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The Fifth Eric Johnston Lecture

delivered at

The State Library of the Northern Territory
on 9th November 1990

**THE END OF THE BAD OLD DAYS:
EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT IN CENTRAL
AUSTRALIA, 1871 – 1894**

by

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State Library of the Northern Territory

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24. *Aborigines and Development in Northern Australia*, by H. C. Coombs. (1991)
25. *The End of the Bad Old Days : European Settlement in Central Australia, 1871–1894*, by R. G. Kimber. (1991)

INTRODUCTION

The Eric Johnston Lecture series was established to fill a serious gap in Darwin's cultural calendar, since the city had no lecture series dealing in depth with the Territory's culture and history in all its diverse ramifications.

The series was named after the Territory's then Administrator Commodore Eric Johnston. Commodore Johnston himself delivered the first lecture in 1986, and has taken a personal interest in the series ever since.

The Eric Johnston Lectures are delivered annually, in general alternating between a prominent Territorian and a reputable interstate/overseas personality. The topics of the lectures can cover any subject providing the central theme relates to the Northern Territory. The lectures are published by the State Library of the Northern Territory in its Occasional Papers series, and we are optimistic that the ABC will continue its established practice of recording and subsequently broadcasting the lectures.

The Eric Johnston Lectures have already established themselves as a prestigious and scholarly annual event in Darwin and have made a real and lasting contribution to the spread of knowledge on Territory history and culture throughout Australia.

The 1990 lecture was delivered by Dick Kimber, whose knowledge of all aspects of Central Australian history and life is unrivalled. He is a regular contributor of articles to such prestigious journals as *Mankind*, *Aboriginal History*, *Australian Archaeology* and *Archaeology in Oceania*.

As the author of "The Man from Arltunga" and the co-author of "Wildbird Dreaming" his work has been acclaimed by academics and by ordinary readers alike. But perhaps Dick's greatest characteristic is the unassuming and diffident manner in which he is ever willing to share the extensive fruits of his research with others.

We at the State Library are proud to have sponsored this lecture, which is a fitting culmination of the Library's 10th anniversary celebrations. Dick says that the lecture will at times be perhaps a trifle more personalised than conventional lectures. However, as this only means that Dick will not just read a prepared paper, but will incorporate "yarning" into his talk, this adds to rather than detracts from the value of his lecture.

ERIC JOHNSTON LECTURES

1986

Commodore Eric Johnston

Operation Navy Help : Disaster Operations by the Royal Australian Navy, Post-Cyclone Tracy

1987

Professor Charles Manning Clark

Writing a History of Australia

1988

Dr Ella Stack

Aboriginal Pharmacopeia

1989

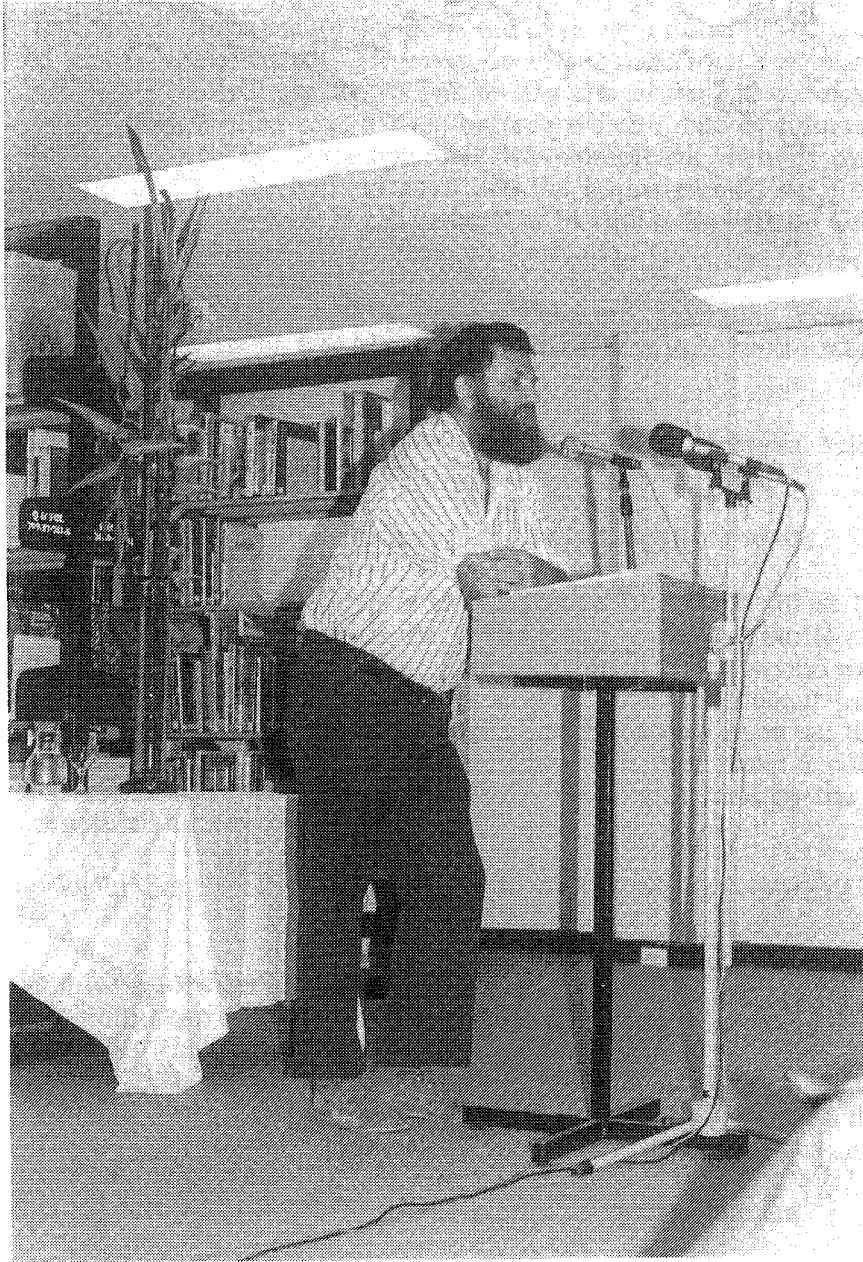
Sir Edward Woodward

Three Wigs and Five Hats

1990

R. G. Kimber

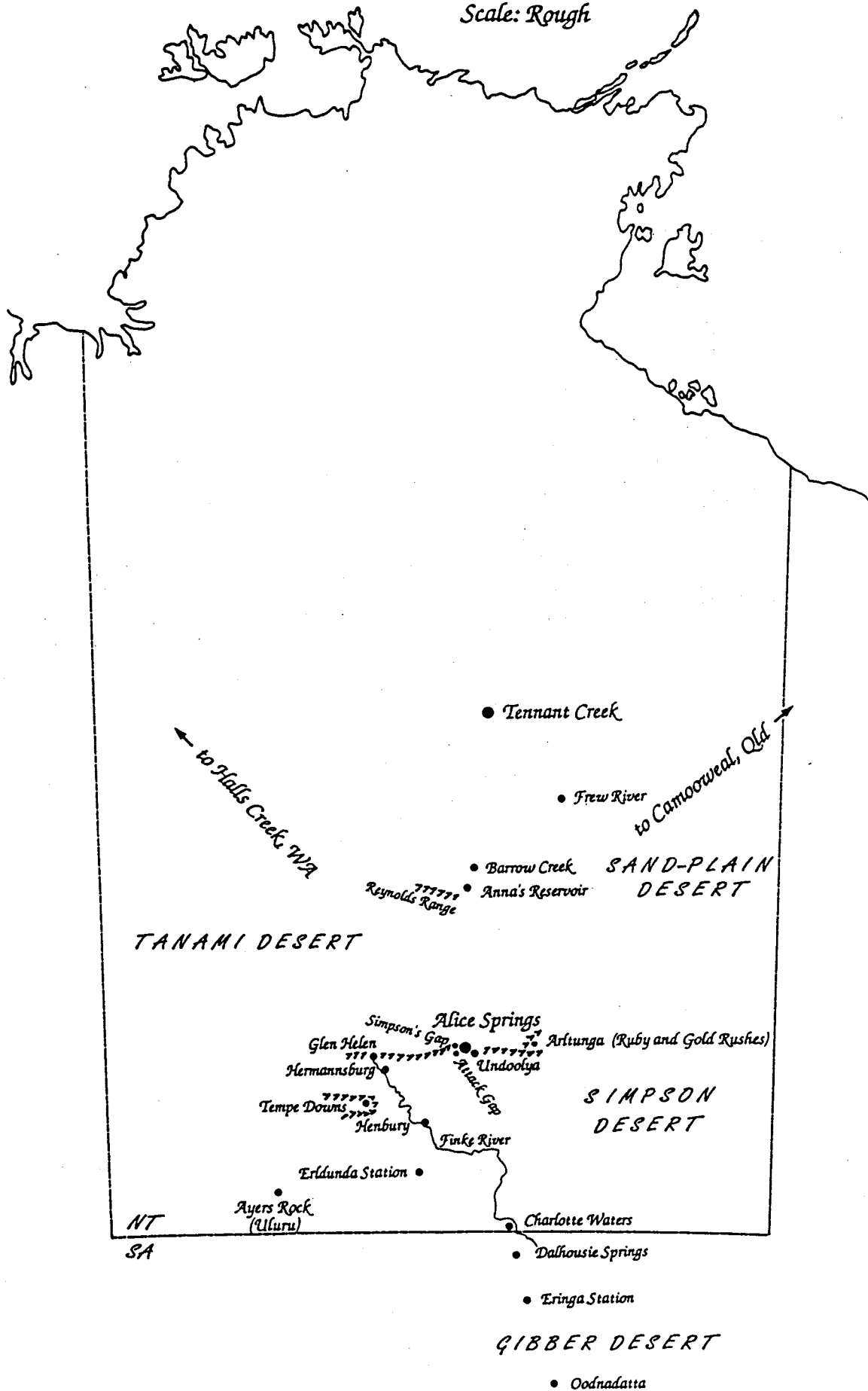
The End of the Bad Old Days: European Settlement in Central Australia, 1871-1894



R. G. (Dick) Kimber delivers the Fifth Eric Johnston Lecture at the State Library, Darwin, on 9th November 1990.

Central Australia 1870s - 1890s

Scale: Rough



**THE END OF THE BAD OLD DAYS:
European Settlement in Central Australia, 1871–1894**

by
R. G. Kimber

'The end of the bad old days' is a different time for every person who lives through an era. For some, in fact, it will be the end of the 'good old days' rather than the bad, and for others it will simply be part of a continuum. However, in this lecture I have nominated the period 1885–1894, with 1891 particularly significant, as 'the end of the bad old days'. If this 'end time' is to have meaning it must have a 'time before', which I date as commencing in 1871, the year in which the Overland Telegraph Line was completed. It must also have a 'time after' to allow reflection on 'the bad old days' and the improvements since then: the year I have chosen for this reflection back is 1911, the year in which the Federal Government took over control of the Northern Territory from South Australia.

An important consideration is the setting, which is Central Australia. This I define as the area of country within radius of 500 kilometres of Alice Springs, with extensions to Halls Creek and Camooweal.

As some people in the audience may not have been to Central Australia, brief comparisons between the Top End of the Territory and the Centre will now be made.

On December 17, 1845 the scientist–explorer Dr Ludwig Leichhardt wrote :

'All these creeks were separated from each other by a hilly forest land; but small fertile flats of sandy alluvium, clothed with young grass, and bordered by Banksias, extended along their banks. [We] came on a cart road which wound round the foot of a high hill; and, having passed the garden, with its fine Cocconut palms, the white houses and a row of snug thatched cottages burst suddenly upon us; the house of the Commandant being ... separate from the rest. We were most kindly received by Captain MacArthur, the Commandant of Port Essington, and by the other officers, who ... supplied us with everything we wanted.'¹

A short time prior to this Captain Charles Sturt had approached the centre of Australia from the south–east.

'The spinifex was close and matted', he wrote, 'and the horses were obliged to lift their feet straight up to avoid its sharp points. From the summit of a sandy undulation ..., we saw that the ridges extended northwards in parallel lines beyond the range of vision, and appeared as if interminable. To the eastward and westward they succeeded each other like the waves of the sea. The sand was of a deep red colour ... [Familiar] as we had been to such, my companion involuntarily uttered an exclamation of amazement ... "Good Heavens," said he, "did ever man see such country!" [I] turned from it with a feeling of bitter disappointment.'²

Such contrasts are extremes, yet elements of them still prevail in the Top End and Centre in the 1990s. Rainfall in the Top End is measured in metres, the plants are tropical with pandanus palms and paperbark characteristic, and the wildlife is epitomized by flocks of thousands of magpie geese. In Central Australia the rainfall is in centimetres – 'afraid of overdoing it' as one pioneer said, the prickly deadfinish and spinifex are characteristic plants, and the only animals readily seen in thousands are ants.

1. Leichhardt, 1847, pp. 535–536.
2. Sturt, 1849, vol. 1, pp. 405–406.

To the north of Darwin are the Timor and Arafura Seas, and tropical lands teeming with life. North of the Alice the country is such that one early traveller noted that 'about one hundred square miles' was required to 'graze a jew lizard'.³ The Top End's southern limit was defined, in the era under consideration, as being at Katherine, where a river full of fish and crocodiles in a striking gorge has always had appeal. At much the same distance south of the Alice is Oodnadatta, of which it has been said that 'the Devil made the place and even he was so disgusted that he threw stones at it'.⁴ Just as the terrain and climate influences the nature of the plants and wildlife, creating distinctive differences between the Top End and the Centre, so too they influenced the pioneer white settlers. Darwin, as with Port Essington, was an instant town, with white women present from the beginning, and also an instant hierarchy.⁵ This Top End population of hundreds swelled to thousands, many of them Chinese, in the decade following the discovery of gold at Pine Creek in 1872.⁶ The numbers of white women remained small, and tended to be 'cloaked in nobility'.⁷ South of the permanent waters and the masses of people of the Top End, the individuality of each person was marked, and the distinctiveness changed with the vegetation. A brief journey from north to south will illustrate my point.

In 1897 the explorer Carnegie told of a remarkable woman, 'Mother Dead Finish', who was a rather prickly lady.⁸ Travelling south of her one next came upon 'Bullwaddy' Bathern, 'Mulga Mick' O'Reilly, and then the land of the 'Spinifex fairies' – as Bill Harney and his mates called young Aboriginal women.⁹ Then, although they belong to a later era, came the 'Pumped-up Paddy Melon', the legendary 'Pituri Pete' and 'Bindi-eye'. This remarkable north-south line of vegetative characters ends at about the Northern Territory – South Australia border where, as P. Goldman recorded, 'the skeleton of a long-dry camel ... was ... the boundary, ... and nothing grows save big sharp stones'.¹⁰ The people who lived in this part of Central Australia were really tough, as I will later show.

Having, I trust, established something of the nature of the country and its characters, I now propose to return more directly to the subject of this lecture. It will be kept in mind, I hope, that century-old quotations are likely to include imperial measurements, and words or perceptions that are sometimes discriminatory or racist in a way that is not acceptable today.

As earlier indicated in the extract from Sturt's journal, Central Australia was initially perceived as a desert region. It remained for John McDouall Stuart, on the third of his great travels, to be the first explorer to successfully cross from the south to the north of Australia and return. He and his companions completed this wonderful feat in 1862, in the process reporting favourably on the MacDonnell Ranges country.¹¹ This was followed, in the years 1870–72, by establishment of the Overland Telegraph line along virtually the same route. It too was a wonderful achievement, linking Adelaide and Darwin and, through an undersea cable, much of the rest of the world. As Peter Taylor has rightly pointed out in An End to Silence, the men who built the Overland Telegraph Line 'suffered hardship and shared heroism on an epic scale'.¹² One of those who suffered most was a man called Kraagen, whose mates included a note on his grave that told all future travellers he had 'perished here for want of water about 12.12.71'.¹³

3. Gillen, 1968, pp. 96–97.
4. Day, 1922, pp. 9–10.
5. James, 1989, pp. 43–44.
6. Donovan, 1981, pp. 94–109; 107–174.
7. James, 1989, p. 115.
8. Carnegie, 1898, pp. 351–352.
9. Harney, 1960, p. 58.
10. Goldman, 1932, p. 89.
11. Stuart, 1865.
12. Taylor, 1980, p. 9.
13. Ibid, p. 199.

This death at the end of 1871 marks the beginning of 'the bad old days', for though the land was a friendly land once known and respected, it was (and still is) unforgiving to those who were careless. The word 'perish' was to become all too common a word in the early years of settlement, and no one has better expressed the sense of desolation than Barcroft Boake:

'Out on the wastes of the Never Never
That's where the dead men lie!
There where the heat-waves dance for ever -
That's where the dead men lie!'¹⁴

As mentioned above, one of the reasons men perished in the pioneering years was that they did not understand the land and the climate. Most who travelled to Central Australia in the 1870s-1880s came from southern Australia, where winter rainfall and summer heat prevailed. As T.G.H. Strehlow has indicated, Stuart did not comprehend that in Central Australia winter is dry, and summer is wet as well as hot.¹⁵ Even as late as 1889 Tietkens, a seasoned desert traveller, thought it possible he had found a permanently flowing creek, although his past experiences suggested otherwise.¹⁶ At the same time that they were adjusting to the nature of the land and its climate, they were adjusting to distances, often in terms of time as much as in miles. And even then the dimensions were understood through experience rather than in any precise way.

Archer Russell has told of the bushman who lost track of time, so had Christmas in late January.¹⁷ The same man, so accustomed to dealing with mobs of cattle, horses, etc., was to talk of the Finke River country in the following terms:

'There'll be mobs of water on the track, we'll get mobs of beef on the runs, the stages'll be mobs shorter, an' there'll be mobs better camping grounds ... And of course we'll be able to take it mobs easier. Oh, yes, it'll be mobs better'.¹⁸

I am sure that all in the audience fully understand this, but it does pay to have lived in the Territory for a while. The great distances meant that there could be problems with foods, which might take over a year to reach their destination. At 70 pounds per ton cartage¹⁹ - probably \$20,000 per ton in today's terms - nothing was wasted, as the following story illustrates:

"Why", a companion suggested to Nat Buchanan, who was sieving out the weevils and grubs preparatory to making a damper, "that is rotten flour you have there Buchanan".
"Oh, it's not too bad while these things can live on it", was the drawled out reply.²⁰

As we are on the subject of flour, and I have previously said that the characters were really tough in the true arid lands, it is appropriate now to tell of an 1877 incident involving flour in the Oodnadatta country.

A station manager and a bullock driver called Richards were obliged to walk a considerable distance, with only a bag of flour as shared tucker. Richards was described as stinking 'to such a degree that it was sickening to get to the windward of him', and he was also such a glutton that the flour supply was soon exhausted. At this stage, 'with no hope of getting more for at least 7 days', a bag of flour was found in the shade of a tree. The station manager's story continues:

14. Dutton, 1976, p. 79
15. Strehlow, 1967, pp. 2-3.
16. Tietkens, 1890, p. 11.
17. Russell, 1934, p. 39; 91-92.
18. Ibid, p. 92.
19. Duncan, 1967, p. 30.
20. Ibid, p. 55.

'[I] had heard of such a thing being done to trap [poison] Blacks on the Coopers Side ... [so] I took no risk, but ... baked a few Johnny Cakes on the coals, and Richards filled himself. I decided to see if Richards suffered any ill effects, but he never turned a hair, so I decided we could use the providential find without risk'.²¹

It will be appreciated that, in the 'bad old days', good fortune such as an unpoisoned bag of flour by the track was a rarity. And it will further be appreciated that the author of the extract lived to a considerable age. He was, incidentally, my great-great-grandmother's brother.

Thus far in this lecture it will be apparent that I have made virtually no mention of the relationships between the pioneer white settlers and the Aborigines. To understand these relationships several points need to be made. I believe all of them to be unquestionably true, and that all are important to any understanding of the era.

The oldest evidence for Aboriginal occupation in Australia is believed to be at Kakadu, where a date of 50,000 years has been deduced by some of Australia's leading archaeologists. One of these archaeologists has also dated deposits in a Central Australian rock shelter to 22,000 years.²² Over tens of thousands of years the descendants of these earliest settlers had, in their very different regional ways, developed extremely strong bonds with the land, and with one another. They were hunter-gatherers who practised forms of resource management, and had dynamic relationships with the land, and with one another. I emphasise that the word dynamic is deliberately chosen in preference to the presently much-favoured expression, 'living in harmony': rose-coloured glasses are no more helpful than are blinkers and blindfolds. I also emphasise that, whilst in today's world there is no need to apologize for being distinguished as a hunter-gatherer, it was not so in the eyes and minds of nineteenth century British settlers – of which more will be mentioned later. Such a brief summary does no justice at all to 50,000 years of history but, as an Australian, I feel privileged to have been able to share experiences with the present inheritors of their ancient ancestral cultures.

Turning now to the British people, when they first settled the Sydney area in 1788, they came with orders and proclamations of the most positive kind. Captain Arthur Phillip was ordered to establish friendly relationships with the Aborigines. 'He must "conciliate their affections", enjoin everyone to "live in amity and kindness with them", and punish all who should "wantonly destroy them, or give them any unnecessary interruption in the exercise of their several occupations"'.²³

As W.E.H. Stanner has eloquently shown, in place of 'amity and kindness' there was, within four years, 'violence, indifference and contempt'.²⁴ South Australia, established in 1836, followed an identical breakdown of ideals, although a leavening of paternalistic Christian compassion was also present.²⁵ This State's development is important to the history of Central Australia because it became the main entry route for exploration and settlement, as well as the early seat of government. Much of this association will be so inherently obvious as this lecture proceeds that it will not be commented upon now. However, crucial to an understanding of Central Australia's settlement by white Australians is that the settlers believed in their superiority over Aborigines, and that they further believed that Aborigines were doomed to extinction. Such beliefs tend to deaden sensitivities.

With this brief background of the ancient Aboriginal world, and the new settler world, in mind, I now turn to the more specific situation in Central Australia.

21. Treloar, 1870–1899?, diary extract for December 1897.
22. Roberts, Jones, Smith, 1990; Smith 1987.
23. Stanner, 1977, p. 3.
24. Ibid, p. 23.
25. Tiechelman, 1841.

The explorers have been touched upon. Their deeds were invariably heroic, even if the means by which they were accomplished were at times ruthless. I have no doubt that most people, faced with the same problems – basically problems of survival – would have behaved in similar fashion. Comments by Ernest Giles act as an appropriate conclusion to Aboriginal – explorer relationships:

'No doubt these ... [Aborigines] were dreadfully annoyed to find their little reservoirs discovered by such water-swallowing wretches as they doubtless thought white men and horses to be; I could only console myself with the reflection, that ... we must be prepared to lay down our lives ... to procure water, as life and water are synonymous terms. I dare say they know where to get more, but I don't'.²⁶

Giles recognised that 'the white man is a trespasser in the first instance, which is a cause sufficient for any atrocity to be committed upon him', but also stated :

'[The] great Designer of the universe ... permitted a fiat to be recorded, that the beings whom it was His pleasure in the first instance to place amidst these lovely scenes, must eventually be swept from the face of the earth by others more intellectual, more dearly beloved and gifted than they. Progressive improvement is undoubtedly the order of creation ...'.²⁷

The Old Testament and Darwin's theory of evolution joined forces in a righteous and comforting way – for the trespassers.

In general, because the explorers passed through the country at a relatively rapid rate, avoiding prolonged associations with Aborigines, direct clashes were few in number. Aborigines tended to use firing of vegetation to force the 'oruncha' or 'mamu' ('devil-monsters', as white men on horseback and their stock were initially perceived) to move on. Fighting involving spears against firearms tended to be 'on the run' rather than from barricades or by ambush, and extraordinarily few deaths occurred on either side. However, once the telegraph stations and pastoral properties were established, and the mining fields opened, very different situations prevailed.

Much as I do not wish, yet again, to interrupt the trend of this account, it is necessary to now make two further points. First, we have virtually no Aboriginal accounts of what occurred in the 1870s–1880s, so available records and interpretations of events are understandably biased. And second, as Eylmann observed at the end of the nineteenth century, although 'major outrages' occurred against the Aborigines, accurate accounts were not readily obtained because of the bushman's 'love of boasting' and, conversely, the murderer's preference that 'his murderous act ... remain hidden'.²⁸

He might well have added that officialdom had an extraordinary ability to sweep things under the carpet, although it was universally known that 'dispersal' was the euphemism for the shooting of people.

I have done my best to be as accurate as possible in the following accounts.

The Overland Telegraph Line stations were established with an eye to water supplies and protection against possible attack by Aborigines. Initial contact between Aborigines and telegraph station staff was cautiously friendly. The Aranda, intrigued by these first ever stone buildings with iron roofs, called the Alice Springs station 'Kapmanta', literally the 'solid head' place. To allay the fears of any who might think this is unfair, they were not referring to the operators but to the roofing – 'the place of watertight roofs'.²⁹

26. Giles, 1889, vol. 1, pp. 212–213.

27. Ibid, p. 184.

28. Eylmann, 1908, ch. 15.

29. Strehlow, 1907.

In February 1874 things changed in dramatic fashion when Barrow Creek Telegraph Station was attacked. Two men, Stapleton and Franks, were killed and others injured. Various reasons have been forwarded for the attack over the succeeding years. Gillen, who knew some of the staff well, stated in 1901 that :

'Stapleton had been kind to the point of weakness to the natives giving them almost everything they asked for until their demands became unreasonable and he was unable to comply with them'.³⁰

He clearly implies that the Aboriginal attack was provoked by this change in relationships, and by the Aborigines' desire to plunder all food and other items.

Another explanation was given by M.J. O'Reilly, who 'got to know a member of this tribe' in c. 1919. O'Reilly understood from the Aborigines that the telegraph station had greatly offended them because it had been built 'on one of the tribe's most sacred spots, their Holy of Holies'.³¹ Still later T.G.H. Strehlow, as a result of discussions with the Aborigines, suggested that 'white men of bad character', not of the telegraph station staff, had abducted young Aboriginal women and raped them: in retaliation the Aborigines attacked the white men available to them rather than the actual criminals.³²

I have presented these different accounts to indicate both how difficult it is to arrive at the truth, and how much perceptions can change. Responses also vary over time. Gillen stated that '[in] the annals of Native treachery there is no crueller or more unprovoked attack ...'.³³ O'Reilly commented, 'They felt they were justified according to their light. We who sent out a punitive expedition and slaughtered dozens of them also felt justified, according to our light'.³⁴ And Strehlow's perception was : '[The] Kaititja in 1874 did only what Europeans living in occupied countries were to do during the 1939-45 war to enemy officials ... guerilla fighters and patriotic individuals made their attacks upon the intruders wherever and whenever opportunities arose'.³⁵

As a final comment, on 5th October 1970 the Aboriginal Paddy Bourke, aged about seventy, told the story of the tragedy as follows:

'You know Barrow Creek? I remember [my ancestors] spear white-fella in the old days'.

He said this with obvious satisfaction. And then he gave a type of sign language for throwing spears ... Then he repeated it.

'They spear plenty white fella. Then white men, policemen, kill big mob of black men'.³⁶

Retaliation was as swift and severe as could be managed. The Commissioner of Police telegraphed : 'KEEP THE STATION AT ALL HAZARDS. SAVE YOUR AMMUNITION AND DON'T FIRE WITHOUT EFFECT'. Gason, the constable on the spot, was 'authorized ... to lead a strong party of police and volunteers to search for and apprehend those responsible'. With such instructions the police party ignored the order to 'apprehend those responsible' and concentrated on firing with effect.³⁷

30. Gillen, 1968, p. 108.
31. O'Reilly, 1944, pp. 87-88.
32. Strehlow, op. cit., p. 590.
33. Gillen, op. cit., p. 100.
34. O'Reilly, op. cit., p. 88.
35. Strehlow, op. cit., p. 590.
36. Kimber, journal, 5.10.1970.
37. Clyne, 1987, p. 173.

The patrols were out for six weeks, and in 1918 'Skipper' Partridge was told that 'they shot every black person they could see'³⁸ – the official figures were 'several' and 'three'. Strehlow was also told of indiscriminate shootings, with many innocent people shot and, in addition, sacred objects smashed³⁹. The end result was that 'for years ... no black ever came within miles of the Barrow Hill'.⁴⁰

In brief summary of the Barrow Hill tragedy, we know that two white men were killed, we can estimate that anywhere between 10 (official records) and perhaps 40 or more (other accounts) Aborigines were shot, and we have many comments and justifications on both sides. O'Reilly's view, that 'they were justified according to their light [and we] ... felt justified, according to our light' is probably as accurate a statement as can be made.

No other major attacks on telegraph stations, resulting in staff deaths and ruthless reprisals, have been recorded for the Central Australian region. Similarly, Hermannsburg Mission, established in 1877, did not suffer attacks, nor – as might be expected – were the missionaries ever involved in reprisals.^{41,42} However, pastoral activities resulted in an entirely different attitude on both sides.⁴³

The first men of pastoral association to follow the Overland Telegraph Line route were the drovers. All who were involved in the 1870s–1880s droving feats can only be considered remarkable men – if also, from an Aboriginal viewpoint, trespassers who could sometimes be ruthless. The first droving trip is illustrative.

In 1863 Ralph Milner started from Adelaide for the Northern Territory but, it being a dry time, he stopped 'at Cooper's Creek for a time'. The stop was for six years, during which time his wife died. After this Milner started again, with his brother John second-in-command, ten other assistants, 7,000 sheep, 300 horses, 25 dogs, a flock of goats and a year's provisions.

Long dry stages, heavy rains, quicksand, a rat plague, threatening Aborigines, tracking up of strayed stock – these were their experiences as they travelled up to Alice Springs. After that they got worse. Upwards of 3,000 sheep and 100 goats died from eating poison bush near the Devil's Marbles. John Milner was clubbed to death and his assailant was shot at and severely wounded, and from then on relationships with the Aborigines were epitomized by the order, 'make sure of a nigger every shot'. At one stage the staghounds were let loose on an estimated 200 Aborigines who were believed to be preparing an ambush; the dogs tore out the throat of one man and savaged others as they fled. Further troubles befell the party, with stock losses and a delay of 3 months because of the wet season. By the time they reached Darwin in March 1872, the entire journey had taken nearly ten years, everyone had suffered great privations, and by now the tally of sheep lost in natural disasters was nearly 4,000.

The government, in recognition of this outstanding achievement, announced that the reward offer had been cancelled.^{44,45}

38. Grant, 1981, p. 121.

39. Strehlow, 1971, pp. 590–593.

40. Grant, op. cit., p. 121

41. Leske, 1977.

42. Schmiechen, 1971.

43. The O.T. stations and Hermannsburg Mission were also involved in pastoral activities. However this was just a side-line, and with the exception of the O.T. station at Barrow Creek, the staff developed friendlier relationships with the Aborigines than did any pastoralists of the 1870s–1880s.

44. Ashwin, 1931. Ashwin claimed the South Australian Government had offered a reward for the first 1,000 sheep or 100 cattle overlanded from South Australia to Port Darwin.

45. Milner, 1927.

Life might not have been meant to be easy, as our former Prime Minister Mr Malcolm Fraser once said, but it is doubtful whether it was meant to be this hard. I have no doubt that those Aborigines who had seen their lands and their waters trespassed upon, who had been frightened by 'devil-monsters', who had been shot at, and who had been savaged by stag-hounds, would have thought the same. 'The bad old days' were experienced, in different ways, by both the Aborigines and the pioneer white travellers and settlers.

Although no other droving expeditions, not even the famous Durack overland party, took as long as ten years to complete, all were to suffer at least some of the same hardships experienced by the Milner party. And often enough, the Aborigines encountered were to suffer similarly to those met by Milner. In many instances the hero became murderer, and the murderer became hero, whether he was an Aborigine or a drover.

Following the earliest continent-wide droving epic came those which brought cattle, horses and sheep to Central Australia, to stock the newly selected station properties. Alfred Giles, one of those involved in these great enterprises, expressed the attitude that was to prevail: '[I] grant no claim to the black as an exclusive possessor of our Australian soil'.⁴⁶

The earliest stations were established along the Overland Telegraph Line and its vicinity, and the courses of the rivers and creeks of the central ranges. They were stocked in the period 1873-1889, with the majority of stock arriving in the years 1876-1884.⁴⁷ Establishing a station was sheer hard work, and I recall Churchill-Smith's diary reading along the following lines during the 1873 work at Undoolya: 'Warm day, 90°F', 'Hot day, 110°F', 'Hot day, 120°F', 'Hot day, 120°F - I wish the man who invented the crowbar was here using it now'.⁴⁸

In the earliest years of station development the Aborigines tended to be cautious and inquisitive, wishing to understand the intruders, their animals, their clothing and equipment, their food and so on. As the explorers had at times found, when the limited number of gifts had been distributed to visiting Aborigines, more would be desired. Petty theft of items, often of steel but sometimes apparently because of their novelty, occurred.^{49, 50} Anyone caught stealing could expect harsh treatment in the process of a station manager establishing the new rules, but generally it took considerable time before the tensions built to the point of conflict.

The developments towards conflict seem to have occurred first on the fringes of settlement, where the white men involved were few in number, remote from communication with the telegraph and police stations, and where the ranges provided protection for the Aborigines. The nature of the white men involved is also likely to have been significant - the further 'out', the more likely for hard men to deal with situations in a way not necessarily as the prevailing laws of the land suggested. Alan Breaden's account of the establishment of Glen Helen Station, 120 kilometres west of the Alice, is illustrative of several of the above aspects.

The drovers arrived at Glen Helen at Christmas time, 1878. They selected a base site near a large waterhole and immediately set to work erecting yards and building a 'reed house'.

'Cleared a space eighty yards from here, or more ... and pegs driven in round the circle ... No bush blacks were allowed inside the pegged line. To teach them, a few got the boot at the start, but soon settled down'.

This was almost certainly conventional practice, although others used harsher measures. J. Bagot, for instance, indicated that where Aborigines were 'inclined to commit offences, ...

46. Adelaide Observer, 9.5.1891, p. 33.

47. Duncan, 1967.

48. Churchill-Smith, 1872

49. Barclay, 1878, p. 4.

50. Purvis, 1971, book 1, p. 65..

stock owners found that the only thing to do was to arm a large number of men with stockwhips, and when they came upon a camp to follow it and use the whip very freely'.⁵¹

Breaden indicates that conflict gradually escalated. On one occasion the cook had a spear thrown at him; two women were caught stealing rations and were given a 'good hiding'; a Schneider rifle was used to fire at men who had encouraged the women to pilfer; and after 'about eighteen months ... the niggers took on killing cattle'. First it was a quiet bullock, with seven men involved in the killing. Of one of them called 'Sugar', Breaden noted, 'I had settlement with him later on'. I don't imagine that the settlement was a cash payment!

At much the same time 'the niggers were killing cattle hand over fist at Boggy Hole', further south down the Finke River. Breaden briefly noted the evidence of two kills, then wrote:

'Third kill ... A cow. A rock had been rolled from the top of the hill, quite half a ton in weight. The cow was as flat as a pancake. Nothing taken from that. The rock covered most of the beast.'⁵²

The Aborigines involved were not caught but two wool-bales, stolen from Hermannsburg Mission, were found. In addition one of the main problems associated with cattle-spearing was noted – the scattering of other cattle which, in running from the spearmen and being so generally disturbed, lost condition. And a little later Breaden and his companion of the time, Chewings, were abused and threatened by Aborigines, and yet another 'kill' was located near Ormiston Gorge. At this stage, with a powder-keg situation and matches being struck, as it were, dry conditions set in. Despite a total rainfall above average in 1882, the period 1880–1884 inclusive was a drought; 1882, in fact, was specifically stated to be the most severe drought year yet experienced in Central Australia.^{53, 54} The increasing pressures on the Aborigines were the same pressures that had been recognised further south during earlier pastoral settlement. 'A prominent cause of their depredations', wrote the Commissioner of Police only a little later, '[is] no doubt ... the increased difficulty they experience in finding native game, the supply of which is being steadily lessened by the gradual settlement of the country'.⁵⁵ Drought, of course, exacerbated this problem, making cattle or horse-killing a greater temptation.

The 'depredations' varied from one locality to another within the overall region. In the more southerly areas the opportunities for cattle-killing were limited in that reprisals could be expected swiftly, for there was not the range cover or, in many cases, the thick scrub cover that was available on the more central stations. It is almost certain that it was to the stations in this Dalhousie Springs country that J. Bagot was referring when he stated that stock owners used 'the whip very freely' wherever there was any inclination by the Aborigines 'to commit offences'.

An entirely different reason meant that there were virtually no troubles in the central Finke River country. From about 1875, just before the establishment of the earliest stations on the Finke River, a major inter-tribal Aboriginal guerilla war was waged, totally independent of any aspects of telegraph station, pastoral or other white settlement. It involved people from a very wide range of country, with upwards of 160 people killed over three years. By the time the last avenging warriors returned to their home country in 1878, the first cattle stations and Hermannsburg Mission had been established. According to T.G.H. Strehlow the Aboriginal people were so 'sickened by the several years of murder and killing' that, although they resented aspects of the intrusions, they also 'longed to return to an era of peace and quiet amity'.⁵⁶

51. The Register, 31.8.1888.
52. Purvis, 1971, book 2, pp. 10–17.
53. Adelaide Observer, 5.8.1883; 22.9.1883, p. 33.
54. Vamplew, 1987, p. 68.
55. Peterswald, 1888, p. 689.
56. Strehlow, 1968, pp. 36–45.

It would be fascinating to know the significance of the roles of Aboriginal leaders, men and women, in deciding against conflict, and it would be at least as interesting to know how widespread was the support for cattle-killing. Often enough some Europeanised name such as 'Sugar' is known, but not the wider background, the precise reasons, the support or otherwise of ritual leaders, the pressures from wives and families, and so on.

In May 1883 there was a period of calm before the storm, so much so that a Dalhousie Springs 'Correspondent' wrote, 'We have some JPs and some [police] troopers, but we could get on without them ...'.⁵⁷

The next year saw the establishment of the Barrow Creek Pastoral Company, with its base at Anna's Reservoir. The wording 'Barrow Creek Pastoral Company' brings to mind the attack on the Barrow Creek Telegraph Station and the reprisals in 1874. However the impact in 1874 was primarily on Kaititja people. A crucial difference in location of the cattle station at Anna's Reservoir is that it is in northern Anmatjera country. Despite some of them being innocent victims during the 1874 reprisals, they had not otherwise been substantially trespassed upon or 'dispersed'. And, in contradiction to Commissioner Peterswald's comment about 'gradual settlement', they were suddenly avalanched! William Benstead was manager of the new station, with Harry Figg (stockman) and Tom Coombes (cook) amongst the others involved in what was one of Australia's largest ever mobs walked to new country. Suddenly some 5,000 head of stock, of which over 4,000 can be presumed to have been cattle and most of the rest horses, needed water and grass.⁵⁸ It might have been virgin country from a pastoral viewpoint, and it had been reached easily enough because of fortuitous rains, but it was in country with very few natural long lasting waters in the midst of a droughty spell. Here was not a match, but a flaming torch, to the powder keg.

Cattle-spearing commenced almost at once, not only in Anmatjera country but also, coincidentally, in the MacDonnell Range Country. In July 1884 'Fortunas Sequator' had a letter published in 'The Adelaide Observer' in which he 'drew attention to the fact that the natives were troublesome at Alice Springs, and that additional police protection was urgently required to save life and property'. Shortly afterwards he stated that Mounted Constable Willshire, the sole policeman for a vast area, 'has the confidence of the settlers; but he must be reinforced ... Alone he is powerless'.⁵⁹

So severe did the 'wanton destruction of cattle' become that on 29th July Mounted Constable Brooks (from Barrow Creek) and two white stockmen set off in pursuit of the cattle killers. This legitimizing of the use of stockmen and later others who were not of the police force, as members of punitive expeditions, is, I believe, an important aspect in the history of the next two years. It meant that nearly all white people, the Hermannsburg Mission staff and a limited number of Telegraph Station staff excepted, were drawn into a kind of authorised police vigilante role. I here make the observation that had I been present in the area in the 1880s I like to think that I would have been a fair and reasonable man, yet the high probability is that I would have strapped on my .44 revolver, taken down my Schneider or Martini-Henry rifle, and ridden on revenge bent with the police patrols.

Mounted Constable Brooks rode out, and his report was brief:

'Offenders tracked by party same day ... from where beast had been killed. Fresh beef found on their camp. Endeavoured to arrest offenders, who were recognised. Firearms were not used until absolutely necessary. Spears and stones were thrown at the party, and some of the natives were wounded. They made their escape in the ranges.'⁶⁰

57. Adelaide Observer, 5.8.1883.

58. Duncan, 1967, p. 162.

59. Adelaide Observer, 5.8.1883, p. 27.

60. Adelaide Observer, 16.8.1884, p. 29.

One week later, while William Benstead was in Alice Springs and the rest of the stockmen were 50 kilometres west at a stock camp, Harry Figg and Tom Coombes were attacked at Anna's Reservoir homestead. A large group of warriors silently gathered, some of them almost certainly Western Aranda who not only had affiliations with the Anmatjera, but also (very likely) experience of cattle killing and avoidance of reprisal parties.⁶¹ The pre-dawn attack was a complete surprise. The initial telegraphic report told of burnt stores, books and clothes, and of the men being wounded⁶²; Ridley Williams gave more details:

'They first tackled the cook who slept near the kitchen ... and speared him eight different times. They then tackled the stockman who had been awakened by the row and had got his revolver ready for action. He opened the door and a shower of spears met him. He fired several shots, wounding some of the blacks, [but then closed the door as defence]. [They] set fire to the roof, which was a thatched one, and he was – after the shirt was on fire on his back – forced to rush out of the house. He fired his revolver four or five times at the blacks and they scattered. [From other accounts he killed two or three leading spearmen.] He got one spear in his shoulder but he pulled it out and rushed towards them. When they fled he then stood out in the open. The light of the house burning made everything clear as day for some time. [To] his astonishment the old cook crawled out from his room, covered in spear wounds. [He was also burnt, but had saved himself by crawling beneath his bullock hide bed]. [The] very weak stockman managed to get a horse and put it in the cart and drive the cook and himself to the ... [stock-camp].'⁶³

When this news was sent to the various southern police headquarters Inspector Besley telegraphed instructions to Willshire 'to organise strong party immediately, including four black trackers'.⁶⁴

At this point in time the 'outrage' was obviously perceived as an essentially unprovoked one by the Aborigines against the station hands. However, in 1896 Erhard Eylmann stated that 'the drovers had had sexual intercourse with a girl who was still only a child'.⁶⁵ It is clearly implied that Figg and Coombes were the guilty men, but 'drovers' does allow of it being other men and, without wishing to diminish the possibility, one will now never know whether it is a true charge or not. Similarly one will never know whether it was the main reason for the attack or not. Whatever the circumstances, though, it appears to have had no bearing at all on the police party's pursuit of the Aborigines.

Constable Willshire's account indicates that the police party followed the tracks of the men who had attacked the station, taking women and children into custody to prevent them warning the spearmen. On August 29th, having received information from 'old lubras' who were fearful of the police, the patrol members surrounded a 'big camp of natives', amongst whom were believed to be key figures associated with the attack:

'[We] worked the attack so that the natives would be surrounded. When they observed us they took spears and all other sorts of weapons. I must here state ... I ordered the trackers to call on the natives in their own language to surrender.

61. This presumption is based on the fact that the Aborigine called "Clubfoot" was involved in the cattle-killing at both Glen Helen and Anna's Reservoir. In addition, the later tracking of cattle killers by Mounted Constable Wurmbrand links the two areas.
62. Adelaide Observer, op. cit.
63. Purvis, 1971, book 2, p. 68.
64. Adelaide Observer, op. cit.
65. Eylmann, 1904, ch. 25.

But the wild natives took no notice of this. They fitted their weapons into their woomeras, commenced to throw them, and tried to escape. One spear entered the horse ridden by Tracker Betty. Those for whom I had warrants were then fired at. The well-known and notorious cattle killers – Slim Jim and Clubfoot who tried to burn Figg and Coombes alive, were shot dead. Three others were wanted, but with the remainder made good their escape ...!

From this camp site they returned to Benstead's stock camp, on the way seeing one horse which had been speared in the leg. Here they found that a valuable horse had been speared, and discovered that 'the natives were killing the cattle in one place while we were in another'. The account continues:

'We saw twenty three beasts within a few miles of one another lying dead, with spear wounds all over their carcasses. The natives were aware they were being tracked by a white party, ... [so] they split into mobs. This made tracking difficult. In the camp where Slim Jim and Clubfoot were shot we found a number of axes, knives, etc., all belonging to Benstead's Station. The natives were numerous here, the tracks were all fresh

On September 5 we found a fat cow just killed, with thirty three rough mulga spears sticking in her. ... One hour afterwards we caught five full grown natives chasing a fat beast full of spears We tried to arrest the offenders, but they took to the Reynolds Ranges. Jimmy Mullins, a native cattle killer, who was concerned in the burning of the station, was shot dead on the side of the range by one of my trackers. The rest made their escape. We found here a great quantity of fresh meat.

On the 7th September we came across another batch of natives, amongst whom was Boco, for whom I held a warrant. They showed fight, as usual, fitting their spears into woomeras, and throwing them. There were about 40 natives with Boco when he was called to surrender. He replied in broken English, "Come on, you white buggers". They were getting away very fast, and we therefore had to fire upon them. In a close hand-to-hand fight with one of my trackers, Boco was shot dead. We tried very hard to arrest them, but we were almost helpless in the big ranges compared with those savages, as they leap from rock to rock and suddenly disappear.⁶⁶

This patrol has been quoted in considerable detail for several reasons. First, it indicates, I believe, that the Aborigines were having considerable success in their cattle killing, horse spearing and other raids. Secondly, it illustrates that the police, their trackers and the volunteer conscripts were conscientious in their duty. And thirdly, on the basis of a close reading of the various newspaper and other reports available, I believe it likely that only a small part of the story is being told. How was it that the old lubras became so fearful that they divulged the whereabouts of a camp to the police party? How was it that men on horseback, with a camp surrounded or coming by surprise upon men intent on cattle spearing, could not manage a single arrest? How was it that, with scores of Aborigines scattering, only those for whom warrants existed were shot when all in the police party were shooting? How was it that men were either shot dead or escaped, with none at all wounded in such a way as to allow capture? Why were there quite significant variations from one account to another? I suspect that the answer to all of these questions is quite simple: the police were doing the job that the pastoralists wanted, often enough with the pastoralists assisting, and the Police Commissioners in Adelaide and Port Augusta turning a blind eye so long as no one else did any hard questioning. I could, of course, be entirely wrong, so I will leave this possibility for the time being and presume that the reports were as extraordinarily accurate as the shootings.

While all of the patrol work was going on, Ridley Williams, the Queensland drover whose account of the Anna's Reservoir attack has been given, arrived with another 2,000 head of cattle! Anna's Reservoir itself was now dry, so most of the cattle were moved west to the main stock camp. Here, despite the cattle killing that had been going on, there must now have been over 6,000 head of stock, including horses. The weakest of the Queensland cattle were now walked to Simpson's Gap, some 20 kilometres west of Alice Springs. It was a case of instant pressure on a major Aboriginal water supply yet again, with cattle-killing commencing almost immediately yet again too. This cattle-killing was only discovered late in the second week of September 1884, at which time Mounted Constable Daer and party (again including stationmen) were following the Aboriginal murderers who had killed an Alice Springs based Aboriginal shepherd. At least three accounts of this patrol exist. In essence, the patrol encountered a sizeable group of the wanted Aborigines; called upon them to surrender (which they refused to do); 'dispersed' them with rifle fire, with only 'Joulla, one the ringleaders', being wounded; 'shot several dogs, broke a few weapons'; recorded that the trackers 'were bitter enemies' of the western people whom they were chasing; and discovered that a 'portion of same blacks again spearing cattle and horses thirty miles further west'.^{67, 68, 69}

One week later Constable Willshire and a patrol of black trackers and station hands were riding east of Undoolya Station where thirteen cattle had been found killed. Mr William Willoughby, J.P., volunteered himself and his stockman as part of the police party and the Commissioner of Police in Adelaide accepted the offer, but was obviously concerned – at what, I suspect, was both officially and unofficially reaching his ears. His telegram in reply warned 'all engaged to keep within the rules imposed on such expeditions by the Government'.⁷⁰ Willshire's report had one variation from his earlier ones – in addition to those shot dead, several Aborigines were wounded, but all of these escaped. As usual, no arrests were made.⁷¹

West and east of Alice Springs, then west again, the cattle-killing continued. In mid October Jas McDonald who had taken over from Breaden as manager of Glen Helen, was riding through a narrow pass with two companions. Cattle-killing had been rife and now the Aborigines rolled stones from the gorge rim down upon the men. Although the men escaped with their lives, one horse was killed.⁷² Two different police patrols in the general area had different results. Constable Daer was attacked and in shooting at his attackers, wounded one of the wanted men. Constable Wurmbrand, after arresting and chaining three Aborigines, shot them all: his claim that they were attempting to escape was disputed by the evidence – they were still all chained together in death. He shot four more a little later.^{73, 74} At this stage Aboriginal guerilla warfare, with stock killing and attempts on the lives of station hands would appear to have been successful – but at undesirable cost.

The reports thus far given are only the more official reports. Other reprisals undoubtedly occurred at much the same time, some of them carried out by groups of stockmen working beyond the law, and others involving the police but not being officially recorded. Blackfellows' Bones Hill and Bore marks one such site. Aborigines, finding their natural game diminished because of the stocking of the country, began spearing cattle. The patrol of

67. Protector of Aborigines correspondence GRG 52/1, 12.9.1884; 17.9.1884.
68. Port Augusta Despatch, 29.9.1884.
69. Purvis, 1971, book 2, pp. 69–70.
70. Adelaide Observer, 29.9.1884, p. 30.
71. Protector of Aborigines correspondence GRG 52/1, 29.9.1884.
72. Ibid, 14.10.1884.
73. Hartwig, 1965, p. 398.
74. Schmiechen, 1971, p. 85.

combined police and station people caught up with the cattle-killers on the hill and their bones gave their name to the hill thereafter.^{75, 76} Another attack, and follow up punitive expedition, occurred 15 kilometres south west of Alice Springs at a site later known as Attack Gap. An old mate of mine, the late Walter Smith, told me that the Aborigines had attacked a supply waggon, driving off the teamsters (they cut the traces and rode the waggon horses in to Alice Springs) and then taking all of the supplies. This immediate success was short-lived, for the largest party of whites ever assembled then rode out. One of the patrol members was later to recall:

'[We] went a bit too far. It was the biggest fight we ever had up here.

'We made a tidy mob when we all got together ... about twenty all told - eight or nine cattley men, some of the chaps from the Overland Telegraph an' a mob of police from the Alice. The 'nigs'... poor devils... met us at the top of the valley ... [We] rounded 'em up on that razorback hill over there. Then we let go. We ran a cordon round the hill an' peppered 'em until there wasn't a 'nig' showing... Poor devils... There must have been 150 to 170 of 'em on that hill and I reckon that few of 'em got away... But what could we do? We had to live up here. That was the trouble of it'.⁷⁷

Although the date of this event is not known, and its accuracy can obviously be questioned, I reiterate that Walter Smith independently confirmed the account, giving details as he had heard them from old-timers amongst the Aborigines. The most likely dates are 1884 or 1885.

The numerous Aboriginal attacks in Central Australia were now given a rivalry by the spearing to death of miners on the Daly River. Aside from the tragedy of the incident, and the terrible reprisal raid, an important call which joined with those from Alice Springs was the call for the establishment of a native police force.⁷⁸ Although the various native constables or 'black trackers' in Alice Springs were already working in similar fashion to the Native Police of Queensland - Willoughby clearly indicates that Aborigines from northern South Australia were already in use 'against the natives' of the Alice Springs district - an official Native Police 'Queensland style' was something which had previously been resisted in South Australia in the 1870s-1880s. The Queensland Native Police record was one of such butchery that ideas for a similar force in South Australia had been suppressed. Now, though, strong pressures were at work. The tiny number of white settlers were, without doubt, under threat to the point where abandonment of country was being considered: 'Life and property are quite unsafe here', read Willoughby's telegram.⁷⁹

The various pressures at work - from the pastoralists who owned the stations (some of whom lived in Adelaide), from the managers in Central Australia, from the police of Central Australia, from Willshire's father who wished his son to be in charge - won the day. In November 1884 the idea was approved⁸⁰, and the South Australian Government Gazette of 17 September 1885 (p. 831) recorded it:

'Six native police have been enrolled under the charge of Mounted Constable Willshire. Their headquarters are at Alice Springs, and their duties are to patrol the country from the Peake to Barrow's Creek in order to protect the settlers from the outrages of the natives'.

75. O'Reilly, 1944, p. 117.

76. Strehlow, 1971, p. 588.

77. Russell, 1934, pp. 254-255.

78. Adelaide Observer, 20.9.1884, p. 31.

79. Ibid, 4.10.1884.

80. Clyne, 1987, p. 185.

Now, although clashes continued in the 1890s, particularly on the remote stations such as Tempe Downs, Erldunda and Frew River, I will give but one more illustration of a patrol and its work. I have previously suggested that, by reading the reports closely, one can perceive that what has been left unsaid is significant.

In April 1885, Mounted Constable Wurmbrand received word from Glen Helen that Aborigines had surrounded the station, threatening to burn it down and murder the cook. He set off north, instead of west, deciding that a circuitous approach would catch the native criminals by surprise. His account of this patrol was to be, in fact, a reply to Missionary Kempe of the Hermannsburg Mission who had heard accounts suggesting 'outrages committed on natives and undue severity used by the police'.

Despite specific instructions that he was only to use native constables, not 'any [station] men nor to hire any horses', he allowed William Benstead and a man called Lennon to join the patrol. On May 4th, 1885 the police party, which included four native constables, encountered a party of Aborigines who had been involved in cattle-killing. The native constables called on them to stop and surrender but the group ran off into heavy mulga scrub. Some three pages of the report describe his (Constable Wurmbrand's) and William Benstead's experiences, which concluded with:

"Come here Moodlawoorta me no wantem growl longe you only wantem jabber" as he replied "No bloody fear" pointing at the same time the revolver [taken from Benstead] at me. Things were getting critical and I considered myself justified in going to the last extreme.'

During this shooting, Wurmbrand reports that he and Benstead 'heard several shots fired' and, on joining the rest of the party, were told that the native constables and Lennon 'had tried all in their power by speech and action to persuade the offenders to surrender, but the natives threw their spears at them and the constables defending themselves made use of their rifles'. Approximately one-third of a page is used for this more incidental note on the patrol.

Later there is an account of a clash in which one Aborigine was killed and several wounded, but in the previous clash as described above one is left with the very distinct impression that only Moodlawoorta was killed.⁸¹ "No bloody fear", as he might have said. Lennon told the missionaries at Hermannsburg that the number shot was 17.⁸² That this is not just an example of the boasting about which Eylmann warned is proven by an independent account of the patrol which I have sighted.⁸³

When one considers all of the official reports, independent accounts and strongly circumstantial evidence of punitive expeditions which occurred in 1884-1885 in Anmatjera territory, the early Aboriginal success in their attack on Anna's Reservoir was certainly but a Pyrrhic victory. I find no reason to disbelieve Spencer and Gillen's observation that as a result of this initially successful attack the Anmatjera were 'nearly wiped out'.

As has previously been mentioned, the guerilla warfare continued on the most remote stations into the 1890s (and, indeed into the 1920s; the Coniston Massacre of 1928 was to be the last major recorded massacre in this bloody frontier history). Much as Aborigines continued to be shot, it is evident that there was increasing official concern in the South Australian Police headquarters that all incidents should be fully detailed and explained. The pressures were sufficient, in fact, for cattle-killers to actually be arrested in 1887 and thereafter and, in contrast to previous years, for Aborigines who were arrested to survive! In 1990s Australia it requires an act of will to place oneself even remotely back in that era, but I suspect that the fervour associated with Queen Victoria's Jubilee in that year and therefore

81. Protector of Aborigines, Correspondence; GRG 52.1.1885.

82. Hartwig, 1965, p. 399.

83. Private mss. sighted by author.

the fervour associated with the concept of the British Empire and notions of British justice, may have created a demand for justice to be more clearly seen to be done. Having said this though, I do not believe that the curbs were strong, especially when stockmen decided to take the law into their own hands. At Frew River, for instance, very rough 'justice' seems to have prevailed: there was said to be a population of '45 bucks and 460 gins' less than a decade after the station's establishment (1889).⁸⁴ Once again, one can never prove or disprove such figures but Eylmann, who spent considerable time with the former station men immediately after the station's abandonment, wrote:

'[The] inhabitants of the cattle station whose cattle have been decimated year after year by the Aborigines, allow themselves to become involved in major outrages. Some carry on manhunt as a kind of sport, and it is inevitable that in the course of time many an Aboriginal male will meet an untimely end through a well-aimed bullet'.⁸⁵

I believe that this is probably an oblique reference to the Frew River country shootings.

In brief summary of the punitive expeditions of 1874–1891, Rev. W. J. Schwarz is quoted. He had lived at Finke River Mission from the time of its foundation in 1877, so his understanding covered most of the period. He believed:

'[Many] of the actions which were taken against the blacks were ... taken with the object of exterminating them, and especially the men. If a squatter kept cattle, and there were blacks on his run, either the blacks or the cattle had to go'.⁸⁶

The evidence presented does, I suggest, support this perception. I believe in fact that some 500 Aborigines and quite possibly upwards of 1,000 were shot in Central Australia. That Willshire wrote so much more than any other police officer of the era, having three small pamphlets published, means that he has often been selected for special criticism.⁸⁷ I do not in the least think that he can avoid criticism for being murderous, but he was only one of many; the other police such as Wurmbrand were certainly as guilty, if not even more ruthless, and so too were many pastoralists and other settlers. One can also make a case for the Commissioners of Police in Adelaide and Port Augusta, and other senior South Australian government officials, having unofficially condoned the shootings up to about 1885. However it is also apparent that southern pressures for real attention to the laws of the land increased as time passed, and that police such as Willshire and Wurmbrand, and some pastoralists, were prepared to fracture those laws long after they had been warned to curb their activities.

A number of other aspects have not been touched upon. Despite the lecture's title, life was not, for instance, an unmitigated and constant series of disasters for all Aborigines and all pioneer settlers through the period 1871–1891. Aboriginal cultural life, no matter how seriously disrupted and dislocated, continued in various forms through the 20 years, as the records of such as Spencer and Gillen readily attest. And the settlers appreciated social evenings with singing and yarn spinning, card games, drinking sprees and horseracing, reading, writing letters and many other enjoyable pursuits. It must also be kept in mind that no matter how much Aboriginal women, children, and older people in general appreciated bullock meat, they were not likely to have been involved in any major way – if at all – in the 'outrages' against the station owners; the youngest and fittest men were the key figures. Similarly, although at times called upon, the Overland Telegraph Station staff, after 1874, and the Lutheran missionaries at all times, had little or nothing to do with the shootings. In

84. Port Augusta Dispatch, 16.12.1898 (Keane. Four months in the Territory).

85. Eylmann, 1908, ch. 25.

86. The Register, 10.1.1890.

87. For an account which places Willshire in the wider Central Australian context, see Mulvaney, 1989, chaps. 17–20, and especially ch. 18.

fact, the missionaries on more than one occasion strongly protested at the murderous treatment dealt out by police and station hands although, their evidence being hearsay, no matter how accurate, it tended to be dismissed. Still, to their great credit, the Hermannsburgers remained courageously honest.⁸⁸

The impact of introduced diseases and changing diets is not well known for this period, although it is known to have been disastrous at times thereafter.⁸⁹ However, one form of disease is known to have developed amongst Aborigines and settlers alike at this time, and it will now be considered as an adjunct to another pioneering activity known, at the time, as 'gin hunting'.

The image of 'Spinifex fairies' is a light-hearted one, and Bill Harney was a lover of life and man of integrity who both appreciated the expression and married and cared for an Aboriginal woman. Not all men had that integrity (although I suspect that it was wider than is generally recognised) and, as has been suggested, it is at least possible that some attacks upon white settlers were provoked by abduction and rape of young women, even children. That it was common is likely, and one illustration tells of the manner and purpose. Accompanying one Queensland drover was an Aborigine called Billy. The drover decided that he would assist him to get a wife, so abducted one young Aboriginal woman from a small camp. A short time later he changed his mind:

'We saw some girls here, mostly young, and there was one amongst them that was by far the best looking of the lot. She was, I should say, about 18 years old, not a bad style; of course they were all naked and there was nothing to hide their limbs so we could judge them the same as we would a horse or any other beast, so we decided to leave the first one and take this one for Billy's bride ...'⁹⁰

Eylmann summarized the situation that prevailed with the white settlers (and other races) thus:

'It is obvious, considering the disproportion between the sexes, that most Europeans and Asiatics have sexual intercourse with Aboriginal women. There are normally no unions based upon mutual love and respect ... Usually the foreigner bestows his favours on the lubra of some "black fellow" who lives permanently in the same district as himself. If ... he wants a lubra completely to himself, albeit a rare occurrence, he chooses one to whom nobody has the right of possession or who has run away from her husband. The travelling bushman finds in all the stations lubras who will readily render the desired favours for half a stick of tobacco. Now and then one of ... [the travelling bushmen] will be accompanied by a somewhat womanly manservant abundantly attired in shirt and trousers'.⁹¹

These pressures on the local Aboriginal populations were dramatically increased in Central Australia with the short lived ruby rush, the longer term but fluctuating gold rush and the railway line construction from Warrina to Oodnadatta: all occurred in 1886-1890 and all involved hundreds of men in concentrated areas. The Aboriginal people of the railway line construction country had already experienced and substantially adjusted to the coming of white people. However the Eastern Aranda of the ruby and gold field country had no real alternative to instantly accommodating the changed situation as best they could. Many of the Aboriginal women were to live with, and work for, the miners.

88. Schmiechen, 1971.

89. Kimber, 1990.

90. Purvis, 1971, book 2, p. 75.

91. Eylmann, 1908, ch. 25.

Although he does not consider all aspects of the advent of British settlement in Central Australia, Captain Barclay very usefully and feelingly summarised the impact of settlement with regard to sexual relationships (the question mark is his in the extract below):

'Central Australia has been inundated by three distinct waves of "civilisation" (?) which have left their traces only too plainly behind. The first occurred during the construction of the overland telegraph line, when the country in the vicinity of the line was overrun by an army of labourers, bullock drivers and camp followers who appear to have worked their own sweet will so far as the aborigines were concerned.

'The second advent of "civilisation" came with what was known as 'The Ruby Boom' in 1887-88, when a heterogeneous mob of prospectors, navvies, runaway sailors, pedlars, Afghan camel men, in short, all who could be tempted ..., [arrived]. Lastly, the Arltunga gold boom ... caused a fresh influx ...

'Of course, it must be understood that on all these occasions of sudden influx of white population, the masses were leavened by many respectable, hard-working men ..., [but they were powerless] in the face of a flooding population scattered broadcast over thousands of square miles ... The consequence was unbridled licence and immorality, resulting in the communication of hereditary diseases to the aborigines, which spread in all directions amongst them, owing to their own laws compelling the men of each tribe to take their wives from certain others sufficiently removed in relationship. It is remarkable, and perhaps providential that the native women now very rarely bear children, whereas the opposite was formerly the case'.⁹²

The preceding clearly indicates that venereal diseases had joined the carbine and revolver as controls on the Aboriginal populations. Of course, given the nature of the majority of bush characters, 'pay-back' in venereal disease was a common enough occurrence, and a line of a parody bush-ballad keeps recurring to me:

'I've ridden colts and black gins, what more can a bastard do?'

What more, indeed, but to spread the pox, as the same 'Bastard from the Bush' is said to have done!

Several strands of the impact of British settlement of Central Australia on the Aboriginal populations having been considered, it is now time to briefly examine the period 1885-1894 that I have suggested marked the 'end of the bad old days'.

The year 1885 suggested itself to me because it was in this year that Jenny Ross, wife of the Undoolya Station manager, who had so recently been engaged in punitive patrols, arrived in Central Australia. She was the first white woman, other than the missionaries' wives, to live in the Centre, and was very soon to be followed by the wives of William Hayes and William Benstead. The arrival of white women clearly indicates that a change in Aboriginal and pioneer settler relationships had occurred. Women's safety was of such paramount concern that they would not have been permitted or encouraged to join their husbands had serious doubts about safety remained. The change in relationships may be thought to have been rendered possible by the 'dispersals', and this is certainly a key reason at Undoolya and at Anna's Reservoir area. However, there was another more positive reason, and this was that some pioneer pastoralists had successfully used local Aborigines to assist them, rather than imposing upon them without any regard for their knowledge. Treloar of Eringa Station had, very early in the establishment of the station, begun to learn the local language and to use

92. Barclay, 1905, p. 448.

Aborigines as guides to water: in his unpublished diary he clearly indicates that he knew that this was an advantageous use of Aborigines that had not readily been available to the explorers.⁹³ It is likely that this was an increasing practice from the mid-1880s, at least partly fostered by those Aborigines who had either decided to accommodate the intruders as best they could, or whose womenfolk were in semi-permanent or permanent relationship with the station people, miners and other pioneer settlers. In a very short time Aboriginal stockmen were to become recognised as indispensable.

The date 1891 looms large for three main reasons. Firstly, the railway line reached Oodnadatta – where the terminal was to remain for nearly another 40 years. This meant that the 'tyranny of distance' (to use historian Geoffrey Blainey's apt expression) was very substantially broken, a point fully appreciated by the pastoralist William Hayes as he reflected back upon his experiences shortly after 1911.⁹⁴ The extension of the railway meant that provisions arrived in a fortnight or so in Alice Springs from the rail head, instead of 5 months or more from Port Augusta.⁹⁵ In addition it meant that stock could be more rapidly sent to market or for agistment, that hospital assistance (in emergencies, still in Adelaide) could be reached more quickly, and so on.

Secondly, in this year, following the shooting of two Aborigines and the subsequent burning of their bodies, Mounted Constable Willshire was arrested on suspicion of murder. Although the charge was dismissed (the blame was placed entirely on two native constables' heads, although clearly Willshire was their superior 'on the spot' officer), he was never permitted to return to Central Australia. Thereafter shootings of Aborigines did occasionally occur, but they were no longer prevalent, they were investigated fairly thoroughly and they and any other breeches of the law could obviously result in charges being laid.⁹⁶

Thirdly, the period 1890–91 saw increasing discussion which recognized that Aboriginal food supplies were much diminished because of pastoral activity, and therefore that there was a need to establish some kind of ration depots, reserves and training opportunities for the people. Alfred Giles, who believed that the 'Anglo Saxon fulfilled the divine command by tilling the soil', which entirely legitimized 'the land being wrested from them [the Aborigines]', was one who supported such schemes. His letter was given considerable newspaper prominence amongst many others giving 'suggestions for ... [the Aborigines] better protection'.^{97, 98}

Another major change that occurred at this time, in part influenced by the 1890s depression, was – from the viewpoint of the pastoralists directly involved – a disaster, an increase in the problems of 'the bad old days'. This was the decision that the only way out of the problems of costs, cattle-killing, droughty conditions and the impact of the depression, was to abandon properties. Several stations were abandoned for a number of years, with 1894 a low point. By that year those limited numbers of 'stations which survived carried fewer cattle in the 1890s than they had in the 1880s'.⁹⁹ They were not, in fact, to rejuvenate until the railway line was extended to Alice Springs in 1929.¹⁰⁰ However, the early abandoning of pastoral stations was, in one way, an ending to the 'bad old days'. These men had not understood the limitation of water supplies, had grossly overstocked small rich pockets of land, and paid the penalty of other bad decisions.¹⁰¹ Their misfortune was the small man's fortune or, in the

93. Treloar's unpublished diary is not available for general use. Copy currently held by the author.

94. Adelaide Observer, 11.7.1914, p. 47.

95. Ibid.

96. Clyne, 1987.

97. Adelaide Observer, 9.5.1891.

98. The Register, 10.1.1890.

99. Duncan, 1967, p. 47.

100. Ibid.

101. Ibid, pp. 47–49.

case of the Hayes' family, the small family's fortune. In looking back over his life William Hayes could well appreciate this, and his wife's firm encouragement to take up Mount Burrell (Maryvale) Station, starting with 162 head, is a clear illustration of both foresight and an easing of the pressure on the land. The family enterprise included construction of the first fencing, dams and early deep bores – all in recognition of the problems that the 'big pastoralist' had experienced, but not really tackled.

At precisely the time that the stations were undergoing transformations as above described, Australia's greatest pest, the rabbit, arrived. The year 1894, when it crossed the South Australia/Northern Territory border, could be viewed as the beginning of the 'bad old days', yet anyone looking back in 1911 would not have readily recognized this; severe droughts had kept the rabbit in very considerable check. Thus from the point of view of this lecture it was more a latent menace than the great ecological disaster it was soon to become.

Can anything at all positive be said about the relationships with Aboriginal women? I believe, keeping in mind that 1885–1894 is the somewhat arbitrary 'end of the bad old days', that there was a degree of 'steadying' of many relationships, even if the majority were still closer to abduction than mutually shared regard. In the book *Man from Arltunga*¹⁰² this is touched upon, but it is an area worthy of further investigation. There is some possibility that the presence of white women in increasing (if still very small) numbers, with their need for house maids and child minders, caused a change in at least some relationships. Doris Blackwell's reminiscences suggest friendships, or at least cordial arrangements.¹⁰³

Conversely, the enquiry into relationships at Oodnadatta in 1911 revealed the following accepted estimates : 8 out of 10 Afghans, who were said to treat Aboriginal women well, were believed to have venereal disease; excluding the 'pure and wholesome' white women, 6 out of 10 white men were afflicted; and in the case of the Aborigines the ratio was believed to be 9 out of 10.¹⁰⁴ If these figures reflect **improvements** in the situation, then things must have been rugged a little earlier!

In looking back over this era I have attempted to find some ground for a positive outlook to the future. The transfer from South Australian to Federal Government control on 1 January 1911, only meant, as Peter Donovan has indicated, that another government 'faced a daunting task'.¹⁰⁵ If some answer was to be found, I had to find it in comments by pioneer settlers, Aborigines, or preferably both. The general trend to a more positive situation is apparent from the preceding discussion, but I wanted some comment that encapsulated it all – a nice ending to the lecture. 'Not too many Christmases them days', as old Walter Smith had said to me, did not seem quite appropriate. I sought it in vain in the words of William Hayes, and though he was contented with the weather, the condition of the country (he had seen it better), the proximity of the railhead, his family life and his properties, and thought that 'the raw native of the past was a much better man than the one of the present day', he did not provide that tidy ending I wanted.¹⁰⁶

All of T.G.H Strehlow's marvellous descriptions of mythological sites and rituals suggested that they were at an end, or very nearly so; that would not do.

I recalled travelling on the back of a truck with Aborigines, and in looking out over the country I had been struck by its harshness. 'Must have been hard old men in the early days', I said to one of the men. 'Hard old women too', he replied. 'Yes', I thought. But that wasn't the ending I wanted.

102. Kimber, 1986.

103. Blackwell and Lockwood, 1965.

104. Barclay, 1911.

105. Donovan, 1984, p. 3.

106. Adelaide Observer, 11.7.1914, p. 47.

I turned to Captain Barclay, who had made many journeys of survey and exploration.

'In the southern limit of this magnificent mountain system ... '(a good start), 'the greater part of the country is arid, inhospitable desert, an ocean of sand waves, almost impassable and waterless'.

Hmm, I had better skip this bit:

'From the ranges radiate numerous great river beds, ... '(a possibility here!), 'alas! now mere beds of sand ...'.

Well, I should have expected that.

'With the exception of a small fraction of the year, a few weeks, more or less, the climate is most enjoyable'. (True!)

'Such ... is the country in which the central Aborigines have for untold generations resided, a bold, active, intelligent people who may well be termed the Highlanders of Australia in comparison with the coastal tribes or those inhabiting less favoured parts of the continent'.

This is, truly, the best and most positive description I have heard – 'a bold, active, intelligent people'. I believe it to be an accurate comment. But Barclay continues:

'Here they must have had happy hunting grounds indeed, until disturbed by the ever fatal advance of the white man, which seems certain to improve them from off the face of the earth unless prompt steps are taken to ameliorate the condition of the remaining remnant'.¹⁰⁷

I realise now that what I was searching for did not exist in 1911. All of the comments I have located have had more truth than any nice 'winding-up' image. At the 'end of the bad old days', Central Australia still had a long, long way to go.

In conclusion, I wish to extend sincere thanks to all State Library staff for their friendly assistance, and in particular Colette McCool, Sheila Forrest and Michael Loos. Very special thanks to Saskia Mulder and Donna McMah for typing this transcript.

107. Barclay, 1905, pp. 443–450.

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