

Book reviews

Kayang and Me by Kim Scott and Hazel Brown, 270pp, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, Western Australia, 2005, \$29.95

RENE BAKER FILE #28/E.D.P by Rene Powell and Bernadette Kennedy, 221pp, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, Western Australia, 2005, \$24.95

Kayang and me and *Rene Baker File #28/E.D.P* are both collaborative works combining individual Indigenous life stories in the form of oral narratives with analysis of the history of contact between European settlers and Indigenous people in Western Australia. Both works are valuable and moving contributions to the archive of Aboriginal first person life histories. Each can also be seen to address some of the difficulties that are raised about the historical status of oral histories, and each could be regarded as projects in 'trauma history' as conceptualised by Bain Attwood in *Telling the truth about Aboriginal history*.¹

Kayang and Me is co-authored by West Australian Indigenous writer Kim Scott, winner of the Miles Franklin and other literary awards, and Hazel Brown, a Noongar elder, born in 1925 at Kendenup. '*Kayang*', meaning female elder, is Brown's honorary title. She names her family as Wilomin people, from '*wilo*', the curlew. *Kayang and Me* interweaves the voices of the two co-authors, each identified by a contrasting typeface, comparable to the dialogic form developed by Jackie Huggins in *Auntie Rita*.² Kim Scott as both secondary voice and primary author is the 'Me' of the title. Scott explores complex questions about Indigenous identity for individuals of Aboriginal descent like himself who are 'relatively disconnected, dispossessed and assimilated', without experience of many aspects of disadvantage associated with being Aboriginal, and knowing little about their Aboriginal antecedents. Like the curlew, he writes: 'we become visible only when our eyes are opened to history'.

Rene Baker File #28/E.D.P is the story of Rene Powell of the Ngaanyatjarra people, born Rene Baker at Warburton Ranges in 1948. The co-authors met in 1978 at an East Perth refuge for homeless women where Bernadette Kennedy, a nun at that time, was working and Rene Baker was a resident. On the basis of their continuing friendship Powell persuaded an initially reluctant Kennedy to co-author this book.

Scott affirms the centrality of his unfolding relationship with Hazel Brown to his sense of self as Aboriginal and also as a writer: 'With Auntie Hazel I stood on the sandy shore of my indigenous heritage, and sensed something substantial and sustaining

1. Attwood 2005: 177-180.

2. Huggins, J and R 1994.

waiting for me to grasp, and yet the only means I had to do so was this laying out of words upon the page.' This cross-cultural paradox, explored in Adam Shoemaker's study of Aboriginal writing, *Black Words White Page*, is also conveyed by Hazel Brown's story of her forebears who adopted European systems to transmit their own cultural communications, sending 'Message sticks in stamped envelopes'.³

Scott's quest for identity involves extended listening to Hazel Brown's stories, supplemented by his own research, whereas few oral narratives are available to Powell: her search requires painstaking archival research into bureaucratic records, a task she delegates mainly to Kennedy. The circumstances of Powell's birth are complex. As the elder of twins, she was permitted to survive according to traditional Aboriginal law, whereas her brother should not have been. Rather than put him to death, the Aboriginal midwives decided to hand the younger twin over to the Warburton Ranges Mission. Later Powell's own file in the white bureaucracy was falsely annotated 'unwanted at birth', overriding the facts of the care she received within her family in her first four years until forcibly removed by white authorities. However, the statement was essentially true for her brother Ernest, who died without knowing the full story of his origins.

Kennedy's account of her persistent and probing investigation into the invasive bureaucratic procedures that so drastically impacted on Powell's life confirms the trust that Powell places in their collaboration. Kennedy not only narrates a record of bureaucratic inhumanity but also examines the relevant laws and questions the legality of what occurred even by the standards of the time. Kennedy also provides a brief outline of her own life story and Anglo-Celtic antecedents in the interests of transparency.

Hazel Brown's and Rene Powell's stories corroborate many aspects of Indigenous/white contact recorded in other Aboriginal life stories. Brown was born in an old packing shed; Powell and her twin brother were born in the bush 'near the airstrip', as Aboriginal women were not then permitted to give birth in white hospitals. Consistent with the persistence of Indigenous maternal genealogies, Brown knows the name of her mother, Nellie Limestone, and where she was from, and likewise her maternal grandmother, Mary Williams. She records the name of her Aboriginal father, Freddy Yiller (Roberts) but does not know the name of her grandfather, 'supposed to have been a white man'. Powell considers it irrelevant that her unknown father was white as she was fully accepted by her mother's Aboriginal husband.

Brown identifies her mother as one of the Stolen Generations, sent to the 'Carrolup Native Settlement' near Katanning. Her account of institutionalised neglect and abuse in her mother's early life concludes with the chillingly familiar words 'she never ever saw her mother again'. The identity-effacing operations of the settlement's management include coercing her mother to marry and also to change her name from Nellie to Sybil 'because there were too many Nellies around'.

The neglect experienced by Rene Powell as a mission child of the next generation proved to be life-threatening. She was removed from her mother in Warburton at four years old and placed some 500 kilometres away in Mount Margaret Mission. While resident there she suffered serious burns when her clothing caught fire: despite being close to death, and then scarred for life, at no point was her mother contacted and informed.

3. Shoemaker 1989.

Powell is also linguistically alienated from her community, being brought up on the mission to speak English only. When as a young adult she is reunited with her mother, they have no common language: her mother does not speak English and Rene has literally lost her mother tongue.

Brown herself grew up among her father's full-blood relations. She was saved from the Carrolup Settlement after her father's early death when her father's brother married her mother according to traditional law, and cared for the young family — an instance where Noongar custom circumvented white power.

Hazel Brown's opening words, 'I remember', introduce the book's major purpose in recording the hidden but preserved memories of Noongar people that when revealed, transform accepted white histories. Her initial story of men of her family going hunting also alludes to a massacre of Noongar people at Cocanarup in the 1880s. Although the full story is initially withheld, the atrocity casts a dark shadow over the narrative as a whole. As an adult Scott is put in touch with Hazel Brown by Noongar elders whom he met while coordinating an Aboriginal bridging course. The shadow of the Cocanarup massacre falls on him also: one elder, hearing that his family came from nearby Ravensthorpe, declares 'Oh, I hope not, for your sake.'

Born in Perth, Scott grew up mainly in Albany in a suburban government house, not far from the 'rubbish tip and the Native Reserve'. The first home he remembers had an unfinished floor, symbolising his shaky knowledge of his ancestry. Scott's father was the son of an Aboriginal mother who died when he was ten and a Scottish father who arranged boarding schools and a 'succession of stepmothers'. Although Scott's father told him to be proud of his Aboriginal descent, his only contacts with Aboriginal people during his 1960s childhood were associated with violent incidents. He saw himself as 'only ever on the fringe of a community which showed all the signs of being under siege'.

Process is important to Scott as he describes how 'Aunty Hazel' sorts through and explains family relationships to him, preferring to talk about Indigenous family history and stories from her childhood rather than her own adult life. He explains the mutually agreed process of tape-recording their conversations as a basis for his manuscript, a transparency not always adopted in earlier Indigenous life stories.⁴ Scott also cross-checks oral history 'against the scanty written records'.

Scott reviews aspects of West Australian contact history, finding primary sources for Indigenous family history in the writings of early British settlers Ethel Hassell, George Cheyne, John Septimus Roe and missionary Bishop Salvado. Scott reads these records critically, tracking significant phrases, 'first white man born', 'the last full blood aborigine', and 'our native'. But neither Scott nor Brown shy away from the ambiguities and divided loyalties of their Aboriginal ancestors who worked closely with white settlers. Scott concludes: 'I think Indigenous experience can encompass both pride and shame, and can even include complicity in processes of colonization.' Brown is also committed to 'bring it all out in the open', even the stories about forebear Bobbie Roberts, who 'worked against Noongar people' and became a police tracker.

4. For example, the text of Charles Perkins' *A Bastard Like Me* (1975) was, according to Perkins' biographer Peter Read, transcribed from tapes recorded by Ted Noffs, although this is nowhere indicated in the foreword by Noffs or by Perkins (Read 1990: 177).

Brown's contributions provide an Indigenous perspective on the colonial practice where Noongar people excluded from their own land by pastoralists were 'compensated' by government rations of poor nutritional value — sugar, tea, flour, tobacco. Brown records her family's income-generating work, dingo-trapping and sewing blankets, bags and boots from kangaroo skins to trade with white settlers. The family's resourcefulness is a recurrent theme, whether supplementing their diet with wild honey, making soap from emu fat and emu feather mattresses, hunting possums, making flour from seeds of the mangart tree or learning to drive a harvester. While acquiring much traditional knowledge, Brown was also learning to read, from cowboy books — taught by her mother.

Brown refuses to classify her occupation as a domestic servant, given that she also did farm work, drove a tractor, became a woolclasser and managed the farm while the owners went on holiday. She prides herself on honesty in words, and in work. Respect is an essential value. She tells of her countering of racist rebuffs and her local activism, including the painful process of securing the deregistration of the white doctor who refused to treat her baby daughter because he was playing golf: the child died. But Brown doesn't hesitate to criticise collaborations between white and Indigenous people where she considers power is wielded unfairly, including 'ATSIC and their black bureaucracy'.

She also commends a few white people for decent relations with Noongar people — the Browns, pastoralists who employed her father; the Wrights, missionaries who encouraged Indigenous self-reliance as well as providing medical services, schooling, clean water, and protection from official harassment; politician Kim E Beazley, who responded to her community's need for a clean water supply. Scott questions Brown's commendation of the pastoralists employing his relatives as farmhands on their own land but reluctantly concedes that Brown's experience with the Wrights' mission community was positive.

Brown records her experiences of community racism in Gnowangerup, where police harassment was common, Noongar people had to observe a curfew, were barred from cinemas and pubs, and where Aboriginal mothers were not allowed to attend inter-school sports days. She notes the alienating effect of jail on Noongars, most of whom, like her Uncle Booker never returned to their traditional land after imprisonment on Rottnest Island, because they were '*kanya-kanya*', ashamed and afraid.

Brown's narrative of the massacre at Cocaranup is consistent with the authenticating criteria identified by Deborah Bird Rose's informants in Northern Australia, although Scott's research fails to uncover any definitive first-hand written account.⁵ Brown as elder, has status as a reliable informant; she is specific about the location, sequence of events and the names of those involved, and also refers to human remains. She begins with an account of the rape of a 13-year-old Aboriginal girl by a white settler, in the context of regular abuses of Aboriginal women. She names the victim, the alleged perpetrator and the Aboriginal man who speared him in reprisal. According to Brown, government permission was then secured to kill 17 Aboriginal people from Ravensthorpe. However alternative Indigenous sources quoted by Scott state that over 30 people were killed, including people from Hopetoun and Jerdacuttup who were visiting

5. Rose 2003: 129–5.

for meetings about initiations and marriage. Brown states that the massacre site is now fenced off and belongs to the Boy Scouts. In recounting an occasion when she and her husband were driving past the area, she introduces an element of spirituality and mourning. A thick mist arose and covered the road: 'Must've been old people crying', she reflects.

Scott's contributions blend the autobiographical and scholarly, and gloss Brown's narrative. Although generally informative with interesting sources, these can be a little cumbersome compared with Brown's pithy reminiscences. As Brown teases him: 'We don't want to bore people, unna? We want to tell a good story. You should know that better than me, you s'posed to be the writer.'

Kayang and Me includes a glossary of Noongar words, a regional map, comprehensive bibliography but no index. At times more precise referencing would be useful, for example in relation to 'the infamous 1905 act and its amendments [which] institutionalised the disempowerment of Noongar people ... and created a fault line between Noongars and wadjelas [white people]'. Powell's and Kennedy's book reproduces actual documents, and provides details of the *Native Administration Act 1905-1947* and later amendments, although Kennedy describes the difficulty she had in accessing this basic information in archives and libraries.

Both books convey irremediable loss. Rene Powell states her aspiration to rebuild her relationship with the Aboriginal community at Milyirritjarra (Warburton). But she can never recover the relationship with her mother broken by the white bureaucratic interventions. Brown, whose knowledge of oral tradition stretches back to the early history of contact in south Western Australia, from whalers and sealers to Indigenous participants in white agricultural development, does not minimise her people's grievous loss of cultural heritage and damage to land, the destruction of waterholes, land clearing and salinisation. She asserts the power of Indigenous memory: 'They can destroy our country but they can never destroy the memories of it. They can change it, but they can't change what we know about it.' But at times her capacious memory of relationships, sites, re-locations and stories falters, indicating the fragility of this enterprise. 'I can't remember ... Sad that I can't. Dreamt it once, that song; woke up with it in my head, but it went away again.'

References

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Botany Bay: where histories meet by Maria Nugent, 272 pp, Allen & Unwin, 2005, \$39.95

Botany Bay is a name known to everyone who has even a little knowledge about the European side of Australian history where, as Maria Nugent says, it is usually linked with Captain Cook and 1770. The Aboriginal side of the story is of equal importance, but often less well known to non-Aboriginal people, and this book admirably brings together the two sides of the story. Both strands of Botany Bay's history are interwoven throughout the book, which covers peoples' lives and events from the time of Cook's landing in 1770 to recent times. Botany Bay is of great significance to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians for many different reasons – often opposing. As the site of Captain Cook's landfall it represents the event that began the process of European colonisation and, at the same time, Aboriginal dispossession. These oppositions are brought out in this book.

The chapters cover Captain Cook's 1770 landing and the subsequent arrival of Captain Phillip and the First Fleet in 1778; the role of Botany Bay once the colony settled in Port Jackson and its initial apparent isolation from Sydney town until relatively recent times; the rise and growth of tourism at Captain Cook's Landing Place and La Perouse; the visit by the French expedition under La Perouse and the consequences of the events of that time for Australian history and French–Australian relationships; the transformation of the initial settlements established by Aboriginal people and 'poor whites' at La Perouse in its isolationist period to present-day suburbs and national parks; and the history of the industries established around Botany Bay and environmental issues that arose as a consequence of this industrial development.

The final chapter comes back to issues involving the original inhabitants, their dispossession by European colonists and the Aboriginal people who live there today – people who now come from many parts of New South Wales and often other states. The location and composition of past and present La Perouse settlements are discussed earlier in the book, raising issues surrounding the question of whether any of the original inhabitants survived and/or continued to live around Botany Bay by the mid-nineteenth century and later. Maps show the location of places commonly referred to. The chapters are well illustrated with black and white photographs of people, places and events illustrating the life and environment at different times.

This is not a historical novel about Botany Bay, but a scholarly work based on Nugent's PhD thesis. It is written in a clear and easily readable manner so that anyone interested in the history of Australian black/white relationships, Aboriginal history and non-Aboriginal colonial history will find it interesting and absorbing. It is also not just a local history, but situates the events that happened in and around Botany Bay in the past and recent times in much broader national and at times international contexts. The sources – including interviews with local people, documented oral histories, as well as film and videos, unpublished documents and publications – are well identified and clearly listed in a bibliography.

One of the things I liked about the book was the fact it confronts the 'myths' that have arisen about events that took place around Botany Bay – myths created by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people about events that happened to both communities. For example, the interpretation of the two men brandishing their spears as Cook attempted to land being interpreted as 'resistance' whereas it simply may have been

part of the protocol to be followed when strangers ventured onto their land — actions which Nugent says are described in later ethnographic accounts, albeit from other parts of Australia (p 13–15). Also, given the uncertainties about the composition of the La Perouse communities, can nineteenth and early twentieth century claims by people that they were direct descendants of those who had witnessed the landings of Captains Cook (p 29–30) and Phillip (p 135) be substantiated, or were those people actually speaking of a broader relationship rather than one that was strictly biological and genealogical? Reasons why such stories are created are far from clear and no doubt differ in most cases, but they are still being created. For example, in recent articles in the press⁶ about the controversial re-development of The Block in Redfern — what is the source for the figure of '62' symbolising the number of 'Gadigal families' killed by the smallpox epidemic in April 1789, given the uncertainties surrounding such things as the number of clans that existed in coastal Sydney in 1788, the number of people comprising each clan, the area of each clan territory, and the total size of the Aboriginal population — not to mention how a 'Gadigal family' would be defined. While almost total annihilation of the Gadigal during the 1789 smallpox epidemic is not doubted, that there were 62 Gadigal families in 1789 is questionable.

However, Nugent's book is more than a collection of myths and tall stories — they only form a small part of its chapters — it is packed full of facts and information about the history of Botany Bay — its people, their lives and the land they live in. In all, an excellent book well worth having — a recommended purchase in conjunction with visits to Captain Cooks Landing Place and La Perouse, respectively on the south and north sides of Botany Bay.

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Shared landscapes: archaeologies of attachment and the pastoral industry in New South Wales by Rodney Harrison, 240pp illustrated, with index, Department of Environment and Conservation, NSW and UNSW Press, Sydney, 2004, \$45.00

Historians can often gain a sense of intimacy about a place that they have never visited. The archivally-recorded places of one cattle station in North Queensland that I studied were rich in evocative names such as Monkey Flat, but not in exact locations. I knew the details of so many scandals and subversions in Aboriginal-white relations that had taken place there on that country. But where exactly did they happen? I decided to go there and to take in the landscape and its history.

When I completed my long journey to this remote location, I met the managers of the station, who worked for a large company. Amidst the dust churned up by loaded road-trains, they lived in an impressive old house with a showy garden full of exotics. As I drove in, hundreds of cattle were lumbering out, giving the impression of plenty of dollars changing hands. The managerial couple were very hospitable, providing me

⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald* 1–2 October 2005, *Spectrum* 27 and 22 February 2006: 17; *The Australian* 13 March 2006: 10.

with free petrol and attempting to help me in any way they could. But, despite their interest, they knew nothing of the station's history.

'The gardener is an old-timer', the manager said; 'he can help you'. I got excited. With all the English mannerisms and the accent of the butler from an Agatha Christie novel, he hated snakes. With a huge brown snake skewered and writhing on his garden fork, he was shouting for someone to help him when we met.

Disappointingly, the gardener's 'long time' there amounted to some four years. Neither he nor anyone else who worked there had heard of the station's earlier features, the named yards, flats, the waterholes and places I had read from the 1930s archives. They said that perhaps waterholes had been being ploughed over, that grazing yards had changed. It was as though the historical landscape had vacated this station; blown away in the rearrangements of a slow, abrasive wind.

If we class 'landscape memory' as residing in those who live there, the places and their names had completely passed from that station's current 'living' memory. The people who knew all about the station's history, as I later found, were the old Aboriginal ladies now living in rough shelters at a nearby town — right across the road from where I spent the previous night in a holed plastic-curtained hotel.

In his case studies, Rodney Harrison aims to reclaim exactly what my landscape visit could not — the 'shared landscapes' of pastoral histories. Harrison's *Shared landscapes* presents an exciting study that attempts to map the kinds of histories missing in pastoral New South Wales. He is well up on his historical and archaeological theory, and his scholarship is an example of interdisciplinary and community inclusiveness.

Historians have a lot to learn from archaeologists. Harrison is adept at using photographic illustrations, satellite and topographical maps, objects, tables, the material culture unearthed in archaeological digs, archaeological diagrams, geographical, archival and oral history insights. The breadth of evidence used to colour the picture of case studies of the pastoral regions of New South Wales is quite astonishing. His energetic team uncovered all sorts of amazing information. He also held workshops for community members who had once lived in particular regions and stations. Knowledge-sharing unearthed some profound moments.

He cites this example, between a younger Aboriginal woman from Armidale and a local white pastoralist. She had never visited East Kunderang Pastoral Station before.

F: I know you. You're Mr McRae, aren't you?

M: Yes, I am.

F: You are very important to the Dhan-gadi people! All of my brothers and sisters know about you! You used to feed our mother and father inside your house at the dinner table, instead of on the front porch like they were nothing [crying]. You are a very important person to our people! Come here, give me a kiss!

Unfortunately, such first-person encounters are relatively rare in the text. Harrison did most of the work whilst working for a government department as a historical archaeologist in the National Parks and Wildlife Service's cultural heritage research unit. Time lines are crucial, and it is clear that he has done an impressive amount of research in an apparently short time. Yet sometimes the book reads as if it has been written by a committee. Despite all the theoretical sophistication and wide knowledge

of the literature and sources, the style, and possibly the haste, at times detracts from the book's readability. Its style merges the government policy document with the heritage report and then presents 'scientific' truncations on a diversity of themes. Some of the book is very of the moment, gesturing towards a truly revolutionary history of people in spaces and places, historically and in the present. Other parts are very conventional – the factual Eurocentric histories of pastoral legislation and the 'difficulties' faced by those who wished to expand industries and holdings. Some sections have the stamp of the peremptory, cover-key-facts 'local histories' where themes and arguments drop out in favour of an implicit story of progress.

The scholarship behind this book is certainly good; Rodney Harrison is onto a wave of histories of place in past and present; history that uses mapping, satellite photographs, community meetings, memory, historical archives and wonderful interdisciplinary collaborations, illustrated by useful sketches and diagrams. He jolts us into wondering why historians and archaeologists do not work together more often.

As Harrison admits, his study is divided into 'settler' perspectives of pastoral history and 'Aboriginal participation'. Even the chapters are split accordingly, marring his key ambition to present 'shared history'. *Shared landscapes* does not spin a yarn, or tell a good, sustained story. It's a scientific style report published as a gorgeous book. While its scholarship and wide reading and original conceptualisation takes it way beyond the average consultant's report, emotions and the research journey story are very restrained. Until the stories can take over, can be allowed to run free of the predictable academic perspectives, they will not seep into readers' minds, and change the way we think about shared histories.

Shortcomings aside, the book remains a wonderful achievement. It is path-breaking and will inspire more scholars to apply this approach to other parts of Australia. It is also timely – the notions of 'shared landscapes' and 'archaeologies of attachment' are crucially important, neglected themes in our national narratives.

Harrison has made many important steps to unite historical research techniques with those of archaeology and human geography. He has obviously been tireless, energetic and a hard worker. This book demonstrates a methodology aimed at achieving an ethical approach to both accuracy and information sharing.

The Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW) deserves to be congratulated for supporting such innovative and comprehensive research and helping to nurture this sophisticated take on its brief. This was clearly a fascinating and broad research project, with an admirable and rapid publication. I commend the Department and Harrison for getting this major body of work out so quickly, with all its new information and new approaches. The book is beautifully produced, with a gorgeous cover; little Aboriginal kids on the back of a patient sheep, standing on a dusty area in front of a layered corrugated iron shed. The book is extremely well illustrated – with historic photos, maps and contemporary photos.

This book will be much valued by heritage practitioners, local enthusiasts and those with an interest in pastoral history more widely. The book starts to clear a new path for truly interdisciplinary, community-collaborative research. With more inclusive use of oral histories, and greater amplification of the resonant emotional stories of shared experiences of place, Australian ways of thinking about pastoral landscapes will

be further challenged. Harrison has demonstrated there are many different archives, including the land itself, and that all sources combine to reveal powerful stories. If only he had conducted his study in North Queensland, I know he would have found Monkey Flat and dug deep for its stories.

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Australian dictionary of biography: supplement 1580-1980 edited by Christopher Cunneen with Jill Roe, Beverley Kingston and Stephen Garton, xxii + 520 pp, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2005, \$74.95

The *Australian dictionary of biography* is justifiably regarded as an invaluable resource and a notable scholarly achievement. Since its inception in 1962, 16 volumes have included entries on more than 10,000 individuals. Many of the volumes appeared, however, before the great expansion of Australian historical research during the 1970s and 1980s. The *supplement* seeks 'to both capture and advance biographical knowledge brought to light by research and scholarship in recent times' (p vii), with newer fields such as Indigenous history receiving particular attention. Entries are on average shorter than in other volumes, the longest being just over 1000 words.

Forty-nine Australian Aborigines are included in the *supplement*, a far higher proportion than in the earlier *Australian dictionary of biography* volumes. Non-Aboriginal people who had contact with Aborigines are also dealt with. Although the *supplement* focuses 'on Australians of significance previously missed, regardless of their representativeness' (p viii), entries relevant to Aboriginal history cover people from a quite considerable range of backgrounds, places and periods. Contributors come from many different parts of Australia. All entries, as one expects with the *Australian dictionary of biography*, are clearly written and well organised with extensive use made of primary sources. For obvious reasons, the Aboriginal people recorded are those who came to the attention of Europeans.

It is impossible in a short review to discuss more than a tiny selection of the *supplement* entries. Laura Barwick tells the fascinating story of Louisa Briggs (1836-1925), a dormitory matron and nurse who was a leader of her people at Coranderrk Aboriginal station in Victoria, for which she paid the price of being forced off the reserve. William Jones (c1842-1906) was, as Mark Valentine St Leon engagingly explains, an Aboriginal circus acrobat in the goldfields and back-blocks of south-eastern Australia well known for his 'marvellous versatility and agility' (p 207). Tom Gara provides a comprehensive account of Mullawirraburka (c1811-1845), a skilful warrior from the Adelaide plains in South Australia whom colonial authorities came to recognise as a key spokesman. Fulgentius Torres (1861-1914) was, Clement Mulcahy explains, a Spanish Benedictine abbot who undertook significant missionary activity during the early twentieth century among Aboriginal people in Western Australia's Kimberley district. Until quite recently historians frequently ignored or misunderstood these and many other life stories in the *supplement*.

I am hesitant to point to any omissions in a publication of such scope and value. It is, nevertheless, surprising that there is no entry on Billiamook, the prominent Larrakia man from what is now Darwin in the Northern Territory who met George Goyder's survey team in 1869, visited Adelaide in 1870, interpreted for the police, was photographed by Paul Foelsche and at Melbourne's 1888 Centennial International Exhibition was part of the first group of Aboriginal artists to have their work publicly displayed in Australia. There is no other *Australian dictionary of biography* entry on him while his *Northern Territory dictionary of biography* entry that appeared in 1990 is seriously incomplete in the light of more recent published research.

Readers may identify further 'missing persons' but the *supplement* remains an impressive achievement. Many of its entries add greatly to knowledge of Aboriginal history, especially for the period before the early twentieth century. They will do much to enlighten and inform future research and writing. They also provide some wonderful reading that encompasses moving stories and intriguing details. The editing is of a high standard and the book is well designed. An added bonus is its inclusion of a complete name index to the *Australian dictionary of biography* to 1980. Christopher Cunneen, his fellow editors and the 399 contributors deserve our warm congratulations and gratitude.

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Aboriginal Victorians: a history since 1800 by Richard Broome, Allen & Unwin, 2005, \$39.95

In this generous book, Richard Broome has provided an impressively researched general, and often intimate, history of Aboriginal people in Victoria from 1800 to the present. With its wealth of information on the historical experiences of Aboriginal people across the State, the book is sure to become a staple on school and university reading lists. With its many references to, and descriptions of Aboriginal people, families, organisations and communities, well-thumbed copies will no doubt be found in the homes of Koories, not only in Victoria but further a-field.

The Aboriginal people of Victoria have been well-served by historians over the last three or so decades. Broome's book complements, and clearly owes a debt to, the work of people such as Diane Barwick, Bain Attwood and Jan Critchett. He also makes good use of the scholarship of a new generation of historians like Corinne Manning and Robert Kenny. Most importantly, however, this is a book that could only be written because of the author's long and close engagement with some of the present-day generation of Aboriginal Victorians who are the direct descendants of many other people who cross its pages. This personal engagement has provided Broome with access to material not held in public repositories as well as insights that cannot be gained solely through diligent work in and with public records.

Books like this are difficult to write because they must satisfy two quite different audiences. Broome successfully manages the task of writing a history that will appeal to its Aboriginal constituency while at the same time withstand the scrutiny of his intellectual peers. The beauty of the book lies in how stories of the personal and the particular

come lightly wrapped in historical analysis. The analysis does not hinder the history being told, but there are sufficient nods to the historiographical developments and debates of the last 30 years to gratify academicians.

In terms of the latter, Broome is most concerned with demonstrating Aboriginal people's agency in the ways they engaged with the new situations in which they found themselves. He is attentive to how Aboriginal people saw and understood themselves as 'Aboriginal', although it must be said that he is not too concerned with theorising this, or with questioning key concepts such as Aboriginality or identity. His method is to illustrate by example how Aboriginal people responded to colonial violence, to government intervention and to racism. He often assures his readers that no matter what happened, the Aboriginal people involved were able to deal with the situation without losing their 'identity'. At times I found this unsatisfying, and wanted the author to grapple more with the contradictory and conflicted experiences of being an 'Aboriginal Victorian'.

Despite this quibble, Broome's book is to be commended. It harnesses a large body of research into a highly readable text, in ways that ably map the major historical shifts without ever losing sight of or empathy for the people who experienced them.

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Bluff Rock: autobiography of a massacre by Katrina M. Schlunke, 271pp, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, in partnership with Curtin University of Technology, 2005, \$29.95

This book belongs to the discipline of Cultural Studies and it is here reviewed by an historian, and I apologise for any problems of interdisciplinary translation. My lack of expertise will be very obvious. From an historian's point of view, then, it is an unusually slow-moving and contemplative piece of work. The main event, ostensibly, is a massacre of Aboriginal people which is said to have taken place at Bluff Rock, a great granite outcrop a little to the south of Tenterfield, in northern New South Wales, in 1844. In fact, whatever killings there were (the numbers are completely unknown) probably happened somewhere nearby. However, in the end the deaths are really incidental to what Schlunke has to say.

The book has a striking sub-title, *Autobiography of a massacre*, and indeed, the work is mainly autobiography. It is about the author's relationship with the evidence she uses (mainly documentary and topographical) and with her readers. Throughout the book there is a very strong sense of the kind of readership she imagines for herself, and the intensity of that imagined relationship permeates everything. It is a relationship that is morally and emotionally exclusive. Katrina Schlunke grew up close to Bluff Rock but she now lives in Sydney, and this is a book that tells the story of a city-dweller's experiences in the bush. She writes for others like herself, and in that way the book is reminiscent, say, of the film, *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. The territory being described is alien and ugly. 'Here be monsters', and indeed, there is something monstrous about the inhabitants of the area, as they appear in Schlunke's text – though they include some of the author's own family (and, indeed, not far away, some of mine).

It becomes increasingly clear, and indeed explicit towards the end, that the writing of the book is meant as a form of self-exoneration from the evils of the past. Paradoxically, distance is achieved by stressing closeness, although the complexities of that process are not thoroughly worked out. The need for self-exoneration is overwhelming. The mood of the writing becomes strikingly urgent, for instance, when the author describes her realisation that a family home stands within the likely area of the massacre site. This concern with her own feelings tends to undermine the integrity of the rest of the work — I stress again, this is an historian's point of view. The distinct and varied realities of the past fade into the background. Even at the prosaic but still crucial level of factual accuracy, there is too much dependence on supposition rather than open-minded research. Why take it for granted, for instance, that squatters in the 1840s used Aboriginal labour without making any kind of payment? Much of the interpretation of the very slight evidence available on the event in question seems cavalier and unreliable. For instance, if a man chooses to record a human death (murder or not) with a mere three or four words in his diary, passing then to more prosaic matters, does that prove anything at all about his feelings? It is easy to think of examples to the contrary. Too often in this book it is implied that the dead, and the silent dead especially, never felt much at all.

More fundamentally, Schlunke's method seems to involve a kind of tyranny over the past. There is too little regard for it as domain of real human beings. Its characters become a kind of backdrop for the wandering introspection of the author — as she proves her own feelings very thoroughly, to the extent of many tens of thousands of words. Certainly, she struggles with her image of the European perpetrators, but as one might struggle with a ghost. Meanwhile, the Aborigines become almost irrelevant to the main action. This is partly because the Europeans are, in a sense, her own people, but partly also (I am guessing here) because they left written records — the tools of her trade — and the Aborigines did not. The latter pass in a very shadowy fashion through the undergrowth of this book. Their deaths are mourned, but it is hard to see how their lives might fit within all the intricacies of sensibility the author sets herself to explore.

Towards the end there is a remarkable passage when she imagines herself married and in bed with the squatter Edward Irby — a scenario shocking to the reader, partly because Schlunke's lesbianism is a continuing sub-theme of the book, partly because Irby was the principal murderer, but also very much because, chapter after chapter, she has demonstrated that her feeling for the past — and for the place of her upbringing — is a barbed-wire tangle of contradictions. She comes at the problem with tremendous energy and no small ability, but the relationship she wants to establish cannot work because in pulling her people (past and present) to her she simultaneously struggles to keep them at a wholesome distance. She thinks — in a world where text is God — that the solution lies in writing, writing, writing, but (to a historian) this book seems to prove the opposite.

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Two steps forward three steps back: a Wiradjuri Land Rights journey by Gaynor Macdonald, 138 pp, LhR Press, Canada Bay, 2004, ISBN 0-9577766-2-4, \$24.95

The subtitle of this book is *Letters to the Wiradjuri Regional Aboriginal Land Council on its 20th Anniversary 1983 – 2003*. Apart from one or two explanatory asides concerning Wiradjuri history and the complexity of the 1983 NSW Land Rights Act, the book is literally just that – letters. There are five of them, each of about 20 pages, each beginning 'Dear Wiradjuri Friends' and each one signed 'Gaynor'. It's a clever technique allowing for interpolations, interviews, extracts from Submissions, facsimile letters and any amount of photographs. Indeed, the whole text, as Macdonald in a sense intended, works well as a family album or scrapbook of reminiscences. Photographs of favoured Wiradjuri people appear many times, and the unfavoured not at all.

Of course, the design is more than a strategy of presentation. Macdonald has worked as a profound friend and adviser of Wiradjuri people since she began her anthropology doctorate in their country in the early 1980s. Apart from a couple of years in Japan she has never stopped working amongst them almost on a weekly basis, writing letters, researching, going to meetings, social occasions, demonstrations, deputations. Her published works, almost all on Wiradjuri themes, include biography and academic discussions of photographs, native title and cultural continuities. So many Indigenous organisations round the country have depended enormously on this type of informed dedication over so many decades. The ideology still prevailing in some circles that Aboriginal history and anthropology should be written only by Aboriginal people could not receive a better rebuff than through this engaging book and its resolute author.

The title is pessimistic, but no more than is necessary. Indeed, sometimes it seems that four or five steps back compared to the one forward would be a fairer ratio. For the 1983 Land Rights Act, bitterly opposed by many as likely to achieve very little, was only passed with the simultaneous retrospective parliamentary acquiescence to hundreds of illegal reserve revocations in the previous eighty years. Yet for all its defects, the NSW Act established Regional Land Councils, differently structured and more efficient, at least in Wiradjuri country, than the Local Aboriginal Land Councils (too small and inexperienced) and the later State Land Council (too big and bureaucratic). Wiradjuri people are tough. So intolerant were the residents of the Aborigines Welfare Board and its managers that Erambie reserve, Cowra, was long regarded as one of the most difficult in the state to manage. By the 1980s the experienced and well-organised Wiradjuri were more than ready to administer their own affairs. And so they did, probably more efficiently than any other Regional Council.

The weakness of all Acts of State is that they can be unmade as easily as they were made. Ideology is as important a factor as any in their unmaking. Greiner, NSW Premier from March 1988, tried to get rid of the five-year old Act altogether. Rebuffed in the Upper House, he tried to establish a trust fund into which all the regional Councils would have to deposit their assets. That failed, but in the major amendment of 1990, all financial functions were removed from the Regional Councils to the NSW Aboriginal Land Council. Regional Councils could no longer hold any land or make purchases. Western lands could be claimed only as perpetual leasehold rather than freehold.

The experiment in regional self-management, then, was so short. Some Wiradjuri would no doubt argue that it simply had not been worth it. But for Macdonald and her friends I think it was, not least for the opportunity for real leadership, brief though it was, but for the sociality, the solidarity, the friendships, the dances, the fun.

Several aspects of this remarkable book are striking: the powerlessness of Aborigines in the face of the tergiversations of government; the extreme reluctance of Australian parliaments to come to terms with a brutal past while failing to see that certain simple measures can do so much to make amends. Most striking of all is the productive, warm and constructive relationship between Macdonald and her Wiradjuri friends. It leaps from every page. Her friends recognise and appreciate her dedication, as she recognises theirs. Yes, it's a partisan account, but magnificently so. I don't think that the letters could have been written in any other way.

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Cleared Out, First Contact in the Western Desert by Sue Davenport, Peter Johnson and Yuwali, 208pp, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2005, \$45.00

This book tells the story of the 1964 'first contact' with a small group of Aboriginal women and children who were found living at the Percival Lakes in the north of the Great Sandy Desert. Officers of the Weapons Research Establishment (WRE) and of the Western Australian Department of Native Welfare (DNW) sought out this group because of a threat from the air: three successive test firings of Blue Streak rockets were planned and the missiles were intended to return to earth near the Percival Lakes.

Peter Garrett begins his foreword to this book by noting that: 'Most people view the ultra-remote Western Desert from the air'. This is certainly true of the Percival Lakes, and conversely the Aboriginal inhabitants of the area must, by 1964, have seen many aircraft overhead. On the other hand, possibly only one of them might by then have caught a brief and frightened glimpse of a single motor vehicle and none had seen white people (p 16).

The exploring parties that had struggled across the northern parts of the Great Sandy Desert with their camels in the 19th century had by-passed these salt lakes: Colonel Warburton to the north in 1873, and in 1896 David Carnegie to the east and Lawrence Wells just to the west. Ten years later, surveyor Alfred Canning laid out his stock route to the south and south-east of the lakes. He crossed a salt lake that is an eastern extension of the Percival Lakes and just south of it he noted on his map: 'Number of bucks here came into camp. Another native came on with us.'¹ On his return journey in April 1907, a hostile encounter with an Aboriginal man near this lake resulted in the death of one of the party, Michael Tobin, who shot and killed his assailant. This 35 kilometre long lake has since been marked as Tobin Lake.

¹. Gard 1995: 64.

These were the only fatalities on Canning's first survey but later parties using the stock route were sometimes harassed and attacked and lives were lost in encounters not far away at Wells 35 and 37. It is likely, however, that friendly contacts with the Aboriginal stockmen in the droving parties encouraged some people of the desert to venture north, using the line of wells to reach the Kimberley cattle and sheep stations. Such emigration may not have directly affected the people of the Percival Lakes area before the 1930s.² The authors of this book make some general observations about the migration of the Aboriginal people 'from their nomadic existence in traditional territories to settlements around the desert', indicating that by 1964 'the desert had effectively emptied' (pp 104-107). It seems worthwhile here to look at some recorded visits to this area before 1964 — visits which may have influenced the emigration process, and may throw some light on it.

The recorded history of the lakes began in 1937, when they were first charted on the fourth of Donald Mackay's aerial surveys of the desert — and were apparently named after the Percival Gull aircraft that Mackay had used on his 1933 expedition.³ Mackay marked on his chart wherever an 'Abo smoke' was seen, noting three of these in the area immediately north of the lakes and others farther to the north and south of them. In October 1943, when a team of men was repairing the stock route, an RAAF aircraft landed on Tobin Lake to evacuate the seriously ill foreman of the party; and in November four charter flights from Perth to Tobin Lake delivered supplies and equipment to the team.⁴ In 1953 the RAAF used DC3 aircraft for intensive aerial photographic survey work over these desert regions.

In 1957 the lakes and surrounding features were subjected to a much closer examination by a Bureau of Mineral Resources (BMR) team using a helicopter, and flying over and landing at the lakes.⁵ The party established a helicopter base at Canning's Well 40, near Tobin Lake, and had fuel drums dropped there by RAAF DC3 before beginning several weeks of survey work with a traverse of Percival Lakes. They named Picture Hill at the western end of the lakes, having found 'intricate aboriginal paintings' in a cave there. JJ Veevers, in his account of this work, noted that: 'Natives were not seen at Picture Hill but barely a day passed that we did not see the smoke from their hunting fires.'⁶ On a later traverse of the Percival Lakes they saw 'innumerable footprints leading from one side of the lake to the other'. Some of the local inhabitants had meanwhile visited their camp:

At first shy of the helicopter but nevertheless attracted to the camp at Well 40, the natives required some encouragement before they could be brought to enter the

2. Erich Kolig, however, concluded from genealogical data that perhaps 'even prior to European settlement' and certainly from the early 1900s 'Aborigines from the Desert fringe zone and the interior of the Desert gradually and in small groups converged on the [Fitzroy] River area' (Kolig 1987: 31).

3. I am indebted to David Nash who offered this likely explanation for the origin of the name of the lakes. Mackay's maps are held in the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

4. Gard 1995: 134-136.

5. Veevers 1958: 6-8. I am also indebted to David Nash for introducing me to this published account of the 1957 BMR survey.

6. Veevers 1958: 7.

camp. The first natives we met ... were healthy well-built men and boys who, though appreciative of the little food and tea we were able to give them, were by no means starving.

More natives came into the camp from the surrounding desert, and in so doing probably leaving the tracks which we later saw on the Percival Lakes. A week after our first meeting with the natives there were an estimated thirty to forty native men, women and children, camped nearby.⁷

When two of the party stopped to refuel the helicopter at Well 40 they saw 'a woman and a boy who ... obviously required urgent hospital attention'. The woman had 'open spear wounds on leg and chest' and the boy was extraordinarily emaciated; he was later found to be suffering from poliomyelitis. The two were evacuated by the helicopter to the Balgo Hills mission and, after treatment there, were taken to Derby hospital.⁸

The BMR party established a second helicopter base on a claypan some 80 kilometres north of the Percival Lakes, and there saw more footprints 'headed north' which they thought 'probably belonged to a group of six or seven natives on their way to better-watered country'.⁹ It is likely that these tracks had been made after the heavy rains that had fallen in the north of the desert in June, when people would have been confident that water would not be hard to find. Two years earlier another BMR party working in an area to the east had reported 'heavy and unseasonable rain'.¹⁰ This had evidently encouraged movement in the north: a party of men had walked in 1955 from the Lake Mackay area to Mount Doreen station in the Northern Territory; others had walked north to the Balgo mission; and groups from the desert were also reported arriving at Christmas Creek station in 1955 and 1956.¹¹ These northward movements were probably by then beginning to isolate the Percival Lakes people, many of whose eastern neighbours had settled at Balgo mission or the cattle stations. But the drought years that followed might well have curtailed these emigrations, at least until the good rains that fell in 1967, had it not been for the roadmaking project for the rocket range.

Len Beadell, roadmaker for the WRE, had made a road through the South Australian reserve to the Rawlinson Range where the Giles meteorological station was built in 1956. In 1960 he cut another north to the Kintore Range and west some 400 kilometres to be used by a National Mapping team the following year for a geodetic survey. But it was the winter of 1963 before Beadell extended this road to Well 35 and beyond, south and west of the Percival Lakes, past Picture Hill, to join the WA road system at Callawa station. In early August, Beadell was surveying another line of road to the south and met 'two wild-looking Aborigines' near the McKay Range.¹² Later he and his team

7. Veevers 1958: 7.

8. Veevers 1958: 8. This helicopter evacuation attracted some press attention and a helicopter pilot was quoted as saying that the people at Well 40 were 'starving' (p 44).

9. Veevers 1958: 7.

10. Casey and Wells 1956: 6.

11. Long 1989: 25. Later, in March 1961, a party of '11 desert natives' was reported to have been found by police on Christmas Creek station; this group consisted of 'two men, an eight-year-old boy and eight girls whose ages ranged from five to thirteen' (*The News*, Perth, 11 March 1961).

12. Beadell 1983: 85-86.

spent some weeks camped near this group, receiving silent 'daily visits' from the men; the women and children kept 'several hundred metres away'.¹³ In November, his road completed, Beadell led a party including two DNW officers to visit this group.¹⁴ The two officers returned a week later with Bob Tonkinson, then engaged in anthropological research at Jigalong mission, and learnt that a second, related group was living not far away. These 50 people included a few men who had previously walked in to either Jigalong or Warburton. They were all offered transport to Jigalong, apparently in accordance with a recently modified DNW policy permitting such offers as long as officers did not 'use any persuasion to influence the natives' decision' (p 140). Most accepted, but those in the second group chose to stay where they were, eventually moving to Jigalong in 1966.¹⁵

Farther north, oil exploration parties had extended their seismic surveys south towards the Percival Lakes, establishing an airfield, Swindells Field, some 80 kilometres north-west of the lakes and clearing another road, roughly parallel to Beadell's, south to the stock route. The modern world was closing in on the people who remained at the Percival Lakes.

In the east the WRE patrol officers and Northern Territory Welfare Branch officers, including me, had been making use of Beadell's roads since 1960 and by 1963 we had met over 100 people in groups widely scattered through an area up to 250 kilometres west of the WA border. These encounters had already prompted several to make the long walk east to join their relatives at Papunya. Reporting on the 1963 patrols, I proposed that we should provide transport for others who had expressed interest in moving to Papunya.

The authors of this book remark on 'the profound effect' of my report on John Harman, the DNW officer based at Kalgoorlie who was responsible for this remote area of the desert (p 56). He at once arranged to make a visit to the area in October, using the roads Beadell had just completed, and then proposed a joint patrol with the WRE and NT officers. In December, officials agreed to his recommendation and to mine, since it seemed clear that the people remaining in the desert were too few 'for the social system to function effectively'.¹⁶ In April 1964 parties from the WA and NT, with the two WRE patrol officers, went out equipped to respond if any of those we met wanted to leave the desert. The WA and WRE officers met a small group south of Well 35; these chose then to stay where they were, but most had made their way to the Warburton mission by the end of the year.¹⁷ Eight families, 42 people in all, travelled by truck to Papunya. Later in April and in September the WRE officers transported several other groups either to Papunya or to the Warburton mission.

During this joint patrol, Harman was told that the oil exploration party working near the Percival Lakes had seen signs of recent occupation near Picture Hill. Because test firings of the Blue Streak rocket were planned to begin in late May, arrangements

13. Beadell 1983: 110-111.

14. Beadell 1983: 142-157.

15. Peterson 1986: 116-117 D20, D21.

16. Long 1989: 33.

17. Peterson 1986: 121 D24.

were at once made for WRE and WA officers to explore the area and discover whether people might be in the planned 'impact area'.

The authors give a splendid day by day account of the attempts to make contact with the people at the Percival Lakes and of the successful efforts of the group to avoid any close contact. This is followed by a briefer treatment of the next patrol which in September succeeded in meeting the 20 women and children who had fled in May. These sections form the heart of the book, and are based largely on the stories told by the third author, Yuwali, aged about 17 at the time, who has been able 40 years later to provide a uniquely detailed story of a most unusual encounter.

Sue Davenport explains in a preface how the research for the book was done and, in particular, how the oral histories were collected and translated. A short introductory note outlines the events in the late 1940s which led to the 1964 encounters: notably, the decision to develop a rocket testing range in the north of South Australia; the appointment of a 'Native Patrol Officer' to look after the interests of the Aboriginal people; and the birth of Yuwali at a waterhole, Yulpu, near the Percival Lakes. This is followed by a short account of the travels and activities of Wirnpa, the rain-making snake-man who settled at the waterhole that bears his name to the north-east of the lakes.

The next section describes the life of the people of the Percival Lakes, the foods they ate throughout the seasons, and the recent history of Yuwali and her relatives, who had been almost completely isolated from others for some years. A diagram, with photographs of each of the people, shows how they were related. Each is identified by a personal name and their ages are shown as recorded when they were seen in September 1964.¹⁸ The three older women, all widowed, were sisters and two had daughters married to an elderly, blind man who had left this group and was being cared for by his three other wives with another group some distance to the north. One of the other widows was a younger sister of this blind man, and another had been married to his brother. We are told that the husbands of five of the women 'had disappeared over several years' (p 14). Apparently two had died violent deaths: one 'killed by a revenge party' and the other 'speared in the ribs' because he had stolen another man's wife (p 14). These seven women seem to have chosen to stay at the Percival Lakes rather than moving north with the blind man.

Having introduced us to the people at Percival Lakes, the authors begin their story of events leading to their first contact with a short but telling account of the establishment of the rocket range. It was planned to reach at first only some 480 kilometres to the north-west, 'stopping short of the Central Aboriginal Reserve', but a second stage would extend it across the desert to the north-west coast (p 17). The plan aroused opposition, notably from Dr Charles Duguid and Dr Donald Thomson, who were unimpressed with the proposed measures to 'safeguard the aborigines from contact'. A committee of officials, with Professor Elkin, provided the advice the Government wanted: that 'satisfactory arrangements' could 'ensure the safety and welfare of the aborigines in the proposed range area' and that any 'acceleration of the de-tribalisation

¹⁸. No section names are shown in this diagram or mentioned in the text. The other published account of the group identifies the people only by their section names (Peterson 1988: 120 D23).

which is now taking place ... can be controlled by the appointment of patrol officers' (p 20). The committee had been assured that no 'construction of roads within the Central Reserves' was contemplated!

The next section deals with the appointment as patrol officer of Walter MacDougall, a son of the manse who had spent much of his life working on Presbyterian missions, at Kunmunya in the north-west and latterly at Ernabella on the eastern edge of the desert. It was a choice calculated to appease Dr Duguid, an active supporter of these missions, and MacDougall's task may have seemed practicable in the first years before the range was extended. But when it was proposed to establish a meteorological station at the Rawlinson Range, it was clear that the lives of the inhabitants, who had had little contact, would be disrupted. MacDougall expressed his concerns and was silenced.

The authors then examine the 'protective non-interference' policy for the 'full-blood tribal natives' of Western Australia (p 35). This was based, at least in part, on lack of resources to do more than try to cope with the problems presented when these people reached the settled areas. Officials had resisted proposals from mission groups seeking to work with the 'bush natives', but had not been able to stop the United Aborigines Mission moving into the heart of the desert to establish a mission at the Warburton Range in 1933. Later mission activity had been kept to the desert fringes: at Balgo Hills, south of Halls Creek in 1939; at Jigalong in 1946, when a mission took over the ration depot on the rabbit proof fence; and in 1955 at La Grange, where the desert meets the coast south of Broome. Western Australia was a 'mining state' and just when the WRE was intruding into the reserve at the Rawlinson Range, a much greater area to the south was excised to allow a mining company to explore for nickel. The condition of the people at the Warburton mission and north of there, and what was to be done about it in the context of these intrusions, became an issue of public controversy in 1956.

More criticism came when, in 1958, the intention to fire rockets over the full length of the range was announced. No one could say with any certainty how many people might be in the affected areas or where they were, but the authors quote assurances given by the department and the minister responsible for the WRE, to the effect that no people 'would be inconvenienced' by this extension of the range (p 48). A second patrol officer, Robert Macaulay, had meanwhile been appointed and posted for a time to the Giles weather station, but he and MacDougall were kept busy in the areas to the south, trying to ensure that no people were at risk when atomic bombs were being exploded. The roadless northern areas of the range remained well out of their reach. As the WRE built roads through the area in the early 1960s the two officers could begin to explore the area, but vast areas lay distant from the roads even in 1964.

The authors begin their account of 'The First Patrol' by introducing the members of the DNW party sent to join MacDougall at Swindells Field, which became their base of operations: Terry Long, the officer in charge of the DNW office in Port Hedland [full disclosure: no relation]; a trainee named Webster; and Gordon McKay, interpreter and guide. McKay spoke a language the people could understand but was no longer young enough to undertake a pursuit on foot with any enthusiasm. MacDougall and Long met on Sunday 17 May, and for each day to Tuesday 26 May, we have narratives of the hunters and the hunted placed side by side, illustrated by numerous photographs, and by an excellent series of maps showing the daily movements of the two groups.

Yuwali provides an astonishingly detailed and vivid account of the moves she and others made over these two weeks as the strangers in their two noisy vehicles battled with sandridges and boggy lakes to approach close enough to communicate. Had there been any men in this group it is likely that McKay would have been able to establish contact but, for the reasons the authors set out (pp 14-16), these women chose flight when strangers approached. The story of the pursuit is told with extracts from the reports made by MacDougall and Long, with additional comments by Long who was interviewed for the book. MacDougall soon observed 'clear signs of panicky flight' (p 77) which took the group well to the east, 'between the eastern end of Lake Percival and Lake Tobin' (p 84). Rain began falling, further impeding their vehicles, and the firing scheduled for that day was cancelled because of cloud cover. When it was further postponed, Long left and Macaulay joined MacDougall for a few days. Having won this round, Yuwali and others started north, looking for her father, while the rest moved back to the east.

The F1 rocket was finally sent on its way on 5 June, but 'veered off course' and was destroyed in mid-air 'many hundreds of kilometres south of the Percival Lakes' (p 90). One of several ironies in this story is that MacDougall and Macaulay, driving south next day, found signs that 'at least four natives' had camped the week before near Well 35 and had probably been in the prohibited area when F1 was fired (p 90).

The authors devote a few pages, 'Between the Patrols', to comments that Long and the WRE officers made in their reports on the inadequate time and resources provided for their task. Long concluded that the group 'should not, again, be subject to the harrying tactics which were inevitably applied' and that 'we are probably doing them more harm in our attempts to ensure their safety than if we left them entirely alone' (p 96). Public criticism of the way the firing had been handled joined with criticism of the April joint patrol and the removal of people to Papunya, one critic concluding that 'the Government wanted them out of the way of the rockets, into what appeared to be a crash programme of assimilation' (p 99). Clearly preparations for the F2 firing scheduled for 20 October would need to withstand close scrutiny.

MacDougall stressed the importance of having suitable guides 'closely related to the area and its people' and Bob Tonkinson recommended two men at Jigalong: a young man, Nyani, one of those who came in from the McKay Range area the previous year, and an older man, Punuma Sailor, who had more English than Nyani but did not know the Percival Lakes area (pp 105-106). MacDougall reached Swindells Field on 18 September and made a wide air search in the RAAF aircraft laid on for this exercise, also flying south to pick up the two guides at Jigalong. The search began on 22 September and they saw fresh tracks next day. Sailor and Nyani went off on foot and 'returned with a woman and child' (p 109). The woman was sent off (with her grandchild) to bring the rest to a water farther east. On the way there MacDougall came on two more women and two children and it was then that he was told that there were no men in the group. At this point Yuwali's account is supplemented by a briefer story told by Junju, a young mother of four. Both young women continued to flee that day in the heat, but next day Nyani caught up with them and persuaded them to return to the others. The group of 20 walked in to join MacDougall and Sailor at their camp on the north side of the lake.

MacDougall provided food and stayed with the group as they walked west to a water on the south side of the lakes. After a week there, waiting for his vehicle to be

repaired, he and the guides left the group in order to search the stock route for the other group possibly in the impact area. Macaulay joined him and continued the search until he returned to Swindells Field to meet Terry Long when the RAAF flew him from Port Hedland.

MacDougall had returned to the lakes and Long and Macaulay joined him the day before the F2 firing. Together they agreed that Long should recommend that evacuation of the group was 'absolutely necessary for tribal, physical welfare and medical reasons, plus the women's own request for evacuation' (p 123). MacDougall had earlier reported that Nyani had 'married Yuwali' and Sailor had found that one of the young widows was his wife's 'sister' (p 117). He had also reported that one woman appeared to be seriously ill with leprosy and arrangements were made for a doctor to fly out. The rocket was fired. The men saw a vapour trail and heard it as it came to earth, they thought about '40 or 50 miles away' to the south; Long says that the women were 'absolutely terrified' when they 'saw the sparkle and then the boom' (p 125).

The two WRE vehicles carried the group slowly to Swindells Field, while Macaulay and Long drove south to Well 31 where they met the guides who had found a group of eight people: two women (mother and daughter), four young men and two boys. These were also taken to the airfield.¹⁹ Three DNW vehicles arrived from Port Hedland and an aircraft flew in with a doctor, a woman welfare officer, and Bob Tonkinson. The woman with leprosy and her small daughter flew to Derby with the doctor and the rest prepared for the three day journey via Marble Bar to Jigalong, where they arrived six days after the firing.

The authors then discuss, very fairly and fully, how it was that the DNW and WRE officers should have concluded that it was appropriate that they should go to Jigalong and why the senior women of the group should have agreed to, even approved of, this outcome. The instruction from Frank Gare, the Commissioner of Native Welfare, was that 'any persons moved away [from the danger area] should be returned to their point of evacuation' (p 139). None of the officers had any enthusiasm for bringing people in from the desert, and all were acutely aware that the removal of people to Papunya only six months earlier had attracted intense criticism. We are led to the conclusion that the outcome was very likely decided when MacDougall engaged the two men from Jigalong as interpreters. As in other similar situations, the enthusiasm of guides and interpreters for seeing 'bush people' reunited with their relatives was sufficient to overcome any anxieties and hesitations that the people themselves may have felt.

The Percival Lakes group was left at the Jigalong mission and responsibility for their future care was delegated to the mission staff. The authors discuss the relationship between the DNW and the missions in general, and the problems facing the newcomers

¹⁹ The authors keep a tight focus on the Percival Lakes group and, though they do include photographs of four of the men brought from Well 31, we are not told of any relationship or contact between the two groups, only that the second group chose to go in to Warburton, where they knew they had relatives. First, however, they travelled with the others to Jigalong. This group was recorded by Macaulay and at Swindells Field by Tonkinson (Peterson 1986: 119 D22).

to Jigalong in particular, and examine the views that the WRE officers expressed about the processes in which they were involved.

An epilogue outlines the later decline and disappearance of the WRE and its patrol officers, and the subsequent careers of Yuwali and the other members of the group.²⁰ Perhaps the most striking feature of their stories is the geographical range of their travels in a 'social nomadic existence' (p 184). Since Yuwali's father was taken in with others to the La Grange mission in 1967, it is not surprising that nine of the group are recorded as having lived there at least for a time, but 14 spent time at Strelley. Relatively few, however, have been drawn to live closer to their homelands in 'the Martu instituted desert communities of Punmu, Parnngurr and Kunawarritji' (p 184).

This is a fascinating and thoroughly researched account of the only occasion when the rocket range activities might actually have imperilled people in the desert, an unusual encounter in the final stages of migration from the western desert. The events, policies and practices that led up to the meeting at Percival Lakes are examined coolly but critically, and the book provides much for us to reflect on when we consider our collective responsibilities towards all the people of the deserts.

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²⁰ The authors state that the WRE only appointed three patrol officers — MacDougall, Macaulay and, when he resigned, Bob Verburgt (p 180) — but I recall that another, Bill Jenvey, was appointed, and that Jenvey, with his vehicle and equipment, was later transferred from the WRE to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in Alice Springs, where he was serving in 1974.