep gorges. The road was built as part of the Beef Roads Program in the 1960s to allow cattle trucks passage over the King Leopold and Phillips ranges to Derby or east to Wyndham. Despite a sealed pass in sections of the King Leopold Ranges completed in 1972, the road remained impassable for at least three months of the year until 1997. Wilderness tourism flourished along the Gibb River road, increasing dramatically from 1987 to 1996. In May 1989, when travelling with Howard Coate, the ex-missionary and linguist for Kimberley languages, I was able to stop at Sadler’s creek crossing to sit for more than an hour in the stream flowing over the road, eating lunch, cooling down and hearing Coate’s account of Sadler’s alleged murder of his partner. By 1996, more than three thousand campers visited Bell Gorge, near Sadler’s creek in two months. By then only fools sat in the middle of the road for more than a few minutes during the tourist season.

The Gibb River road enhanced mobility and thus the range of influences, services and activities open to Aboriginal people. On completion of the final road works across the Phillip ranges in 1969, the Mowanjum Mission truck travelled from the reserve outside Derby to Mount Elizabeth station for wet season ceremonies. In recent years, Aboriginal communities have based themselves near the road, either near the old station homesteads or at sites which maximise vehicle access from Kalumburu in the north to Derby in the south. The road, despite being a recent phenomenon cutting across old station cart tracks, walking tracks and dreaming


45 NB1, 24 May 1989.

46 ‘Summary of Permanent Counter Station Data’, Registration Site no. 9120 Gibb River Road, Main Roads Department Statistics. 27,589 campers travelled from Derby to the Napier and King Leopold ranges in 1996.

47 Lacy Dairies, 18 December 1969.
tracks and linking language groups, provides a contemporary regional identifier for
the people occupying the area north east of Derby.48 The region is also known as
'over the ranges', a name with a white exploration and settlement view encouraged
by Ion Idriess's popular books *Over The Range* and *Outlaws of the Leopold*.49
Banjo Woorunmurra, co-author of *Jundamurra: The Bunuba Resistance* stated that
he and his contemporaries were 'ranges cowboys'. These are not identifiers that
north Kimberley Aboriginal people often use for their cultural markers, but they are
part of the history of contact in the northern Kimberley, and significant factors in
pastoral development and the nature of work.

The majority of the older Aboriginal informants to this research are identified as a
cultural entity by their Wanjina-Ungud religion.50 They also spoke or understood
Ngarinyin language and from 1996 were increasingly being represented as a distinct
socio-political entity, 'The Ngarinyin people' and 'Ngarinyin country' in the central
and northern ranges area north of Derby. 51 While it is tempting to classify
informants as members of a clearly bounded socio-political unit defined by one
language, it would be misleading to use one term to encompass all informants in
this research. Each person has an identification which relates to knowledge of much
smaller sites, rivers or range systems, and when asked where they were from as

48 Kim Ackerman presented a diagram of Wunan trade routes or 'roads' which roughly followed
the Gibb River road with central exchange points at Mount House, Gibb River and Kurunjie
stations. This may be influenced by contact experiences and show where people were resident as
carriers of Wunan, rather than traditional exchange sites. Kim Ackerman, 'Material Culture and
Trade in the Kimberlys Today', in R.M. and C. Berndt (eds) *Aborigines of the West: Their
Past and Present*, Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1979, pp. 243-251, p. 248
and Kim Ackerman, The Renascence of Aboriginal Law in the Kimberlys’, in R.M. and C.
Berndt (eds) *Aborigines of the West: Their Past and Present*, Nedlands, University of Western

49 Ion L. Idriess, *Over The Range: Sunshine And Shadow In The Kimberley*, Angus And
Robertson 1937; Ion L. Idriess, *Outlaws of the Leopolds*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson,
1952.

50 Ackerman, 'The Renascence of Aboriginal Law in the Kimberlys’, pp. 234-242; A.P. Elkin,
'Rock Paintings of North-West Australia', *Oceania*, vol. 1, no. 3, October-December 1930, pp.
257-279; Ian Crawford, *The Art Of The Wanjina: Aboriginal Cave Paintings in Kimberley,

51 David Mowaljarlai and Jutta Malnic, *Yorro Yorro: Spirit of the Kimberley*, Broome, Magabala
Press, 1993; Alan Rumsay, 'Aspects of Native Title and Social Identity in the Kimberleys and
Beyond', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no. 1, 1996, pp. 2-10.
region with a marriage partner, for work or as a result of institutionalisation. All informants spoke Aboriginal English in addition to an indigenous language.\textsuperscript{54} The range of languages spoken by older informants in the Kimberley underlines the complex rules of interaction which reinforce cultural ties and social linkages, and provide for a recognition of common interests.\textsuperscript{55} Knowing more than two languages also reflects informants' historical need to use a common language on stations where the Bosses spoke English, and where a variety of indigenous language groups may have worked together.\textsuperscript{56}

Identifying as a part of a station 'mob' sometimes, but not always, coincided with land and language identifiers. The complex system of shared rules of ownership and rights to land ensure that land will not be left 'empty' - that is, without caretakers or owners. When a site becomes depopulated the lateral caretaking system functions to keep the information for the country alive. Thus a person who works on a southern station can be caretaker of sites and tracts of land at a station in the north and the east, without having to be residing on that tract of land.\textsuperscript{57} Informants living at different stations were connected through the land owning system. Station lease boundaries rarely fit neatly with indigenous people's clan boundaries.\textsuperscript{58} Although analysis of the links between Aboriginal systems of land ownership and the formation of a pastoral station workforce is outside this


\textsuperscript{55} E. Vaszolyi, 'Kimberley Languages: Past and Present', in R.M. and C. Berndt (eds) \textit{Aborigines of the West: Their Past and Present}, Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1979, pp. 252-260.

\textsuperscript{56} Kimberley Language Resource Centre, \textit{Moola Bulla}, pp. 235-238.

\textsuperscript{57} Patrick Sullivan, 'Colonising the Kimberley - an Ethnohistory', Paper submitted to the Northern Australian Research Unit, 1995.

\textsuperscript{58} It is debatable whether Aboriginal people share the concept of a boundary with European lease holders although they may have one common 'boundary' of sorts in a river.
historical study, it is important to recognise that most informants knew where their country was, who owned it and was looking after it. In addition, most informants had occupied or lived near their ‘country’ as pastoral workers. Mount Elizabeth, Gibb River, and Barnett stations were located in Ngarinyin-speaking people’s country. To the south, Mount House, Mount Hart, Napier and Kimberley Downs stations were also worked by large numbers of Ngarinyin-speaking people, although the leases may not be designated as exclusively Ngarinyin, because they overlap with land for Nyigina, Bunuba or Unggumi speaking people.

Morndingali or Morndi Munro, with whom I worked intensively for two years to produce his collection of station narratives, *Emerarra: A Man of Merarra*, spoke five languages and could ‘hear’ at least three more.\(^{59}\) His mother was a Ngarinyin speaker and land owner from near Mount Barnett, and his father spoke his ‘private language’, Unggumi. His grandmother, who trained him in important social obligations and taboos when he was a child, spoke another language, possibly Umide, which is no longer heard in the Kimberley.\(^{60}\) His father’s brothers, who taught Morndingali to work on the station spoke Bunuba. They all worked at Napier station. Morndingali also moved to work in the desert and learned some Walmatjarri, taking part in ceremonies there and hoping to be given a wife from that area. But when asked who he was, he was Emerarra, a man of his father’s and grandfather’s clan country, Merarra, which runs north along the Isdell river to a point where salt water meets fresh water near Walcott Inlet.\(^{61}\)

I began my research in Derby at Karmalinanga reserve, with people who had recently migrated to towns from the stations directly north-east of Derby: Meda, Kimberley Downs and Napier Downs. The Meda head stockman, Willie Lennard, his wife Rosalind and their family were recent arrivals, having been evicted from

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\(^{59}\) Morndi Munro (with Mary Anne Jebb as editor) *Emerarra: A Man of Merarra*, Broome, Magabala Books, 1996. He was the last full grammar speaker of Unggumi and spoke Worrora, Nyigina, Bunuba and Ngarinyin.

\(^{60}\) Tindale’s map of Native Tribes drawn from information he collected in the 1950s, placed Umide near the coast, next door to Unggumi. Norman Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes Of Australia: their terrain, environmental controls, distribution, limits, and proper names*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1997.

\(^{61}\) Morndi Munro, David Mowaljarlai, Tape (38) 10 March 1991.
Meda in 1988 after their cottage was burned down by the new manager.\textsuperscript{62} At Karmalinanga reserve I worked with Morndingali, his wives Weeda Munro and Daisy Angajitt, his son Jack Dann and wife Rita Laylay, Jack Dale and his wife Biddy Rijaworla, Freddy Marker and his sister Maudie Lennard, Ginger Warrebeen, Wallace Midmee and Mabel King. During 1990 and 1991, I worked in collaboration with Morndingali to produce his book, which was subsequently published in 1996.\textsuperscript{63} I contracted with him and four Aboriginal trustees to his book to use the information gathered in the production process for my own research.

Morndingali was head stockman with his brother Tim Munro at Napier Downs and Kimberley Downs stations. He was a highly respected lawman and custodian for stories and land belonging to Bunuba people to the east of the Gibb River road along the Napier, Oscar and King Leopold ranges, as well as land associated with Ngarinyin and Unggumi languages north west of the Gibb River road to Walcott Inlet. He was also a linguist and storyteller to whom many people came for help and advice. I was specifically taken to him as the person who could be an authority on work and history of pastoral stations. I was redirected to him over the next four years, to confirm and expand on stories of events which took place across the northern region from Derby to Mount Barnett and west to the coast. He was a senior storyteller, with extraordinary linguistic skills and long experience as a station worker.

Morndingali provided information in the genre of life story narratives, as well as introducing other people for support and to expand on stories. He had worked with anthropologists in the process of prosecuting a mining company for damaging a sacred site for which he was custodian, and effortlessly and unselfconsciously adopted words like ‘evidence’ into his vocabulary. He also provided a critical view of other people’s stories and information, as well as expressing opinions on some of the written documents which I brought to him and to other informants. On one occasion when I brought a tape to him of narratives told by one of his contemporaries from Tableland station, he would not include it in his book because

\textsuperscript{62} NB1, pp. 21-25. Notes taken at Meda station with Willie and Rosalind Lennard, 18 May 1991.

\textsuperscript{63} Munro, Emerarra. Morndingali died in April 1993.
it did not have enough names of people and places for white people to understand. He also rejected sections of one tape which referred to an Aboriginal woman as a white man’s wife and station Missus, because it was not ‘true’.

Morndingali was unusually aware for an aged Aboriginal person from the north Kimberley of the needs of European audiences and researchers. He, unlike many of his contemporaries, named deceased Aboriginal people. He would not call his deceased brother’s or father’s bushnames but would call women’s names including his mother and grandmother. Taboos and restrictions like this influenced this study and made it a time-consuming process to find out names of dead people and link them to narratives within a chronological framework. For instance, Morndingali’s unwillingness to discuss his father encouraged me to research contact narratives in his mother’s country at Mount Barnett, rather than at Oobagooma or Napier station where his father had come out of the bush. But this research is not aimed at providing a historical context only for Morndingali’s life story. It utilises life story material from him and other informants to examine aspects of their lives as workers which brought them to the stations and to the Derby reserve, and away from stations on which they had worked for up to fifty years.

Although Morndingali was himself unable to travel, he consistently influenced this research by directing me to travel with certain people and not others, and nominating knowledgeable and appropriate informants at communities along the Gibb River road who would introduce me to relations and contacts at other communities to the north. I was not in total control of the process of selecting informants, nor was it arbitrary. The resulting network of informants are primarily Ngarinyin-speaking station people, mostly age contemporaries of Morndingali and his wife Weeda Munro and experienced stockmen and women who held positions of authority in their community and in the station workforce.

David Mowaljarlai assisted often with discussions and formal interpreting of Ngarinyin. He was a trustee for Morndingali’s book and recipient of a great deal of knowledge about the north from the older man. But Mowaljarlai was from the mission at Kunmunya and did not live and work on the stations along the Gibb River road. He was not a key informant. He was part of the Mowanjam community who were resident fifteen kilometres from Derby at the start of the Gibb River road.
Two hundred and fifty Ngarninyin, Worrora and Wunambal-speaking people live at Mowanjum. The older adults are mostly people who were moved to Derby in the 1950s from their isolated coastal missions, Kunmunya, Wotjulum and Munja. Their various ‘countries’ are from 150 to 600 kilometres from Derby. The next community east along the Gibb River road is Winjingare, a small excision on Napier station owned by Morndingali and his family. In 1996 it had no houses and no permanent or running water. Morndingali’s classificatory son, Jack Dann, and his children and grandchildren occupied this land for months each dry season, with regular visits to shared housing on the Derby reserve.

Imintji community is another small one mile by one mile excision, 230 kilometres from Derby north of the King Leopold Ranges on the Mount House station lease. In 1989, when I made my first visit about sixty people lived in recently constructed houses, tents and tin shelters. There was a reliable water supply, electricity, no school, no store and no on-site administrative support. A state Welfare authority officer visited weekly with stores and pension money. The chairman, Jack Dale, had worked at Mount House station and then moved in the 1950s to do contract mustering on nearby stations. In 1983, Dale argued with the manager at Beverley Springs and joined his relations from Mount House, Tableland and Silent Grove to form an Aboriginal community at Imintji, alternatively known as Sadler Springs.

The Imintji community was formed with the support of Community Welfare at the height of tensions between management and Aboriginal people which coincided with the Seaman Land Inquiry and publicity about Aboriginal land rights. The Community Welfare officer servicing the Gibb River road wrote in 1984 that he had been helping the Gibb River road people for three years to understand their rights and leave the stations. Imintji people were, according to the officer, the first of the Gibb River road people to ‘stand up’ to management and start their own community on their own land. He saw Imintji as an example to other station

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workers and families who were living in ‘bad’ or ‘horrendous’ conditions within an exploitative relationship with the owners and managers of the stations.

Imintji was a pensioner community in 1989, with only four or five young families and a very small group of single men who occasionally worked at Mount House station during the muster season. Morndingali’s classificatory sister and children, who identified as members of his clan group with special affiliations to Merarra, were resident at Imintji. At various times over the next four years, Jack Dale looked after me in the Mount Hart, Beverley Springs, Silent Grove and Mount House area, pointing out aspects of the country and sharing many life story experiences for the purposes of my research and for his private collection. From 1994 to 1997 I was resident in Derby and continued to refer to him and his wife Biddy Rinjaworla for advice.

Tirralintji community members also stayed at Imintji during the wet season. Tirralintji was a bush camp with plastic and steel framed shelters, and a solar powered cool room, situated one hundred kilometres to the east of Imintji, with rough access through the Mount House lease during the dry season only. They were a family group of approximately 25 ex-workers from Tablelands station led by Jack Jowan and Mick Jowalji, the ex-head stockman. Jowan, Jowalji and the latter’s sister, Barbara Midmee and their spouses were first generation station workers. Barbara Midmee was a classificatory daughter to Morndingali and my constant source of advice on bush foods, fishing holes, station work and early days stories. Her niece Betty Walker became community chairperson in 1992. This core group refused to leave the Tablelands area when in 1983 they walked off from the homestead camp to a bush site forty kilometres toward Mount House. In 1990, they lived there on bush resources and stores which were brought out by a Community Welfare officer. In 1992 Commonwealth funding provided them with permanent shelters at the Imintji site and a new truck. They had never come to town to live and in November 1994, after acquiring title to the Tablelands pastoral lease under the name of the Yulumbu Aboriginal community, were adamant that they would never
have to.66 Jack Jowan remained at Tirralintji in his bush hut with two daughters and their husbands and children.

Mount Barnett station is one hundred kilometres north of Imintji, along the Gibb River road just north of the Phillips ranges, and 312 kilometres from Derby. It is also known as Kupungarri after it was resettled in 1989 by traditional owners. There, I worked mostly with Maggie Gudaworla and Billy King, the chairman and station manager. Billy King was head stockman at Mount House to 1976. He helped old traditional owners Joe Jorda and Dutchie Bunggurt return to their clan land at Mount Barnett. Bunggurt had been forced to leave his area in the 1920s and take refuge at Kunmunya mission. He moved to Derby with the Mowanjum mission people, and then to Imintji. Bunggurt was Harry Howendon’s older brother and remembered seeing the police when they first came to Mount Barnett pre-1910. I was not prepared to work with him. He was an extremely old and frail bushman who had no idea of the purpose of my research and no relations or carers who could communicate on his behalf.

Gudaworla was a highly respected linguist, storyteller and custodian of songs and Law, and contributor to most of the anthropological studies conducted in the last twenty years in the Mount Barnett region.67 She was Morndingali’s classificatory wife and corrected some of his stories after I read them to her. Many of the older people referred to Mount Barnett as the ‘mission’ because UAM missionaries camped there in the 1930s and later worked teams of Aboriginal people to build the existing homestead. It was never an official mission. The main body of information from Gudaworla was recorded in 1994 when I travelled with her for seven days, from Imintji to Mount Barnett and Gibb River station, calling in to waterholes and places she wanted to see. She was born in the area in about 1912. Mandy Ungandin and Maudie White at Gibb River station assisted with translation for Gudaworla.

66 They are forced to make numerous journeys to town to attend meetings, collect pensions, buy stores and attend hospital. They have no literate people living in the Yulumbu community. Their Social Welfare income is sorely stretched to afford the truck and the new station costs.

67 Kim Ackerman, Nick Green, Patrick Sullivan and B. Dobson all produced anthropological reports with Gudaworla’s assistance.
In 1989 approximately 60 people lived in the old Mount Barnett station shelters about one hundred metres from the homestead. Two white employees managed the store and the accounts, and gave general advice to the community. Like Pat and Peter Lacy at Mount Elizabeth, they managed all contacts with service providers and visitors, lived in the homestead and were responsible for medicines and stores. Unlike the Lacys who were owner/managers, they were employed by an Aboriginal community council. During my field visits along the Gibb River road from 1989 to 1994, the community grew dramatically to resemble a township. It was moved from the station homestead site to a more accessible position south of the Barnett River and adjacent to the Gibb River road. It had a government school, clinic, large store and fuel station, 260 members, nine white staff, a tourist camping area at the main gorge and waterhole, and a range of new houses. In 1992, 6,424 tourists visited the tourist camping site. It was also a working pastoral station. Billy King moved into the old homestead as station manager and chairman of Kupungarri. Morndingali’s eldest classificatory son and custodian for Merarra became chairman of Kupungarri in 1997. His wife was was the female chairperson.

Gibb River station is one hundred kilometres from Mount Barnett along the Gibb River road, with the Mount Elizabeth turn-off almost half way between these two communities. The station was bought back in 1989 for the traditional owners. The old head stockman, Alphie White, was made chairman in 1994. On my first visit to Gibb River station, the community lived in the old iron ‘blacks’ camp’, without access to running water, electricity or a store. Two Catholic nuns ran a school in the old store room and young men sped around in a bull buggy or broke and rode horses. The community had only one road-worthy vehicle.

In 1994 there were eighty members, living in new housing and a single men’s quarters, all serviced with power and water. There was a store for basic foods (icecreams, lollies, bread and packaged meat was sold from the old Missus’ verandah) and a new Catholic primary school. It was also a working pastoral station. There I worked mostly with Maggie Ghi, Rosie Mamangulya and Susie Umungul who were all born in the bush and came in to stations as children. The

68 ‘Summary of Permanent Counter Station Data’, Registration Site no. 9120 Gibb River Road, Main Roads Department Statistics.
previous owners of Gibb River had moved into town, except for one son who was the mechanic and his wife the book-keeper. This couple weathered the transfer of ownership to the community and became paid employees on their old station. The eldest son, who was the Boss at the time of the transfer did not want to become an employee of the new council.

At Gibb River, Mount Barnett and Mount Elizabeth, I worked with Campbell Allenbrae, ex-head stockman of Kurunjie station, a further 100 kilometres east of Gibb River station toward Wyndham.69 Throughout my research, Campbell Allenbrae taught me the small amount of Ngarinyin language I was able to master, translated interviews in Ngarinyin language, discussed and recorded his own station stories, assisted Mrndingali at the reserve with his book and was my primary caretaker during my stay in the Gibb, Mount Elizabeth and Mount Barnett area during stays there in 1990, 1991 and 1992.

In 1972 Valda Blundell noted in her archaeological study of social, cultural and economic change in the north west coastal and adjacent inland areas that the mission at Kunnunya (1913-1952) provided a refuge for Wororra and coastal Ngarinyin people who suffered less dramatic dislocation than the central Kimberley station people.70 Blundell's work did not cover post contact employment relationships nor did she focus the central ranges stations, however she did work with Aboriginal people in the west Kimberley, at the Derby Reserve and at Mowanjum Mission outside Derby. The 'gaps' in her informant groups which led to the statements that the Unggumi were 'extinct' and little information on the cave paintings at Mount Elizabeth was available were partly created by the continued isolation of people on Mount Elizabeth and stations further north. They were only just beginning to come to town. Blundell makes the important suggestion that the stations in the central range area may not have provided as favourable an environment for cultural continuity as did the missions, and that the groups there had suffered significantly from the impact of the pastoral industry. While I am not attempting to resolve comparisons between station and mission environments for cultural continuity, this thesis will expand significantly on the contact history of north and central Kimberley region and on the development and maintenance of alliances between management and indigenous people there, about which little has been written.

69 See also Campbell Allenbrae's contributions to Munro, Emerarra.

70 Valda Jean Blundell, 'Aboriginal Adaptation In North West Australia', PhD, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1975, p. 61. Mrndingali identified himself as Unggumi and held songs and stories which detailed Unggumi people's relationship to their land and other ceremonial rites of passage. Weeda Munro also said her father was 'Unggumi' from Mount Hart.
The thesis will also revise and explore Blundell’s comment that station people from the central ranges seemed to have drifted into town after the equal wages decision in 1968, and in 1972 were mostly living in the Derby reserve. From my initial contacts in the area in 1989, it was clear that Ngarinyin station people from the central ranges region lived in a variety of circumstances and locations along the Gibb River road. Since 1972 when Blundell was in the Kimberley a great many people had returned to their country and were taking part in the cultural ‘renascence’ described by Ackerman in 1979. When Blundell was at the Derby reserve and hoping to work with Unggumi-speaking traditional owners of the Napier range, Mordingali was working away from his country and not yet entered the reserve compound. He and most of the other older informants to this research had been caught up in the movements away from the stations to work elsewhere. Other men like Scotty Martin at Mount Elizabeth could have explained about the caves there had they not been socially, economically and physically segregated on the station with the bosses.

**Literature and written archives**

The written records which helped to establish a chronological framework for events and relationships between police, pastoralists and Aboriginal people in the region also provided documentary evidence for patterns of pastoral development, official government policies concerning police, pastoralism and the protection of Aboriginal people. They supplemented oral testimonies and in some cases added new and important information about deaths, disappearances and removals of children. Written documentation included files from the various government departments which had an interest in surveying, settling and servicing the region north of Derby. The police were the major source of written historical information from 1903 to 1948. After that period, there are about 400 Kimberley region files from the Western Australian Departments of Native Welfare and Aboriginal Affairs which embrace what were seen to be welfare issues for the towns and the 100 pastoral stations. They provide a detailed record of the introduction of welfare services to

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72 Native Welfare Department Northern District General (NDG) WAS46 accession 3412. File on each station created 1948.
Kimberley pastoral stations, covering the introduction of equal wages in the pastoral industry and Commonwealth Social Security benefits.

Other written sources for the period before Aboriginal Affairs developed a patrol system into the northern region in 1948 included observations from missionaries and anthropologists. The coastal missions at Kalumburu, Kunmunya and the government ration station at Munja attracted scientists researching Aboriginal culture, religion, languages, health and physical characteristics. While their substantial body of work is important ethnographically, they did not visit the inland stations, preferring to work from mission and government centres on the west coast, the Derby Leprosarium and Moola Bulla government station near Halls Creek.\textsuperscript{73} From there they produced valuable accounts of marriage systems, languages, tribes and clans, with occasional entries about movements from the central ranges regions to the missions.

J.R.B. Love who was superintendent of Kunmunya mission in the 1920s and 1930s produced publications, notebooks and diaries which do not focus on historical relations between Bosses and Aboriginal people on the pastoral stations in the inland region.\textsuperscript{74} Similarly Elkin’s research in 1927 and 1928 at Kunmunya provides valuable commentary on marriage patterns and traditional ceremonial practices and religious beliefs but is not concerned with the relationships of power which were developing on the stations in that region.\textsuperscript{75} His later article on the administration of Aboriginal affairs in Western Australia did mention that there was a pervading sense of fear amongst Aboriginal people which was encouraged even


\textsuperscript{74} Love, \textit{Stone-Age Bushmen Of Today}.

\textsuperscript{75} Elkin, 'Rock Paintings of North-West Australia'; Elkin, 'Social Organisation in the Kimberley Division, North-Western Australia'; Elkin, 'Studies In Australian Totemism'. 
by people paid to protect them. He did not name them. Phyllis Kaberry's research in the early 1920s was with station people at Moola Bulla and in the area of Bedford Downs and Tablelands. These people were primarily Kija speaking and are closely linked to the key informants in this thesis through their land affiliations and through station experiences. Kaberry makes some useful but brief comments about the causes and levels of conflict and fear in this period and about changing practices in response to pastoral settlement in the early 1930s. This is a period of significant social change in the northern ranges.

The majority of white people who made the history and formed the station communities in the northern ranges region either did not or could not write. Fortunately, Frank Lacy of Mount Elizabeth station was an exception and his diaries (1945 - 1972) provide interesting material for this study. Marion Nixon used them as a framework for interviewing Frank Lacy in 1975. Access to the originals on Mount Elizabeth station allowed for another reading to assess the development of the station community rather than the solitary pioneering efforts of Frank Lacy with which the published version is primarily concerned. Diaries were also kept by Fred Russ who went to the Mount Barnett region in about 1918. His sons held the lease until 1989. These diaries were not made available to me, although I have urged the family to preserve them or place them on the public record at some stage in the future. Fred Russ, the son, did make himself available for interview and commented that his father wrote of events which were too personal and recent to be trusted to researchers.

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77 Kaberry, Aboriginal Women: Sacred and Profane.

Of all the documentary sources, Ian Idriess's book *Over The Range* and to a lesser extent *One Wet Season*, created the most interest amongst informants. These books include vignettes and illustrations of informants and their relations, as well as stories about them and their white Bosses. The descriptions and captions were often embarrassing to read to the people, who were at times objectified to the point of caricature - for instance, the 'wild girls of the hills' photograph of Weeda Munro represented young female stock workers at Mount Hart station (but perhaps this was better than the 'dear old girl' tag from visitors to the reserve in the 1990s). While it is tempting to dismiss Idriess's perspective of life in the ranges area as an anachronism which is mostly insulting to indigenous people, I will argue in Chapter One that his books are also useful social documents for developing a picture of a fringe community, and are essential for understanding the enduring public image of, for instance, the 'wild girls of the hills'.

In chapter One I utilise Ion Idriess's accounts of colonisation in the north Kimberley to set the scene for the region, and some of the characters and relationships of the 1930s. Idriess renders colonisation palatable and defensible. His view of the north and the people who lived there provides useful historical evidence as well as being an articulation of attitudes to colonialism in the north of Australia which influenced hundreds of thousands of Australians. He is particularly useful for his descriptions of the nomad whites who made up the majority of the white population in the region until the late 1960s.

Chapter Two examines first contact interactions between Europeans and indigenous people in the central and north Kimberley from 1903 to 1914. This period is dominated by police removing Aboriginal men to jails. It shows how individual white men and police parties initiated the processes of selecting a station work force and defining the boundaries and rules of white occupation. Through this selection process, informants' parents made alliances with white men which had important consequences for the children's survival and their later position in the station system.

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In Chapter Three I analyse the period of soldier settlement in the 1920s, which resulted in a crisis for a land-holding group in central Ngarinyin country. The narratives on which this chapter is based focus on the activities of an individual white man and his Aboriginal assistants. They provide a framework for analysing the extreme boundaries of white men’s behaviour toward Aboriginal people and their dependence on local women and children to survive. This chapter shows that the divisions between good and bad, or black and white were blurred and that small group alliances sustained survival.

Chapter Four begins the shift in reference point from detailed description of the people over the ranges to follow them more generally through broad policy as it is evolving to frame Aboriginal people’s lives and relationships with the state. It focuses on the period after the ‘early days’ when government policies which directed that managers, not the state, provide rations to whole groups of Aboriginal people. The policy of benevolent supervision reinforced the separate status of station communities and the authority of Bosses over their ‘mob’. It examines the leprosy campaign from 1936 to 1945 which added to the pressure on northern people to settle with a pastoral manager and conform to station life.

Chapter Five shows how managers’ attempts to establish control and authority over the younger generation of workers were muted by the existing system of indigenous authority and the system of seasonal holiday in the bush. Despite changing punishment regimes both on the station and in the bush, fear of reprisals and catastrophe underpinned servility and ‘settling down’. Protection continued to be framed by physical violence and social alienation which were set in the early days.

Chapter Six examines the emergence of a Welfare discourse in the 1950s and its practical impact on pastoral station relationships. Chapter Seven completes the story of government intervention, incorporating an examination of the introduction and impact of Social Security benefits and a cash economy to the north Kimberley in the 1960s'.
Chapter One

Over the Ranges

Although the East and West Kimberleys are now settled the country over the range is not. Although the tribesmen are fast entering the “iron age” (and alas fast vanishing under disease) old Felix always has a revolver handy - must never be without one when he leaves the house; for some of these Aboriginals are “sulky feller”. The danger is aggravated when the munjons come down from the hills.¹

Ion Idriess’s books Over The Range and One Wet Season provide a benign picture of the settlement process in the north Kimberley in the early 1930s.² Set in the region on which this study is focussed, the stations north of Derby to Gibb River, they include my informants and their relations and white Bosses as characters, and provide a descriptive record of contemporary relationships between white men and indigenous people, as well as police activities in the 1930s. Idriess's image of the wild northern ranges fired the public imagination about the northern Kimberley and, despite sometimes offensive caricatures of indigenous people, he made useful historical observations for understanding paternalism as it developed in the wake of bloody frontier conflict. His books are particularly useful for understanding something of the culture of the ‘early days whitemen’ who lived on the fringe of white society and chose ‘over the ranges’ as their domain.

‘An army of readers’

Ion L. Idriess was a prolific Australian author and travel writer for newspapers across Australia. He had 44 books published between 1927 and 1968, along with hundreds of newspaper articles.³ Over The Range: Sunshine and Shadows in the West Kimberley appeared in November 1937 and sold ten thousand copies in a

¹ Ion L. Idriess, Over The Range: Sunshine and Shadows in the West Kimberley, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1937, p. 36.

² Idriess, Over The Range; Ion L. Idriess, One Wet Season, Sydney Angus and Robertson, 1949.

fortnight. It had photographs and stories about informants and their close relations. By December it was in its fourth edition and was still being printed in the 1950s. Idriess’s output and general popularity did not guarantee him a respected place with critics of Australian literature, although he received grudging respect for his contribution to the Australian publishing industry. In 1937 he was ‘commended’ by Kylie Tennant in the *Australian* for the improvement evident in *Over The Range*, which meant that this book, unlike the previous twelve, could be taken seriously. He was, according to Tennant, finding his place in Australian literature as a ‘recorder of Australian life’ and had begun to take control of his romantic style and his tendency to ‘force reality into line with the romantic vision’. Despite an ambiguous reception, Tennant admitted that Idriess’s ‘romantic outlook ... combined with his intimate knowledge of wild Australia, has given pleasure to an army of readers.’ The Australian public consumed hundreds of thousands of Idriess’s tales of the Australian bush and the wild natives and honest hard working white men who lived there.

Writing in the 1960s, J.K. Ewers appreciated Idriess’s astounding industry but was similarly ambivalent about his literary status:

> His success has been with semi-factual, heroic, adventure narratives which cover all aspects of outback life in Australia. They owe something to the technique of the novel something to a careful sifting of known facts, but most of all to an inherent dramatic quality which he manages to infuse into stories of the lives of known people. Roughshod and even slipshod in their writing, they are successful pieces of dramatic, highly coloured journalism.

Even Gavin Casey’s attempt to celebrate Idriess in a review article for *Meanjin* in 1964 delivers the faint praise that his ‘yarns would never change the world’ but they would record it. He added that Idriess’s stories of the ‘good and the exciting’ in Australia’s outback were ‘tales of men and their mates dealing vigorously and

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5 *Australian* 23 November 1937.

6 ibid.

7 J. K. Ewers, *The Novel in the Thirties*, Melbourne, Georgian House, 1962, p. 93. Ewers was a modestly successful Western Australian novelist. His lack of enthusiasm for Idriess’s work was probably tinged with envy. See for example, his own travelogue of the Kimberley, J.K. Ewers, *With The Sun On My Back*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1953.
Plate 1 - Bell Creek Falls, within the King Leopold Ranges

*Photograph Courtesy Simon Neville.
bravely with a harsh new land’. This image, he stated, fitted Australia’s ‘vision of itself.’\textsuperscript{8} The vision of the child-like ‘sulky feller’ natives was not critiqued.

In 1985 when Dorothy Green revised the *History of Australian Literature*, published by Angus and Robertson (Idriess’s publishers) she classified his writing as simple, sincere and unsophisticated descriptive journalism in which ‘pathos became bathos and drama melodrama’.\textsuperscript{9} But like the other critics, Green had to admit that despite Idriess’s ‘small literary skill’, through his ‘vivid’ observations and ‘talking pictures’ he had introduced thousands of Australians to the ‘wildest’ parts of their Australian continent and that it was ‘largely owing to him that these places have become to us more than mere spaces on a map.’ Green nevertheless criticised Idriess for his ‘less than first class’ methods and attitudes. She may have been referring to his research methods which in the Kimberley often involved sitting at the front bar in a country hotel listening and memorising stories which he wrote up in his journals and then used to form narrative texts. *One Wet Season* derived entirely from his stay at the Port Hotel in Derby in 1934, which provided detailed stories from the white men who occupied the land over the Leopold Ranges to the north of Derby.

Criticism of his methods may also refer to his preparedness to edit and publicise his books for the widest possible audience at the most ‘timely’ moments. In 1937, shortly after the publication of *Over The Range*, he appeared at the New South Wales Parliamentary Select Committee on the Administration of the Aborigines Protection Board and was accused by an Aboriginal person observing the Committee of using it to publicise his book.\textsuperscript{10} During the late 1930s, when newspaper coverage was discovering injustices against Aboriginal people in the north (Xavier Herbert contributed to the trend with *Capricornia*) Idriess was a respected correspondent on whom the public could rely for reassurance that cruelties to Aboriginal people by white people were not widespread.\textsuperscript{11}


\textsuperscript{9} H. M. Green (revised by Dorothy Green) *A History of Australian Literature* vol 2, Sydney, Angus and Robertson 1985, p. 1388.

\textsuperscript{10} Eley, *Ion Idriess*, p. 297.

\textsuperscript{11} Eley, ibid. p. 165.
Idriess avoided writing anything which suggested that immorality, exploitation or avoidable conflict occurred between settlers and indigenous people. His biographer, Beverly Eley, who had access to his private journals and correspondence, suggested that he wanted to protect his mates and acquaintances from gossip and innuendo, and from being blamed for wrong doings to Aboriginal people. He was an image maker as well as a documenter of his travels and recorder of oral history. His images of the north encouraged southerners’ pride in the white men (and very occasionally white women) who settled it for the sake of civilisation and the Australian nation. In doing so he wholeheartedly embraced the ideals of the pioneer myth which celebrated white men’s determination, bravery, foresight, endurance, resourcefulness and heroism in the grand colonial project of civilising and occupying a vast and dangerous land. In the same vein, he utilised the conventional imagery of colonial writers about indigenous people which excluded them from a role in the future development of the north, portraying them as exotic, manipulative and childlike. And like other writers of the 1930s and 1940s, he lamented their passing as an unavoidable by-product of progress which resulted in different types of people coming into evolutionary competition rather than active conflict with each other.

White wits against black. ...The stone-age man is no fool .... in anything that touches his own line of life and that interests him. But he is chained to the primitive by a mental chain he will never break; he seems to have been born a million years ago with a brain that could not expand as the rest of humanity developed.

Despite the overriding tendency in Idriess’s works to infantilise Aboriginal people, he was enthusiastic about incorporating them as identified characters who occupied places they had named, rather than a silent backdrop in an empty land. He also characterised indigenous people as belonging to a domestic sphere. Although the family was presented as inferior to white civilisation, indigenous characters were socially related to one another within a family framework which was recognisable

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12 Eley, ibid. p. 244.


15 Idriess, Over The Range, p. 25.
to readers.\textsuperscript{16} They were not just the ‘Natives’ they were fathers, uncles, wives and children. He also extended and varied the pioneer myth by introducing and examining mounted police practices and the peripheral white men in the colonial project: the stockmen and bushies who became ‘chronics’ (drunkards) when they got to town. This interaction and dialogue between white men and Aboriginal people is particularly evident in \textit{Over The Range} and \textit{One Wet Season}. Here Idriess expanded from his focus on the lone hero, the mounted policeman, to include the not so heroic but still active and interested trackers, ‘nomad whites’ and indigenous people resisting the white regime.

By the end of his career Idriess had incorporated a wide range of Aboriginal characters into several of his books. Jandamarra in \textit{Outlaws of the Leopolds} was the most notable for the Kimberley region because it centred on a black ‘outlaw’ who engaged in open conflict with Europeans during the mid 1890s.\textsuperscript{17} This story is set in an era of conquest when lives were lost in a struggle to occupy land. Events touched on in this book point to the extent of police and indigenous conflict in the south-eastern boundary region of Bunubla and Ngarinyin country and aspects of relationships between trackers and police before the turn of the century. It is dominated by the tragic hero, Jandamarra, who is trivialised as an almost competent strategist (he had learnt military competency from white men) fighting for something which could never be as just or as rational as the cause of the white men who represented civilisation and the paramountcy of white justice.\textsuperscript{18} The fight, however, was long and hard and provided Idriess with what he called ‘good copy’.

\textbf{Idriess and the archive}

Much of the information in \textit{Outlaws of the Leopolds} was drawn from a ‘mountain’ of police files which had been collected for Idriess to view in the Police Commissioner’s office in Perth in 1933 on his way to the Kimberley.\textsuperscript{19} It appears in various forms in \textit{Man Tracks} (1935), \textit{Over The Range} (1937) \textit{Forty Fathoms Deep} (1939), \textit{Outlaws of the Leopolds} (1952), \textit{The Nor’Westers} (1954) and \textit{Tracks

\textsuperscript{16} Thomas, \textit{Colonialism’s Culture}, p. 35.

\textsuperscript{17} Ion L. Idriess, \textit{Outlaws of the Leopolds}, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1952.


\textsuperscript{19} Eley, \textit{Ion Idriess}, p. 167.
of Destiny (1961). These written archival sources were always transformed into narrative dialogue and were not referred to in his books. He was a travel writer who preferred to emphasise his personal experience of places and ‘first hand’ knowledge of the named people who became characters in various plots. In the foreword of Man Tracks he wrote:

My principal qualifications for writing Man Tracks are: personal acquaintance with most of the men concerned, a share in a twelve-hundred-mile patrol through the Kimberleys, and twenty five years’ wanderings in the interior (often with the blacks) by which I have gained a knowledge of the country, and an understanding of the mentality of the aborigines, that can be learned in no other way. 20

Idriess operated primarily in the realm of oral storytelling which he transformed into a range of books and short stories with a varying degree of reliance on written records. In the Kimberley, oral sources merged with police records of exciting events which had occurred in living memory.

Idriess’s rendering of events varied from direct paraphrasing of archival file material to form whole chapters of his books, to more creative and interventionary use of stories and written information. In the collection of disparate adventures called Nor’Westers, portions of stories have been pasted together to form a barely recognisable incident which involved three Aboriginal prisoners escaping custody by holding on to the rudder of a ship from Broome to Derby.21 According to police files and oral information from Weeda Munro, the named men did escape custody and one, her father Big Paddy or Wundigul, from Mount Hart suddenly and unexpectedly appeared in his country, hundreds of kilometres from Broome.22 But Weeda Munro had never heard of the boat story. In Idriess’s account, Big Paddy meets a dreadful ending sliding into the propeller of the boat. In this rendition, the one survivor was not jailed because the white men, including the Resident Magistrate at Derby, got together for a drink the night before the court hearing and there decided that he should be rewarded for his courage. Idriess prefaces the Nor’Westers with the comment that he had at last been given the chance to write ‘whatever he wanted’. The book exceeds in caricature, describing a character of

20 Ion L. Idriess, Man Tracks: The Mounted Police in Australia’s Wilds, Sydney, Angus And Robertson, 1935, p. i.


Broome’s China-town as a ‘droopy-backed scraggy whiskered weedy stoop-shouldered lewd-faced old Celestial ...[with] shifty eyes’.23

In *Man Tracks*, Idriess again utilised written historical material from the north Kimberley and one chapter is almost entirely derived from the police file about an incident which occurred on Kimberley Downs station in 1925.24 The same incident is reproduced as a narrative by Mordingali in his own book but with many interpretive differences.25 The three versions converge at many points; names, places and the primary focus on an Aboriginal man being murdered over an incident described by informants in 1994 as ‘jealous business’ and by police and Idriess as a revenge killing which in their opinion went beyond any indigenous person’s understanding of a husband’s role. On first reading, the convergences are so strong that some readers might wonder at the origins of the story’s construction.26 In *Drums of Mer* and in many other cases, Idriess reproduced stories and descriptions of practices which he had seen or been told about or had read in police records.27 His attention to detail needs to be separated from his overriding tendency to romanticise and caricature. His versions of events intersect with stories told by Aboriginal people who experienced them and were members of the community which maintained the oral tradition about them.

In 1932 Idriess’s publishers wrote to all State Police Commissioners asking for their assistance in his project to research a book about the mounted police. The stated aim was to create an image of ‘our troopers’ which would ‘parallel the Canadian Mounty ideal’ by showing the public their ‘endurance’ and ‘intelligence’

23 Idriess, *Nor’Westers*, p. 178.

24 PD7551/1925.

25 Munro, *Emerarra*, pp. 87-93.

26 In the case of Queensland versus Eddie Mabo in the Federal Court, the Crown took this aetiological approach to oral knowledge to its extreme, arguing that Mabo had derived his knowledge from reading Idriess’ book, *Drums of Mer* (1933) and that his knowledge was therefore not of his own tradition. Mabo had certainly read Idriess. His family and the stories he was defending had been observed by Idriess and explained by Idriess’ main informant, the missionary on Mer and further by Mabo’s family. (personal comment Greg MacIntyre lawyer representing Mabo.) This adherence to a strict dichotomy between Aboriginal oral tradition and written white sources denies the dynamic and interactive nature of oral and written contact history. It can also denigrate the capacity of Aboriginal people to express themselves within a colonial discourse. See Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture*, p. 56.

27 Ion Idriess, *Drums of Mer*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1933.
in the ‘wilds’ of Australia.\textsuperscript{28} The Western Australian Police Commissioner responded enthusiastically, providing him with exceptional material for the project: original copies of files, patrol journals, photographs and a list of police who had either survived attacks by Aboriginal people or who had been involved in punitive expeditions against ‘blacks’ who had killed policemen.\textsuperscript{29} The list begins with the murder of Constable Richardson and the capture of Jandamarra, includes several arrests after murders of white men in 1908, 1910 and 1920, and adds the names of policemen who were available to tell their stories of seeing action. The names include Pollet, McKenna, Johnson, Flinders, Fletcher, Dewar, McClay and Walters who was a serving officer at Fitzroy Crossing in 1932. These same policemen are named in Ngarinyin people’s narratives. Idriess responded to the Commissioner that he had received too much material about police chasing black outlaws and nothing about white men who were the subjects of investigations and arrests.\textsuperscript{30} Presumably he knew from his experience that exciting chases and law breaking were not the province of blacks only and he was not certain of the audience for a book which had only one or two white characters.

The Commissioner then sent Idriess recent police journals from Constable Lawrie O’Neill who travelled over the Napier and King Leopold Ranges north of Derby. Idriess was delighted with the extra material which included photographs and descriptions of life in the north. But he also stated that he was not able to utilise one of the patrol reports because it would disappoint Australian readers. It described the police losing a group of prisoners who had been cut off the chain by a woman after she had tracked the party for days and then waited for an opportunity to release them. The prisoners were not recaptured because the tracker on whom the policeman was entirely dependent would not follow them ‘for tribal reasons’.\textsuperscript{31} Failures and complexities which challenged the idealised image of the police were not going to make it into Idriess’s books. When he arrived in Derby in 1934 to observe the mounted patrols, he wrote to his publishers that although there were only a handful of white men in the north Kimberley, there were enough for a

\textsuperscript{28} PD4751/1932, June 1932. Although he doesn’t mention Jack London, it is possible that London’s books like \textit{Call of the Wild} influenced Idriess. See also A.L. Haydon, \textit{The Trooper Police of Australia: a record of mounted police work in the Commonwealth from the earliest days of settlement to the present time}, London, A. Melrose, 1911.

\textsuperscript{29} PD4751/1932, CoP to Angus and Robertson, 2 July 1932.

\textsuperscript{30} PD4751/1932.

\textsuperscript{31} PD4751/1932, Idriess to CoP, 18 April 1933.
'human interest' element. Furthermore, he found that the majority of white men who had died in the region north of the Napier ranges had died violently, 'with their boots on'. These were ‘the badlands’ north of Derby where few outsiders would travel. They had the ingredients for Idriess to stir suburban interest: Australia’s own wild west which was more exotic because of the ‘stone age’ people.

In Over The Range, Idriess combined patrols and incidents from 1931, 1932 and 1933 with a 1934 patrol on which he says he went. He inserted the additional material into the 1934 patrol as stories told to him at particular points in the patrol by Police Constable Lawrie O’Neill and the trackers Larry Kunnumurra and Davey. From the archival records it is clear that those events occurred over a period of three years and were derived from files already seen by Idriess before he arrived in the Kimberley. The stories conformed to such an extent with police patrol records that it is difficult to determine how much of the patrol he experienced personally. In the preface to Over The Range, Idriess stated that the book was based on a patrol which occurred in 1933, whilst in the Man Tracks preface, referred to previously, he stated that he had ‘a share’ in a 1200 mile patrol in the Kimberley. Other evidence suggested that Idriess was reported as returning to Derby in June 1934 after accompanying Lawrie O’Neill on a two month patrol to Mount Hart station and Munja government ration station. The official police journal and Idriess describe that patrol traversing the ranges to Mount Hart, Munja, Gibb River station, Mount Barnett and into the Charnley river area, where the ‘lost tribe’ of Charoo struggled with disease and starvation.

In 1937 Idriess wrote a self congratulatory article which appeared in the Melbourne Herald about his role in publicising the wonders of Aboriginal culture in the north Kimberley. In it he stated that his visit to and writings about the ‘wildest country in Australia’, north of Kunmunya station to visit the ‘remnants of untouched tribes’


33 PD3744/1931; PD7931/1931; PD6975/1932.

34 WA 16 June 1934, p. 19.

35 Idriess wrote a long article about his patrol, WA 18 July 1936. Others have tried in vain to find Charoo. See David Mowaljarlai and Jutta Malnic, Yorro Yorro: Spirit of the Kimberley, Broome, Magabala Books, 1993 in which Jutta Malnic describes never quite arriving at the caves of Charoo.

36 PD532/1934, copy of Melbourne Herald article, undated, and letter from Police Commissioner and CPA (1934).
living there, had resulted in three reserves being gazetted by the government of Western Australia to preserve paintings in the region. The Chief Protector of Aborigines complained to the Police Commissioner that he had not been consulted and that the reserve was unnecessarily large. Lawrie O'Neill explained to the Commissioner that one of the paintings sites was shown only to Idriess by police tracker Davey and the photographs were Idriess’s.\textsuperscript{37} In 1934 when Idriess saw the paintings at Maurice Creek near Mount Elizabeth station, they were freshly painted and, in Lawrie O’Neill’s opinion, were retouched each year because they were important. Idriess had not accompanied O’Neill on the whole of the patrol but was ‘over the ranges’ in the region near Mount Elizabeth 350 kilometres north of Derby, his share of the patrol.

Idriess’s biographer was in no doubt that he accompanied a patrol and cited a letter from him to his publishers sent from Mount Hart station in April 1934.\textsuperscript{38} Without further research and access to his journals it is not possible to establish exactly where his historical imagination departed from his personal experience. What is clear is that Idriess spent a great deal of time in the hotel researching \emph{One Wet Season}, with intermittent visits to the police station where he had extensive contact with police, trackers and local white men. These observations, together with some experience in the range country and prior experience as a prospector and ‘bushie’, photographs, files and journals from the Police Commissioner’s office, form the basis to his books \emph{Over The Range} and \emph{One Wet Season}.

Descriptions of Derby wharf, the township, the police station and lock up, Aboriginal trackers and the native hospital where lepers were held in a wire compound, are all vivid pictures of a small frontier town with a population of about two hundred white people and few motorised vehicles. The characters at the Port hotel were drunks and storytellers who had arrived in town for the Wet Season. There they spent their cheques and waited for the season to break when they would return to the stations. Amongst them were men from the vast region north of Derby which included the wall-like Napier Ranges 130 kilometres north and the much wider and more rugged King Leopold Ranges about 180 kilometres north. Further north were the smaller Phillips and Caroline ranges just south of Mount Barnett which were not surveyed until 1898 and impeded pastoral settlement until 1903 (see map). Idriess’s article for the Melbourne \emph{Herald} emphasised his own feat of

\textsuperscript{37} PD5321/1934, O’Neill to CoP, August 1934.

\textsuperscript{38} Eley, \emph{Ion Idriess}, p. 207.
travelling to this isolated place and also encouraged readers to think that a few battling white men were occupying a vast land which offered resources for future populations of white people. But not anyone. It was ‘no use coming if not made of the true pioneer stuff’:

...The ranges are barriers, row following row of them like battalions of soldiers facing you in line after line. These barriers grow from the East Kimberley and carry on right through to the West coast. Many rise almost straight up from their valley base...The rock walls have gained the reputation “Inaccessible” for this particular corner of the Kimberleys.39

The extent of Idriess’s personal experience of the patrol is somewhat problematic because he says he travelled with the patrol and wrote Over The Range as his personal travelogue. But it is not significant enough to cast his observations aside as racist fiction without any historical veracity or value, as Shoemaker would with regard to Outlaws of the Leopold.40 Over The Range is an observant journalist’s record of places, events and relationships which were drawn from five months’ stay in the Derby area in 1934 when Idriess was in close contact with white men who occupied the region over the ranges in the north Kimberley. His characters include the nomad whites with whom he sympathised, the police whom he romanticised and the trackers and Aboriginal people who he observed but may not have spoken to directly.

**Nomad Whites and ‘wild women’**

Over The Range and One Wet Season conform with white colonial views of the north and of indigenous people. The former’s opening lines were: ‘Romance; visions of untamed country; of wild men. Mountain barriers; an almost unknown coastline.’41 And Idriess’s portrait of the police conforms with his initial project to idealise them as the heroes of the settlement process. He describes Constable Lawrie O’Neill as:

a fine type of the Western Australian Mounted Police. Tall and strong with the long swinging walk of the bushman, his boyish face and

39 Melbourne Herald, 26 July 1934, p. 23, entitled ‘Lonely Land and the Royal Progress’.

40 Shoemaker, ‘Fact and historical Fiction’.

41 Idriess, Over The Range, p. 1.
ready smile had a determination that was alertly quick to swing into action. 42

At the same time, Idriess offered insights into the relationships between white men and indigenous people which disrupt conventional images of development on the periphery of colonial expansion.43 The positioning of the nomad whites in the colonial project is particularly important in Idriess’s work for analysing the alliances and relationships between white and black people in the 1930s which contributed to the incorporation of Aboriginal people into the northern pastoral industry. These are the men who slip through official histories, the ‘loners’ who follow frontiers from Queensland, the east Kimberley, the Pilbara and even further afield.

In the 1930s the majority of white men who were in regular contact with indigenous people in the northern ranges were itinerants hoping for a season’s employment. Some were ex-miners and part-time stockmen who were hoping to settle their own land. Although Idriess utilised standard colonial images of the good and civilised whites versus the stone-age and essentially bad blacks, the ranges provided him with a geographic and metaphorical boundary where extraordinary events and relationships could be rationalised. At the same time he was committed to silences which collapsed the process of settlement in the region into the period and picture which he described. Preceding events, as well as issues of direct white violence, terror, fear, coercion or sexual intimacy between black and white were not central features of the scene. But, as Idriess described it, the ranges region was not an uncontested picture of harmonious settlement by white pioneers; it was ‘unsettled’ and consisted of tensions and struggles for all the characters who were not engaged in a clear-cut process of progressive transformation of the wilderness through white initiative and intervention.

The paramount project in the northern region that united the author, the readers and the white characters in Over The Range was the eventual development of communities of white women and children, and the domestication of the land and the indigenous people. In this area, however, the ranges, the climate and the distances from ports and towns, the Depression and the indigenous people blocked the settlement project. By the 1930s the pioneering effort was reduced to a state of suspended evolution where the majority of white men were engaged in the process

42 ibid. p. 40.

43 Rose, ‘Nature and Gender in Outback Australia’, p. 419; Thomas, Colonialism’s Culture, p. 20-21.
of managing Aboriginal people's transition from bush to station - not overseeing vast herds of cattle from the homestead verandah. White men were portrayed by Idriess as providing a service to the grand colonial project which had been transformed from simply settling pastoral land and dominating the environment, to training and rescuing indigenous people who were vanishing under the pressure of contact with civilisation. Within this framework, the police operated as protectors of both white men and Aboriginal people. The police had 'the full-time job of looking after the isolated settlers and wanderers, of hunting native killers, of keeping an eye on the tribes.'

Idriess relied on the conventional gender signifiers of the north as a frontier: it was devoid of white women who were the primary representatives of civilisation and the only representatives of an ideal form of moral society. On page four of Over The Range he set the scene for potentially extraordinary relationships and events by signalling that there were

hardly a dozen white women in the West Kimberley... In the Nor-west there are no white women at all inland. ...The Kimberleys owing to their extreme isolation are essentially a man's land.

The absence of white women in the region signalled the potential for white men to be as wild as the country and the indigenous people. William Chalmers, co-owner of Mount Hart Station was, according to Idriess,

...a great worker and a quiet shrewd man... Occasionally a bit wild, hardly to be wondered at in the then untamed country with its primitive environment and its wild men both white and black. And the only women were wild women.

In this schema, white women who entered the station environment were merely tolerated as white men's silent partners. The only woman resident on a pastoral station north of Derby, Kimberley Downs which was sixty miles north, knew the rules for white homestead women:

...never interfere in the slightest with the work of the men... never visit their quarters, seldom visit a muster camp. ...[and] Above all she

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44 Idriess, Over The Range, p. 67.


46 Idriess, Over The Range, pp. 4-5.

47 Idriess, One Wet Season, p. 135.
must never tell the boss of any little irregularity she may see. This is the golden rule.\textsuperscript{48}

On the coast near the government ration station Munja (opened 1926) and Port George IV Mission (Kunmunya 1913) there was a small ‘outpost’ of civilisation and three white women. Fred Merry had settled in the vicinity after failing to develop a pastoral enterprise at Mount Barnett station and was, in the 1930s, acquiring a non-Aboriginal wife and attempting to cultivate peanuts. All the other white men associated with pastoral enterprises in the region over the ranges were without white women. Such men belonged to a peripheral group who moved from place to place assisting would-be settlers as stockmen, doggers, prospectors, cooks, boundary riders, mailmen and donkey team drivers. Even the settlers in this area were drawn from the ranks of the nomad whites but were in the process of acquiring some of the trappings of the conventional settler: land, a hut, livestock and an Aboriginal workforce. But the majority remained unsettled, living in bark huts with earth floors, talking to their dogs and without white wives. They had a tenuous link with the classical image of a successful white pioneer.

Mount Hart is a frontier station; hard to realise that such still exists in Australia. The homestead was really one big shed, bare walls, open doors placed so that at a glance any one moving in the country behind or in front can be seen. The only window has a heavy wooden shutter that at a touch drops into place.... everything is rough strong and serviceable... Handy on the walls are guns and rifles; the needed belt with heavy revolver is slung across the table.\textsuperscript{49}

Without white women, Idriess’s white men on the frontiers of civilisation acted out a romantic drama with the land. However, in the ranges region the majority of white occupants were not primarily engaged in dominating the land or becoming landed gentlemen and husbands. Their raison d’etre was to live with and occupy rather than dominate the wilderness. Their role, according to Idriess, was to oversee the transition of Aboriginal people from bush to station and to patrol the fragile boundaries between the two. To do this they had to be capable of ‘handling blacks’. In the northern region, it was no security that an Aboriginal man was a station worker or a tracker, because he was essentially unpredictable and untrustworthy: ‘though the aboriginal is capable of faithfulness and affection he is

\textsuperscript{48} ibid. p. 5.

\textsuperscript{49} ibid. p. 19.
prone to sudden and violent outbursts, far more so than the white race." The way white men and police patrols operated was portrayed by Idriess as dependent on the savage and unpredictable nature of Aboriginal men, and women's slavish loyalty to their husbands. Their ascendency in the bush and resistance to white men justified frightening raids, occasional beatings, constant verbal abuse, vicious dogs and the potential threat offered by Bosses always carrying hand guns.

Nomad whites were scattered throughout the ranges country in the 1930s. Just north of Mount Hart, Bill Connell lived alone with a group of Aboriginal people and had recently lost 'his favourite lubra' to a bushman. Further north west at Graces Knob there were three men living in bush camps made of bark and saplings. Two, Bob Maxted and his partner owned the lease and were away on muster. Peter Backsen watched the camp and the group of Aboriginal people who lived with them. He had established an alliance with an Aboriginal man who sat at the camp with his wives and children. The 'quick eyed lubras' worked in a cooking area behind the hut. At Mount Caroline, twenty miles from the Mount Barnett hut, Bob Muir lived with a small group of Aboriginal people in his scrub hut but with no white company. He avoided contact with white society preferring, according to Idriess, to live 'alone'. He, like most of the white men in the area, occasionally took up a lease of land, sat on it with a group of Aboriginal people and then, according to Idriess, walked away.

At Mount Barnett the station hut was deserted, while further north at Gibb River station, a white man called Jack Callahan supervised the small bark homestead and 'roared' at the Aboriginal women who worked there. He was a

...dingo-shooter, travelling on his own; a month here, a month there. Just another of the nomads who lead the lonely life but will not settle down even on a lonely station. He might visit Derby once in every two or three years.

His treatment of Aboriginal women was portrayed by Idriess as kind and indulgent, with special care for a small child who played in the hut or wandered freely from

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50 ibid. p. 63.
51 ibid. pp. 34-35.
52 ibid. pp. 53-56.
53 ibid. pp. 77-78.
54 Idriess, Over The Range, p. 87.
the cooking area to the camp. When the police party joined him for tea, having left
the black ‘boys’ to do the unloading, Callahan

...shouted to the house lubras... They giggled. He then swore at one
in particular; but the more he swore the more she giggled... When Jack
walked toward them they all dived into the kitchen...\textsuperscript{55}

Bob Thompson lived in a hut north of Port George IV Mission on the Glenelg
River, also with only Aboriginal people and a special small child. He had an
agricultural lease at Marie Springs and was attempting to grow peanuts. Thompson
rarely saw white men and was resigned to surviving in the north and not
‘graduating’ to the status of a ‘squatter’.\textsuperscript{56} His role in the colonial project, as
presented by Idriess, was to look after indigenous people who came to his camp for
tobacco. Thompson described his settlement experience and resources:

Just one hundred pounds, a couple of pack-mules, a saddle, a few old
bags and a bit of wire, a case of nigger twist tobacco, an axe - and a
rifle thrown in. With the clothes I stood up in, and the old dog for a
mate. What more does a man want to start a selection! And now I’ve
got the mules and saddle and rifle and dog, but nothing else. The
niggers have got everything, including three years work chucked in. I
work for them.\textsuperscript{57}

Thompson also described how he established and maintained a workforce primarily
by bribing people with tobacco, without which ‘no nigger would work in the
Kimberleys.’\textsuperscript{58}:

I had to find a place, then start to work it, build the hut, clear and grub
the ground, train the teams, the donkey-team and the nigger teams - not
to mention myself, and not to mention teaching the most intelligent
niggers English for a start. I should have been a school master and a
dictator and a philanthropist rolled into one.\textsuperscript{59}

All the white men lived with Aboriginal people; small camps around loners and
large bush camps and station compound camps at places like Mount Hart and Gibb
river, where the lease holders had established herds and a system of stock work. At
all the huts and stations, the boundaries between bush and station were based on the
power of white men to provide food and tobacco, guard the store house and

\textsuperscript{55} ibid. pp. 85.

\textsuperscript{56} ibid. pp. 241.

\textsuperscript{57} ibid. pp. 239.

\textsuperscript{58} ibid. pp. 240.

\textsuperscript{59} ibid. pp. 242-243.
homestead, and surround themselves with a group of Aboriginal people who were dependent on them for protection.

The boundaries between bush and station were also enforced by individual Aboriginal men who had been trained since a young age to work for white men or who had formed alliances with them which involved them in conflict with bush people. Men like Weeda Munro's father Wundigul or Big Paddy and Chalmer's Willie, who lived at Mount Hart station, Joe White with Fred Merry at Mount Barnett, and Munja and Jack Campbell at Kurunjie, assisted white men to patrol the boundaries of their homesteads. Wundigul was described by Idriess as a cruel and savage man who transformed himself without warning from white man's helper to a primitive killer. Their power and influence protected white men from what Idriess described as a constant threat of attack from bush people as well as station people. But by the end of the patrol, which described successful raid after raid on bush camps and 'scattering' bush people to assist with musters, Idriess provided evidence which suggested that the rules of settlement had been established well before the 1930s. Killing or harming a white man was no longer a rational form of resistance or revenge for the majority of indigenous people in the northern region:

Suggestions were made to kill the white man, but these were argued against by half-caste Joe, by the black boys Merry had brought with him, and by some of the Ngarinyin who had taken a liking to Merry. It would not be worth their while, they argued, because of the "Big Trouble" the killing would bring upon them. The Big Trouble meant the certain arrival of the mounted police patrol.  

Fred Merry, described by Idriess as 'a fine type of Australian', travelled with men and women who were informants for this thesis. He 'picked them up' in the Mount Barnett area and took them to the coast to develop his agricultural lease. In *Over the Range* he described a fight he had with one of 'his boys' as an exercise in self control. Merry 'thumped him' and they wrestled for a while whilst the 'boy battled gamely' but would not stop. 'He forced me to beat him to his knees before he gave in.' Merry's views on settlement were:

A man must be prepared to ride the country; find his own land, then squat down and put up a hut. That means shepherding the sheep for a

60 Idriess, *One Wet Season*, p. 117.

start, building a brush fence... When a few wild nigs come in he must 'educate' the most intelligent looking; they will come in handy.  

Harry Howendon at Mount Elizabeth and Joe White's daughter Maudie White at Gibb River station were informants for this research and had been part of Merry's mob who travelled with him from Mount Barnett in the early 1930s to grow peanuts at Munja.

Throughout the book Idriess described indigenous people running and hiding from the patrol. He trivialised their concerns as fears based on ignorance of the necessary process of bringing them in to town for medical treatment or as savage resistance to well meant intervention into their revenge practices:

They were utterly unconcerned about the tragedy of it all - the tragedy of their self-practised fast declining birth-rate, of disease; the tragedy of intrigues and superstition and killings that is constantly depleting the little man-power they have left.  

The process of chasing, chaining, jailing and loss of wives and children was hinted at as disruptive but never a serious consideration. As the patrol approached Gibb River station:

Suddenly Davey galloped all out. ... and in a moment more we were right in the camp. One startled glance and then lubras were snapping for some old dress, men snapping at a pair of trousers, piccaninnies climbing to the gunyah roofs, dogs crouching uneasily. Most of the lubras squatted strangely in the dust and ashes, looking strangely like monkeys. One old crone was alternately pinching a pretty child's cheeks and lousing her hair. A very old woman who had been hamstrung was dragging herself across to a gunyah on her hands, one skinny leg up under her chin. One pretty young lubra smiled proudly when Davey noticed her piccaninny, and held it up for him to feel how fat it was. Tousle-headed tribesmen, their chests heavily cicatriced, stood scowling or staring silently. All had eyes for the handkerchief on my hat.  

His description of the raid on Gibb River Station camp showed the boundaries between bush and station were not merely a matter of being fed or acquiring tobacco; bush people feared for their lives. One form of protection from police was wearing clothes: the symbol of a 'station black' who was not offering significant resistance to white men, was unlikely to spear cattle, and was under the watchful eye of a white man. The handkerchief may have been more than a quaint object of desire of the Aboriginal people, perhaps a crucial signal for protection.

62 ibid. p. 216.

63 ibid. p. 141.

64 ibid. pp. 83-84.
Outlaw bands: the anti-heroes

Throughout his description of the patrol, Idriess developed a sub-plot of roaming bands of bush men who endangered the stations by stealing women and stores and spearing cattle. They were portrayed as having opposing interests to those of station people who were beginning to understand that the police could help them. These groups were described by Idriess as revenge war parties containing lawless young men driven by lust. The leaders of the war parties were men who had not become entrenched in alliances with white men. They moved on the fringes of camps and in the bush. The police were breaking them up because the leaders were identified as being involved in spear killings of their own people. This was a change of policy for the police who in previous years tended to view murders amongst Aboriginal people as not their business. But this group of men were actively moving about in groups and were starting to challenge the fragile settlement which had been established by the early 1930s. The prospect of groups of men moving in the bush unnerved white men and police because they were there due to their conflict and tensions with camp people and station whites. The women the men wanted and the men they needed to settle disputes with were living in the white men’s camps and were being trained for station work.

Aboriginal women were central to the transition from savage to civilised despite their exclusion from the realm of legitimate objects of white masculine desire. Throughout Over The Range, Idriess developed a plot in which three Aboriginal women were central characters. They travelled with the patrol and provided Idriess with a focus for portraying gender relations within Aboriginal society and a mechanism for closing the story. They are picked up early in the patrol as the wives of alleged murderers and cattle killers and are quickly relegated to the position of Mrs Oomagun, Mrs Nipper (the ‘virile figure of primitive womanhood’) and Mrs Charcoal:

Nipper strode out obviously proud of himself. His hefty spouse strode behind, carrying her lord’s spears, Chalba had a face hard as crinkly bark, but shrewd eyes. How men could fight to the death over her,

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65 ibid. p. 7.

66 ibid. p. 70.
civilized man would be puzzled to understand. But one glance at her athletic body, explained all. Chalba could work.\textsuperscript{67} During the patrol their allegiance to their husbands began to shift and by the end of the book they were married off to the trackers. Their role as witnesses for the gaoling of their husbands was not mentioned. And so a happy ending. But it was only a happy ending in the context of the form of gender relations presented by Idriess. These were not romantic associations which civilisation generated for white men and women, they were fickle, utilitarian and unacceptably violent. For instance, Oomagun, one of the alleged murderers, was part of a group of bush people who were portrayed as ‘especially cruel in that they [were] noted women-killers.’\textsuperscript{68} He was feared and admired by other Aboriginal men because he ‘attacked any enemy like a mad animal’.\textsuperscript{69} Women, however, ‘adored him’:

The wild native women are almost always that way, not that they received much encouragement. Their men generally, will be comparatively kind to them providing they remain uncomplaining beasts of burden, live to do his bidding, and not complain over much when he adds someone younger to his harem... When a black fellow becomes a bit civilised he puts up with a nagging woman until his patience becomes exhausted. The more they are civilised the longer their patience lasts.\textsuperscript{70}

White men were consistently portrayed by Idriess as the protectors of station women who were threatened by bush Aboriginal men who stole, abused and brutalised them. During the patrol, individual alleged murderers and cattle thieves were united as members of outlaw bands who roamed the country, terrifying and stealing indigenous women from stations, missions and bush camps. According to Idriess, the bands were a product of deterioration of order within Aboriginal society. They were and could not possibly have been ‘traditional’ or a response to contact with white men because Idriess had already defined Aboriginal society as incapable of collective resistance to white men and driven by suspicion, revenge killing and petty rivalries. Idriess had also portrayed white men as objective observers in the deterioration process. They were not directly responsible for deaths, damages or diseases.

\textsuperscript{67} ibid.

\textsuperscript{68} ibid. p. 72.

\textsuperscript{69} ibid. p. 92-93.

\textsuperscript{70} ibid. p. 93-94.
This relationship of control without intimacy or extreme outbursts of violence was carried into white men’s transactions with Aboriginal women. For the men in this region, the criteria of a white man’s civility were not having a ‘bush black’ for a wife and not losing control of your temper. Within those parameters, the practicalities of training could include roaring, chasing, and beating as well as carrying a pistol. But the struggle to retain and train Aboriginal workers and domesticate bush people included constant contact with Aboriginal women. Idriess was careful not to portray Aboriginal women as wives or potential wives, but they were not excluded from his picture of the north. That would have involved an extraordinary fiction, for Aboriginal women and girls were to be found wherever there was a white man’s hut. The fact that they were never placed in a white man’s bed was consistent with the dominant European view which excluded them from that realm of domestic intimacy and was backed by legislation aimed at preventing cohabitation. It was also consistent with the picture Idriess wished to portray for a wide audience. An Australian audience would not have accepted any mention of white men’s emotional reliance on Aboriginal women or sexual relations between them. A black woman in the homestead was acceptable to the public only as a tamed servant.

Idriess wanted to present even the nomad whites as honourable men, but this picture was not supported by oral evidence and Idriess himself calls it into question. The struggle to retain and train Aboriginal women was an important factor in developing a station workforce. The actual methods of capture and control were completely missing from the ideal picture of settlement and from Idriess’s more expansive view of interactions between white men and Aboriginal people in the ‘unsettled’ northern regions. The police and station men assumed that the women were better off in the camps and assisted in the process of keeping them there. They were not always successful and were often forced into negotiations with relations which could result in open conflict. Idriess was silent on the value of Aboriginal women to white men except for their capacity to work and thus failed to acknowledge the potential for conflict and tensions which derived from their alliances and associations with white men. He also failed to associate the ‘outlaw groups’ with Aboriginal women’s captivity on the stations, a theme which will be explored in later chapters.

*Over The Range* described a moment in the settlement process when the hills and ranges surrounding Mount Hart station and further north through to Gibb River provided indigenous people with physical protection from police and from white men, which increased the degree of tension between black and white and slowed
the settlement process. In the early 1930s groups of Aboriginal men were moving from station to station and in the bush but their capacity to injure whitemen was overstated by Idriess, encouraging dramatic tension but condensing twenty years of contact history into a ‘moment’ that did not exist. Their reason for being there was portrayed by Idriess as greed for young women to whom they had no traditional right but because of unknown factors were now attempting to control and remove them from the old men who, from Idriess’s descriptions were often resident in the station camps. There were very few children in the bush in the 1930s and more men than women.71 This contrasted with the stations, where there were many women. The only man whom Idriess described as having several children and two wives was also described as brutal, cruel, fearless and unwilling to co-operate with police, trackers or station whites. Oomagun moved in the Mount Elizabeth and Gibb River area in the 1930s. Of him Idriess stated that he smiled and spoke softly when white men approached and appeared ‘slightly amused, but not interested’:

If all aboriginals had his mental as well as physical strength, Authority would have a hectic time in first catching the wrong doers, and then in proving anything against them.72

Like Ernestine Hill in the Northern Territory, Idriess arrived in the north to write about the struggles of the settlement process without blaming any white people or damaging the image of Australia as a developing and ‘fair’ nation.73 But in the northern ranges, the Derby pub and in the police records, Idriess found relationships and practices which underlined the notion of an active struggle between Europeans and indigenous people, and between white men and the environment; evocative of violent and unsettled times. He reassured his huge readership that this phase of unsettled relationships was passing. The white nomads, like the Aboriginal people, belonged to a passing stage. He salvaged the nomad whites who occupied the frontiers by portraying them with police as protectors who were assisting Aboriginal people to negotiate the impact of civilisation while introducing an element of control into their lives. At the same time he reinvented the mounted policeman as a combination of the bushman and Anzac


72ibid. p. 117. I have not been able to identify the man Idriess calls Oomagun. Jaalba, Nipper, Charcoal and Yuulbu were well known and easily identified. Bunggurt is also mentioned by Idriess, this is probably old Dutchie Bunggurt but I did not interview him. I suspect from Gudaworla’s information that Oomagun is Duncan who took refuge at Kurunjie station in the 1940s and is known as one of the three brothers who owned land around of Gibb river, Mount Barnett and Kurunjie stations, clan lands for people known as Biarrngungu.

73 Rose, ‘Nature and Gender in Outback Australia’.
hero. Although Idriess described the patrol’s and other white men’s actions as protective, patient and honourable, he also provided evidence that they were engaged in the process of breaking the ascendancy of the bush people in the far northern regions and imposing boundaries between bush and station which reinforced their control over a potential work force. Women were central to the process. While Idriess suggested that there were problems emerging in the 1930s over marriage arrangements, he focussed on the struggle between Aboriginal men over Aboriginal women, rather than recognising a wider and more significant manifestation of contact experience and the potential social and economic impact of a small number of white men. The following two chapters will provide the historical context for exploring why these men moved in the bush as so-called ‘outlaw bands’ in the 1930s. They will also explore the form of alliances between white men and Aboriginal people in the camps, and the conditions which preceded their sitting down at the stations setting the scene for their enduring suspicion of white people.
Chapter Two

The New Country 1903-1914

[W]e are dealing with a question which requires a very firm hand: the natives in these northern districts far outnumber the whites, and being for the most part wild, unreasoning creatures, it would lead to a great disaster should they once get the idea that they can overpower their employers. ...my work is mainly for the benefit and protection of these natives and not for any harsh repression, yet I consider that firmness exercised in a manner which they only understand will in the end be more to their benefit than a weak toleration of their lawlessness. (Henry Prinsep, Chief Protector of Aborigines, 1906)

This analysis of the beginnings of the station system in the north Kimberley focuses on the period before most of the informants were children. Maggie Gudaworla, Harry Howendon, Jack Jowan, Morndi Munro and Rosie Mamangulya were born at the end of this period but their stories were general rather than personal accounts of their own experiences. This chapter seeks to describe the historical circumstances which led to their parents’ survival and the nature of their initial relationships with white men who occupied their country. It focuses on the period between 1903 and 1909, when the people of the central ranges region north of the King Leopold Ranges experienced intense police activity associated with the first attempts to extend the boundaries of European pastoral occupation into that area. It draws on oral information about events and relationships with white men during the time before informants were born, but relies mostly on police records from the Isdell police post near Mount Barnett station, from its inception in 1903 to its closure in 1914. Police and trackers associated with this post patrolled or travelled through the region from Derby to Gibb River in the north, raiding camps, arresting people and removing many to gaols in Derby, Broome and Roebourne. The police at the Isdell post concentrated their activities on the area of land which surrounded the pastoral leases at Mount Hart, Mount House, Mount Barnett, Isdell River and Graces Knob. Their role was to assist white stockmen extend the boundaries of

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1 ARAD 1906, Henry Prinsep CPA, MS AADL.

2 PD1588 Special Item, ‘Isdell Police Station Journals 1903-1908’, BL.
European occupation in the Kimberley into ‘the new country north of the King Leopold Ranges’. At the same time as they dealt with indigenous people who were experiencing the initial problems of white occupation of their country, the police were also patrolling and safeguarding the older leases to the south, nearer the Napier Ranges.

Although, in this period, relationships between white men and Aboriginal people were circumscribed by matters of life and death, not everyone was in the same danger. Some people found protection from the exigencies of white occupation in their relationships with white stockmen and the police parties who assisted in the pacification process. They learnt the rules of occupation and managed to find a place which assured them of survival and laid the groundwork for their children’s incorporation into the station system. This is not to suggest that these relationships were based on mutual respect or complete unity of interest. The circumstances in which they were made and maintained involved instances of violence, coercion, social dislocation and fear. They became, however, more than loose associations between victims and aggressors. These white men also kept some people alive, introduced them to the world of work and occasionally fathered and maintained their children and members of their families. This complex dynamic between violence and protection formed the basis for paternalism, which developed as an enduring characteristic of station culture and life with a white Boss.

Ngarinyin country was subject to speculative leasing in the 1880s but not occupied by pastoralists and their cattle until after the turn of the century. On the southern fringes of Ngarinyin lands, pastoral occupation in the 1880s and 1890s followed the Robinson, Lennard and Fitzroy Rivers where Unggumi, Nyigina and Bunuba people resided. Police patrols went into the King Leopold Ranges during the 1890s chasing alleged thieves and cattle-killers. In 1892 police patrols near Mount Broome on the south side of the King Leopold Ranges officially killed six Aboriginal men in retaliation for the deaths of two miners. The last Aboriginal men executed in Western Australia were taken from the King Leopold Ranges after

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3 PD4987/1914, US to Col Sec, 7 August 1903.

extensive and determined patrols from 1897 to 1900.\textsuperscript{5} The conflicts between police and indigenous people would have had some impact on the people of the central lands, with groups or individuals moving into neighbouring country to exploit resources or evade conflicts. But these movements and interactions were not on the same scale for Ngarinyin people as those which occurred with the initiation of the Isdell police post in 1903.

Introduced diseases probably preceded the police post but Frank Hann, who explored the region in 1898 made no mention of illness amongst indigenous people. The police mentioned venereal disease or perhaps yaws in 1907 but not prior to that. Individual prospectors may also have moved close to the central ranges in their search for gold but they were, until after 1905, concentrated in the area of the Mount Broome gold fields on the southern boundary of Ngarinyin country, where Bunuba, Unggumi and Nyigina intersected on the south side of the King Leopold Ranges. After 1905 individual stockmen also prospected in the area as an adjunct to station work. Many of the white men who came into Ngarinyin country after the turn of the century came from leases in the earlier settled districts. They brought trackers or ‘private boys’ and Aboriginal women with them to assist their occupation. The pattern of moving with white men had already begun for these people. Their initial contacts and relationships with white men probably followed a similar pattern to that which emerged in the northern ranges and is the central theme of this chapter.

‘The country is too good to be idle’

In 1879, the ‘endless rugged zigzags of the cliffs’ forced Alexander Forrest’s exploration party to give up in ‘despair’ from entering Ngarinyin lands and moving across the ranges from Derby to the northern coastal regions.\textsuperscript{6} The party was approached by a group of about fifty armed men who left after being given some


flour and sugar, but on returning later that day were frightened off by gun shots at a tree. As the party moved along the southern edges of the King Leopold Ranges from Mount Matthew to Mount Hart, Forrest remarked on the beauty of the pools and waterfalls in the region, and of its occupation by Aboriginal people:

Native fires are very numerous about here, which shows that, although this country is entirely unsuited to Europeans, it is well adapted to the support of native existence, the natives in these high lands being in greater numbers than in the good lands below.  

The King Leopold Ranges continued as a barrier to further exploration until May 1898 when the adventurer Frank Hann travelled extensively through the area to explore, survey and report on its pastoral and mineral potential. Hann, together with two Aboriginal women and four Aboriginal men from Queensland or the Northern Territory, moved through the ranges country, starting at Derby and travelling north as far as Gibb and Charnley Rivers. He followed the course of the Hann, Gibb, Adcock, Barnett and Isdell Rivers, naming them and hills, creeks and mountains after friends, acquaintances, relatives and government officials. He named the Isdell River after his friend and benefactor James Isdell, who had rescued him from ruin the year before while prospecting in the Nullagine district.

During his exploration, Hann recorded numerous sightings and evidence of Aboriginal occupation of the region. From May through to August he noted an extensive array of tracks, camp sites and fires. At Mount Clifton, just north of the prospecting camps he saw more tracks than he had ever seen in his previous travels from the east Kimberley to the Pilbara. On the Isdell River near Isdell Gorge the

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8 F.S. Hann, Diary Transcript, Acc4308A Item HS26, vol. f, 9 September 1897-5 September 1898.

9 Hann, Diary Transcript, Acc4308A Item HS26, vol. f, p. 17. On the 31st December 1897, Hann experienced ‘loneliness and poverty’ in Nullagine, ‘out of food, refused credit’. Isdell’s support indebted Hann to him; ‘How am I going to pay him back ... He is a real white man.’ Isdell later joined the Aborigines Department and came through the northern ranges area in 1908 as travelling inspector. He was a vocal supporter of state intervention to prevent racial intercourse expressed in the 1905 Aborigines Act and then in carrying out the removals of women and children in the Kimberley.

10 Frank Hann, ‘Explorations in Western Australia’, Read to Royal Society of Queensland, 7 April 1900, Typescript BL, p. 11.
‘blacks were exceedingly numerous [sic], but whenever one of our party came into view they fled.’ On the Edkins Range north of the King Leopold Ranges and west of Graces Knob near where the police post was later situated, Hann was surprised by the density of the indigenous population. He noted ‘tracks and camps in every direction’, managing to take one group by surprise:

I got right onto them before they saw me, when they all bolted, some catching up their spears. I got some fine spear heads in that camp ... left a tomahawk and some other things in camp in place of the spear heads I had taken.

At the foot of Mount Caroline on the south side of the Phillips Ranges, near where Bob Muir’s dogging hut was when Idriess came through, he came across thirteen established graves. The next day he returned to camp to find his ‘boys’ using a skull for target practice. He and his party’s contacts with indigenous people were not friendly, nor could they be called a meeting of wary but peaceable strangers. Hann expected to be attacked and was ‘well armed’. He noted on several occasions shooting at groups of men who appeared on hill tops to watch the party. At a gorge near Mount Hart he noted:

The blacks were on the main range to our left and very cheeky. They thought they had us. I put a few shots over to them which blocked them for a time. We had to go through gorge. Had the blacks come on us there was no help for us as they could see us and we could not see them.

When on another occasion a ‘great number’ of people shook their spears and yelled at the party, he and his ‘boys’ fired several shots in their direction. At Mount Clifton nearer the prospectors camps and in company with several other white men from the Lennard River stations, indigenous people came toward them and Hann noted having ‘got one black-fellow’ despite the others having apparently run away. He did not elaborate on whether this was a hit or a capture or a male or female.

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11 Hann, ibid. p. 10.

12 Hann, ibid. p. 16.

13 Hann, Diary Transcript, Acc4308A Item HS26, vol. f, 12 June 1898.

14 Hann, ibid. 17 June 1898.
Capturing Aboriginal women was not unusual for Hann.\textsuperscript{15} The women who accompanied him in the north Kimberley also prospected for gold, cooked and hunted for food. Thanks to his Aboriginal assistants he had a constant supply of fish, ducks, kangaroo and possum as he moved from water hole to water hole in the cool season weather. During his travels in the north Kimberley, he 'hammered' one woman for undisclosed transgressions but did not increase the size of his group during the tour of the north. The captured man or woman may have given information and then been released, or moved off with the white men from the Lennard River stations.

Hann was excited about the pastoral prospects in the area north of the King Leopold Ranges. He commented that he

\begin{quote}
had no idea the country was so good. I never saw such a better watered creek in my life ... No one could believe there was such a good track and such good camps in the middle of the range. I never saw such a place or any one else, I believe.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

He took up a large lease in 1898 of 793,000 acres near Mount House, after drawing a sketch of the country and lodging a payment with Dr House the Derby Resident Magistrate and namesake for the new pastoral lease.\textsuperscript{17} The lease was transferred to Joe Blythe the same year. Further north of the King Leopold Ranges Hann again commented in glowing terms on the natural water courses and deep pools, good grazing land, the unusual pastures of box wood on the plains surrounding the Barnett, Gibb and Harris Rivers and useful stands of pine on the ranges. He came to the conclusion that although the people of the northern ranges were, in his opinion a 'better class of blacks' than those of Queensland, 'such country was much too good to be idle as a mere hunting ground for wild blacks...'.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{15} Hann, Diary Transcript, Acc4308A Item HS26, vol. a, 17 June 1995-17 July 1996, see entries for 14 July and 4 November 1895 and 7 and 27 March 1896. Hann was accused of stealing Aboriginal women from their husbands, 'Don't use force. Just Flog 'em' by Dryblower, *Kalgoorlie Sun* 19 July 1908.

\textsuperscript{16} Hann, Diary Transcript, Acc4308A Item HS26, vol. f, 10-11 June 1898.

\textsuperscript{17} Hann, ibid. 25 June 1898.

\textsuperscript{18} Hann, 'Explorations', 1900, p. 9.
Station workers and prospective lease holders for the northern country - Blythe, G. Calder and A. Rose who occupied leases on the south side of the King Leopold Ranges - made excursions into the northern ranges area after Hann, but did not move cattle there until 1903. The push to extend pastoral settlement 'over the ranges' received official support from the Western Australian government in 1901. In that year, F.S. Brockman led an exploration party from Wyndham to the west coast, passing through Mount Elizabeth and Mount Barnett. He recorded few contacts with indigenous people but noted evidence of occupation and some characteristics of Aboriginal life which were drawn from observations of cave paintings, camps, walking tracks and the belongings which were abandoned on the approach of the exploration party.

The extension of pastoral occupation across the King Leopolds from the turn of the century until 1920 did not result in the permanent homestead settlements of the Fitzroy and Ord River districts, nor port facilities at Napier Broome Bay as had been mooted in 1901. As Bolton noted, Brockman's report on the pastoral potential of the north Kimberley led to speculative leasing but not to 'settlement'. It involved small numbers of cattle, and groups of two or three white stockmen and their assistants and police and their Aboriginal assistants, living in bush camps and occupying pockets of land surrounded by high ranges. From 1903 to 1914, they moved around their leases and built and rebuilt huts at various locations, and moved from lease to lease as they changed hands.

The owners of the pastoral leases were predominantly companies which were extending their existing holdings to outstations in well-watered pockets of land further north enclosed by ranges and not in need of fencing; M.C. Davies and Sons, Joe Blythe and Sons, Rose Bros and J.A. Game. Felix Edgar formed a partnership with William Chalmers at Mount Hart and G. Calder’s name appeared

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20 F.S. Brockman, 'Report On Exploration Of The North-West Kimberley 1901', WAVP no. 2, 1902. Brockman's diaries for the north Kimberley exploration were missing from Battye Library. See also J.S. Battye (ed.) The History of the North West of Australia, Perth, V.K. Jones and co. 1915, pp. 53-54.

on maps as a lessee but his cattle belonged to James Rose or to Game. He took over Blythe’s Milliwindi station, the southern section of Mount House, in 1910. Most stockmen went to the new country to secure areas of land for pastoral purposes by settling the indigenous occupants. Owners like James Rose (recorded in police patrol reports as Major Rose because of his Boer War service) travelled regularly to their isolated bush holdings. Calder’s or Isdell pastoral camp was the most permanent and was often visited by police and groups of stockmen in the period from 1903 to 1910.

The first decade from 1903 was dominated by the pacification of indigenous people. The police and stockmen who came into the country in this period were on the periphery of pastoral settlement. They came with guns and few stores or items for exchange. They were preoccupied with reducing the capabilities of indigenous people to hinder or threaten pastoral occupation and eventually to surround themselves with a small group of specially selected workers, drawing on bush populations for seasonal and more intensive tasks such as mustering, fencing, building yards and creek crossings or clearing land.

**Police Protection and the Isdell police post**

The system of European justice operating in the Kimberleys after the turn of the century was, according to Peter Biskup, aimed at protecting settlers’ stock rather than protecting their lives.²² Biskup added that it was not a method of selecting or detaining employees but of ridding the districts of people regarded as a nuisance to pastoral settlement. Police would ‘arrest whole groups [of Aboriginal people] secure the men by neck-chains, and march them to the nearest magistrate or justice of the peace, who completed the formalities by sentencing all and sundry to two or three years’ imprisonment.’²³ This system of arrest was regarded as a more civilised version of justice than the earlier method of dispersals and summary punishment, in which the police and pastoralists attacked and sometimes injured or killed Aboriginal people who were attempting to escape. The violence implied by

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‘dispersal’ was greater than that of arrest and gaoling. Aboriginal people were at least being brought to trial rather than shot or punished on the spot; they were being ‘protected’ from summary justice and brought to trial for an officially designated offence. As Gill suggested however, the act of arresting alleged cattle killers, at least until 1905, was often violent and in itself punitive. Police were actively involved in pacification and selecting workers and had not separated their roles of protection and punishment by handing over people to the courts. They were sent by the government to protect settlers and their cattle in the region.

Gill found that the police records were not a complete record of the extent of the violence. The policy may have shifted from life-threatening conflicts but situations were often dangerous for Aboriginal people as armed police patrols surrounded and raided bush camps at dawn. Gill suggested that there was a tendency in the decade up to 1905 for police not to report instances when things ‘got out of control’ and ‘warning’ shots hit people. With the Roth Royal Commission in 1904 and a separate inquiry in 1905 into alleged abuses by police and trackers from the Isdell camp against Aboriginal people, the mode of arrest and accompanying violence came to light. In the northern ranges country, arrests were accompanied by punitive actions which, together with the system of arrest and gaoling laid the groundwork for people’s entry into the pastoral system. At the same time as arrests were being made to limit resistance and reduce competition for pastoral resources, the process of selecting workers was also under way. Biskup’s suggestion that there were distinctly separate phases of labour recruitment and the campaign against cattle killers underestimated the role of police in opening this new country in the north Kimberley by assisting with pacification and with labour. Furthermore, it underestimated the importance of women to police parties and stockmen. The police parties patrolled the bush and released some people to stockmen, many of them women.


In April 1902, Brockman's recommendations to reserve land for a prospective township at Camden Harbour were placed before the Minister for Lands. A month later pastoral lands in the hinterlands near Mount Elizabeth, the Gibb, Charnley and Hann Rivers were reopened for selection from July 1903. In 1902 the Police Commissioner reported that he had no need to increase costs of policing in the Kimberley because 'cattle killing' incidents were under control. In August 1903, he announced that 'police protection' would be provided for the new settlers because the land had only recently been explored and was isolated. The Police Commissioner was advised by the Kimberley police to send two parties to converge from east and south on the region. He refused to provide such a large force without extra funding. Walter Kingsmill, the Colonial Secretary convinced Cabinet to set aside £1,000 in the estimates for a police post to be situated at Graces Knob just south of the leases owned by Rose and Game. From that point the police would also patrol the 'new country' at Mount Hart, Mount House and further north around the Isdell, Gibb and Hann Rivers. Rose's stock were to arrive in the district by October and the police camp was required to be operating by that time to patrol the area to the north of the proposed station and assist with its occupation. The post was 300 miles from Derby and the police party had to transport all their provisions for an initial six month period.

Constable Jack Wilson, previously at Turkey Creek, was chosen to lead the party of three constables and four Aboriginal trackers. There is no record of why Wilson was recommended for the task or whether he volunteered. However, he had previously been stationed in the Halls Creek area where the Police Commissioner had reported that cattle killing was under control. Wilson proved to be an extremely determined operator who led a thorough campaign against Ngarinyin people, both as a policeman until 1905 and as a stockman at stations in the north until his death in 1939. He made a considerable amount of money out of ration fees for prisoners and trackers, and the extra pay for 'special duties' at a frontier posting in the east

26 DOLA4610/1902, vol. 01 acc 541, 20 April 1902. Copy of GG 9 May 1902.

27 Annual Report Police Department, WAVP no. 15, 1902.

28 Annual Report Police Department, WAVP no. 17, 1903-1904.

29 PD4987/1914, Isdell Police Station, U.S. to Col Sec, 7 August 1903.
Kimberley before taking up the Isdell post. Wilson became the subject of embarrassing allegations in two separate inquiries and had retired from the force by the end of 1905. But he did not leave the area. He became one of the white Bosses who was central to the incorporation of Ngarinyin informants into the pastoral industry and was 'the little iron man' in Idriess's *Over The Range*. His step daughter Daisy Beharrell (Angajit) was also an informant for this study and was Morndingali's first wife. Wilson's identity in oral discourse is as a stockman and white boss, not as a policeman. He was named along with other stockmen - Billy Skinner, Dick Sullivan, Jack Connaughton, Jack Dale, Jack Gallagher, Scotty Sadler and Jack Carey - who worked together to 'clear the country' of bush people from Mount Hart, Mount House, Isdell River and Mount Barnett after the police camp closed in 1914.

The Isdell police camp was initially staffed by Constables Wilson, Napier and Forbes, accompanied by four Aboriginal trackers, Onearra (Turkey Creek), Bobby (Fitzroy Crossing), Toby and Charley, who had worked with police at Derby and Fitzroy Crossing. While it is difficult to establish where the trackers came from prior to their association with police, oral testimonies record trackers in this period coming from Fitzroy Crossing and Turkey Creek into what was new country for them. According to written records, the trackers did not speak the language of the northern groups beyond the Phillips Ranges which was primarily Ngarinyin. Onearra, who was Wilson's assistant and the most notable of the trackers at Isdell,

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30 Roth, 'Royal Commission', p. 15; PD4987/1914, Isdell Police Station.


33 Daisy Angajit, in Morndi Munro (Mary Anne Jebb ed.) *Emerarra: A Man from Merarra*, Broome, Magabala Books, ch. 5.

34 Jack Dale pers. comm., Banjo Woorunmurray, NB4, p. 30; Mabel King, NB9, p. 71.

35 Maggie Gudaworla, NB11B, p. 32.
could communicate with people around Mount House and east toward the Fitzroy River.\textsuperscript{36} He probably spoke Bunuba and Kija.

Police were dependent on black trackers and often left patrol work to them while they waited at camps or with the horses if the country was accessible only by foot.\textsuperscript{37} The police records rarely show this complete reliance on the trackers, nor are they explicit about the extent to which trackers were left to their own resources while in pursuit of Aboriginal people or accompanying them to towns for court hearings. After 1905, trackers were not supposed to carry firearms but very often did. Their role in the pacification process was crucial to the success of police and stockmen’s attempts to subdue resistance and select potential workers. Their relationships with local people were complex. Sometimes it was clear that the trackers performed their tasks with deadly efficiency, tracking, chaining and pursuing people who tried to ran away. At other times it was apparent that trackers themselves ran away from police and were also brought back, along with the prisoners. They were also likely to be blamed by police if things went wrong.

By December 1903, when the police party arrived at Isdell station (variously called Calder’s, Isdell Downs, Graces Knob or Scented Knob) Calder had one hundred of Rose’s cattle on the river and reported that no Aboriginal people had visited the river frontage since he had arrived. The police camp was initially positioned only four miles from Calder’s but it was moved about ten miles north to the Manning River. This gave the police party easier access to the people and the country near Mount Barnett, where Dick Sullivan established a stockman’s camp late in 1904 for Rose Bros. W. Fitzgerald, an agricultural specialist who had accompanied Brockman in 1901, revisited the area with Crossland and Browne in 1905 to survey the leases at Mount House and further north to Gibb River and report on the region’s agricultural prospects. The government also offered a £300 reward to locate a cart access road through the ranges to the northern leases. Mick O’Connor was assisting the party as guide in the hope of receiving the reward.

\textsuperscript{36} Roth, ‘Royal Commission’, p. 89.

\textsuperscript{37} The role and craft of black trackers in the Kimberley is described in Jack Bohemia and William McGregor, \textit{Nyabayarri: Kimberley Tracker}, Canberra, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies Press, 1995.
Fitzgerald reported that 624,500 acres of good pastoral land were served by the Isdell River and its tributaries. He also said that on the Isdell itself there were 287,000 acres of cultivable land, adding that although 'most of the finest land North-east of the King Leopold Ranges is held under pastoral lease, it is to be regretted that with the exception of one or two lessees no effort has been made to stock it.'\(^{38}\) Despite this, Fitzgerald reported in 1905 that the 'troopers' at the police camp 'were kept busy by the blacks.'\(^{39}\) By 1909, the police reported that there were only about 100 cattle on the Mount Barnett lease, although the leases at Mount House and Mount Hart were well stocked.\(^{40}\) The small numbers of cattle which were driven over the ranges to the Isdell and Barnett Rivers and the immediate response of government to fund a police camp nearby, suggested that the initial exercise of stocking the country was cautious, if not experimental, even designed to provide only a small preliminary reason for pacification with police assistance and judicial support. Ngarinyin people paid a high price for the presence of a small number of cattle.

**Removing men and detaining women**

From 1904 to 1908, police and trackers from the Isdell camp captured, detained and escorted to Derby no less than 283 men and 50 witnesses (who were, in all except a few cases women). These are minimum figures taken from records which, for at least 1904 and part of 1905 were found to be lazily kept.\(^{41}\) The numbers included several instances of repeat arrests. Some people who were released after twelve months imprisonment were back in custody after only a few months in the bush. The lists of people arrested or removed for witness duties, or who were trackers, included names of people who were part of informants' genealogies and whose land affiliations were well known. Many were again mentioned by Idriess in the

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\(^{39}\) Fitzgerald, ibid. p. 21.

\(^{40}\) AD940/1908, James Isdell Travelling Inspector, Diary August-September 1908.

\(^{41}\) Troy, 'Report on Investigations into Isdell Police Post', 30 May 1905.
Plate 2 - Phillips Range men
Morndingali stated that the men in the above photograph were from Phillips Range and were, from left to right (with one man not discernible): Kuwalli Tommy, Barrun Jack, Mamundu, Kuntjilli, Ratjilla Rudlow, Tulawangu Walter, Tilyangu Spot. He also said the new cicatrice markings on one of the men showed that they were probably captured while on Law business. Barrun, Mamundu and Ratjilla are named in Chapter Three as members of the 'outlaw bands'.

*Morndi Munro, NB4 p.27, 30 July 1990.
1930s. For instance, Police Paddy or Wundigul, Weeda Munro’s father, was a tracker at the Isdell police station during this early period; Toolwonoor was arrested and gaoled from Isdell but returned to his country to become one of Idriess’s ‘outlaws’; Ludmurra was arrested and gaoled twice between 1904 and 1908 and became one of Idriess’s outlaw ‘generals’; and Bolva, a female witness for cattle killing, was again secured in the 1930s on one of the patrols referred to by Idriess.\(^4^2\) She was Weeda Munro’s sister. Several of the white men who came to the region after 1903 stayed to became Idriess’s informants and characters and early days Bosses.

The table below shows the intensity of the campaign to remove Aboriginal men from the region. Sentences were usually from three months to three years for cattle killing and for stealing offences. Not all arrests resulted in gaoling. In 1905 the Derby Resident Magistrate, Dr Wace, refused to charge eighteen prisoners because he believed there was insufficient evidence.\(^4^3\) Wace was a strong critic of the system of justice which operated in the north Kimberley. He labelled cattle killing trials a ‘farce’ and took a firm stance against several of the local white men and police whom he believed abused their authority.\(^4^4\) He was particularly critical of Constable Wilson and Calder (the latter was a Justice of the Peace in 1904) and the methods of arrest at the Isdell station.\(^4^5\) His efforts to protect Aboriginal women in the newly occupied north Kimberley resulted in the magistrate from Cue being directed by the Commissioner of Police in 1905 to inquire into the goings on at the

\(^{42}\) Although a detailed analysis of names and clan affiliation of all people listed by police was outside the parameters of this research, many of the names on the police lists were recognisable as familiar places in the northern landscape. Some people carried the same name. But most were not recognisable as living people. This may indicate that some of the people who were listed by police did not survive first contact to pass their names to descendants. Others are not recognisable because of mistakes or difficulties with the original transcription. Police developed their own orthography and relied on informants to name prisoners. Other names were not familiar to informants because they were not in fact names but mundane terms which had mistakenly been recorded as names. It is doubtful that police invented names and more likely that they simply made mistakes in naming.

\(^{43}\) PD 690/1906, PC Napier to CPA, 29 December 1905.

\(^{44}\) CSO 2973/1905, Wace to Under Secretary, 10 September 1905; see also Wace’s evidence to the Roth Royal Commission CSO 822/1908.

Isdell post and Wilson’s resignation from the force shortly afterwards. By the end of 1908 there were 92 Aboriginal men in Carnarvon, Broome and Wyndham gaols who had been arrested by Isdell police and successfully prosecuted for cattle killing.

Table 1 - Arrests from Isdell police station, 1904 -1908

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Prisoners</th>
<th>Witnesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>July</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sept</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>August</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sept</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>January</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>April</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dec</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May</td>
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<td></td>
<td>July</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nov/Dec</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March-Dec</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>283</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compiled from PD1588 Special Item ‘Isdell Police Station Journals 1903-1908’.

The social impact of the campaign of arrests and gaoling was significant. Police arrested and removed only men who could sustain the long walk to Derby and who were likely to offer resistance to the colonising enterprise. It severely reduced the numbers of men in bush communities, destabilising the economy and increasing women’s vulnerability and dependence on white men. After only three months in the district, the police noted coming across a group of one man and ‘several’ women who were moving north over the King Leopold Ranges to ‘avoid the


47 AD95/18, ‘Moola Bulla original file’, folios 80-82.
Fitzroy police.'\textsuperscript{48} The impact of the loss of men from the hunting communities was noted as early as November 1905 when a police party tracked and caught a group of four women and six children in the act of killing a cow:

They had broken the cow’s hind leg and had the beast down on the ground and were throwing stones on the cow’s head, the beast almost dead when the women saw me and they said me hungry fellow. There was no male natives with these women. They said the male natives belong [sic] to them was in gaol.\textsuperscript{49}

In 1906 the arrests increased and the incidence of women travelling alone or in groups with one or two men also increased. In March 1906 police noted that they had tracked a large group of men, women and children but on raiding the camp the next morning found eleven women and ‘some children’ who stated that the men were ‘frightened’ and went away during the night.\textsuperscript{50} In June the police noted that one man who had just returned from gaol was travelling with nine women and a group of children, while days later they caught up with another group with only two men, two boys and several women and children.\textsuperscript{51} In October they raided a camp of five men and twelve women. In November 1906 they raided a camp of three old men (‘too decrepit to walk’) and twenty-six women. Fifteen men who had been with the group had left three days earlier to evade police. They were tracked north to Charnley River and captured and gaol.\textsuperscript{52} In September 1907 a group of ‘several old women’ hunted alone, setting fire to the bush as they travelled to prevent the police from following them. Fires destroyed the feed for the horses, made tracking more difficult and conditions unpleasant and dangerous. They were an important form of resistance for indigenous people but they may have been out of season and unusually destructive. It was thus a desperate strategy. In 1907 fires were raging out of control across the district from Mount House to the Isdell River

\textsuperscript{48} PD1588 Special Item, ibid. PC Wilson 26 May 1905.

\textsuperscript{49} PD1588 Special Item, ibid. PC Forbes 10 November 1905.

\textsuperscript{50} PD1588 Special Item, ibid. PC Forbes 10 March 1906.

\textsuperscript{51} PD1588 Special Item, ibid. PC Forbes June 1906.

\textsuperscript{52} PD1588 Special Item, ibid. PC Napier November 1906. David Mowaljarlai and Wunambal men living at Mowanjum and Kalumburu retold stories of a large scale massacre on the Charnley River. This incident is likely to be part of that tradition.
and Mount Barnett. The police found six men hiding in the Isdell Gorge who had recently been released from prison.\textsuperscript{53}

In January 1905 the police called in at Dick Skinner’s camp which he had set up just north of the police camp on the Barnett lease owned by Rose. Skinner and his white assistant O’Malley had two Aboriginal women, Morbur and Woolinginna, in the camp. One of the women reported that a boy, about eight years old, had been lost in the bush and ‘eaten by bush blacks’.\textsuperscript{54} After three days travelling, the police party was ‘approached’ by two other women who said that the boy was travelling with them. According to evidence given by the boy, the woman at Skinner’s camp was his mother and had told him to stay away from the white man and travel with the bush people. She had led the boy away from Skinner’s camp, tracked the bush group, which consisted of three men and six women, and told him to join them. A month later, the police reported that the women from the bush group had joined Skinner’s camp and the boy had moved on with another group. Skinner asked the police to continue looking for the boy and force the women to leave as their presence in the camp would soon bring a larger group and ensuing ‘trouble’. The police escorted the women for three days then warned them not to go near white men’s camps.

The story of the boy being eaten by bush blacks was concocted by his mother to allow him to leave Skinner. Skinner and the police continued to hunt for the boy, travelling hundreds of miles in search of the ‘runaway’. Skinner lost control of this young boy but he eventually gathered a workforce around him. The early Isdell police records were seldom explicit about the degree to which control of children and women was contested and the fear in which the police were held by local Aboriginal people. Their record of the ‘approach’ of the bush women to inform the police party of the boy’s whereabouts was later recorded by Fitzgerald in 1905 as a raid involving Calder and police when ‘the men bolted up the trees while the women threw themselves flat on the ground, threw sand over their heads and

\textsuperscript{53} PD1588 Special Item, ibid. PC Forbes October 1907.

\textsuperscript{54} PD1588 Special Item, ibid. PC Napier January 1905.
howled like dingoes.'\textsuperscript{55} It was not the quiet approach and cordial exchange of information suggested by the police report of the incident, and although it could not be identified in oral testimony, it added to the culture of terror on the frontier.\textsuperscript{56}

The two women at Skinner's camp were drawn into a sphere of limited protection which distinguished them from bush people and decreased their chances of being dispersed, chased or taken to Derby as witnesses. Only four months before the police had dispersed the 'bush women' and heard evidence from Skinner's woman, Woolinginna, she was herself a bush woman (and apparently wanted her son to remain one.) Her association with Skinner was supported by police and the system of arrests. In May 1904, police journals record tracking a large group of men and women north of the Isdell police camp to Gibb River.\textsuperscript{57} The police recorded sighting tracks which indicated that a large group of Aboriginal people had herded cattle away from the river frontage and then split the cattle into two groups. After a dawn raid of the camp, the party 'secured' Woolinginna as witness to cattle killing and the man she travelled with, Carwell, as the alleged offender. She travelled first to Isdell police camp then to Derby to be witness against the man with whom she was travelling and was then escorted back to the Isdell camp. She then stayed with Skinner and tried to continue her son's contact with the small groups moving in the bush.

Separate patrols in May 1905 yielded women witnesses Nimbandi and Morbur, and several male prisoners. The witnesses travelled with the police party from May until August picking up other prisoners and walking to Derby. Throughout this time the police were drawing allowances for the women's rations. In late August on the return trip from Derby, the police recorded releasing the women to 'their tribe', who were known to be in the bush south of Calder's Isdell station.\textsuperscript{58} However, the

\textsuperscript{55} Fitzgerald, 'Diary of the Kimberley Trigonometrical Survey, 1905', p. 35.


\textsuperscript{57} 'PD1588 Special Item, 'Isthell Police Station Journals 1903-1908' BL, PC Wilson May 1904.

\textsuperscript{58} PD1588 Special Item, ibid. PC Wilson 26 August 1905.
women did not leave the police party as was suggested in the journal. They continued with the police, herding a group of goats which they had cared for since leaving Derby. According to the police, the women were ‘offered further food if they helped with the goats’ and they chose to stay.\textsuperscript{59} The next year Woolinginna was again recorded as living at Skinner’s and Morbur at Calder’s camp, accompanied by another woman. They had come in from the bush while in the custody of the police. Their choice was determined by the campaign of arrests, frightening dawn raids and the removal of men to gaols. Their association with police, trackers and white men in the region began in a climate of fear and sudden change. Women were not arrested for cattle killing but were removed for months at a time for witness duties. Their return to the bush and their families was not guaranteed.

In February 1905 Resident Magistrate Dr Wace assisted one of the women witnesses, Nimbandi, to make a formal complaint against the police and Calder, alleging instances of murder of prisoners and rape of female witnesses. Wace was irate that a man like Calder could be given the role and responsibilities of a Justice of the Peace.\textsuperscript{60} Roth’s 1904 inquiry had already resulted in embarrassing publicity about police actions in the Kimberley. He pointed out the absurd lack of protection afforded by the 1898 Aborigines Act which permitted an ‘outrageous’ state of affairs.\textsuperscript{61} In particular, Roth had utilised evidence given by Constable Wilson to conclude that police made a profit from their ration allowances for prisoners and witnesses which was shared out amongst station personnel, failed to supervise armed trackers, admitted that women witnesses and trackers may have had sexual intercourse while the women were in custody, gaoled children, intimidated witnesses and for much of the ranges district had no interpreter who could speak Ngarinyin.\textsuperscript{62} For the Isdell police it was a relatively easy and lucrative business to


\textsuperscript{60} Troy, ‘Report on Investigations into Isdell Police Post’, Nimbandi statement, 9 February 1905. See also Wace’s scathing comments in note form on the statement, that locking women’s hands to their neck chains ‘could have some advantages’.

\textsuperscript{61} Peter Biskup, \textit{Not Slaves Not Citizens}, p. 60; Roth, ‘Royal Commission’.

catch a group of prisoners and witnesses, travel with them for three weeks to gaol and then accompany the witnesses 300 miles back to the region. In four months in 1904, Constable Wilson was paid £192 for rationing prisoners and witnesses.63

The inquiry into Nimbandi’s allegations was undertaken by Patrick Troy, ex-policeman and current mining warden for Cue. Troy travelled to the region in May 1905, interviewed Nimbandi, the police and Wilson’s tracker Onearra, who was implicated. According to Gill, Troy’s inquiry was relatively unbiased and provided evidence of police ‘cooking’ their journals to enhance their allowance claims. It offered clear evidence of the potential for abuse and punishment by police or members of the police party.64 Roth’s evidence about Isdell police station and Constable Wilson, together with Nimbandi’s allegations and the Troy Inquiry provide an unusually comprehensive documentary picture of events in the region. Although Troy concluded that Nimbandi’s allegations of murder and rape were not proven, her statement was a rare officially-recorded complaint from an Aboriginal woman against police and white men’s practices in her country during the period of pacification.

Nimbandi’s allegations

Nimbandi began her statement in a similar way to informants for this study, by naming her ‘country’. She came from the Phillips Ranges and her ‘special place’ was also the centre of the violence, Ungadinda, the water hole at Manning Gorge where the Isdell Police camp was situated.65 Nimbandi was not a name which was remembered or given by informants. She was thought to be one of the sisters from Kupingarri country, near Mount Barnett, who first came to police and trackers. Nimbandi may have been a functional word taken as her name. Nim uminde means to remember or get back the thought.66 As a custodian for Ungadinda she had a

63 Roth, ‘Royal Commission’, p. 15.


right to know and speak for the country. She said that her first husband had been killed by sickness (singing) by Aboriginal men from Meda station. After her husband died she moved to live with his brother who was arrested and gaolled. They were travelling together when the police picked them up. She stated that Calder and Wilson had raided their camp and shot three young men who were trying to escape. That evening they were all chained to trees. Two of the police, Wilson and Forbes and one of the trackers, Onearra, sexually assaulted three of the women while they were chained. They received damper at night and kangaroo during the day. After raiding another camp, an old man was shot while he was lying on the ground on a piece of flattened bark. At each raid, several of the men escaped.

Nimbandi’s statement was made in Derby through an interpreter who, according to Troy, was unreliable, did not speak her language and suggested the answers. Troy set off without an interpreter. He picked up Duncan, a station worker at Balmaningarra (near the Napier Ranges renamed Kimberley Downs) who was recommended by the manager to act as interpreter. The area was not his country but he was believed to speak enough of the language for the purposes of the inquiry. Morndingali called Duncan his uncle and an Unggumi man. He may have spoken Ngarinyin from his mother’s side. He also became one of Idriess’s characters, playing a central role in the murder of an Aboriginal man from Graces Knob in 1919.67

Nimbandi led Troy to the Isdell police camp and surrounding region, and to the scenes of the alleged murders and rapes. Onearra, the accused tracker, accompanied them. At each site, Nimbandi attempted to act out the events which had occurred there. At one site about ten miles from the police camp, where Nimbandi showed him the paperbark on which an old man had been shot and killed, Troy found no traces of blood or a body. He concluded that as there was no body there was no evidence: ‘given the remoteness from whites it is improbable that any concealment of a body would have been thought necessary.’68 Troy found that while Nimbandi

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67 Ion L. Idriess, Nor’Westers, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1954, pp. 1-26; PD7551/1925; Munro, Emerarra.

contradicted herself during the Inquiry and her previous statements, the police and tracker Onearra all agreed on what had happened: no stockmen rode with them, no murders, beatings or rapes. They were further supported by A.E. Love who had been accompanied by Wilson and Onearra in 1904 to search the Gibb River and Mount Elizabeth area for a possible pastoral lease. Love testified that on that trip Wilson made it clear to him that he "was averse to dealing harshly with natives".\(^6^9\)

Troy indicated that he held doubts about the white men in the northern ranges and found Onearra's evidence fitted more accurately with the bush scenes of broken spears and scattered campsites than that given by Wilson. On his arrival at Calder's camp, Troy found that Mick O'Connor, one of Rose's stockmen from the Fitzroy valley had left Derby the day before him and arrived in a very short time to warn the others of Troy's imminent arrival. Calder, the Justice of the Peace, avoided contact. He was away from the camp on both of Troy's visits and made no attempt to give a statement. Two women, one of them Morbur, the witness from 1904 who was also allegedly raped while detained, were at his camp. They stated that their husbands were away in the bush, although Troy noted that their men were "being deprived of their conjugal rights".\(^7^0\) Presumably he believed they were detained for camp work with the white men. After a few days retracing the patrols and alleged incidents, all the trackers disappeared. Troy continued with Nimbandi as the tracker but without any means of communicating with her. He returned to Derby and within three months Constable Wilson resigned from the force. He became a prospector and itinerant worker for the various lessees and stockmen in the central ranges region, travelling with his Aboriginal wife, who was 'picked up' from her country at Mount Barnett during the period 1903-1914. She was Daisy Angajit's mother.\(^7^1\)

The month after the Troy Inquiry, patrol reports began to follow a new procedural format. They began 'After going into camp' and included details of alleged offenders 'freely admitting' to the offences, their being taken to the site of the


\(^7^0\) Troy, 'Report on Investigations into Isdell Police Post'.

\(^7^1\) Daisy Angajit in Munro, *Emerarra*, ch. 5.
offence and giving details of the stolen property in their possession. The names of owners of the stolen property were also given but there was no mention of brands. Considering the problems of surveying the country and the lack of fencing, it is unlikely that police knew where the boundaries were or whether beasts were inside one boundary or another, or on Vacant Crown Land. What they did know was that Aboriginal people tended to stay near waterholes and in inaccessible pockets of land. One of these was Harris Creek, which allowed access from the northern areas of Gibb River and Mount Barnett to the southern area of Mount House. Although it was a strategic place for hiding and moving between countries, Harris Creek turned up so often from the existing records as the site for cattle-killing offences and the site where bones and ground ovens were found that it suggested that the evidence was being recycled. On one occasion at Harris Creek, Constable Napier recorded that despite having no proof, he was ‘morally certain that it [the meat found in ground ovens] was the property of Rose Bros owners of Isdell Station.’ From 1905, white men who accompanied the police were recorded as showing the police where the offences occurred and naming the owners of the property. Their involvement in raids was not recorded but it was unlikely that they held back while the police party raided camps. Given the increasing numbers of arrests from 1906 to 1908, it seems that the police continued to write up patrols after arrests were made by trackers working without supervision, continued to misunderstand and frighten witnesses and continued to share profits from ration allowances. It was doubtful that the police significantly modified their methods of arrest but they did attempt to record standard procedures.

Conditions in the northern ranges were obviously not conducive to standard police procedures: it was a first contact situation in rough terrain and a well populated region. For the first year of white occupation there were only three white policemen and their four trackers, and four or five white stockmen and their Aboriginal assistants. The police travelled under the guidance of trackers who were new to the area. For numerous raids, they recorded escapes and their inability to follow tracks because of rain or inaccessible terrain. Although police and white men were armed

72 PD1588 Special Item, 'Isdell Police Station Journals 1903-1908' BL, PC Napier, 8 September 1905.
and had Aboriginal assistants, the local Aboriginal people were in their own extremely rugged country.

**Escalating tensions**

In the second year of European occupation, 1905, the numbers of white men, trackers and 'private boys' increased rapidly, and so did the recorded conflicts between them and local Aboriginal people. In 1905 while Troy was investigating Nimbandi's complaints, Crossland, Browne and Fitzgerald arrived to survey and explore the district. They occupied the region for four months, travelling with a group of eight white assistants and at least four Aboriginal assistants. Two Aboriginal women also travelled with their party to mind horses but they were not officially recognised as members of the group. Fitzgerald, who accompanied the survey party to report on the region's pastoral and agricultural prospects, noted the intensity of Aboriginal occupation indicated by walking pads around the country, smoke signals and evidence of rock paintings and old camp fires. He always carried a loaded revolver but recorded having to use it only once against Aboriginal people. In general, local people avoided contact but some groups watched the survey parties and travelled close by, while two small groups exchanged spearheads and information for tobacco.

Fitzgerald's description of relationships in the region showed the prevailing tensions in the area and the potential for loss of life. He did not approve of two of the white men in the region and reported that they gave statutory declarations about the ownership of cattle at a trial in Derby, intimating that there was something amiss. He described a clash between his colleague's party and an attacking group of Aboriginal people and another, previously cited, which involved Calder raiding a camp of Aboriginal men and women near the Charnley River, who ran and hid and were clearly terrified. He also recorded finding a stockman, Delaney, at Mount Barnett, 'scared' by a group of sixty Aboriginal men, women and children who had

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73 Fitzgerald, 'Diary of the Kimberley Trigonometrical Survey Expedition'.

74 Fitzgerald, 'Diary of the Kimberley Trigonometrical Survey Expedition', p. 35.
come toward his camp and then moved only a short distance away into the bush. In the Phillips Ranges, where the police had already been operating for over twelve months, Fitzgerald became separated from his party and was attacked. He described the incident:

...saw a number of native smoke signals on Phillips range which is opposite and these were shortly afterwards followed by the native “coo” from among the rocks close by me. As I was armed with a heavy service revolver, I examined this as guard against eventualities. Soon after this I saw two blacks stalking me each armed with three spears. The younger one evidently meant mischief and although there were numerous breaks in the cliffs through which I could have descended to the lower ground, there was a risk of being speared in attempting it. Ultimately came to where the cliffs gave way to a sharp slope and as the young black was about 60 yards behind me, and would evidently make a rush at me immediately I began to descend for the purpose of trying to score a hit, I decided on testing his intentions. I held up my hand for the purpose of proving I carried no arms. He replied by hissing and shaking a spear at me. ... My antagonist as I suspected, appeared about 3 yds from me with a spear shipped for my benefit, and appeared for the moment to be non-plussed at my disappearance. I at once fired at him, when he gave a yell and went down. He immediately jumped up and bolted, apparently shot through the shoulder. To my astonishment 9 other natives made their appearance but they were 100s of yds away.

The police at Isdell had only been permitted four trackers, who had all decamped during the Troy Inquiry. To bolster the police force at Isdell, Constable Napier followed Onearra and Toby, two of the ‘run away’ trackers, to a bush camp near Fitzroy Crossing, where he once again enlisted them. He wrote that they were ‘perfectly willing to return’. While in Fitzroy Crossing, Napier sent a telegram to his superiors asking for trackers from Roebourne to be sent to Isdell, possibly to overcome any likelihood of conflicts of interest for Kimberley trackers. Napier had been involved in the capture of Jandamarra in the 1890s when a Roebourne tracker proved more successful than trackers from the local area. Despite the trackers not speaking the language of the northern groups and having assisted with numerous raids and arrests, their allegiances and obligations would have been complex, dynamic and difficult for the police to comprehend. They were also taking wives from the area and extending their family networks. According to Napier, the trackers refused to go with him to ‘strange country’ without taking other men for

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75 Fitzgerald, ibid. p. 54.

‘company’, so three other men were hired as Napier’s ‘private boys’ and rationed from his allowance.\textsuperscript{77}

While Napier was in Fitzroy, Constable Forbes went south toward the older pastoral leases on the Lennard and Barker Rivers to enlist men who were known to the manager at Balmaningarra station - Munday, Peter and Paddy. Munday ran away within twelve hours. He was named by Idriess in the 1930s as a member of the outlaw group who refused to ‘settle’.\textsuperscript{78} The manager’s ‘private boy’ tracked Paddy into the bush and he was also enlisted.\textsuperscript{79} There was no written record of Paddy’s attributes in this early period, however he was involved as an assistant to several white men from this time, was suspected of killing a white man in 1916, gaol for killing two Aboriginal men in the 1920s and became one of Idriess’s main characters. Weeda Munro, his daughter, stated that he was a young man living in the bush when his brother who was ‘private boy’ for a teamster carrying stores to Balmaningarra Station, ‘picked him up’.\textsuperscript{80} Paddy, or Wundigul, was not always a great success for the police and his later Bosses, and after only a few months of service for the Isdell police, ‘ran away’ with a police revolver, leaving the police officer stranded in the bush.\textsuperscript{81} He returned but what he did with the revolver was not recorded. This was possibly the police attempting to cover up the fact that they allowed armed and lone trackers to wander the bush. Their marked nonchalance was out of character in comparison to their panicked response to later instances of bush people stealing or carrying weapons. The police had only limited control over a tracker like Paddy, who developed a fearsome reputation amongst his own people and whites.

The numbers of trackers and white men in the district had increased markedly by mid 1905. There were stockmen’s camps at the Isdell and Barnett sites which now

\textsuperscript{77} PD1588 Special Item, ‘Isdell Police Station Journals 1903-1908’ BL, Forbes 11 August 1905.

\textsuperscript{78} Idriess, \textit{Over The Range}, p. 69.

\textsuperscript{79} PD1588 Special Item, ‘Isdell Police Station Journals 1903-1908’ BL, PC Forbes, 16 June 1905.

\textsuperscript{80} Weeda Munro, NB12 pp. 15-16.

\textsuperscript{81} PD1588 Special Item, ‘Isdell Police Station Journals 1903-1908’ BL, PC Forbes, 6 July 1905.
included extra men to commence building stock yards. Seven trackers and three police worked from the Manning Gorge camp, located between the homestead huts. Crossland, Browne and Fitzgerald and their party of trackers, white assistants and Aboriginal women split into two to comb the area and survey it. Troy was also moving in the region, completing his investigations. In addition there were visiting parties of stockmen and ‘private boys’ from southern leases bringing stores and mail to the outcamps. The police camp was never attacked, but in 1905 Fitzgerald and the police recorded two instances of armed men stalking them. Fitzgerald shot his attacker but the police did not record shooting anyone. Constable Forbes had been warned by his trackers who intervened to save him;

...a party of male natives following my horse tracks towards my camp. These natives had their spears in their womeras ready to throw. The trackers then concealed themselves in the rocks and watched the bush natives until they were getting close to my camp and then seeing that the natives intended throwing the spears by the way they were acting and also heard them saying so, they then gave me the alarm by singing out. The bush natives then ran away. I only succeeded in catching two as the country was rough. All the others got away. What the police did record was a process of escalating tension and conflict between bush people and police which justified the police presence and the aggressive campaign of arrests. The records also provided evidence of neighbouring groups moving into the areas where white men and cattle were, to continue ceremonial practices and possibly to share some introduced foods and materials like tobacco, flour and pieces of cloth and glass.

The boundaries of protection and ownership between bush and station were beginning to emerge with women and children the first to be identified from the local groups as belonging to a particular white man or tracker. Police also began to distinguish between known and settled groups of Aboriginal people and groups or individuals who threatened the colonising project. The removal of even a few of the men and the control of one or two women had an immediate impact on a group’s capacity to maintain itself, physically and socially, but some people escaped and others became known to police and white men as non-threatening. Certain people


83 PD1588 Special Item, ‘Isdell Police Station Journals 1903-1908’ BL, File note PC Forbes, November 1905.
became familiar bush people, moving between bush and station. Their role, which developed later but was beginning in this period, was to look after cattle in the bush, keep them away from the ranges and boggy areas and protect them from other groups of Aboriginal people and eventually to provide a pool of labour when more than a core group of four or five workers were needed. Men and women who developed such a relationship with stockmen received, according to oral testimonies, occasional meat rations and some tobacco when they came into camp. Successful negotiations of this kind were made by senior men or women who were, according to informants, ‘Ernod’ or ‘Ngowerung’, leaders of clan groups who held the authority to make decisions of this kind. Examples of senior men negotiating with white stockmen so that they could stay in the bush and alive occurred in this early period at Mount Barnett and at other stations in the region from the 1920s to the 1940s, as land was occupied for pastoral purposes. In every case a woman and children from the group stayed with the white stockmen while the decision-maker continued his life in the bush. When police raided the bush camps, the stockmen identified their bush people and they were released from custody.

In September 1905 the police recorded a rare instance of not arresting six men and eight women who were camped in the region, near water being used by cattle. Nimbandi had been picked at this camp twelve months before and had given it as her country in her evidence to Troy. This group’s relationship to Nimbandi, Morbur and Woolinginna may have assisted in that process, as these women and others from the area continued to live with white men and trackers, increasing their range of skills including English language and their capacity to protect their own close relations. Constable Napier reported that

84 Morndi Munro, NB2, pp. 33-34; Billy King, Interview notes, 20 May 1992; Jack Jowan, Mick Jowelji, Tape (35) 5 March 1991; Wallace Midmee, NB9, pp. 71-72.


86 Billy King, Interview notes, 20 May 1992; Jack Jowan, Mick Jowelji, Tapes (35) and (36) 5 March 1991; Wallace Midmee, NB9, pp. 71-72; Campbell Allenbrae, Tape (12) 2 April 1996; Scotty Martin for Mount Elizabeth, NB6, pp. 56-57; Maggie Ghi, Susie Unungul, Rosie Mamangulya, with occasional translations and assistance by Jilgi Edwards, Tapes (43) and (44) 17 May 1992.
...all appeared to be very quiet and as I saw no stolen property in their possession I did not molest them. I don’t think they had been molesting stock in any way as there was a mob of Isdell cattle close by their camp that was very quiet and they appeared to have been there some time, they having strayed away from the Isdell Cattle Station.  

Local people’s relationship with police could also be influenced by the tracker’s ability to represent them. The trackers were in powerful positions. The Fitzroy trackers who assisted with the pacification process also became enmeshed in local obligations and relationships. They maintained wives from the region while they worked for the police. Some of the trackers used their power to remove competing husbands from the area, thus increasing the pressure on local social obligations and on women once their husbands returned from gaol. Alignment with trackers could enhance survival and increase chances of sharing the very limited supply of rations which could be transported across the ranges on packmules and horses. The women who cooked and washed for the police also looked after groups of old people who came into the camps because they were starving. They were given kangaroo and damper to supplement fish from nearby creeks.  

While small groups of people continued to occupy their country and were protected from police arrests and removal, young men were consistently identified by police parties and stockmen as potential antagonists and were not secure in the region. Their integration into pastoral work often began as children or young boys. The situation was extremely fragile. Despite the campaign of raids and arrests, many groups continued to move across the country to maintain significant ceremonial practices. These movements and gatherings challenged the new rules of co-existence with white men. The main concern in the police journals was expressed in military terminology, identifying indigenous groups combining to oppose them or adopting a strategic response like stealing guns and ammunition, destroying property, lighting fires to decrease police mobility or herding stock into remote and well hidden pockets of range country.

87 PD1588 Special Item, ‘Isdell Police Station Journals 1903-1908’ BL, PC Napier, 14 September 1905.


89 Evelyn Bidd, NB8, p. 95.
In September 1905 Constable Napier reported that he had been ‘distinctly’ informed by men he had recently arrested that ‘the natives from the Drysdale River country and from the Fitzroy were going to come and kill all the whites, then kill the horses then finish the cattle in this district.’

Police insecurity was magnified by the size of the groups gathering in the region and compounded by a robbery at Mount Hart camp in late 1905 when guns and ammunition were allegedly stolen. The police recorded finding at one site on the Barnett River a number of cow heads, large numbers of broken spears from the attack on the cattle and 22 ground ovens where there had been a feast. They attempted to follow the group north toward the Drysdale River but were cut off by fires which were lit by the group as they moved north.

A week later, the stockmen at Isdell station reported that a group of sixty men, not including women and children gathered near the Isdell outcamp. The police party of one Constable and five trackers surrounded and raided a camp in the area and reported finding a civilian coat, matches, tobacco and strips of blanket, which had been traded with them by people who had moved from Mount Hart station lease north toward the Isdell River outcamp. Eight men were arrested.

While escorting the prisoners to the Isdell police post, the patrol raided another camp;

A large number of natives were in the camp and a great number got away judging by the number of beds that I saw where natives had slept. I feel confident in saying that fully 80 male natives and more than that number of females had occupied the camp. The bush natives broke from the patrol party and got into the rocks and the trackers went in pursuit of them to try and turn them back where upon the bush natives turned on the trackers by holding their spears up and shaking them, also challenged the white man along with the trackers to come to the rocks and get them, as I had 8 natives arrested I was unable to accompany the trackers to try and make other arrests.

In the Phillips Ranges another group were ‘talked into’ coming into the police camp by Onearra who tracked the ranges with ‘private boys’ but without a Constable. Two men carried materials allegedly stolen from Brown’s Mount Hart camp: ‘a dark grey tweed coat, crepe shirt, 1/2 yard of print, wood chisel, about 1/2 lb of 4

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90 PD1588 Special Item, ibid. PC Napier, 24 September 1905.

91 PD1588 Special Item, ibid. PC Napier, September 1905.

92 PD1588 Special Item, ibid. PC Napier, September 1905.

93 PD1588 Special Item, ibid. PC Forbes, File note 26 November 1905.
inch tin nails, a piece of fencing wire'. They were arrested and gaol ed along with several other men who were also implicated in the robbery or who had received stolen property. The system of trading and exchanging knowledge and items across the country was expanding the numbers of people implicated in crimes against European property.

The police were aware of ceremonial gatherings in the region and on one occasion were apparently convinced there was no threat. In December 1905 and January 1906 the police continued to track groups of people across the region, arresting some and gathering information on the whereabouts of the stolen rifle, shotgun and two revolvers and ammunition. North of the Napier Ranges, the police party was notified of a 'strange' group of Aboriginal people thought to be from Mount Hart, occupying the northern end of the station lease. The camp was raided but nothing to associate them with the robbery was found in their belongings. The trackers, who had originally been picked up in that district informed the police that the group of about thirty men were from the north side of the King Leopold Ranges, toward the coast and 'that they were there at the invitation of Balmaningarra natives to take part in circumcising 6 native boys and as soon as the ceremony was over they were going back to their country over the range.' A site called Balmaningarra was a designated trading and exchange point in the Wunan system; the religious, social and legal imperative which connected the smaller groups across the north Kimberley. The men were on sacred business and were also senior affiliates of trackers Paddy and Peter, who accompanied the police on that raid. The men were released.

By February 1906 the guns and ammunition had still not been found. Corporal Buckland and Inspector McCarthy visited the region, and the police took on two extra 'private boys' as the four trackers and three private boys were found to be inadequate. One of the extra men, Coombool (pronounced Gumbil by informants)

94 PD1588 Special Item, ibid. PC Napier, 19 December 1905.

95 PD1588 Special Item, ibid. PC Napier, 3 February 1906.

96 Morndi Munro transcript of Balmaningarra story. Undated confidential transcript held by Gulingi Nganga Aboriginal Corporation, Derby.
was ‘secured’ for work after appearing in the records six months before as a prisoner arrested for cattle killing at Mount Barnett. Gumbil claimed a wife from the women at the police station - Nellie or Yuulut, who was tracker Paddy’s classificatory mother. This made Gumbil tracker Paddy’s classificatory father. He was now working with the police in his own country, accompanied by his son and wife. More camps were raided in March and April and possessions from Brown’s camp were found. Mick O’Connor, who had taken charge of Isdell station for Rose Brothers accompanied the police on the patrols. In one camp, to the north of Isdell police camp, the police found a ‘new rasp, 2 new horseshoes, some new fencing wire, a billy can, some pieces of cream shirt, piece of old dungaree pants, a piece of rope and a potato tin.’

The trackers now included individuals who could communicate with groups throughout their patrol area, and their recorded information on movements of individuals began to include destinations and names of men leading the groups. The police were informed that the weapons were in the possession of a group who were travelling north toward Charnley River. The chains were full, so no attempt was made to follow them. Seventeen prisoners were delivered to Derby and without the sympathetic Dr Wace to scrutinise the charges, all were convicted of cattle killing and given maximum sentences of three years with hard labour.

In June 1906 the police party raided and arrested men at a camp in the Packhorse range, a small range between the Isdell and Barnett Rivers. Amongst them was Telyon, labelled the ‘ring leader’, who informed them that he had stolen the gun and after using all the ammunition which he had carried away from the hut in a 50lb flour bag, had buried it. The other guns were supposedly with two separate groups led by men who were also labelled as ringleaders. One was Carwell, Skinner’s woman’s husband, who was now labelled an outlaw and moving outside the

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97 NB11B, p. 23 and Weeda Munro genealogy. Gumbil travelled with Constable Fletcher to Mount House and then to Mount Barnett as the bullock team driver with stores for the Isdell police station. Mordingi said Gumbil was a Nyigina speaking person who married a Ngarnyin woman. Morndi Munro, Jeffrey Jamieson, Freddy Marker, Tape (22) 31 July 1990.

98 PD1588 Special Item, ‘Istdell Police Station Journals 1903-1908’ BL, PC Napier, 2 March 1906.

99 PD2412/1906, McQueen RM Derby, 14 April 1906.
parameters of pastoral protection where his wife was. The female witness secured from this raid was Manuwarla (transcribed on different occasions as Menowella and Mandowalla in the records) who became tracker Paddy’s wife and mother to Weeda Munro.  

On the 20th of June, the police raided a camp in Manning Gorge consisting of one man just released from gaol and a number of women and children. On the 24th they moved north between the Barnett Gorge and Charnley River near Mount Elizabeth. There they surrounded and raided a large group of men, women and children. A loose page of the Isdell journal recorded the clash on the 24th of June 1906;

Native camp covered from 2 to 3 acres a large number of male and female natives when the natives saw the patrol party they made a general stampede most of male natives having spears, womerahs in their hands some had both spears and womerahs. They rushed to South where PC Johnson and tracker Toby were stationed and seeing the PC and tracker there, turned and rushed to other side where trackers Onearra and Paddy was. Here some of the natives threw spears just missing the trackers, some escaped others turned and ran towards where PC Forbes was on North side of camp where he was engaged handcuffing 2 natives together when one native who was running in his direction speared me in two places.

The page was torn off at this point, unlike any of the other pages. Perhaps because of the scrutiny afforded to the station, the records were changed and the section recording killings of Aboriginal people was destroyed. The following page stated that nine men were arrested. But a report in the Hedland Advocate entitled ‘Nigger Shooting’ stated that on the 24th of June 1906, Constables Forbes and Johnson were attacked while making arrests. Forbes was wounded in the chest and arms but reported shooting and killing his aggressor. In 1906, the shootings were part of a violent frontier but nevertheless not fully reported in the Aborigines Department Annual Report. In 1906 Chief Protector Henry Prinsep congratulated Constable Forbes for his patience while under attack but expressed his concern that 39 men had been gaol for three years for attacks on cattle at one isolated pastoral station. Although he agreed that ‘the crimes were committed in very wild country, where it

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100 PD1588 Special Item, ‘Isdell Police Station Journals 1903-1908’ BL, PC Forbes, Jnl 4 - 15 June 1906.

101 PD1588 Special Item, ibid. PC Napier, 24 June 1906.

102 Hedland Advocate, 4 August 1906.
is necessary to show the efficacy of British law to these untutored savages’, he believed it was time to consider feeding them beef at ration centres.\textsuperscript{103}

Raids on bush camps in the northern region in 1906 marked the violent culmination of months of escalating tension. They pointed to the potentially disastrous and certainly frightening consequences of resisting European occupation of the country. The potential for loss of life or injury was clear, and was carried into oral tradition as events that had occurred before informants were born. They stated that a massacre occurred at Manning Gorge when the police station was there and that a separate massacre of a large number of people occurred near the Charnley River.\textsuperscript{104} The details of names and places were not available for these specific events, although a story was told to me but not taped or noted, as I was driving, of a man called Nipper throwing a spear at Forbes which hit him in the chest but had no spear point. They were part of a generalised struggle between police and bush people. For instance, Phillip Krunmurra who was the son of Charcoal the ‘outlaw general’ and Maggie Ghi who was a child in the 1920s stated:

Phillip Krunmurra: Ungadinda from that old police station. Yeah. That time now. That policeman he was a bit rough too.

Maggie Ghi: Olden day policeman he been proper rough man because blackfella been rob longa policeman house, from a white fella. They didn’t lettem [white people] to come here. They didn’t let to come here anyway. They bin havem big fight, blackfella and whitefella long that country!\textsuperscript{105}

Krunmurra’s namesake Crowanmurra appeared on the police lists in 1906 as a male witness secured at Manning Gorge who had been amongst the group threatening to combine and kill the whites in the area. Indigenous resistance to white occupation is a constant theme in oral tradition.

Maggie Gudaworla and Harry Howendon were both born prior to 1914 near the Barnett station camp when the police camp was at Manning Creek. Howendon gave

\textsuperscript{103} ARAD1906, MS AADL.

\textsuperscript{104} David Mowaljarlai, Lawrie Uttamorrah and Wilfred Gunak from Mowanjum reserve told a story of a Charnley River massacre but it was not for the purposes of this research and I was not able to record it on tape or in note form.

\textsuperscript{105} Maggie Ghi, Phillip Krunmurra, Tape (29) 6 June 1995.
only a little information specific to the time of the police station when his father was incorporated into the station workforce:

Nother old police station been up to Nikol yard sitting on top the main river. Police station been there. Early days police station. All that way, gaol house [all the people] finish. I been little bugger when that police station [was at] Nikol yard. ...My father never tell me. He been Mount Barnett [station] all day. After when he been run away they always bringim back house, ‘til [I] was born.106

Gudaworla, whose namesake appeared on the police lists, described the police station era as a time when old people camped near the police and their trackers and received rations. Her mother was Woolinginna, also known as Maudie (pronounced by Gudaworla and other informants as Worlunyinna). She was Skinner’s first woman from the Barnett area. Her aunt was the cook at the police camp and a wife of a tracker. Gudaworla’s stories of the police station era emphasise the ration camp and old people starving in the bush. Billy King’s mother and sister were also at the Isdell police camp. His aunt lived with a tracker, Wunnarra, who may have been Onearra. She moved to Mount House station, where Billy King was born in about 1920 to another ex-policeman and stockman.

From late 1906 to early 1908, patrols of one or two policemen and six trackers ranged across the country from Isdell to the Fitzroy River, arresting men and securing witnesses who were camped at gorges and water holes, or hiding under cliff faces. Complaints were laid by stockmen and managers that cattle had been killed or chased on the leases. They assisted the patrols to identify the bones or ovens, some not used for months. On three occasions men were arrested for being in possession of ‘ornaments’ made from bullock tails which they stated had been given to them by other groups.107 The system of arrests included people who had received stolen property even though the owners of the property could not be identified. Arrests from Isdell police camp were responsible for 92 of the 229 Kimberley men in gaols at Roebourne, Carnarvon, Broome and Wyndham in 1908.

106 Harry Howendon, Tape (41) 15 April 1992.

107 PD1588 Special Item, ‘Isdell Police Station Journals 1903-1908’ BL, PC Wilson, 24 September 1905, PC Robinson, 9 October 1906, PC Forbes, 4 May 1907.
The Travelling ‘Protector’ and a change in policy

By late 1908 the practice of arresting and gaoling Aboriginal people for killing or eating stolen beef was estimated to cost £20,000 per year. The government began to question the system which protected remote, understaffed and understocked pastoral leases. It had also invested large amounts of the Departmental budget in a system of isolating diseased Aboriginal people in Lock Hospitals.\(^{108}\) There was at this time a shift in public attitude towards the need for greater government intervention, which included issues like public health and the increasing incidence of venereal disease amongst Aboriginal women. Science and the State were uniting in their ‘interest’ in Aboriginal people. In 1907 the Chief Protector, Henry Prinsep tried to argue that on the basis of new scientific knowledge that Aboriginal women who had a white child became infertile, there was a need for increased funding for the Aborigines Department and support for policies which prevented white men living with Aboriginal women, ‘in order to keep up the splendid supply of labour now available in the Northern region’.\(^{109}\)

The change in policy was also brought about by the adverse publicity from the Roth Inquiry in 1905, Troy in 1906 and Professor Klaatz in 1907, who claimed that Kimberley Aboriginal people ‘regarded every white person with dread’ and that ‘police officers were likened to dangerous animals’.\(^{110}\) The Canning Stock Route Inquiry in early 1908, and the police shootings of Major and two men and an Aboriginal woman in Major’s ‘gang’ in the Halls Creek area placed the government under further pressure to intervene and try to reduce conflict in the newly occupied ranges areas of the north, central and east Kimberley. The Colonial Secretary responded to calls from Kimberley residents for more police and tougher methods


\(^{109}\) ARAD 1907, MS AADL.

\(^{110}\) Prof Herman Klaatz, ‘Some Notes on Scientific Travel Amongst The Black Population of Tropical Australia 1904-1905, 1906’, Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, vol. 11, 1907, pp. 577-583. Klaatz’s report to the Australian Scientific Conference and his allegations against northern white men and police, were reproduced in London newspapers in 1907. (AD599/1907 Secretary of State Elgin to Governor Bedford, 26 June 1907.) The northern press reported that Klaatz had said that ‘police were paid by those interested to get as many blackfellows as possible, and they captured young women, ostensibly for purposes of evidence, but the real purpose everyone knew.’ Hedland Advocate, 12 January 1907.
like flogging and dispersal to farms in the south west to stop cattle killing by reminding pastoralists that there were already 27 police, 29 trackers and 107 horses working from Wyndham alone.111

In 1908 evidence was given during the Canning Stock Route Inquiry that surveyor Rudall had never heard of the practice of exchanging gifts with Aboriginal people for their assistance. His method was to run them down and force them to find water.112 Criticisms of the Western Australian government were made by Federal counterparts and questions were officially put by the British government about the Canning Stock Route Inquiry. In the same year Frank Hann, who utilised similar methods to Rudall to capture his assistants, found himself the subject of extreme public criticism and gruesome descriptions in the *Kalgoorlie Sun* about 'flogging' Aboriginal men in order to steal their wives.113

The government also changed its policy on arresting and gaoling alleged cattle killers, in an attempt to curtail the spiralling costs of rationing Aboriginal people who were arrested, gaol ed and increasingly moving into police ration camps or stations. In the Kimberley, Moola Bulla and Marndoc reserves were initiated to resolve problems of conflicting interest between Aboriginal people and pastoralists. In 1908 the travelling inspector, James Isdell was engaged to check Kimberley stations and ration camps to ensure that rationing was necessary and not open to fraudulent practices. At the same time, he was charged with the protective duties enshrined in the 1905 Aborigines Act: ensuring that employers of Aboriginal people had permits, that no abuses against them occurred, that Aboriginal women did not cohabit with non-Aboriginal men and that children fathered by white men were removed to missions.114

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111 *Hedland Advocate*, 12 August 1908, p. 3.

112 *Hedland Advocate*, 25 January 1908, p. 3.

113 'Don't use force. Just Flog 'em' by Dryblower, *Kalgoorlie Sun* 19 July 1908. The verse was directed at Frank Hann. The *Kalgoorlie Sun* 11 April 1909 verse is entitled 'Frank Hann-Guish' which described tales of beheading corpses for a museum bounty.

James Isdell’s report on the northern stations showed that by 1908 white men at Mount Hart, Mount House, Isdell, Barnett and Graces Knob leases had permits for a small workforce, usually of one or two ‘private boys’, three men and three women from the area, one or two boys under sixteen and camps of old people and young children. These were the core group who stayed near white men with occasional visits to the bush. White men lived in huts of bark and stamped earth built by Aboriginal people. At Mount Barnett, there were large numbers of old people and children living in a nearby camp. They were unable to survive in the bush because their male relations were either in gaol or had left the area. There the old people survived on fish and the occasional ‘hand out’ of bones, offal and kangaroo. Isdell suggested that the government should provide rations for the old people by paying the manager, Mick O’Connor, for beef. Any other rations like flour, tea or tobacco could not be supplied as the managers would not transport them the long distances from Derby for the use of Aboriginal people. Isdell reported that he saw no ‘half-caste’ girls at the station homesteads and those people who were working under permit were ‘fat and happy’. His inspection of the stations north of the King Leopold Ranges was not repeated by an officer of the Aborigines Department until 1950.

Isdell reported that in the Mount Barnett and Isdell River area there were few young men left on the stations, and that of the few who moved in the area and were not attached to stations very few had not spent some time in gaol. The system of punishing cattle killers was not working. In fact, he suggested that Aboriginal men in this region were ‘very bad and treacherous’ and that they enjoyed their stay in gaol, even asking him if their wives and children could accompany them. In the context of the women being left alone and subject to other groups, individual whites and police trackers or starvation, gaoling may have assisted some Ngarinyin people to survive despite the dislocation and absence from their country and extended families. Isdell also warned that Aboriginal women would soon replace men as cattle-killers and that the idea of gaoling women would cause embarrassment to the government. He wrote:

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115 AD940/1908, James Isdell Diary, August-September 1908.

116 ibid.
In a few years we will have the unusual spectacle of the women doing the cattle-killing, and the men sitting in camp waiting for their bit of steak. If a mob of women are arrested, brought in on the chain, tried and sentenced to a term of imprisonment, how they will have to be dealt with will be a difficult problem for any future Government to decide; and the general public are sure to take a big hand in it.\textsuperscript{117}

Although costs were primarily responsible for the change in government arrest policies, issues of protection and the destructive impact of colonisation were also canvassed in reports and debates which led to the setting up of reserves for Aboriginal people living in remote regions. In July 1909, Isdell warned the Colonial Secretary and the Chief Protector of Aborigines that in some areas, particularly the east Kimberley, the environment and people’s access to resources had altered so drastically that they needed beef to survive.\textsuperscript{118} Simply reserving land for their use would not provide enough meat to keep them there. His suggestion for the formation of a government-run Aboriginal pastoral station between Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek was accepted, and in 1910 Moola Bulla was established and expected to accommodate up to 1,000 people. The Chief Protector was instructed by the Colonial Secretary not to have uniformed police on the reserve as ‘a uniformed policeman, in the eyes of the natives, is the greatest enemy he has, and the less we have to do with uniforms the better it will be for all concerned.’\textsuperscript{119} He was also told not to forget the value of handing out tobacco as an incentive to stay near the ration depot and to break bush people’s spears if they continued to kill cattle. He believed the Moola Bulla reserve would attract people from outlying areas and therefore assist pastoral occupation further north. Chief Protector Gale also tried, with little success, to find an overseer who could work with Aboriginal people but who did not have the ‘habit too common amongst stockmen in these parts of abusing natives and calling them names’.\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{117} ARAD 1909, MS AADL.

\textsuperscript{118} AD95/1918, Isdell to CPA 31 July 1909.

\textsuperscript{119} AD95/1918, Col Sec to CPA 1909.

\textsuperscript{120} AD 359/1910, Isdell to CPA 19 May 1910.
In 1911, the one million acre Marndoc reserve on the north east coast was also established as a reservation where Aboriginal people would be protected from contact with white people and where they would not need rations. A Benedictine mission (1908) at the mouth of the Drysdale River and a Presbyterian mission (1912) at Kunmunya on the north west coast were also established in this period. Moola Bulla and Marndoc were long distances from the central ranges and provided an alternative means of survival only for people who were on the fringes of Ngarinyin country. The missions were also peripheral to interactions and relationships with white men in this very early period.

The impact of changing policies on police practices was first evident in the northern ranges in 1909, when the Isdell police followed up a report from Billy Skinner that hundreds of Aboriginal people were gathering on the Mount Barnett lease between the Manning, Barnett and Hann Rivers. Skinner was one of the first stockmen on the Barnett River and was reportedly living with Woolinginna from at least 1905. When the police investigated Skinner’s complaints in 1909, they found camps, ovens, broken spears, half eaten calves and dead cows distributed over a wide area ‘right out in the open, in the middle of the cattle run’.\textsuperscript{121} At Bella Creek, which runs into the Hann River the wire stockyard was destroyed when all the wires from 63 panels were removed and had consequently fallen to the ground. Heavy stockyard wire was in demand for spear making. It was expensive and difficult to replace because it had to be packed out on horseback from the towns and through the Fitzroy stations also owned by Rose Bros. Toward Hann Gorge and Mount Elizabeth the police found an area of broken trees and tracks where animals had bogged and been speared, and ‘under a shady tree, there were sticks placed across two rails making a table on which the beef had been laid.’\textsuperscript{122} This site was where Skinner and his assistants had ‘come onto’ the group and scattered them while riding the boundaries of the Barnett lease.

The police confirmed Skinner’s report that there were at least one hundred people involved in the feasting and destruction of the stockyards. They tracked and raided

\textsuperscript{121} PD1289/1910, PC Forbes Jnl, 16-24 December 1909.

\textsuperscript{122} PD1289/1910, PC Forbes Jnl, 17 December 1909.
various groups of old people and women who said they were meeting for a corroboree on top of Manning Gorge not far from the police camp, but found only small numbers of men. The Barnett station bush people, who were supposedly no longer a threat to pastoral occupation, had joined with visiting bush people from the north and helped to kill cattle and destroy the yards. The police made no arrests on any of the raids because of ‘lack of evidence’. In 1910 another incident went without any arrests, despite the police, who were accompanied by Mick O’Connor, finding ‘15 cattle tails, fencing wire cut into pieces and made into spears.’ They were apparently outnumbered by ‘a number of male natives coming towards [them] with spears, in open order and appeared to be sneaking into our camp...’. The same patrol reported that there was a good area of 10,000 acres which could be used for an Aboriginal reserve and that the pastoral leases near Mount Barnett, Mount Elizabeth and Gibb River which had been owned by Rose Bros. held less than 100 wild and frightened cattle.

In February 1910 Bobby Brown, the overseer for Felix Edgar at Mount Hart, reported that he was in danger of being forced off the station by Aboriginal people. The incident was reported in the *Hedland Advocate* under the heading ‘Natives Take Possession at Mt Hart’:

> Natives have taken possession of the station, and the cattle have all gone. One hundred natives at the old yard, Barker River; over thirty showed fight; broke a number of their spears. Cattle must be brought away or natives shot.\(^{124}\)

The article stated that ‘feeling was strong’ in Derby that police needed to provide better protection or pastoralists would abandon their stations. But the police were changing their practices. They refused to muster an official party to respond to the alleged cattle killing, arguing instead that Brown was known to be ‘excitable’, that the police did not believe cattle killing actually took place and that the station was insufficiently manned by white men to deserve police protection.\(^{125}\) Government inquiries into allegations of incorrect arrest and gaoling procedures, and fraudulent

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\(^{123}\) PD1290/1910, PC Forbes jnl, 10-17 January 1910.

\(^{124}\) *Hedland Advocate*, 26 February 1910, p. 5.

\(^{125}\) PD738/1924, Derby Police Letterbook 1910-1913, 28 March 1910.
rationing claims were under way by late 1910. This was reported in the northern press and followed up in 1911 with a story about Brodie, the 'honest' Derby policeman who helped to release alleged cattle killers from prison, and threats to publish embarrassing details about ration profits being shared around the Kimberley by store keepers and police.

The push to open the country through an intense campaign of arrests gradually receded with no further arrests for cattle killing in that district between mid-1910 and 1915. This term coincided with C.F. Gale's period as Chief Protector of Aborigines. Gale was an ex-northern pastoralist who tackled the issue of the government subsidising station ration costs as well as the system of arresting cattle killers. He also instructed police to arrest only the ring leaders in cattle killing cases

...instead of arresting all and sundry natives who happened to be eating some of the beast killed by their comrades. The whole party were generally convicted on the admission of their guilt; an easy enough matter to obtain from practically uncivilised natives. The following year Gale reported that the numbers of arrests for cattle killing had decreased by 197. In response to government rations being withdrawn on stations, some managers in the Murchison, Gascoyne and Pilbara refused to ration old people on their stations, taking limited responsibility for only young workers. Gale wrote to all pastoralists employing Aboriginal labour to enlist their support to ration old Aboriginal people on their leases. He reported in 1910 that he hoped for assistance, especially from those who

having borne the heat and burden of the early pioneering days, assisted mostly by native labour, realise their obligations to those natives who have grown too old for further service, and who are the parents or relatives of the younger employees, by providing them with the necessaries of life at their own expense.

In the Kimberley, Moola Bulla and Marnodc reserves were initiated to resolve problems of conflicting interest between Aboriginal people and pastoralists. Ration

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126 *Hedland Advocate*, 13 August 1910.

127 *Hedland Advocate*, 5 August 1911; AD 359/1910, Isdell to CPA, 19 May 1910.

128 ARAD 1909, MS AADL.

129 ARAD 1910, MS AADL.
costs were cut by half in 1910 and they became the subject of ongoing tensions between the government and pastoralists for the next 50 years.

In 1911 the Aborigines Act of 1905 was amended to lessen the likelihood that Aboriginal people would be gaolled for cattle killing and to provide legislative support for greater government intervention in Aboriginal people's lives. They could no longer provide evidence of their own guilt, and owners of the stolen cattle or those laying the complaint were required to appear in court. The per head ration allowance was also withdrawn and replaced by a system of prepaid stores, thus removing the profit incentive. By 1912 there were only three men left in prison who had been convicted of cattle killing offences. Chief Protector Gale suggested that a permanent solution to the problem could be found by deporting the ring leaders' wives and families from the regions, thus eliminating future resistance by 'breaking up' the groups. The First World War intervened and Gale was sacked in 1915. The idea of detaining wives to control the whole group became an important part of local relationships between European Bosses and Aboriginal people, and is a theme of the next chapter.

Between 1910 and 1914, the Isdell police post was an unofficial ration camp where old people received blankets, flour and kangaroo meat, while younger relations worked on nearby stations. Police also provided medicines to some of the men and women who were reportedly suffering from venereal disease. A small number, about 15 people from the Isdell camp who were suspected of carrying venereal disease, were sent to Derby and then on to island hospitals off the coast of Carnarvon a thousand kilometres south.

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130 ARAD 1912, MS AADL.

131 AD1782/1914, PC Forbes to CPA, 30 June 1914.


Finances for extending settlement within Australia came under further pressure with the beginning of the First World War. From 1914 police were instructed to again cut costs by limiting their use of trackers and ammunition. Superiors in Perth were warned that police would not want to patrol with only one tracker and they would not move across the ranges alone. The police station at Isdell was closed, as were the police outcamps throughout the Kimberley, the system of supporting pastoral settlement shifting to occasional patrols from Derby, Fitzroy Crossing and Turkey Creek. At the time of the closure of the Isdell post, only four leases north of the King Leopold Ranges were occupied and only one, Glenroy, had an owner residing on it, ex-policeman Spong, who had engaged Jandamarra in clashes during the 1890s. Isdell Downs was ‘about to close’ and Mount Barnett was ‘soon to follow suit’ due to the poor condition of the soil and grasses. According to the police report which led to the closure of Isdell police camp, the local Aboriginal people still speared a few cattle but were no longer ‘wild’ and a threat to white men’s lives as they had been in 1903. They had also suffered from an epidemic of malaria and widespread venereal disease. In 1916 the new Chief Protector of Aborigines, A.O. Neville, tried to have the police station re-opened as part of his plan to establish a chain of ration depots across the Kimberley. Cattle killing reports continued in the Isdell region. But the Commissioner of Police did not want to commit his troops to the task and told Chief Protector Neville that he should ‘open a ration station not a police station’; he was not going to direct his men to feed and administer medicines to Aboriginal people. Neville did not open a ration station in the northern ranges, nor did he have protectors other than the occasional police patrols to report on the region.

134 The police camp north of Broome continued.

135 PD4987/1914, Sub-Inspector Houlahan to CoP, 21 September 1914. Spong reportedly walked into the bush in 1916 and was found dead by his Aboriginal assistants, *Hedland Advocate*, 30 September 1909.

136 PD4987/1914, Sub Inspector Houlahan to CoP, 21 September 1914.

137 AD1782/1914, PC Forbes to CPA, 30 June 1914. *Venereal* would have included yaws and leprosy.

The First World War depleted the Kimberley of white stockmen, and several of the younger men who had occupied the northern leases when Rose, Blythe and Game owned them, joined the armed services.\footnote{Bolton, ‘The Kimberley Pastoral Industry’, p. 31.} The pastoral stations continued to be occupied by even smaller numbers of white men, who surrounded themselves with Aboriginal workers and enforced their own form of justice and discipline. Biskup suggested that by ‘about the beginning of the First World War’, the northern ranges leases were ‘settled’.\footnote{Biskup, Not Slaves Not Citizens, p. 32.} This accords with the police rationale for closing the Isdell post. Oral testimony, together with police patrol journals and incident reports after 1914 suggest that the closure of the police camp ended the official campaign of arrests for cattle killing but did not significantly alter the climate of fear and potential for violent clashes between stockmen and indigenous people. Struggles over the control of women and workers resulted in continued conflict and occasional deaths for at least a decade after the police camp closed.
Chapter Three

‘Stone blind in their need of Christ’: finding a Boss in the early days’, 1915 - 1930

After the police closed the Isdell post in 1914 the campaign of gaoling and dispersing large groups of unknown bush people dissipated. It was replaced by a more discriminating process of reward of individuals and small groups who were allied to a white Boss and punishment of those who refused or failed to acquiesce to white men’s requirements. From 1915 to the early 1930s, stockmen and managers in the central and northern ranges were assisted by occasional police patrols, with peaks in official activity in 1916 and 1922 after white men were murdered and police made extensive and co-ordinated raids on bush camps over a wide area.¹ Patrols on the coast near Drysdale mission in 1920 and to Kunmunya mission and north to Cape Voltaire in 1921 were also made in response to alleged murders of white men, although bodies were never found.² For most of the time white stockmen were responsible for occupying and settling the region without continuous police assistance or scrutiny into the methods they used. Fred Russ, whose father settled Gibb River station, remembered the early days as a time when ‘You were a law unto yourself up there. The police wouldn’t have cared.’³

From 1919 to 1925, cattle-killing incidents continued to be reported in the north and central Kimberley, resulting in arrests and gaoling of about 90 Aboriginal men from 1919 to 1922.⁴ A severe drought in 1924 was followed by the massacres at Forrest River in 1926.⁵ Chief Protector Neville responded to the situation in the north

¹ PD1193/1916, Murder of George Aukland; PD7410/1915, Aukland Murder; PD7871/1921, Murder of Harry Annear.

² PD8466/1920, Murder of Bass and Smith; Ulbrick and Renland (Russian Jack) Reported in the Norwest Echo 6 November and 10 December 1920.


⁴ ARADs 1919-1921, MS AADL.

Kimberley by establishing the Munja government ration station on the coast in 1926 to prevent Aboriginal people moving onto pastoral stations were they threatened white men and their cattle. The role of the police changed from arresting large groups of Aboriginal men to dispersing them from leases, destroying dogs and spears, and arresting leaders or individual ‘trouble makers’. Some of the nomad whites found themselves outside the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and in conflict with police, who occasionally enforced the ‘protective’ clauses of the Aborigines Act against their interests. In general, relationships between white men and Aboriginal people remained extremely fragile, with conflict over Aboriginal women increasing. The result was that on a number of occasions the killing of a white man precipitated government intervention in the form of raiding parties to ‘resolve’ the conflict.

Violence and the threat of it continued to circumscribe relationships between Aboriginal people and white men, but greater familiarity and experience led to increasing security for the small numbers of people who were able to work, share land, women and children, and assist white men with other Aboriginal groups. This pattern did not apply evenly to the region over the Leopold ranges, and some individuals and groups found themselves outside the managers’ protection, despite having assisted them earlier. For them it was a return to chaos. In the north, beyond the King Leopold and Phillips ranges, another phase of pastoral expansion in the early 1920s brought renewed violence and dislocation to the region.

The lateness of this expansionary exercise meant that older informants experienced it and could provide detailed accounts of the process of accommodation which occurred. Their narratives, together with written sources, show that the peaks of official police activity evident in written records were accompanied by a localised process of accommodation which had a significant impact on their chances of survival. They also show that white men’s behaviour, regardless of whether they were settling new country or not, was unpredictable. Finding a good and reliable Boss was a difficult and risky process. Only a few stations in the northern region developed in this period into large homestead camps, with the material trappings of a successful pastoral enterprise and a highly structured, work-based regime. The majority of Ngarinyin people experienced a protracted period of instability, which intensified from about 1919 through the 1920s as white stockmen struggled to
establish their own pastoral leases in marginal and isolated country around Mount Barnett, Gibb River, Mount House and east to Tableland station. By the early 1930s, many of them had failed to develop a station and turned to peanut crops, prospecting, selling dingo scalps, sandalwooding, contract droving or labouring for the few stations in the region which offered remuneration for work. By the mid 1930s when Idriess travelled in the region, the manager at Munja ration station on the coast described the area north of the King Leopold Ranges as the 'underworld of the Kimberleys', while missionary visitors more kindly described the white occupants as 'stone blind in their need of Christ'.

The period from 1915 to the early 1930s is referred to in contemporary Ngarinyin discourse as part of the 'early days', when informants and their families were 'getting used to' white men and forming their first relationships with a white Boss. Within the early days stories there is a sub-set of narratives and biographical information which revolve around the actions and impact of a white man called Jack Carey, who worked on the pastoral leases north of the Leopold ranges from 1915 to 1929. Although Carey was rarely mentioned in official records and was completely absent from Idriess's account of the white men of the northern ranges,

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6 AD237/1935, Reid to CPA, 31 May 1935.

7 AD195/1929, Extract United Aborigines Mission Messenger 1 September 1935.

8 This is not the late Jack Carey of Halls Creek. According to available written sources, William John (Jack) Carey was a young stockman in the north Kimberley in 1915 and a pastoral lease holder at Gibb River station from 1922. He was born in 1892. He was declared unfit for the armed services, because of malaria, when he attempted to enlist in August 1918 aged 26 (DOLA acc1384 an 3/9, 3944/1920). The Nor'West Echo reported on 22 August 1925 that Jack Carey had an accident in a motor vehicle on the way to Halls Creek. Fred Merry took over at Mount Barnett in 1925. Carey left the Kimberley around 1929. Research into probate, births, deaths and marriages showed that Alexander Campbell Carey known as 'Jack' was a pearler and Kimberley station owner who died in 1913 and left everything to his brothers, Stewart Roy and Harry Edward (Henry). Harry bought four pastoral leases in the Kimberley in 1913 on his and younger brother's behalf (Probate file 278/13 vol. 20 no. 3436). Harry joined the Light Horse and was injured at Gallipoli.
which included men with whom Carey lived and worked, his activities were firmly entrenched in oral history:

Not too many gardias like Jack Carey. [He] been a bad man, proper bad man. No gardia been like him. I don’t know about Ned Kelly but Jack Carey we know. ... I know that man I seen that man. ...Police never try to caught him. I don’t know how come. He must have his own Law. He done that all the way down, cutting man ankle, cutting man shoulder, chuck a salt on the people, made’m crawl around taking all the pain. Died there. Put a chain around them and chase’m in the water. Make’m swim and killem. That what he done. All that story about Jack Carey. That story is all around the place, I tell you, all around you can hear that Jack Carey, big story. ... Only bloke can beat him, that Ngulit.

Within oral tradition, Carey was a significant historical figure because of his immediate impact on some on the informants and because he was representative of the worst aspects of relationships between indigenous people and early days white men. In a clan-based contact history, Jack Carey stands apart from other early days whites as a significant individual whose actions were directly linked to the dispersal and near-extinction of the primary custodians of land near Gibb River, Mount Elizabeth and Mount Barnett. Carey the white man killed, maimed, threatened and ‘cleared out’ the area. But he was not alone. The narratives include information about other people, black and white, who lived and worked with him and who came into conflict with him. They contain a range of detailed information about small groups’ attempts to negotiate with white men and with each other. They also extend into the realm of magical interactions between the clan’s ‘wish man’ or banmun, Ngulit and Jack Carey, police and trackers.

The stories of resistance and trickery through magic are perhaps the most important aspect of the narratives for the informants. People grew intensely interested and animated when their banmun, Ngulit and his activities were mentioned, suggesting that Ngulit rather than Jack Carey is the most significant actor in their history. As a

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10 Mordni Munro, Tape (11) 1 April 1990.
representative of the deepest aspects of Ngarinyin Law, he can never be defeated
and his death in the Derby leprosarium in 1944 was 'not really him'.\textsuperscript{11} Many of
Ngulit's extraordinary feats and accomplishments refer to a realm of interactions
and responses which inform this research but lie outside its analytical scope. What
is important is the detail of responses and interactions and Carey's representation in
the narratives as having broken the emergent rules of confrontation and negotiation
of the early days. His status in the narratives as being different from other early
days white men provides a descriptive focus for understanding what were the limits
of expected behaviour after the police had left the Isdell police post. Carey
represented a break with the emerging pattern - a reference point in a new ethic.

\textbf{The Policy of 'Protection'}

During the period under review there were few external constraints on white
stockmen's relationships with Aboriginal people throughout the Kimberley, and
even fewer in the northern ranges. The overriding ideal enshrined in the Western
Australian 1905 Aborigines Act was the development and expansion of the pastoral
industry, with Aboriginal people remaining on pastoral stations under the
benevolent control of European managers and stockmen. The Act gave the Chief
Protector the right to remove Aboriginal adults to any district or institution if he
believed it was in their interests. Aboriginal people under an employment permit
were exempt from the removal clauses.\textsuperscript{12} In practice, the Act was aimed at minimal
interference in station relationships unless there were half-caste children or extreme
cases of abuse. This was primarily an economic response from the government to
avoid the cost of rationing dispossessed people or non-workers on pastoral
stations. It enhanced pastoralists' access to an indigenous labour force and placed
them in the position of controlling and supervising their capacity to live on or near
their land and their integration into the station system. It was based on the belief that
Aboriginal people were better off on the stations where they would be integrated
into pastoral development and kept away from the vices of prostitution and alcohol
which existed in towns and mining camps. On pastoral stations they would

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\textsuperscript{11} Morndi Munro, Campbell Allenbrae, Tape (11) 1 April 1990; Derby Leprosarium Admission
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\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Aborigines Act} no. 14 of 1905, clauses 12 and 13.
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participate in an employment system of self-contained communities, dividing their
time and their energy between the station and the bush, under the supervision of
managers and white stockmen. Stockmen would be assisted by occasional visits
from the police who carried out the protective functions of the Aborigines
Department under the 1905 Act. These included ensuring employers held an
employment permit signed by a protector of Aborigines and discouraging them
from cohabiting with Aboriginal women.

During his time as Chief Protector, from 1915 to 1940, A.O. Neville made
occasional attempts to regulate station relationships in the Kimberley but met with
determined and effective resistance from the pastoral lobby whom dominated
Parliament and resented government intervention in its affairs.\textsuperscript{13} He was unable to
intervene on pastoral stations and ended up concentrating on the institutionalisation
of southern adults and ‘half-caste’ Aboriginal children. Neville made several
attempts to introduce a form of wages for northern pastoral employees, and to
establish inalienable reserves and ration depots for displaced Aboriginal people.\textsuperscript{14}
In 1916, when Aboriginal labour was at a premium during the First World War, he
attempted to introduce a system of wages for pastoral employees. This was rejected
after a change of government the same year. In 1922 his proposal was again turned
down by Cabinet. Further attempts in 1925 and 1927 never reached Cabinet
because of pressure from the pastoral lobby led by A.A.M. Coverley, MLA for the
Kimberley. In 1928 a proposal for wages in a draft Aborigines Bill was deleted in
Cabinet, again due to pressure from northern pastoralists who ‘objected to the Bill
because it gave the Department too much power to interfere with their affairs’.\textsuperscript{15}

Neville’s capacity to intervene on pastoral stations was severely limited by lack of
staff and finances, as well as the political necessity to concentrate on the south.
Parliamentarians’ support for a policy of non-interference in the Kimberley added to
his problems. The Department was hopelessly under-funded for the task of
‘protection’ of people in isolated areas. When Neville took up the Chief Protector’s

\textsuperscript{13} Peter Biskup, \textit{Not Slaves Not Citizens: The Aboriginal Problem In Western Australia 1898-
1954}, St Lucia, University Of Queensland Press, 1973, pp. 77-78.

\textsuperscript{14} Biskup, \textit{Not Slaves Not Citizens}, pp. 76-77.

\textsuperscript{15} ibid. p. 77.
position in 1915 the Department had only a vague idea of how many Aboriginal people occupied the Kimberley region.\textsuperscript{16} During his time in office a travelling inspector was appointed for the Kimberley, between 1924 and 1929.\textsuperscript{17} The travelling inspector’s task was to reduce the numbers of Aboriginal people on rations, and thus the cost to the State, to report on the missions and government stations at Moola Bulla (1910) and Munja (1926), to collect part-descent children for missions and government institutions, to oversee court cases involving Aboriginal people, and to report abuses of the permit system. The travelling inspector visited Broome, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Wyndham and Moola Bulla, with occasional visits to stations along the Fitzroy valley. He did not visit the stations north of the Leopold ranges, relying instead on word of mouth from permit holders, the Munja manager after 1926, the mission at Kunmunya and police patrols.

The 1905 Act instituted a system of work permits intended to provide some protection for Aboriginal workers through government supervision of the types of people who became Bosses. The system was weighted in favour of pastoral employers, requiring only that they supply ‘substantial, good, and sufficient rations, clothing and blankets, and also medicines and medical attendance when practicable and necessary.’\textsuperscript{18} An Aboriginal person under permit was liable to prosecution for leaving his or her place of work, refusing to work, neglecting to fulfil required tasks or deserting or quitting his work ‘without the consent of his employer’.\textsuperscript{19} It legalised the practice of police returning ‘absconders’ to stations without formally asserting pastoralists’ responsibility for rationing the old or infirm. That was left to managers and stockmen in exchange for limited interference from the State in employment contracts and conditions, or in the methods used by stockmen and managers to train and retain a work force.

\textsuperscript{16} See especially ARAD 1916-1919, MS AADL.


\textsuperscript{18} Aborigines Act no. 14 of 1905, clause 22.

\textsuperscript{19} ibid. clause 25.
In the Kimberley, pastoralists were allowed to employ under a general permit which covered whole communities who were listed without names under the headings of workers, male and female, indigents, children and ‘half-castes’. Just who the workers were was unknown to the Department, as pastoralists were required to give only the total number of ‘natives employed’. The local police had little knowledge of which Aboriginal person came under which permit agreement. When James Isdell inspected stations in the northern ranges in 1908, he issued the first general permits to the managers at Mount House, Isdell Downs, Mount Barnett, Mount Hart and Napier station to cover 88 Aboriginal employees; 32 men, 36 women, 2 boys and 6 girls under sixteen years. The only ‘single permit’ on which the employee was named was issued at Mount House for a Queensland Aboriginal assistant named ‘Queensland Charlie’. General permits enabled pastoralists to expand and contract their work force as required and gave the employer legal backing to enlist the assistance of the police to return employees. Brown at Mount Hart was issued with a general permit by Isdell in 1908 so that he could ‘employ some more bush natives’ as he came across them. Even as late as 1940, when the Fyfe Royal Commission inquired into conditions in the northern pastoral industry, the Commissioner supported continuing the system of general permits so pastoralists could take on ‘excess’ labour or a pool of labourers to accommodate the variation in the work force as people moved away to the bush or became ill or disabled. General permits were also more economical than single permits, with a maximum fee of two pounds per year for an unlimited number of Aboriginal people. Single permits, at ten shillings per person per year, were only economical for self-employed wagon drivers, cooks or yard builders.

In 1913 there were 748 Aboriginal men and 530 Aboriginal women recorded as working under permit in the Kimberley. By the end of the First World War, the

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20 AD940/1908, James Isdell Travelling Inspector, Diary August-September 1908.

21 Queensland Charlie may have accompanied Hann to the Kimberley in 1898.

22 AD940/1908, James Isdell Travelling Inspector, Diary August-September 1908, 16 September 1908.

23 W. V. Fyfe, Report Of The Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into and Report upon the Financial and Economic Position of the Pastoral Industry in the Leasehold Areas in Western Australia, West Australian Government Print, 1940, p. 158.
numbers had risen to 2,279. In 1930 1,041 Aboriginal people were employed in the Derby region alone, under 30 general permits. The rise was due to the increased demand for labour as white men enlisted for service in the First World War and to more intense supervision of the permit system after the arrival of A. O. Neville as Chief Protector in 1915. Neville instituted a more rigorous system which cancelled all permits on the 30th of June each year and stipulated that applications had to be viewed by the Magistrate in Derby. Previously, employers only applied once to a policeman or to their neighbour, who could be a Protector or Justice of the Peace, and the permit could be transferred to the new lease owner as a land and labour package.

In the northern ranges in the 1930s there were general permit holders at Gibb River, Mount House, Mount Hart and Kurunjie, which were the main pastoral work centres. There were very few single permits. Permits were also a problem for some stockmen and employers. If the police performed the protection duties of checking on all permit holders, they had the potential to draw attention to their living conditions and relationships with Aboriginal people. Permit holders were sometimes threatened with cancellation of their permits if they were reported by police or fellow stockmen as living with Aboriginal women. It was the anti-cohabitation clauses which emerged in this period as the main reason for government attempts at 'protective' intervention on stations in the northern ranges, rather than concern over the climate of fear and intimidation in which labour was recruited.

This system of protection through permits placed white stockmen and managers in the position of overseeing Aboriginal people and reporting to police patrols if they

24 ARAD 1913-1919, MS AADL; See also Geoffrey Bolton and M.A. Jebb, 'On the Stations 1905 to 1965', in S. Yu (ed.) In Our Own Country (forthcoming) Broome, Magabala Books.

25 ARAD 1930, MS AADL.

26 ARAD 1916, MS AADL; ARAD 1919, MS AADL. The informal system of selling leases with Aboriginal labour was referred to by the ex-magistrate of Cossack and Halls Creek, Lamden Owen, as a 'jumble-up' of bizarre values and attitudes characteristic of the northern districts around the turn of the century. He wrote that pastoralists asked three questions before buying a pastoral lease: 'How many acres? How many miles of fencing? How many niggers? The niggers always went as part of the stock. If there were no niggers or not enough, the sale was off or the price was dropped.' W. Lamden Owen, Cossack Gold: The Chronicles Of An Early Goldfields Warden, Sydney, Angus And Robertson, 1933, p. 149.
were problems beyond their control. Cases of abuse of permits came to the Department’s attention only occasionally from 1915 to the early 1930s. They were rarely successfully prosecuted. In the northern ranges it was possible to stay outside the permit system because there were so few inspectors or protectors pursuing the Department’s protective obligations under the Act. Neville’s scrutiny of the permit system did not challenge many permit holders or address violence on the stations over the ranges. However, it brought occasional cases of excessive brutality to light and increased pressure on single white men to deny that they employed Aboriginal women and to hide their sexual relationships with them.

**Taming and detaining workers**

Mick O’Connor was a stockman at Isdell Downs from early 1905 to 1915 when the police camp was officially closed. In 1908 Travelling Inspector Isdell had suggested that O’Connor be given a general permit as well as a ration allowance to provide beef to the old people who were moving into camps for food. For twelve months after the decision was made to close it, the police camp also operated as a ration depot, with beef provided for 22 people. Maggie Gudaworla, who was born about 1912 near the Mount Barnett police camp, was adamant that her mother, father, uncles and aunts were not ration camp people, they were workers who stayed with stockmen. The ration depot at the police camp was for old people, while workers stayed with O’Connor. Maggie’s aunt lived with the police tracker and cooked the old people’s food. By the time the police abandoned Isdell camp, Gudaworla’s parents and some of their affiliates were either stockmen and stockwomen, trackers or cooks who had moved into the sphere of white men’s assistants. Mick O’Connor was their first white Boss. Gudaworla’s description of him was typical of most informants’ portrayals of early days Bosses which contain contradictions of survival situations: a ‘bad man but a good manager’. He fed some people, dealt harshly with everyone and was capable of killing others.

After the police camp closed O’Connor moved to occupy the vacant police hut where old people and women remained. The women tried to leave the camp. Gudaworla described O’Connor’s methods of taming two of her ‘aunties’ for station work:

Old man Miganna (Mick O’Connor) ...that’s the Boss belongin to early days. He’s cheeky one too ... when twofella girl been get away,
leavin kitchen. Two fella cook there. Alright two fella bin go way now. That on top that hill. [Mount Barnett] Whole lot, big mob go way. All the girl. Alright he bin go gettin horse and he bin climb up that right longa house, that police man route. Police station already gone. They bin makim longa Isdell first time, now they bin go there longa gorge [Manning Gorge]. Miganna there now. He live there, kitchen. Right sit down there. He bin climb up there. Miganna chasim all about close up longa house, that on top way. He bin catchim twofella, tie im up twofella. Fire em all round, grass... [crying]. Two fella bin sit down longa chain. He bin burnem round. Twofella bin cry. They bin ...[crying]

Right he bin takem twofella now, gotta chain, home, Mount Barnett. Right twofella bin sit down there. One day, right he bin take im out twofella [from the chain] go longa kitchen.... He never killem, 'cause that two girl bin young yet. He bin want to keepem twofella. Every boy bin married em girl there, all the time.27

In 1915 O'Connor moved away from Mount Barnett to occupy his own small lease just south of the Leopold Ranges at Mount Joseph. He moved again in about 1916 to another small lease at Paddy's Paddock north east of Mount House. Mount Joseph was bought by M.C. Davies who owned the neighbouring lease, Kimberley Downs. O'Connor was one of the 'small holders' of 'salt beef and damper days', referred to in Bolton's study of the Kimberley pastoral industry, who survived by selecting a pocket lease between or next to larger stations, branding strays from the larger leases and then selling out to the lease owners after having made enough of a nuisance of themselves to get a reasonable price.28 They travelled with at least one Aboriginal woman and a male assistant, and expanded their workforce by utilising others who moved in the bush. Police Paddy or Wundigul and his wife Manuworla joined O'Connor at Mount Joseph and then moved on to work at Mount Hart after O'Connor went east out of Wundigul's country. Weeda Munro was a child when her father and mother worked at Mount Joseph with O'Connor. Gudaworla's aunt and her tracker husband also moved to Mount House after the police station closed but continued to 'holiday' in the area. Mordingali's mother had already been taken from Mount Barnett by her husband when he drove a herd of cattle from Napier Downs to Graces Knob for James Game to stock the lease. Billy Skinner was left at Isdell Downs, the furthest north of the pastoral camps dealing with the people who


28 G.C. Bolton, 'A survey of the Kimberley pastoral industry from 1885 to the present', M.A. Thesis, University of Western Australia, 1953, p. 23.
had survived the first period of occupation in the Mount Barnett and Gibb regions, and who were not removed to towns or other stations with police and stockmen. He estimated that there were approximately 300 Aboriginal people living between Isdell and Mount Hart station camps.\textsuperscript{29}

In 1915 Skinner came to the notice of the Chief Protector after he was charged with the manslaughter of a young Aboriginal man, Billy or Chameron, at Isdell Downs station.\textsuperscript{30} Skinner had come north as a stockman working for Rose Bros. and formed the first camp at Mount Barnett in 1904. Maggie Gudaworla’s mother, Worlunyinna or Maudie, was captured by police as a witness and left with Skinner in 1905. Her brother Donkey or Marmandoo was a young boy at Skinner’s camp when the incident occurred. Gudaworla’s narrative about Skinner killing her uncle mirrors the events detailed in police records.\textsuperscript{31} In 1915 Skinner was manager of Isdell Downs for James Game with two white assistants, one of whom was Peter Backsen, who provided Idriess with stories in the early 1930s when he lived in a bush camp north west of Isdell Downs.\textsuperscript{32} Skinner was arrested and charged by Constable Napier on patrol from Fitzroy Crossing where he had been stationed after the closure of the Isdell post.

Evidence from witnesses and the accused established that Skinner and Backsen had gone to the stock workers’ camp about one hundred yards from the white men’s camp to remove Dolly or Dadai from the stock ‘boys’ who were ‘fooling about’ with her. Backsen fired shots above their heads with his revolver, Skinner carried a rifle. She stayed the night in the white men’s hut and the following morning was ‘frightened’ by one of the stock men into running away from the hut. Skinner followed her to the camp. He was armed and surrounded by dogs. His dogs fought with the stockmen’s dogs and Chameron hit Skinner’s dog. At this, Skinner hit Chameron who then picked up a stone and threatened Skinner who in turn fired a

\textsuperscript{29} PD1903/15, Skinner to CPA, 10 March 1916.

\textsuperscript{30} PD1903/15.

\textsuperscript{31} Maggie Gudaworla, Tape (62) 10 November 1995.

\textsuperscript{32} Ion Idriess, \textit{Over The Range: Sunshine and Shadows in the West Kimberley}, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1937, pp. 53-56. Backsen is called Peter Bextram by Idriess.
warning shot and then fired at his neck. In April 1915, Skinner was acquitted of the charge without putting up a defence. Chief Protector Neville, acting on the advice of Crown Law that a ‘glaring miscarriage of justice’ had occurred, and that Skinner was known to be a very heavy drinker, cancelled his permit to work Aborigines.\textsuperscript{33}

Skinner went back to Isdell Downs after the court case and continued to manage the station until early 1916, when he came into conflict with the police and lost control of his trained workers and the camps of bush people nearby. The patrol was part of an expedition of two parties made up of police, white stockmen and at least seven trackers, who swept through the region from Napier Downs station to Federal Downs station and the Mount Barnett area in search of the alleged murderer of George Aukland.\textsuperscript{34} O’Connor had known Aukland for many years, having worked with him to establish Isdell Downs. O’Connor, Jack Dale, Jack Carey and other white station workers accompanied the police at different stages of their patrol. Aukland had been murdered at Federal Downs camp in late 1915 by Rinjalngu or Spot, after chaining Spot’s wife, Maudie, to the verandah post and threatening to shoot Spot. Maggie Gudaworla’s narrative of this incident stated that Maudie, not her husband killed Aukland.\textsuperscript{35} A report in the northern press stated that the murderer found his wife manacled to the bed in the company of George Aukland.\textsuperscript{36} Federal Downs lease was west of Mount Hart and north of Napier Downs. It was a small lease taken up by Derby butcher and storekeeper, McGovern. Aukland and his white assistant occupied the lease, living in a small wooden hut.

The patrols searched camps throughout the region, shooting 104 dogs and engaging in a standoff with Aboriginal people at a large granite rock called M undoorna. The journals of this expedition correlate with Ngarinyin people’s stories of two massacres on the northern boundaries of the Napier Downs lease which occurred in

\textsuperscript{33} PD1903/15, file notes CoP, 19 July 1916.


\textsuperscript{35} Maggie Gudaworla, Tape (62) 10 November 1995.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Nor'West Echo} 15 April 1916.
the aftermath of Aukland’s death.\textsuperscript{37} One at Limestone Spring involved only police, while the other at Mundooma, an easily distinguishable granite rock, was said to have been led by Police Paddy or Wundigul, who was picked up by the police party from Mount Hart station in late 1915 for the purpose of tracking the alleged murderers.\textsuperscript{38} The police journals do not record any killings or injuries to Aboriginal people but particular trouble spots mentioned are also the alleged massacre sites, which suggests that some violent encounters occurred. The reports state euphemistically that on one occasion a group of 25 people were ‘frightened somewhat’ by the dawn raid which resulted in twenty dogs being killed.\textsuperscript{39} On another, at a large granite rock, it took the police and trackers two hours to persuade people to stop throwing rocks at them and come down to be questioned.\textsuperscript{40}

The police patrols moved north until they were one mile from Skinner’s camp at Isdell Downs where they raided a camp of 166 people, shot and killed 76 dogs, chained 40 people to trees but missed Rinjalngu, who was in the camp but escaped with his wife Maudie. Spot was well known to Skinner, who worked him at Mount Barnett in 1907 and knew he was part of the extended station group who moved between Mount Barnett and Mount Hart.\textsuperscript{41} He was not a trained horseman but one of a group of local people who travelled on foot between two or three leases in their clan countries, carrying messages between white men’s camps, reporting on the condition of waterholes and assisting white men with specific labour-intensive tasks. Leases did not have large numbers of horses, which were expensive and subject to disease. Managers relied on bush walking groups who were semi-integrated into their work regime and were known to be living in their own country and unlikely or unable to leave. In 1915 Spot was picked up at Mount Hart station by George Aukland and taken outside his familiar country to Federal Downs. According to Skinner, Spot was handed over to Aukland by Constable Napier and

\textsuperscript{37} see Mordi Munro (Mary Anne Jebb ed.) \textit{Emerarra: A Man of Merarra}, Broome, Magabala Books, 1996, pp. 54-56, for the Limestone Spring massacre.

\textsuperscript{38} PD70/1916, journal PC Jury, 2 November 1915.

\textsuperscript{39} PD1193/1916, journal PC Jury, 23 December 1915.

\textsuperscript{40} PD1197/1916, journal PC Napier, 29 December 1915.

\textsuperscript{41} PD1903/1915, Skinner to CPA, 10 March 1916.
it was this interference in forcing him out of his country which caused Aukland's death. Spot was given a light sentence, on the grounds of provocation. The Chief Protector did not want to return a 'murderer' to his country to create more trouble, so Spot and Maudie were sent to work at various places in the south west, including the Perth police stables and a farm. They were still in the south west of the State in 1919 and may have been sent to Moore River Settlement which opened in that year.

Skinner’s complaints about the police were fuelled by a grudge against Constable Napier for allowing him to be charged with Chameron’s murder and standing by while he lost his permit to work Aborigines. Skinner was not always consistent in his allegations, suggesting that no Aboriginal person over the King Leopold Ranges would steal from a white man’s camp or ‘had done for years’, while on the other hand stating that he always carried a revolver in camp and had been expecting conflict with his stockworkers as they were getting ‘cheeky’ since the police left Isdell. The inconsistency of the style of his correspondence suggests that he relied on a third party to write his letters. One helper was Resident Magistrate Elliot at Derby, who also came into conflict with police in 1919 over his attempts to withdraw a permit from a stockman for being a known ‘combo’ and ‘living like blacks’. The stockman, R.P. Griver of Liveringa station on the Fitzroy River, had written to the Chief Protector complaining that Aboriginal women across the Kimberley were not being adequately protected from prostitution. Magistrate Elliot then investigated the stockman, not liking what he found. He was particularly disturbed about Griver participating in a mourning ceremony over the death of his half-caste son. This was a sign of 'going native'. The police defended him to the Chief Protector as a good character, the case was withdrawn and he was allowed to continue working with Aboriginal people.

The discourse of white racial superiority and need for purity is an interesting theme amongst these men who were performing the difficult task of living on the margins

42 PD7410/1915.

43 PD1903/1915.

44 AD 64/1920.
of Empire. 'Going native' was not only a euphemism for living with an Aboriginal woman as husband and wife, it referred to Empire - civilisation - being overcome by the bush and becoming savage. Griver had danced naked in the bush, which seems to have upset the Magistrate more than his having a half-caste son. Further comments from Jas Gallagher in the Longreach Leader in 1932 detailed his opinions, based on working on a station in the west Kimberley from 1927 to 1932, on methods of forcing Aboriginal people to accept incorporation into a station workforce. He argued for a degree of necessary violence to the extent of occasional killings by boundary riders to protect themselves and stock. He stated that the real problem was when white men went 'native' and took a woman from a 'tamed' and trained 'boy' and then had to kill him because of jealousy. His comments were strongly denied by the Chief Protector but they point to relationships which are supported by oral historical narratives and police files about the north Kimberley.

In one long letter written to Chief Protector Neville after the 1916 patrols in response to Aukland's death, Skinner accused the police of a range of misdemeanours: chaining any Aboriginal man or woman they could lay their hands on, forcing evidence from witnesses by threatening to kill them, sitting in camps while trackers were away for days at a time, starving witnesses, threatening to enforce laws against particular white men and prosecuting 'cattle killing' which was in fact beef rations. He also suggested that killings had taken place on the 1916 patrol by two white stockmen, Bert Bowers and Charlie Taylor, who travelled with the police doing their 'dirty work' for them. The Resident Magistrate who assisted Skinner with the letter annotated it with the comment to the Chief Protector that if the allegations were only 50% true, they needed an inquiry by a man like G.T. Wood, once Crown Prosecutor and Resident Magistrate of Broome and later Royal Commissioner into the massacre allegations on the Marndoc reserve in 1927.

45 AD248/1932, extract Longreach Leader, 24 March 1932 and correspondence and file notes from A.O. Neville.

46 PD1903/1915, Skinner to CPA, 10 March 1916.

Constable Napier, in rejecting Skinner’s allegations, stated that the region was a known trouble spot where ‘several’ Aboriginal people had been shot by police in self defence and where policemen had been speared and injured.\textsuperscript{48} The Sergeant of Police added that the officers were protecting the Aboriginal woman Dolly from Skinner’s attempts to cohabit with her and also protecting the two stockmen who were frightened they would be killed on their return to Skinner’s camp.\textsuperscript{49} He added that Napier had about as much to do with Aukland’s death as ‘Julius Caesar’ and that the facts of the case were that ‘Aukland in order to cohabit with Spot’s gin handcuffed her legs together. Spot saw what happened and smashed the side of Aukland’s head in’.\textsuperscript{50} He also stated that Napier had resigned from the force and joined the AIF late in 1915. The police dismissed Skinner’s allegations as mere grudges by a man who was illiterate and often drunk, and whose real motive for killing was jealousy over an Aboriginal woman. For Chief Protector Neville, Skinner was the type of white man from whom Aboriginal people needed protection: poor, prone to violence and drink, and cohabiting with Aboriginal women. He was, in the parlance of the time, in danger of ‘going native’ and crossing the boundary of publicly acceptable behaviour for white men.

The loss of a permit to work Aboriginal people meant that Skinner was demoted from manager to head stockman and paid two pounds instead of six pounds per month.\textsuperscript{51} Station owners who had nodding regard for the protective clauses of the 1905 Act and the permit system employed managers only if they had a general permit. Without a permit they could not manage a station, as they were not legally entitled to control an Aboriginal workforce which was vital to pastoral development. In 1918 Skinner was again reported by police for supervising Aboriginal people at Oobagooma station, but his manager had a permit and spoke personally to the Resident Magistrate in Derby, who wrote to the Chief Protector

\textsuperscript{48} PD1903/1915, PC Napier statement, 6 July 1916.

\textsuperscript{49} PD1903/1915, Drewry to CoP, 19 July 1916.

\textsuperscript{50} PD1903/1915, Drewry to CoP, 26 August 1916.

\textsuperscript{51} PD1903/1915, Skinner to CPA, 21 July 1918.
recommending no action on the grounds that ‘Skinner’s unlucky shot was unintentional, just to frighten’.52

Skinner’s main problem related to his capacity to retain Aboriginal workers in whom he had invested time, energy and rations (and perhaps more in the case of Dolly who worked in the white men’s hut) and upon whom he depended for his livelihood as a stockman or manager. When Napier arrested him in 1915, he removed his most trusted female worker, Dolly, and the two core male stock workers who ‘lived with him for years’. Skinner had ‘got them out of the bush when they were young, [and] took a lot of trouble in learning them to work’.53 Dolly was escorted to Derby by Napier’s party and handed to Mrs Blythe. She was then released to travel with Scotty Sadler to Mount House, where he had established his own small pocket lease, Isdell Junction, between Mount House and Mount Hart stations. According to the police, this was her country.54 Dolly moved on to Jack Dale and in 1920 gave birth to Jack Dale (junior), a key informant for this study. The other two men were sent to Fitzroy Crossing with a 14 year old boy from Skinner’s camp. After the police raid near Skinner’s camp in 1916 Bert Bowers, who was travelling with the police and had a pastoral lease partnership in Isdell Junction with Scotty Sadler, took seven Aboriginal men and five women off the police chain to build up his own workforce. The police defended this as justified under the 1905 Act, as the Aboriginal people concerned said they did not belong to any other white Boss and Bowers had as much right to them as Skinner.55 Skinner was furious, writing:

If I could not get natives to work for me or stay with me without having to get policemen to chain them up and hand over to me, I would carry my swag out of the country. Those people are all new settlers out here - any how those natives have all run away now. This treatment to blacks is only trying to make them bad. I don’t think they [sic] will be any come here again for many a day, they got such a shaking up.56

52 PD1903/1915, Resident Magistrate Elliot to CPA, 22 August 1919.

53 PD1903/1915, Skinner to CPA, 10 March 1916.

54 This is Landarr, clan land which according to Jack Dale was her country.

55 PD1903/1915, PC Jury, 4 August 1916.

56 PD1903/1915, Skinner to CPA, 10 March 1916.
He added that he had not made a cattle killing report since 1910, had assisted in capturing Spot for killing Aukland and had handled the large populations of Aboriginal people without police assistance: ‘It looks to me if a man cannot get or keep natives without their [police] assistance that he should not be given a permit.’

Skinner, like other stockmen and managers in this newly occupied region (and possibly throughout the pastoral north), maintained a fragile balance between coercion and accommodation in order to extend his influence to other groups of Aboriginal people without having to ration too many people or stimulate conflict and resistance which had dominated the earlier period when the police were stationed on his doorstep. White stockmen relied on an indigenous system of authority and sustenance to develop the station, and on core workers for labour and assistance in managing local groups. Their core workers required the manager’s accommodation to a range of their own social and economic requirements, such as exchanging items with visitors and leaving the station camps to attend ceremonies. The camp of 166 people near Skinner’s group of eighteen people were known to Skinner and had visited before. When they came to visit they exchanged rations, clothes and items like glass and tin with the camp workers, as well as providing him with a pool of potential workers with whom he had been dealing for six years. In return, the core workers continued their separate sphere of ceremonial and social obligations with the additional resources of the station to encourage good relations with their neighbours. Skinner and other stockmen and managers did not have total control over all aspects of early days interactions between white and black. On the occasion of the raid, Skinner had just released one of his trained stockmen, Charley (named Warramallener in the records) for a corroboree, giving him flour and tobacco and instructing him to ‘come back when the fun was over.’ Charley and his wife were removed by Bert Bowers to work further south at Isdell Junction with Scotty Sadler. Charley’s removal stripped Skinner of a trained stockman and hunter who could shoot and spear game. It also changed the social dynamics of the camp and the relationship between the camp and bush visitors. Charley was no

57 ibid.

58 ibid..
longer able to negotiate with bush people on Skinner's behalf. Removing key men challenged local authority systems and left Skinner unprotected and unaligned.

A 'family' of workers

Establishing a core group of labourers and gathering others from the bush for labour intensive tasks was not easy. Scotty Sadler and Bert Bowers formed a partnership in 1915 on the Isdell Junction lease between Mount House and Mount Hart. Bowers brought his skills as a carpenter, stockman and general labourer to their pastoral enterprise. He also brought valuable items like tools, saddlery, horses and mules. But the men had difficulty finding and keeping Aboriginal workers to develop the station. Sadler had brought his Aboriginal wife, her brother, younger sisters and mother and father and a young half-caste boy called Sandy from a Fitzroy River station to the Isdell Junction camp. Only his wife, Coomie or Coombilya, and Sandy stayed with him for long periods; the others ran away to their home station soon after they had camped at the prospective homestead site, Imintji springs (site of the present Imintji Aboriginal Community). With this small workforce, Sadler and Bowers built a hut and horse yard. They exchanged their specialist pastoral skills, spaying, branding and cutting cattle, with neighbouring stockmen and contractors for horses, mules, stores, cattle and the use of neighbours' yards. They started with 30 cattle exchanged with O'Connor for mules and horses, and by 1917 had 1,000 cattle, which the police alleged contained more than their fair share of animals from neighbouring leases.

Coombilya and the boy Sandy travelled with Sadler, cooking, collecting wood and water, tailing horses, branding, roping and assisting white men to cut, spay, dehorn or brand. Men, women and the child dug post holes, foundations for the hut and carted stones, water and sand. There was no marked gender division of labour. Children also performed a range of tasks which made them valuable assistants. They carried water, dug holes, watched horses and cattle, delivered messages to other managers and stockmen, and helped with domestic work. Women and

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59 PD1531/1917. See also Nor West Echo, 30 June 1917, 4 July 1917 and 19 January 1918.

children were less physically capable of resisting stockmen and running away on their own into the bush and, if trained from a young age like Coombilya and Sandy, were able to communicate with white men as well as being familiar with work requirements. Girls were taken as wives at a young age, while boys were working as stockmen by the time they were about 14 years old. Children were also future core workers on whom station managers could rely for support and assistance with pastoral work and with other Aboriginal groups. Coombilya and Sandy received rations in exchange for work with the woman allegedly receiving extras such as soap and lollies.\textsuperscript{61} Coombilya and Sandy could also ride and help with musters if the neighbouring stockmen did not have enough labour of their own. According to the manager of Mount Hart, it was recognised practice in the region that only one white man per station worked on musters with an all-black team of workers.\textsuperscript{62} Neighbouring stockmen and contractors visited their camp regularly on their trips into and out of town with stores for the northern camps at Isdell, Mount Barnett, Mount House and Mount Hart. They all travelled with at least one Aboriginal assistant whom they occasionally left with Sadler or Bowers to help at the station or with a muster. They recognised specific Aboriginal people as belonging to certain white men and assisted each other to retain them if they ran away and went to other camps without permission of their Bosses. They were ‘held’ by giving them tobacco or rations until their Boss arrived.\textsuperscript{63}

To develop the station, Sadler and Bowers needed more labour for tailing cattle, yard building and fencing to stop them wandering into heavy scrub or pockets in the nearby ranges. Bowers accompanied the police on their raids of camps in the Isdell region to recruit labour; taking men and women off the chain to start his own group of labourers at his station. However, he managed to retain only one man and woman, who also ran away at the end of 1916. In February 1916 the police reported that Bowers was travelling in the region of the Margaret River ‘trying to get Natives but was unsuccessful.’\textsuperscript{64} Sadler went to Mount House and returned

\textsuperscript{61} PD1513/1917, Frank Gardiner, statement to Police.

\textsuperscript{62} ibid.

\textsuperscript{63} PD1531/1917, Jack Dale, statement to Police.

\textsuperscript{64} PD1531/1917, Constable Capstick, statement to Police.
with a group of men and women. Two of the men ran away and Sadler followed but there is no record of what transpired. Sadler made another attempt to find extra labour in early 1917. Coomie described it:

Next day Scotty get em Horses & he & Peter go away. He take em two fellow pack horse & two fellow riding horse. Scotty tell me he go away look out more Blackfellow to help build em yard & tell Me & Nellie to look after Station & dig more post holes.\(^{65}\)

In February 1917 Bowers disappeared. The subsequent police investigation into his disappearance was never finalised. The police who came from Perth to investigate concluded that Sadler had the motive to kill Bowers and they felt he was capable of killing someone, but there was no body and a confusing trail of allegations against Aboriginal people.\(^{66}\) Wundigul or Police Paddy was named by three Aboriginal witnesses as the murderer. He was one of a group of at least 15 Aboriginal men and women who met at a main water hole during their wet season break while managers were away in Derby. The station camp and store was watched by a white stockman and old people, while mobile senior men and women who were also workers travelled to meet their contemporaries from other stations. Three men and women from Mount Hart met five others from Mount House and then moved to a bush meeting place where Munday and his group were camped. Munday had run away from the police in 1905 when they tried to enlist him as a tracker for the Isdell camp.\(^{67}\) He was named by Idriess as a black bushranger wanted by police for murdering an Aboriginal man.\(^{68}\) Two of the other men had worked as trackers for the Isdell police and were now incorporated into the station system as workers. Another was Queensland Charlie, who was the only Aboriginal person under single permit in 1908. He was a significant core worker at Mount House having been integrated into local social systems and given a wife and responsibility for a particular tract of country.

\(^{65}\) PD1531/1917, Coomie, statement to Police.


\(^{67}\) PD1588 Special Item, ‘Isdell Police Station Journals 1903-1908’ BL, PC Forbes, 16 June 1905.

\(^{68}\) Idriess, *Over The Range*, p. 94.
According to the witnesses’ statements, Bowers had approached the group, asked for help to unload his packs and then for one of the women in exchange for food and tobacco. Her husband refused and Wundigul led the attack on him, throwing his body into the waterhole and taking the stores. The station manager of Mount Hart, Frank Gardiner, defended them, giving details of the group’s country and likely route during the wet season and stating that they could not possibly have been in the area where they supposedly killed Bowers. The police re-interviewed them with the result that they all stated that the police tracker had threatened to shoot and burn them if they didn’t admit to the offence. The police accepted their statements that they had all lied under threat from the police tracker and concocted a detailed account of events. They were all released.

In fact, this group could have been at the pool where Bowers was supposedly killed as it was not more than two or three days’ walk from Mount Hart station. This suggests that in this case the manager did not wish to have them implicated because of their value as station workers. The investigating officer suggested that Sadler had encouraged the story, possibly even started it. Regardless of the official outcome, Chief Protector Neville added this murder to Wundigul’s list of offences when in 1927 he was gaoled for killing two Aboriginal men. The investigation turned to Sadler who was labelled a ‘combo’ and castigated by the police because of evidence from Coombilya that he had made her kill three of their half-caste babies and caused her to hand two other babies to women at another station. Sadler replied that he did not have a direct hand in the deaths of the babies.

Jack Dale’s mother Dolly was removed from Skinner in 1915 by Constable Napier and then travelled with Sadler to the Mount House area. She became Jack Dale senior’s wife and camped with him at an outcamp of Mount House station 25 miles from Sadler’s Isdell Junction camp. She told her son stories of Bowers’ disappearance but they remain confidential except to say that Bowers and Sadler fought over Aboriginal women and that jealousy was part of their final argument. From the archival evidence they were also fighting over their methods of training.

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70 PD2665/1927.
and detaining Aboriginal workers. Sadler told police that on two occasions Bowers caused workers to run away and just before his disappearance had tried to stop Sadler 'thrashing' the boy Sandy for making a mistake while yard building. This kind of interference was intolerable to Sadler, who moved to dissolve their partnership. Sadler was never formally charged with the murder but the police, acting on the Chief Protector's instructions removed the 'half-caste' boy Sandy and took him to Moola Bulla government station in 1918. In 1938 a second 'half-caste' boy was removed from Sadler despite his correspondence with the Chief Protector pleading that the boy would become a useful worker if he remained, and that the policy of removing children was biased against small lease owners. The boy was young Jack Carey, whose father had by that time left the Kimberley.

'Half-caste' children were problematic for white stockmen. Biskup referred to one instance of a pastoralist in the east Kimberley boasting that he had no trouble getting workers because he bred them himself. This seemed a logical way to expand a station workforce but it was not one that many people would admit to, nor was it successful in the northern Kimberley. Billy King and Jack Dale, who were both born about 1920 to stockmen who worked in the Mount House region and lived with Aboriginal women, named only about ten other half-caste children who lived in the north or who were removed from there to missions in the 1920s and 1930s. The presence of one or two light-skinned children in small camps where there was only one white man could lead to further questioning by police if they decided to act on rumours started by disgruntled or jealous stockmen. There was also the social stigma of having 'half-caste' children, which resulted in most white fathers denying that they were their responsibility. On northern Kimberley stations during this period all children were part of the work force and part of an Aboriginal community living in camps and the bush. They were valuable labourers and future trained stockmen and stockwomen. It was a rough environment, however, where an education was unlikely and where there were no white women to bring a semblance of civilisation deemed appropriate to a child with white blood.

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71 PD1531/1917, Frank Gardiner, Statement to Police.

72 PF770/1947, Sadler to CPA, 30 March 1938.

This did not mean there were no half-caste children born in the northern ranges, or that they were given up easily to missions and government stations by their fathers or by stockmen and managers. For instance Jack Dale, William King and former policeman Jack Wilson all had half-caste children and tried to keep them. During the few years in this period when a travelling inspector was placed in the Kimberley to increase official intervention in the region, the Chief Protector instructed police in 1925 to remove young Jack Dale and warn his father to stop cohabiting with Dolly. Dale was a contractor who relied on Dolly and her classificatory mother and father to work for him and to help him enlist indigenous workers from the bush for yard and road building. The police informed the Chief Protector that Dale had agreed to school the boy when he was six and would hand Dolly over to her tribal husband, Left Hand Spider. Dale took his son and wife to the Phillips and Packhorse ranges further north of Mount House to avoid police and collect dingo scalps, but returned to work at Mount House in 1926 when Dolly joined her Aboriginal husband. In June 1926 and July 1927 police patrols called in at Mount House station and checked with the manager whether Dale continued to cohabit with Dolly. They reported to the Chief Protector that she was living with Left Hand Spider but made no comment on the child’s welfare until his father died in 1928.

From 1926 until his death in 1928 while working on Mount House Station, Dale tried to stop his son living a camp or bush life with his mother or Aboriginal family but would not release him to police for placement at a Departmental institution or mission. He spoke to his son about sending him to the Dale family in Queensland and providing him with an education, but drinking and violence dominated his life. He shot his son in the ankle to stop him camping with his grandparents, nearly killed him on another occasion after tying him to their camp roof as punishment for trying to run away to his mother at Mount House stock camp, and then died in front of his family.

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74 Jack Wilson shot Scotty Salmond in the throat over the custody of a young ‘half-caste’ boy, Daisy Angajit’s brother. (PD1930/1928) Wilson moved to an abandoned station hut with the boy to avoid police. (AD298/1930) The issue was resolved in 1935 when the boy was handed to UAM missionaries and removed to Sunday Island mission.

75 AD440/1925.

of him after a violent fight with another stockman at the Mount House main camp in 1928. By the time the police patrol visited the station, Dale's body was buried. They accepted the manager's statement that no one was to blame. They had already given Jack's grandfather flour, tea and tobacco to stay away from the station until the inquiry was finished. Young Jack Dale spoke English and may have told police what he saw.

Billy King's father also died but the child did not come to the attention of the police until Dale's death in 1928. Neville instructed police not to interfere unless the boys were being mistreated, as it was girls rather than boys who needed to be removed from stations. He believed that both boys' welfare was secure under the protection of the manager at Mount House station, where they would be integrated into the work force. The Blythe brothers owned Mount House, which they worked from their neighbouring station, Fairfield. When the Moola Bulla truck made its first visit to Mount House in the late 1920s, both boys were warned by the manager to hide at a nearby waterhole. Part-descent girls, on the other hand, were removed from stations and sent to missions or government stations, where it was hoped they would not be at risk of sexual abuse or of producing more 'half-caste' children and where they would receive training as domestics. The boys in particular were valuable station workers and where there were large numbers of white stockmen (or as in the case of these boys, their fathers were dead) paternal responsibility could be shifted or hidden. It was more socially acceptable for white men in this period to integrate children from the camps or the bush into a station regime than to accept the responsibility of fathering a half-caste child, and risk increased police surveillance of their activities and the shame of rearing their own partly-white child in a bush camp.

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78 AD440/1925, PC Walter to CPA, 25 August 1928.

79 AD440/1925, CPA to Police, 11 September 1928; see also PD1345/1927, Fitzroy Patrols vol. 4.

By the mid 1920s Mount House had become the centre for wet season gatherings of local white men from surrounding stations. After the First World War, stockmen returned to the north Kimberley to establish their own leases and assist old mates. Mount Barnett, Gibb and Kurunjie stations were occupied by new owners Russ, Rust and Salmond. Isdell Downs was owned by Sidney Kidman, and further west Oobagooma, Federal Downs, Secure Downs and Mount Hart were working stations and outcamps owned by men who had shares in butcher’s shops in Derby. Leases north of Mount House were occupied by Jack Smith and Bob Maxted, and other stockmen who worked for Blythes, MC Davies or Rose Bros. Glenroy station north east of Mount House was owned by ex-policeman Spong and worked with the assistance of ex-policeman Jack Wilson. Tablelands station was also new and access was through Mount House. The old cooks, teamsters, boundary riders, carpenters and stockmen met at Mount House, which was at the end of the cart track from where stores and mail were collected. On occasions the revelry was fuelled by home brew and other alcohol, secreted in drums of flour and other stores so that fellow stockmen and donkey team drivers did not attempt to steal or share it. According to Jack Dale and Billy King the camps of Aboriginal workers went bush partly to avoid the drunken brawling and target shooting which ended the wet season breaks and put them at risk. The scenes described by informants of gatherings at Mount House were mirrored in the pub brawls and antics in Idriess’s *One Wet Season*. The difference was that the revelry turned violent and ‘characters’, like Jack Dale’s father were killed in front of their own children.

**The Travelling Inspector**

This picture of early days conditions on stations in the north Kimberley is supported by evidence in police files and Aborigines Department records of two incidents, in 1924 and 1925, at Kimberley Downs station, 60 miles from Derby and on the police patrol track to the northern stations. The first concerned the disappearance of an Aboriginal woman who allegedly died while attached by a rope to the manager’s saddle. The Travelling Inspector, who was appointed in 1924

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82 AD417/1925.
after a gap of 13 years, struggled to overcome distance and resistance from police and white men to investigate the cases but the witness went missing and no body was ever found. In 1925 he had more success and brought a case of neglect against the station manager, Harry Bannon, who held the employment permit for Kimberley Downs. An Aboriginal woman died after being shot in the leg when a stockman fired from the verandah toward the camp to force her to come to the homestead camp. The injury was not reported and without medical treatment or assistance she later died. Bannon had his permit withdrawn for six months. The owners, MC Davies, moved him to Napier Downs station further from Derby, where he was manager until 1934 when Idriess visited. The Department tried to prevent the man who fired the shot from working with Aboriginal people but was constantly frustrated by a lack of resources and a system which was not aimed at protecting Aboriginal people at the expense of white men’s employment prospects. In 1930 the Chief Protector ordered police to prevent him from working with Aboriginal people but the instructions were withdrawn after pressure from the Minister and MLA for the Kimberley, A.A.M. Coverley, who argued that it was ‘persecution’, that no charge had been proven and that the original evidence of cruelty was based on inadequate evidence, ‘tales told by natives’.84

Morndingali was about 12 years old and living with his father, mother, uncles and extended family at Napier Downs when Harry Bannon became manager in 1926. He remembered old people disappearing and believed they were shot or left in the bush camps and refused food at the station because they were no longer ‘useful’.85 He and his older brother were in relatively secure positions because their father and uncle were already trained stockmen and leading hands at the station. Morndingali’s father had assisted with the occupation of Mount Barnett and Isdell as a stockman who drove cattle to the northern leases. He returned to Napier Downs from Mount Barnett with Nurgaworla, Morndingali’s mother, who was a cook at the police station, having been captured by police.86 On Napier, they worked at muster camps

83 AD267/1926, Mitchell to CPA, 1 March 1925.

84 AD 267/1926, US to CPA, 20 November 1930.

85 Morni Munro, NB2, p. 7.

and from their son's stories appear to have been comparatively secure. For instance, Morndingali described his birth at a muster camp after which the manager insisted the family return to the station to protect the new baby.\textsuperscript{87}

By the early 1920s Morndingali was being trained to be a stockman and had an established position within the core working group at Napier Downs station. Despite experiencing a range of punishments, from kicking to threats that he would be shot if he didn't work quickly and efficiently, his childhood was not circumscribed by the intense physical uncertainty which prevailed on stations north of the Leopold Ranges during the 1920s. From his stories and written sources, he came closest to losing his life on wet season breaks when Aboriginal inter-group disputes took place.\textsuperscript{88} This process of accommodating internal punishments and ceremonies to a settled work regime is the subject of the next chapter. What Morndingali did grow up with was detailed narratives of atrocities and disturbances which occurred during his childhood and teenage years in and around his mother's country north of the Leopold Ranges. There, the pacification process intensified as stockmen expanded the boundaries of pastoral settlement into regions which had not been previously settled by white men or, in cases like Mount Barnett showed few signs of pastoral occupation: a few wild cattle, a hut, a yard and Aboriginal people who still occupied the leases. It was this expansionary context that produced the Jack Carey narratives.

**Soldier Settlement and the second wave of violence**

After the First World War the government instituted a policy of extending settlement into the northern regions, where pastoral occupation had been inhibited by lack of access to ports, rugged ranges and continued resistance from Aboriginal people. The committee appointed to advise the government on the best means to proceed recommended that the 'material development' of the north was needed, regardless of its incompatibility with the needs of indigenous people's 'spiritual welfare'.\textsuperscript{89}

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87 Morndi Munro, Tape (38) 8 March 1991; Munro, *Emerarra*, pp. 3-5.

88 Munro, *Emerarra* ; see PD1168/1916, PD243/1920, PD310/1920, PD2156/1920 for deaths by spearing which were investigated by police.

89 Biskup, *Not Slaves Not Citizens*, p. 103.
Occupying the north was also a strategic concern. In 1921 William Easton led an official expedition into the northern district to survey the area from Walcott Inlet north to Napier Broome Bay ‘with the object of locating the most suitable site for a new port to serve the large tract of vacant country lying between the King Leopold, and the Durack Ranges’. Easton portrayed the ‘numerous’ Aboriginal occupants who watched him but never made contact, as skilled bush people with a strict family-centred social structure and remarkable capacity to exploit the abundant natural resources. He suggested that they would not ‘cause much trouble’ if they were not interfered with. He added that it was

...practically essential that men settling this country should have had previous experience of similar work, as there will be innumerable hardships to be borne, and much isolation. A knowledge of natives and their customs is necessary, as the natives, even if friendly disposed, would soon gain the ascendancy of an inexperienced man.

The push to expand pastoral occupation was bolstered by the soldier settlement scheme, introduced in 1919. The scheme allowed small holdings to be thrown open for reduced rents and was encouraged by the opening of the Wyndham meatworks in 1919. The Department of the North West was established in 1920 and A.O. Neville was made secretary, with his Protector of Aborigines duties split at the 26th parallel so he could concentrate on the north. He was also responsible for employing ex-servicemen. The southern portion of the Marndoc Aboriginal Reserve in the east Kimberley was thrown open for soldier settlers in 1922. John Hay, who had worked as a stockman for lease holders in the north Kimberley before the War, took over Nulla Nulla station on the southern portion of the Reserve and was speared by an Aboriginal man in 1926, after a dispute over an Aboriginal woman.

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90 *Nor'West Echo* 6 March 1920. Following the First World War, the Federal and State government began discussions on ways to develop and occupy the north in the face of Dutch, German and Japanese interests in the region.


92 ibid. p. 50.

93 ibid. p. 52.


The police party's response to Hay's murder formed the basis for the Wood Royal commission into alleged massacres of Aboriginal people.96

Jack Carey, Fred Russ, Dave Rust and Scotty Salmond all worked as stockmen at Mount Barnett in 1919 and 1920, and applied for leases under the soldier settlement scheme. Carey applied for two leases, one near Gibb River and one on the Barnett River.97 His application was initially rejected because he had not actually joined up, producing only a rejection certificate. A Pastoral Board member supported his appeal and he took over the Gibb River lease late in 1920. Carey and Russ shared costs until 1925, when Russ took over the Gibb River leases. Dave Rust applied as an ex-serviceman for land east of Mount Barnett which he named Kurunjie station.98 Salmond and Rust had been in the 10th Light Horse together and before the War had been Kimberley stockmen for Fitzroy River pastoralists. They were all experienced stockmen with limited resources, developing stations on the fringes of pastoral settlement. They joined others like Fred Easton at Sale River on the coast south of Kunmunya mission, Scotty Sadler who expanded his holdings to Tableland, and Jack Connaughton who had owned small and marginal pastoral ventures in the northern ranges for years. They continued to attempt to expand their work forces and establish their authority over indigenous people who occupied the leases, by a combination of intimidation and reward for select communities and individuals who were prepared to accommodate white men's requirements. Oral sources indicate how fragile relationships were, with individuals attempting to negotiate a settlement with a white Boss by sharing land, women, children and labour resources.

After the police investigation and Sandy's removal, Scotty Sadler sold his Isdell Junction lease to Sidney Kidman, and in 1919 moved further east to establish Tableland station. He sold out in the early 1950s but occupied the station as a stockman or assistant until he hanged himself in 1966, aged 92.99 Sadler moved to

96 Green, *The Forrest River Massacres*.

97 DOLA acc1384 an 3/9, 3944/1920, Russ F.A.

98 DOLA acc1632 an 3/2, 1478/39, Kurunjie Station.

99 Death Register Derby Courthouse; A.B. Sadler DOLA lease print out.
Tableland with a group of people he had collected from the Mount House lease. The senior man of that group, Biriraiyidmi, known to whitemen as Monkey, showed him the way from Imintji springs to the Tableland lease to a permanent water hole which was also a significant site for which he was custodian. Biriraiyidmi and his family became the core group from which Sadler built a labour force. He left his son Mick Jowalji with Sadler to be trained as a stockman and one of his wives to be trained as a house girl. Mick Jowalji became head stockman and much later, in 1995, chairman of Yulumbu Aboriginal Corporation, which bought the Tableland station lease.

In the early days of the station, Biriraiyidmi came into the station camp to work for short periods, just enough to get tobacco or trousers and then he would move off again. He didn’t always work and occasionally came into the homestead camp only to claim tobacco and other items which his wife, sons and others were obliged to give him. Sadler knew of these visits and would tell him to hunt cattle out of certain range areas and take only one for himself and his group. The group who moved with Biriraiyidmi were probably other wives, children and old people who were not needed at the homestead camp.

Biriraiyidmi had the authority amongst his own people to come in to the station and tell the workers in the homestead camp when and where there would be a ceremony and if they were obliged to attend.\(^{100}\) He could also translate that authority to assist Sadler with his labour requirements, bringing a labour force together for specific tasks and a neighbouring senior man into the station system so his young son could be trained as a stockman. On one occasion Biriraiyidmi was told by Sadler to gather men and women from the bush to transport roofing iron across the Leopold Ranges for the station homestead. With two people on each end, piles of iron were carried across the ranges to the Tablelands camp. The men and women assisted with the building and were rewarded with tobacco and rations and allowed to move back to the bush:

They carry iron through the gorge, camp, pickim up, carry again. They never damage them, they keepim clean, they frighten. They wipe ‘im

\(^{100}\) Wallace Midmee, Interview notes, NB9, p. 74, 8 June 1992.
clean. They climbed up that jump up and come in to Scotty. Puttem down slowly, layim down.¹⁰¹

Biriraiyidmi’s and Sadler’s relationship was circumscribed by the threat of being removed or harassed by police or stockmen. He started his relationship with Sadler when he was taken off a police chain which held a large group of alleged cattle killers. This incident seems to have occurred in 1919 when about 30 Aboriginal men were arrested near Mount House for killing cattle. That year, the numbers of cattle killing convictions rose to 47, mostly from the central and west Kimberley region.¹⁰² As one patrol brought the prisoners to Derby, they passed Sadler’s camp and he was able to remove Biriraiyidmi. He in turn extended that favour to other groups throughout the 1920s, encouraging them to become part of the station system:

Mabel King: Policeman chase people bring em into station.

Wallace Midmee: Some time they take em long way out. Tie em up, bring em in the station. Call my grandfather “Who This?” Scotty Sadler tellem. “Oh yeah this bloke work for me.”

One time my grandfather been tied up there. Scotty Sadler saw him “Let this fella go.” He stayed for a few days and took off. Nother time, policeman had about twenty bloke tied up. Grandfather said “This my countryman.” Scotty let the lot go. Scotty said “You mob want to work?”¹⁰³

Mick Jowalji recalled his father’s role as settling down other groups for their benefit:

Scotty Sadler makin that place. My father he was the Boss. Like a big Boss. Everyone been come in longa him. My father been bringem in whole lot. Make it easier for them and makem good manager, settle em down, don’t want to go.¹⁰⁴

Men and women who were not identified as workers and who were suspected of interfering with cattle were not safe, despite being related and known to the survivors in the camps. If stockmen and managers identified them as strangers and

¹⁰¹ Wallace Midmee, Interview notes, NB9, p. 76, 8 June 1992.

¹⁰² ARAD 1920, MS AADL.

¹⁰³ Wallace Midmee, Mabel King, Interview notes, NB9, p. 77, 8 June 1992.

¹⁰⁴ Mick Jowalji, Tape (35) 5 March 1991.
a potential threat, punishment and dispersal could be swift and violent. Jowalji described one incident when Sadler's white stockman heard of cattle killing on the lease nearby at Glenroy station. He rode out from the homestead camp, across the creek where the housegirl was washing the manager's clothes, told her to return to the camp, and then moved on to the bush camps:

He been come out longa all about.

"Ah Boss here, Boss. Oh yeah. What we can do for you?"

"Makem paddock, makem fence." All that good way, manager been say.

This lot been get away from mob, livin la river.

Gardia been go sit down waiting there for might be five hour, he been sit down.

And he been walk away from this mob and go sit down on top longa side, longa hill.

He been all day watch us. He see him one fella been just come in now, come lotta spear, my cousin brother. Missed him. Second bullet right here, under the rib. Forty four. 105

Birraiidyidmi helped locate the station, settled other groups and left his son Mick and wife with Sadler to be trained for station work, but he was not entirely protected. When he tried to leave the station and move away from the area with his wife and other children, he was shot in the leg and had to rely on the intervention of a stock worker who could speak English. His daughter Barbara Midmee, who was born after 1920 described one incident when her mother tried to leave the camp:

And old Scotty Sadler too, he been murderin one. ...We land up on the river. My mother been cooking la station. Me fellas been go.

My father been look. "He come us." That mob of dog. "What for you follering me?" He bin tellim.

He bin sickem out dog longa dad. My mother bin carryem up me and my father been on top. This nother one [a stockman who had joined them from the Mount Barnett region] he walk, running all the way, take em back old fellas.

And he bin shootim my father in the leg. Scotty Sadler, he been shootim my father. My mother been takim mefellas bush. Long way, himself.

And we been waitin longa bush and he [the stockman] been comin up. Him been tellim [Sadler] "What for you want to. What for you been

105 Mick Jowalji, Tape (35) 5 March 1991.
shootim this old man? He got big mob of family, you’ll have to let im go.” He bin tell im. My father got no English much and my mother.

Biriraiyidmi’s children lived on Tableland until they were forced to leave in 1984 after an argument with the new owners.

Jack Jowan moved to Tablelands station after his first white Boss abandoned his small lease in Jowan’s country, just east of Mount Barnett. His first Boss was Jack Connaughton, who was a stockman in the northern ranges and lease holder from 1920 to 1925 for leases variously called Hann River, Echo Hills and Berri Werri. He was also named by the police as in Carey’s company at Gibb River in 1921. Frank Hann met him in the Pilbara in 1897 when Connaughton was prospecting. He had two ‘wild blacks’ on the chain to show him water. Jowan was about eight years old when his father left him and his mother with Connaughton and his Aboriginal assistant Alunguwarra at Berri Werri station. Alunguwarra, later known as Berri Werri Charlie, was Jowan’s classificatory father and brought him up as Connaughton’s special boy. In that capacity, Jowan saw and was involved in many instances of ‘hunting bush people’. He and Jowalji’s stories cover an area of land from Gibb River station, Mount Barnett and east to Glenroy and Tablelands station. They refer to managers and stockmen working together to punish people for cattle killing, attempting to run away or removing women from the homestead camps who had been identified as white men’s women. Jowan and Jowalji’s narratives included incidents when they rode with their Bosses and saw people being shot. They were not all stories of decisive victories or clear cut boundaries between white and black:

Jowan: We been hunting blackfella all round bush, bring em back.

Jowalji: Me and you go. Getta rifle. Boss been go make a camp. Me and you climb up trackem all the blackfella. Me two fella police boys long time. We been youngfella.

Jowan: I tellim “Don’t shoot, don’t shoot.”

106 Barbara Midmee, Tape (23) 1 August 1990.

107 F.S. Hann, Diary Transcript, Acc4308A Item HS26, vol. f, 9 September 1897 - 5 September 1898, 27 April 1898.

108 Jack Jowan, Tapes (35 and 36) 5 March 1991; This may be ‘Cundra’ or Rosie who joined Connaughton in 1918 and in 1925 was reported by Scotty Sadler as being held without her consent. (AD57/1925)
Jowalji: I been hungry I want to shoot that kangaroo, but this one say, “Don’t shoot. By and by hearem we.”

Jowan: Too late they been findem we, all gone. All been gone. Boy called Willie, two gardia put a revolver and shoot. He never take notice that boy, walkin away.109

Jowan commented that it was a ‘cruel business’, while Jowalji stated that he didn’t know why Scotty Sadler spared him.

Oh long time rough. I don’t know how come my Boss been save me. I been grow up and stop longa him. Mefella, my sister, Barbara, this one father belonga him [Tableland Anji - deceased] and Jock and Sandy and me here, one dead sister...Big family.110

Jowalji’s youth and capacity to work, and the fragile but long-standing contract between Sadler and his father ensured his survival and continuing occupation of his clan country. His mother’s role as cook in the homestead camp and mother to a number of children reinforced their comparatively privileged position.

During his childhood Jowan had worked with the soldier settlers when Carey was at Gibb River.111 He referred to Carey’s treatment of bush people as part of the settlement process in which other white men killed bush people. He described Carey’s cruelty as exceptional but not his actions in killing bush people. When Jowan was about 12, Carey called at Connaughton’s camp and reported that bush people were lighting fires in the Mount Barnett region. He left the camp with two Aboriginal men, George Dulnoor and Toby Naninggoort and their wives, in search of the trouble-makers.112 Connaughton instructed Jowan to take a message to Fred Russ at Gibb River station. He travelled alone on a mule with a tuckerbox of food, which was his payment. He took a back track. The mule bolted into the bush to a small waterhole on the Hann River. There he saw bloodied water and evidence of recent killings. He rode on to Gibb River and delivered the message. Russ warned him not to go near the water hole on the Hann because it had been poisoned and there were dead dogs in it. Jowan rode back with a message from Russ to


110 Mick Jowalji, Tape (35) 5 March 1991.


112 Maggie Gudaworla named George as her uncle and the first stockboy for Gibb River. He also worked at Mount Elizabeth and Mount Barnett.
Connaughton who read it aloud, apparently not worried about the contents which
told of men being killed by Carey on the Hann River. The next morning
Connaughton and Scotty Salmond and young Jowan rode to another waterhole
where they waited until daylight and then raided the camp. One man was shot in the
back while the women were left hiding in the pandanus palms in the water. Jowan
remembered the incident:

Alright we seein' one old man been run. Mine Boss been lookin' at that
road findin' him. "Here Jack you want to have a shot?"

"No. I can't shootem my own body," I been tellin'.

"You gotta do it," Him been tell me.

"No," I been tell im. "No."

... He want me to shootim that old man that run. I never like shootim.
I been tellin' "You can shootim." Alright he been knockin' here, fall
down. ... Big solid man. Ah poor fella.

"You gottim?" Two fella talk like that.

"No I got one there. But this one don't matter, him little bugger."
Gardia, this Gardia been tellin'. "Takim la water chuck him in."

I been longa that two man. I never like Scotty Salmond and Jack
Connaughton.\footnote{Jack Jowan, Tape (35) 5 March 1991.}

Salmond himself described the first years of occupying Kurunjie and Gibb River as
a time of 'vigilance' and 'courage' when he and Dave Rust were 'stalked' and
attacked by 'savage Kimberley tribes' who retreated 'dragging their dead'.\footnote{Countryman 7 May 1970, Westraliania section 1970, pp. 22-23.}
When Salmond died in 1957, his obituary in the Northern Times honoured him as
one of the pioneers of the most isolated regions in the Kimberley whose 'courage
and uncanny bush craft caused the natives to call him "devil devil" of Kurunjie.'\footnote{Northern Times, 17 January 1957.}
Informants also used this title for Salmond, who like Jack Carey seems to have
encouraged his reputation for being able to frighten Aboriginal people. Salmond
added that in the early days of pioneering Kurunjie, the early 1920s, he had been
told by police that the 'savage natives would kill [him] in a fortnight' and he would
not receive police protection.\textsuperscript{116} Although patrols were infrequent, he stated that the soldier settlers did receive some police assistance and that he took part in 'official and unofficial punitive expeditions'. He did not describe exactly what happened on these occasions except to say that he chased, chained and frightened people and kept a pack of savage dogs to protect him and his camp. A patrol in 1921, in response to the alleged murders of Bass and Smith between Cape Voltaire and Kunmunya mission does not record moving as far east as Kurunjie but it may be one of the unofficial punitive expeditions in the north Kimberley to which Salmond referred.\textsuperscript{117} Three patrols set out, from Derby, Broome and Fitzroy Crossing with two trackers each. They were all heavily armed. The report suggests that they moved easily to the coastal mission to capture the alleged murderers and witnesses, and returned through Mount Hart to Derby without incident. Four years later Constable Pollett referred to the patrol to the local doctor in Derby, describing four police and eleven trackers rounding up two hundred and seventy Aboriginal people near the west coast and seeing extreme cases of sickness.\textsuperscript{118} This patrol and another in 1920 to the far north coast and nearby islands were also described by the Commissioner of Police in 1932 to Idriess as an example of dangerous mounted police work. I was not able to locate the original journals to determine whether this patrol added significantly to the terror of 1919 to 1926. It contributed to the tensions in the areas near the missions between Aboriginal people and white men and police, as did the Marndoc Reserve massacres in 1926.

**Prospecting for children**

Salmond formed a settled relationship with at least one Aboriginal man who visited his camp for many years, working occasionally but living mostly in the bush. Other men and women joined him and his white assistant, Scotty Menmuir, and were trained into pastoral work. Rosie Mamangulya and Susie Umungul remembered starting the camp at Kurunjie, while Maggie Ghi came in to the camp when she was


\textsuperscript{117} PD8466/1920, Murder of Bass and Smith. See also *Nor'West Echo*, 4 September 1920, 2 October 1920 and 18 December 1920.

\textsuperscript{118} District Medical Officer, 14 February 1925, reproduced in W.S. Davidson, *Havens of Refuge: A History Of Leprosy In Western Australia*, Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1978, p. 165.
a young girl in the 1920s. Campbell Allenbrae was born in the camp in the early 1920s. They spoke specifically of the spearing of Yellow Harry (Harry Annear) and the police patrols avenging his death, as the beginning of a 'war' between Aboriginal people and white men:

That bloke Yellow Harry started the war. Jack Carey was working the other side, Barnett and Gibb. They used to meet up with Jack Connaughton and Scotty Salmond. Jack Carey used to tell Scotty, "This is a good one for station." Scotty was new from Scotland. They had just a few cattle, not much. First place, Jack Connaughton and Scotty were going to make a place at Berri Werri, but Scotty started Kurunjie, different one.

Salmond also made specific mention of Harry Annear’s spearing by an Aboriginal man. Salmond was contemptuous, stating that his spearing was his 'own fault' for stealing a young Aboriginal woman and then not being vigilant or quick enough to shoot a few people from the attacking party. Salmond summed up the situation:

It was no good being noble and dead. The natives had been brought up knowing nothing but killing. In spite of the wailing and singing over dead relations a life meant nothing to them. All they could understand was savagery and strength. Even now strength is the only way to get their respect. We'd just come back from a war in which we were taught to kill. And when it came to a showdown we were the stronger.

Harry Annear was a 'half-caste' who was assisting pastoral expansion. According to police records he travelled north in late 1921 from Sadler's Tablelands station to look for new country and for children for existing leases. He was heavily armed, carrying two rifles, two revolvers and 400 rounds of ammunition, 150 lent to him by Jack Connaughton. He travelled with three Aboriginal women, two of whom he had removed from a bush camp were chained to trees at night to prevent them escaping. The husband of one of them was camped at Connaughton’s station on the Hann River when he heard that Annear had moved into the bush, followed and speared him. Annear then shot himself in the forehead. Police did not write of


120 Campbell Allenbrae, Tape (11B) 2 April 1990, Notations on draft from Allenbrae.


122 PD7871/1921.
an 'uprising' as they had in 1905 and 1906 but they were concerned that a stockman was dead and that Aboriginal people had access to guns and a large quantity of ammunition. Police parties from Fitzroy Crossing and Wyndham accompanied by Jack Wilson, Jack Connaughton and Jack Carey, converged on the area, raiding camps, shooting dogs and chaining witnesses from Gibb River to Tablelands station and east to Kurunjie and Durack River. One of the policemen reportedly took ill and he and Jack Carey moved off on their own toward Tableland station. At Connaughton's lease adjoining Mount Barnett they rounded up all the Aboriginal people and questioned them. At Mount Barnett they rounded up ninety-four Aboriginal people after a raid on one camp. One police party continued raiding camps toward Durack River. At a gorge on the Durack River a large group of men, women and children were surrounded, and according to the tracker's statement to police some people 'fell down'.

According to informants for that country, the patrols across the ranges in 1922 culminated in a large massacre at Durack River Gorge.

The Annear incident and police response has been referred to by Green as part of a continuing 'pacification' process which culminated with the Manndoc reserve massacres in 1926. From the police records and Green's research, police party raids in 1916, 1922 and 1926 were significant events which erupted on each occasion after a pastoral worker was killed or injured following a dispute over an Aboriginal woman. They marked points at which negotiation and accommodation between small groups of Aboriginal people and individual white men broke down, and the police provided additional resources to contain resistance and enforce punishments. Each incident involved the police searching for a known Aboriginal man who had worked for white stockmen. They were not simply pursuing 'bush blacks' but taking part in a process of dividing and separating out those people who were willing to comply with white men's requirements which included their controlling access to certain Aboriginal women and children.

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123 Green, The Forrest River Massacres, p. 76.

124 Campbell Allenbrae, Tape (11) 1 April 1990; Maggie Ghi, Jilgi Edwards, NB7, pp. 48 -52.

125 Green, The Forrest River Massacres, pp. 75-77.
According to informants, Annear and Jack Carey were 'boundary riders', and 'prospectors' for new leases and children to train for the stations. This assessment is repeated by Annear's female assistant who stated to police that 'Harry been go down longa that country to look out boy to look out longa horse, he been wantem boy to work longa station.' Children continued to be a valuable resource in this second wave of settlement. Campbell Allenbrae described the process as it was told to him by his father:

Scotty Salmond and Jack Carey were talking about what they can do. Take young boys and girls, give them tucker and tobacco. But those old people didn't like it, they threw it away. Flour they kept for corroboree paint. Tea, they put it in a billy can. "No don't eat it, that thing is blown." Sugar they reckon, "That's river sand, rubbish. Throw it away." Scotty Salmond used to put flour in paper bark, tie it at the end and put it in a cave. Everywhere Scotty Salmond and Jack Carey gave tucker, but early days blokes didn't like it.

After a while these young fellas [who] were getting trained, told the old people, "Don't make humbug with that flour. For eat, make you full up guts." My Dad was telling them that in all that Durack country, and my brother-in-law. My Dad was with the whitefellas in the first place. "Eat that tucker, we eat it, don't throw it away." That's what he told the bush fellas.127

Scotty Salmond removed Campbell Allenbrae from an Afghan sandalwooder's camp near Kurunji station. He stayed with Salmond and eventually became head stockman at Kurunji in the 1940s. His mother and father divided their time between sandalwooding and Salmond at Kurunji station during the 1920s and 1930s. The 1905 Aborigines Act excluded 'Asiatics' from employing Aboriginal people, thus they were at a disadvantage when it came to retaining labour.128 Salmond strictly controlled the boy’s contact with his relations who moved in the bush, although, as Allenbrae stated many of his closest relations had been dispersed or killed at the Durack Gorge massacre, and if Salmond wanted to track him after running away he only had to go to the Afghans' bush camps where Campbell's parents were and pick him up. This left him without many options.

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126 PD7871/1922, Coomic statement to Police, 13 September 1922.

127 Campbell Allenbrae, Tape (11) 2 April 1990. Notations on draft from Allenbrae.

128 AD1044/1943; AD457/1944.
Jack Carey

Around the same time as the Annear incident the rules of occupation and coexistence were collapsing in the Mount Barnett region, leading to a crisis for the land owners of Kupingarri, Gunbungarri and Ngorrut Ngorrut near Mount Barnett and Mount Elizabeth. Maggie Gudaworla’s mother and father moved to work the Mount Barnett lease with Fred Russ and Jack Carey in about 1919 and stayed through the early 1920s when the stockmen were trying to begin their own stations. During this period her clan affiliates experienced a slow reversal in their fortunes and exclusion from a white Boss’s protection. The group included stockmen and women who had been trained by Skinner, O’Connor and other white men at Mount Barnett, Isdell and Graces Knob since the early 1900s. They had been affected by the campaign of arrests and dispersals when the police camp was at Isdell and many, like Allangawarrrai or Berri Werri Charlie, Morndingali’s mother, Billy King’s grandmother and Wundigul’s wife had moved in to the stations and established their position as workers: ‘All those police boys [and] policeman kill all the people and they want to work on station.’ Others continued to move in the bush and visit station camps like the one at Isdell station when Skinner was manager. Ngulit, the ‘magic man’ who escaped from Carey, continued to move in the bush between Mount Barnett, Isdell, Graces Knob and Mount Hart. On one occasion, when he was threatened by two trackers who travelled with the Fitzroy police patrols, he magically led his two wives and one old man out of danger and called up a storm to prevent them being followed.

Before moving with Russ to Mount Barnett, Gudaworla’s group had been able to rely on protection from the managers at Isdell Downs. Her mother was Skinner’s first woman and when he was replaced by Fred Potts in 1916, she and her husband and a small group continued to move in the region, visiting the Isdell Downs camp and their own country at Mount Barnett without fear of harassment. Potts lived in a small camp with an Aboriginal woman, her husband and children, and a group of old people. He fed the old people and, according to Gudaworla, stopped the police

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130 Maggie Gudaworla, Tape (62) 10 November 1995; Jack Dale also told this story but with detailed recollections of the methods used to call up a rainbow, along which they all escaped. These were not recorded on tape.
removing her father after a raid on their bush camp. Ngulit may have been able to escape through his own magical powers but Gudaworla's father and mother, like many other Aboriginal people, relied on social obligations of relations who were aligned with white men to ensure their survival.

When Carey first came to the Isdell region in about 1915, the Mount Hart manager gave him the task of assisting Fred Potts in outcamps on the lease. According to oral sources he shot and bured a group of bush people who were visiting the boundary area between Isdell station and Mount Hart. Gudaworla stated that Potts told him to leave the area because he was a danger to the trained and settled Aboriginal people who also moved in the bush socialising with visiting groups: 'manager bin huntim away. “Go on, you go way. You might shootim my boy,” he tellim.' On a separate occasion Gudaworla and her family were again moving in the bush between their clan land at Mount Barnett and Graces Knob station when they decided to visit the workers at Graces Knob to ask for tobacco. Potts was manager there and had been joined by Wundigul, his wife Manuworla and children. Two other classificatory daughters were also with Fred Potts. Their mother Ludbuwarla, sister to Manuworla, was Pott's Aboriginal wife. Her husband Babaij was, according to Maggie Gudaworla, shot and killed by Jack Carey near Berri Werri station and thrown into a waterhole. Wundigul patrolled the lease with Fred Potts:

Wundigul and Fred Pott[s] come up, want to put mefella on the chain. Daddy said “Wundigul here!” He leavim Daddy mine and three boys because he full cousin for my father. Weeda mother, Manuworla, he pickem up Mount Barnett.

Weeda Munro was a baby when her father and mother lived on Mount Hart with Fred Potts and grew up there into a trained stockwoman.

In 1927 Potts lost his permit to work Aborigines after Wundigul shot and killed two Aboriginal men. Evidence at the hearing suggested that Potts had given him the gun and told him to go and clear the bush blacks from the nearby waterhole. Evidence


133 Maggie Gudaworla, NB11B, p. 33.
Plate 3 - Aboriginal stockwoman at Mount Hart station

This woman (deceased) was trained by Fred Potts, and worked with Weeda Munro at Mount Hart Station.

*Courtesy of Ion Idriess collection.
from the police file and from Wundigul's daughter, Weeda Munro stated that the killings were retribution for the death of her teenage brother.\textsuperscript{134} He had been watching cattle with another young boy and died after hitting his head. Potts was aware of Wundigul seeking retribution for the death. His actions may have been motivated by an internal system of justice and morality but it also came at a time of increasing tensions in that region after Mount House lessees opened a new outstation at Mount Matthew. Wundigul's actions contributed to the process of clearing bush people who were moving from Munja station to Mount Matthew.

In 1925 Potts went to the Mount Matthew outcamp to watch cattle and Aboriginal people. George Layman owned the Secure Downs lease to the west of Mount Hart and Frederick Easton owned Sale River also called Avon Valley station. They stocked their leases with cattle and wanted police support to control the indigenous people who were moving in the region. They had some help from a 1924 patrol which raided a camp four miles from Easton's hut and removed the 'ring leaders' to Derby after Easton had pointed them out. Easton himself was acquitted of cattle stealing from Isdell station in 1924, much to the amusement of the local press which described the managers' confrontation:

\begin{quote}
The Manager of Isdell rode up, jumped off his horse, rushed at the accused, with a cocked and loaded revolver in his hand, and holding it within a foot or two of the accused's head, ordered him to hold up his hands. He then searched the accused, his swag and packs for firearms, taking a revolver and gun away, giving his native boy the former and putting the latter in his own pack. Couldn't have been better staged - by a Yankee "Deadwood Dick" screen actor.\textsuperscript{135}
\end{quote}

In 1925, there were more reports of 'trouble with natives' from Easton, Layman, Potts and others in the area. The police were told not to lend too much support:

\begin{quote}
Cattle killing attributable to not enough white labour employed. At Walcott [Sale and Secure Downs] about 4,000 head roaming about a million acres. They can afford to lose 30 head a year, but they cry for help at one loss by natives. Natives do nearly all the work.\textsuperscript{136}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{134} PD1345/1927 vol. 4, Fitzroy police patrols.

\textsuperscript{135} Nor'West Echo 30 August 1924.

\textsuperscript{136} PD1346/1927, Inspector Douglas to CoP, 3 August 1925.
Fred Easton drowned in 1926, amidst a minor controversy that he had been poisoned by his own Aboriginal domestic. His lease was bought by the government and became Munja ration depot and government pastoral station.

When Carey and Russ moved to Mount Barnett in 1919, Carey continued to endanger indigenous people who were identified as stock workers or were semi-integrated into station work. He took a group of people from Mount Barnett camp east toward Berri Werri station, and shot and killed a man so he could remove his wife, Mary Karraworla. He returned without the camp people. According to Gudaworla, Fred Russ would not let him have any more workers and sent him to Gibb River with Karraworla and a young man called Mobby, or Larry Murphy. Larry had been brought up by white men after his father was killed by spearing. Their violent activities were not recorded in written records. Oral sources describe a range of violent incidents which followed Carey’s attempt to settle Gibb River station between 1919 and 1924, resulting in members of Gudaworla’s clan group gradually disappearing or seeking refuge elsewhere. For instance, Ngulit moved south toward Napier Downs station after magically avoiding Carey’s attempt to shoot him while he was chained to a tree, two old women were shot while fishing at a waterhole, a group of men were shot and drowned after accidentally dropping a box of chickens in the Hann River, a young man sought refuge at Kunmunya mission after fighting with Carey and one young woman became Dave Rust’s wife after Carey shot her father and threatened to kill her.137

Gudaworla’s mother continued to work for Fred Russ at Gibb River station until Carey shot her daughter, a young girl, about 100 yards from the homestead camp and they decided to leave. Gudaworla remembers being told by her mother that her sister was dead and they were fleeing. She was carried on her parents’ shoulders to Mount House, where they joined Gudaworla’s aunt who lived with the ex-tracker from Isdell station. Carey had broken all the established rules of the early days. He

killed old people, women and a child, and people assisting him with work. The act of ‘sitting down’ next to a white man’s camp for food and protection was worthless. After Gudaworla and her mother and father left, Carey was alone at the station when he found that three stockmen had left the goat yard open. He shot them all. They were all clan members of either Kupingarri, Gunbungarri or Ngorru Ngorru. Russ returned and ordered him off the property, apparently at gun point. Carey’s wife moved into the homestead camp as Russ’s wife and Mobby continued as part of his stock camp to draw on his protection for past atrocities with Carey. Carey moved on to Tablelands station with Scotty Sadler and Jack Wilson.\textsuperscript{138}

**Negotiating for wives**

Each small group who could claim a reliable white man as protector and Boss was closely connected to an Aboriginal woman who lived with that white man. Informants often referred to their early days white Bosses as their ‘fathers’. In some cases, like Jack Dale and Billy King, they were biological fathers. This designation also reflected the significant role of the Boss as protector, material resource and authority figure to the informants. It also accommodated white men’s relationships with a significant man who called the white Boss his brother, sharing land, resources, women and children. Even Carey, who threatened most Aboriginal people he met, protected and rationed a small group of people who were sisters and close relations of his Aboriginal wife, Mary Karraworda. Harry Howendon survived and became a stock worker at Mount Barnett because Carey’s wife was his aunt. When Carey came across his mother and father in the bush, his wife claimed them as family:

> Only mine old father, he [Carey] been find im in the bush. He take im in the house. Because he been marryem sister for [of] my mother. They been take im la house Mount Barnett, leave im there. Old woman been carrying me and my sister, me two fella been go. Leave me fella. Ah... give it me fella tucker, clothe, ration. He been good to my old woman. Cause he been have his sister.\textsuperscript{139}

After Carey left Gibb River station Howendon and his family became the core working group for Fred Merry, who was manager at Mount Barnett in 1925.

\textsuperscript{138} PF770/1947.

\textsuperscript{139} Harry Howendon, Tapes (40 and 41) 4 April 1992.
Howendon's sister was Merry's woman, and like other female assistants to white men, intervened to stop her younger brother being hurt.

Howendon: Oh he a rough man. When me been little kid, you know, and when me been doin work me properly way, he come up put a whip longa me, chasem me longa horse. Chasem me all around, right round, I go round. I start cry. When I been kid you know. Mummy and Daddy longa home. Only my sister, that's all. [S]he argue with him. My sister argued with Fred Merry for me, like.

Q: Did he listen?

Howendon: No. From there he take me now right up to camp. He give me hiding properly there. My sister come up. Damper, [s]he chuckem longa head longa old Merry, makin im stop. 140

Merry then went on to save young Howendon's life when a bull charged him. The family and one other small group from Gibb River moved with him to the coast in 1931 and were there in Idriess's account in Over The Ranges.141

Carey's wife, Mary Karrawarla was also responsible for rescuing another young girl and close relative, Susie Umulgun, who was taken into Gibb River station and later lived with Dave Rust at Gibb River and Kurunjie stations.142 Informants recall the story of Susie's rescue as the time when Jack Carey told his wife that she would be shot if she didn't help him. Other stories recount instances where Mary Karrawarla lied to him to protect people. Susie Umulgun and Rosie Mamangulya helped build the first station huts in the early 1920s, becoming stock workers as the stations developed in the 1930s and 1940s. Both women moved into station camps after their fathers were killed. They also saw their 'promised husbands' shot and killed; one by a white man and the other by his half-caste assistant.143 They and other older women from the northern stations described their first contact with their white husbands as a process of being chosen from the station camps when they were pre-pubescent girls, receiving limited ration privileges as a white man's wife and like Mick Jowalji's father, times when they went into the bush and assisted

140 Harry Howendon, Tape (40) 4 April 1992. Howendon drove the first flock of sheep across the Ranges from Noonkanbah to Sale River in 1935.

141 Idriess, Over The Ranges, pp. 200-221.


143 Promise husband refers to arranged marriages, see Phyllis Kaberry, Aboriginal Woman: Sacred and Profane, London, Routledge and Sons, 1939 for descriptions of 'marriage' relationships in the central and northern ranges.
white men to find new country and bring young women and men into the camps to settle them down for the station.

Maggie Ghi was younger than Susie Umulgun and Rosie Mamangulya, and stayed in the bush with her parents for a few years after Gibb River and Kurunjie station huts were established. She was a young girl in the 1920s, living with her father and mother on the fringes of Kurunjie station and travelling between Afghans' camps, where they exchanged dog scalps for rations. Her first contact experiences show that a process of entrapment operated to force her into the camps, involving the whole small group of white men, assistants and women.\textsuperscript{144} When Maggie Ghi was about ten years old, her father and mother went to Kurunjie station camp where relatives, like Rosie Mamangulya were already part of the core group, living and working with Scotty Salmond and partners Dave Rust and Scotty Menmuir (called Minderoo by informants). Her parents did not stay for long, deciding instead to sneak into the whitemen's camp and remove her from their verandah to the bush in the east Kimberley.\textsuperscript{145} They were taking Maggie away from Scotty Salmond's camp to meet their obligations to her promised husband who was waiting in a bush camp:

Maggie Ghi: This time that, my husband waiting longa Kurunjie side, that he bin lose him bin go that away la Wyndham side. I bin leave there now.

Question: You followed your husband?

Maggie Ghi: Mmm. They bin come and pickem up me, now, my mother and father. "We'll have to go now, followim up," they reckon. We bin travellin night time, not day time. All about on top hill. We bin run there ...longa that Afghan camp, Jaana [Sahanna] camp.\textsuperscript{146}

Maggie Ghi's promised husband died from being speared, before she was able to become his wife. After her parents returned to their country, her mother died and Maggie and her father, who were travelling in the region between Gibb River and Kurunjie, were tracked and brought into Kurunjie camp. She was initially tied to a

\textsuperscript{144} Maggie Ghi, Tape (61) 30 June 1995.

\textsuperscript{145} Maggie Ghi, Susie Umungul, Tape (44) 17 May 1992.

\textsuperscript{146} Maggie Ghi, Tape (61) 30 June 1995.
bed, then slowly introduced to her new husband, Salmond’s Aboriginal assistant and also to the white men and work:

Maggie Ghi: I followem twofella here [Rosie and Susie sitting with her] My mother been lose [died]. Take me longa white fella now. Because I never know white fella. My father never know whitefella, he didn’t know, I didn’t know. We been sit down there, bushman. [laughs] Bush black fella. My Daddy been sit down bush blackfella properly. We humble way. We been go take me fella to Scotty Minderoo, old bugger.

Rosie Mamangulya: That his [Salmond’s] mate.

Maggie: Right up longa brother.

Jilgi Edwards: All come from one country.

Rosie: Yeah he come from Kotlen. [Scotland]

Maggie: Gotchaman. [Scotchman]

Jilgi: Dave Russ, Scotty Salmon, Scotty Minderoo all from Scotland.

Maggie: That the first white man [she met]. Old bugger Scotty Minderoo. He tellim me “Go on you work this one,” [actions for washing plates]. He married little bit me, not too much but, [everyone laughed].147

Salmond’s Aboriginal assistant had been ‘grown up’ by Salmond with his mother and sister Rosie Mamangulya, who was also one of Salmond’s special female assistants. Their mother came into the camp from the bush, with two children. She was not Salmond’s wife but her daughter Rosie, claimed to be ‘married’ to him although the term covered a range of liaisons.148 Rosie Mamangulya was also ‘married’ to Jack Campbell, Salmond’s assistant who was of Afghan and Aboriginal descent.149 Rosie stated that she was Jack Campbell’s tracker and wife when they went looking for land and workers in the Drysdale River area north of Kurunjie and Gibb River stations. It was Rosie Mamangulya and Jack Campbell who tracked and captured Maggie Ghi and her father and brought them back to the station and tied her to a bed. Rosie’s group from Kurunjie reclaimed her for the Aboriginal assistant, while her father was allowed to sit and receive rations. She


148 Maggie Ghi, Susie Umungul, Rosie Mamangulya, Tapes (43 and 44) 17 May 1992 talked of ‘marrying’ as single incidents as well as long term relationships.

149 Jack Campbell travelled with Alexander Forrest’s exploration party in 1879 however, I am not sure if this is the same man or perhaps a son.
was not forced into marriage immediately because she was too young and ‘frightened’. She was then brought round to the idea of having a husband by older women in Salmond’s camp who were all close relations to his Aboriginal assistant:

Maggie Ghi: Some day we go, that mate mine Biddy, she friendim me all the way. Meantwofella go and sit down longa him now, talk talk long him. That man I bin talking la him now.

“You stop here now, my brother now. And don’t come back.” [s]he tell me. “No me’n you gonna go back.” From there I bin stop longa him.

... I bin camp there, longa that olguman, mother blong to Rosy, Dolly his name. [S]he tell me “You cook Ngarla for him, meat, you know. And tea. Take im for him, give it long him. And he sit down there.” [S]he told me that.

Qquestion: She trained you?

Maggie: Yeah [s]he trainem me all the way...

I bin think about it now “I’ll have to marry that man. He do anything for me.” ...

Biddy now, “Can’t stop single,” He bin say, “You gotta marry.” ...

[S]He bin tellim me like that. He gotta look after me. “He gotta get you anything, like meat if feedim he gottem, meat anything, he gettim. And you gotta do it like that again.” He tellim.

Right I bin think about it now. Finish now, I married now.150

Their marriage did not cause conflicts with other groups, perhaps because her promised husband died and her close relatives were already at the station and assisting with her new marriage. It also suited the manager, Scotty Salmond, who began the process of training Maggie Ghi to become part of his team of male and female stockworkers and domestic assistants who were intimately associated with one another.

When the police patrols came to Kurunjie in the late 1920s, white stockmen were warned of their arrival and sent the women to the camps:

Question: Where did Dave Rust pick you up?

Susie Umungul: He been pick me up here [Gibb River] takin me that way longa old station Ungudinda. [Mount Barnett] We been go that way then, longa Kurunjie. We been sit down there.

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150 Maggie Ghi, Tape (61) 30 June 1995.
Maggie Ghi: Him been living there longa Dave Rust when policeman come out and standing up longa blackfella. “Go that a way.” Send longa camp.

Police man go way, [we] go back longa house, [all laughed].

As there were no half-caste children in the Kurunjie and Gibb River camps in the 1920s the police took no action. Jowalji and Jack Jowan described some of the desperate conflicts which emerged between ‘full brothers’ over women who were captive in a white man’s camp:

And ‘nother one, this whiteman wife, black girl, him been like a that [walked close to her and whispered]. “You give me tobacco.” And gardia been look back like that. He see him talkin with that girl. White man belonga wife.

“Allright get them horses we go long river, big river.” They been go down big river, these two brothers. This nother [brother] been get away. He know that he [the white man] might do something.

But this one [brother] been tell him “He’s alright Boss, he good one. He been tell im you, get that mule and me and you go here longa river.”

Alright plant [other stockmen and horses] can go back, right back to station.

He been take him there, that mule, proper quiet, he can’t move. Him been take long that big waterhole, get him there, finish, shoot.

On a separate occasion Jowalji’s uncle from a bush camp tricked his other uncle at the station into a trap to remove his wife:

Mick Jowalji: And one fella, he bushman again, he been come here longa station. And he been tellim this other young fella, stockman bloke, he been tellim “Ah I been come up pickem up you two fella. We’ll have to get away, bush, leave em manager.”

“Allright.” ...

He got no wife nothing, he single man, he been trickin this nother uncle. So rollem up swag and get going. “Oh well better camp here.”

“Allright make a big fire.” That cold weather. ...

He been get away from station too. Bushman been pushem out. Makem to go way from station. Right la rock, bashed im on la head. Never get lookin. Broke em all, smashem all the spear. Smashem,

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152 Mick Jowalji, Tape (36) 5 March 1991.
finish he get that wife, take im way, that new man been Boss now take it wife bush. [Everyone laughs] Bad people long time you know.  

This may have been a new and destructive development in response to changes in Aboriginal men’s access to women who had moved into the station sphere amidst the instability created by disease, gaolings and restrictions on movements outside the stations or the station work force. Aboriginal men could not simply move out of their area to find another wife. They risked breaking their own Law if they did and may have seriously disrupted the pattern of ownership and caretaking for the land. As a result, a woman’s residence at a station influenced their husband’s capacity to stay outside the station.  

The combination of official and unofficial violence against Aboriginal men who attempted to approach or claim Aboriginal women in white men’s camps led to an ongoing resentment:  

Mordingali: All round this cattle station country. Everywhere whitemen were having black women. They didn’t have too many white women, they were going more for black women. They put it over the blackfella.  

Campbell Allenbrae: We couldn’t fight. He would just take that girl away and she’s got a little fella from him. They were pretty rough with those girls. I know you were handling things alright this side, but my country Kurunjie, they were really rough gardia.  

Mordingali: Oh Christ yeah. That’s the top end. There were no policeman there, that’s bush country and they did what they liked. Shooting men when they were sitting down eating tucker. If they challenged them when they were taking the young women away, shoot the man and take the woman.  

The shortage of wives and restrictions on access of any kind to Aboriginal women also led to Aboriginal intergroup conflict over women who were camped at the stations. This was occasionally settled by spearings and injuries at ceremonial gatherings, or by direct raids on a station camp of the kind described by Idriess at Mount Hart and Kunmunya. When Idriess described the ‘outlaw’ Possum stealing young Weeda Munro from the Mount Hart camp and from her father Wundigul, he  

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154 Patrick Sullivan, ‘Colonising the Kimberley... an Ethnohistory’, Paper submitted to the Northern Australian Research Unit, 1995.  

155 Mordi Munro, Campbell Allenbrae, Tape (11) 1 April 1990.
failed to include the manager Frank Gardiner in the conflict. Possum was her promised husband while Willie, the Aboriginal assistant to the owner, William Chalmers also claimed her. However, Frank Gardiner had chosen her as his homestead girl and neither the bushman nor the assistant were permitted to claim her. ‘Gentleman’ Gardiner, as Idriess called him and as he was known to other white men at the time, chained her to the bough shed verandah and fired shots above her head as a warning never to leave his camp. She was with him when he died in 1934, while Idriess was in the Kimberley researching his books. She was a captive to the stockmen and manager, but her father was also the manager’s assistant. The balance of force and coercion was complex. It was not, as Idriess suggested, a simple case of white men protecting Aboriginal women from the abuses of the outlaw gangs who roamed the bush.

Some stockmen took refuge at stations from punishments by other Aboriginal people, and were protected by their association with a white man. From 1915, when police were withdrawn from the Isdell post, they were also instructed not to make arrests in inter-Aboriginal marriage disputes because of the ‘tribal’ nature of the offence and the complexity of the evidence making it unlikely they would get a conviction. This left managers, stockmen and assistants who could speak English in the position of reporting deaths or injuries and providing evidence for the police. The patrols could be used to remove rival husbands, white or black, and to pursue bush groups who threatened the stability of the stock camps. For example, in 1925 Fred Merry asked for police assistance to arrest six named men who would not ‘settle down’ at his camp or at Mount Barnett and who threatened his stockmen and his authority in the region. One of his stockmen was living at the station for protection after being involved in a wet season killing over an Aboriginal woman. Merry did not mention that he also lived with an Aboriginal girl.


157 Weeda Munro, NB13, 23 January 1996.

158 PD1168/1916, Circular to all police in isolated regions, 30 March 1916.


160 PD5345/1925.
at the Mount Barnett camp. Her alliance with him restricted her access to her promised husband, and may have been significant in the early disputes near his camp after 1924.\textsuperscript{161} He suggested that the group of resistors were killing cattle and coming into his camp while he was away. The police investigated his complaint, and arrested and gaol ed six men for cattle-killing but considered the murder a ‘tribal matter so took no action’.\textsuperscript{162} By removing the cattle killers they had also removed the problem of inter-group disputes which threatened Merry and his stockmen. The shame of living with an Aboriginal woman may well have been hidden behind calls for police to settle cattle killing problems, when they were primarily problems of access to wives.\textsuperscript{163}

Other Aboriginal men, such as Mobby used Jack Carey to disperse bush groups with whom he and his affiliates were fighting. He also used Carey to take Ngulit’s wife and other women.\textsuperscript{164} After Carey left the Gibb River region about 1925, Mobby was punished for his role as assistant to the white man. He travelled with his contemporary, Charcoal or Ungundongerri, through the region from Gibb River to Kunmunya mission and the coastal stations at Sale River, meeting at bush camps and settling disputes. Reverend Love at Kunmunya described the period of ‘revenge killings’ between people from the inland and those taking refuge at the mission.\textsuperscript{165} Informants also spoke of the ‘Damun wars’ when the ‘glass spear head’ people came from Kunmunya to steal women and land from Gibb River.\textsuperscript{166} They were chased away by Fred Russ. The \textit{Nor’West Echo} also reported in 1926

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[161]{This is Howendon’s sister.}
\footnotetext[162]{PD5345/1925, journal PC Bandy, September 1925.}
\footnotetext[163]{Barbara Midmee who was born and grown up at Tablelands station by Scotty Sadler, retold a story of white men at Gibb River and Mount Barnett disposing of an Aboriginal man and claiming his wife. He was lured to the station for work and then clubbed with a hammer and his body burned. I have not been able to untangle the names of the people involved, although according to Barbara Midmee’s narrative, Fred Russ knew of this event. (Barbara Midmee, Tape (23) 1 August 1990 ).}
\footnotetext[164]{Phillip Krunmurra, Maggie Ghi, Tape (60) 29 June 1995.}
\footnotetext[165]{Maisie McKenzie, \textit{The Road To Mowanjum}, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1969, pp. 128-129.}
\footnotetext[166]{Evelyn Bidd, Interview notes, NB9, pp. 55-62.}
\end{footnotes}
that there were ‘tribal wars’ in the region near Kunmunya.\textsuperscript{167} This process of resolving past crimes of women-stealing and revenge killing continued for more than two wet seasons, and according to Charcoal’s son Phillip Krunmurra, was the subject of the message sticks shown in \textit{Over The Ranges}.\textsuperscript{168} When Constable Lawrie O’Neill picked up Charcoal and others in 1932 for taking part in violent retributions over women, he was removing men and women who, over a period of several years, had been responding in part to disputes which emerged during white occupation in the early 1920s. Mobby refused to accept his responsibility for the killings of the early days but accepted punishment for breaking the Law in relation to other men’s wives. He and Carey’s wife, Mary Karraworla became Fred Russ’ trusted assistants and worked at Gibb River or Mount Barnett until their deaths in the late 1960s.\textsuperscript{169} Russ recalled how his father and his Aboriginal assistant, Joe White ‘survived’ because of the ‘little group’ of people, Mary, George, Nipper, Quartpot and Mobby who were forced to align themselves with the Boss for their own survival.\textsuperscript{170}

The Carey narratives and related incidents during the 1920s uncover a range of temporary and fragile alliances between Aboriginal people and white men which increased people’s security only marginally. From Gudaworla’s perspective (one repeated by other informants) Carey was different from other early days white men because he killed women, girls, trained workers and people who signalled their preparedness to ‘settle’ by camping near the homestead. From written sources and other early days stories, it is evident that Carey was also part of a wider process of ‘settling’ the northern ranges and, like his contemporaries, had an Aboriginal wife and child, and an Aboriginal assistant who had been brought up by white men, and was quick to use a gun to threaten people who challenged his authority. Carey differed from other white men in his propensity for cruelty and his willingness to

\\textsuperscript{167} \textit{Nor’West Echo} 10 April 1926.

\textsuperscript{168} Idriess wrote that a rumour went through the camp that Murphy had been killed somewhere near the coast. This fits with the oral account that Mobby, known to white people as Murphy was going to be punished. Idriess, \textit{Over The Range}, p. 45.

\textsuperscript{169} NDG36/55.

\textsuperscript{170} Fred Russ, Interview notes, NB9, pp. 46-47, 3 June 1992.
transcend the boundaries of white men's behaviour. In the process of breaking the rules of workforce protection he entered the separate sphere of Aboriginal people's interactions. He spoke Ngarinyin and walked naked in the bush, carried a bundle of spears in which to hide his gun, used his wife to meet and call in bush people, hid near water holes and in rocky outcrops, painted himself with white ochre, hung a corpse in a tree near a known walking path, used a rasp on people's feet, cut the ankle ligament, sat with men at a ceremony then salted their cicatrisce wounds. His power to find people, track them and trick them was so unusual that he, unlike any other white stockmen in the northern ranges narratives told as a part of this research, was said to have some form of magical power himself, similar to the all-encompassing lightning powers of the north Kimberley.\textsuperscript{171} He had truly 'gone native' in the sense that he had became savage and immoral. He increased the terror of the early days by appropriating and exploiting Aboriginal people's secret sphere of fears and obligations, and confused the established boundaries between white and black. Billy King, Peter Lacy at Mount Elizabeth and Fred Russ said Carey symbolised and exaggerated Aboriginal people's fears of all white men for years after.\textsuperscript{172}

Ngulit's escape from Jack Carey added significantly to his legendary status. The long and detailed narrative told by several informants describes him evading Carey, despite being chained to a tree with a gun pressed to his forehead. His powers over life and death extended to a range of instances which enabled him to heal people and to escape from police and trackers. Ngulit's powers of resistance were also evinced by the stories of his being able to steal tobacco from white men's store rooms and locked tin trunks, and deliver it to his group who continued to walk in the bush or who were camped at another station.\textsuperscript{173} Tobacco was a powerful commodity used in exchange for work and sex, and strictly controlled by white men. It became a key commodity in the maintenance and training of a station workforce.


\textsuperscript{172} Billy King, Interview notes, 20 May 1992; Fred Russ, Interview notes, NB9, pp. 46-47, 3 June 1992; Peter Lacy, Interview notes, NB8, p. 66.

\textsuperscript{173} Campbell Allenbrac, Morndi Munro, Tape (11) 1 April 1990.
In general, the government failed to protect Kimberley Aboriginal people from cruelty, and rarely discussed the possibility of coercion or exploitation in the pastoral system. Instead, it provided legislative and police support for managers and stockmen to control the process of integration of Aboriginal people into the pastoral system, with few constraints on the methods to achieve those ends. Newspaper reports of the 'wild tribes' of 'Derby's outback' where white men were in 'constant danger of losing their lives' were labelled as 'ridiculous' and 'libellous' by the Member for Roebourne. Plans to settle British migrants in the north were being negotiated at the time.\textsuperscript{174} The Department and government hoped that the 700 Aboriginal people who were thought to be living in the ranges between Mount Barnett and the coast would quietly move to Munja 90 miles away, where they would be fed on beef and trained to raise crops of peanuts.\textsuperscript{175} About 150 people worked occasionally for the manager Harold Reid and his wife in exchange for regular rations, but their forays into the bush and stations further inland continued.

In 1927 after twelve years as Chief Protector and inspired by the public outcry over the Forrest River or Marndoc Reserve massacres of 1926, Neville wrote a strictly confidential minute to the Under Secretary to the Attorney General:

\begin{quote}
I can definitely assert that throughout the North there is still much amiss in the relations between blacks and whites. Numerous though the reports are, only a small portion of what is wrong is ever reported officially to the Department.

It is well known by those associated with the North that there are definite principles employed by those engaging in nefarious practices, which result in the degradation and assist in the extermination of the black race. Then, again, under the existing conditions of employment in the North, the Aborigines are far too often regarded as the chattels of the white employer, and while actual cruelty is not alleged, coercion is undoubtedly used to enforce the employer's wishes, not only as regards working but also in regard to the disposal of women and dependents, savouring on a system of semi-slavery.\textsuperscript{176}
\end{quote}

In 1928 Neville travelled with Elkin to Munja, via Mount Hart station, staying for only a few days and as his biographer said, finally taking part in a true adventure in

\textsuperscript{174} Nor'West Echo 5 and 6 November 1926.

\textsuperscript{175} ARAD 1927, MS AADL.

\textsuperscript{176} AD412/1927, CPA Strictly Confidential Minute to US, 29 July 1927.
the wilderness. The following year, an Aboriginal Reserve was gazetted at Mount Hann abutting Mount Elizabeth and Gibb River leases. Nevertheless, Neville saw no protective role for missionaries when the United Aborigines Mission sent Tom Street into the north Kimberley in 1929 to evangelise the ‘untouched tribes’ on the Mount Hann reserve. He refused to give them land or government support, and instructed police to check on their activities to ensure that they were not gaining a foothold in the north by masquerading as pastoral lease holders. J.R.B. Love and the Presbyterians were on the coast at Kunmunya, Reid was at Munja and the Catholics were on the north coast, and that was enough. Neville’s attitude was that regardless of how well meaning the missionary, the ‘government should be first in these areas’.

The missionaries Tom Street and Howard Coate stayed in the region for the next ten years by negotiating with lease holders for the use of their land in exchange for work which was done with the assistance of a large group of Ngarinyin people who came to their camp. Like the majority of the white men in the region, they were also itinerants who relied on an informal system of exchange with other white men who occupied leases without large herds of cattle, or who just occupied old camp sites and struggled to survive. In the early 1930s the Depression placed further pressure on poorer lease holders and owners of marginal land. Sidney Kidman sold his leases at Isdell Downs, and Kurunjie was temporarily closed while Dave Rust and Jack Campbell assisted Fred Russ at Gibb River and Salmond sought work at Munja. The work was a failure for Salmond and resulted in him having to repay the Department for rations he had lent to his friend, Fred Merry - who in turn swapped them for dingo scalps with doggers at camps in the northern ranges. Amongst them was Jack Wilson, the ex-policeman.

The correspondence surrounding the missing stores alluded to Salmond having ‘gone mental’. Reid explained Salmond’s condition as possibly a combination of


178 AD195/1929, Mount Barnett Mission.

179 AD 195/29, Neville to Minister 20 November 1933.

180 AD237/1935.
drink and war injuries. Salmond was not charged and paid for the missing stores from wages due. His letters to Reid explaining the situation gave an indication of his desperate straits and the social isolation of itinerant white workers. By the time he left Munja he was tempted to 'take the short cut' - suicide. He referred to being in a bad state with drink his 'biggest enemy' and the bush, 'as usual' the only cure for his troubled disposition.\textsuperscript{181} The issue which most troubled Salmond was the accusation from the manager at Munja that he 'thought nothing of cohabiting' with Aboriginal women. Chief Protector Neville responded by calling for the cancellation of all general permits to men who lived only from dogging or itinerant labour. But as Reid told him, men in the northern ranges knew the Aborigines Act but police rarely visited or checked on them and he was not able to either.\textsuperscript{182}

By the early 1930s the Ngarinyin population was severely depleted, despite having the protection of rugged ranges and a government and religious mission in neighbouring territory. While the country supported groups of bush people, the populations at station camps and missions had few children.\textsuperscript{183} Diseases would have had some impact as epidemics of influenza, malaria and leprosy were recorded in this period at Kunmunya, Munja and in the towns.\textsuperscript{184} The manager of Gibb River station told his son of visiting camps of dead and dying people in the 1920s who were being decimated by influenza.\textsuperscript{185} Salmond stated that the problems which he had experienced trying to settle indigenous people down had dissipated by the early 1930s because there were so few people left in the region.\textsuperscript{186} Cases of venereal disease were identified at the Isdell police camp as early as 1907.

Violent confrontations between police, white men and Aboriginal people added to the picture of decimation and decline, as did violent internal dispute settlement

\textsuperscript{181} AD237/1935, Salmond to Reid, 23 April 1935.

\textsuperscript{182} AD237/1935, Reid to CPA, 2 June 1935.

\textsuperscript{183} AD195/1929, Mount Barnett Mission.

\textsuperscript{184} ARAD 1930-1935, MS AADL; PD6975/1932, PC O'Neill.

\textsuperscript{185} Fred Russ, Interview notes, NB9, pp. 38-48, 3 June 1992.

which occasionally resulted in death by spearing. By the early 1930s, when UAM missionaries began the unofficial Mount Barnett mission, their call for an end to the ‘evil’ practices referred to internal disputes. Idriess, like the missionaries, also focussed on disease and moral decay within the indigenous population to explain their decline without taking the impact of white ‘settlement’ into account. Fred Russ, Mary Karraworla, Mobby and others sat down at the missionaries’ camp at Mount Barnett with members of the groups who had been forced to flee their country but were returning with the missionaries. This meeting, according to Gudaworla, signalled their move back to their land and an end to the extreme violence and the ‘early days’. She recalled the missionaries’ arrival from Mount House to the Mount Barnett and Gibb River area:

“One fella Boss there with gardia. Watch this one. Might be gardia.” Mefella [my relations] been talk. Alright he been go now. He been go back [and bring] old man brother [Fred Russ’ ‘brother’ Mobby] and Mary Karraworla.

“What this one, he gardia, headstockman?” he tellim. “No that’s a missionary, he gotta preachem you fella bye and bye, night time.” he say. “He learnem you fellas. Where you fellas killem self, all this bad.”

Old woman Karraworla say “That a missionary, missionary.” [S]he been say. Everywhere this way ration camp. “Missionary, missionary.”

All right we been sit down now.187

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Chapter Four

Government policy and practice: the leprosy campaign and ‘benevolent supervision’, 1930s and 1940s.

Government policies which directed that managers, rather than the State provide rations to whole communities of Aboriginal people, as well as a campaign of leprosy patrols from 1936 to 1945 added to the pressure on northern people to settle with a pastoral manager and conform to station life. Bush populations declined in the late 1930s as patterns of occupation contracted toward stations, missions and station camps, and a pastoral routine was established. Aboriginal people who moved between Munja, Kunmunya and the pockets of bushland in the northern ranges and who were not incorporated into a station workforce became the focus of a government leprosy campaign from 1936 to 1945. Leprosy and other diseases were important factors in population decline and the history of the north Kimberley. Missions and ration stations closed immediately after the Second World War at the end of the campaign years, while the stigma of leprosy and regional isolation measures such as the ‘leper line’ in 1941, which prevented Aboriginal people’s movements outside the Kimberley, were also factors working against pastoral development in the north Kimberley.¹

Police patrols made extensive sweeps across the north, raiding camps and removing groups of bush people who were suspected of carrying leprosy. Station people were also caught up in the campaign, and were isolated at the Derby leprosarium, known as Bungarun to Aboriginal people.² Of the estimated 1,134 admissions to the Derby leprosarium from its inception in 1936 to its closure in 1986, approximately 513 people came from the northern ranges.³ Several of the men and

¹ W.S. Davidson, Havens of Refuge: A History Of Leprosy In Western Australia, Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1978, pp. 104-105.


³ Derby Leprosarium Admission Books, 1935-1981, West Kimberley Public Health Department; Davidson, Havens of Refuge, p. 109, records about 400 Ngarinyin, Wunambal and Worrora speaking people admitted into the Leprosarium from 1929-1975. I have included people from
women who were labelled as trouble makers by police and Europeans in the early 1930s and mentioned by Idriess in *Over The Range*, were captured by the leprosy patrols between 1938 and 1943.\(^4\) Senior men and women like Ngulit, Charcoal, Mobby, Dolly Dale, Yuulut and Marmandoo, who had been with police at the Isdell camp and involved in retributions in the Gibb River region in the early 1930s were amongst them. Their containment in the leprosarium added to the dispersal of northern people outside their country and away from relatives on the stations. At the same time the institutionalisation process brought members of previously dispersed groups together in the leprosarium, encouraging the spread across language and clan groups of stories like that of Ngulit’s escape from Jack Carey and the police.\(^5\)

The leprosy campaign provided the conditions for contact between government officers and northern bush people, and became the main form of outside intervention on northern stations. It was conducted in such a way as to reinforce the pattern of police raids and removal of bush people from the early days, rather than introducing a form of government assistance and protection for Aboriginal people. Leprosy and the collection campaigns, together with government policies aimed at segregating Aboriginal people on pastoral stations constrained Aboriginal people’s movements and contacts with anyone outside the immediate confines of the station and the Boss. The campaign of leprosy collections also reinforced the division between work and ‘holiday’ time, and undermined senior men and women’s authority over younger workers.

**The leprosy campaign**

Police patrols in the early 1930s, like the one led by Lawrie O’Neill in 1934 which became Idriess’s focus for *Over The Ranges*, brought leprosy in the north to the attention of the government and the public.\(^6\) At that time, the Health Department did not know the mode of transmission of leprosy, and residents of Broome and Derby

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\(^4\) Idriess, *Over The Range: Sunshine And Shadow In The Kimberley*, Sydney, Angus And Robertson, 1937, see particularly chapters 9 and 12.

\(^5\) Jack Dale, Interview notes, NB9, pp. 96-9.

\(^6\) WA 21 June 1934, p. 17; Davidson, *Havens of Refuge*, p. 45.
panicked to such an extent that the District Medical Officer warned that any alleged case of leprosy in the towns would be hunted into the bush by them and thus needed to be removed immediately.\textsuperscript{7} Between 1933 and 1937, 147 new cases were diagnosed. Numbers rose sharply in 1936 when Reid from Munja, Reverend Love from Kunmunya, the Travelling Medical Inspector, Dr Davis and four trackers made a special patrol of the coastal region around Munja, Kunmunya and north to Vansittart Bay, west of Kalumburu. About 42 people were collected from camps in the region.\textsuperscript{8} Reverend Love reported to the Commissioner that the patrols were frightening Aboriginal people and keeping them away from the mission.\textsuperscript{9} Separate patrols of stations close to Derby resulted in 17 people being removed from Kimberley Downs and six from Meda.

In 1937 Davis made a special patrol into the central ranges region north of the King Leopold Ranges, an area which was ‘hitherto untouched’ by leprosy patrols.\textsuperscript{10} He collected only three people from the stations at Mount House and Mount Hart, reporting that it was ‘not always easy to get natives to submit to examination’ and he was thus not certain of the extent of disease amongst people who had left the stations prior to his patrol and were hiding in the bush. Some managers were so antagonistic toward Davis’ ‘interference’ that he had been prevented from seeing their station groups. This had happened at Napier Downs Station, when Harry Bannon was manager. Morndingali recalled the exchange:

When the first doctor, named Doctor Davis, came around the country, I was a working man then and Doctor Musso came after that. Davis came to Kimberley Downs and Napier, put us in a line and took our clothes off, trying to examine us for leprosy and things like that. Harry Bannon was manager. He was rough on that doctor, rough on policeman too. He said, “Before you come trying to do that, you come ask me. That boy is working with me, I know if he’s sick. I’ll send him to hospital. But he’s not sick now. What are you trying to take the clothes off him? How would you like standing there naked? I’m the Boss, if he’s sick he’ll tell me and I’ll send him in for medicine.”

\textsuperscript{7} Davidson, \textit{Havens of Refuge}, pp. 52-53.


\textsuperscript{9} ARAD 1936, Kunmunya Report, MS AADL.

\textsuperscript{10} ARAD 1937, MS AADL.
used to tell Doctor Davis and Musso too. Half the time they never came to examine us, used to leave us alone.\textsuperscript{11} Davis nevertheless reported to the Commissioner that the ‘rumours’ that Aboriginal people on stations in the northern ranges were all ‘sick and dying’ were unfounded. He believed the main problem was that people did not have enough to eat, which resulted in a very high mortality rate. He felt it was ‘remarkable that there was not more evidence of malnutrition’.\textsuperscript{12} This, coupled with untreated injuries from horse falls and ‘fighting’ increased the number of disabled Aboriginal people on each station. The further north he went, the more Aboriginal people’s health improved because they had better access to bush foods.\textsuperscript{13}

Cases of leprosy (and granuloma) continued to increase in the coastal region in 1938. Reverend Love at Kunmunya advised Neville that the incidence of leprosy was ‘alarming’ and influenza ‘disastrous’.\textsuperscript{14} Police Constable Cooper undertook a patrol of the northern region from May to July 1938, to ‘evacuate leprosy suspects’ and investigate complaints from Fred Merry at Sale River station that his sheep were being speared, and that he had been threatened by an Aboriginal man named McGinty, who had approached his camp while he was away and demanded stronger tea from Merry’s wife.\textsuperscript{15} Cooper was assisted by two trackers, Kicker and Paddy, with additional help from private Aboriginal assistants and Protector Reid from Munja. The methods of capturing leprosy suspects were the same as those used for suspected criminals: a policeman and two or three trackers surrounded camps, and at dawn raided and put suspects on the chain. Shots were fired into the air or at dogs to stop anyone running away. The entry for 18 January 1936 read: ‘...natives very wild, nine rounds of ammunition expended to quieten camp, had difficulty making natives come together, in all we rounded up 31 natives only 1 getting away.’ And again on the ninth of September 1936: ‘Raided camp fired 15 rounds of ammunition to quieten the camp, natives very frightened and attempted to

\textsuperscript{11} Morndi Munro, Tape (14) 5 April 1990.

\textsuperscript{12} ARAD 1937, Davis Report, MS AADL.

\textsuperscript{13} ibid.

\textsuperscript{14} ARAD 1938, MS AADL.

\textsuperscript{15} PD2200/1938, journal PC Cooper, 15 May-31 July 1938.
get away - got all the camp 27 natives in all amongst whom was the witness'. The police parties visited all stations, outcamps and miners' and doggers' camps from Meda to Kunmunya. They travelled to Mount Hart which was abandoned and to the old camp near Mount Hart homestead, which was also empty after the death of another nomad white, mica miner Syd O'Sullivan alias Dan Ryan. Graces Knob and Echo Hills were occupied occasionally by doggers, Bob Muir and Peter Backsen. The police raided nearby camps and bush camps in the area to locate leprosy suspects and resolve future law and order problems by shooting 41 dogs in three camps and an 'excess' in a fourth.

Cooper arrested seven of the men involved in the sheep killing incident at Sale River but did not transport them to Derby for trial. Instead he arranged for them to be rationed at Munja station, on condition that they stay away from the white men's camps at Sale River where Merry was, and Marie Springs where Bob Thompson had started his small agricultural lease to grow peanuts. Cooper did not believe Merry had secured or shepherded his sheep and felt he had exaggerated the numbers killed by Aboriginal people. Cooper's report contained unusually detailed ethnographic information about the movements of people in the region, their ceremonial practices and obligations to exchange meat with visiting groups, and locations of men's and women's sacred sites. One section of his report read:

Dandalmoorooyoo is a sacred ground where they perform their ceremonies. In January last the 15 referred to above [men] were employed by the headman of the Sale River tribe to bring pieces of painted wood and a corroboree which they call "Croker" from Munja Stn natives to Sale River. It is the bounden duty of the head man to supply those employed with food on their arrival for the service performed. Dandalmoorooyoo is situated within one and a half miles from Merry's homestead and the game is killed out of that area. As there were a few station bred sheep close at hand, the carriers demanding their dues, and no other game for miles around, sheep were killed to satisfy them. Only the men are allowed to visit Dandalmoorooyoo. The sheep were cooked and parts of the meat was taken to Moonyuloo and given to the women there.17

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16 PD7005/1935, vol. 7, 'Wyndham Police Patrols'.

17 PD2200/1938, journal PC Cooper, 15 May-31 July 1938.
These insights may have been pointed out to him by members of a team of visiting anthropologists who were based at Munja at the time of his investigation.\textsuperscript{18} They showed that white occupation in the region was sparse and, although it had not stopped some Aboriginal people’s movements across the country from as far as Mount Barnett and Gibb River to Munja and Sale River and Kunmunya, the population in the bush and on stations was in decline and under continuing pressure from patrols and disease. Cooper did not realise that in the early 1930s Thompson had placed his camp near a significant sacred site because it attracted potential labour.\textsuperscript{19}

The police patrols failed to locate leprosy suspects who took refuge on Augustus Island or dispersed and hid in sandstone ranges, where their tracks could not be followed. The two senior men, McGinty and Nipper, who were named as the men ‘creating a bad influence on the others’, were not located, while only twelve adults and two children were collected for the Derby Leprosarium. Four of the adults, two men and two women, were found on the return journey at Scotty Sadler’s old camp near Mount House. One couple had run away from Kunmunya to avoid the leprosy patrols there. The other couple were hunted off Napier Downs by Harry Bannon, to protect his workers from the spread of disease.\textsuperscript{20} The man who was identified by Cooper as ‘Nullun’ was Ngulit the ‘magic man’ who had escaped Jack Carey in the 1920s and continued to move between stations in the early 1930s. Harry Bannon was diagnosed with leprosy in 1942 and moved south to Woorooloo sanatorium. He joined Bob Thompson, alias R. Steele, owner of the small agricultural lease at Marie Springs who had voluntarily submitted for treatment in the Derby Leprosarium directly after Cooper’s visit in July 1938.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{18} Petri, Frobenius, Fox, Lomell, Schultz and Gerta Kleist from Germany and Pentony from the University of Western Australia. Capell was also in the region undertaking linguistic research. ARAD 1938, MS AADL.

\textsuperscript{19} PD5321/1940, O’Neill to Tredgold, 10 August 1934.

\textsuperscript{20} Morndi Munro, Tape (22) 31 July 1990.

\textsuperscript{21} PD2200/1938, journal PC Cooper, 15 May-31 July 1938.
At the end of 1938 Davis reported that leprosy was spreading from the coast but he was still unsure of the extent of the disease because of the numbers of people who had escaped previous patrols and were hiding in the bush. After Bob Thompson’s diagnosis confirmed fears among police and non-Aboriginal residents that white people could catch leprosy, Derby police refused to make another patrol into the ranges without a doctor.22 Davis called for a ‘more efficient and drastic’ approach to the northern region to ‘survey every native bringing them all in’. Thus the region would ‘be rendered clean with every hope of future settlement’.23 A conference between government ministers and departmental heads in February 1939 also heard the disturbing news that white station people were sending their families away from the region and threatening to abandon their leases.24 Davis’ suggestion for a more ‘drastic’ approach was followed.

In 1939 two patrols each of two policemen, at least three trackers and a doctor, set out from Derby and Wyndham to inspect and collect leprosy suspects throughout the north.25 The western patrol tracked and raided camps, pursuing one group of ten people for four days until they were finally detained on chains. The group, which had been warned by two women and two children from Munja, fled into the bush carrying one old man on a sapling stretcher. They were among 45 people detained at Munja following the patrols. Twenty-four of them who could walk were admitted to the Derby leprosarium.26 The two patrols met at Gibb River and raided three camps in the region. From one camp McGinty and his wife, who had escaped Cooper’s patrol in 1938 and travelled in the Gibb River and Mount Barnett region, were both detained as lepers. Yulbu, who was Weeda Munro’s sister and a stockwoman at Mount Hart until it was abandoned in 1937, was caught by the patrols at Walcott Inlet. She and three other people escaped from the patrols and were not recaptured. As the patrol returned to Derby it picked up Nurgaworla, listed

22 Davidson, Havens of Refuge, p. 71.

23 ARAD 1938, MS AADL.

24 Davidson, Havens of Refuge, p. 72.

25 PD2200/1938, journal PC Rowe, 3 June 1939-5 September 1939.

as Marianne Nilguawun, from Napier Downs station. Nurguworla was Morndingali’s mother, who had been captured by police when they were stationed at Mount Barnett between 1903 and 1914. She became a cook at the Isdell police camp and was taken south to Napier Downs where she became Tom Munro’s (Linyit) wife. She died in the leprosarium in 1944.

The statistics from the leprosy patrols show that by 1939 there were only small numbers of Aboriginal people, from 17 to 27, resident at each northern station with a total working population of about 150. There were larger numbers being rationed at missions and government stations (143 at Kunmunya and 154 at Munja) and groups of people moving between camps. However, they were greatly reduced from previous estimates. In 1939, Reverend Love at Kunmunya reported a marked and worrying decline in the mission population due to disease and drought in the region. He believed that the situation in the bush was even worse than at the mission:

We have expected in past years visits of people from the bush in numbers up to one hundred at one time. These visiting parties are much smaller lately. Reports have been brought in of deaths of people whom we know and doubtless there have been others of whom we have not heard.28

There were only 14 children amongst the 200 people who visited Kunmunya mission in 1939. By 1941 there had been only 44 births at the mission in 23 years.29 The situation was similar at Munja, with the manager and official Protector Harold Reid reporting that the numbers of people attending the station were down from 300 to 150, with very few children or pregnant women in the group.30 After Thompson, Merry and other small holders abandoned their leases in 1939, Love was alone at Kunmunya. He wrote that there was

27 ARAD 1939, MS AADL.

28 ibid.

29 Maisie McKenzie, The Road To Mowanjum, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1969, p. 158.

30 ARAD 1939, MS AADL.
no profitable industry at present in view in this part of Australia. If there had been, the country would have long ago been taken up by white settlers. White settlers have tried and all have so far failed.  

Love left Kunmunya in 1940.

In late 1939 and 1940 Davis made a ‘determined effort’ to clear the inland region of the King Leopold Ranges and north to near Mount Barnett and Gibb River, of leprosy suspects, including those people who had escaped previous patrols. He travelled for two months with police and trackers, detaining a further 32 people at Munja ration station. Commissioner Bray instructed Reid to lead a raid on the UAM camp at Mount Barnett. Reid warned him that the methods of raiding camps could cause embarrassment if they were made public:

I would have to approach this camp with my boys under cover of darkness and take up our positions surrounding the camp and wait for break of day before making a move, would then rush the camp and endeavour to hold everyone in it. It’s a risky game and one has to have a rifle to bluff the natives into submission and there is always a chance of some daring native putting up a fight and one could be jammed into using a weapon to protect his life....

He added that he did not have the resources in men or horses to undertake the patrol and if he went, he would need to leave the leprosy suspects and rationees unattended at Munja. He sent a tracker, Casey, to lead the patrol, but Casey ran away after realising that he was also a leprosy suspect.

During the 1940 patrols the missionaries’ camp at Mount Barnett was raided, but only four women were captured, a small group of men escaping to the nearby hills. Constable Mason wrote that the missionary Howard Coate had told Aboriginal people they did not need to leave the area because he could provide the necessary medical treatment. This disturbed the doctors at the leprosarium and

31 ARAD 1939, Kunmunya Report, MS AADL.


33 AD195/1929, H. Reid to CNA, 1 September 1940.

34 AD195/1929, journal PC Mason, 9 August 1940.
added to Departmental antagonism toward the missionaries which had existed since
the early 1930s when they first entered the northern ranges.35

Despite continuing opposition from Neville and from the Benedictines who ran the
Kalumburu mission, Tom Street, Ern Faulkener, Howard Coate and William
Heggie persisted with their evangelising for the UAM, beginning a small unofficial
mission camp in the Mount Barnett region in 1933 and an outcamp of Sunday
Island Mission on the west coast, south of Munja, in 1934. Their passionately held
beliefs were expressed in regular items which appeared in the UAM Messenger
during these early years, reporting on the struggle to overcome government
resistance and an extreme lack of resources for their enterprise. Tom Street wrote in
1934:

Having spied out the land, it is time to possess it for the Lord and build
up a work for him. Station boys at Gibb River know so little English
we could not use them for interpreters. Knowing nothing of God,
these poor, ignorant, Satan bound souls naturally are not conscious of
Sin against Him, nor their need for a Saviour. Never before has there
gone into this range country seeking these lost sheep for the Lord. No
wonder that Satan does his utmost to keep the light of the glorious
Gospel out of this stronghold of his.36

Howard Coate and Ern Faulkener worked as itinerant missionaries during the
1930s, living in a similar manner to the doggers and poorly resourced station
owners and managers in the northern region. They exchanged flour, tea, bush meat
and cloth with local indigenous people, in return for their assistance to build huts
and yards and their attention to Bible readings. Howard Coate followed Reverend
Love's method of evangelising; he learned and utilised indigenous languages,

35 The Abbot of New Norcia made representations to the Commissioner in 1934 to stop the
UAM from entering the north as it would cause 'antagonisms' with their mission further north.
Neville refused to provide subsidies or support the central ranges mission. AD195/1929, Abbot
of New Norcia Catalan Superior of the Drysdale River Mission to Minister, 21 September
1934.

36 Tom Street, 'In The Interior', The United Aborigines Messenger, 1 October 1933.
eventually translating large sections of the Bible into Ngarkinyin and becoming a renowned but reluctant expert in north Kimberley Aboriginal languages.37

At the time of the leprosy patrols in late 1940 the Mount Barnett camp was described by police, and Reid, as a collection of trouble-makers, wife stealers, escaped lepers and runaway workers from surrounding stations.38 Reid noted that it was also a known meeting place for station people on ‘holidays’ from Mount House and Gibb River. The UAM missionaries did not come into conflict with local station owners or managers over the control and maintenance of Aboriginal workers, as was the case further south near Udalia, La Grange and Moola Bulla. When the missionaries came to Mount House in 1934 the manager instructed Gudaworla’s brother Marmandoo to accompany them north. Gudaworla joined them in about 1935. She had travelled north from Mount House toward Gibb River where her relatives were working for Fred Russ. Thirty other people also moved to the missionary’s camp about 1935, after Isdell Downs station was abandoned.39

Bob Muir, who owned the Mount Barnett and Graces Knob leases came to an arrangement with the missionaries, allowing them to camp on his leases in exchange for rationing camp people when they were not needed at his camp. Fred Russ at Gibb River assisted the missionaries by permitting his workers to visit during their breaks from work. Russ’s son believed the camp at Mount Barnett swelled to at least 200 people during this period of re-occupation with the missionaries.40 Gudaworla’s brother, Marmandoo, stayed with the missionaries throughout the late 1930s until he was collected by a leprosy patrol in 1942. In April 1940, Coate bought Muir’s leases but the pressure from police leprosy raids and lack of resources forced him to abandon the camp, and he joined the armed

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38 AD195/1929, Reid to CNA, 1 September 1940 and Police Reports on file.

39 Tom Street, ‘Mr Street On The Track’, United Aborigines Messenger, 1 September 1935.

services. His contemporary, Ern Faulkener, continued evangelising in the north from Mount House station, where he used his carpentry skills in the building of the Mount House homestead as well as carting mail and stores from Derby across the ranges. Coate returned after 1946 to work along the Gibb River road from Derby.

After the 1940 leprosy patrols Travelling Inspector Davis resigned and enlisted in the armed services. Before he left he revised his earlier assessments of the limited nature of leprosy, reporting that it was endemic in the northern ranges and may have been since 1930. In 1941 a wire compound was built at Munja to hold leprosy suspects but inmates continued to escape and many died. In 1942, after Japanese air raids on Broome panic spread among Kimberley residents and about 30 people escaped from the Derby leprosarium and travelled north to Munja. They were placed in the wire compound but some escaped into the bush when there was the prospect of being shipped to Derby again.

Mabel King, born in the bush near Munja in about 1938 told a story of running from the police on the Munja reserve when she was very small. Her father would not settle at Munja or on any pastoral stations and they were walking in the bush when a police patrol saw them. She was swung onto his shoulders in a hessian bag and bumped about until they had escaped capture. She was transported to the leprosarium in September 1945, when she was estimated to be seven years old, among a large group of people including her mother, younger brother and sister. She was released shortly after and moved to Mount House station in about 1950, where she became Billy King’s wife and worked in the Mount House homestead.

41 AD195/1929.

42 ARAD 1940, MS AADL.

43 Davidson, Havens of Refuge, p. 88.

44 I was unable to tape this story. Mabel King, NB1, 19 May 1989, p. 21.

By 1944 Munja was reputedly little more than a 'holding place for lepers', avoided by indigenous people and needing regular injections of Departmental money. The Commissioner of Native Administration decided to close it in 1944, and four years later most of the Munja residents were transferred to the care of the Presbyterians at Kunmunya. At this point several of the working men and women and their families moved to Kimberley Downs and Napier Downs, where they were integrated into the workforce to work with Morndingali and his brother, father and uncles. Morndingali remembered the last days of Munja when he had been enlisted by Reid to work at the wire compound, and track runaways and sick people in the bush. He remembered:

They were dying. We carting with a two [wheel] cart, little cart, little steel wheel cart. We used to cart them fellas in that hill. And they're there all been bury up before they got to Bungarun. They died there. ...We used to drag them fella dead body take em down to the hill there in the bit of a ...they got a bit of a ridges there, we had to bury them there. And that's when that Munja used to broke down. They was frighten that was wash away might come from all that stuff might comin back to the home so they give that place away.

Further leprosy patrols in 1943 and 1945 brought the numbers of northern ranges people isolated at the Leprosarium from 1938 to 1945 to 153 adults and 14 children under the age of 16. Forty four were recorded in the leprosarium Admission Books as more than 50 years old. Old Charcoal, who had escaped from O'Neil in 1932 was recaptured in 1934, and described by Idriess as a fearsome and respected man who would not cooperate with whites. He escaped from the leprosy compound at Munja and was still 'at large' in 1945. Police reported that he was travelling in the region north of Gibb River station with 25 other escapees and suspected lepers from the Leopold Ranges and the coastal areas around Munja and Kunmunya.

While in the leprosarium a range of strategies were adopted by Aboriginal inmates to continue ceremonial and social obligations, both inside the institution and on the outside. Charcoal's son, Phillip Krunmurra, described a formal ceremonial

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47 Morndi Munro, Tape (22) 31 July 1990.

48 AD268/1945, O'Neill Report to CNA, 22 September 1945.
retribution planned from the leprosarium which took place during the late 1940s near Gibb River station, over 300 kilometres north.\textsuperscript{49} Jack Dale and David Mowaljarlai described dances and initiations which occurred there with the old men, the 'Bosses' overseeing ceremonies. Nevertheless, leprosy and the isolation process had an impact on the numbers of people in the bush and continued the dispersal process which had started with European colonisation of the north Kimberley. The removal and isolation of senior men and women in the leprosarium separated them from younger stock workers on the stations, and undermined the protective role of the government ration station at Munja and Kunmunya mission and the Mount Barnett 'mission' camp.

The methods of collecting leprosy suspects resulted in a protracted period of tense and punitive relations between police and northern bush people. During the War, the Aborigines Department was instructed to close all coastal ration points, collect all 1,450 Aborigines not employed on pastoral stations in the Derby region and concentrate them at points 100 miles inland.\textsuperscript{50} Otherwise, according to Brigadier Hoade, 'practically all natives would be liquidated by the enemy before they left these shores. The labour problem after the War would then be most difficult.' The Chief Protector warned that there were 'practically no' Departmental staff in the Kimberley and that if the armed services went out with guns, it could develop into a 'nigger hunt' as Aboriginal people tried to evade capture.\textsuperscript{51} The plan was abandoned, although police patrols of the northern region in 1944 and 1945 did occur.

Constable Carr led a patrol across the north from Wyndham to Kunmunya to collect leprosy suspects and shoot camp dogs.\textsuperscript{52} Armed trackers killed one man and injured another, and an Aboriginal woman released chained prisoners, who then set fire to the constable's saddles and gear, leaving him to walk north to Kalumburu mission. The ensuing inquiry recommended no action be taken as there was

\textsuperscript{49} Phillip Krummura, Tape (60) 29 June 1995.

\textsuperscript{50} AD1032/1943, Brigadier Hoade Western Command to CPA, 29 March 1943.

\textsuperscript{51} AD1032/1943, CPA to Brigadier Hoade, 10 April 1943.

\textsuperscript{52} PD3906/1944; AD268/1945.
confused evidence from Aboriginal witnesses - typical of people who had 'exceptionally poor' memories for detail and who forgot the past quickly. There was also no evidence of 'wanton cruelty'. Carr was reported as having 'good relations with the natives' and missionaries, while the tracker Dampier, who allegedly fired the shots was described as one of the best in the Kimberley, who placed police work above all other obligations.53

The reason for his unpopularity among the natives in the district appears to be the fact that he puts his police work before everything else and has no scruples about locating and assisting to arrest any native, wanted by police, and will go to any lengths to ensure the capture required. He has no fear of any repercussions which may be meted out to him by the tribes or natives concerned. As far as the police are concerned he is an ideal boy and would be very hard to replace.54

The report also stated that the nature of patrol work in isolated regions left police dependent on trackers, who were likely to receive a 'hostile reception' on raiding camps:

Furthermore, in the case of a scattered camp, it eventuates that a police party becomes a number of individual raiding parties and police accompanying the trackers just cannot see everything that goes on. A camp may cover a couple of acres of country and with scrub and trees intervening it is not in the Constables [sic] power to observe and control the whole of the actions of the trackers. They get their orders before starting but after that are hardly seen until such time as the camp is rounded up and assembled in one spot... If all patrolmen in the north were to report truthfully I feel sure that they would admit the same difficulties and also that unless they arm their assistants they would not get the cooperation which is needed to make the work a success.55

Constable Carr continued to patrol the north in early 1945 without further incident. He reported that the area north of Kunmunya and Gibb River station held only camps of old, sick and starving people from that region and from further south who refused to go into missions or stations.56 He rounded up 87 people in one camp at Prince Regent River and 140 in seven other camps in the far northern region but most escaped. He did not pursue them, reporting instead that they were starving, blind and sick, and in need of Departmental assistance.

53 PD3906/1944, PC Box report to Inspector Reid, January 1945.

54 ibid.

55 ibid.

56 AD268/1945, PC Carr to Inspector O'Neill, 12 February 1945.
The Native Affairs Department re-employed Lawrie O’Neill as a Travelling Inspector in 1944 and instructed him to report on the situation in the far north.\textsuperscript{57} He suggested that Carr had exaggerated the problems for bush people and recommended that there was no need for Departmental assistance because people chose to live there, were accustomed to surviving on very little at certain times of the year and, as there were few children in the bush the problem was not ongoing.\textsuperscript{58} He added that there were probably young people with the old and sick but they had escaped detection and would return to assist the others once the police left. O’Neill pointed out that if the Department chose to intervene to collect leprosy suspects it would need an expensive campaign from sea and land and different methods of collection. Although police officers were paid a ration allowance for each Aboriginal person as well as a ‘risk of infection allowance’, O’Neill suggested that they required further inducement to make them ‘sympathetic to natives’ and prevent ‘dogging expeditions’ and their trading in dog scalps:

this latter is quite important as I am certain that fear of having their dogs destroyed is one of the reasons why the natives are hard to contact in this area. ...fear of being taken away from their country ...chaining of sick natives and walking them sometimes hundreds of miles plus the killing of their dogs first is not much inducement to them to either give themselves up or to betray their fellow tribesmen.\textsuperscript{59}

The police inquiry into the shooting incident found that there was no evidence of police trading in dog scalps and argued that packs of dogs had been a long term problem for pastoralists, forcing managers like Dave Rust at Kurunjie to ‘move people on’ who were travelling outside the missions.\textsuperscript{60} The Commissioner of Native Affairs argued in correspondence to Inspector O’Neill that camp dogs needed to be shot to stop them building into hordes which ate old Aboriginal people’s food.\textsuperscript{61} The Commissioner refused to grant further subsidies to missions

\textsuperscript{57} PD3906/1944, O’Neill to CNA, 12 November 1944.

\textsuperscript{58} AD268/1945, O’Neill to CNA, 22. September 1945.

\textsuperscript{59} ibid.

\textsuperscript{60} PD3906/1944, PC Box report to Inspector Reid January 1945.

\textsuperscript{61} AD1117/1945, CNA Bray to Inspector O’Neill, 9 October 1945.
to feed people who were moving between the bush, the missions and the stations further south, stating that the ‘happiness of the bush natives in their ordinary bush habitat is important in my opinion and I have no desire to encourage them to indolent habits in camps alongside missions.’

The dog scalp vermin bounty peaked in 1945 at 13,889 for the Kimberley. At one pound per scalp they were a valuable commodity. Aboriginal people who moved between Munja, Kunmunya and the pockets of bush land in the northern ranges and were not incorporated into a station work force became the focus of a government leprosy campaign from 1936 to 1945. Oral testimony did not record anyone selling or exchanging scalps with police. However, police were killing hundreds of dogs in camps on their patrols and there was room for trade. Aboriginal people’s fear of police killing dogs was also drawn to the Commissioner of Native Affairs’ attention by Scotty Sadler at Tableland station. In 1944 the police shot the station camp dogs, then scalped them in front of their owners. Scalps were openly traded by Aboriginal people with missionaries at Munja and Kunmunya, station Bosses like Frank Lacy at Mount Elizabeth and itinerant miners and beach combers, in exchange for tobacco and rations. Jilgi Edwards described how she and her mother and father stayed outside the northern missions of Kalumburu and Forrest River during the War by trading scalps with missionaries and with white men who worked on the roads. Jimmy Kelly, a stockman and station manager in the ranges

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62 AD268/1945, CNA Bray to Oldmeadow, Forrest River Mission, 2 November 1945.

63 'Vermin Control in Western Australia', MS, Agwest Library, Derby.

64 PD2691/1927 vol. 5, 'Derby Patrols' for instance. But most patrol files from 1915 have accounts of killing dogs in camps.

65 PF/770/1947, Sadler to CPA, January 1944.

66 PD408/1936, has correspondence surrounding the killing of a white man at Cape Voltaire. Aboriginal men are accused and one is convicted and jailed but letters from police and a man called 'Nick the Greek' show that the white man was probably killed by other beachcombers for his 150 dog scalps. He had exchanged the scalps with local Aboriginal people but relations with them soured when he demanded a woman from the leading man and then shot camp dogs for the scalps; See DOLA 1384/1921 on trading scalps for rations at Munja government station.

region during the War and after, recalled how some men would cheat on the vermin bounty by ‘knocking off’ Aboriginal people’s dogs.68

A combined police and medical patrol of the Prince Regent River was planned but abandoned in 1946. In 1947 responsibility for leprosy patrols was transferred to the Health Department. The Commissioner for Native Affairs described the northern Kimberley in 1947 as ‘still very wild.’69 Police continued to be involved in occasional patrols, and chains were used to hold leprosy suspects until at least 1949, when a small group of suspects was chained to the pine tree outside Mount Elizabeth homestead camp and young Scotty Martin was handed to the manager’s wife, Theresa Lacy to save him from the walk to Mount House where the truck met patrols.70 Although the introduction of antibiotics and penicillin in 1949 brought leprosy carriers more hope of a cure and dramatically changed the prognosis for venereal disease sufferers, the number of people in the leprosarium peaked in 1951, with no drop to indicate that people were being treated outside or released from isolation. Aboriginal people were kept in isolation at Bungarun longer than was medically necessary if they were ‘normally resident in an inaccessible area’ or unable to fend for themselves and showing signs of disease.71 There was no alternative for most Aboriginal people in need of medical supervision.

The policy framework - ‘benevolent supervision’

During the 1930s and 1940s government and northern managers’ interests converged under a policy of non-intervention, which left the sustenance and training of station people to managers with occasional visits from police and leprosy patrols. The Moseley Royal Commission in 1934 set the tone for policies and legislation during this period, rationalising non-interference and exclusion of full-blood station people from social and economic changes which may have


69 ARAD 1947, MS AADL.

70 Theresa Lacy, Interview notes, NB12a, 17 December 1994; Scotty Martin Interview notes, NB8, pp. 52-56.

71 Davidson, Havens of Refuge, p. 178.
undermined their containment within the pastoral industry.\textsuperscript{72} The Commission was called partly in response to government and local Europeans' fears of leprosy.\textsuperscript{73} Reports of abuses on northern pastoral stations in the \textit{Anti Slavery Reporter} in London and Melbourne, and a case brought by the Australian Workers Union in Derby in 1932 to pay Aboriginal people wages added to the pressure on the Western Australian government to review policies and practices concerning Aboriginal people.\textsuperscript{74}

Moseley visited towns, some accessible central Kimberley pastoral stations, and government settlements at Moola Bulla and Violet Valley in the east Kimberley. He did not travel over the ranges, confining his observations of Kimberley pastoral stations to those in the Fitzroy Valley and near towns. From these contacts he rejected any need to establish a policy of government intervention on pastoral stations, agreeing with the 'saying of experienced people in the North' that the 'more you leave a native alone the better it is for him'.\textsuperscript{75} He was adamant that suggestions of forced labour and slavery were untrue, that the 2,000 or more Aboriginal people living on 70 or 80 pastoral stations in the Kimberley were 'happy' and that the policy of non-interference should continue:

\begin{quote}
I have seen numbers of these station camps, and have seen no sign of unhappiness in the natives. During the day the men work the run, the women - or some of them - are employed in or about the homestead. The old or infirm and children, where they exist, are kept by the station. At an early age the children begin a training which makes them useful. ... Bearing in mind the number who do nothing, it is not a cheap form of labour, but it suits the pastoralist who, by looking after the old people, keeps the young people on the property and has labour when it is needed. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to obtain white labour when such labour is required only during a portion of the year.

It is a life of freedom in that the native is under no obligation to remain on the station if he desires to go elsewhere. He has no such desire - he
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{73} Davidson, \textit{Havens of Refuge}, p. 45.

\textsuperscript{74} ARAD 1933, MS AADL.

\textsuperscript{75} Moseley, 'Report of the Royal Commission', p. 10.
is in country to which he belongs and given fair treatment - which in my view he undoubtedly is - he wants nothing better.\textsuperscript{76}

Moseley’s report portrayed station owners as benefactors to a station community who lived as near as possible to their ‘natural state’, ‘in the country to which they belong’ and worked in an appropriate environment ‘in the bush amongst stock’.\textsuperscript{77} It was a conservative report which also reduced Aboriginal people’s employment status to one of mendicancy; pastoralists were doing Aboriginal people a favour by ‘allowing them to remain’ while undertaking the difficult task of utilising a workforce which was ‘naturally lazy’ and resistant to overwork.\textsuperscript{78} Moseley argued that in order to maintain the current situation on pastoral stations whereby private individuals provided for the welfare of Aboriginal people, they should be excluded from training programs to bring them to a ‘higher degree of living’ and precluded from receiving wages.\textsuperscript{79}

Moseley recommended a similar hands-off policy for all isolated Aboriginal reserves and missions, thus reinforcing the Department’s existing stance which focused state assistance and intervention on ‘half-caste’ children at missions and government institutions.\textsuperscript{80} He made specific reference to the region north of the Leopold Ranges in his recommendation for changes in court procedures for bush

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid. p. 4.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid. p. 5.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid. p. 5. These comments mirrored those in the 1933 debate about the 1898 Land Act Amendments to reduce Aboriginal people’s access to waterholes and fenced paddocks on pastoral leases. (See \textit{WAPD} 15 November, pp. 1276-1279; 29 November 1934, pp. 1672-1676; and 20 December 1934, pp. 2244-2248) The Minister for Lands warned parliamentarians that Aboriginal people would be forced to leave their country and move to reserves and ration depots in order to survive. (\textit{WAPD} 20 December 1934, p. 2246). Aside from the financial burden to the State, he argued that it was ‘not fair’ to restrict Aboriginal people’s access to water, a right which they had held since ‘time immemorial’. Parliamentarians with pastoral interests stated that the amendments would not be applied in practice except in the case of ‘outlaws’. \textit{WAPD} 29 November 1934, p. 1675.

\textsuperscript{80} Anna Haebich, \textit{‘For Their Own Good’: Aborigines and Government in the Southwest of Western Australia 1900-1940}, University of Western Australia Press, 1988, p. 277.
people who were disadvantaged by the current system of arrest and trial.\textsuperscript{81} In June 1934, while in Derby conducting his enquiries, he presided over the trial of Charcoal and Nipper for the murder of Burrin, in the region between Gibb River station and the coastal settlements at Munja and Kunmunya. These men were collected by Lawrie O’Neill during the patrol on which Idriess based \textit{Over The Ranges}.\textsuperscript{82} Moseley categorised them as being at the extreme end of the scale of civilisation; ‘the bush native who has seldom seen a white man’. He recommended that the government extend the Mount Hann reserve, which was only 80 kilometres north west of Gibb River station to ‘preserve country for them where water and game are to be found for their use and leave them to their natural life’ but no additional rationing provisions. This was the same area north of Mount Elizabeth and Gibb River station which had been recommended for reservation in 1909 by the police. The additional land extended the Mount Hann reserve to 1,520,000 acres for the use and benefit of Aboriginal people.\textsuperscript{83} It was rarely referred to again in reports or patrol journals, and was degazetted in 1954. The leprosy epidemic and patrols, and the government’s refusal to provide a rationing point nearby undermined the aim of the reserve to allow Aboriginal people to live without contact or conflict with whites.

Moseley acknowledged that his recommendations would not sit well with ethnologists - people like A.P. Elkin and Phyllis Kaberry, who were drawing public and scientific attention to the value of Aboriginal culture in the Kimberley and the need for the state to prevent the depopulation and deculturation process which accompanied colonisation, by providing rations and medicines in isolated regions.\textsuperscript{84} Kaberry made a public appeal to Moseley in 1935 to continue the feeding

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\textsuperscript{82} WA 16 June 1934 p. 19; WA 21 June 1934 p. 17; PD6875/1932, PC O’Neill, June 1934.
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\textsuperscript{83} Moseley, ‘Report of the Royal Commission’, p. 5. Mount Hann Reserve no. 20120 gazetted 1929, extended to 1,520,000 acres. Degazetted 1954. See also DOLA 01931/1934 Mount Lyell reserve no. 8215, 1,000,000 acres near coast and Admiralty Gulf.
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\textsuperscript{84} Moseley, ‘Report of the Royal Commission’, p. 24. American ethnographers S.D. Porteus and Withington visited all coastal communities near Broome in 1934, taking photographs and motion pictures. Ralph Piddington and his wife were at La Grange. Professor Clark from the USA and Livingstone from Sydney applied to go to Sunday Island but stayed in Broome and Kaberry undertook research in 1934.
\end{flushright}
station at Violet Valley in the east Kimberley, to assist Aboriginal people’s cultural continuity. In 1934 and 1935 she visited the east Kimberley to carry out field research for her study of Aboriginal women’s role in their society. She did not argue, as Biskup has suggested, for an overall policy of non-intervention in all aspects of Aboriginal life in the Kimberley, but in fact argued for a system of non-interference in tribal ceremonial and social life, protection from ‘molestation by police’ and economic support through rationing, rather than institutional policies which attacked indigenous practices as ‘devil worship’.

Kaberry saw Violet Valley as a good example of a feeding station which supported people unable to work on stations. She recognised the divisions which were occurring between bush and station, and the dire straits of those people who were not identified as core workers and not rationed adequately. She had been present in January 1935 when 400 people from the bush and surrounding stations gathered at the ration station to hold ceremonies. They gathered there because they knew there would be food and tobacco, that their dogs would not be shot and that they would be permitted to continue their ceremonial practices. According to Kaberry, the latter concern was ‘the crux of the matter’. Kaberry was careful to point out that the ration station did not interfere with the economic interests of the surrounding pastoral stations as the people who gathered there were not needed on stations. Those people from stations who gathered for ceremonies came during the wet season when they were on ‘holiday’. Moseley did not support Kaberry’s argument that ceremonial gatherings should be supported and protected by the state. He recommended that Violet Valley and Munja ration stations should continue so long as they did not pander to what he saw as Aboriginal people’s natural laziness; only those who worked should receive rations. The Mount Hann rationing point, which had been mooted and scuttled in 1916 foundered once again.

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85 Phyllis Kaberry, ‘Do They Justify Their Existence?’, WA 9 December 1935.


87 Biskup, Not Slaves Not Citizens, pp. 105-106.

88 Phyllis Kaberry, ‘Do They Justify Their Existence?’, WA 9 December 1935.
Most of Moseley’s recommendations and additional clauses to the 1936 Native Administration Act focused on continuing an informal system of pastoralists rationing Aboriginal people in exchange for work and not increasing the already low levels of government intervention. The one area where he supported increased government involvement on the stations and in the northern Kimberley, and where he received a sympathetic reception from government, was leprosy collection and treatment, and the formation of an Aborigines Medical Fund for Aboriginal people on stations. He had been shocked at the number of deaths which occurred amongst Aboriginal people in the Kimberley while he made his enquiries. He was later to find out that a severe epidemic of malaria passed through the Kimberley in 1933. This followed continuing reports of widespread ‘influenza’, which was held responsible for the deaths of people in towns, missions and stations in 1919 and 1920, and from 1929 to 1936.

To meet pastoral interests the 1936 Aborigines Act introduced a voluntary Medical Fund for station people. It involved a one-pound-per-year fee for each permanent worker which covered all Aboriginal dependents to the worker, 10s for trainees, 5s for casual workers and a maximum payment of £50 per single employer. Thus employers with a general permit and 100 Aboriginal people paid £50. Costs of travelling to the Native hospitals in Derby and Wyndham were to be born by the employer. The Regulations abolished employers’ workers’ compensation liabilities for physical loss due to accident or injury for Aboriginal workers and replaced them with the Medical Fund. It also abolished fees for permits to employ Aboriginal people for one month and reduced permit fees for casual employees of over one month. Each employer who worked an Aboriginal person under the permit system was obliged to provide sanitary conveniences, bedding and a mosquito net ‘if so required’ and ‘suitable substantial and sufficient food and

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89 ARAD 1934, MS AADL.

90 ARAD 1920, 1921, 1930 to 1937, MS AADL.


drinking and bathing water’. Blankets, boots and clothing could be supplied ‘in lieu of wages’.

The Regulations of the Native Administration Act 1936, which were gazetted in 1939 continued the policy of anti-cohabitation on pastoral stations. Section 86 prohibited both the employment of unmarried Aboriginal women at homesteads where there was no white woman present and the employment of any married Aboriginal woman away from her husband.93 Despite opposition from the pastoral lobby to any changes to the Aborigines Act which increased government intervention on their properties, Commissioner Neville managed to insert a strongly worded clause stating that ‘No child under fourteen shall work or be hired for labour under any conditions without the consent of the Commissioner’ and a clause making payments to an Aborigines Medical Fund compulsory. These clauses passed through Parliament in 1939 when A.A.M. Coverley, Member for the Kimberley and leader of the pastoral lobby since 1924 was made Minister for Native Affairs. He reassured pastoral interests that the regulations and interference in employment conditions depended entirely on the Minister and would be exercised ‘only if circumstances required it’.94

The issue of cohabitation between Aboriginal women and white men on pastoral stations had been raised by Moseley in 1934. He expressed his ‘amazement’ at the small numbers of half-caste children on pastoral stations and at the inconsistency in attitudes and practices of Kimberley residents, who on one hand stated that it was unwise to be ‘familiar with natives’ because the ‘natives lose respect for the white man who fraternises with them’, yet condoned widespread sexual intercourse between European men and Aboriginal women.95 He suggested changes to the 1905 Aborigines Act to increase the fine for cohabitation but was especially concerned to change the attitudes of white men in the Kimberley to ‘instil a feeling

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93 ‘Native Administration Act, 1905 - 1936 Regulations’, Section 86 a and b, and Section 87, GG 8 September 1939; AD307/1937, Circular no. 186, 26 August 1939.


of repulsion at the practice of cohabiting with native women'. In 1935 Chief Protector Neville made some attempts to restrict white men's access to Aboriginal women by withdrawing employment permits issued to doggers and men of their 'type' but, as was noted in the last chapter, the Protector at Munja, Harold Reid, warned him that the Act was almost impossible to police in the northern ranges. There were very few white women occupying homesteads or camps, and Travelling Inspector Davis reported that he excused some employers from complying with government guidelines because they were too isolated to be expected to abide by the regulations. His major concern was leprosy.

Neville resigned in 1940, expressing his disillusionment with pastoral interests in his book *Australia's Coloured Minority*. He argued that Aboriginal people's natural propensity to stay in the country on which the stations had been built was exploited by employers who provided only for their 'bare existence', 'destroyed' family life, robbed them of women and then 'discarded [them] in old age'. He did not mention that he had helped to develop Departmental policy which left rationing to station managers, frustrated missionary assistance to Aboriginal people outside pastoral stations and relegated full-blood people to extinction:

> It is apparent that full-blood aboriginal labour will disappear before very many years have passed, and it is my hope that the rising generation of coloured youngsters, many of whom are being at least partially trained, in Departmental institutions and missions, will be able to take the place of its full-blood predecessors. More intensive training should take place and replace the feeling expressed by some employers that an "educated native is a no good native".

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96 ibid.

97 AD237/1935, Reid to CPA, 31 May 1935.


100 Neville, ibid, p. 198.

101 ARAD 1939, MS AADL.
Before Neville resigned he filed a note for the new Commissioner, F. I. Bray, which was submitted to the Fyfe Royal Commission into the beef industry in the same year, pointing out that the ‘real problem’ in the Kimberley was that some Aboriginal men were ‘intelligent’ and realised their value as employees and were not prepared to work for nothing unless their families were also cared for by employers.  

Fyfe’s Commission was mainly concerned with profitability and associated economic issues in the pastoral industry, particularly the devastating drought in the Murchison and complaints from pastoralists that there was a serious shortage of labour, ‘white and other’. The War, mining and other industries, and road and general labouring work made it ‘extremely difficult for pastoralists to obtain satisfactory white labour for station work at award rates’, while Departmental rationing points at Moola Bulla, Violet Valley and La Grange Bay south of Broome were providing station groups with an alternative source of rations and destabilising the station work force. Fyfe heard complaints from pastoralists that missions were also taking employable Aboriginal people away from stations.

Pastoralists complained to Fyfe that ‘increased obligations on employers created by legislation lessened the freedom pastoralists have had in past years’. The Department of Native Affairs was blamed for doing ‘more harm than good, particularly in the direction of making the native employees independent and difficult to manage and retain.’ Fyfe pointed out that the Commonwealth Arbitration Acts meant more complex contracts for employers than agreements and supervision of Aboriginal employees under State Aboriginal Affairs legislation. He supported the permit system which enabled Kimberley pastoralists to take out general permits for managing a pool of labourers. On the advice of the new

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103 ibid. p. 87.

104 ibid. p. 160: Biskup notes that Moola Bulla was particularly irksome to pastoralists, as it was central to pastoral stations and a working station itself. By 1940 Moola Bulla had approximately 200 men, women and children, with 48 children attending school. Biskup, *Not Slaves Not Citizens*, p. 139 and p. 200.


Commissioner of Native Affairs, F. Bray, that ‘thousands’ of Kimberley station people did not understand the value of money, Fye recommended that although a system of wages might be needed in future to retain select workers, ‘the time was not yet ripe’ in the Kimberley. He rejected suggestions from the Pastoralists and Graziers Association for indentured Asian labour, opting instead for ‘the preservation and education, within certain limits, of the native population’.

Fyfe was impressed with Davis’ evidence that a serious decline in the Aboriginal population and the high incidence of untreated bone breakages which maimed workers for life contributed to labour shortages. Bray added that the incidence of serious injury to workers was so high that ‘actually we gave up recording them’. Fyfe recommended that the Aborigines Medical Fund and the medical patrols be retained to prevent the ‘complete loss of this class of labour’:

> The efficiency of native labour and the amount of it available and likely to become available in the future, are important factors from the pastoralists’ point of view, ... as they are dependent on the health and preservation of station natives...

Fyfe’s recommendations were similar to those of Moseley 16 years previously: to contain all full-blood Aboriginal people on stations and limit industrial developments in the Kimberley, and make no significant changes in living conditions other than cleaning up some of the station camps and continuing the Aborigines Medical Fund.

There was very little change in government policies during the War. In 1945 Commissioner Bray outlined the state’s Aboriginal Affairs policy by repeating sections of the recommendations from the 1937 Commonwealth and State Ministers Conference. The Conference was influenced by the ideas of A.P. Elkin, to bring all Aboriginal people including those classified as ‘full-blood’ who were in missions and on stations under a government policy umbrella. It created a three-tiered categorisation of full-blood people: ‘detribalised’ living near towns, ‘semi-

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107 ibid. p. 88.
108 ibid.p. 630.
tribalised’ living on pastoral stations, and ‘uncivilised’ living in a ‘tribal state’.\footnote{110}{Proceedings of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Welfare Authorities Meetings’, 1937, AADL.} The employment and education policy for ‘semi tribalised’ people on stations was aimed at the continuation of the system of ‘benevolent supervision’ by station owners and managers, and the continuation of the system of seasonal employment with holidays in the bush. To prevent the movement of people categorised as ‘unemployable’ away from the stations a policy was adopted by the conference to provide small reserves in their tribal areas near stations, where the ‘unemployable’ could live and those people employed at stations could ‘repair’ in order that they might continue ‘as nearly as possible a normal tribal life’ and ‘unobjectionable tribal ceremonies’. Station people’s ‘ultimate destiny’ was for employment which was ‘lucrative’ but did not ‘bring them into economic or social conflict with the white community.’\footnote{111}{ARAD 1938, MS AADL.} The subject of wages was to be the responsibility of the states according to their legislation. The conference also decided that Commonwealth Age and Maternity Allowances should be extended to those people who were less than full-blood on the recommendation of the State Departments for Aboriginal Affairs, and paid to the Departments, not the individuals. Full-blood people on northern stations were not included in the scheme - they continued to rely on the station economy and the Boss.

The Western Australian government did not move to create reserves on or near station land where it would be responsible for rations and medical care, as had been agreed at the 1937 conference. However, it did introduce the Aborigines Medical Fund and embrace the policy of containing Aboriginal people on stations under the benevolent supervision of managers. In 1945 Bray explained that the Department’s policy of non-intervention applied to all ‘tribalised’ Aboriginal people on reserves:

> Purely tribal natives who live in the desert areas under primitive but healthy hygiene laws have reached only a low standard of civilisation, and as most of these natives are outside our control no further mention is needed of them.\footnote{112}{ARAD 1944/1945, MS AADL.}
The ‘semi-tribalised’ category of full-blood people on stations had been changed to ‘semi-civilised’. For them there was a commitment from the Commissioner to encourage station owners to make limited changes to living conditions, such as insisting on sweeping humpies and burying rubbish once a week. While other improvements like housing or lavatories were dismissed as ‘not much use’, Bray did recognise that some full-blood Aboriginal people on stations were skilled workers but did not include them in any policy changes aimed at introducing wages, housing or education to pastoral stations. They were categorised as ‘better types of semi-civilised full-bloods’. State government policy for Aboriginal people on stations was that they

...be kept under benevolent supervision in regard to employment and social and medical services in their own tribal areas, and education is not particularly necessary for them. Nor is education necessary for tribal or uncivilised natives. They should be safe-guarded in their tribal areas, and there is a doubt in my mind as to whether it is even necessary to disturb their social state by attempts at Christianity. Rural and pastoral pursuits are considered to be the most suitable avenues of employment for native labour. Socially they appear to be much happier in country districts.\(^{113}\)

Throughout the official debates about Aboriginal people’s employment status, and the pros and cons of state intervention, government officials assumed that full-blood Aboriginal people were better off on stations than they were in institutions or ration depots. Moseley had made it clear in 1934 that he recommended non-intervention partly because the station system supported groups or families on or near the land on which they had been born. The children ‘where they exist are taught from a early age to be useful’, while women and older people performed occasional duties in return for their keep.\(^{114}\) In 1937 Neville warned members attending the Commonwealth Conference on Aboriginal Affairs that institutionalising Aboriginal people did not necessarily lead to better health. He stated that he was ‘not proud’ of the government’s ration scale and refused to give details, adding that at missions, pastoral stations and government settlements it was

\(^{113}\) ibid.

...neither sufficient nor of the right kind. It lacks the very things that the people need. The natives in our State exist on four articles, meat, tea, flour and sugar. For the most part they do not get enough meat.115

While Commissioner Bray voiced his concern in 1940 that some station people were unable to supplement rations with bush food, he did not institute a system of government support to pastoral stations. He stated that there were two classes of station people:

namely, those who can be employed and those who cannot. The latter are accommodated in special camps and are considered the responsibility of the station as well as the employed natives.116

The other members of station camps were pensioners who had been injured or grown old in station employment. In the Kimberley the Department restricted rations to people who had come in from the desert or who were ‘not attached’ to a station; it ‘made every effort not to ration natives who were born and reared on pastoral holdings but it must be recognised that game and hunting grounds have been depleted’.117 The system of rationing which was supported by the government was for children, pensioners, and the sick and injured to be categorised as dependents of employed people on the stations: ‘In short, the Department considers the pastoralists to be responsible for the natives who have been born, reared and employed on their holdings, including the pensioners.’118

Although the 1936 Regulations to the Native Administration Act prohibited the employment of any Aboriginal child under the age of 14, Bray was aware of their importance to pastoralists because employers had refused to allow some ‘half-caste’ children to be removed to institutions or missions. He admitted that the Department had no idea of the numbers of children on pastoral leases but was confident that the ‘established custom’ of station owners looking after everyone on the stations was unlikely to change in the Kimberley, because those pastoralists


116 ibid. p. 604.

117 ibid. p. 596.

118 ibid. p. 604.
who had attempted to eject non-workers from their leases had also lost access to the children and regretted it: 'pastoralists are beginning to realise that it is to their advantage to care for and keep native children on their holdings as a means of recruiting labour in years to come.'\textsuperscript{119} Because government policies were developed to include 'half-caste' children as a state responsibility, 'full-blood' children were excluded from policies: they were part of a station camp and a future employment resource whose training and sustenance were the manager's responsibility.

Bray's rejection of increased state intervention was consistent with decisions made in 1944 when Justice Kelly heard a case brought to the Commonwealth Arbitration and Conciliation Commission by the Australian Workers Union, for inclusion of full-blood Aboriginal people as station hands in the Pastoral Industry Award.\textsuperscript{120} Kelly rejected union claims that full-blood Aboriginal workers were being exploited by employers because they were increasingly filling responsible positions without pay or official recognition, and at the expense of white waged labour.\textsuperscript{121} He upheld submissions from pastoralists to previous hearings in 1932 and 1938, and the Fyfe Commission in 1940, that Aboriginal people needed supervision, that they were few in number, that money would be of no use to them and that their living standards and values were lower than those of white people.\textsuperscript{122} He stated that money would be an 'embarrassment' to them. He was especially concerned to note that the people of the Kimberley were not 'civilised' enough to include in standard employment provisions and that 'local' interests knew how to deal with the variation and nature of their employment relations. This assessment was based on information from Fyfe's Royal Commission of 1940:

I take the view that we are under a moral obligation not to hasten the extinction of these people. Deprived of their hunting grounds they are entitled to look to us for food and such clothing and shelter as they require. But it would be foolish...and even cruel to pay them for work

\textsuperscript{119} ibid., p. 604; See also NWD749/1938 Louisa Downs for an example of this.

\textsuperscript{120} 'Pastoral Industry Award - Variations', CAR vol. 53 1944, pp. 212-257.

\textsuperscript{121} ibid, pp. 213-216.

\textsuperscript{122} ibid. p. 215.
they can do at the wage standards found to be appropriate for civilised “whites”.¹²³

Justice Kelly was not willing to accept any union claims that they were acting in the interests of Aboriginal people. As Aboriginal people were not permitted to join the Australian Workers Union until 1964, there was some basis to his decision. National arbitration cases and awards applied only as state exclusions were lifted through Aboriginal Affairs legislation. In 1944 Western Australian state awards were introduced which provided only limited wages and conditions for Aboriginal farm workers in the south west land area, or through Citizenship Rights legislation enacted in the same year. This exclusion of the north from state awards also excluded Aboriginal people in the north from federal awards. In the same year the Commonwealth’s attempts to include Aboriginal Affairs in its Constitutional powers failed at a referendum. This meant that until changes in the provisions of State Aboriginal Affairs legislation in 1963 and the successful wage cases from 1965, pastoralists and the state departments continued to have responsibility for enunciating and carrying out what was in the best interests of Aboriginal people on northern stations. It also gave these parties the power to define ‘full-blood’ Aboriginal people as partially incorporated into the economic life of the Kimberley. Their role as workers was diminished and their lack of access to alternative forms of support outside the stations and the managers maintained. This increased the importance of ‘Welfare’ when Native Affairs and later Native Welfare eventually moved to influence Aboriginal people’s working and living conditions on Kimberley stations in the 1950s.

¹²³ ibid,
Chapter Five

The struggle for authority: settling down and becoming ‘sensible’

They been shootem all the people. And people been left to goin in the station and trying to work for gardia. Make himself sensible a bit. Tryin to pick up all the experience from gardia side. And they been learn about gardia more then. And before we been born we had to follow them foot track to them old people. People alive today, we work a different way, ‘longside gardia. We couldn’t be different, we had to follow the work, we’ve got no other life, couldn’t do it.1

This chapter explores the processes of negotiation which contributed to the training and maintenance of the pastoral workforce. The distinction between working for white people and following the foot tracks of the old people was an important part of the accommodation process to an increasingly structured and time-consuming pastoral work routine which emerged in the north and central ranges during the 1930s and 1940s. During this period bush populations contracted and station populations developed a pattern of wet season ‘holidays’ when essential ceremonial meetings occurred. Force and potential violence continued to influence relationships between Bosses and Aboriginal people but it was accompanied by a more complex relationship of interdependence, exchange and accommodation to work. Aboriginal people’s movements revolved around white men’s camps.

Anne McGrath’s study of pastoral stations in the Northern Territory to 1940 noted some of the characteristics of station life which encouraged Aboriginal people’s independence and cultural continuity.2 These were also apparent in the north Kimberley. Fishing and visiting waterholes, hunting and collecting bush foods and medicines, travelling across country on musters, sharing information with younger workers or checking on sites of significance, speaking language with contemporaries, sitting at camp fires re-telling stories or listening to grandparents,

1 Morndi Munro, Tape (21) 24 April 1990.

sharing rations and learning to ride were all activities which allowed for the transmission and integration of existing secular knowledge. They also were the focus of informants' nostalgia for station life. The reward for complying with pastoral work requirements could mean a secure source of rations for small groups of men, women, old people and children, and a degree of independence at work and on 'holidays' in the bush. 'Holidays' relieved managers from rationing Aboriginal people for periods throughout the year and during the wet season, while food gathering from the bush and nearby waterholes supplemented everyone's diet, including the stockmen's and manager's. Time for ceremonies was more difficult to integrate into a pastoral routine and had to be relocated to designated 'holiday' periods during the wet season.

This chapter shows that there were limited privileges for station workers within a system where food and security of occupation depended on the managers' patronage. Fear of losing their place on the stations where they had access to rations and relations framed informants' early working lives, adding to the Bosses' power over them. It also shows how senior men's and women's authority to direct activities on their country, like time for 'holidays', had to be re-negotiated in the light of the Bosses' work requirements and their dependence on rations.

The pastoral context

Unreliable rainfall, fires, Kimberley horse disease, distance from ports and towns, pests and fluctuating cattle prices all worked against consistent or large profits in the northern Kimberley cattle industry, with the result that there was little pastoral expansion during the 1930s and 1940s beyond the leases which had been established during the 1920s. Gibb River, Tablelands, Mount House and Kurunjie stations remained isolated outposts of pastoral settlement, while the neighbouring lease at Mount Barnett was intermittently a mission, a doggers' camp and an outstation for other leases. In the north of the region, between Gibb River and Kalumburu mission on the far north coast, doggers and beachcombers visited from Broome until the Second World War.² For a short period in the early 1930s they were joined by Bert Haldane, who tried his hand at agricultural development on a

² PD408/1936, 'Alleged murder of Whiteman'.

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small lease north of Kunmunya. To the west between Munja, the government pastoral station, and Kunmunya, the Presbyterian mission, two small holders, Fred Merry and Bob Thompson attempted to develop mixed agricultural leases. By the beginning of the Second World War, these enterprises had failed. Bob Thompson contracted leprosy and Fred Merry took his new white wife and child to a safer and less isolated environment. Mount Hart homestead in the Leopold Ranges was also abandoned in the late 1930s after the death of the owner and the suicide of the manager Fred Potts, who had previously been banned from employing Aborigines after allegedly giving Wundigul a gun to shoot bush people. Mount Hart was re-occupied for short periods as an outstation of Mount House. Mount Elizabeth was taken up in 1946 by Frank Lacy, while Mornington, Echo Hills and other small leases were worked from larger neighbouring leases or by poorly-resourced men who relied on dogging or itinerant work to survive. Further south of the Leopold Ranges, Napier Downs and Kimberley Downs continued to be run by managers working for absentee owners M.C. Davies and Son, who had owned the leases since the turn of the century. The numbers of white stockmen and managers also declined during this period. When an army unit was formed from local whites to defend the northern region, all 60 white men in the north were utilised, despite their being older than hoped for a fighting force.

With the exception of Fred Merry's small coastal lease at Sale River where he experimented with sheep from 1936 to 1939 the northern Kimberley pastoral industry was entirely based on cattle. Pastoral leases had a small number of fixed yards and very few fenced paddocks. Herd management was limited to spaying non-breeding cows. The open range system relied on natural watering points which were replenished yearly by torrential rains between December and March. By late November only permanent water holes remained as the river system evaporated and some water holes became boggy or stagnant and a danger to cattle. To manage the herds' access to water, a form of cattle shepherding was necessary. Aboriginal family groups camped near waterholes and kept cattle away from boggy areas, or

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4 PD2665/1927.

groups of workers were sent out from the homesteads to watch and move cattle for
days and sometimes weeks at a time.⁶

The muster took place for four to five months during the dry and cooler months.
Preparations for muster began in March, with horse breaking and replacing and
restoring leather ropes, harness and saddlery. Each muster involved groups of
approximately 15 men and women on horseback moving around the leases for
weeks or months at a time, herding cattle, branding, dehorning, castrating males
and spaying females. Some of this work was completed without a holding yard.
The cattle were herded into a group, individual beasts selected, secured with hand-
made rawhide ropes and worked on in the open. Each muster gradually picked up
mobs of cattle, clearing out pockets in the ranges and moving on with the herd.
When the herd was large enough for shipment, the droving teams of about 15 riders
and a cart with cook and horse tailers picked their way through the ranges to the
ports of Derby, Broome or Wyndham. In the rough ranges country, without
paddocks, holding yards, artificial watering points or in many places even steel
wheel cart access, the industry depended on horse riders to survive. It also
depended on Aboriginal people to perform a variety of tasks to develop the
homesteads, clear tracks, build and clear yards, maintain and make station
equipment, watch and manage the cattle, and muster them for market.

Each homestead and pastoral lease, regardless of size and distance from towns, was
accompanied by a ‘blacks camp’ where a core group of workers, pensioners,
children and injured or sick adults lived in bark or spinifex humpies for long
periods throughout the year. The size and make-up of station camps fluctuated over
the year. Population and employment figures kept by the Aborigines Department
were general estimates for the Derby West Kimberley region and, as the
Commissioner stated in 1941 were of ‘doubtful value’ given that there were no
travelling inspectors between 1930 and 1939 and no prescribed system of
counting.⁷ In 1932 the owners of Mount House asked the Aborigines Department
to remove more than 100 old and infirm people to a ration depot because they were

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⁷ ARAD 1941, MS AADL.
not working but were being rationed. The Chief Protector did not respond, leaving the station owners to sort out the problem. After the crisis associated with Jack Carey and the early days, Mount House became a centre for a large group of refugees and dispersed peoples from Bunuba, Nyigina, Unggumi, Ngarinyin and Kija language groups. Maggie Gudaworla was a child in the camp, while Jack Dale moved between the camp, the bush and the homestead as his fortunes changed. Gudaworla’s mother, like many other older women, worked around the homestead, carrying water for gardens, the homestead and the camp, and tailing and milking goats, while their children were trained for stockwork. In about 1935, Gudaworla’s father and mother moved back to Kupingarri with the UAM missionaries when the crisis of the early days was over and they could ‘settle down’.

Reports of station populations in the northern region from the leprosy and police patrols between 1937 and 1939 showed an average of 20 working adults on each lease, with additional children and old people bringing the resident station ‘mob’ to between 25 and 45 people. Such small numbers of people suited managers, who did not want to ration non-workers or manage large camps where internal obligations overrode those to the Boss and work. They concentrated their training and rationing efforts on children and the small groups of people who had been incorporated into work during the early days, or who were born on the station.

The anthropologist Phyllis Kaberry believed that a small station camp of only 20 people was unlikely to be socially sustainable. She observed and documented a range of practices in 1935 on Bedford Downs station, next door to Tablelands, which led her to conclude that Aboriginal people lived a full and rich economic and ceremonial life when they were travelling away from stations, missions and ration depots during the wet season breaks. Kaberry stated that it was difficult to say how much movements and practices had altered since European contact, but she noted that some change had probably occurred with pastoral work as bush people who

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8 In 1938 and 1942 the managers from Louisa Downs and Christmas Creek asked for government support to remove people who would not or could not work but they were also refused. AD508/1930 Christmas Creek; AD749/1948 Louisa Downs; 249/31 Margaret River Station.

9 ARAD 1939, MS AADL.

10 Phyllis Kaberry, ‘Do They Justify Their Existence?’, WA 9 December 1935.
were not part of a station workforce gathered during the April to July period for initiation and mourning rituals, while station people only gathered in large groups during the wet.\footnote{11}

While Morndingali, Banjo Woorunmurra, Harry Howendon and Maggie Gudaworla all described instances of singing in the station camps and checking sites while droving or on muster as a part of their station lives, they did not mention sacred or ritual activity during work. Morndingali described a definite separation of work and ritual on the stations to protect the processes of Aboriginal Law:

Not that time, we used to hang onto the white man work. We never lookin at that Law. We didn’t want to interfere with the blackfella way trying to do the culture and all that. But we done that in the holiday time, when we had a holiday when we out in the bush, when we got a ration bag and all that. Manager don’t got us in the work that time. We can done what we like with all this culture, talking more about culture and this holiday place and try and meet up some ceremony place, trying to mix up with the people trying to corroboree around there. We didn’t have no whiteman work didn’t been onto us, we used to hang onto our Law, [ex]changing corroboree or might be new corroboree to take it and show other people. And they give us nother corroboree from them, like that. And when we going back to the work we never even worry about the Law, blackfella Law we used to hang onto the work and all that.\footnote{12}

The intense and secret nature of some of the ceremonies, as well as the need to incorporate specific people from neighbouring stations or outlying regions to meet existing obligations, meant that they could not be performed during the work season without disrupting the work routine.

Jack Dale travelled in the bush and between stations in the Mount House and Mount Hart region from 1928 to the mid 1930s, when he was a child.\footnote{13} For several years after his white father’s death in 1928 he walked with his grandfather, grandmother, mother and Aboriginal father from station to station following ceremonial and social obligations and staying on the fringe of the station system. His narratives help explain the gradual process of negotiation and accommodation which occurred in


\footnote{12} Morndi Munro, Tape (5) 7 October 1989.

the late 1920s and early 1930s in the northern ranges, and managers’ attempts to regulate workers’ movements away from the stations to meet social and ceremonial obligations.

Jack Dale’s grandfather was the most senior of the Ngarinyin men living in the Mount House region and senior to the stockmen on the station. Although he had escaped police patrols during the 1920s and re-told chilling stories which instilled a fear of police and white men in Jack, he was known to managers and stockmen in the region and continued to move between station camps, sneaking in at night and hiding in river beds during the day. He was reasonably fit (he carried Jack across rivers or up steep ranges) but he was not a working stockman on whom the managers depended for their labour. He and other old men and women worked occasionally, chopping and carting wood, carting water, gardening, bread making, assisting with road making, cutting posts and a range of other labour-intensive tasks. According to Jack, his grandfather’s role was to oversee and ensure the continuation of ceremonial obligations to the land and to other groups. Other senior men from neighbouring stations shared similar responsibilities.

A year or two after Wundigul’s release from prison in 1932, Jack Dale’s grandfather was instructed by a senior affiliate at Napier Downs, Peter Yamiga, to bring a large group of men together for a ceremony for one of the younger Napier Downs stockmen. He walked for weeks during the dry season from Leopold Downs station across the ranges, camping at sites at Mount Ord, Mount Eliza, Mount Bell, Mount Matthew and Bell Gorge, following an established path for that particular ceremony. In the northern part of Napier Downs lease, another large group had travelled south from Munja government station and were waiting to exchange corroborees and take part in ceremonies and dispute settlements. Morndingali, his brother, male cousin, father and three uncles were stockmen at Napier Downs and were instructed by their senior Lawman, Peter Yamiga, who lived in the camp at the station, to attend the meeting. Jack Dale’s Aboriginal father, Spider, was also a stockman at Napier Downs and went north for the ceremony. He had been taken from the bush in the early days, around 1910, by Alec Thompson. Thompson was manager at Kimberley Downs in the early 1930s when Idriess
visited. According to oral testimony, Thompson was present when Spider’s father was shot by stockmen and the boy removed to Mount House, where he was trained for stock work. He moved with Thompson to Napier Downs and stayed there after Harry Bannon took over as manager in 1925. Thompson moved on to Kimberley Downs in the early 1930s to settle with a white wife. She was the white woman in Over The Range who understood the ‘golden rule’ not to ask questions or pry into ‘little irregularities’ on the station. Jack Dale’s father and uncles and Morndingali’s father and uncles, and their female relations and spouses made up the core stock workers for Bannon. They left the muster camp during the night to attend the ceremonies, thus putting a stop to the muster.

Over the next week there were initiation ceremonies, as well as a spear fight to resolve Wundigul’s claim over his wife, who had been living with an ex-police tracker and worker for Mount Hart while her husband was in gaol. Wundigul may also have been facing ritualised punishment for the murder of two men from Munja, for which he was gaoled in 1927. While the large group waited for men and women from stations to the north, they were interrupted by Jack Goodall, one of the early days white men who lived north of the King Leopold Ranges surviving on the dog scalp bounty. He committed suicide in 1939 after coming to the attention of the police for a severe assault on an Aboriginal man. Jack Dale recalled Goodall’s approach to the camp:

Old Jack [Goodall]... Big tall fella with a short nose. [laughs] Anyway he come up first thing in the morning, look around. Everyone look around, “Here’s a policeman here,” they reckon. “It’s a policeman here. Come on.” Everybody scattered everywhere. They went, went bush, climb up the hill. My father too, step father was climbing up the hill. He climbing up the hill, he left me behind him. ...I wasn’t smart enough to keep up with them. And I pull up halfway. I singin out “Come on policeman we here.” I said “We up here. They left me. They left me.” I said “Policeman we here, on top of the hill. Come up here.” I reckon. [laughs] Anyway my father sneak back again, he grab me and he took me up there and he give me a good hiding for singin out to the police.

14 Ion Idriess, Over The Range: Sunshine and Shadows in the West Kimberley, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1937, p. 5.


16 AD308/1930, Police report, 14 September 1943.
It wasn't a policeman. He was just a bloke was doggin, see. But we thought he was a policeman, I singin out for policeman. "We here we hidin all the way on top of the hill."

Right that was finished. He come up with a pack horse and give us a flour ... for the whole camp. We had a good feed, he was a good bloke. Then we went down to this place where my uncle got cut with a bottle, cuttin him.  

Harry Bannon followed the Napier Downs workers to the dancing ground but did not interrupt the ceremony. He returned to the muster camp and waited for the stockworkers' return:

We had a big camp there. They had a big dance, big corroboree. And old Bannon's lookin for all this mob. This was his two good boy. His [Mordi's] uncle [Dooly] and my step father [Spider]. They was a right hand blokes for Bannon. He look all over. I think he was camping in the dry bank in some where. And then he went across, he know this big meeting ground for every Aboriginal and he come up there. He stop up right up on top of the hill, high hill and he left his horse behind him where we can't see him. And he sneak up on his hands and knee up to that tree. And he want to see. He's lookin down there and he had no glasses and I s'pose he couldn't see properly with one side. He come out bit more but he had a hat on. He come out bit more for full head. Well they spotted him from down the camp there, from the fishing ground. And they said "Hey Bannon there, stop quiet now." Oh everyone got frightened they reckon he gonna shoot them, you know? We all jumped in to the water. Jump in the waterhole to get out of him. When he seen that happen he just got on his horse and went home.  

Peter Yamiga, Jack Dale's grandfather, and other senior men and women who were classified as pensioners at a station camp were responsible for the workers' attendance at ceremonies but their dependence on the manager and younger men and women limited their authority. They decided to break camp soon after the ceremonies and directed their group's return to the stations to avoid any trouble with the manager:

We split up and Peter Yamiga told my grandfather to take the mob back for job [to Mount Hart], that grandfather mine. The two of them was talking about "We don't want to fall out with the whiteman, take the stockboys back to Napier." Peter wasn't a working man but he took all the stock boys back to Napier. They didn't want any problem with Bannon. They couldn't tell Bannon the reason the stockboys left, otherwise he wouldn't let them, otherwise they get killed. They ran

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17 Jack Dale, Mordi Munro, Tape (27) 28 February 1991.

away from Bannon for this Law. If they didn’t go for their Law this other mob from two sides would kill the Bosses. [black Bosses] When they went back to Bannon [and said] what they got away for, he said they shouldn’t get away from work. They said they went holiday. Gardia wouldn’t believe.

Peter was living in the camp when Bannon was there. He wasn’t a working man, but he got his rations, he was a pensioner. Bannon didn’t know he was a Boss, he mightn’t have had him there if he knew. That’s what they used to do, gardias. If they knew there was a Boss in camp lookout for Law, they’d get rid of him. They never hunted him off, died of old age.19

After the ceremonies Jack Dale’s Aboriginal father refused to return to the muster camp at Napier Downs and moved in the region of Mount House and Mount Hart with his wife and young Jack Dale, living from the bush and supplemented by rations passed to him by relations on the stations. According to Jack his father wanted to keep his wife away from the stations where his access to her would be challenged by Aboriginal as well as white men.20 William Chalmers, part-owner of Mount Hart and Bob Maxted, owner of Mornington station north east of Mount House, sent rations of flour and tobacco to him to entice him into the station to work and to help feed the young half-caste boy who was living ‘wild’. He was not chased by police or managers but always approached station camps at night or hid nearby the stations until a message or rations were brought to him. He worked for a short time with Bob Maxted and Jack Smith, who had taken over sections of Kidman’s leases and renamed them Mornington. He then moved to Mount House and settled down to join the stock work team. Jack Dale was about 13 years old at the time (mid 1930s) and began his training for stock work.

Wundigul did not return to Mount Hart station after the ceremonies in the north of Napier Downs lease. His aggression had brought his immediate relations into damaging disputes with other groups, as well as triggering police raids of their bush camps. Jack Dale recalled his grandfather trying to prevent Wundigul from taking revenge against the man who usurped his position while he was in gaol. This failed and Jack Dale agreed with Idriess’s representation of Wundigul in the early 1930s as ‘nearly out of control’ and threatening to kill white and black people on

19 Jack Dale, notes on transcripts of Tapes (27) and (28) both 28 February 1991.

Mount Hart station. Jack’s grandfather was senior to Wundigul but had great difficulty controlling him. Eventually, after the formalised fighting and ceremonies in the north of Napier Downs, Jack’s grandfather convinced Wundigul to leave the region and move north toward his wife’s country south east of Mount Barnett. He and his wife moved north to the Phillips Ranges, then west to Munja government station and in the late 1930s returned to Napier Downs, where his daughter Weeda Munro was working as a stock woman. This direction from the senior man of the region was made for the protection of the majority of people in the Mount Hart and Mount House region. Wundigul had become a ‘trouble maker’ who would be pursued by police if they came across his camps or tracks and was a danger in the station camps.

**Learning who is Boss**

The younger stockmen for whom the ceremony was being held north of Napier Downs had been trained since childhood to work on the stations and were completing essential components of their training for their own Law. As children, some stock workers were separated from their families by managers for long periods to inculcate in them the skills and authority structure of the stations. Morndingali, who was brought up as a stockman on Napier Downs station, referred to a transition in relationships between Aboriginal people and white men as a change from ‘bush’ to ‘middle time’, when he and others were no longer labelled as ‘bush niggers’ or ‘wombas’ but ‘boys’, ‘blackfellas’ and ‘black gins’:

> My name now, today you call me Aborigine that’s a different name, that’s a new one name. We used to be Womba ... Nigger we are bushmen you see. Now today, new name.

> “Ah, where’s that boys?” That lately name, half a name, middle. But in the first place that was a Womba.

> “Where’s them blackfellas?” That our name. That’s how manager used to call us. “Where’s the blackfellas? Tell them fellas to come up.”

> ...And woman they used to call em “Where’s the gin? Where’s the black gin? Where’s the black lubra?” That’s the name.

> ...Well poor fellas, we been trying to come and put all that name, come close onto whiteman.\(^22\)


\(^22\) Morndi Munro, Tape (10) 1 April 1990.
To encourage the transition from ‘bush niggers’ to station ‘boys’ and ‘gins’, managers engaged in a system of rewards and punishments which was referred to by informants as learning their ‘discipline’, getting their ‘experience’ and becoming ‘sensible’. The learning process began when they were children. It involved a range of punishments, including beatings, kicks, verbal abuse, being tied to a tree, boys and men being forced to wear a dress, shots fired above their heads and food and water being withheld. Children worked as horse tailers, cleared yards, assisted with goat herds, housework and gardens, delivered messages to muster camps and neighbouring stations, and watched cattle on the river frontages when the muster teams were resting. They learned the skills of station work and the overriding rule of the stations: to move quickly when the Boss was around and never to question his commands. The core workers entered a privileged sphere of rations and comparative security.

Aboriginal girls and women in the north Kimberley worked in the homesteads and in the stock camps, as well as riding for stock work. Maggie Ghi described her initial training and the independence of having a place with a white man and of not being punished for making mistakes. After running away from Kurunjie station she and her mother hid in the hills until the manager’s offider claimed her as his wife and taught her to ride:

We been la bush on top and this same man again your brother, come up now. He love me now. Put me long a yowarda [horse] now. That yowrda take me all round. I don’t know riding. Proper bushman, wild one. He stockman. He mustering there all around. He put me longa horse now. They been tie me up [to the horse] and put me long yowarda. I didn’t know that yowarda yet. Proper Munjung [bushman], nothing. They tell me puttim on trousers. I never like it on trousers. I got a dress...

I been frightened longa that bullamana [cattle]. I been stand up that tree [hid in a tree]. I don’t like much. I been sit down now. Gardia tell “You been boil the billy now,” Scotty Salmond. I go and get wood. And make fire. And get a water now. He train me for that. “Puttem longa billy longa fire.” ...Good Boss too. He cheeky one too. He cheeky fella alright. What he been tellim anybody, they never do proper work he come up with a whip and make em all about work. Start em all about, that the way. Not shootem, with a whip. ...We been get a rotten hiding, I tell you. From whip, from that boot too, he kickem mefella. We been learn makim damper, makim bread, cookim

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23 See Banjo Woorunmurra and Morndi Munro in Munro, *Emerarra*, pp. 80-86.
meat, makim custard, makim soup soup, makim anykind custard, corn flour, everything. Well we been start to cookim now. Gardia never talk long mefellas now. We been get learn now. I know everything. He been leave it to mefellas do.24

Campbell Allenbrae from Kurunjie station explained that his removal from his mother and the Afghans for whom she occasionally worked was his manager's attempt to stop him getting 'silly' and 'spoiled', and to give him a place on the stations as Scotty Salmond's 'boy':

...old Scotty pick me up and "Oh never mind might be spoiled." Old Scotty was reckon I might be spoil a little bit, with the Afghan. "I better take you away from them." When I was only that much [about 10 years old], I get away from mum and I gotta horse work now. Learn me how to do something all the time, good everything. I gotta do something good all the time. ...He trained me with his idea. He don't want me to get silly. Anyway if I'm get away from Scotty well I'm not anybody, I don't interest in work. Because I was in that old fella Scotty, well he trained me different way, his way of work or whatever he do. And I do my work just like him. That's way I learn to work. That old man all the time learn me how to work. I get understand from him and I learn to work what he want to tell me to work. I go by him, go by old Scotty.

Question: What did your father think about that?

Allenbrae: Old father was thinking "Ah well, he might take him off me or he might go for good."...

He said "Ah well you might take him." And one time he had an argue with him. "What you gonna do?"

"Well he's mine now," old Scotty reckon. "I gonna take him for my boy now."25

After a period of separation and training, sufficient to ensure Allenbrae returned to the camp and did not run away, he was permitted to participate in his initiation ceremony during the wet season holiday break. Despite the displacement of his father's authority over him and a persistent fear of being beaten or having food withheld, Allenbrae was not prevented from undertaking his initiation ceremonies:

Well I tell Scotty "Ah well, I gotta go do my Law."

"Alright," he said. Send me way. Put me out, give me tucker, everything for holiday. Mum with me. We go out in the Law ground. When I finish that, my Law finish, right I go for nother two week.


25 Campbell Allenbrae, Tape (12) 2 April 1990.
Come back one week time. I was okay, I come back right again. “Ah well, he alright” he say. Old Scotty send me out for doing that business... Give us tucker and tobacco...

No he don’t stop me. When I finish that one, everything, well I’ll be out there all the time doing all sort of what he want me to do, saddling, leather work, whip work, all that business. Making bridle, reins, girth, blanket, surcingle, all sort of thing. Pack saddle all that.26

Other men and women who were being trained in stock work at Tablelands, Gibb River, Mount Hart and Napier Downs during the 1930s described a similar pattern, of being released after Christmas, with rations, to complete ceremonial obligations and meet other groups at ‘holiday’ camps.27 If they were identified workers they received a ration bag of flour, tea and sugar to supplement bush foods. But this was expected to last for weeks during the wet season. If the season was very wet it was difficult for large groups to gather and move about. Rations ran out and managers refused to provide any more. A trained and settled group of workers integrated ‘holidays’ into station work and were rewarded with unencumbered access to the lease and rations for a portion of the year:

Question: What about the police? Why wouldn’t they come chasing you?

Morndingali: What they gonna chasin me for?! I got no trouble with him. I used to work on the station. I used to go for holiday. The station manager used to send me with a ration.

Question: Why they chasing this other mob? [Jack Dale’s family.]

Morndiingali: ...Because they running away. Cart other mob to the station, tryin to put him in the work and tryin to get him to work. They got away from the station, tryin to sneak away. All this Aborigine fellas, they used to walk away from a whiteman to work for couple a while there... they didn’t try to stand the whiteman. They used to work for a little while and they was start off for work and they was try to get away in the night and walked away from a place. They never try to get through the manager.

Why I been get used to? I used to go and put announce; I used to give him my month notice or a week notice, before I gonna pull out. That what I used to learn about, when I was first start of it. That’s why I used to get all this experience out of whiteman, that what I use to do. And I’m here now, gettin old. I was workin for station ‘til I get old. I didn’t try to live out in the bush and try to make myself run away from a station. And police didn’t chase me, put a chain around me. I wasn’t

26 Campbell, Allenbrae, Tape (12) 2 April 1990.

a man tryin to get away from my station manager. I used to workin for hard man that used to work me, with a dry bread and a corn beef, that’s all...\footnote{28}

The camps of ration people, like Peter Yamiga and other senior men and women, received food from their relatives or from the managers in exchange for work but they risked being ‘hunted off’ by managers if they threatened the stock or the social relations on the stations. Howendon recalled the process of moving from camp to camp and sneaking in the bush until the ‘Queenslanders’ came to the north Kimberley during the Second World War to Mount House, Mount Hart and Napier Downs:

They sit up every night time. Never come outside. We want tobacco, we sitting down longa stock camp. Gettem tobacco, we go way night time. That the rule we been havem before. Sneaking all round here...

When Queenslander been coming this country, we been walk outside. [we didn’t walk around] All the Queenslander [said] “Oh you fella can come in any time la house.” Oh we big mob of spear, everything we longa house talk talk long all the stockman. Any tobacco we been want im and go back. We been live the bush. ...All the stockmen stop back them manager. That the rule we been havem before. This time we come up, we talk talk la stockmen, stop with them. They say “You can walk here now.” Everybody can walk outside, bushman come in and that just walk up to house. Not like the olden time all that Fred Merry, and Fred Russ and Dave Rust and all that, Scotty Salmond. We been always sneakup... All the Queenslander been come up, oh we can walkabout outside. They can meet you in the river you can feed.\footnote{29}

Harry Howendon, Dutchie Bungarrt and Dickie Udmorrah were also ‘hunted’ from Munja government station in the early 1940s and moved to camps with Queensland doggers in the central and northern ranges.\footnote{30}

Frank Lacy’s journals provided a rare band brief written description of hunting both bush people and individual ‘trouble makers’ from the Mount Elizabeth lease in the late 1940s and 1950s. In 1946 Lacy selected two young women, one senior woman and two old men from the Gibb River camps to develop Mount Elizabeth station.\footnote{31}

\footnote{28 Mordni Munro, Tape (28) 28 February 1991.}

\footnote{29 Harry Howendon, Dickie Udmorrah, Tape (40) 4 April 1992.}

\footnote{30 Munja manager to CPA, 20 August 1943, Mowanjum Research Notes, ‘Mission Lands Review’ Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority, 1988.}

\footnote{31 Theresa Lacy, Interview notes, NB12a, 17 December 1994.}
Mary Karraworla was the senior woman. She had been Jack Carey's wife in the 1920s and Fred Russ' wife in the 1930s while she assisted her relatives to come to terms with the UAM missionaries, and was now helping to establish Mount Elizabeth. Lacy had two Aboriginal men with him from the south-east Kimberley who had travelled and worked with him for 20 years, but he needed more workers to establish the station. Like other managers in the north, he tried to negotiate a settled relationship with bush visitors by exchanging tobacco with them for dingo scalps or occasional work. But they left the camps without warning and camped amongst his cattle. In January 1949 he noted: 'Bush blacks here. I raided camp and got two. Broke up weapons and gave them about more dead [cattle] junction middle creek'.

In 1950, 1955 and 1968 Lacy again noted having hunted people from the station. In February 1955 an Aboriginal man with five wives, who walked with them in the bush from Kalumburu to Mount Elizabeth and called in occasionally for tobacco, led a group of 'bush blacks' into the station camp to remove the workers for a ceremony. Lacy hunted them off, which led to 'trouble' in the camp, and the workers threatening to 'run away'. Within days, two men and women from Lacy's camp walked off at night.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Lacy's workers cut timber, cleared tracks, built yards and watched cattle but they also left the camps without warning to meet others at a nearby gorge or socialise at Gibb River station camp. He gave out rations for 'holidays' with instructions to return at a set date but consistently sent one of his long-term assistants or young boys to bring people back with the offer of fresh beef or a stick of tobacco. A loose note slipped into his diary for January 1950, reminding him to read Frank Hardy's *Power Without Glory* sat poignantly between entries, expressing his frustration at his failure to control all Aboriginal people's activities on and nearby the Mount Elizabeth lease.

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33 Lacy Diaries, 15, 17 and 18 February 1950, 8 February 1955, 21 September 1968.

34 Lacy Diary, 8 February 1955; Also told by Scotty Martin, NB6, pp. 56-57.
The Bosses’ off-siders

Station managers across the north Kimberley, like Harry Bannon at Napier Downs and Frank Lacy at Mount Elizabeth, relied on the younger men’s and women’s horse skills, their limited English language and their ability to manage community members in the camps. They were the Bosses’ off-siders who translated the managers’ orders, occasionally carried guns to kill kangaroos or cattle for the camps, assisted with the training of some of the workers, wore clothes and received additional items of cloth and tobacco during the work season. Attaining a leadership position on the stations was not simply a matter of being chosen and trained by the Boss to impose order on the others. Their authority as leaders for work or the Bosses’ off-siders was integrated into relationships and obligations in the camps and the bush.35

Multiple leadership roles developed on all the northern stations to integrate work with the existing authority system deriving from land and Law obligations. Jack Dale described his Aboriginal father, Spider and Morndingali’s uncle Dooly as leaders only for work, not for Law. While Morndingali’s father, Linyit was leader for the country on which the station was located and was also a good horseman, he was not the leader for work because he could not speak English:

They [Spider and Dooly] used to be the favourite blackfellas. In them days all these old timers they used to have one good man or might be two. They work on that two to tell the rest of them what’s going on and what to do. They the leaders, they lead the rest of them. That the sort of job they used to do these good boys. ...

Question: Was Dooly, you know, before you talked about your two grandfathers, they were like leaders?

Jack Dale: That was Aboriginal way. Dooly was leader gardia way. These really old fellas they leader tribal Law and that sort of thing. Dooly was a leader in gardia side. These old fellas they couldn’t ride a horse or anything. These good man, old Bannon had that for leader. Every place they work, they had their own leaders but the gardia had their own leaders again. That’s in gardia way... They had the Law right through all the time. When white come in, that’s when they started on this after Christmas they go in the Law. This was before Christmas when we walked off. They were supposed to be working

chasing bullocks. That's the way [why] Bannon used to go and follow them good boys, he never hunted them.  

Patterns of inheritance and comparative privilege emerged within the station system for core workers and their families, and for part-descent assistants who had accompanied the Bosses to the north during the early days. At all the stations in the north, men and women who had been assistants or children during the early days became the core workers affiliated with the Boss and the station in the 1930s and 1940s. Part-descent workers were known as managers' off-siders on the majority of stations in the north (Joe White at Gibb River, Jack Campbell at Kurunjie, Billy King at Mount House, Joe Butcher at Mount Hart and Sandy Harris at Tablelands). However, they were accompanied by a leader for the 'boys' who was not necessarily chosen by the Boss. Peter Lacy recalled that only the oldest man in the camp, Jumbo, who had travelled from Halls Creek to the northern region with the manager, could sack workers; his father did not. But work orders only came from the manager's offsider. Fred Russ remembered the overriding power of the old men, Quartpot, Nipper and Murphy (Carey's offsider Mobby) at Gibb River station to hunt off any strangers or outsiders who threatened the stability of the station group or their position there. According to Fred Russ junior, punishment from the old Aboriginal men was more frightening to Aboriginal people than punishments from the manager, old Fred Russ:

...the young ones had no choice, nowhere to go. Older ones would chase off a bloke from another station. They were frightened of punishment from their side more than Dad's side.

Managers from Mount Elizabeth, Gibb River and Meda stations all gave examples of their failure to influence the selection of the manager’s offsider; internal obligations prevailed above their attempts to select a leader of their choice for work. There were limits to the manager’s authority.

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38 Peter Lacy, Interview notes, NB6, pp. 53-54.

Mordingali occupied a privileged position at Napier station. His father and uncle shared positions of leadership which integrated work with Law, while his grandmother was Ngowerung, woman leader for Law and the senior ‘house girl’. She passed on her position as ‘house girl’ to her daughter, who used to sneak extra food from the kitchen to Mordingali and his brother throughout the 1930s until she was taken to the leprosarium. He had also inherited special skills and accompanying songs from his father which he used to sew and heal horses and mules, adding to his status within the system of working for white men.\(^{40}\) Despite Harry Bannon drawing a gun on Mordingali when he didn’t move quickly enough in the stock yards, he described his father Linyit or Tom Munro as the tougher disciplinarian of the two men. But Linyit rarely openly challenged Bannon’s authority, telling his son privately ‘don’t listen to that white man, you do it your own way.’\(^{41}\) His authority lay in his leadership for Law, which was not destroyed but displaced by the pastoral routine and the manager’s dominance of the work sphere.

**A skilled and settled group of workers**

When Ned Delower replaced Harry Bannon as manager on Napier Downs station in 1938, he found himself in charge of a skilled and settled group of workers who were led by Dooly, Linyit and two older women. Delower had no previous management experience. He was passionate and successful as a race horse trainer and jockey at local Kimberley race meetings but he was not fond of droving or mustering:

You’d kill a bullock today and between the heat and the blowflies, you had to throw it away after three days. ... In March, wet and miserable and hot and blowflies and mosquitoes and all the rest of the Kimberley pests that are around....

When your pushing 1500 head of cattle you’re not thinking of poetry, you’re dead thirsty, there’s little puddles of water there but by the time the cattle go through, it’s just mud....

That’s a miserable job droving, day after day - ten or twelve, eight mile, all depend on your waters, camps. Blimey.... It’s so monotonous, just so monotonous. I never enjoyed droving. And they

\(^{40}\) Mordni Munro, Tape (12) 23 April 1990.

\(^{41}\) Mordni Munro, NB3, pp. 47-50.
[Aboriginal people] can be monotonous, just sit there and doze all day. Then do your night watch on top of it.\footnote{Ned Delower, Tape (50) 22 July 1991 continued on Tape (51) 22 July 1991.}

During the Depression, Delower and Tom Ronan ‘bagged it’ around the east Kimberley and Northern Territory, reciting and discussing Australian bush ballads.\footnote{Ned Delower, Tape (48) 8 July 1991; Tom Ronan, Once There Was A Bagman, Cassell Australia, 1966, pp. 190-193.} From 1935 to 1937 Delower worked as head stockman on a Fitzroy River station before being offered the position of manager at Napier Downs. As station manager in 1938, he received £6 per month plus keep. A white stockman received £2 10s and head stockman £3 10s. Wages had not altered since 1915 when Billy Skinner complained to the Chief Protector of Aborigines that losing his permit to work Aboriginal people had caused his demotion from manager to stockman and a subsequent drop in income.\footnote{PD1903/1915, Skinner to CPA, 21 July 1918.}

Jim Kelly who owned Oobagooma station in the late 1930s and was a stockman in the 1940s, described tobacco as ‘wages’, adding that camp people were ‘only too anxious to work’ because ‘the tucker was cut off and everything like that for them.’\footnote{Cecil James Kelly, Transcript OH 540 1982-1983 interviewed by Michael Adams BL, p. 259.} In the station camps tobacco and food were used as a form of payment for specific tasks, while drovers received extra items for their work off the stations. Kelly recalled the system of payment during the 1940s:

On the road whites got four pound a week. The blacks got thirty shillings spending money, they’d get naga red cloth for the gins (sort of a dress for gins) a pair of trousers and hat something like that. They got as much tobacco as they wanted.\footnote{Kelly, Transcript OH 540, p. 151.}

This created a division between workers and non-workers based on their receipt of regular rations, access to clothing and training for specialist work in the muster camps, the homestead and droving teams. Banjo Woorunmura remembered the divisions on Mount House station between ration camps and workers during the
1930s when he was a young stockman. His mother was head ‘girl’ in the homestead:

I was a young fella. My father, when we have tea, the white man, he like me this old man. He said “Son when you grow up you’ll be the man to work on the station. You can go droving.”

And I listen to what he was telling me.

Alright, I look back, old man come up.

Aborigine fella he come up sit down there. And this Gardia fella he sing out to them “Hello bro, here tobacco.”

“That’s all they good for, they give emself tobacco.”

I sitting down there listening that story what they talk about.

I been grow up, I been watching their footstep this white bloke, how he been work. And I come round that side. I seen this other one Aborigine fella “Ah that’s how they been work. When I grow up big man I doing the same.” That was my thought.

Alright when they come, old gardia say “I think you’re big enough to ride horse boy.” I’m happy. Old man give me the horse, give me two horses. Righto I got two, I been work. He tell me this white man, he said “Listen, you do it what I tell you. You take orders. What I want to say, you take it.”*47

Billy King recalled playing cards on the Mount House verandah, eating at the stockmen’s table and having access to the homestead when he needed it, like ‘part of the family’. *48 In 1950 the manager asked for Billy King to be exempted from the Aborigines Act. *49 He was advised that King should himself write to the Department, submitting two referees and stating that he would live ‘according to European standards, and disassociate himself altogether from tribal customs.’ Despite being a privileged worker, with clothes, accommodation, work, rations and access to the homestead verandah, Billy King, like other ‘half-caste’ stockmen in the north Kimberley could not read or write and would not dissociate themselves from ‘tribal customs’ if they were to stay on the stations. Only the leprosarium altered that for people who were removed for long periods from a young age. They

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47 Banjo Woorunmura, Tape (14) 5 April 1990.


49 NDG36/58.
nevertheless did the work of head stockmen during the 1930s and 1940s, without the wages.

Delower did not require paid assistance at Napier Downs in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Oobagooma from 1944 to 1949 or at Tablelands where he was manager from 1956 to 1968.\textsuperscript{50} At Napier Downs he managed existing authority structures, asking Dooly to name the best riders and organise the ‘boys’, and Dolly to keep the kitchen ‘girls’ working.\textsuperscript{51} Dooly nominated his two nephews, Morndingali and his brother Tim as the best riders for training race horses and working stock, thus entrenching their position with the new manager. At Tablelands station Mick Jowalji, the eldest son of the man who led Sadler to the station site and the first of the ‘boys’ to be trained since childhood, became head boy and horse breaker on the station. His brothers and sisters and their close relatives were all protected and trained for work. At Tablelands, Jowalji and the group of stockmen and women were working with camels as well as horses. Delower had no experience with camels and left them to the Aboriginal workers. He was dependent on Aboriginal labour.

In 1944, when Delower worked his own lease at Oobagooma station he was drawn into a cattle stealing incident involving Jim Kelly, who had previously owned the lease.\textsuperscript{52} In response to a rumour that the police were going to cancel all permits across the northern ranges stations, Delower wrote to the MLA for the Kimberley that he might ‘just as well walk out’ of the country as he could not develop the station without Aboriginal labour:

For the advancement and development of the country it needs as many small men as possible and if my permit is cancelled it will be in sheer spite on the police behalf as the natives are always well treated and supplied with clothes tobacco and rations in my employ.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{50} Ned Delower, Tape (51) 22 July 1991.

\textsuperscript{51} Morndi Munro, Tape (26) 22 February 1991; Ned Delower, Tape (49) 8 July 1991.

\textsuperscript{52} Munro, Emerarra, pp. 128-134.

\textsuperscript{53} AD 298/1930, Delower to R. Coverley, 24 September 1944.
In the same year, Scotty Sadler at Tablelands station was charged with cattle stealing and police threatened to remove his Aboriginal stock workers. The Commissioner of Native Affairs also refused to release his trained ‘half-caste’ stockman from Moola Bulla government station. Sadler wrote to the Commissioner explaining that he was dependent on Aboriginal people as he could not afford the wages for white labour. He pointed out that government intervention had resulted in his ‘boy’, young Jack Carey, being removed to Moola Bulla, escaping and returning to Tablelands station and then being removed a second time on the orders of the Commissioner of Native Affairs but against the wishes of the Moola Bulla manager. Sadler stated that he had pleaded guilty to a charge of cattle stealing to stop police removing his workers in the middle of a muster. He added that the information drawn from his workers was given under the threat of the police shooting their dogs. On previous visits to Tablelands station, police shot and scalped dogs near the homestead and in view of the camp. Sadler wrote:

It was my cheapest way out if they had brought all my stockmen into Halls Creek they would of been no more good to me when they returned they would of been real red ragers [sic] & all had Union Tickets.\(^5\)\(^5\)

The police dismissed Sadler’s comment as a ‘pathetic’ excuse which was not borne out by the experience of other station managers in the region who regularly brought Aboriginal stockmen and women to towns without their being ‘spoiled’.\(^5\)\(^6\)

**Control of food**

There were worn and tired phrases which informants would repeat, that were almost cliched. The stories of learning to hunt a kangaroo, or crocodile have repeated lines and themes, told over and over in extraordinary detail. Such emphasis reflects the importance of the almost ritualised first spear-making, the hunting and cooking which is a mark of transition to manhood. And from the sphere of work, ‘shirt, trouser, stick a tobacco’ is reiterated each time wages were

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\(^5\)\(^4\) PF770/1947, Sadler to CPA, January 1944.

\(^5\)\(^5\) PF770/1947, Sadler to CPA, January 1944.

\(^5\)\(^6\) PF770/1947, PC Bond to CNA, 4 March 1944.
mentioned or asked about. This referred to their payment but also to a relationship of servility, with reward in rations controlled by the Bosses. On ‘holidays’ the dignity of controlling food and openly expressing cultural knowledge was restored. Mорndingali was nostalgic for some aspects of station life, which provided social stability to him when he was young. He recorded a long narrative about the leaders he had grown up with on the stations, who could hunt, fight and make important decisions about marriages and the country. These were leaders who stood at the head of large groups of men, women and children who gathered during holidays at sites and dancing grounds, and told them all how to sit, who with and how to relate to each other. Each of these leaders could feed themselves and their groups and distributed food according to set obligations and respectful relationships. Mорndingali, Campbell Allenbrae and the majority of informants also recalled station work like horse riding, moving in the bush and holidays with pride. For them, tobacco was comparatively accessible as they became entrenched into the workforce. But food and tobacco was cut and controlled by managers, reminding them of their powerlessness to survive without the manager’s patronage:

Mорndingali: See the scar from carrying posts longa shoulder. Poor fella I been half killing myself. I didn’t know what I been doing but I reckon I’m quite happy for that dried bread and meat ... I like my horse, I like my cattle, like my new saddle...

Allenbrae: It was fun, only the horse side and the cattle side...

Mорndingali: They reckon we was a bloody good man. Manager used to reckon “He’s a good man that one.” But he used to still feed us with a tucker, cutting one [one slice of bread and meat handed out.] ...just a drink of tea, just a little bit of sugar.

Question: Tobacco?

Mорndingali: Ah tobacco was alright, give one stick a tobacco. Not tin of tobacco; stick, Nicky Nicky. Nigger they callim. Nigger my name.

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57 Morni Munro, NB6, pp. 124-125. Howendon stated ‘Before, no pension. Only bread and meat and shirt and trouser, we been work, tobacco. We never get a money olden time.’ (Howendon Tape (51) 5 April 1992). Weeda Munro stated ‘blanket, trouser, shirt, boot, hat, tobacco. Every month flour, meat, kangaroo, when we go la bush.’ Weeda Munro, NB1, 18 June 1989.


Allenbrae: Nigatine.

Mormdingali: My name nigger now. You didn’t know that name, Womba?

Allenbrae: Blackfella, well he’s a nigger.60

Frank Lacy wrote of his ‘trouble’ in 1966 when a worker whom he had trained from childhood threatened to kill him over slices of bread.61 He was bewildered at the ‘trivial’ nature of the conflict. Informants often mentioned being handed food, sliced meat and rationed in a limited and mean way. When conflicts began to emerge in the 1960s, food was a significant element of the conflict.

**Them and us - ‘A friend for sure’**

The boundaries between white men and Aboriginal people were reinforced by legislation which encouraged race-based distinctions between station populations. Ned Delower for instance told of his first sexual encounters with Aboriginal women in the east Kimberley in the early 1930s, but would not be drawn on the subject of intimacy of any kind with Aboriginal people once he became a manager. Instead he repeated well-worn phrases alluding to the complete separation of all spheres of life on the stations:

Ned Delower: That’s where I first met Billy Munro [Mormdingali] and he worked for me years after on Kimberley Downs, marvellous isn’t it?

Question: Why did you get on well with them?

Ned: I never used to try and bullyem and I never used to be brother brother with em. This was my camp there and that was their camp there and that was it. In those days they used to be a bit bad if you got familiar with them. They could be bad.

Question: But there were men who had Aboriginal women though?

Ned: Oh yes there were plenty of those, not plenty but a few. ...You been reading the ‘Drover’s Boy’ have you? [laughing]62

Delower viewed the social and physical separation of Aboriginal people from the homestead and the Bosses as a necessary means of controlling Aboriginal workers:

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60 Mormdi Munro, Tape (10) 1 April 1991.


Question: When you arrived on Napier first up, how did you go with the workers there?

Ned Delower: Very good. I've always been good with me natives. I've never been, not like you, brother brother with them. Those days you'd call us racist, I suppose, really racist ... Natives were there, that's their side, whites were this side and that was it. You had your own meals, they had their own meals. You didn't sit down with them. You didn't talk to 'em, except working talk and things like that. You didn't hold a conversation with them like you do now. They're different altogether. I had that drummed into me when I first went to Kimberley [in 1930]. In those days when I first went there things could of been a little bit bad if the whites hadn't a been strong and conservative. ... There could've been some bad natives in those days. ... You just didn't associate with them, that was it. You kept your place, they kept theirs.63

Even those Aboriginal men and women who were selected by white men to work in the house or with their children maintained a respectful distance from the Bosses. In the wet season of 1942 Delower moved into the Leopold Ranges prospecting for gold. He was accompanied by Banjo Woorunmurra for the next ten years, during which they tracked and rescued a lost white stockman, and rescued the crew and civilians on an Air Force plane which had crash landed at Napier Downs in 1943.64 But Delower would not admit Banjo inside the homestead:

Ned Delower: Banjo a friend for sure; he'd been with me for years.

Question: Did you treat him differently?

Ned; No no no, they were just natives and that was it. I took him to the pub [to work] after. Took him to Derby. He used to look after the kids. ...

Question: Well he was a bit different then wasn't he?

Ned: In what way?

Question: He was with you more often, in the house and everything?

Ned: Oh no, no, no! He was never in the house, never in the house. He came up from the camp to work. He wasn't treated any different.65

Jim Kelly also recalled the social distance between white people and Aboriginal people which existed on northern Kimberley stations in the 1940s:

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63 Ned Delower, Tape (49) 8 July 1991.

64 Munro, Emerarra, pp. 126-127.

...you never spoke, you know, the only time was you gave an order sometimes. He wouldn't talk to you unless he had to come up and tell you something. In those days in a stock camp, a blackfella wouldn't come up and talk or anything like that.66

Changes in living and working arrangements occurred in the late 1930s and 1940s which conformed with government policy to prevent Aboriginal women from cohabiting on a permanent basis with white men. It also coincided with the leprosy epidemic and the increased surveillance by the leprosy patrols. Police and a medical inspector noted each 'half-caste' child at station camps and any diseases. In 1936 an itinerant pearler notified the Chief Protector of Aborigines that the young girl who had been removed from the doggers' camp north of Kunmunya and sent to an institution had been replaced by another.67 Sadler, Connaughton, Wilson and Salmond also reported each other to the Department for breaking the anti-cohabitation clauses of the 1905 Act.

After the introduction of the 1936 Act Regulations, employers in the Derby region dropped most Aboriginal women from their employment lists.68 Employment figures fell sharply from 30 general permits for 781 people in 1938 to 16 general permits for 279 people in 1939.69 The UAM missionary, Howard Coate, recalled the tension which existed between some police and single white men living with camps of Aboriginal people. The Aborigines Department file on Mount Barnett mission noted in 1940 that Coate had married a white woman who was moving with him to the Mount Barnett lease.70 In the same period, managers and lease owners like Fred Russ, Dave Rust, Fred Merry and Alec Thompson moved from casual relationships with 'full-blood' local Aboriginal women to enter formal marriages with white or light skinned mission trained women who then became the station 'missus'. The first wives who had been taken from the bush were sent away to the camps. Older women at Gibb River and Kurunjie remembered:


67 PD408/1936.

68 ARAD 1939, MS AADL.

69 ARAD 1939, MS AADL.

70 AD195/1929, File note Derby police, 29 November 1940.
Jilgi Edwards: His (Susie Umulgun’s) promise one been die. Alright Dave been got her. And went to station and go to Kurunjie. And this troubling for the, you know, native girl married. This government not like to marry to white people. That was a long time ago. ...All right she been give to his brother.

Q: He didn’t hang on to her?

Maggie Ghi: Whole lot, he been chuckem out this lot.71

Jack Dale welcomed the arrival of white women to the stations because it marked the end of shootings and extreme violence. It was the time when white men settled down, not when Aboriginal people settled down:

We never know white ladies and kids. All we know these old hard bloke, that’s all. First white Missus was Mrs Bell, she the first one we seen. Used to be in this Mount Bell. They used to live there. Done a bit of mining this old bloke, old Ned his name. They had donkey, pack. They’d come in with the donkey to Mount House. That’s the first white woman we seen. Then after that Mr Coate had his wife out there. Mr Faulkener. Got bigger and bigger then. More white woman. Not many. They had a mob of half-caste wife all up this way. Two white woman three white woman. Mrs Blythe, Mr Coate’s wife and Mr Faulkener’s wife. They were living out there. They were really good too. Everything was settling down then. All this wild business they settled down, give it away. “Missus there, no noise down the camp there, Lady there.” That’s what they said. They gotta be very careful.72

Jilgi Edwards' mother and father stayed outside the missions and stations in the north and central Kimberley until after the Second World War by exchanging scalps for rations with road workers, dingo shooters and missionaries.73 During the War, she and her parents moved to clear land for old Scotty Menmuir at Ellenbrae station adjacent to Kurunjie. They worked for a short time, then travelled through the east Kimberley with two visits to Forrest River mission to pick up older relations (including Dickie Udmorrah), and one long walk from there to Mount House for a large Law ceremony. Before the end of the War, Jilgi Edwards' father died and she and her mother decided to ‘settle down’ at Kurunjie and work. A white drover picked her mother up from the camp and they all travelled once again from


Tableland to Wyndham. She was trained to ride and work camels, and did not like the constant cooking and night watches of droving.

Jilgi Edwards described watching the cook hitting Aboriginal men for not jumping to their feet when ordered to move. Her white stepfather intervened on one occasion stating that the aggressor didn’t have a permit for thrashing his workers with sticks. At the Kurunjie camp, another fight occurred over a stockman’s wife and the same white man locked himself in the store while he bashed the Aboriginal husband senseless. He then tied him to a tree and whipped him. Jack Edwards intervened again with the warning that white men were not allowed to be with white women and would lose their work permits if found out. Jilgi Edwards was picked up by a leprosy patrol in 1956 and spent three years in Bungarun. Her uncle Dickie Udmorrah, who moved with her family for years and was at Mount Elizabeth in 1992, and her mother and brother were already there. 74

Morndingali and Jack Dale also told stories of beatings that were never reported to police. After one fight with the manager at Meda station in the late 1940s, a young stockworker died:

Morndi: All Aborigine fellas, all the black fellas, they never try to put up a report in the policeman. That’s the time. And they used to thought that boy goin to get out [of hospital], get over that sick. But he, they bust his guts out with the boot. He was a big man that [white man]...

Jack Dale: No we had no police then. Not even welfare.

Morndi: Today you report people. But early day they was frighten [of] that Gardia, they didn’t want to report. They’ been frighten to do it. And the poor fella got pain on his own and he never got over that. And he got killed then, this boy died then in the hospital here. 75

According to oral tradition, the dead man’s relatives ‘sang’ the manager, who was killed when his horse fell on him. Morndingali and Jack Dale stated that Aboriginal people stopped talking to police about murders because everyone went to gaol and the police did not understand that people had been ‘sung’. 76 When questioned by police about events, they tried to explain the complex interconnections of


75 Jack Dale, Morndi Munro, Tape (28) 28 February 1991.

76 Munro, Emerarra, p. 97.
obligations and relationships of who was responsible in Law for ‘crimes’, thus increasing rather than decreasing the amount of incarceration. Harry Howendon was chased by police in 1944 for the murder of his second wife. The transcripts of evidence suggest that Aboriginal women stated in evidence that because his wife had broken marriage rules, Howendon was able to punish her according to his rights and abilities in Law, not that he did it. Another man, Rajilla, was convicted and gaol ed. The deceased woman had asked police for protection from punishment by Aboriginal men, including Howendon, and they left her with Bob Muir at Mount Barnett dogging camp. Bob Muir ignored the risk and left her with two other women to look after the camp. Howendon and Dutchie Bungarrt had only just been hunted from Munja station for allegedly trying to steal other men’s wives. Conflicts continued over women camped with white men.

George Renton lived on the fringes of settlement in the northern ranges and provided an important ration alternative for men and women in the northern ranges during the War. He was reported in 1945 to be ‘harbouring all and sundry’ and living ‘just like a blackfellow’. His camp, Pine Grove, was near the northern border of Mount Hart and Mount Barnett. He was a dingo scalper who attracted Aboriginal people from Munja and surrounding stations to his camp. W.C. Connell and his sons, who were at Beverley Springs between Munja and Mount Hart reported to the Commissioner of Native Affairs that Renton ‘had a bad influence on the blacks and they are getting out of hand, just because they take liberties with him they think they can do the same with every other white man.’ After enquiries in Perth, the police found that he had a previous charge of murdering an Aboriginal person. His permit to employ Aboriginal people, which he had been given in Derby by Lawrie O’Neill, was cancelled by the Commissioner. The police raided Pine Grove camp, finding 25 people they had been looking for for three years. Eileen Ungundan and Nita Goonal, Morndingali’s younger ‘sisters’, were also there as little girls and were being trained to hunt dogs and look after the camp. They moved

77 PD4458/1944.
78 AD195/1929.
79 AD195/1929.
to Napier Downs and became part of the women's muster team in the late 1950s.\textsuperscript{80} Jack Dale worked for Bill Connell at Beverley Springs from about 1945 to 1949 and stated that he was a loner who found Kimberley Downs too close to town. Connell was one of the small number of white men who lived with an Aboriginal woman, with the permission of her brothers. Harry Howendon explained the system as it developed for older stockmen in the late 1940s:

\begin{quote}
Howendon: We been work for him but he got a girl friend. That all. Staying one time, that's all. One man gardia been chasim [a wife] I go to everybody, "How we can lettem him do that?" Like that you know. They been run around longa that girl. Single girl, go round longa that girl, well that his business, we can't do nothing. He been married woman, well two fella fight that man, like that.\textsuperscript{81}
\end{quote}

In the late 1940s Aboriginal women with children gradually moved out of stock work and were replaced by younger men, or in the instance at Napier Downs, with younger women. Some women without children who had also been trained to ride during the early days, like Maggie Gudaworla (Mount House and Glenroy), Weeda Munro (Mount Hart, Napier Downs and Kimberley Downs), Maggie Ghi (Kurunjie and Gibb River), Daisy Angajit (Napier Downs and Kimberley Downs), Barbara Midmee (Tablelands) and Susie Umulgun (Kurunjie and Gibb River) continued to work as riders throughout the 1940s and 1950s.\textsuperscript{82} They described their clothing as men's clothes - boots, a man's shirt, trousers and hat - but there was no indication that they were hidden from the view of police or government protectors, despite some of them working as contract drovers and riding into townships. These older women had moved out of their dual role as wives and riders for white men and were living with Aboriginal husbands who also rode or worked in stock camps. During the 1940s only a handful of 'full-blood' Aboriginal women lived and worked with white men as their spouses and as stockwomen. Most had moved away from white husbands and the homestead to the camps.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{80} Daisy Angajit in Munro, \textit{Emerarra}, p. 103.

\textsuperscript{81} Harry Howendon, (41) 5 April 1992.

\textsuperscript{82} Maggie Ghi, Susie Umungul, Rosie Mamangulya, Tapes (43 and 44) 17 May 1992; Weeda Munro and Daisy Angajit in Munro, \textit{Emerarra}, pp. 99-109; Maggie Gudaworla, Tape (63) 14 November 1995; Barbara Midmee, Tape (23) 1 August 1990.
\end{flushright}
When Maggie Gudaworla referred to her group's return to their clan country, Kupingarri, she spoke of a gradual process of travelling north from Mount House to Mount Barnett spanning several years of visits and meetings with relatives, culminating in their re-occupation with the United Aborigines Mission in 1935.\textsuperscript{83} The process of returning was gradual, revolving around holidays from station work and movements between white men's camps in the region. When the missionaries left during the War, she stayed in the ranges at Bob Muir's camp.\textsuperscript{84} In 1946 the missionaries returned with tobacco, dresses and their wives to begin a mission station. They bought Muir's leases at Mount Barnett and Echo Hills but were again refused official mission status or support by the state government. When they applied to open a school, they were also refused.\textsuperscript{85} Gudaworla and her relatives went back to Mount House where they could receive rations. Even the white doggers were leaving the northern ranges.

\textsuperscript{83} Maggie Gudaworla, Tape (63) 14 November 1995.

\textsuperscript{84} Maggie Gudaworla, Tape (65) 15 November 1995.

\textsuperscript{85} AD195/1929, Commissioner Bray to UAM, 15 October 1946.
Chapter Six

‘Now we’ve got Native Affairs’:
The arrival of Welfare, 1948-1959

Up north, a whole lot of people got shot by White Man, and some
were burned in a fire. That was before the station was built up. The
Aboriginal people didn’t do no harm, they were just chased out of the
country for the cattle. We didn’t fight for the land, we didn’t have any
Bosses like White people did. The station was holding the country
pretty strong; those days we didn’t have anybody ahead of us, but now
we’ve got Native Affairs. (Sam Woolagoodja, Derby 1976.)

Welfare came in ‘50 giving hand out of food and rations, finding a job
and helping out giving a tent. When a bad manager was ‘round people
couldn’t tell police because police and managers a bit too close. When
welfare came they were more on Aboriginal side. (Maggie Scott, Halls
Creek, 1989.)

In the 1950s significant changes occurred in legislative controls over Aboriginal
people, coinciding with a policy shift from segregation to assimilation and the
substantial increase in Commonwealth activity and funding in the area of Aboriginal
Affairs. The Western Australian government adopted an assimilation policy in 1951
but did not substantially alter its policy of segregating full-blood station people under
the benevolent supervision of the Boss and the Missus. In the Kimberley, unlike the
Northern Territory or Queensland, the government closed or otherwise divested itself
of all settlements and institutions for Aboriginal people. This preserved the status quo,
leaving pastoralists in the north and central Kimberley with a virtual monopoly over
station labour, as well as continuing responsibility for feeding all people on their
pastoral leases. Again unlike the Territory, the government did not pay some of the
larger stations for rationing Aboriginal people. Nor, as in Queensland, did it provide
large settlements for centralising them.

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1 Sam Woolagoodja in R. Layton, ‘Coastal Story Places In The Western Kimberlies’, [sic]


3 See Peter Biskup, Not Slaves Not Citizens: The Aboriginal Problem In Western Australia 1898-
1954, St Lucia, University Of Queensland Press, 1973; C.D. Rowley, The Remote
The state government’s partial commitment to assimilation on pastoral stations extended and reinforced the Kimberley’s regional difference within Western Australia’s pastoral areas. Pastoralists in the Kimberley negotiated with the state over wages and minimum conditions for Aboriginal people living on stations, with the first unofficial agreement for a small amount of cash ‘pocket money’ occurring in 1950. The subject of equal wages for ‘full-blood’ people in the Kimberley was carefully avoided by government officials, station managers and Native Welfare officials throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. Special reference was made by Departmental officers and managers to preventing alleged communistic influences taking hold. They were keen to avoid unionisation of the Kimberley workforce and the ‘problems in the Pilbara’ which resulted in the pastoral strike of May 1946 and ongoing conflict with the Department in the 1950s.\(^4\)

The Department of Native Affairs, known also as the Native Welfare Department after 1954, consistently drew back from open conflict with pastoral employers over conditions for Aboriginal people on stations. They were understaffed and apprehensive that they would become financially responsible for a large group of town-based ‘indigents’ if they interfered. The negotiations between managers and welfare over the implementation of new policies were aimed at a gradual transformation in station people’s lives without any significant alteration in the locus of power on the stations which might disrupt the ration system and encourage ‘unrest’.

**From punishment to assistance**

Commissioner Bray retired in 1947, after seven years at the head of the Department of Native Affairs without resolving the Pilbara pastoral strike or reforming the administration of Aboriginal Affairs in Western Australia. He had managed to oversee the introduction in 1947 of a State Farm Workers’ Award which for the first time included Aboriginal people, but only those people living in the south of the state and they were subject to a ‘slow workers’ clause.\(^5\) Ex-Police Constable Lawrie O’Neill,

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\(^4\) ARAD 1955, MS AADL.

\(^5\) ARAD 1947, MS AADL.
who returned to the Native Administration Department from the army at the close of the Second World War, was the officer responsible for dealing with the Pilbara strikers while another police officer, Jensen, was appointed to inspect and report on the west Kimberley from 1944 to 1949. O'Neill reported to Bray in late 1945 that Aboriginal people in the Pilbara district were not capable of the unity required to threaten the pastoral industry, thus adding to the government’s surprise when about 800 people walked off stations in 1946 with large numbers staying out until 1949 and forming their own mining enterprise.6

On Bray’s retirement, Charles McBeath, Travelling Inspector for the East Kimberley and another ex-policeman, became Acting Commissioner of Native Administration. In early 1948 he attended a Commonwealth and State conference on Aboriginal affairs, the first since 1937.7 The conference was partly a response to Western Australia’s request to the Commonwealth for an annual £50,000 grant for the Aborigines Department. But it was also a response to increased pressure in the eastern states from Aboriginal people, church bodies and other interested academic and private groups, for the repeal of strict legislative controls over Aboriginal people which excluded them from the increasingly important Commonwealth grants for health, education, housing and welfare benefits.8 A.P. Elkin was present at the meeting and again took a prominent part in the discussions. He pushed for increased services to full-blood people in isolated regions, and minimum wages and conditions on pastoral stations.9

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7 ‘Proceedings of Commonwealth and State Welfare Authorities meeting, Canberra, 3 February 1948’, AADL.

8 Paul Hasluck, Black Australians: a Survey of Native Policy in Western Australia, 1829-1897, Melbourne University Press, 1942, pp. 76-77.

McBeath refrained from voting on the recommendation, adopted by all other members, that as well as clothes and standard accommodation, a minimum cash wage be paid direct to Aboriginal employees on pastoral stations. He was ‘not prepared to come into line’ on the recommendation that all states endeavour to pass uniform legislation and to professionalise departments through anthropological training of all staff. He also declined to vote on the recommendation to pay workers’ compensation to Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry. He argued that Western Australia was different from other states in size, large Aboriginal population and, most importantly, its coverage of northern and southern zones.\(^{10}\) The Department saw the south as predominantly a half-caste and increasingly ‘civilised’ population, while the north was characterised as a ‘full blood’ population, many of whom were viewed as ‘primitive’. Only local knowledge and experience could successfully straddle the needs and requirements of two different populations.

While the Western Australian government was not willing to alter its policy of non-intervention in northern employment conditions, the possibility of securing Social Security funds was attractive. McBeath supported the principle and argued that Social Security benefits be extended to Aboriginal people, including those people resident on pastoral stations, with the exception of ‘full-blood aboriginals living under primitive or nomadic conditions.’\(^{11}\) Payment of Social Security benefits for Aboriginal people could help to resolve the tensions between the Department and pastoralists over who was responsible for rationing and maintaining ‘indigents’. As early as 1942 the Commonwealth had received a submission from the Graziers’ Federation Council of Australia that it supported the extension of the Child Endowment benefit to station people, on the condition that it be paid to station management, in recognition that it was the stations who supported the children, and that the parents were not capable of handling cash. Commissioner Bray supported this move, which would help to ‘preserve the supply of labour’ for the pastoral industry.\(^{12}\) The suggestion was not accepted by the Commonwealth.

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\(^{10}\)Ibid., pp. 4, 14, 17 and 20.

\(^{11}\)Ibid. p. 8.

Neither the State nor Commonwealth governments wanted Social Security benefits to interfere with Aboriginal people’s employment, or lessen the government’s capacity to control their ‘social development’. Restrictions on Child Endowment benefits were lifted in 1943 on the proviso that they be paid only to ‘detribalised’ Aboriginal people who had an exemption from the State Act and did not live on an Aboriginal reserve, attend a state Aboriginal institution or mission, or live on a station where they were still classified as ‘semi-tribalised’. The Commonwealth refused to support people on government reserves or institutions, on the grounds that these people were dependent on the state and not capable of spending their money in an appropriate manner. All Aboriginal women were excluded from the maternity bonus, known as the ‘baby bonus’.

The Commissioner was keen for the endowment program to expand and supplement Departmental funding. Passing the Western Australian Citizenship Rights Act in 1944 made citizenship holders eligible for Age, Invalid, Child Endowment and Maternity benefits. In addition the Commonwealth agreed to pay Child Endowment to the government for Aboriginal children at approved state institutions. By 1945 the Department received £3,000 for children at southern reserves and £4,500 for children at settlements and institutions. This money represented almost half of the £15,000 budget for relief and rations to Aboriginal people in 1945. It also enabled Commissioner Bray to start Udialla ration station 80 miles south of Derby, on the Fitzroy River, for training half-caste boys for pastoral work. It became a ration depot for desert people coming into the Fitzroy River stations but closed in 1949 after heavy criticism from pastoral neighbours that it interfered with their labour and was unproductive. The Department was also reprimanded by the Commonwealth just before Udialla closed, for paying wages to staff from Child Endowment money. Child Endowment benefits were a significant financial boost for Moola Bulla settlement and the Derby leprosarium.

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13 AD1104/1939, whole file relates.


Until the late 1940s, when restrictions were lifted on payments to Aboriginal women, only a small number of people in the south of the state and those in northern institutions were eligible for Social Security benefits. As a result of Social Security guidelines and the State's definition of 'Aboriginal', children from Kimberley stations came into a payment category only if they were in an institution but not if they were with their parents on stations or in towns. This focus on the child apart from the family increased during the 1960s, to become an important part of the manager's paternalism and the disintegration of the station mob.

**The Bateman Commission**

The prospect of increased financial support from the Commonwealth contributed to the government's decision to review the administration of Aboriginal affairs in Western Australia with the 1948 Bateman Royal Commission.\(^{16}\) The commission provided a range of recommendations which ensured that 'full-blood' people on Kimberley pastoral stations continued to be 'protected' and segregated on the stations under the control of the Boss and the Missus, and only partially incorporated into the emerging welfare system and assimilation policy.\(^{17}\) Bateman recommended an overall policy of 'gradual' change toward the 'eventual assimilation' of half-caste people on stations, including a special Aboriginal minimum wage in the pastoral industry in the Pilbara and Murchison, and improved housing and education of 'half-caste' children. Despite warning the government that 'sustenance in return for service [was] not in accord with modern civilisation', he believed that full-blood station people in the Kimberley should be given a small wage as store credits but excluded from receiving cash as they had 'no sense of money values whatsoever and they would become prey to the unscrupulous hawker who would persuade them to spend their money on useless articles.'\(^{18}\)

Bateman recommended a tough application of the 'neglected' child category in order to completely isolate half-caste Aboriginal children from their 'verminous', 'squalid'

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\(^{16}\) Biskup, *Not Slaves Not Citizens*, pp. 219-222.


\(^{18}\) Bateman, ibid. p. 16.
fringe camps and ‘lazy’, ‘unclean, idle and useless creatures’ - their parents and relatives.\textsuperscript{19} ‘Full-blood’ people on stations would have their standard of living raised by training the children in hygiene and the value of money, and regular inspections by Departmental staff to assist the managers to supervise the camps.\textsuperscript{20} But Bateman did not recommend that full-blood children be removed from the stations to missions or institutions for further education:

In regard to the pastoral districts generally, in my view it is most undesirable to remove the native children from the stations to the towns for schooling. The influence of the town spoils the native for future employment on the stations and they should not be encouraged to enter the towns if it is at all possible to educate them otherwise. The pastoral industry is an important one to the State and it is almost entirely dependent on native labour. So long as the natives receive fair treatment on the stations it is in their best interests, as well as the State’s, that they should be employed in the pastoral industry.\textsuperscript{21}

Bateman was adamant that the Department could improve its system of supervision of Aboriginal people by increasing its regional staff and ensuring that it was led by someone with anthropological training or at least some background in the colonial administration of indigenous affairs. This suggestion was taken up and, with the support of Elkin, Stanley Middleton was appointed Commissioner in September 1948. He had anthropological training and previous experience in New Guinea, from where he recruited four of his colleagues for the Department of Native Administration.\textsuperscript{22} Two of them, Dave Pullen and Jim Beharrell, took up the positions of Senior Administrative Officer, Northern District and District Officer in Derby in 1949 and 1950 respectively.

Lawrie O’Neill was ‘returned’ to the Police Department in 1949, shortly after Middleton declared that his views were ‘diametrically opposed’ to those of the new staff and the Department. \textsuperscript{23} O’Neill’s return to the Police marked an important shift in

\textsuperscript{19} Bateman, ibid. p. 26.

\textsuperscript{20} Bateman, ibid. p. 16

\textsuperscript{21} Bateman, ibid. p. 25.

\textsuperscript{22} Bateman, ibid. p. 229 and p. 232; Kevin Johnson, Tape (59) 17 May 1994.

Departmental policy, from capture and punishment to assistance for Aboriginal people. Dave Pullen was remembered by older Aboriginal informants as the first ‘welfare’ officer in Derby and the west Kimberley, while O’Neill, who worked as an official Aboriginal Protector for at least 15 years, with four as a travelling inspector, was remembered as a ‘hard’ and efficient policeman from whom it was difficult to escape. Lawrie O’Neill was intimately involved with punitive actions against Aboriginal people, whether explicit in the capture of beef thieves and suspected murderers, or implicit in the capture and chaining of lepers and bush people. Weeda Munro recalled being frightened of Lawrie O’Neill when he asked her in the early 1930s to remove her clothes so he could take her photograph, which was later captioned the ‘wild girls of the hills’ in Idriess’s *Over The Range.* Having made the transition from bush to station, Weeda Munro was not keen to remove her clothes and risk being classified a bush woman.

O’Neill’s replacement by Pullen and return to the Police Force was part of the Department’s separation from the police which had been suggested by each of the Royal Commissions in 1904, 1934 and 1948. Bateman’s 1948 criticisms were convincing. He wrote that the concept of police Protectors was ‘contradictory’ and ‘universally condemned’, adding that in ‘isolated districts the police officer wields a great deal of power. His word is law and if he happens to be unsympathetic towards the natives then it is a poor look-out for them.’ He wrote that the lack of Departmental officers in the Kimberley meant that it was the ‘police who administer native affairs’ and this was ‘entirely wrong in principle.’ The practice of employing ex-police officers as travelling inspectors was also impractical because Aboriginal people ‘usually fear police’, and were unlikely to approach them for assistance. The numbers of police Protectors declined from 77 in 1950 to 29 in 1956, and clearer distinctions developed between Police and Welfare from that period.

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26 Bateman, ibid. p. 35.

27 Bateman, ibid. p. 36.
'Not to encourage unrest'

Dave Pullen was in the Kimberley for only two years. His death in 1951 deprived the Department of his enthusiasm and experience, and his unusual literary asides about the region and its white and black residents. One which was reproduced for the 1950 Annual Report was a quote which Pullen believed reflected attitudes of Kimberley residents to missions and missionaries:

A Mission station boy is no use to anyone for he has acquired the vices of the white man without his virtue. In return for a smattering of education and Christianity he is liable to become conceited, insolent and secretly disloyal. He has learned that all men are equal in the sight of God without the useful corollary that they are not equal in the sight of man and that the world conforms to the latter usage.\textsuperscript{28}

This quotation was taken from J.H. Curle's \textit{Shadow Show}. Curle was an English travel writer and journalist for \textit{The Times}, who, like Ion Idriess brought the excitement of racial difference and savage passions of the post-World War One British Empire to a large and enthusiastic audience in the cities. He wrote of his observations while travelling in the late 1920s and 1930s in New Guinea, Africa and Australia, providing expatriates like Pullen with reading material as well as adding to their own exotic image at 'home'.\textsuperscript{29}

The fact that Middleton, Commissioner from only 1948, chose to reproduce such comments in a published report was a reflection of his respect for his New Guinea colleague and their shared vision for reforming the Department and changing white Australian attitudes to Aboriginal people. Middleton himself wrote in the 1949 Annual Report that it seemed

\textit{incredible that the experiences with native peoples in other countries have apparently been entirely lost upon most of the people of Western Australia. Obviously the familiarity which has bred so much contempt has become congenital, and is therefore noticed only in otherwise unavoidable circumstances.}\textsuperscript{30}

In 1950 he commented that the field work task of assimilating Aboriginal people into white society defied 'lucid description' and taxed his officers too greatly. He

\textsuperscript{28} ARAD 1950, MS AADL.

\textsuperscript{29} See W. Lambden Owen, \textit{Cossack Gold: The Chronicles Of An Early Goldfields Warden}, Sydney, Angus And Robertson, 1933, preface by Curle.

\textsuperscript{30} ARAD 1949, MS AADL.
mentioned the perennial problems of lack of funding and inadequate staffing, and the size and variation in the living conditions and experiences of Aboriginal people. But he also mentioned the existence of white community prejudices which blocked the reform program. This was a significant change in policy, indicating that the Department would identify what it believed to be Aboriginal interests, and, to a greater extent than before support them against detractors. Middleton reported that Departmental Officers in the field were treated by residents and station managers with a 'lack of respect', as if they were 'of little more account than the coloured people who are their responsibility'. His officers endured their poor treatment from the community with the 'patient toleration of men who know that what they are doing is right, meet, just and overdue.'

The transition from patrolling the frontiers of an external colony like New Guinea to administering the internal frontiers of Western Australia had brought both Middleton and Pullen into conflict with pastoralists and parliamentarians, with little support from the public. By 1953, after five years as Commissioner, Middleton was accused in Parliament of being 'frankly propagandist' for alleging that State Aboriginal affairs legislation approved of [Aboriginal people's] pauperisation on the one hand and on the other directed a form of control which bordered on unwarranted interference with personal liberty unparalleled in the legislative treatment of any other people of the Commonwealth or Pacific territories. Its effect on aborigines was to create in their minds a state of degradation, or at least inferiority, and it appears to have gradually driven most of them into a state of passive resistance which may take years of patient and painstaking effort to remove.

...We, who are charged with the unpleasant duty of administering it, regard it as repugnant to basic humanitarian and welfare principles devoid of any common ground with the people we are trying to help and creative of more misunderstanding, dissatisfaction and abuse than any other piece of similar legislation known to the free world today.

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31 ARAD 1950, MS AADL.

32 ARAD 1950, MS AADL.

33 A.O. Neville noted that as Administrator to Aboriginal people, he received less direction and support than his colleagues who worked with indigenous peoples in other parts of the world. Pat Jacobs, *Mister Neville*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1990, p. 229.

34 ARAD 1953; comments and debate at *WAPD* vol. 136, pp. 2761-2766, 16 December 1953.
Middleton was particularly critical of the prejudice which he found in the northern pastoral industry, where even people who claimed to be 'pro-Aborigine' believed an Aboriginal person 'must be kept in his place'. He openly claimed that police officers reinforced this view, and that to attempt to fight against discrimination was to 'fight the entire recognised social system of the white community'.

The conflict between Middleton and McLeod who was spokesman for the Pilbara strikers further eroded Departmental support. Lawrie O'Neill's advice to Middleton about the situation in the Pilbara was flawed but he also made his own mistakes. He attempted to force McLeod away from the strikers using the 1936 Native Administration Act to gaol white and black organisers, and prohibit contacts between Aboriginal people and outside supporters from Church or political bodies. The publicity from supporters helped to raise the public profile of the strikers and to discredit Middleton. He in turn sought to ensure that industrial unrest and 'communism' did not spread to the Kimberley.

The 'unrest' of the Pilbara strike was also evident in the Murchison and the Ashburton, where some Aboriginal workers turned from station work to mining. According to Don McLeod, Aboriginal stockmen from three Kimberley stations near Broome were also supposed to walk off in 1946, but failed to do so. In 1948, Bateman wrote that the problem in the Pilbara stemmed from McLeod's influence, as well as resentment by Aboriginal people that the Department failed to support them, dealing only with station managers. He made it clear that the same discontent was becoming a factor in the Derby area, where some Aboriginal people had told him they would also strike for better conditions. He suggested that 'Communistic influences' in the Kimberley would bring about the same divisive

35 ARAD 1953, MS AADL.


37 McLeod, How The West Was Lost, ch. 5.

38 Biskup, Not Slaves Not Citizens, p. 236.


situation as in the Pilbara, and that the Departmental Officer in Derby should 'forestall any such influence as soon as it appeared'.

 Middleton did not have to deal with the same scale of organised walk-offs and public scrutiny of Departmental actions in the Kimberley as he had in the Pilbara. The situation was different. Firstly, there were no mining alternatives to supplement or replace station rations. The Kimberley was also a region of many different languages and cultural 'blocs', and only a short time had elapsed since the chaos and terror of the frontier. Vast station holdings for cattle and sheep were rarely fenced or developed to significantly reduce pastoralists' dependency on resident groups of Aboriginal people. Leprosy patrols and the leprosy epidemic also added to its isolation. Furthermore, there were no McLeods or outsiders willing to advocate and assist with strike action. Between 1949 and 1959 there were only two recorded official visits to the west Kimberley by a union representative interested in station working conditions for Aboriginal people. The ban on Aboriginal people joining the Australian Workers' Union was not lifted until 1964. Finally, in the 1950s the state Native Welfare Department provided the most significant critique of conditions on Kimberley stations, but its policy of assistance was not designed to cause a fracture in station relationships. It was aimed at encouraging pastoral paternalism, which in turn would save Aboriginal people from abject poverty and extinction, as well as ensuring their future employment.

In 1949, at the peak of national and international publicity about the Pilbara strikers, the Anti-Slavery Society of London also questioned Middleton about slave labour on Kimberley stations. Middleton defended Kimberley pastoralists, referring to pastoral paternalism as the only means of survival which catered for Aboriginal people's

41 Bateman, ibid. p. 18.


45 AD34/1949, Pullen to CNW, 18 July 1949.
inherent cultural dependency. Middleton wrote that it was not a matter of not paying wages, it was

a matter of the stage in the natives' development in the handling of money, of which to a large extent they have no real knowledge, and the possession of which will disadvantage them. ... You are no doubt aware that on the stations in the Kimberleys the administration is paternal in nature, in that a considerable number of natives and the relatives of those who work are maintained in food and clothing and other necessaries by the Station owners.46

In his reports to Middleton in 1949 and 1950, Pullen provided the Commissioner with information which undermined such generalisations about Aboriginal people on west Kimberley pastoral stations and questioned the benevolence of the paternalism he found there. Pullen wrote to Middleton that on arrival he

came up against the well-rehearsed opinions that the natives should not be interfered with, that they were getting all they needed to keep body and soul together, that they were happy, that money would spoil them and make them more sophisticated and that the pastoral industry would be upset and the stations would have to resort to white jackeroos and thus throw the responsibility of providing for the natives back on the Government. Also I had been led to believe that the stations were, great heartedly, maintaining hundreds of aged and indigent people.47

After two visits to station camps Pullen found that Aboriginal people, particularly stockmen and domestics, began to approach him and ask for changes in their living and working conditions. They understood money and wanted a wage. He checked some station books and found that most stockmen were in debt to the stations, while in only a few cases were women paid.48 One manager had indicated that at the 'end of the year he magnanimously wiped off the debts.'

Pullen called on Middleton to implement the 1936 Aborigines Act and Regulations to improve living conditions on the stations, suggesting that the 'Administration, through the years, has been very tolerant ... and has not insisted on the carrying out of anything which might tend to upset the industry.'49 On the other hand, Aboriginal

46 AD34/1949, Minister for Native Affairs to Anti-Slavery Society London, 12 September 1949.

47 ARAD 1950, MS AADL also published in WA 24 June 1950.


49 AD34/1949, Pullen to CNA, 28 September 1949.
people’s requests had not been considered by the Department or by Bateman in his report:

I think that the most important factor was not mentioned, the natives themselves. They appear to me to be keen to get wages - to jingle a few coins in their pockets, to be able, when they feel inclined to buy something for the wife and kids and to feel that they are an important unit on the station.\(^{50}\)

Pullen reported that he had ‘yet to see the hawkers’ who allegedly threatened to exploit Aboriginal people and found that there were very small numbers, about seven or eight, old and sick people on each of the stations who could be classed as ‘indigents’. Old people watered gardens, tended goats and otherwise contributed to the station economy. He was unwilling to class women as indigents as they performed some employment duties and most were the wives of workers and were therefore the responsibility of the pastoral employers. On offering to remove the old and injured to the ration station at Moola Bulla, he was told by managers that they should not be moved as they were ‘an important link between the employer and the young, active workers’.\(^{51}\) If they left, the young people would not want to stay and work. This was a concern to managers as there was a severe shortage of labour on almost every station in the west Kimberley in 1949 and 1950.\(^{52}\) White labourers were reportedly asking for eight and nine pounds a week for muster work, while a well paid Aboriginal stockman received two pounds per week.\(^{53}\)

After his 1949 survey of the stations near Derby and along the Fitzroy River, including Kimberley Downs where Morndingali and his family were working, Pullen described living conditions on the stations as compounds of flattened tin huts or bush pole and blanket tents with earth floors where flies sat on piles of bones. There were no ablution facilities at the camps: water was usually brought by women, in buckets hung from a wooden yoke, from nearby rivers or water holes.

\(^{50}\) AD34/1949, Pullen to CNA, 28 September 1949 also quoted in Biskup, *Not Slaves Not Citizens*, p. 241.

\(^{51}\) AD34/1949, Pullen to CNA, 28 September 1949.

\(^{52}\) See ARAD 1949, 1950, MS AADL.

\(^{53}\) AD34/1949, McGaffin Superintendent La Grange to CNA, 2 June 1949.
(thus the classic images of station women). A bush shower was set up for women who worked in the homesteads but men were expected to wash in the open, which 'embarrassed' them. He wrote that medical facilities on the stations were basic kits for minor ailments and that sore eyes were widespread throughout the camps. There was 'almost an entire absence of young children' at the stations, which he believed was partly due to the inadequate diet of flour, meat and tea. Some pre-cooked soups and stews were handed out at the kitchen, collected in billy cans and taken back to the camps, or eaten while squatting on the ground or on the log pile behind the kitchens. He suggested that a dietary survey be undertaken to assist with the implementation in the future of a fixed minimum ration scale, pointing out that the permit system required only 'adequate and sufficient' food which made 'provisions rather elastic'.

To his amazement, although station camps were sometimes as little as 200 yards from the homestead, managers rarely visited them and knew very little about the camps or Aboriginal people's lives. According to Pullen, they were 'just there when they were needed and so long as the tucker was kept up to them, their sores attended to and a hand-out at Christmas, nothing else mattered.'

In some of his more frank and private exchanges with Middleton, Pullen referred to extremely difficult conditions in the Kimberley as well as hostility towards him from white Kimberley residents. He reported one incident where the manager told him he was wasting his time because Aboriginal people 'had no intelligence and would never learn the value of money', to which he replied that 'it seemed remarkable ... how a lot of unintelligent people could completely run sheep and cattle stations as they are doing throughout the Kimberleys.'

Even after driving hundreds of miles, Pullen was not assured of an open and friendly reception from the Boss, especially if he mentioned wages:

There is no doubt at all that the natives themselves want wages and that this demand will continue to grow in strength. A major upset could easily be caused in the pastoralist areas if a mining or other company offered wages and good living conditions to the natives there would be

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54 ARAD 1949, Pullen Report, MS AADL.

55 ARAD 1949, Pullen Report, MS AADL.

a general exodus by the natives from their present employment. Most of them are already ‘wages conscious’ but don’t know how to outwardly express their views. They are not encouraged to do so on the stations and any white man who mentions wages in the vicinity of a station is branded a Communist.\textsuperscript{57}

To avoid the open conflict with pastoralists and the public scrutiny being afforded the Pilbara, Pullen assured Middleton that he was engaging in a “‘cold war’, keeping the employers on their toes and, by ceaseless propaganda, making it clear that we have laid down a path and shall not deviate from it’.\textsuperscript{58} He referred to pastoralists’ goodwill and support once they understood that the Department’s aim was to separate punishment and police from welfare, not to introduce ‘revolutionary’ change.\textsuperscript{59} They also had to be convinced that the Department would not try to force them to adopt a wage system in the Kimberley. After Pullen’s first tour of stations near Derby in April 1949, Middleton sent extracts from Pullen’s journal to the Minister to ‘allay fears’ amongst pastoralists that the Department was pressing for wages.\textsuperscript{60} He also sent extracts showing that Pullen had brokered an agreement with an AWU organiser who had visited Derby and the Pilbara in 1950. This ensured that unions would not get involved but wait and see if the Department could introduce its own wages scheme. Three days later, Middleton telegraphed Pullen instructing him not to push too hard for the introduction of wages in the Kimberley: ‘I know you have counters to reluctance to pay wages but we must be cautious do not have staff to supervise.’\textsuperscript{61}

It is likely that the Minister had received word from a Kimberley pastoralist that Pullen was creating trouble in the region. Such was the power of the pastoral lobby in Western Australia that Pullen was immediately instructed to curb his activities and proceed with more conservative goals. The Pastoralists and Graziers Association history, published in 1979, bemoaned the gradual ‘lengthening of the lines’ of communication between it and government in comparison to the earlier period when

\textsuperscript{57} AD699/1949, Pullen Report, 9 August 1949.

\textsuperscript{58} ibid.


\textsuperscript{60} AD34/1949, CNW to Minister, 17 May 1949.

\textsuperscript{61} AD34/1949, CNW to Pullen, 20 May 1949.
'dealings with governments and officialdom were usually direct - only a phone call or a deputation between friends away, if the politicians weren’t actually at the meetings.'

'A few coins to jingle in their pockets'
At the end of 1949, Pullen amalgamated ration and wage scales from the Northern Territory, New Guinea and a plan drawn up by McBeath for Moola Bulla in late 1948, to produce a detailed list of conditions and minimum wages for Aboriginal men and women on Kimberley stations. He asked the Commissioner what should be done about children working at missions and was instructed in a circular to all staff in late 1949, that the Masters and Servants Act did not apply to children if they were not ‘commanded’ or ‘ordered’ to work. The point being, where children were not directed to work there was no employment relationship: 'they are not employed'. So Pullen did not need to concern himself about their working conditions or ‘employer’s’ complaints. Pullen’s list of wage rates and conditions for adult workers included a wage for ‘half-caste’ workers which was higher than that for ‘ordinary natives’ to encourage them to retain ‘different standards’. It also set a minimum wage for men and women working in towns and on pastoral stations, a trainee wage and a proviso that all employers of Aboriginal labour ‘provide adequate and suitable living accommodation for the workers and their dependants, which includes quarters, kitchen, dining room, ablation and sanitary facilities.’ The suggested allowance was:

Male stockmen: **Annually** 4 trousers, 4 shirts, hat, boots, belt, mosquito net, blankets, ground sheet, swag cover, sweater, coat, pocket knife, enamel knife, pannikin, spoon, 2 handkerchiefs.

**Weekly:** 2 soap, 1 matches, 2 sticks tobacco.

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63 AD34/1949, Pullen to CNA, 28 September 1949; AD34/1939, McBeath to CNA, 14 January 1949.

64 AD699/1949, circular memo, 13 December 1949.

65 AD34/1949, McBeath to CNA, 14 January 1949.
Females as domestics. **Annually** 4 dresses, 6 yrd calico, 1 sweater, 4
towels, 4 handkerchiefs, 1 mirror, 2 combs, 1 blanket, needles and
thread, plate, pannikin, spoon.

**Weekly** 2 soap, 1 matches, 2 sticks tobacco. 66

'Rations' were also to be given out for three weeks' annual holiday. There was no
food ration scale, although Middleton had forwarded the standard scale for New
Guinea native workers to Pullen. This scale included meat, fruit, vegetables, oils,
fats, tobacco, rice, wheatmeal, tea, sugar, matches and soap. 67

The wages scale called for Departmental involvement in supervising the initial
agreement between each worker and employer, checking books to be kept by stations
recording pay and ration scales to individual employees, advising on the rate of pay
and administering a compulsory trust account for a fixed portion of all station
workers' wages. The plan attempted to initiate a scale of wages and conditions for a
range of workers; male, female, senior, junior, trainees, caste, town and station.
Pullen believed that a wage scale 'could prove an important step in the emancipation
of native women' by ensuring that they received their own money rather than the
usual practice whereby they were handed some cloth or a present by stockmen when
they returned from a droving trip. 68 The plan divided workers by caste but left room
for lower payments to any 'half-caste' living in 'native' conditions. They, according
to the Department, did not require incentives or payments to live otherwise. Only
'half-castes' who wanted to spend money on housing or clothing needed to be paid at
the top rate for Aboriginal workers.

This plan went a step further than that suggested by J.J. Rhatigan, who had joined the
Department in 1949 as Patrol Officer for the Halls Creek region. He was a Kimberley
resident who left the Department in 1953 to replace A.A.M. Coverley as the
Kimberley MLA. Rhatigan's views on wages mirrored Bateman's and those put by
the pastoral lobby. He warned of the risk of hawkers, the financial burden to the

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66 AD34/1949, Pullen to CNA, 28 September 1949.

112, 7 December 1949; See 'Dietary Survey Of Aborigines In Western Australia', 1951
Department Of Health, Commonwealth, AADL.

68 ARAD 1950, MS AADL.
government when employers decided to keep only the waged workers, and the ridiculousness of paying wages to people who had no idea of money.\textsuperscript{69} He suggested introducing a wage which operated only ‘of theory’: to give some coins regularly to each worker in return for their labour. It was a simple scale, involving three levels of money in addition to keep, for men and women and no caste distinctions. Men could earn either £1, 15s or 10s per month. Women, who were assumed to be domestics could earn 10s, 5s or 2s 6d. No one under 16 or over 60 would be included in the scheme unless they were performing ‘hard labour’.

The more complex Departmental plan, which included incentives for caste workers and Departmental supervision, was put to the Pastoralists and Graziers Association of Western Australia in Perth in November 1949, and debated at other Association meetings in January and February 1950. Middleton briefed the Minister prior to these meetings, reminding him of the need for caution in view of the previous ‘attacks’ on the Department by pastoralists. He noted that A.O. Neville had warned the Fyfe Royal Commission in 1940 that there would be trouble in the Kimberley if Aboriginal people were not paid for their work, that the Commonwealth advised on a base wage in 1947 for the Northern Territory, and that some employers wanted to pay cash but were concerned about the impact it would have on smaller and less wealthy stations who could not afford a competitive cash system.\textsuperscript{70} Middleton's notes also included a quotation from Sir Hubert Murray, warning that people who ‘understand the natives thoroughly’ were a ‘very dangerous class for they really believe what they say and are quite unconscious of their limitations.’ Also included in the briefing documents was part of a 1947 letter from Elkin, warning that the ‘new rates of pay for aboriginal employees in the Northern Territory will have its indirect effect on Western Australian native employment, and the employers will have to come out of the dark ages of 50 years ago.’

At the Perth meeting the Minister explained that the State had to do something because the pressure from the Commonwealth to alter wage scales for half-caste pastoral

\textsuperscript{69} AD34/1949, Rhatigan to CNW, 8 March 1949.

\textsuperscript{70} AD34/1949, File note Middleton to Minister n.d.
workers in the Northern Territory would disrupt Kimberley stations.\textsuperscript{71} Middleton reassured employers that unions had 'no wish to accept natives', so any agreement would not be subject to formal arbitration: it was an informal agreement between the state and pastoralists. Pastoralists, on the other hand, wanted the Department to police the agreement to ensure that it was fixed and that there would be 'little or no enticing of natives from one station to another'.\textsuperscript{72}

The outcome of these meetings was a simplified informal agreement between the Department and the Pastoralists and Graziers Association of Western Australia to pay, in addition to their keep, monthly pocket money of 10s for women, £1 for drovers and 10s to all other men, regardless of their caste or skill. Departmental staff would ensure that the agreement for a flat rate was upheld, thus putting a stop to potential unrest in the pastoral industry. The cash amount could be paid as store credits or extra rations at the 'discretion of the manager'. Only two station owners from the northern ranges attended the meeting - Bob Rowell, who owned Tablelands and Napier Downs stations, and Doug Blythe, part-owner of Mount House and Glenroy. They were assured that a cash component would not be enforced.\textsuperscript{73} Kimberley pastoral employers were not willing to accept any regulation of living or work conditions, such as compulsory provision of bathing and sanitary conveniences, holiday pay, written agreements or trust accounts. Nor was the state government willing to force their hand. The Department backed down from its plans to regulate wages and conditions on stations and the Pastoralists and Graziers Association of Western Australia was able to advise all its members, including Frank Lacy at Mount Elizabeth, that there would be few changes to the existing system except in areas near Derby where workforce stability was threatened by alternative employment and cash was beginning to change hands already.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{71} AD34/1949, Minutes of Meeting PGA, 2 November 1949.

\textsuperscript{72} AD34/1949, Minutes of Meeting PGA, 3 February 1950.

\textsuperscript{73} AD34/1949, Pastoralists' Association of Western Australia Inc. Notification of 'Payment Of Native Employees - West Kimberley Stations', 3 February 1950.

Middleton telegraphed Elkin immediately, triumphant that pastoralists had agreed to a ‘wage scale’ and formally accepted their responsibility for all dependents and pensioners on pastoral stations.\textsuperscript{75} The Minister went to the newspapers to announce the ‘pay’ breakthrough for Kimberley Aboriginal people.\textsuperscript{76} Charles Rowley repeated these claims in his book \textit{The Remote Aborigines}, saying that Kimberley Aborigines were paid wages from 1950 as a flow-on from the Pilbara strike.\textsuperscript{77} In negotiating with the Department pastoralists had managed to implement a plan which provided a flat-rate pocket money component - a ‘few coins to jingle in their pockets’ - which was lower than the amount already being paid to some workers.\textsuperscript{78} Stockwomen such as Weeda Munro, Daisy Beharrell, Daisy Angajit, Maggie Ghi and Maggie Gudaworla were not accounted for at all in the new scheme. Rather than agreeing to a ‘wage’ for Aboriginal workers, pastoralists and the Department had come to an agreement to allow some employers to break the existing wage-fixing system. They also reinforced the rhetoric that pastoralists were ‘protecting’ Aboriginal people from themselves, announcing to all members that

the consensus opinion of the meeting was that the present system, whereby both working natives, their dependants and pensioners were provided with all the necessities of life, virtually from the cradle to the grave, was the one best suited to the present stage of development of the natives, and one moreover calculated to avoid the evils which are invariably associated with the circulation of money, among a native people not generally educated to its value.\textsuperscript{79}

Paying cash to Aboriginal people who lived on isolated stations ran contrary to the non-cash economy and, as some pastoralists submitted to the meetings in 1949 and 1950, cash was useless where there was nowhere to spend it. When the agreement was made there were no stores on northern Kimberley stations, just storerooms from where everyone was rationed. Most stations had a system of ‘gifts’ after musters, of nominated items like tobacco, cloth, razors, mirrors, biscuits, lollies and hats.

\textsuperscript{75} AD34/1949, 10 February 1950.

\textsuperscript{76} AD34/1949, extract from WA 14 February 1950.


\textsuperscript{78} AD34/1949, CNA to Pullen, 20 May 1949.

\textsuperscript{79} AD34/1949, Pastoralists and Graziers Association of Western Australia Inc., ‘Payment Of Native Employees - West Kimberley Stations’, 3 February 1950.
Domestic, garden, butchering, clearing or goat herding tasks were completed for rations. The idea of paying money to Aboriginal people also cut across existing relationships between Bosses and ‘their mob’, challenging notions of cultural dependency which underpinned Departmental and pastoral negotiations. The debate over paying wages included statements from pastoralists like, ‘there are not any decent people who would stoop to bribing natives’ and ‘bidding for a good Aboriginal stockman must be avoided at all costs’.\textsuperscript{80} Aboriginal people were unpaid servants whose culture would be destroyed by the evils associated with money.\textsuperscript{81} An Aboriginal person making a demand of a Boss was inconceivable, yet it was this aspect of station relationships which Pullen hoped to change.

Pullen immediately informed the Commissioner that the scheme would not work to ‘fix wages’ in the Kimberley because the rate was too low and did not recognise the variation in skills on the stations. Some managers were embarrassed at the prospect of paying top stockmen 5s per week, while others near Derby and Broome, including Kimberley Downs and Napier Downs (where Morndingali and Weeda Munro and their families worked) intended paying more than 5s per week to keep the best workers from moving to other stations.\textsuperscript{82} He added that if managers stuck rigidly to this scheme, £1 would not cover the cost of clothing for a man and his family, they would increase their debt to the station and this in turn would open the way for ‘agitators’.

\textbf{‘A slow but not yet truculent awakening of the native’}

The wage system which Pullen envisaged included changing Aboriginal men’s and women’s relationships with their Bosses, not just providing ‘a few coins to jingle in

\textsuperscript{80} AD239/1930, 15 July 1930; AD745/1938, O’Neill report on Liveringa station, 3 May 1946; AD34/1949, Minutes of Meeting PGA, 2 November 1949.

\textsuperscript{81} Paternalism was imbued with the notion that it was not socially appropriate to discuss money in public, nor morally responsible to discuss it with inferiors who had no understanding of it. In 1904 when Premier, Walter James replied to questions in Parliament about the need to uphold section 70 financial agreements for Aboriginal people in the Constitution, he answered by quoting from Tennyson: ‘But the jingling of the guinea helps the hurt that honour feels, And the nations do but murmur, snarling at each others heels.’ WAPD 21 December 1904, p. 2131.

\textsuperscript{82} AD34/1949, Pullen to CNW, 26 April 1950; AD34/1949, Pullen report to CNA, 16 June 1950.
their pockets’. He wanted to assist workers to see their economic value within the pastoral industry and to tackle the Bosses themselves, instead of patiently waiting for change. One aspect of station life which puzzled him, and which he aimed to change, was ‘the extreme loyalty of a native to his Boss - it has almost the quality of the absurd loyalty between a much cuffed dog and his master’. Pullen did not attempt any analysis of the origins of this form of ‘loyalty’ and made no explicit mention of instances of violence which occurred at the time or in previous years to reinforce servile behaviour. He did not believe that Aboriginal people were happy with their conditions and tried to understand why more of them did not complain. He noted that the situation on stations had merits for those who could live with their older relations, marry whom they wished and have children. He believed that compared to missions and fringe camps, pastoral stations offered social stability without the same level of interventionary regulation of family lives. Women in station homesteads were better fed than some town-based women and had access to clothes and a sewing machine from the Missus. He suggested that he had uncovered a ‘stoicism’ and unwillingness to complain which was part of a Kimberley ‘type’ and philosophy:

The aboriginal appears to be a most discerning bloke and he knows when something is in the air and stoically awaits results. Employers are taking much more notice of him, are more solicitous of his welfare and he appears to be lapping it up. And he is shrewd enough to realise he is a pretty important unit on the community and not easily discarded. 

Despite his patronising tone and tendency to typecast, Pullen was unusually reflective and accepting of Aboriginal people’s skills and interest. He remained optimistic, writing in his annual reports that all he needed to do was to assist station owners to introduce reforms which, if not welcomed with open arms by them were inevitable and would have to be accepted eventually. He felt that Aboriginal men shared his and other white Australian workers’ interests in wages, housing, caring for children and ‘the Missus’ and hoped to implement a new and ‘enlightened’ welfare philosophy in which the role of welfare officers was as a ‘friend, philosopher and guide’ to Aboriginal people. To this end, he produced a strategic plan for overcoming

83 ARAD 1949, Pullen Report, MS AADL.


85 ARAD 1950, MS AADL.
pastoralists' 'blatant antagonism' and resistance to change by focussing his attention on specific stations where changes in wages and living conditions were most likely to succeed. That station would then provide an example to Aboriginal people on surrounding stations, who would demand improvements in their own living and working conditions.

Pullen gave Kimberley Downs station as his first example of a station where changes needed to happen, and where the Aboriginal stockmen and women and the General Manager, Jack Lee were willing to change. He reported enthusiastically that 'word appears to have got around', after Tim Munro (Morndingali's older brother and leading hand at the time) visited the Native Administration office in Derby after a droving trip to ask when the housing would be improved on the station. The 'boys' there had also asked Pullen if they could move to another station where they had heard they could receive a 'few bob'. He suggested that they wait. When the manager heard they wanted to move, he produced the weekly pocket money. This was the kind of change which was acceptable to Pullen: it showed that Aboriginal people were moving toward assimilating with white workers without the Department having to confront managers on their behalf. He reported on one small 'spot of unrest' when a stockman was 'promptly dismissed by his employer' for asking for better living conditions and, instead of waiting at the camp before returning to work, the stockman took the unusual step of leaving for a different station.

Pullen aimed for a change in employee and employer relations but he did not want to support 'unrest' of the kind being experienced in the Pilbara. His approach was to encourage Aboriginal people to speak for themselves 'politely' and 'quietly', not to openly challenge the Bosses' power over them. Kimberley Downs showed signs of success, within the limits of expected behaviour for Aboriginal people:

when employees get to the stage where they are courageous enough to voice complaints in the presence of their employers the gate was opened to freer and easier relations between the natives and their bosses. This is perhaps one of the outstanding changes noticed in the

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86 AD34/1949, journal District Officer Derby, 1 November 1949.

87 ARAD 1950, MS AADL.

88 ibid.
West Kimberleys during the year. A slow but not yet truculent awakening of the native to their importance in the industry is evident. The danger of this developing the wrong way is appreciated but with our officers covering the whole district it should be noticed and controlled quickly.

...The trends which must be watched are, any sign of truculence on the part of the natives and any subversive influence working amongst them, but these Kimberley natives do not appear to be very pliable material for agitators.  

After six months of the new ‘wages’ scheme, Pullen reported that station workers were ‘seldom in credit’ and conditions were improving in only a minority of station camps.  

Complaints from Aboriginal people had increased but they were mostly about insufficient food, with no ‘serious assaults’ by employers being reported. Pullen believed that rumours that Aboriginal people would leave the stations to work in towns were unfounded. The majority of Aboriginal men did not wish to leave stations where their families were and where they had a predictable source of work and rations. Pullen wanted to develop a scheme for skilled town-based Aboriginal people who were doing carpentry, loading and driving trucks, and assisting builders.  

He also tried to improve conditions for female domestics who worked under permit at businesses and private houses for white women. They were rarely paid more than 5s as the flat rate agreement allowed, lived in huts behind white people’s houses and worked without breaks. Middleton replied by telegram that it was ‘not Department’s role to protect or control [but] merely to streamline welfare support. Wages for town workers outside our brief.’ He added that the disputes which were occurring in the Pilbara and on the Darwin wharves were not going to occur in the Kimberley as the ‘Communistic element’ was ‘not in Kimberley yet’.

Child Endowment

Middleton also reversed his stance on Child Endowment payments to Aboriginal women in the Kimberley because of the potential impact the money would have on

89 ibid.

90 ARAD 1950 and 1951, MS AADL.

91 AD34/1951, Pullen to CNW, 23 January 1951.

92 AD34/1949, Middleton to Pullen, 26 January 1951.
employment relations on pastoral stations at a time where they were negotiating ‘wages’ and aiming to control the circulation of cash in Aboriginal communities. He may also have realised that the Department had insufficient staff to police its expenditure to the extent required by Social Security. 93 The system which had been put in place in the south of the state from 1944 was for police protectors to buy rations from Child Endowment money and distribute them to eligible Aboriginal people. 94 By 1947 this was the crux of complaints from Aboriginal people. The police working as Protectors for the Department had taken on the role of trustees for the parents, in order to ‘discipline the natives to industrious habits’ and regulate aspects of their lives ‘such as the care of children and better camping conditions’. 95 In so doing the Department came under scrutiny from the Commonwealth and some criticism for not having officers in the field, relying too much on police and being ‘out of step with other States.’ 96

When Middleton came to office in 1948 he immediately sent circulars to all field officers to ‘spread the news’ of changes to Social Security guidelines to ‘all Natives who do not know their rights’, including Kimberley station women. 97 Child Endowment could be paid for all Aboriginal children in government institutions, missions and on pastoral stations, and to the mothers themselves if an officer of the Department or policeman vouched for their ability to handle the money. 98 By 1950 Middleton noted that the £12,000 of Child Endowment money paid to missions in Western Australia was the ‘saving of Mission activity in this State’, adding that they were also a ‘great saving to the government’. 99 They were also a potential saving to stations and a large sum of money for recipients, made even more significant by the

93 AD932/1943, Whole file relates.
94 AD932/1943, CNW to CoP, 5 April 1943.
95 AD932/1943, Note Bray to Minister, 4 May 1943.
96 AD932/1943, Prime Minister Curtin to Premier, 2 March 1943.
97 AD1058/1946, CNA Circular Instruction no. 3, 29 November 1948.
98 Sanders, ‘Access, Administration and Politics’, p. 94.
99 ARAD 1950, MS AADL.
rationing system of the stations in the 1950s. Child Endowment of 10s per week for one child sat in stark contrast to the 5s and 10s per month pocket money which women were allocated under the 1950 ‘wages’ agreement. It was also twice as much as the proposed five shillings per week pocket money for stockmen. This was pointed out to the Commissioner by the Director of Social Security in late 1950:

The payment of Child Endowment to natives living on stations in the Kimberley area is likely to have grave repercussions insofar as employment of natives in the cattle industry is concerned and is certain to cause anxiety to the pastoralists throughout the Kimberley.\(^\text{100}\)

To ensure that the money was spent according to Social Security and Departmental guidelines, it was paid directly to managers on pastoral stations and Aborigines Department Officers were discouraged from pushing too hard for Aboriginal women’s practical inclusion in the Child Endowment scheme. Middleton informed the Federal Office of Social Security that the matter of ‘spreading the word’ to Aboriginal women about their right to Child Endowment ‘could best be disregarded’ because they had ‘not yet reached the standard’ to spend the money appropriately.\(^\text{101}\) Child Endowment payments were not taken up by many of the station managers in the north Kimberley, probably because there were very few children on the northern stations. Other stations in the Kimberley were quick to ask for Child Endowment. Vestey’s which owned five pastoral stations in the east Kimberley, received payments for 65 children in 1950 and 72 in 1960.\(^\text{102}\) The money, in accordance with Social Security guidelines, was distributed by the manager as rations. Patrol Officer’s reports on stations during this period did not question the expenditure or distribution of these funds until after 1960, when Social Security exclusions were again lifted and stations came under further scrutiny.\(^\text{103}\)

The impact of Child Endowment payments on station relationships in the 1950s was minimised by the State’s policies in that period which ensured that management controlled its distribution in their communities. Managers were responsible for

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\(^{100}\) NDG33.2, DSS to CNA, 19 October 1950; see also AD705/1950.

\(^{101}\) NDG33.2, CNA to DSS, 24 August 1950.


\(^{103}\) ibid.; Sanders, ‘Access, Administration and Politics’, p. 105.
filling in the forms and distributing the money as rations. This was not only acceptable to the State government, it was preferable. Social Security guidelines did not allow for station women to receive or control their Child Endowment until after 1959. Middleton interpreted Aboriginal people's use of benefits and increasing use of rations as 'exploitation' of the State and missions. He claimed in a circular to all field staff designed to reduce costs and rations, that parents intentionally placed their children in missions and then lived off the Department.\textsuperscript{104} This was 'wrong in principle and financially disastrous'. In 1959, when restrictions were lifted on Aboriginal people's access to Social Security, Native Welfare Officers voiced concerns that there was a 'degree of antipathy' from pastoral employers toward Social Security payments to individuals because of 'fear that it would upset current scale of wages' and weaken 'proprietary interests manifested by these stations'.\textsuperscript{105} The Native Welfare Officer, Kevin Morgan, pointed out that a man with three children could receive three times a stockman's wage in Child Endowment. This situation fuelled fears amongst some employers that workers might leave. He added that the Department required pastoral employers’ support because stations would have to provide the stores which could be bought with the extra cash. They were also the main source of information about the Aboriginal people on their stations.

\textbf{Name, age and station}

Middleton changed Departmental reporting practices in 1949 as part of the new Patrol Officer system. The forms were five page documents which had changed from the previous half page of numbers 'under permit', male, female, adult, child, 'half-caste', 'full-blood' - to a more detailed but standard patrol report. Patrol Officers were supposed to visit station camps yearly or each six months if the station was closer and more accessible. On arrival at the stations Patrol Officers often found them deserted and the majority of the camp people off at the muster or working away from the homestead. In practice, they went to the homestead first and relied on management to provide most of the information in their reports. This was standard and expected, and a subject of conflicting interest as an increasing number of Departmental Officers and missionaries began to seek out station

\textsuperscript{104} NDG1/1/1a, Circular Instructions no. 56, 24 November 1956.

\textsuperscript{105} AD932/1943, K. Morgan regional report, 23 September 1958.
camps. In 1965 a recommendation was passed by the Pastoralists and Graziers Association to warn missionaries that they must not visit station camps ‘without prior notice to station authorities’. Their role as gatekeepers of station mobs emerged in the 1950s as they negotiated with the state over responsibility and access to Aboriginal people. Managers provided welfare officers with information about Aboriginal people such as names, ages, whereabout, family relationships, living conditions and employment details. Their reports included information about accommodation, ablution facilities, rations, hygiene, medical facilities, wages which followed the recommended scale, ‘recreation’ which was invariably ‘hunting and fishing’ and ‘relations with employer’ which were rarely anything but ‘satisfactory’ ‘good’ or ‘very good’. From 1949 to 1959 the reports also included a section for Patrol Officers to comment on ‘behaviour of natives’ which was usually recorded as ‘quiet and respectful’. Although this formal section was dropped from reports after 1959, similar concerns about Aboriginal people ‘knowing their place’ and showing ‘respectful deference’ to their Bosses, continued until 1972. A 1962 patrol report stated that Oobagooma station ‘natives [were] clean, well spoken, self assured, without arrogance.’ In the same year the Kimberley Downs manager was described in the yearly report as giving the impression that he ‘yearns for the day when natives could be shot with impunity’ but the Patrol Officer added that he was really a very ‘soft touch’ who maintained ‘sympathetic yet firm control over them’.

After Pullen’s death in 1951, J.S. Beharrell, also from the New Guinea Native Administration, took over as District Officer and struggled to make yearly visits to stations. He worked without a Patrol Officer until 1956, when two Aboriginal men

106 Kevin Johnson, Tape (58 and 59) 17 May 1994.
107 NDG18-1, Minutes of Meeting Pastoralists and Graziers Association West Kimberley District, 4 July 1965.
108 WAS46 accession 3412, NDG files created in 1948 for all Kimberley stations.
110 ibid.
were employed as patrol assistants. The lack of staff and resources between 1951 and 1956 made it difficult for Beharrell to follow up reports and check on whether conditions were improving for Aboriginal people. Stations closer to towns were visited at least once a year but others like Gibb, Kurunjie, Mount Barnett and Mount Elizabeth were not visited until after 1957. Stations with airstrips received visits from police and doctors who collected and returned leprosy patients. Managers from most stations filled in the forms themselves and sent them in to town on the flying doctor and mail plane, or handed them to police patrols. They did not provide plans for upgrading work or living conditions for Aboriginal people, but this did not matter to Beharrell, who wrote in 1952 that the ‘battlers’ needed to be shown tolerance as they were little better off than their workers.112 Both Theresa Lacy, who was the Missus at Mount Elizabeth from 1946 to about 1972, and Ned Delower, who managed Napier, Oobagooma, Tablelands and Kimberley Downs, stated that ‘welfare never troubled us’.113 They rarely visited the northern stations and did not challenge or worry the managers. Frank Lacy’s journals record visits from the Department every second year from 1962 to 1970. Delower added that he asked police to make a yearly patrol to kill dogs in the camps but had only two visits from welfare between 1956 and 1967, and they were for age pension investigations.114

The Mount House and Glenroy air beef scheme, which started in 1949, meant that planes were often calling at Glenroy. Nevertheless, it was only in 1959 that the Mount House manager ‘heard’ from the police that he could apply for Child Endowment for the children on the station. He was unable to produce the necessary age and birth dates because he had only ever noted dates of deaths of Aboriginal people, not births.115 He was instructed by the Welfare Officer to estimate ages and record as the

112 ARAD 1952, MS AADL.


114 Delower also told a detailed narrative about the first vote for Aboriginal station people in the State elections in 1965. The story shows how he enrolled Aboriginal people from the station and then as official polling booth officer assisted them to vote. According to Delower, each station did the same thing and consequently, the votes always followed the manager’s preferences. Ned Delower, Tape (51) 22 July 1991.

115 NDG36/58, D. Blythe to Beharrell, 15 September 1959.
first of June in the approximate year. Because Social Security would not provide benefits to anyone with only one name, station children were either given their mother’s name as a surname or provided with a white one. The patrol reports provide interesting details about Aboriginal people’s entry into the welfare system and some valuable ethnographic information. For many people this was the first time their names or ages were recorded in writing. It was also the beginning of their taking a white name or even a surname. These records need to be taken seriously but with reservations. They were constructed by white people for the purposes of bringing Aboriginal people into the welfare system. Some managers, patrol officers or institutional staff members knew more than others, could hear more language than others or had better advice from Aboriginal people and managers about names, relationships and ages. An example of a list of names which correlates to a high degree with Aboriginal people’s language names is that of the Leprosarium admission books. This was probably a result of long-term acquaintances between the St John of God Sisters and inmates, and some literacy skills amongst the long-term language-speaking inmates.

Conversely, there were numerous examples of misunderstandings and mistakes in naming and labelling which confused managers and Patrol Officers, and which Aboriginal people have carried from that time. Some misguided attempts to provide language names resulted in women’s names being given as a surname for male children, or questions, statements of fact and body parts being recorded as names. In 1957 the Director of Social Security instructed Departmental officers to give the husband’s Christian name as surname for all wives who had only one name. Alternatively, station managers and book-keepers sometimes gave fanciful surnames to Aboriginal people such as Hitler, Roosevelt, Michael Angelo, Don Bradman, Roly Poly or Ginger Mick. Peter Lacy remembered when his father chose names for Aboriginal people at Mount Elizabeth, the children had just finished Treasure Island so they suggested Friday (which Frank Lacy later changed

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116 NDG36/58, Kevin Johnson to Blythe, 17 December 1959.


118 AD1058/1946, Humphreys, DSS to CNA, 24 July 1956.
to Freddy). Another young stockman on Mount Elizabeth, Scotty Martin, received his surname from the store order for Martin’s biscuits. This may also account for the common occurrence of the Martin surname in the north Kimberley. Biscuits were sought-after items and the irony may not have been lost on managers.

From 1963 the Departmental policy of naming children with their father’s Christian name was stopped, to avoid passing ‘absurd names such as Jimmy Whisky’ to children. These practises created disjunctures between eras of naming policies and lessened the likelihood that non-Aboriginal naming systems in the Kimberley reflected meaningful Aboriginal relationships. For instance Curlywig, Quartpot, Nipper and Bandy were dropped, while others with names which welfare officers thought less offensive became surnames of large family groups who were not necessarily related. For example, Morndingali and Weeda Munro’s son became Jack Dann, which was a shortening of his bush name ‘Dandayi’ and not an indication of his relationship to the large Dann family at Beagle Bay Mission. His children, in turn, were listed under their mother’s name in the 1960s, when policies changed again.

From 1965 a policy was also put in place to not use the father’s Aboriginal name because it had to be changed as soon as he died. After seeking expert advice from the Anthropology Department at the University of Western Australia, Departmental officers were instructed to use approximate English names instead. They were also told that ‘undignified, unsuitable or derogatory’ names must be avoided, and the ‘practice of conferring names inviting ridicule must be eliminated.’ The example in the 1965 Instruction Manual for Native Welfare Officers to change ‘Nyunma’ to ‘Newman’ was followed on more than one occasion, despite the original names coming from distinct language groups. This created further anomalies between names from ‘Welfare’ and names from Aboriginal families, and left a confusing trail of

119 Peter Lacy, Interview notes, NB6, p. 60.
120 NDG33-2, RS Mauger, DO Halls Creek to DO Derby, 14 November 1963.
misinformation for children to return to if they sought to trace their families at a later stage.

‘Welfare’, blankets and tobacco

The Department depended on managers such as Fred Russ, Frank Lacy and Ned Delower to bridge the gap between the stations and the emerging policy of integrating station people into welfare services. Russ reported to Beharrell in 1954 that he was fed up with all northern Aboriginal people who were discharged from the leprosarium, gaol or the Native Hospital being dropped off at Gibb River station without rations or support from the Department. They usually moved from Gibb River into the bush and the Mount Hann reserve area if there were bush groups in the region, but if they were disabled he had to feed them because the Department refused to provide rations or subsidies to stations. He complained that the tax exemption for ‘native dependents’ of one pound per week or £50 per year did not cover the cost of feeding and clothing the extra people who were not directly related to Gibb workers but were gathering at the station. He suggested that the Department utilise Moola Bulla for feeding old people who were not directly related to station workers. Beharrell replied that he needed to send people back to stations to keep the younger ones ‘settled’ and allay fears in the communities that people never returned home from the leprosarium. At Mount Hart the manager also complained to Beharrell in 1955 that there were groups of bush people in the region who were not part of his station camp but were coming in for tobacco and rations (as they were at Mount Elizabeth.) They refused to go to missions on the coast because these were outside their country. These old people may have been the last Unggumi or Worrora-speaking people to come into a pastoral station. In 1957, after the closure of the coastal missions Munja and Kumnunya, bush people stayed in the region around Mount Hart station, and the

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123 NDG36/37, Russ to Beharrell, 20 April 1954.

124 NDG36/79, Sturt Creek Station file.

125 NDG36/37, Russ to Beharrell, 20 April 1954. I have not found the extent to which this rebate was claimed, although it may have been claimed throughout the pastoral industry for many years. Advice from the Taxation Office Canberra was that ‘Natives’ were arguably ‘dependents’ of the stations under section 79 of the Income Tax Assessment Act 1936 which gave concessions of £50 per year for children under 16. This accords with Russ’s deduction.

126 NDG36/27, Telegram Beharrell to Russ, date obscured.
Department refused to take responsibility for feeding or removing them.\(^{127}\) In 1959 the manager would not accept one woman from the leprosarium because she could not work. He added that he wanted all indigents removed but Beharrell did nothing.\(^{128}\) The Department refused to remove adults to towns or provide rations for them at the stations.

The government provided tax-exempt black stick ‘native tobacco’ to government institutions and to some missions but detailed records of whether any reached pastoral stations cannot be found. Government rations were withdrawn from pastoral stations around 1911 and not replaced. Station record books for Napier Downs have consistent entries for tobacco from the earliest years through to the 1950s.\(^{129}\) In 1920 the ledger shows more than £30 per month paid to H.O.Wills. In 1933 the Emanuel-owned Christmas Creek station recorded £20 per month to H.O. Wills for tobacco. On Mount Elizabeth, Frank Lacy detailed his ration items each year, always including black stick chewing tobacco and each ‘haul of fish’ from the nearby river to supplement station stores. In 1950 he recorded his order of ‘1 ton flour, 4 bags fine salt, 5 bags sugar, 1 case jam, 4 bags rice and ten pounds native tobacco.’\(^{130}\) Tobacco was expensive and recorded with care each time Lacy distributed one or two sticks of tobacco to people for work, to return from holidays, to take mail to neighbouring stations, to take to a corroboree or in exchange for dog scalps.\(^{131}\) Dicky Udmorrah, Emu and his three wives, and Billy and his five wives all moved between Kalumburu and Mount Elizabeth in the 1950s and went to Frank Lacy for tobacco. Peter Lacy recalled Aboriginal people ‘craving’ black stick tobacco and the excitement of workers returning to camp when they had mustered at a well known bush tobacco site near Mount Matthew.\(^{132}\) Stockmen filled saddle bags with bush tobacco and rode into camp shouting of their acquisitions as they approached. Like other Aboriginal

\(^{127}\) NDG36/57, Fraser to Beharrell, 23 January 1957.

\(^{128}\) NDG36/57, Fraser to Beharrell, 20 May 1959.

\(^{129}\) M.C. Davies Ledgers, Kimberley Downs and Napier Downs, MN183A/19, BL.

\(^{130}\) Lacy Diaries, Loose note 1950.


\(^{132}\) Peter Lacy, Interview notes, NB6, p. 55.
people, they mixed the tobacco with ashes of burnt gum tree bark and chewed it into gobs, which were saved behind their ears.

After the 1950 agreement was made between the Pastoralists and Graziers Association and the Native Affairs Department, Lacy continued to pay workers in kind, feeding a regular group and handing out extra items after droves or musters but recording their cost as part of the ‘wage’.\textsuperscript{133} Days after noting the new ‘wage’ scale he recorded a list of items handed to the leading stockman whom he had ‘borrowed’ from Bedford Downs to help muster and drove cattle to Wyndham. The stockman received ‘Naga [cloth] tomahawk, handkerchief, wool, pipe, shirt, trousers [and a] dress’. In 1962 Lacy recorded his order for £18 11s worth of fine cut and black stick tobacco.\textsuperscript{134} At Oobagooma the head stockman’s store list for January to June 1960 showed that he paid £8 for tobacco and £1 for pipes, out of a cash wage component of £90. The rest was spent on a leather belt, a hat, hair oil, toothbrush, mirrors, matches and razors.\textsuperscript{135} Boots, shirts and trousers were paid for by the station.

Tobacco rations in Derby became a problem for Native Welfare Officers who, after following the official dietary survey of 1951 which suggested that one or two sticks of tobacco needed to be given to people on rations, found that by the late 1950s they were distributing boxes of tobacco to growing numbers of people collecting in Derby. In 1958 officers were instructed to withdraw tobacco from standard rations and not distribute it at missions unless missionaries approved. They were warned that tobacco was not a ‘right’, it needed to be given as a ‘comfort’ and not at stated times but at the officers’ ‘discretion’.\textsuperscript{136} The ration in towns during the 1950s was: ‘3lb flour, sugar, tea, meat, liver, table margarine, potatoes, meat and veg tinned, fruit or veg tinned, rolled oats, honey, milk, salt, soap’. Meat was distributed at the

\textsuperscript{133} Lacy Diaries, 25 June 1951 states: ‘Jack: legions spurs 1.10.0 hat pipe brush towel trousers riding trousers credit muster one pound. Jumbo: trousers cash 1.10.0 hat 2.10.0 spurs 1.15.0 riding trousers 1.10.0 credit muster 1.0.0’.

\textsuperscript{134} Lacy Diaries, Invoice, 1 April 1962.

\textsuperscript{135} AD298/1930, Oobagooma was then owned by three doctors - Elphinstone, Holman and Davidson and D. Stewart, manager.

\textsuperscript{136} NDG1/1/1a, circular no. 64, 17 April 1958.
Officer’s discretion and could be withheld if game was available. Each rationee also received 5s pocket money and assistance from a Departmental officer to spend it.

Camp numbers at the town reserve between the police station and the Native hospital began to increase from 1950. Prior to that there was strict enforcement of regulations prohibiting Aboriginal people from towns unless they were under permit. As a result, there was a camp four miles from town where stockmen and non-employed Aboriginal people were permitted to stay for short periods. Pullen had intentionally tried to lift the standard of reserve housing and rationing in Derby township, partly to improve the general standards in the district by Welfare showing an example to others. He also instigated a scheme for town employers to pay a small weekly rent for their employees to live on the town reserve instead of in humpies in back yards, vacant blocks or having to walk into town each day from a fringe camp. But there were complaints from pastoral employers that workers were not returning after a visit to town to the Native Hospital, preferring to stay in the reserve on rations; or if they did return, their ‘morale for work deteriorate[d] in the camp’. Beharrell defended attempts to improve rations and housing, and assisting with pocket money, stating that the majority of station people wanted to return as soon as possible but a few would not because their living conditions compared badly with the reserve. He nevertheless found that placing people on the flying doctor plane to northern stations also drew complaints from employers.

Beharrell also began to voice suspicions about the motives of large companies and absentee owners who made promises about improving living conditions but were reluctant to outlay any capital. Drought conditions between 1950 and 1954 engendered sympathy for small owners. However, he found that managers working for large companies were not permitted to spend money on workers or their families

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137 NDG1/1/1a, circular no. 69, 27 November 1958.

138 ARAD 1950, MS AADL.

139 AD780/1949, US to CNA, 23 November 1953.

140 AD780/1949, Beharrell to CNA, 9 December 1953.
even where the hygiene was 'deplorable' or housing was a 'disgusting' pile of tins, blankets or rubbish from tips. In these cases he believed there was 'no room for tolerance ... his ruthlessness and penny-pinching, in regard to his native labour, reduces them to the point of being slaves.' Beharrell gave a particularly clear statement of the emerging conflict of interest between Departmental officers and pastoral employers when he wrote in his annual report that:

The resources of this country have been developed at the cost of the labour employed. Men have added to their worldly possessions at the cost of other men. Such development has only one true name, and that is exploitation. It should not be permissible for any industry to depend for its success in keeping labour poor... As a Christian people we will never be able to evade the moral issues involved.\textsuperscript{142}

He believed that children on these stations were being denied the education which was essential to assimilation because there was a strong resentment to allow these children to leave the station to attend the nearest school, for they are selfishly looking to them to provide the station with future labour as stockboys etc, and think that once they receive education they may not desire that form of employment.\textsuperscript{143}

He suggested that as Aboriginal people's 'natural place was with cattle', schools should be placed at stations and not in towns, which would disrupt the pastoral industry and Aboriginal people's residence at stations. But after a survey of stations the next year he decided that most west Kimberley stations did not have enough children to warrant such a scheme and that they should be placed in existing missions or brought to towns as soon as hostels could be built.\textsuperscript{144} The hostel scheme began officially in Derby in 1957, and expanded through the 1960s. It was a significant factor in the movement of Aboriginal people to towns and away from stations during that period.

Beharrell reported changes in housing and living conditions at stations in the early 1950s, when the worsening labour position forced pastoralists to raise the standard of living for workers or lose the trained Aboriginal labour force:

\textsuperscript{141} ARAD 1952, MS AADL.

\textsuperscript{142} ARAD 1955, Beharrell District Officer Derby, MS AADL.

\textsuperscript{143} ARAD 1952, MS AADL.

\textsuperscript{144} ARAD 1952 and 1953, MS AADL.
The economic position is literally compelling the employer to become less apathetic towards his native employees, for most realise that the numbers of employable natives available are insufficient for the needs of all, and it is with some concern we learn that the rate of decline amongst the aborigines in contact with civilisation, estimated by the well known Anthropologist, Mr. Tindale, to be a reduction in numbers by 50 per cent. every ten years.\(^{145}\)

Survival remained the benchmark for good practice on stations, with Beharrell stating in 1953 that ‘satisfactory’ rationing, hygiene and clothing were the most that could be expected for Aboriginal people on stations. Even so it was doubtful that the rations were adequate.\(^{146}\) Reports from the Health Department about diet and eye diseases confirmed his concerns that living conditions on stations were not good.\(^{147}\)

The 1954 Native Welfare Act lifted a range of exclusions and controls from some Aboriginal people’s lives, particularly those who were of part-descent. Town prohibitions were lifted. The Act marked the end of employment permits, repealed the Medical Fund and allowed for workers’ compensation to apply to Aboriginal people on stations but did not provide minimum conditions or wages for Aboriginal people. The Regulations were only slightly changed from those of 1940, which called for ‘suitable substantial and sufficient food and drinking and bathing water’. Employers were to ‘provide accommodation, including such sanitary conveniences as may be deemed necessary, to the satisfaction of the commissioner’ and a ‘mosquito net and bedding if necessary’. All goods were to be sold at current market rates, or no more than the price they would be sold to a white employee, and accounted for in books which were to be kept for Departmental Officer’s perusal.\(^{148}\) It did not significantly alter working and living conditions for ‘full-blood’ station people whose ‘place’ as servants and dependents on stations was not challenged by State welfare policy and practice. It was only with the entry of Social Services into station communities in the early 1960s that expenditure and station accounts came under sustained scrutiny.

\(^{145}\) ARAD 1954, MS AADL.

\(^{146}\) ARAD 1953, MS AADL.

\(^{147}\) Dietary Survey Of Aborigines In Western Australia’, Commonwealth Department Of Health, 1951, AADL. See the AADL for papers by Ida Mann on eye diseases in the Kimberley region.

In 1956 Middleton wrote that the system of patrols to stations was not working. This, he believed was due to the ‘lack of legislative backing to effect, by official direction, improvement in native employees’ living conditions’, and the ‘reluctance on the part of most employers to accept our advice and recommendations.’ The 1954 Act had not improved conditions for station people. Middleton appealed to Departmental officers to stop their ‘reconnaissance and survey’ method which resulted in ‘expensive and time consuming travel, a short visit to the station, an even shorter visit to the Native camp’ and no effective change. Complaints had been received that there was little contact between Aboriginal people and Native Welfare officers:

With few exceptions the patrolling officer meets with the same promises and lack of action ...and the same lack on the part of the natives themselves of the desire to improve their own conditions.¹⁴⁹

Focus on the children

In 1958 Frank Gare, who became Commissioner of Native Welfare in 1961, produced the Report of the Special Committee on Native Matters, in which he reiterated the field staff’s concerns that employers did not respond to Departmental appeals and were ‘apathetic’ and occasionally ‘antagonistic towards any improvement in the lives of the natives.’¹⁵⁰ The report referred to submissions which argued for the introduction of the standards in work and living conditions for Aboriginal people required by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Labor Organisation Convention of 1957.¹⁵¹ Submissions by anthropologists Catherine and Ronald Berndt, who researched Aboriginal people’s working and living conditions on Vestey’s stations in the Territory in 1944, were also made.¹⁵² The Berndts’ statement to the Commission presented a bleak picture of station life for Aboriginal people and adopted the language of opposing interests, with the blame laid at the feet of wealthy pastoralists:

¹⁴⁹ NDG1/1/1/a, CNW circular no. 53, 14 August 1956.

¹⁵⁰ Frank Gare, Report Of The Special Committee On Native Matters (With Particular Reference To Adequate Finance), West Australian Government Print, 1958, p. 53.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p. 10.

Pastoral station managers have it virtually [sic] all their own way. Some of them are relatively ‘enlightened’, others the reverse. The general picture in certain areas is reminiscent of a feudal situation, epitomised in the common statement “my Aborigines”, or the little cluster of sordid humpies to one side of the large modern premises of many cattle and sheep stations.¹⁵³

The Gare Report argued that Aboriginal people were not socially ‘ready’ to accept equal rights and equal access to services, but that the time had come for the state Arbitration Court to appoint a special commissioner to look at the provisions of award wages to all Aboriginal people. It also detailed the State’s requirements for Grants in Aid from the Commonwealth and the need for a hostels scheme to board children in towns while they attended school. It was no longer acceptable to segregate children on stations for their labour. The report indicated that Aboriginal people on northern pastoral stations were no longer going to be exempted from Departmental policies designed to encourage their assimilation into white society. Middleton had already begun that process in 1957, when he circulated a statement from the Minister to all his staff that

In view of the progress made elsewhere in these modern times and in view of the fact that natives in the North West, particularly in the Kimberleys, do not seem to have been treated as liberally as in the Murchison and South West Land division, I am recommending to Cabinet that action be taken to improve wages and standards generally, more particularly in relation to accommodation, ablution facilities etc.¹⁵⁴

Gare recommended a tougher approach by government to intervene on stations, and demand better conditions and greater inclusion of ‘full-blood’ people in the welfare net, after the government had closed its own institutions for Aboriginal people to force them to live independently of state settlements and ration depots. This placed pressure on Aboriginal people to stay on stations, or move to towns or missions where there was some support. From 1949 to 1959 the government dismantled its policy of segregation and rationing, even of the isolated Worrora, Wunambal and Ngarinyin people, and closed or withdrew from settlements, missions and ration stations.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ ‘Material Set Out By R. and C. Berndt in reply to questions put by Special Committee on Native Matters, Parliament House, 18 April 1958’, AADL.

¹⁵⁴ AD843/1941, CNW to District Office North, 8 January 1957.

Udialla ration station, which opened in 1944 was closed in 1949, with all inmates trucked to La Grange ration depot south of Broome.\textsuperscript{156} In 1955 La Grange was transferred to the Pallottine Order to complete its separation from the state. Munja ration station was also closed in 1949 and residents were gradually moved to the Presbyterian mission at Kunmunya and then to another site at Wotjulum on the coast south of Munja. In 1956 149 residents of Munja, Kunmunya and Wotjulum were moved into Derby to form the Mowanjum community ten kilometres from the town.

In 1954 all missions were offered 99 year leases over 1,000 acres of land held at that time, with no qualifications that the land would revert to the Crown if the mission was disbanded.\textsuperscript{157} The government also cancelled large reserves, including the Mount Hann reserve, parts of which were opened for pastoral selection in 1955. This reserve just north of Mount Elizabeth and Gibb River stations had been mooted in 1916 by A.O. Neville as a ration station for northern bush people, and opened in 1934 in response to Idriess's letters to the police and newspapers about the extraordinary rock art in the region. Pastoral leases north of Gibb River station were opened as a result of this final push for pastoral occupation of the land in the far north Kimberley. The Morgan survey report was made in 1954.\textsuperscript{158} During the survey work a mining company representative made his first visit to the region, while W. Fyfe, author of the 1940 Fyfe Commission report into the beef industry, flew in to the north to view the new country as Surveyor General. Morgan was led by Aboriginal guides who provided local language names for places and led him to recently used bush camps in the region. He nevertheless reported that pastoral development was possible in the

...remote North Kimberley area, the north western tip of the continent commonly referred to as "Over the Range". Its previous seclusion from pastoral settlement may be attributed to the existence of natural barriers of rough sandstone ranges to its South-west and South-East and until early this century, the large number of Natives who inhabited the region would have undoubtedly resulted in losses of cattle. However, the numbers of these Natives has declined rapidly and apart

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{156} ARAD 1950, MS AADL.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{157} Biskup, \textit{Not Slaves Not Citizens}, p. 253.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{158} J. Morgan, \textit{Report on the Central North Kimberley Region}, Western Australian Department Of Lands And Surveys, 1955.}
from those associated with the Missions on the coast, there are not many in the area. 159

The UAM missionaries were finally assisted by the government in this period. They were granted land and a permit to begin a hostel for children at Fitzroy Crossing in 1953, and a children’s hostel at Derby in 1957. Both projects benefited from Child Endowment payments and additional state subsidies to missions, which increased rapidly from 1953 to 1958 as the state withdrew from institutions and settlements. In 1955 the small UAM hostel and mission experienced a large increase in inmates when the government extended its program of offloading all institutions for Aboriginal adults and sold Moola Bulla pastoral lease to private owners. Two hundred and fifty residents were trucked off the station to Halls Creek and then to Fitzroy Crossing.160 Middleton came under a great deal of public criticism over the closure of Moola Bulla in 1955, and again in 1961, when it was alleged that babies from Moola Bulla died of disease in the Fitzroy camp and that the new owners had made large profits by stripping the property of assets which included a school, store room and other institutional structures.161

Moola Bulla was closed because of the government’s policy decision not to encourage separate state-run Aboriginal communities. This was in line with assimilation policy which directed that the government should not encourage Aboriginal people to stay in a tribal or uneducated condition unless they were working on stations. The part-descent workers and their families at Moola Bulla were supposed to assimilate after the closure of the institution by moving to work for private employers. As early as 1948 Bateman had reported that Moola Bulla was in a disgraceful condition, which made it difficult for the government to insist that pastoral stations improve conditions on their properties.162 There were also problems with staff and conditions at the

159 ibid, p. 35.


162 Biskup, Not Slaves Not Citizen, p. 230.
institutions. Wotjulum, Munja, Moola Bulla and Forrest River staff all came under suspicion of cohabiting with Aboriginal women in their care at different times from 1936 to 1953. Allegations of torture of inmates at Moola Bulla had also been investigated and assault charges laid.\footnote{163} The fact that a school and housing for certain workers had recently been established at Moola Bulla was ignored by policy makers. The government wanted to divest the Department of its institutional responsibilities.

Fear of ‘McLeodism’ emerged again in 1955, after Don McLeod offered to run Moola Bulla for the private lease holders and retain the large Aboriginal community. His travels through the Kimberley were closely watched and reported by pastoralists and Native Welfare officers. A station manager from the Broome district telegrammed the Department that ‘the notorious Donald McLeod (“Whiskers”)’ and one full-blood native passed here about mid day yesterday, August 29th, heading north for Halls Creek.’\footnote{164} A month later, District Officer Beharrell reported that they were resident at Moola Bulla and had asked for a permit to remove Aboriginal people from the state to muster and drove cattle to Queensland.\footnote{165} Middleton attacked McLeod in the 1955 Departmental annual report for attempting to start a strike team in the Kimberley to disrupt the industry. The new owners of Moola Bulla refused McLeod’s help and the station was sold.

The closure of Moola Bulla was welcomed by surrounding pastoralists. Middleton quoted the Vesteys’ Field Superintendent to defend the move, stating that it had ‘resulted in a much more equitable distribution of skilled station and domestic labour.’\footnote{166} The closure of Moola Bulla also contributed to the increasing numbers of children in hostels in the Kimberley. In 1956 there were 116 children resident at the


\footnote{164} AD226/1955, M. de Marchi to Beharrell, 30 August 1955.

\footnote{165} AD226/1955, Beharrell to CNW, 9 September 1955.

\footnote{166} ARAD 1955, MS AADL.
UAM mission in Fitzroy Crossing. Their parents were not rationed by the government and were encouraged by patrol officers and mission staff to seek work on surrounding stations. The mission superintendent reported in 1956 that

   Many were the telegrams received from managers of cattle and sheep stations throughout the Kimberleys, seeking employees. ...The demand was so great that not all the stations could be supplied with labour.\(^{168}\)

One of the important consequences of increased staffing levels and subsidies to missions and the closure of government settlements was an increase in the numbers of Aboriginal children removed from their families and placed in missions.\(^{169}\) In 1958, Gare suggested in his report that

   the removal of children should be limited in recognition of the emotional damage done to children without a home life. Children at missions should be encouraged to go home, despite the environment they will return to. But if the home is likely to do damage they can stay at the mission.\(^{170}\)

Conditions on stations and in town camps were not always ‘suitable’. By 1958 ‘almost half of all known children’ in the Kimberley were in missions where they were subsidised by the state government and attracted Child Endowment funding.\(^{171}\) One quarter of adults were also at missions, and almost half of them were also being subsidised by the Department. According to Beharrell old people were not moving into missions because they ‘prefer to exist with their relatives and within their tribal areas rather than proceed to an institution.’\(^{172}\)

The initial entry of the State Aboriginal affairs administration into the area of ‘Welfare’ support for Aboriginal people on northern Kimberley stations was an exercise aimed at station managers retaining responsibility for them in exchange for Social Security being integrated into the existing system of localised patronage and

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167 ARAD 1956, MS AADL.

168 ibid.

169 NDG1/1/1a, DNW Circular no. 93, 11 July 1960.

170 Gare, Report Of The Special Committee On Native Matters, p. 27.

171 ARAD 1958, MS AADL.

172 ibid.
control. With the Gare report, policies began to change even further, and conflicting interests between welfare and pastoralists emerged, to the disadvantage of Aboriginal people.
Chapter Seven

Pastoral paternalism turns sour, 1959-1972

This chapter examines the impact of welfare policies and practices on station relationships from 1959 to 1972. In the early 1960s State and Federal policies began to include full-blood station people in the Australia-wide assimilationist project, providing the social and economic conditions for dismantling the station system without providing an institutional alternative for people who left or were forced to leave the stations. Important legislative changes came with the lifting in 1959 of exclusions to Social Security payments to Aboriginal people, the 1963 Native Welfare Act and the application of the Pastoral Industry Award to Aboriginal workers in the Kimberley from late 1968.¹ In 1972 the last of the overtly restrictive legislation was lifted from full-blood Aboriginal people in the Kimberley and they no longer had to apply for Citizenship status to exempt them from the Act. From that date they could consume alcohol, manage their own work and financial arrangements, or move interstate without permission from the Commissioner of Native Affairs.² A discourse of intervention and conflicting interests emerged with welfare’s focus on changing living conditions for station people, particularly housing, schooling, health and wages. In the period from 1959 to 1972, the Boss and the Missus came under increasing pressure from Native Welfare and the Social Security Department to implement assimilationist ideals on their stations. Their roles as gatekeepers for their communities increased, yet their benevolence came into question as they failed to meet the complex demands from various welfare agencies and Aboriginal people to make significant alterations to living conditions on the stations.

¹ Social Services Act 1959, no. 57 of 1959; Native Welfare Act 1963, no. 79 of 1963; CAR Case nos 536 of 1964, 270 and 289 of 1965, were successfully appealed in 1967 for delayed application of the Pastoral Industry Award 1965 to the Kimberley to December 1968.

This chapter shows that the removal of children to hostels and missions, and the
introduction of age pensions in the early 1960s were key factors underpinning the
movements of Aboriginal people towards towns and reserves, where Social
Security became the means of survival. By the time equal wages and Aboriginal
people’s protests about living conditions were blamed for the dismissals and walk-
offs of the 1970s and 1980s, the social and economic foundations of the old
rationing system on most of the stations in the northern Kimberley were already
crumbling. The equal wages decision and debate in the late 1960s signalled the end
of the long struggle between welfare and pastoralists over their moral obligation to
manage and maintain station communities. The long-standing argument between
pastoralists and the government over rations was transformed into an issue of
Aboriginal people’s cultural inability to work or be productive and ‘civilised’. At
the same time their land relationships and pastoralists’ obligations to them as land
owners or assistants developing the country were subsumed into a welfare
discourse.

‘Family welfare’

At the 1961 Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Affairs Ministerial Conference,
assimilation policy was formerly advanced by Minister for Territories Paul
Hasluck, and adopted by all other states. ‘Our Aborigines’ pamphlets, with black
stockmen on the cover were distributed around Australia to encourage white
Australians to accept Aboriginal people as equals.3 Assimilation policy was again
‘accepted with reservations’ by Western Australia’s representative, Charles
Perkins, who stated that the government needed to keep control of information
about Aboriginal people’s living and working conditions, to protect itself against
‘left wing elements’ using Aboriginal issues to advance their own political
interests.4 He questioned the proposals to go out to desert or isolated regions to
bring in tribal people, adding that in the Kimberley ‘semi-tribal’ people on stations
were often on land ‘where the natives had lived long before the white man went

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3 See also ‘Our Aborigines’ pamphlets mentioned in Tim Rowse, ‘Assimilation And After’, in A.
Curthoys, A.W. Martin, Tim Rowse (eds) Australians: From 1939, Fairfax Syme and Weldon,
1987, pp. 133-149.

AADL, p. 69.
there’ and ‘have played a useful part in developing the pastoral economy’.

5 He believed that criticisms of their treatment on the stations may have been well founded in the past but ‘today pastoralists pay more attention to their welfare’. The majority remained illiterate because of isolation and lack of facilities, and the fact that compulsory education applied only where there was access to a school. School of the Air was available for the white station children only, because those few Aboriginal children who could benefit did ‘not live close enough to the station homesteads’. There was a school at Gogo station, and Camballin and Ivanhoe research stations but they were mostly used by white children. The Minister announced that the new policy which would bring Kimberley station people into the assimilation era was for the expansion of the hostel system in towns, where the children would attend school and receive the ‘basic three R’s’:

They are not taken from their parents. We are trying to insist that the parents remain on the properties where the children came from. We do not want to see a shift in population. At the end of the school term the children go back to the homes they came from just as our white children return home from boarding school.6

Nevertheless, hostel children were not always transported home for holidays, either because transport was difficult in the wet season, too costly for parents, or the ‘homes’ to which they were being sent were not considered ‘suitable’ by welfare officers, missionaries or managers.7 Bringing children home for holidays became another task for managers to negotiate on behalf of their communities. The result of this policy was that some managers’ children spent more time on the stations than Aboriginal children.

The Minister advised the conference delegates in 1961, that ‘prominent pastoralists’ served on the committees of the hostels, which were financed by the Native Welfare Department. Derby hostel was the first of its kind in the Kimberley. It was to provide domestic and stock training for young Aboriginal people: ‘To put it shortly,

5 ibid. p. 36.

6 ibid. p. 37.

7 Native Welfare Instruction Manuals have sections on procedures for returning children to their homes for holidays. ‘Department Native Welfare Instruction Manual’, 1969/70, AADL, B-2-13 and B-6-15.
the objective is to fit them into the workforce in the area to which they belong’.

He also stated that the transitional housing scheme which formed the back bone of assimilation policy in the south had not been advanced in the Kimberley. There the Department had two transitional houses and twelve tin sheds on the Derby reserve which provided an alternative to the ‘primitive native quarters found in most employers back yards throughout Derby town site.’

State government policy was to close all settlements and ‘have done away with any that looked like developing’. Where the Commonwealth Department was funding an assimilation policy framed by employment on housing programs at reserves and settlements, the State was funding a hostel system and refusing to build houses on Mowanjum and Derby town reserves because it might continue separate development. Instead, Middleton allowed ‘qualified segregation’ by making one town reserve a transients camp and another into an ‘intermediate’ reserve where non-permanent huts would be erected. This enabled the Department to have greater ‘authority to ensure a satisfactory standard of living’ and the hoped-for transition to a suburban lifestyle.

In 1961 Middleton misleadingly termed this period as the time of ‘Family welfare’ policy. He had returned from a tour of all states, reporting afterwards that he was pleased with Western Australia’s ‘family welfare’ policy, which meant there were and would be no large segregated institutions, stations and settlements which either became ‘shanty towns’ or ‘glittering expensive closed communities of 12 to 15 hundred gloomy natives’. Middleton admitted that, ‘more through accident than design’, Western Australia was in an advantageous position for assimilating Aboriginal people into the white community. In Western Australia the closure of

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9 ibid. p. 40.

10 AD780/1949, Health Department inspector to CNW, 28 August, 1956.


12 NDG 1/1/1a, circular no. 73, 26 June 1959; ‘Mission Lands Review’, Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority, Unpublished Report, 1988, p. 250(e).

13 NDG30/5, Circular Report, CNW to all DOs, 28 June 1960.
institutions and settlements for whole communities had left Aboriginal people living in small groups in town reserves, missions and stations without permanent housing or facilities. These people were able to be placed elsewhere and were more physically fragmented than those who lived under the collective institutional policies of other states and the Northern Territory. The policy was a negative one, of not encouraging large settlements and not supporting others on stations or near towns. Middleton felt that this was a quicker and ‘more cost effective’ path to assimilation than having to decentralise Aboriginal people from institutions. Ironically, an important aspect of family policy was removing children from pastoral stations to place them in hostels.

Native Welfare Patrol Officers struggled to convince managers and Aboriginal parents that schooling in towns was beneficial to them and their children.\textsuperscript{14} Instances of parents refusing to send their children to school decreased in the early 1960s but some managers and parents continued to resist Native Welfare’s advances because:

Parents believe one of the three following theories

(1) If child goes to school, it will go mad.

(2) If my child goes to school it will never come back, the white people will take it away.

(3) Schooling teaches my child white ways, so that when they come home they will sneer at their parent (sic) and their “black fellow beliefs”.

No. 3 has been heard before and is a very real and sincere belief.\textsuperscript{15}

One Patrol Officer reported that the owner of three stations was actively discouraging children from going to school because he believed he would lose his labour force if the children were removed. His wife was quoted as saying that ‘nobody was going to dictate what I do with my blacks.’ The Patrol Officer later reported that the owner was frightened he would lose the Child Endowment money.\textsuperscript{16} The Officer countered by telling the Aboriginal people on the stations that

\textsuperscript{14} NDG36/8, Blina Station, 18 July 1961; NWD749/1938, Louisa Downs.

\textsuperscript{15} NWD749/38, Mauger Patrol Report, 1963.

\textsuperscript{16} NWD749/38, Mauger Patrol Report, 24 March 1964.
their children would become the ‘odd man out’ in the Kimberley and would be ‘relegated to the black’s camp’ if they didn’t go to school.\(^{17}\) This was not an isolated incident. In 1963 a Patrol Officer in the east Kimberley was called to attend the Cattlemen’s Association meeting, where he was asked to convey their antagonism towards the Department for not providing schools on stations instead of ‘carting them’ to towns and missions.\(^{18}\) He was also asked to police contracts of employment and ‘enforce’ them. Pastoralists complained that Aboriginal people were walking off stations and leaving debts at the stores. The officer replied that he always checked a man’s past employment to see if he was leaving a situation and if he had debts he would ‘send the native back’.\(^{19}\)

There were many tensions which appeared in this period between some parents and Native Welfare over access and control of their children and access to Social Security benefits. The hostel records have lists of children who ‘ran away with parents’, did not return after a Christmas holiday, ‘absconded’ mid-term or were expelled because of breaking rules.\(^{20}\) Increasingly, as relatives moved to town in the late 1960s, children were able to find a ‘parent’ nearby at Mowanjum or in one of the two town reserves. In 1964 Commissioner Gare, who had replaced Middleton two years earlier, sent a terse circular to all field staff that the policy for the custody of Aboriginal children had changed in 1960 to ensure that children were treated as

part of the family rather than the only part of the Aboriginal race worth saving. From now on institutionalisation for education or removal from parents must be watched and care taken.\(^{21}\)

\(^{17}\) NWD749/38, Mauger Patrol Report, 1963.

\(^{18}\) NDG18-1, 13 March 1963.

\(^{19}\) NDG18-1, 13 March 1963.


\(^{21}\) NDG1/1/1a, Circular no. 142, ‘Custody of native children’, 1 May 1964.
Kimberley Downs station school was opened in 1964 to provide for the families who worked there, and on Napier Downs. The population expanded rapidly when families with children moved there from Napier Downs, Mount Hart, Leopold Downs and other stations. Single men from Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing also moved to the station to work on a temporary basis. It was a time when Morndingali, as head stockman, had widespread influence over a range of people. For a short period the families at Kimberley Downs also lived with their older relations who were being supported by Commonwealth pensions. In 1966 Native Welfare Officers noted that Aboriginal people from the central ranges, Mount House, Mornington, Napier and others from the Derby reserves were congregating at Kimberley Downs. Morndingali was recorded as earning $10.00 a week as head stockman, with Weeda Munro earning $5.00 a week as a domestic. There were nine pensioners from Mount Hart, Mount House, Napier and Kimberley Downs, 17 children and 20 experienced working couples, making a station population of 78 Aboriginal people.

As is indicated by Table 2 below, the population on Kimberley Downs dropped sharply in late 1968 and early 1969. This coincided with the closure of the station school after the Department of Labour and Industry representative reported that the children were doing more work than schooling. The children were moved to the UAM hostel in Derby. The same pattern emerged for Meda, Napier and Mt House. The children moved to a hostel and gradually the women followed, leaving small groups of working men, a few women and a camp of old people as permanent residents. When the old people also moved to town, the social stability of the station communities disintegrated.

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### Table 2 - Station populations from Native Welfare patrol reports.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Meda (Kimmerley Downs)</th>
<th>Napier Downs</th>
<th>Mt Hart House</th>
<th>Mt Elizabeth</th>
<th>Mt Barnett</th>
<th>Gibb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15 and camp</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>34 (no kids)</td>
<td></td>
<td>19 (6 kids)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>34 (7 kids)</td>
<td>28 (2 kids)</td>
<td>'none'</td>
<td>36 (8 kids)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>28 (3 kids)</td>
<td>18 (no kids)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>38 (3 kids)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7 (19 camp)</td>
<td>8 (2 kids)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28 (1 child)</td>
<td>17 (3 kids)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>23 (3 kids)</td>
<td>23 (8 kids)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>49 SSP</td>
<td>25 (33 in July)</td>
<td>46 (6 kids 9 SSP)</td>
<td>26 (8 kids)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13 (11 SSP)</td>
<td>6 (7 kids)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23 (6 SSP)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>32 (3 kids, 1 SSP)</td>
<td>18 (6 SSP)</td>
<td>10 (6 kids 9 SSP)</td>
<td>43 (8 SSP)</td>
<td>5 (SSP)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>45 (school)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>66 (6 SSP)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 (3 SS)</td>
<td>5 (3 SS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>41 (7 kids)</td>
<td>6 (4 SSP)</td>
<td>5 (no kids)</td>
<td>11 (4 SSP)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>78 (17 kids)</td>
<td>3 (2 SSP)</td>
<td>20 (13 kids)</td>
<td>43 (11 SSP)</td>
<td>13 (1 SSP)</td>
<td>4 SSP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>18 (5 kids, 7 SSP)</td>
<td>85 (24 kids)</td>
<td>8 single men</td>
<td>3 SSP</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>45 (6 SSP)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>25 No child</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 (6 kids)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>16 AJCCO</td>
<td>34 (15 kids)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>37 (10 kids)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compiled from Patrol reports NDG files.

Old age pensions - 'A flood of money'

An important factor which undermined pastoral paternalism in the Kimberley region was the extension of Social Security benefits to Aboriginal people in 1960. Prior to that date, only a few people in the north received an age pension. Larry Kunnumurra, who had received a Queen’s Coronation Medal for 50 years service to the police force as a tracker, was an exception. He was granted an age pension in 1957 but first had to be given exempt status from the Native Welfare Act because he was a 'full-blood' Aboriginal person living on an Aboriginal reserve and thus excluded from receiving one. In 1957 District Officer Beharrell actively pushed for age pensions for Aboriginal people in the west Kimberley, seeking their mass exemption from the Act to make this possible. After assisting Larry Kunnumurra, he applied for exemption status for elderly people in the Leprosarium and Mowanjum mission on the outskirts of Derby. Middleton instructed Beharrell to 'stop interfering and causing resentment' and leave it to Social Security.

In February 1959 Middleton asked for a report from Beharrell on the numbers of people living on pastoral stations and reserves in the west Kimberley who might be eligible for invalid, age and widows pensions if the Social Security Act was liberalised. Beharrell's estimate of at least 300 people received the response that he had better be careful as an over estimation would cause embarrassment to the Department. Middleton reminded him that the system of paying pensions would involve station managers and mission superintendents as warrantees, thus placing them in positions of 'great trust'. He concluded that not everyone would be accepted and it was the Department's responsibility to prevent 'sponging'.

On the 24th of December 1959 Middleton wrote a long confidential circular to all field officers, outlining the distribution of maternity, age and disability pensions


25 AD1058/1946, Beharrell to CNW, 19 June 1957.

26 NDG33/3/1a, CNW to Field Officers, 10 February 1959.

27 NDG33/3/1a, Beharrell to CNW, 25 February 1959.

28 NDG33/3/1a, CNW to Beharrell, 7 April 1959.
which were to be payable from the second of February 1960 for all Aboriginal people (including full-blood) living in ‘benevolent homes’ or ‘controlled communities on missions, reserves and pastoral stations’. Individual missions had negotiated an agreement with Social Security authorities to pay either a portion to the mission superintendent and the remainder to the mission headquarters, or the whole to the mission, with a prescribed ‘pocket money’ allocation to be distributed by the mission staff. Mowanjum mission authorities opted for a small portion of 10s to be sent to the mission in Derby and the remainder to their head office in Melbourne. Kalumburu mission received the whole £9 10s per fortnight. Pastoral station managers were to receive the whole of the pension with 10s to be given to the pensioner as pocket money and the remaining £9 for the manager’s use for the ‘pensioner’s maintenance and improvements in accommodation and general welfare.’ Maternity Allowances were to be paid direct to the Mission Superintendents ‘in all cases and they will exercise control in the disbursement of the allowance either in cash or in kind to the mother’. On pastoral stations the manager, his wife or the book-keeper received Aboriginal women’s Maternity Allowances unless the mother demonstrated her ability to manage the money. Aboriginal people living on the fringes of towns in reserves or camps were to be paid direct if Native Welfare Officers advised Social Security Officers that this was appropriate. Aboriginal people classed as ‘nomads’, who occasionally lived in the bush or desert were also brought under the Social Security umbrella if they were ‘within the sphere of mission influence’.

Having argued that Aboriginal people could not understand money, the government extended the trustee system by making station managers official warrantees for Social Security benefits for station people and pastoral stations ‘controlled communities’. The State Minister for Native Welfare, Charles Perkins, rationalised the trustee or warrantee system as a

29 AD1104/1939, Confidential Circular no. 272, CNW to all Field Officers, 24 December 1959.

30 ibid.
means of keeping those, who have been living at some out of the way place, where they normally belong. If that is not done they will drift into towns and become a problem.\textsuperscript{31}

He was reassured by the Federal Minister for Social Security that unemployment benefits were not intended to be given to Aboriginal people, nor were they intended to become a full-time lifestyle. People would have to register and meet guidelines, they would not be sought out.\textsuperscript{32} Perkins replied that if unemployment benefits were available to Aboriginal people, he 'could imagine that many natives would never do any more work for the rest of their lives, and by one means or another would make themselves unattractive to employers.'\textsuperscript{33} Restrictions on Aboriginal people receiving unemployment benefits continued in 1964. Divisional officers were instructed by the state Director of Social Services that benefits were unlikely to be extended in the Kimberley region because there was no representative in the region and it was difficult to establish Aboriginal people as 'genuine workers':

'It is not sufficient to establish full employment for only three months of the year which would mean the SSD [Social Security Department] subsidising, by way of unemployment benefit, for nine months of the year at a figure more than the natives could earn. This could encourage natives to be dependent on the benefit rather than looking for employment.'\textsuperscript{34}

Stations acted quickly to ensure that their old people received age pensions. Kimberley Downs, Bedford Downs, Mornington, Kurunjie, Tablelands, Mt House and Gibb River stations all applied for pensions one week before the new guidelines were introduced.\textsuperscript{35} Nine pounds ten shillings fortnightly was a significant amount of money in 1960. The pastoral economy remained unpredictable in the north and central Kimberley throughout the 1960s, despite the opening of the United States hamburger beef market and the provision of trucking


\textsuperscript{32} ibid. p. 112.

\textsuperscript{33} ibid. p. 106.

\textsuperscript{34} 'Divisional Superintendent's Conference Meeting Minutes 10 to 14 February 1964', AADL.

\textsuperscript{35} NDG33/3/1a, 25 January 1960.
roads to Mt House and Glenroy from 1963 and to Gibb River in 1969. Herd management, distances and the environment continued to limit pastoral profits in the north and central Kimberley. In a good year, a small station like Mt Elizabeth might turn off 300 head to make around £7,500 from cattle sales to cover all living and development costs. Even the larger and better resourced stations in the Kimberley such as Mount House, could expect a beef sales profit of about £10,000 from 1960 to 1962. Frank Lacy, for instance, noted that he was owed only £216 for his cattle sales for 1963, after costs.

The age pension was at least three times an Aboriginal stockman’s ‘wage’ and compared favourably with a white stockman’s award wage of around £12 plus keep of £4. In 1963, fortnightly rations for pensioners at Mount Hart including transport were estimated to cost below £4. Again, the system relied heavily on managers to identify recipients, collect the necessary details to meet eligibility requirements, receive the money and disburse the goods. Problems of naming and eligibility were almost farcical, as managers, missionaries and Native Welfare Officers attempted to fit older Aboriginal people from isolated stations into Social Security guidelines. Correspondence between Native Welfare, the Social Security Department and station managers covered a range of issues, including: placing a cross on forms instead of signatures, indicating sex of applicants as staff processing the forms had no idea from language names whether the individuals were men or women, trying to ascertain a birth year from the managers instead of just writing ‘sighted’ as proof of old age, providing a medical certificate for invalids, proof that they had not left Australia, proof that only the wife living longest with a man would receive a wife’s or widow’s benefit, and finally, ensuring that child allowances for widow’s pensions were paid to only one wife’s


40 NDG36/57, DSS to Telford, 9 June 1965.
children. Each Native Welfare Field Officer was also reminded of their responsibilities, as agreed to with Social Security, to see that Aboriginal people were 'not exploited or imposed upon by their own acts of omission or commission, misspend or mal-handle the money'.

A.O. Day, Native Welfare Officer for the Port Hedland district, pointed out that the method of establishing eligibility, especially age, was problematic. He wrote that having suggested a birth date to an old Aboriginal person who had no idea of dates, and limited English, he or she agreed, and this was backed up by their manager who had a vested interest in their receiving a pension. The Field Officer then placed the estimated age in the census list, which in turn became proof of age for Social Security to enrol the pensioner and for other health or police enquiries. As to the proof of residency, Day wrote that, as it was 'unlawful for an Aborigine to travel interstate it would be unlikely that anyone broke the residency rules.' To overcome some of the difficulties experienced because of the extreme lack of certification and continued lack of staff to cover the region, a 'reputable referee' was accepted as adequate for proving name, age, marital status, family relationships, and whether Aboriginal people were able to 'understand money'. Disability required a doctor's certificate.

In June 1960 the Director of Social Security asked that all Native Welfare Officers take 'extreme care in obtaining claims from natives.' Two months later all staff were asked to 'count all' Aboriginal people and 'name them' as the statistics were 'inaccurate and misleading'. Station populations increased after Social Security guidelines were broadened. Managers had not previously notified Departmental officers of all pensioners or children on their stations because they were not

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41 NDG1/1/1a, Circular no. 83, 28 January 1960; see also NDG3/3/1a.

42 NDG1/1/1a, Circular no. 83, 28 January 1960.


44 NDG1/1/1a, DNW Circular no. 97, 14 September 1960.

45 NDG1/1/1a, DNW Circular no. 92, 8 June 1960.

46 NDG1/1/1a, DNW Circular no. 96, 22 August 1960.
workers under permit, there were no government rations available for them, and few services were offered or utilised which required registration with Native Welfare. Registering births and deaths of Aboriginal people was made compulsory in 1961 and, after 1963 all Native Welfare field staff were instructed to ensure managers knew this. They were also asked to check station books which were supposed to show any earnings, amount of board and lodging being retained by management and the amount being distributed as pocket money to all pensioners. The Commissioner of Native Welfare circulated a standard pension distribution scale which had deductions for a list of foodstuffs (including fruit, powdered milk and rice) clothes and board, some pocket money, medical expenses and £2 to be banked in the pensioner’s name. Two pounds was a working man’s monthly pocket money in the Kimberley at the time.

Table 3 - Social Security age pensions paid to Warrantees in the Kimberley

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Missions</th>
<th>Town/leprosarium</th>
<th>Stations</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>287</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invalid</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widows</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 1961</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>340 (56 stns)</td>
<td>1043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 1962</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 1963</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>360 (61 stns)</td>
<td>1038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 1965</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>1030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 1966*</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>667</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Complied from ARAD 1961-1966, MS AADL.

*In 1966 direct payments were introduced and made to 433 pensioners.

47 NDG36/79 is a good example of this.


49 AD1104/1939, Circular no. 97, CNW to all Field Staff, 14 September 1960.

50 NDG33/3/1a, CNW, 10 August 1960.
The number of age pensioners in the Kimberley increased from one in 1953 to 26 in 1958, and 134 in 1959.\textsuperscript{51} Within six months of pensions being made available to Aboriginal people on stations, missions and reserves, 667 were being paid in the Kimberley.

The 'flood of money' into the Kimberley which the Derby Native Welfare Officer estimated to be about £5,000 per fortnight for all pensions, had an immediate impact on social and economic relations on stations and in towns. The Native Welfare District Officer reported that pensions had 'helped to stabilise employment' and were 'proving a big factor in the improvement of wages and working conditions generally.'\textsuperscript{52} The payment of maternity allowances and age pensions were reported as having 'spectacular results', allowing the Department to discontinue ration allowances to indigents in towns or at missions. Social Security funds now completely financed ration allowances to Aboriginal adults in the Kimberley. Age pensioners on stations were receiving extra fresh fruit and vegetables bought for them by managers, as well as clothing and extra items like tinned fish and sweet biscuits. In towns pensioners no longer relied on the basic welfare ration which provided for their 'bare subsistence' and they were also buying clothes.\textsuperscript{53}

The District Officer reported jubilantly that pensioners' 'self esteem had risen with their independent income' and they were 'wanted in the community for the first time since their prime as a workforce.'\textsuperscript{54} He added that:

\begin{quote}
this spending power has made these aged natives desirable members of the community and we find Shire Councils taking an interest in their well-being, probably for the first time for reasons other than hygiene. At Missions and stations we find these old people, often previously only tolerated, now living in relative splendour with everyone taking an interest in them and their welfare.\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{51} NDG33/3/1a, List of pensioners.

\textsuperscript{52} ARAD 1960, MS AADL.

\textsuperscript{53} ibid.

\textsuperscript{54} ARAD 1961, MS AADL.

\textsuperscript{55} ibid.
According to the Pastoralists and Graziers Association, the interest shown in pensioners was not always beneficial. They sent a deputation to the Minister for Native Welfare in late December 1960 to argue that pension moneys were being misspent, with some pensioners supporting 'a lot of hangers-on'.\textsuperscript{56} They asked for station managers to be made responsible for the whole pension, without any cash component, and for the Commonwealth and the State to take greater control of its expenditure where they were trustees. All Field Officers were notified to have a closer look at how pensions were being used to ensure that pensioners were not being exploited by their relations or warrantees at pastoral stations and missions.\textsuperscript{57}

Under the warrantee system for age pensions a greater degree of outside scrutiny and accountability was expected by Social Security officers than Native Welfare Department Officers had experienced previously, or were able to insist upon. Storekeepers were barred from being 'warrantees' but the potential conflict of interest for station managers who also sold goods in their stores was disregarded. The 1962 Native Welfare Act Regulations which stated that goods were not to be sold at inflated prices applied only to employees.\textsuperscript{58} There was no regulation of the prices at which goods were exchanged in lieu of pensions or wages. As Middleton had warned in 1959, trustees were placed in positions of 'great trust'. In practice, managers rationed pensioners and used the extra money for improving living conditions on the stations for everyone. They did not just improve pensioners' housing, food or ablution facilities. Native Welfare and Social Security condoned this, as well as allowing the station to deduct a fee or charge for handling or cooking stores for pensioners.\textsuperscript{59} Pastoralists were now able to deduct money from pensions for caring for their retired workers or older people who moved in to visit at the station camps. The station lists record pensioners moving around stations during the 1960s staying a year at a station then moving to the next. They probably moved with their working relatives but some walked to different stations.

\textsuperscript{56} AD1104/1939, Minister for Native Welfare to CNW, 15 December 1960.

\textsuperscript{57} ibid.

\textsuperscript{58} Native Welfare Act 1954, Regulations', \textit{GG} 9 October 1962.

In 1964 Social Security’s policy toward stations hardened. The Director of Social Services informed all Native Welfare Department field staff that station workers in the Kimberley were no longer legally excluded from receiving unemployment benefits, but most would not receive them as they did not ‘fit the worker category’; having no work history, not receiving a formal wage and being ‘employed’ for only a portion of the year.60 He added that Social Security did not want unemployment benefits ‘subsidising’ the stations for their workers. The policy for pension expenditure also changed: they were allowed to be used for ‘general housing and uplift of the whole community’ only in the western desert, where ‘tribal’ people were moving in to missions but not on stations or missions in the north Kimberley, where ‘under no circumstances’ were officers to take a liberal view of expending pension moneys. The Social Security Director asked Native Welfare field staff to attend stations at meal times and observe the food being distributed, and then examine the living conditions. He added that he understood that this could cause ‘ill feeling’ between the managers and the Department but reports of exploitation of pensioners had come to light.

Departmental staff reported that some managers and missions did not improve pensioners living conditions at all, and were barely keeping pensioners alive.61 There were also allegations that stations continued to pay wages from pensioners’ accounts and evidence from Native Welfare Officers that child endowment money had to be used by Aboriginal people to buy food because rations and wages were insufficient.62 In 1965 Kimberley pastoral stations receiving pensions were formally investigated by Special Magistrate M.E. Davies for Social Security. The day he was appointed a newspaper article by Douglas Lockwood in the Weekend News claimed there were £9,000 of pensioner monies held by the Wave Hill station managers in the Northern Territory and that Western Australian stations may have been in a similar situation.63 Station managers were now under public scrutiny, with their benevolence in question. According to C.D. Rowley it was during this

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61 NDG33/3/1a, Special Magistrate M. E. Davies for DSS to CNW, 19 May 1965.

62 NDG36/36, Kimberley Downs; ARAD 1963, MS AADL.

63 NDG33/3/1a, Weekend News, 13 March 1965.
period that pastoralists in the Northern Territory were 'heard' to joke that they were making more money from Aboriginal people than cattle.\textsuperscript{64} In South Australia at the same time, pastoralists were accused of 'nigger farming'.\textsuperscript{65}

Magistrate Davies was accompanied by Kevin Johnson, who worked for Native Welfare from 1959 to 1972.\textsuperscript{66} The investigations uncovered alleged over-payments and potential problems at stations throughout the Kimberley, with larger companies like Vestey's and Emmanuels coming under some unwelcome scrutiny. The investigations found evidence for pension over-payments of £9,951 to Kurunjie station but were not able to substantiate abuse of the system at any other stations in the north Kimberley. Repayments of £681 were made by the owner at Mount Hart for pensions paid for one person who had been dead for two years, and another who had lived at the neighbouring station for ten months.\textsuperscript{67} At the time of the investigation the pensioners were naked and surrounded by more than a hundred dogs. They lived at a bush shelter camp 200 yards from the homestead hut along a foot path which was impassable in the wet season. Most had come out of the bush between 1954 and 1962 and had been visited only once by a Native Welfare Officer.\textsuperscript{68} The owner resided on the station between May and November, and allocated blankets, clothes and pocket money during those months. For the remaining five months each year, one of the pensioners was in charge of the camp while the unschooled and illiterate manager was responsible for ordering stores and caretaking. Davies commented that this was 'an extremely poor example of culture contact with natives being out of sight out of mind'.\textsuperscript{69} After discussions with the owner Davies concluded that the situation did not require the removal of the

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\textsuperscript{64} Rowley, \textit{The Remote Aborigines}, p. 304. Kimberley pastoralists did not receive government rations or 'maintenance' funding as did those people in the Northern Territory. See further Owen Stanley, 'Aboriginal Communities On Cattle Stations In Central Australia', \textit{Australian Economic Papers}, vol. 15, no. 27, 1976, pp. 158-170.


\textsuperscript{66} Kevin Johnson, Tape (58) 17 May 1994.

\textsuperscript{67} NDG36/57, DSS to Telford, 9 June 1965.

\textsuperscript{68} NDG36/57, Patrol Report, May 1965.

\textsuperscript{69} NDG36/57, DSS to Telford, 9 June 1965.
pensioners. The camp was controlled by a respected leader who was not 'sophisticated' but had 'complete control over the camp and his word was Law on the station'. After the investigation in 1965 the pensioner camp was moved to a small 'island' hillock in view of the homestead - a 'traditional camping place' - and the manager was sacked.

Davies had already supervised the repayment of pension monies at stations in the Fitzroy Valley, and now found that the system of utilising pension monies for the general good of the station without noticeable changes to pensioners' way of life was widespread. His general comments were that pensioners on Kimberley stations were in much the same position in 1965 as they had been in 1960. Those on good stations had some improvements in accommodation and water supplies, occasional extra store items or washing facilities, but most continued in the 'same primitive way as they have done for many years.' Aboriginal pensioners had 'little understanding of pensions, no guidance and no desire to change their mode of living'.70 Davies suggested that they receive 'guidance' to understand that they can receive 'comforts' for their pensions, otherwise the money would 'continue to be absorbed by the stations.'

Investigations in June 1966 of station books to assess where the money was being spent brought to light the problem of lack of accountability at many stations. Ned Delower was manager of Tablelands station when his station books were investigated. His book-keeping was reported by the investigating team as 'minutely detailed' and could not be faulted.71 Delower showed accounts and payments for lollies, biscuits, cloth, tobacco and clothes sent from Perth, which he distributed to pensioners instead of the fortnightly pocket money component. The Patrol Officer accepted his argument that there was nothing at the station beside staple ration items like flour, tea and sugar, so pocket money was not needed by the pensioners. The next year after further investigations Social Security officers calculated that there was $9,840 unaccounted for after food and pocket money costs were deducted from the pension payments. Delower explained that $2,000 was placed into the

70 NDG33/3/1a, Special Magistrate M E Davies for DSS to CNW, 19 May 1965.
71 NDG33/3/1a, Pensioner Survey Report, 4 June 1966.
station account on the orders of the owner. On questioning, the owner produced accounts totalling $5,500 for items like ‘transport and freight etc’ which were accepted by Social Security as a reasonable record of expenditure in the interests of the nine pensioners who lived at Tablelands station.

Kurunjie and Mount Hart stations had no station books at all. Seventy-five year old Dave Rust, who served in the First Light Horse during the First World War, had sold the Kurunjie lease to an absentee owner. Rust lived on the station with an old Aboriginal woman and eight pensioners who had lived through the period of first contact. Native Welfare Patrol Officer Kevin Johnson recalled his amazement at seeing the ‘old timers’ in the far north living in conditions which he had not seen at other stations near Derby or on the Fitzroy River.\textsuperscript{72} The old bark huts and stamped earth floors of the homesteads at Gibb River, Mount Elizabeth, Mount Hart, Beverley Springs and Kurunjie had been upgraded with tin rooves and out-houses, but little else had changed from the 1930s. Aboriginal women lived with white men, with a small camp of Aboriginal elders nearby and large packs of dogs roaming the camps. Although the anti-cohabitation clauses were dropped from the new 1963 Native Welfare Act, Johnson could have intervened on behalf of the Aboriginal people in the camps, to bring them into town for medical assistance or reduce the number of dogs. But he sympathised with the owners of the northern stations, whom he saw as specially deserving ‘battlers’ because in each case the station Missus at Gibb River, Mount Elizabeth and Mount Barnett was an Aboriginal woman. He reported that they were living in much the same conditions as the camp people and were unable to pay for improvements. He did not believe the pensioners would accept any changes to their ‘primitive’ conditions if they were made.\textsuperscript{73}

At Mount Barnett Johnson assisted the managers to complete forms for two women who had been denied a pension because they were the second and third wives of one man. Mary Yulbu was recorded as one of them. Having survived the frontier and then the leprosarium, she was dropped at Gibb River by the Flying Doctor

\textsuperscript{72} Kevin Johnson, Tape (58) 17 May 1994.

\textsuperscript{73} NDG35/36, Patrol Report 1965.
plane and moved back to the country where she had experienced first contact. One of the pensioners Johnson was appraising was old Mobby, who had helped Jack Carey in the 1920s and moved to Mount Barnett with Fred Russ and Mary Karraworla’s daughter in the early 1960s. Barnett was an outstation of Gibb River and until 1965 was built only of bush materials. Mobby was recorded as a good spear man who hunted most of the meat eaten on the station. Johnson reported that they were in the true sense ‘battling’ and even the ‘sale of one bullock is an event.’ Mobby was granted a pension but his wife was refused because welfare recorded her birth date as 1913, which meant she was too young in 1963. She was granted a pension two years later when Russ wrote to the Derby Native Welfare office that he had known one of the applicants since 1916, when he was 15 years old and the woman Mary was at least his age. Most station pensioners were recorded in 1959 or 1960 as born in 1899 or 1900, which was sufficient to include them in pension categories. At Mount Elizabeth there were five pensioners, and Johnson suggested signing on two more women whom he believed were eligible for a pension. Lacy refused to sign them on, stating that ‘he did not think it was useful’. They lived together in a bark hut and had few needs beyond meat and occasional rations.

The Director of Social Security was not sympathetic to ‘battlers’ on isolated stations, and saw no reason to be lenient on trustees for Aboriginal people. After the Davies investigation he warned the Commissioner of Native Welfare that pension guidelines were being broken in the Kimberley, where Aboriginal pensioners were rarely receiving ‘reasonable benefit’ from their money. He added:

It seems that some warrantees regard the pension as a form of station subsidy and consider that they are entitled to restrict the value of the benefits flowing to the pensioners for various reasons. One being that wages paid to native station workers will not show adversely by comparison.

The effect is that instead of Commonwealth pension moneys benefiting the pensioner only, they are undeservedly and unnecessarily benefiting...

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74 NDG36/35, Patrol Report, 10 June 1965.

75 NDG36/35.

76 NDG36/56.
the station to the extent to which value is withheld from the pensioner.\textsuperscript{77}

He declared that responsibility for Aboriginal people lay with the State, not the Commonwealth, and specifically with the Department of Native Welfare. He appealed to the Commissioner for Native Welfare to follow the practices agreed to by 'all other states in the Commonwealth', to make state welfare officers trustees for all pensioners and provide adequate staff to support the Social Security payments to stations and in towns, missions and reserves.

In response to increased pressure from the Commonwealth to scrutinise stations, the Derby Native Welfare District Officer suggested a full-scale review of the Kimberley, adding that inadequate staff and conditions for travel needed to be taken into account before Native Welfare took responsibility for pensions from pastoral station managers and missions.\textsuperscript{78} In August 1965 the Commissioner for Native Welfare agreed to undertake a general survey of every pensioner on pastoral stations, and where managers would not agree to follow the guidelines for warrantees, Departmental staff would explain to the pensioner that 'if he stays where he is the pension may be cancelled'.\textsuperscript{79} If the pensioner agreed to move, Departmental staff were instructed to advise where he or she should go and 'assist with the move and gradual transition to direct payment of their pensions.'

A follow-up report was completed in June 1966, after Welfare Officers went into camps and huts and observed people eating and then asked them to show what cash and belongings they held.\textsuperscript{80} Some managers successfully resisted interference and scrutiny from Native Welfare Officers, after taking legal advice that trustees did not have to disclose their books because they spent the money for the pensioner, not for the Social Security Department. The pensioner entrusted them to look after their money, thus their relationship was with the pensioner not the government, state or federal. For instance, on Gogo station where there were 200 Aboriginal people and

\textsuperscript{77} NDG33/3/1a, Humphreys DSS to CNW, 2 July 1965.

\textsuperscript{78} ARAD 1965, MS AADL.

\textsuperscript{79} NDG33/3/1a, CNW to Director of DSS, 3 August 1965.

\textsuperscript{80} NDG33/3/1a, Pensioner Survey Report, 4 June 1966.
14 age pensioners, the owners delayed and then refused to allow officers to see their books. This frustrated Welfare Officers, who wrote that the ‘powerful Emanuel group are almost a law unto themselves’, setting a pattern in evidence at other stations not to fully disclose Social Security expenditure to Native Welfare Officers.\textsuperscript{81} According to the District Officer the situation was unsatisfactory across the Kimberley:

Other stations have very inadequate or carefully doctored records, but it is all very obvious from what the pensioners say, their condition and clothing, plus accounting by the Department of Social Services and this Department, that they are not receiving full benefit of their pensions.\textsuperscript{82}

He believed that stations and missions had similar conditions and supported a ‘well worn phrase’ in the Kimberley at the time, that ‘They are all making a quid out of pensioners’.\textsuperscript{83}

From 1966 a direct payment of $9.00 of the $23.50 pension was made compulsory, whether recipients were on church, government or pastoral properties.\textsuperscript{84} The Director of Social Security explained that the Commonwealth was going to transfer to direct payments of the whole pension in the near future regardless of possible problems and ‘would rather err on side of too early rather than too late’.\textsuperscript{85} Welfare Officers were advised that pensions could continue to be spent by managers on accommodation, wood, water and repairs to houses on stations but: ‘it would be necessary for the pensioner to be assured of security of tenure of the building for as long as he wants it.’\textsuperscript{86} This may be the formal understanding to which Morndingali referred when he stated that as a pensioner he was ‘supposed’ to live in a pension house on the station after he retired:

...manager didn’t try to help me along didn’t try to give me a little bit of a block or a little bit of a house put the pension house for me. I coulda stay in my own country! [Tapping the table for emphasis] Now

\textsuperscript{81} ibid.

\textsuperscript{82} NDG33/3/1a, Kevin Johnson Report re Pensioners, 8 August 1966.

\textsuperscript{83} ibid.

\textsuperscript{84} NDG33/3/1a, LB Hamilton DSS to WA SS, 7 September 1966.

\textsuperscript{85} ibid.

\textsuperscript{86} ‘Department of Native Welfare Instruction Manual’, 1967, AADL.
I'm in a different part of country. I'm in a Derby town. This wasn't my place. I s'posed to be settle down in my place, in Kimberley Down and Napier. I should have a homestead that last when I was get pensioned off ... Now that was too late.\footnote{Morndi Munro, Tape (12) 23 April 1990.}

Native Welfare Officers were also trustees for pensioners, and held a pension bank account and some individual bank books for them. After 1963 the accounts were held in individual pensioner's names and were subject to audit. The Native Welfare office in Derby had a large storeroom where rations were kept and distributed weekly to pensioners. Kevin Johnson, Derby Field Officer at the time, recalled the detailed book-keeping he and other officers carried out to account for every pound of flour and every stick of tobacco they distributed to Aboriginal people, in addition to their pension pocket money.\footnote{Kevin Johnson, Tape (59) 17 May 1994.} The transition from rations for 'relief', to the Social Security system did not alter the type or amount of rations, or the personnel distributing them, until the late 1960s but it greatly increased the amount of pocket money available to pensioners living in towns. After 1967 it was normal rather than exceptional for town pensioners to receive their own money into their own account. Native Welfare Officers assisted with stores and with accommodation at the reserve but their control over the cash was reduced.

In 1968 Native Welfare Officers were instructed not to act as trustees for pensioners and not to interfere in how pensions were being spent.\footnote{'Divisional Superintendent's Conference Meeting Minutes', 1968, AADL, p. 20.} The Divisional Superintendent for the north warned his colleagues that there seemed to be systematic problems for aged pensioners in missions. After the death of a pensioner the missions 'invariably' registered 'nil' in their trust account. This was dismissed by the Commissioner as an arrangement between missions and individual pensioners and because individual pensioner accounts were not kept at missions, they were paid into general accounts, there was no hope of intervening. By 1969 all pensions were paid direct to pensioners, who in many cases then spent their money at station or mission stores, or asked the managers to assist them to buy goods.\footnote{NDG36/79.}
The threat to withdraw age pensions from isolated stations or missions, or withdraw Native Welfare support for pensioners forced Aboriginal people to relocate to town reserves. Removing the old people from their country or the station where they had ‘settled’ undermined the cohesiveness of the communities. With Aboriginal children from most stations also living in hostels or missions and away from their relatives, the demographic and social balance shifted from stations to towns. Sunday Island people moved to Derby in 1962 and Forrest River people transferred to Wyndham in 1966; in both cases the old people refused to move until Native Welfare Officers explained that they would not receive food or pensions if they stayed.\footnote{See NDG31/1 and NDG31/4/1 for Forrest River Mission transfer to Wyndham. Michael Robinson, 'Change and Adjustment Among The Bardi Of Sunday Island, North Western Australia,' MA Thesis, University of Western Australia, 1973, pp. 180-189 for Sunday Island; see further ‘Mission Lands Review’, 1988. The Louisa Downs manager also wrote of older residents moving to Halls Creek to receive their pensions and young men moving to receive unemployment benefits. L.A. Schubert, \textit{Kimberley Dreaming: The Century Of Freddy Cox}, Words Work Express 1992.}

The transfer to Mowanjum to the fringes of Derby, was also resisted by the old people and a small group actually left the town and walked north into the bush because they could not settle outside their country.\footnote{Mission Lands Review', 1988, pp. 250 d-f; David Mowaljarlai and Daisy Utamorrah, \textit{Visions of Mowanjum: aboriginal writings from the Kimberley}, Adelaide, Rigby, 1980, pp. 22-26.}

On pastoral stations in the north Kimberley age pensions were the issue around which Aboriginal people’s individual rights began to be protected by a government body. Detailed accounting for pension moneys was an onerous task that not all stations were prepared to undertake. When pensions were first extended to all Aboriginal people on pastoral stations, there was a simple Social Security guide-line which called for the division of pocket money for the pensioner and the rest to the station for accommodation and keep. Social Security undertook this and paid portions to missions and the whole to stations. This system enabled stations to subsidise their work force without challenging their position as Bosses over cash and goods on the stations. As Native Welfare officers responded to Commonwealth directions to pressure managers to allow Aboriginal people to handle their own money and force changes in their living and working conditions, paternalism began to turn sour.
Native Welfare station patrol reports grew increasingly critical of conditions on stations, and openly suspicious of managers’ motives and interests. Mount House pension camp was reported in 1968 as the ‘worst camp’ in the Kimberley, when one old pensioner was found dying and another ‘frail and senile’. They were ‘evacuated’ by plane to Derby and placed in the Native Hospital and the managers were ‘warned’ that Native Welfare would ‘keep a close eye on them’. Complaints continued about Mount House pensioners, fuelled by ex-Mount House workers in the Derby reserve, whose parents were still on the station living in the camp. Mount House management countered criticisms from Native Welfare and applied for more pensions. They sent the ration scale to Social Security which included meat, sugar, matches, biscuits and a tin of herrings and tomato. But pension monies were held up for months because the scale of rations did not have the required pocket money component, and managers were warned that they were in contravention of Social Security guidelines. Each pensioner received $1.00 each fortnight instead of $9.00 pocket money. A further investigation was ordered and conflict escalated between management and Native Welfare until the District Officer reported that the situation was not so bad as suggested. He drew back from the language of exploitation and abuse of rights to that of personal relations and relative needs of old Aboriginal people. There were iron huts, canvas shelters, bower shelters, an iron cottage for the half-caste head stockman, Billy King, and regular rations which were all accounted for in the station books.94

The Missus at Mount House did all the accounting for the pensioners and managed the station store. She was galled by the continuing correspondence and delays over pensioners’ details such as their age, proof of marriage, distance between town and the station, and wrote to Native Welfare that ‘these things could not possibly happen to non-aborigines.’95 The station was sold in 1969 to become part of King Ranch Holdings and the old Bosses who had established the station left for the southern cities. The Missus no longer looked after the domestic sphere -

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94 NDG36/58, District Officer Report, 26 January 1967.

95 NDG36/58, Manager Mount House, 10 February 1969.
pensions, medical chest, radio and station store. By 1972 there were only two pensioners left: two had joined families in town, one was in the leprosarium and the other in Numbala Nunga, the old age residential care institution built in 1969. The pensioners had sums of around $400 distributed to them and King Ranch was left with a small working population of two married men and a group of single male stockmen. Billy King walked off in 1972 after an argument with the owners over their management practices, and began work in Numbala Nunga for award wages, caring for around 40 elderly and disabled Aboriginal people. He joined Jack Dale, also working at Numbala Nunga after a life of stock work in the northern ranges and being head stockman at Beverley Springs. Campbell Allenbrae and other stockmen and women were also living in the Derby town reserve in 1969.

Beverley Springs was not immune to Welfare criticism and conflict. Like other stations it eventually lost most of its younger workers to the town reserves and was left with a camp of old people.\textsuperscript{96} One or two bush groups continued to visit in the 1960s, taking tobacco and rations with them as they walked north toward Mount Elizabeth and Kalumburu. Pensioners and workers lived in better conditions than most stations, and had regular and reliable rations. Their housing was built with $4,500 pension money which had accumulated in their account prior to 1971. In that year the manager informed the Derby hostel not to send the children home because they would be ‘ruined’ in the camps. The next year there was only one Aboriginal woman listed as a worker, and eight pensioners and seven ‘others’: the married workers had not returned after a visit to town.\textsuperscript{97} The Native Welfare Patrol Officer questioned management in detail about their expenses for pensioners, and the Missus who filled the domestic role of looking after the pensioners and store grew increasingly frustrated, writing that she would start to charge them for a range of services such as butchering their meat. In 1972, when four old Aboriginal people who spoke no English at all walked out of the bush onto Beverley Springs, the manager asked for Native Welfare assistance to feed and care for them because they were too old to work for their keep.\textsuperscript{98} They were taken to town instead by Native

\textsuperscript{96} NDG36/6.

\textsuperscript{97} NDG36/6, Patrol Report, 20 June 1972.

\textsuperscript{98} NDG36/6, Derby District Office memo, 21 September 1972.
Welfare and David Mowaljarlai, who was assisting with the move. Mowaljarlai had moved to town with the Mowanjum community and worked with a range of service providers throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The old ‘bush people’s’ relatives were either in the old people’s home, the Derby reserve, Kalumburu mission or at Mowanjum. The ‘bush’ from Derby to Mount Hart and west to the coast was not occupied by ‘bush people’ any more, and old people’s residency at stations was under threat.

The paradigm of pastoral estates, with resident Boss and Missus leading the social and economic development of the north, while they cared for resident indigenous groups, began to disintegrate on stations such as Meda, Napier Downs, Kimberley Downs, Mount House and Glenroy in the late 1960s. In 1965 D. Treloar, an agricultural economist, wrote that there was insufficient reinvestment in Kimberley pastoral leases for long-term, profitable management of herds and pastures by all sections of owners, whether small, large or absentee. Large companies with outside investments had offset some re-investment costs as tax deductions, but the majority of resident owners had families living in southern cities with calls on the station income. Homestead improvement costs were also high, if owners wished to move from the old style of technology to powered homesteads and fenced paddocks.99 They had failed to change their open range herd management practices, and in the late 1960s were facing reduced profits. Lease holders relied instead on open range herd management, natural watering points with trucks allowing increased and easier turn off of cattle, and Social Security assisting to support non-workers.

During the late 1960s many stations were sold. In 1963 there were 342 leases and 123 businesses in the Kimberley, which contracted to 101 leases and 68 businesses in 1971. The horse musters continued, but droving stopped, except for Tableland and stations over the Phillips ranges, Mount Elizabeth and Gibb River. There the managers continued to live with small groups of Aboriginal people they had known since their childhood. They did not invest in labour-saving technology, hire white men for stockwork, strip their leases of cattle in response to market deviations or

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sell out to conglomerates. They started tourism enterprises, with the first group of ‘elderly people from Victoria’ arriving in 1966 to view the cave paintings, the country and the Aboriginal stockmen.

Napier Downs and Kimberley Downs were sold in 1969 to the Australian Land and Cattle company (ALCCO) which bought several stations in the west Kimberley. In 1971 at the beginning of a four-year ‘boom’ in cattle prices, the company held leases over four million acres of the Kimberley. These new American-based conglomerate companies signalled a change in ownership and management practices in the Kimberley which contributed to Aboriginal people’s dislocation from the stations. They were responding to changing markets for Australian beef, from the predictable but slow moving European market to the fast developing hamburger market in the United States. They invested in labour-saving technology such as fences, watering points, helicopter mustering, mobile yards, grain feed and trucks. They developed a system of labour management from Camballin, a central point on the Fitzroy River. Their managers were not paid or expected to cater to the welfare needs of non-working Aboriginal people or develop a homestead sphere with an ‘indigenous’ component to support a residential community. In 1970 the new and young Missus at ALCCO’s Napier Downs station was questioned and placed under pressure by Native Welfare to clarify pensioners’ payments and expenditure and to clean up the camps. She wrote that she ‘tried to get some information from various family groups but it is pretty well impossible - I can’t even find out some of the surnames let alone when or where they were born.’ The new Missus at Kimberley Downs had similar problems in 1969 when she wrote to Welfare that

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100 Kimberley Pastoral Industry Inquiry, 1985. See DOLA acc1764 files 3931/1964 and 3930/1964 for warnings from pastoral Board members that companies were allegedly stripping assets from leases.

101 Lacy Diaries, 2 July 1966.

102 W.D.Scott and co., ‘An Assessment of the needs and opportunities for the Aborigines Of The Kimberley vols. 1 and 2’, 1971, AADL.


105 NDG36/61, R. Wells to Derby District Office, 22 June 1970.
she couldn’t ‘explain or understand how the information about the pensioners was arrived at.’\textsuperscript{106}

\textbf{‘A general air of discontent’}

The managers at Napier Downs and Kimberley Downs were also openly arguing with Aboriginal people over their living and working conditions. The manager from Kimberley Downs complained to Native Welfare about the ‘lack of grip’ he had over workers and the ‘decline in discipline’. He was particularly unhappy about the tendency which seemed to be on the increase for ‘workers to drift from place to place, putting down no roots and acquiring no loyalty’.\textsuperscript{107} The teams under the leadership of Mordungali threatened to walk off the station in 1961, and again in 1968.\textsuperscript{108} Other walk-offs occurred in the 1940s and 1950s but managers eventually found the workers in the bush or they walked back to their families in the camps.\textsuperscript{109}

In 1961 the stock workers at Kimberley Downs left the muster camp after Mordungali punched a white stockman who was swearing at workers. The team rode away for an hour, then returned to work because they did not want to risk leaving the station and stock work.\textsuperscript{110} There were no rations in towns for Aboriginal station workers, transport was owned and controlled by the Boss or Native Welfare and Derby was outside their country. The Native Welfare officer reported that they had been ‘reprimanded’ for walking off and fighting. A similar situation occurred at Kurunjie station in 1963, when the whole muster team decamped one night and refused to return to work for the new manager, who also had to repay Social Security overpayments.

\textsuperscript{106} NDG36/36.

\textsuperscript{107} NDG36/61, Patrol Report, 20 May 1969.

\textsuperscript{108} NDG 36/36.


Harry Howendon, who worked as a horse breaker at Mount Hart, Napier and Mornington in the 1950s and 1960s, and returned to Mount Elizabeth to his own country to 'retire' in the 1980s, explained the walk-off strategy:

Howendon: If gardia no good, that manager, if him no good, well everybody get out, everybody walk-out, finish off that white fella. ...One time we can walk out and learnem that gardia. Well he can't do [his work], he been look around. We go back longa him. ...He do wrong for tucker, for clothes, tobacco anything, anything mean bugger, well every body walk out. Learnem him first.

...He tell me "You can run the camp, I'm finish I stop home." Alright I been run the camp, he been stop in the homestead....

I tellim "I never read and write. You know every read and write. You been longa school. Me, I never been longa school. My father been taken away. Well you can have this country, I'm gone." I been walk out. He been find me half way.

Same Morndi, he been havem plenty gardia. He been walk out everyfella. Some twofella have a fight, next time he been walk out. I never fight gardia, just walk out.... These days they been havem shout. I laying down in the one place, that's all. When I want tucker, I go for tucker.111

In 1968, when Morndingali and the stockmen threatened to walk off Kimberley Downs for better conditions, they also complained to Native Welfare that the manager treated people like the 'early days', saying that 'bread and meat is good enough for natives', and threatening 'to bush all natives for any more cheek', as he was 'not prepared to argue with natives'. Morndingali complained that domestics worked long hours for no cash and pensioners were not receiving their money, despite working on the station collecting wood and tending gardens. Morndingali was described by the Patrol Officer as a 'trouble maker' who had problems with the new manager's attitudes which 'could appear to contain prejudice'.112 He was labelled as one of the 'chip on the shoulder natives' in the Kimberley who were creating 'a general air of discontent'.

The young manager was replaced in late 1969 by Ned Delower, who had known most of the workers previously when he managed Napier Downs in the 1930s. His wife was also willing and experienced at managing the domestic sphere with

111 Harry Howendon, Tape (41) 5 April 1992.

Aboriginal women, and when interviewed in 1992 recalled the English and bush names and relationships of women and children on Tablelands and Napier Downs. But Native Welfare continued to report a ‘general air of discontent’, especially from women over their Child Endowment payments. They received $5.00 a week and rations while their endowment was transferred to the hostels where the children had been directed after the school closed. Again Delower and his wife showed lists of stores and pension expenditures to Native Welfare Officers, accounting for items bought and distributed to Aboriginal people. By 1971 there were three pensioners, no children, ten or twelve men and only two women living on the station. Most were not resident there during the wet season. Commissioner Gare asked for an investigation and an explanation from the owners about the wage levels on the station. Delower replied that there were no ‘trade unionists’ so the Award wage decision applicable to the Kimberley in 1969 did not apply to his station.

There were continual labour problems at Mount Hart from 1966. The manager recruited labour from Broome, Port Hedland and Wyndham because the resident workers left with the pensioners and went to other stations. The outside workers were reportedly ‘sophisticated’ and their complaints were taken very seriously. They were expected to eat with their hands and accept verbal abuse from the manager, who on one occasion arrived with a rifle at the stock camp and tied one of the workers to a horse. In 1968 new owners of Blina, Ellendale and Silent Grove (a portion of Beverley Springs), Thiess Holdings bought Mount Hart and gathered workers from the Derby reserve, including Morndingali for a short period. In 1969 Native Welfare attempted to recoup ration costs for the wife of an employee at Mount Hart, who was staying at the reserve. The manager wrote to Native Welfare

118 NDG36/57, File note, 1 August 1966
stating that he would no longer accept the ‘old system’ of rationing dependents of station employees. The officer replied that it was ‘hoped’ that ‘station management will accept moral responsibility of assisting their native employees in such matters’.

Over the next two years telegrams were exchanged between the manager and the district office, attempting to place workers on the station from the Derby reserve or from other stations, but Aboriginal people resisted. They now had an alternative form of subsistence in the form of ‘Welfare’, and the Derby reserves and a rising sense of ‘rights’ similar to those which Patrol Officer Pullen had aimed for in 1949 and 1950, but without the hoped-for concessions from employers or widespread confident self-expression from Aboriginal people. The transition years from frontier to ‘welfare’ assistance had not encouraged Aboriginal independence to speak up for themselves to management to change their conditions. Individuals who disagreed with government officials or station management were still viewed as potentially dangerous ‘trouble makers’ if they complained.

From 1968 even the small ‘battling’ station owners were criticised for not providing adequate living conditions for pensioners or wages to workers. Fred Russ at Gibb River who had rarely been officially questioned by Welfare Officers was described in 1970 as ‘patriarchal’ and unable to change his attitudes which allowed old people to live in ‘byres’ and ‘hovels’ and dress in ‘rags’. Frank Lacy at Mount Elizabeth was questioned about a pensioner account which had built up into a large sum of money, although there were no iron huts or ablutions for people on the station. Lacy wrote that this money was for their benefit and he had known one of them for 24 years. They had a record player and all they wanted. In 1970 he was criticised again for not providing any housing for workers and actively preventing an improvement in living and working conditions for Aboriginal people on the station. The Native Welfare District Officer reported:

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119 NDG36/57, Thiess Bros to Welfare Derby, 19 September 1969.


121 NDG36/56, Lacy to Welfare Derby, 4 October 1966.
As will be seen pay is quite wretched, and clearly, the workers are being exploited, but this is not as a result of evil opinions or a desire to degrade. The manager genuinely believes that money is an evil in the hands of the aboriginal. Something sure to be gambled or drunk away. The attitude is paternal. "I've been associating with them for 50 years. I know them better than I know the back of my hand. I look after them when they are sick. We all get on well together. It is your department and the like that is spreading discontent etc etc..." There seems to be no Labour Code to protect the employee, and it is difficult to see how employers can be made to move with the times.122

Commissioner Gare asked for an inquiry into Mount Elizabeth with detailed answers as to whether Aboriginal people on the station were 'happy' and 'aware of their entitlements and conscious acceptance of the lesser standard'.123 In addition he wanted to know if they were on their tribal country and if they were willing to move if offered more lucrative work. District officer Johnson replied that only one Aboriginal person in the whole central and northern ranges was a member of the AWU and that this station was more isolated than most.124 He added that although some workers had said they would move to get better wages and conditions, no fellow Pastoralist and Graziers Association members would accept Lacy's workers; they had no choice. The station utilised and cared for six single men who were placed there by Corrective Services. Old Jumbo, who had come to Mount Elizabeth with Lacy in 1946 was frightened of any prospect of change, and more concerned about what would happen to him if Frank Lacy was not there than about improving his conditions by moving elsewhere. Gare referred the matter to the Department of Labour and National Service for investigation.125 It was dropped three months later as a hopeless undertaking that would not 'do any good'.126

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123 NDG36/56, CNW to Northern Division, 21 June 1971.

124 NDG36/56, Kevin Johnson to CNW, 1 July 1971.

125 NDG36/56, CNW to Arbitration Inspector, Department of Labour and National Service, 7 January 1972.

‘A very effective labour exchange’

Aboriginal people’s residency patterns began to change noticeably around 1961 as town-based employment increased, offering wages ten times those on stations, and Social Security benefits provided further income for the community to survive outside the stations. From 1961, one of the Derby town reserves became known as the pensioner reserve while an official ‘transient’ reserve was gazetted nearby. This reserve began to increase in size as footwalking ‘holidays’ to the river or another station were transformed into wet season layoffs to town reserves, and inmates and patients from the leprosarium or hospital were also permitted to camp there rather than being transported to stations. Native Welfare staff were concerned at their lack of control of station people who formed a ‘constant drift of natives in and out of towns’ where there were some rations, some age pensioners, children and women following their children to towns.

Stations were also complaining that they were ‘beginning to lose workers’ who moved to town, to work at the Derby wharf, the Native Hospital, the general hospital, butcher shop, private houses and to assist with building projects funded by Commonwealth monies, such as an ablution block and plumbing for sections of the Derby reserve. Visitors from the Gibb River road stations were also meeting Mowanum residents who were closely related but they or their parents had been dispersed through the frontier and work commitments. The transfer of Sunday Island mission to Derby in 1962 further reinforced the trend away from isolated missions and communities toward towns and the opportunities for socialising and reconstituting relationships between Bardi, Nyigina, Worrora and Ngarinyin people.

The ‘flood of money’ from Social Security benefits alarmed Commissioner Gare, who believed that Aboriginal people were learning the ‘worst possible social education’ and becoming ‘parasites’. He demanded that Native Welfare Field Officers take ‘drastic action’ and refuse to provide rations to anyone who was eligible for a Social Security pension who did not have normal expenditures like

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127 ARAD 1961, MS AADL.

128 NDG1/1/1b, Native Welfare Circular, 11 November 1962.
rent, power bills and water rates. He specifically targeted single people without children and any Aboriginal person who lived in shared reserve housing, ‘tents’, or ‘humpies’. This category encompassed most Aboriginal people in the Kimberley in the early 1960s. In 1962 there were only two Aboriginal families in their own housing and one in State housing, in Derby. In 1963 there were 14 pensioner huts and an iron unclad pensioner eating hall on one reserve. The ‘transient’ reserve had only tin humpies to house all Aboriginal people who worked in town and were ‘permitted to live on the reserve’ or who were visiting town and permitted to camp for short periods. The transitional housing program, which was designed to move people from reserves to integrated suburbs was not instituted in Derby until late 1966. Even then it was not directed at ‘station transients’ for fear that Aboriginal people would stop wanting to work and would sit down on the reserves to live from the communal distribution of pension moneys.

Opening a school on Kimberley Downs station in 1964 encouraged some adults from there and stations nearby to stay on the station with their children during the work season, but Aboriginal people continued to move into town for the wet season layoff. By 1964 the ‘transient camp’ was overcrowded with at least 20 permanent old age pensioners and 20 ‘families’ living in tents and humpies. Native Welfare Officers drew up a list of reserve regulations:

1. No drinking.
2. No gambling for stakes.
3. Cleanliness.
4. Dogs to be kept on chain.
5. Houses to be kept clean and tidy.
6. All residents must be clean and neatly dressed.
7. Proper use of toilets and laundry.
8. Conduct well mannered and orderly, fighting and arguments are not to take place.
9. The reserve is not for idle persons. Each inhabitant must have employment.

ARAD 1961, MS AADL.
10. Each resident must abide by the instructions of the Native Welfare Officer and the Reserve Caretaker.\textsuperscript{130}

Workers and their families were also being displaced from stations for the wet season breaks by managers who refused to provide rations during work breaks and transported them to town instead. Native Welfare Officers worked to offset movements of people into the reserve by functioning as ‘a very effective labour exchange’ and using the Flying Doctor plane for transport to remote stations.\textsuperscript{131} The majority of station files have a collection of telegrams between managers and Native Welfare Officers which started in 1959, and finished in about 1969, from employers seeking specific skilled workers who were camping in Derby at the reserve or were on short-term contracts at other stations. The District Officer noted in 1961 that the ‘demand for labour in the west Kimberley still exceeds supply, indeed, that for able bodied men is so great as to be embarrassing.’ This comment was repeated in 1962 and 1963. As early as 1956, the manager at Blina, next door to Kimberley Downs and adjacent to the main road from Derby to Fitzroy Crossing, asked for any workers at all, ‘even elderly people for the garden would be a help.’\textsuperscript{132} The manager had sacked Ginger Warreebeen after he was injured on Sunday while walking in the bush. Warreebeen’s parents left as well, walking to Napier Downs and eventually moving to the Derby reserve.

Len Connell, who employed Jack Dale for years as his off-sider, reported in 1962 that managers needed to be protected from ‘these smart blacks’ who walked away from muster camps in the middle of the night.\textsuperscript{133} He had no workers at all and would not be able to muster unless some were found and flown to Mount Hart. Other managers in the West Kimberley were more specific and demanding. One

\textsuperscript{130} NDG31/1, Regulations Derby Reserve, 4 August 1964. See also Haebich’s description of a similar process for Kattanning reserve when an agreement was drawn up in 1913 to control behaviour of reserve residents and counter protests by white town residents. The regulations stated that ‘they must be good’, no drinking, no gambling, no firearms, no ‘loafers’ and no young men to eat old people’s rations. Anna Haebich, ‘For Their Own Good’: Aborigines and Government in the Southwest of Western Australia 1900-1940, Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1988, pp. 145-146.

\textsuperscript{131} ARAD 1961, MS AADL.

\textsuperscript{132} NDG36/8, Welfare to Blina Manager, 15 February 1956.

\textsuperscript{133} NDG12/8, Len Connell Silent Grove to Native Welfare Derby, 23 February 1962.
telegraphed the District Office for 'Horsemens preferred with wives no duds' and another for 'clean half-castes' for domestic work.\textsuperscript{134} The Kimberley Downs manager asked for one 'good house girl (1/2 caste to FB)' and four stock boys, 'wives acceptable'.\textsuperscript{135}

During this period of extreme labour shortage, Frank Lacy went to Halls Creek with his head stockman Jumbo, to try to find more workers who, being related to Jumbo might move to Mount Elizabeth. Lacy noted that everyone refused to move, 'there was no hope'.\textsuperscript{136} A pastoral trainee scheme also failed because pastoralists would not enter into a formal agreement with an Aboriginal worker unless they had greater rights to 'discipline' the trainees.\textsuperscript{137} Young pastoral trainees were walking off stations, unwilling to work for a trainee's wage or accept the conditions. According to the Divisional Superintendent, the trainees' parents did not want them to be placed with station Bosses for long periods without being able to contact their families. Derby and Fitzroy reserves continued to grow, despite most experienced workers being re-employed for short periods each muster season.

By 1968 the Native Welfare District Officer for the Kimberley, who was based in Derby, reported that young men were not staying at stations after being sent there from town.\textsuperscript{138} Some officers began to question their role as an employment agency for work at below award wages and award conditions, and their role became increasingly one of removing and caring for children who were committed by a court to the care of the Child Welfare Department (represented in the Kimberley until 1972 by the Native Welfare Department). In 1968 there were 1,295 Aboriginal children labelled as Wards of the State, with almost half of them in missions or state-run institutions. The Native Welfare District officer reported that committals were increasing as younger generation parents moved away from the stations.

\textsuperscript{134} NDG12/4, Manager Mt Anderson, 2 December 1962.
\textsuperscript{135} NDG12/4.
\textsuperscript{136} Lacy Diaries, 12 December 1966.
\textsuperscript{137} 'Divisional Superintendents Conference Meeting Minutes', 19-23 June 1967, AADL.
\textsuperscript{138} NDG12/4.
because they would not accept the old system of work and living conditions.\textsuperscript{139} Committals of children increased with the increasing number of people moving into the town reserves where they lived in squalid temporary huts which were not ‘suitable homes’. On the other hand, new and improved dormitories were built in 1968 and 1969 to increase the capacity of the Catholic hostel, Saint Josephs and the UAM hostel in Derby.\textsuperscript{140}

\textbf{‘Wait and see’}

The Pastoral Award Wages decision, made in 1967 but not applicable to the Kimberley until the 1969 work season, applied to Australian Workers Union members and not to ‘full-blood’ natives employed as station hands unless they held a Certificate of Citizenship.\textsuperscript{141} Women were relegated to the sphere of ‘domestics’ and were not considered relevant to the Pastoral Award hearings.\textsuperscript{142} The Commonwealth and the Pastoralists and Graziers Association had successfully argued during the 1965 hearings that Aboriginal people - especially those in the Kimberley - were not socially or culturally ready for a strict wage system and that the State and Federal governments were not ready to replace the pastoral station ‘welfare’ system with settlements and town-based services.\textsuperscript{143} They were given three years to prepare for the introduction of Award wages and conditions, and the possible mass movement of Aboriginal people away from stations. In the Kimberley the State and Federal governments adopted a policy of ‘wait and see’, increasing town based services and surveillance of children and old people, without due consideration for the consequences of their policies on the social fabric of station communities.

\textsuperscript{139} ARAD 1968, MS AADL.

\textsuperscript{140} ARAD 1968 and 1969, MS AADL.

\textsuperscript{141} ‘Department Native Welfare Instruction Manual’, 1967, AADL.

\textsuperscript{142} ‘Variation- Pastoral Industry Award’, CAR case no. 1669 of 1969, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{143} ‘Cattle Station Industry (Northern territory) Award 1951’, CAR case no. 830 of 1965, p. 1173.
Throughout the considerable public debate over Award wages to Aboriginal people from 1965 to 1969, Native Welfare Officers were advised by the Commissioner not to get involved in wage issues but to inform Aboriginal people of their rights and 'discretely assist' them to go to a union representative.\textsuperscript{144} Similar advice had been given in 1965 when the Derby District Officer asked if the Native Welfare Department could enforce a minimum standard of food and living conditions which met health regulations, even if it couldn't enforce a minimum wage. The Commissioner replied to all Departmental Officers that it had been proved in principle and practice that it is better for the Department not to interfere. Even if there were regulations to cover these aspects they would be extremely difficult to enforce. ...setting minimum standards is all that can be expected.\textsuperscript{145}

The Department nevertheless recognised some responsibility for informing and assisting Aboriginal people which existed under the 1963 Native Welfare Act:

to exercise such general supervision and care in respect of all matters affecting the interests and welfare of natives as the Minister in his discretion considers most fit to assist in their economic and social assimilation by the community of the state and to protect them against injustice, imposition and fraud.\textsuperscript{146}

The Native Welfare Department's Instruction Manual stated that it was the Department's duty to report any 'glaring case of non-compliance with industrial awards' but not to interfere.

In 1969 the Native Welfare Department, in conjunction with the AWU and the Department of Labour and Industry printed and distributed thousands of copies of a pamphlet to explain the Award to Aboriginal workers.\textsuperscript{147} Commissioner Gare was pessimistic about the Award, the pamphlet and union enthusiasm to represent Aboriginal workers. After Father McKelson from La Grange wrote of the absence of union representatives on stations in the Kimberley and a 'grave undercurrent of


\textsuperscript{145} 'Divisional Superintendent's Conference Meeting Minutes', 21-25 June 1965, AADL, P. 12.

\textsuperscript{146} Section 7(f) of Native Welfare Act no. 79 of 1963.

\textsuperscript{147} AD62/1965, 'Pastoral Industry Award; What it means to you and what you should do', DNW, 1969.
unrest’ amongst Aboriginal people, Gare replied that Native Welfare could not get closely involved:

heavenly intervention would be of assistance in conducting an educational program for Aborigines on the rights and responsibilities of union membership and the provisions of the Pastoral Industry Award.\textsuperscript{148}

The pamphlet (see below) instructed Aboriginal people that they were now ‘employees’ and the Boss was now an ‘employer’. It described their rights to holiday pay, sick pay and wages, and the Boss’ right to deduct wages for food, clothing and housing. In 1970 Native Welfare reported that about 50\% of employers paid equal wages to people but very few Aboriginal people were unionised. A large proportion of Aboriginal workers in the Kimberley were on ‘slow workers’ allowance and not receiving award wages. Officers were reminded that it ‘cannot be too forcibly emphasised that this Department has no jurisdiction over the application of this award’.\textsuperscript{149}

There was also confusion amongst Welfare Officers about Aboriginal people’s eligibility for unemployment benefits. In 1968 Native Welfare Officers registered their concern that the trend for stations to lay off workers for the wet season, transport them to town to register for Social Security and then re-employ them for two or three months was increasing. Welfare policy at that time was for Departmental Officers not to give out rations, while Social Security guidelines continued to exclude seasonally employed from receiving a benefit during the layoff period.\textsuperscript{150} Applicants resident on missions were also ineligible for unemployment benefits. Native Welfare Officers were instructed that there were no changes to be made to eligibility criteria for unemployment benefits to provide support for Aboriginal people moving or being dismissed from their stations, after the application of the Award in late 1968: unemployment benefits were for ‘normal’ communities where people were able to work on a yearly basis. They were also informed that refusal to move to find work outside a tribal boundary or a mission would also preclude applicants from receiving benefits. The same applied if they

\textsuperscript{148} NDG11/3b, CNW to Fr McKelson, 23 July 1969.

\textsuperscript{149} NDG1/1/1c, Instruction to Field Officers, 1967.

\textsuperscript{150} ‘Divisional Superintendent’s Conference Meeting Minutes’, 1968, AADL.
in this award
you
are known as the

EMPLOYEE

and

the BOSS

is the

EMPLOYER

CHARGES FOR ACCOMMODATION AND KEEP

If you are employed without keep and the boss provides you with a house or accommodation you must look after it and will discuss with you how much rent you must pay each week. This will be put in writing, the same as for people that live in houses in town.

If the boss sells you meat from the Station he cannot charge more than 5 cents a pound for it and it must be good meat, but if he buys meat from the store for you, then you must pay the store price.

If the Station has a store the boss must display a list of prices and you should check to see that you do not buy very expensive items when cheaper ones will do; particularly with clothing items.

If you are employed with keep, this includes "Good and sufficient living accommodation and Good and sufficient rations for yourself." Most of the goods you should be given are shown on the list, however, sometimes they are not always available and you have to go without a few things until more stores arrive. All food must be properly cooked and served, although this cannot always be in a dining room because you may be in a muster camp a lot of the time.

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THE BOSS CAN DEDUCT MONEY FROM YOUR PAY FOR ALL THESE THINGS

Plate 4 - Pastoral Industry Award pamphlet

*AD62/1965, 'Pastoral Industry Award; What it means to you and what you should do', DNW, 1969.
were not formally employed, or not likely to be employed. Departmental Officers were informed that this policy ‘precludes the payment of Unemployment Benefit or the issue of Departmental relief to persons while they are resident on pastoral properties’.\textsuperscript{151} In 1970 at the beginning of the mineral boom in the Pilbara, there were only four people placed on unemployment benefits of 176 applicants from the entire north and northwest regions. In January 1971 the number had increased to 66 receiving benefits of 248 registered as unemployed.\textsuperscript{152}

The policy of ‘qualified segregation’, which had been in force from 1961, continued throughout the 1960s, with the result that facilities for Aboriginal people on the Derby reserves and in Derby township failed to keep up with the expanding population. Qualified segregation permitted Native Welfare to manage and control reserves without providing services which met a ‘normal’ suburban standard as was demanded under the nationwide policy of assimilation. In 1967 there were 59 State Houses in the whole Kimberley region which were occupied by Aboriginal people who had shown that they had reached the ‘requisite social standard’ to occupy a house. In the 1969 wet season, the Derby reserves held 306 adults and an unknown number of children.\textsuperscript{153} One hundred people shared 13 ‘dwellings’ in the camping reserve. Although Native Welfare’s stated policy was to house families with children, there were not enough houses.

Problems of control, hygiene and laziness preoccupied Native Welfare Officers. In 1970 one officer was severely reprimanded for refusing to supervise a twice-weekly reserve clean-up which was initiated prior to a Ministerial visit.\textsuperscript{154} She wrote that it was an invasion of privacy to check that a woman with six children, in

\textsuperscript{151} NDG1/1/1c, Instruction to Field Officers, 1967. This is followed by Circular Instruction to all Field Officers, no. 1 of 1968, which calls for the registration of all employed Aboriginal men turning twenty in the next six months for National Service. Unemployment benefits were not granted to Aboriginal people living on stations in the Northern Territory in 1976. Owen Stanley, ‘Aboriginal Communities On Cattle Stations In Central Australia’, p. 164.

\textsuperscript{152} Scott and co., ‘An Assessment of the needs and opportunities for the Aborigines Of The Kimberley’, 1971.

\textsuperscript{153} NDG31/1, Children were not officially recorded.

\textsuperscript{154} NDG31/1, Kevin Johnson to Field Officer Derby, 17 June 1971; continuing correspondence on NDG1/4/1b.
a one-roomed hut with no furniture, ‘cleaned up’. The reserve clean-up went ahead to ensure that ‘indiscriminate “camping” of unemployed ranks’ was discouraged and to improve ‘living conditions’. Despite assisting people on the reserve to appoint ex-head stockmen as ‘councillors’ to manage community affairs, the senior men were seen to be:

no more able than other members of the group except that they possess some authority amongst their people - The blind may lead the blind only as long as he is himself is led. 155

Native Welfare Officers used their authority to control Aboriginal people so that conditions on the reserves did not continue to deteriorate. Car bodies were forcibly removed from the reserve, although the Department sought Crown Law advice in case they were infringing reserve dwellers’ rights. The advice was that, although Section 23 of the Native Welfare Act provided for consent to be given by a ‘Native’ prior to the Commissioner disposing of his or her property, the Derby reserve was also an institution under the Act, which meant that all residents were inmates and were liable to punishment or eviction if they refused to follow the directions of the reserve manager or Welfare Officer. 156

During the next wet season 200 people came into Fitzroy Crossing for the wet season break after station managers refused to provide them with rations. They had no accommodation, work or food. Fitzroy Crossing had no facilities for visitors and a very small number of reserve huts for adults attached to or visiting children at the UAM hostel. Social Security conceded to benefits being paid to the workers who had been laid off. In an attempt to prevent further mass lay-offs for the wet season the Native Welfare Department informed all station owners in 1971 that:

Social Security (unemployment benefits) will be paid to Aborigines on stations to avoid the wet season layoffs which have accompanied the pastoral award for native workers. Benefits will allow them to stay on property and be ready and on hand for start of season. 157

155 NDG31/1, Kevin Johnson to Field Officer Derby, 17 June 1971.

156 NDG1/4/1b, Crown Law to CNW, 14 November 1969.

157 NDG36/57, Kevin Johnson Circular to all stations.
Unfortunately, all the paper work was again the responsibility of station managers, as there were few patrols to the stations and a Social Security office was not opened in the Kimberley until 1975. Very few managers were prepared to continue their ‘welfare’ support role for a community of Aboriginal people on the ‘dole’ and other benefits, and under the potential scrutiny of Social Security. Aboriginal people were also trying to maintain social continuity with their children and old people. Women, in particular, stayed in towns in camping reserves. In 1966 there were 373 women recorded as employed in the pastoral industry in the Derby west Kimberley region, dropping to 230 in 1970.\textsuperscript{158} In 1971 there were no women recorded as employed in the pastoral industry in the west Kimberley. Once again, with a shift in station and government relations, women were written out of work in the pastoral industry. The total numbers of people employed by the pastoral industry in the Kimberley dropped accordingly from 1003 in 1970, to 685 in 1971. At that time Aboriginal women were receiving from $2.00 to $5.00 per week plus keep as a domestic on a pastoral station and from $10.00 to $20.00 in hotels.\textsuperscript{159} Aboriginal men received $20.00 to $30.00 per week for the increasing amount of fencing work which was being undertaken in the region and which changed the nature of pastoral shepherding and stock work.

**Negotiating from the Derby reserve**

Campbell Allenbrae came to the Derby reserve in about 1955.\textsuperscript{160} He was in the leprosarium from 1949 to 1955 and was discharged to the Derby reserve.\textsuperscript{161} He, his wife, brother and family had dispersed from Kurunjie to Gibb River and Beverley Springs in 1957 after their first Boss, Scotty Salmond, died.\textsuperscript{162} His wife was old Charcoal’s daughter. Her country, like her father’s, was just north of Gibb

\textsuperscript{158} ARAD 1967 and 1970, MS AADL.

\textsuperscript{159} Scott and Co., ‘An Assessment of the needs and opportunities for the Aborigines Of The Kimberley’, pp. 11-17.

\textsuperscript{160} Campbell Allenbrae, Tape (57) 2 March 1992.


\textsuperscript{162} Campbell Allenbrae, in Munro, *Emerarra*, pp. 35-42.
River station on the Mount Hann reserve.\textsuperscript{163} She had also been trained as a stock woman by Scotty Salmond in the 1930s but was crippled in a horse fall while Allenbrae was inside the Leprosarium. They were re-united at the Derby reserve. From 1958, Allenbrae was moved from station to station working for managers who telegrammed Native Welfare in Derby for workers. He described each move as a move to various relations and their country, not as move for work.\textsuperscript{164} His wife's family worked at Beverley Springs near her mother's country. Another move to Mount House brought Allenbrae close to some of his own relations from Kurunjie who worked under Billy King as head stockman, but again his wife asked to move back to her mother's family at Beverley Springs.

To get to Beverley Springs he accepted work with Native Welfare, plumbing a new section of housing in Derby so he might buy a vehicle. From there he was sent out alone to the east Kimberley to break horses, and then on to Oobagooma station.\textsuperscript{165} The station was owned by doctors Elphinstone, Holman and Davidson, with a fourth share owned by the manager Doug Stewart. Allenbrae knew the doctors from the leprosarium. They asked him to work at Oobagooma for them and flew him out on the Flying Doctor plane from Halls Creek. They also arranged for his wife to follow.\textsuperscript{166} He came to the reserve again during a wet season in the mid 1960s and found his classificatory brother-in-law, Jack Dann also at the reserve. Jack and his wife Rita Laylay moved from Kimberley Downs in about 1967, after the school closed. They also had trouble with transport, and arranged to leave the station after a race meeting in town, without confronting the manager.

Allenbrae had not met his brother-in-law before. Jack Dann's father had been taken from the Isdell River region in the early days by police and had not returned to his country to re-meet his brother Charcoal. Dann was also Morndingali's and Weeda Munro's classificatory son. He had brother-in-law obligations to Allenbrae. As Allenbrae explained:

\textsuperscript{163} Campbell Allenbrae, Interview notes, NB3, p. 39.

\textsuperscript{164} Campbell Allenbrae, Tape (57) 2 March 1992.

\textsuperscript{165} NDG36/67, Noted as Campbell Cambellay in 1960 and Campbell Allinbar in 1962.

\textsuperscript{166} Campbell Allenbrae, Tape (57) 2 March 1992.
We sitting down, at reserve. There was one house, long one. He got a kitchen front. Nother quarter camp, small house on that boab tree. ...Jacky didn’t let me go. That his sister, you know, what I married. I couldn’t go, we only just meet first time. I couldn’t go anywhere. I was staying there. Right, this welfare, one old fella.

Question: Pullen? Beharrell?

Allenbrae: Beharrell, that’s it. He give me ration. And he said “I got some one looking for boy. You want to go out to work on station, Christmas Creek.”...

Well I work there, finish. Well he [manager] said “You got any other work? Some one looking for boy. You can go to next bloke.” 167

Increasingly during the 1960s Allenbrae’s wife found herself in the reserve surrounded by other women stock riders like Weeda Munro, Daisy Beharrell, Mabel King from Mount House and Maudie Lennard from Meda, and their children and old people. Native Welfare Officers noted that there was a process of ‘urbanisation of women and children’ occurring in Derby in 1961. 168 Able-bodied and skilled stockmen took temporary contract work at different stations and were being treated like independent units of labour by Native Welfare and by employers, but without access to Unemployment Benefits. 169 Allenbrae was torn between being ‘humbugged’ by ‘Welfare’ to work anywhere across the Kimberley, or leave his wife and relations on the reserve:

I told my wife, I gonna go back to station. Wife was thinking all the time, he didn’t want to go back. He thinking some one give me job somewhere, he lost me. He on his own.

He think hard all the time “What I gonna do.”

“Alright I look around what I gonna do.”

My wife was make me sorry. 170

Weeda Munro came to the Derby reserve in 1966 and applied for child endowment to look after her foster children from Kimberley Downs station. When the station school closed in 1966, the three children had been placed by Welfare in the Derby

167 Campbell Allenbrae, Tape (57) 2 March 1992.

168 ARAD 1961, MS AADL.

169 ARAD 1970, MS AADL.

170 Campbell Allenbrae, Tape (57) 2 March 1992.
hostel and on a nearby stations as a trainee domestic and stockman.\textsuperscript{171} Weeda Munro resided at the Derby reserve living in a ten-foot by ten-foot iron hut with a cement floor. She gained access to one child for a short period, but was also asked to pay more than she had received in endowment money, for the child’s clothing bill at the hostel. Morndingali was offered work as a contract musterer at Mount Hart station in 1967 where Weeda Munro was born; she soon followed.

Other older stockmen and women along the Gibb River road took up paid work in the 1960s at Native Welfare’s insistence. Morndingali described work as a plumber’s assistant on the reserve and on the Main Roads during his ‘holiday break’ from the stations. Without unemployment benefits or housing and the Native Welfare Department trying to rid their office of rationees, he had little choice about accepting work, despite the social costs of leaving families at the Derby reserve. In 1972 Morndingali was sent by Native Welfare to Kuri Bay pearl farm with 36 other Aboriginal men. He worked for a $50.00 wage, which was not an award wage but higher than the pastoral Award of $32.00, and in conditions which he had not experienced before: ‘three cooked meals per day, beds, sheets, a beer ration and regular breaks from work.’\textsuperscript{172} The Native Welfare Officer reported that although wages were not award and would not satisfy ‘the ardent trade unionist’, they were better than the stations and the standard of food would never have been seen before by the station men. Nevertheless, Aboriginal workers from Derby tried to leave the pearl farm and return to the reserve. This was trivialised by Native Welfare Officers and, because the men left their place of work they were ineligible once again for unemployment benefits. The ‘news of fresh scandals from home’, noted by the Native Welfare Officer as a disruptive and worrying influence on the men at Kuri Bay, reflected serious social dislocations which were occurring in the towns. The communities on reserves were refugees who began to focus on trying to get back to their country and away from the problems of being crowded together in a reserve in land which they did not own.\textsuperscript{173} In response to men refusing to return to Kuri Bay,

\textsuperscript{171} PF821/1963.

\textsuperscript{172} Munro, \textit{Emerarra}, pp. 141-145; NDG11/2/b.

\textsuperscript{173} NDG11/2/b.
the Welfare Officer in Derby was instructed that he could not direct Aboriginal people to work anywhere if they did not agree to go.\textsuperscript{174}

Evelyn Bidd was another stockwoman from the north Kimberley whose mother was cook for the Isdell police camp. She was a trained stockrider but stayed in camp from the 1950s to look after a growing number of children. She tried to keep working with her husband during the early 1970s. Despite taking work where ever it was offered - at Mount Hart, Mount House and then Mount Barnett - she and her husband came to town in 1973, to be near their children: 'Only for kids we come to town.'\textsuperscript{175} She was adamant that she and her husband wanted to stay on the stations, regardless of pay and conditions but they could not risk leaving the children in dormitories and hostels.

Weeda Munro applied for an old age pension in 1971 but her Native Welfare file listed her as only 47 years old.\textsuperscript{176} She was also refused a disability pension on the grounds that she was fit and able to work. In 1952, she and Morningali were listed as 52 and 48 years old respectively.\textsuperscript{177} In 1962 they were listed as 54 and 48 years old. Each assessment reduced Weeda Munro’s age and placed her outside Social Security benefits. Morningali was granted a Citizenship Certificate in 1969 which allowed him claim Award wages if he joined the Australian Workers Union, and to drink alcohol.\textsuperscript{178} Weeda Munro was granted a Citizenship Certificate in 1970. Like so many Aboriginal people, she had no idea of her age and relied on either station managers or ‘Welfare’ to help her apply for Social Security benefits. They in turn consulted their files, or other pastoralists or missionaries who might help with information. A confusing range of birth dates, names and sometimes family members reflect the Department’s own confusion and the process of Aboriginal people’s entry into the welfare system.

\textsuperscript{174} NDG11/2/b, CNW to Welfare Derby, 21 February 1972.

\textsuperscript{175} Evelyn Bidd, Interview notes, NB9, p. 62.

\textsuperscript{176} PF821/1963.

\textsuperscript{177} NDG26/51, Patrol Report Meda Station, 1952.

\textsuperscript{178} Certificate granted to Bill Munro, GG 8 August 1969; Munro, Emerarra, p. 139.
The social and economic conditions of the pastoral industry changed dramatically on most stations in the 1960s, and managers and owners who held large leases near towns opted for a fencing program and temporary, unencumbered labourers who worked for a maximum four months of the year. The financial costs of providing adequate support for a dispossessed population of Aboriginal people were never realistically addressed or contemplated by governments. Despite being granted a special exemption from the application of the Pastoral Industry Award so that government services in towns and settlements could be provided for previously segregated station communities, the Western Australian government adopted a wait-and-see policy, and failed to provide adequate or appropriate staff, housing or support for Aboriginal people moving away from stations. Issues of control dominated state and federal welfare policies throughout the period from 1903 to 1972, while fear of what might happen next undermined Aboriginal people’s relations with non-Aboriginal people.

The Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act of 1972, which replaced the 1963 Native Welfare Act, lifted legal restrictions on employment, movements out of the State, access to alcohol and to the full range of Social Security benefits, for all Aboriginal people - even the older ‘full-blood’ station people like Weeda Munro and her contemporaries. The Act catered for formalised consultation with Aboriginal representatives and leaders, reflecting the shift in government policy from assimilation to community development.\textsuperscript{179} Clauses in the 1963 Act Regulations, which had made it legal for anyone acting in the protective interests of Aboriginal people and on behalf of the Native Welfare Department to have access to Aboriginal people at all times, were barely altered.\textsuperscript{180} The new 1972 Act narrowed the access provisions to provide for all AAPA staff:

\begin{quote}
in the exercise of his powers and duties, ...to enter at any time into or upon any land or premises, ship or vessel, where natives are in any circumstances or where he has reasonable cause to suspect that natives may be found.\textsuperscript{181}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{179} Scott Bennett, \textit{Aborigines And Political Power}, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1989, pp. 28-29.

\textsuperscript{180} Regulations of Native Welfare Act 1963, clauses 14 (4) and 15, MS AADL.

\textsuperscript{181} ‘AAPA Act Regulations’, \textit{GG} 30 June 1972, clause 4 (2).
This clause gave expression to the continuing ‘protective’ and invasive relationship between all ‘gardias’ and Aboriginal people in the Kimberley, whether managers, ‘Welfare’, police or health, and in turn underpinned the whispered warnings that could be heard on my approaching the reserve in 1989 to begin this research: “Gardia coming, Gardia coming!”.

182 This was the title of my seminar paper at Murdoch University in 1991 introducing my thesis topic. David Trigger also draws attention to this warning in Queensland and uses it as a metaphor for Aboriginal people’s responses to Europeans and government agencies in north west Queensland. See further David, S. Trigger, ‘Whitefella Comin’: Aboriginal responses to colonialism in northern Australia, Cambridge University Press, 1992.
Conclusion

This thesis has examined through older Aboriginal people's life stories and written official documents the complex relationships and difficult circumstances which were negotiated from first contact in the northern and central Kimberley ranges between pastoral Bosses and Aboriginal people and then with 'Welfare'. It shows that although the pastoral system encouraged Aboriginal people to live on or near their own land, and supported a range of cultural continuities, it forced changes in social relations which many people could not resolve.

The image popularised by Ion Idriess in the 1930s, of Aboriginal people from 'over the ranges' in the Kimberley emphasised the benign nature of European colonisation to that date and the unfortunate but inevitable demise of Aboriginal culture. This thesis has shown that Aboriginal populations were decreasing in the 1930s due to disease, violence and disruption, but Aboriginal people were actively engaged in the settlement process and in developing the stations north of Derby.

The 'early days' provided an example of Aboriginal people's ability to survive the rise of the station system by aligning with white men through unspoken contracts of ownership and protection. The early days was a time of dramatic change for indigenous people, when Aboriginal men were gaoled in a systematic and intensive campaign against them by pastoralists and police from 1903 to 1909. In the 1920s a second wave of violent confrontation occurred, when Aboriginal men were identified by police and stockmen as 'trouble makers' for threatening to compete with them over women, children or resources. These were not just 'bush blacks' but people who had made contracts of survival which enabled them to be incorporated into the station system. Intra-group conflicts which could be mistaken for pre-contact violence peaked in the late 1920s and early 1930s in the northern region, in response to women's captivity in white stockmen's camps and the changing social dynamics of the region.

In untangling the complex processes of small group and individual negotiations which characterised the early days of contact in the north and central Kimberley from 1903 to 1936, there were not many pastoralist winners of the classic kind.
These 'pioneers' from 'over the ranges' lived on the geographic and social fringes of Australian society, occupying but not 'civilising' the region. They were not wealthy, they lived mostly with Aboriginal people including their own Aboriginal children. This thesis has endeavoured to present a picture of the development of the northern pastoral system, which balances black and white stories and is fair as well to the agents of the state who carried out its often misguided policies. Stories from Aboriginal people who worked on the northern stations, many of whom became Bosses' off-siders during this period, show that the station 'mob' was a complex entity which formed over a period of ten to fifteen years around a Boss and his Aboriginal assistants who helped to resolve tensions between pastoral work and obligations to land and relations.

Government policies not only failed to protect Aboriginal people but provided the legislative context for a climate of fear to emerge in the early days. In the northern and central ranges region of the Kimberley, the leprosy epidemic and isolation campaign at the Derby leprosarium extended the process of forced dispersals of bush people which had begun in 1903. The extent and nature of the disease made it a significant factor in reducing the northern bush populations and leading to a peculiarly isolated form of institutionalisation.

State and Federal Aboriginal Affairs practices and policies quarantined pastoral station groups from education, housing, rationing and other provisions which may have interfered with Aboriginal people's role on the stations, or threatened the Bosses patronage and the fragile peace which they had established by 1940. Policy developments from 1934 to 1948 also failed to recognise Aboriginal people's investment in the pastoral system or active engagement with pastoral work, reducing their role on stations to group dependency on managers. When the first cash payments to Kimberley Aboriginal pastoral workers was negotiated in 1950 it resulted in a wage fixing system with a 'pocket money' allowance and no minimum employer obligations for station managers or owners. It was part of a system of 'benevolent supervision' of Kimberley Aboriginal people which resulted in welfare authorities negotiating with pastoral interests over who was responsible for rationing Aboriginal people. Their role as workers was diminished and their attachment to land began to be replaced by a Welfare system.
Government programs for removing children to hostels and missions and the introduction of age pensions, both in the early 1960s, precipitated the movement of Aboriginal people toward towns and reserves where Welfare Officers and Social Security became the means of social and economic survival. Child endowment and age pensions were the first of the allowances given to Aboriginal people. Unemployment benefits were not provided for Aboriginal people until the 1970s. Some Kimberley Aboriginal people experienced sudden and forceful eviction from stations, while others were able to reorient their relationship toward towns and a Welfare economy more gradually. ‘Welfare’ and the restructuring of the pastoral industry contributed to these changes. By the 1960s the station system in the north and central Kimberley was an anachronism, although the isolation of the far north continued to allow the small community at Mount Elizabeth to make its transition to ‘Welfare’ without challenging the Boss.

Like the process of coming on to the stations, women’s roles were again significant in the move off and the dismantling of pastoral paternalism. In the 1960s women were categorised as non-workers and their obligations to their children were challenged and diminished by government policies and practices. As the old people and children became a focus for welfare intervention, moving to town reserves was a strategic response by communities to manage the new interventionary practices of the state and the lack of support on the stations.

Informants talked of their work on the stations, holiday time, living conditions and their contacts with ‘Welfare’ and towns. These were key aspects of their interactions and negotiations on which this research focused. By utilising oral testimony and working with Aboriginal people in a collaborative research relationship, I was consistently drawn toward a wide range of life story narratives - particularly stories of the period when they were children or before they were born. They used early days narratives to explain what happened in their lives to fashion their collective and individual histories in the pastoral industry and their relationship with white people after the early days and in the 1960s and 1970s. Through oral testimony, the period sometimes invoked by employers, some writers and some aboriginal people themselves - as the golden era of settled working relationships on the stations in the 1940s and 1950s - emerged as an era of fragile relationships and gradual recovery in a context of authoritarian control. The extent and significance of
the violence, uncertainty and recency of the early days were not recognised by incoming ‘Welfare’ authorities. There was a continuing focus on keeping Aboriginal people quiet and contained. This echoed through stockmen’s and policemen’s fears on the frontier and persisted throughout the period of hard work, and ‘settled’ relations, and on the reserves in the 1960s, producing a significant ‘continuity’ of practice: Aboriginal people’s flexible and pragmatic response to white people and their programs for reform.
Epilogue

After 1973 the Commonwealth and State governments increased their spending in the area of Aboriginal Affairs but did not keep up with demographic shifts which began in 1960 and swelled to resemble a refugee movement in the 1970s and 1980s. The lack of housing and other facilities in towns and settlements in the 1970s magnified the ill effects of moving off the stations. In the early 1980s, when Aboriginal people walked off five east Kimberley stations they refused to leave their country and move to town but camped nearby at a soak. Their actions were described in newspapers and by Aboriginal people as 'mass walk-outs' in protest against the living conditions on these stations. Television and newspaper coverage presented southern readers and viewers with a shocking contrast to their own urban expectations: humpies, car bodies and no water. Issues of exploitation and workers’ and civil rights, which had been raised in the late 1940s as a result of the Pilbara strike, were now being openly discussed in the Kimberley.

From 1975 to 1979 the Kimberley cattle industry went into 'crisis' following the collapse of the European beef market and price falls for hamburger beef to the United States. This caused a sharp down-turn in activities on all stations which did not lift until the late 1980s when live cattle markets were opened to Kimberley producers who could meet the standards required for that product. Muster activity on the leases declined to caretaking with minimal turn-off and maintenance. Cattle herd numbers reached their highest levels ever - 812,00 head - but resident indigenous and European populations on the leases plummeted as Aboriginal people sought refuge in towns, where they could survive on Social Security and be near their children and old people. A transitional housing scheme in Derby's 'back streets' began to service some of the 1,175 Aboriginal people in 1977, whilst the old reserves each held an average of 150 people. Over 300 people lived at

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2 Kimberley Pastoral Industry Inquiry; Final Report, Department Of Regional Development And North West, October 1985, p. 35.

3 ARAD 1977, MS AADL.
Mowanjum reserve and Broome’s reserves held almost 900. At Fitzroy Crossing 500 people were registered as living in town camps and Junjuwa reserve, with 700 people remaining on stations: in the Halls Creek region, 620 people lived on stations and 2,809 were officially resident in towns or reserves. By 1977 only a minority - 15.6% of the Kimberley Aboriginal population, were still resident on pastoral stations.

In the late 1970s Commonwealth and state governments began to support Aboriginal people’s movement away from towns and back to land they had occupied as station or mission communities. Small excisions were also made on some stations to allow some communities to remain on their land without having to move to towns. Looma Aboriginal community, for instance, was formed in 1974 15 kilometres from Camballin, where ALCCO staff were housed. In 1978 the Emanuel company agreed to small excisions on Christmas Creek and Gogo for indigenous communities to live on their properties, with community infrastructure provided by government grants and non-workers receiving Social Security benefits. Pantijen, near the old Munja settlement, was also transferred in 1975 to traditional owners living at the Mowanjum reserve in Derby.

Owners of under-resourced stations took the opportunity to sell out using the safety net offered by the Commonwealth’s Aboriginal Land Fund. Tick eradication programs in the 1980s, soil erosion and cattle prices added to pastoral industry woes. A small northern station earned as little as $4,500 from cattle in 1984, while a large station made $117,000. The Kimberley Pastoral Industry Inquiry in 1985 estimated that only 17% of Kimberley workers could be employed in the pastoral industry at its seasonal peak. It added that a large pastoral station could provide employment for 15 to 20 men but the support needed for 60 or more women and children who would form Aboriginal communities on stations had not been researched. The stations over the ranges were especially marginal:

> the original optimism held for the North Kimberley could not now be justified. ...Even operating costs may not be covered unless these are

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4 ARAD 1977.

kept to an absolute minimum, as in the case of small family-operated concerns. ...The Department of Agriculture believes the only feasible options for this area are ...release of parts of the area to family operators who are prepared to exist at near-subsistence levels. ...The result of thirty years of optimism, backed by significant research effort and plenty of true pioneering endeavour, is one of complete disappointment if one uses economic criteria to measure success.6

Gibb River station was transferred in 1987 to traditional owners, and Mount Barnett in 1988. In 1994 Tablelands was bought back by the government for Jack Jowan and Mick Jowalji’s group, which had never made the transition to town. Twenty-eight per cent of Kimberley pastoral stations were Aboriginal owned in 1993, but many leases had been further alienated from Aboriginal people.7 For instance, in 1971 AMAX Bauxite Kimberley consortium bought two northern pastoral leases, Doongan and Mitchell, to ‘help open up’ the north and support proposed mining activities on the Mitchell Plateau between Gibb River station and Kalumburu. The company planned a $100 million township where 3,500 residents would ‘command uninterrupted views’ of ‘bright blue waters dotted with islands’ off the rugged northern coast.8 The project did not develop beyond the initial temporary camp and exploration stage despite a special Act of Parliament to enable it to proceed. Oobagooma and Kimbolton stations on the west coast were transferred to the Australian Armed Services in the early 1970s, with sections gazetted as freehold in the process. Winjana National Park was excised from Kimberley Downs in 1975. Drysdale River National Park was created from the northern leases and parts of old Mount Hann reserve in 1978. Mount Hart and Beverley Springs stations were placed under the Department of Conservation and Land Management control in the early 1990s. Indigenous owners of that land have new Bosses to deal with.

Mornidingali and Weeda Munro were finally ‘retired’ to the Derby reserve in 1975 after 50 years of pastoral work. They moved into pensioner housing in 1976 with


7 Patrick Sullivan, “All Free Man Now”; Culture, Community and Politics in the Kimberley Region North-Western Australia, Canberra, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1995, p.15.

workers from Meda, Kimberley Downs, Mount House and Napier Downs. Later that year Morndingali spoke to the State Minister for Community Welfare, Norman Baxter and the Federal Minister Senator Cavanagh, as an ‘Aboriginal elder’ rather than a ‘trouble maker’. Respect from government and white people for indigenous cultural knowledge increased in this period but Morndingali and his wife and their respective families were not able to return to their country. The social and economic basis of pastoral paternalism had disintegrated and they had no Boss or lease to support continuous occupation of their land. They did, however, have a vehicle and a small excision on Napier Downs where young men and women went each dry season, to get out of town and conduct ceremonies.

The Boss and Missus remained at Mount Elizabeth, negotiating the changing expectations of the ‘mob’ who were now an ‘Aboriginal community’ but without separate title to their living area. There, the divisive topics of independence, rights and exploitation by station owners and managers which helped fracture relations between managers and communities on the majority of stations in the Kimberley, were still being worked out in the 1990s, and were directed at tourism and cultural knowledge rather than work, wages and the pastoral industry. Next door, at Gibb River and Mount Barnett stations, white employees and Aboriginal communities continue to struggle with the demise of the pastoral industry, an ‘invasion’ of tourists, and fears and expectations which were forged during the very recent frontier and honed by years of segregation.
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