

# YIWARRA KUJU THE CANNING STOCK ROUTE

form.

building a state of creativity

Education  
at the  
**NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA CANBERRA**

Welcome: Yarraniya ngalaju  
nyuranya nyintipungku kijalu nyintiku.



Welcome in, we want  
to tell you our stories.

Ngalagnka Nola Taylor, 2010



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## VISUAL STIMULUS IMAGES

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE EDUCATION PACKAGE

This education package has been written to be used with students from years 5–9. It provides background information which is aimed principally at teachers but which may also be useful for older students.

The information and activities in this package complement the exhibition *Yiwarra Kuju: The Canning Stock Route* at the National Museum of Australia. The exhibition opens on 30 July 2010.

## ESSENTIAL PREPARATION

Research has shown that setting objectives for a museum visit is extremely important for students. It makes the purpose of the visit clear and helps students to focus and cooperate during the visit.

It is also important to create interest in the subject prior to the visit. This education package contains suggestions for activities that can be used in the classroom before or after the visit to the exhibition.

It is important students understand that many Aboriginal artworks have strict copyright laws relating to who can paint certain symbols. It is inappropriate for students to copy Aboriginal paintings or symbols from them. These symbols may represent detailed cultural knowledge that has been handed down through many generations. They may belong to a community and identify places of sacred significance or business that is not discussed in public.

## EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

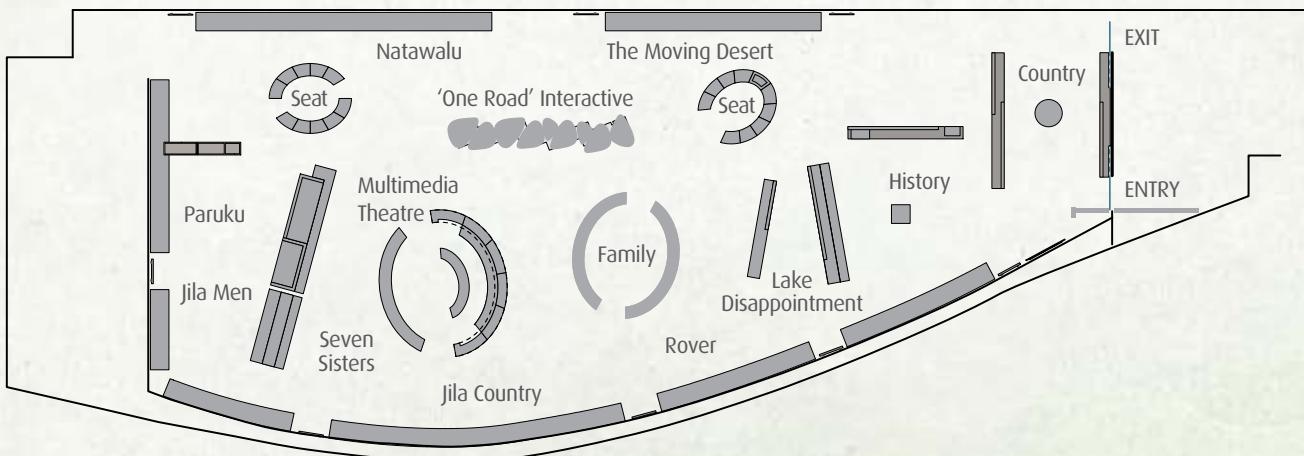
The exhibition *Yiwarra Kuju: The Canning Stock Route* is a joint initiative between the National Museum of Australia and FORM. This exhibition reveals the richness of desert life today. The stock route, first surveyed by Alfred Canning as a means to drive cattle from the stations of the Kimberley to the markets of the south, runs nearly half the length of Western Australia and intersects the Countries of many Aboriginal language groups. The construction and use of the route transformed the lives of the Aboriginal people in the region and led to dispersal and displacement.

The exhibition brings together contemporary works from senior and emerging artists, historical paintings, oral histories and ancestral narratives, films and photographs.

The themes of the exhibition are Country, Jukurrpa (Dreaming), History and Family. These themes are explored through the experiences, knowledge, relationships and beliefs of the artists and distilled into a vibrant, dynamic collection of paintings and other art forms. This art provides a visual and artistic richness through which to view the country and the people associated with the Canning Stock Route.

The exhibition features a large state of the art interactive media piece to enhance the learning experience of the visitor and provide further opportunity for more in-depth research and discovery.

## EXHIBITION LAYOUT



## THE CANNING STOCK ROUTE PROJECT

That road been put by that Canning mob only lately, only yesterday. Before, used to be blackfella Country.

Ngarralja Tommy May, 2007

The exhibition *Yiwarra Kuju: The Canning Stock Route* grew as a result of Ngurra Kuju Walyja (One Country, One People) – the Canning Stock Route Project. The Canning Stock Route Project was an initiative of FORM, a cultural organisation based in Perth, dedicated to advocating for and developing creativity in Western Australia.

It was started to create more opportunities for remote Aboriginal art enterprises across the Western Desert. From 2006 to 2010 the project brought together the vision, energy and talent of more than 110 Aboriginal artists and contributors from nine remote area community art centres and enterprises. As the project took shape and the number of Aboriginal participants increased it developed in unexpected ways. Working with artists from Birriliburu Artists, Martumili Artists, Kayili Artists, Papunya Tula Artists, Mangkaja Arts, Paruku Indigenous Protected Area, Warlayirti Artists, Yulari Artists and Ngurra Artists as well as their communities, the project facilitated creative workshops for artists and researched family networks between artists living thousands of kilometres apart.

*From its inception, the project's cardinal points have remained the same: to record and share the vibrancy of desert life today, connect Aboriginal creativity and history with new audiences, [and] research the intertwined histories of Aboriginal people from the Country surrounding the stock route.*

Carly Davenport, project manager and co-curator

From July to August in 2007, a large cross-cultural project team, guided by Aboriginal custodians, embarked on a 1800-kilometre journey from Wiluna to Billiluna. Along the way they were joined by 60 artists who painted and told stories of how the stock route had changed their lives. Central to this trip were four 'artists' bush camps where artists painted and the project team interviewed and recorded their life stories. These camps also

facilitated a reunion between families and a reaffirmation of their ties to Country. One of the project's core aims was to encourage and support the talent of young Aboriginal people; support the development of their ideas, technical skills and professional industry experience. Clint Dixon, KJ Kenneth Martin and Morika Biljabu were the project's multimedia trainees. Working with award-winning filmmaker Nicole Ma they gained experience in film and photography techniques and made powerful short stories of their personal experiences. Curtis Taylor also joined the team. Emerging co-curators Hayley Atkins, Doolmarria Louise Mengil and Murungkurr Terry Murray shared their cultural knowledge and gained various curatorial skills through working on the project.

*The stories are all coming back. [The old people] been living their lives just singing and dancing through the law. That's what was precious to them back then and families and connections, the waterholes, dreaming — everything. It was all there. And they want to tell the whole world it's still theirs. And it's always been theirs.*

Hayley Atkins, co-curator, Palm Springs, 2009

For close to eight months, after multiple trips into the desert and its communities and hours of recording stories, an astonishing body of work has been generated. More than 120 oral histories were recorded during the project, most in traditional languages, and approximately 80 of these were translated by a small team of Aboriginal translators. Hundreds of hours of film footage, over 20,000 photographs, and a collection of short films were produced by both Aboriginal photographers and filmmakers and FORM team members. The project team spent over eight months in remote communities facilitating meetings, delivering creative workshops and seeking approvals for the use of intellectual and cultural material.

The Canning Stock Route collection was shaped by a cross-cultural team of curators. In late 2008, the National Museum of Australia acquired a significant collection of artworks created as part of the project, and joined with FORM to develop and produce this exhibition. The collection was defined by the emerging co-curators and consulting curator Wally Caruana with support of FORM co-curators John Carty, Carly Davenport and Monique La Fontaine. Translators and cultural advisors Ngalangka Nola Taylor and Putuparri Tom Lawford also guided the project's content and exhibition development, and provided advice to the large project team.

In partnership with the National Museum of Australia this rich cultural collection has formed the basis of an exhibition that explores family, Country and cultural connections across three deserts and the stock route that defined the changing social landscape for people of the Western Desert. The exhibition *Yiwarra Kuju: The Canning Stock Route* is built on the collaboration of a large team of cross-cultural arts and cultural advisers, curators, anthropologists, language workers, contributing academics, and multimedia crew with support teams at FORM and the National Museum of Australia respectively.

*I hope that what people take away from this exhibition is the truth. How this road came about, how it moved people all around. Most kartiya [white people] don't even know about the Canning Stock Route. When they see the exhibition they'll find out what the stock route is really. This project gonna open lotta people's eyes, to find the true history through Aboriginal people.*

Putuparri Tom Lawford, cultural advisor and translator, Palm Springs, 2009

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# Curriculum relevance



## NEW SOUTH WALES RELEVANCE

### HSI

- Year 7 and 8 — What can we learn about Indigenous people? What has been the nature and impact of colonisation on Indigenous and non-indigenous people?
- 4.2 describes significant features of Indigenous cultures, prior to colonisation
  - 4.7 identifies different contexts, perspectives and interpretations of the past
  - 4.9 uses historical terms and concepts in appropriate contexts
  - 4.10 selects and uses appropriate oral, written and other forms, including Information and Communication Technologies, to communicate effectively about the past
  - LS.9 recognises the contribution of Indigenous peoples and other cultures to Australian society
  - LS.10 recognises different perspectives about events and issues.

### Environment

Year 3 and 4 —

- CCS2.1 describes events and actions related to the British colonisation of Australia and assesses changes and consequences
- CUS2.4 describes different viewpoints, ways of living, languages and belief systems in a variety of communities
- CCS3.1 explains the significance of particular people, groups, places, actions and events in the past in developing Australian identities and heritage.

### Visual Arts

#### Stage 3

Students investigate ways of mapping a place using symbols. They discuss how artists have represented their environment in paintings and public sculptures. The students document their ideas in research drawings then develop concepts into sculptures. The students also consider how concepts are represented differently in drawing and sculpture.

Students investigate ways of evoking the environment, using observation and recording as a basis for an expressive interpretation. They look at how artists have represented their environment in expressive ways. From their own environment, they document ideas in research drawings and then develop concepts into paintings and weavings.

Students explore their own identity in an artwork. They seek inspiration in self-portraits by Australian painters who include symbols of their identity. Students combine drawing, painting, collage and printing in a mixed media artwork, discovering how artworks can be built up through layering images. Students look at artworks that record and interpret Australian history. They discuss how artists create points of view in the way subject matter is organised and how colour and texture has been used. The students make drawings, prints and paintings that represent historical events and Australian icons.

Students consider how artists represent ideas and feelings in abstract artworks through the use of symbols. Students develop their own symbols in response to dream images. They experiment with layering techniques in painting, drawing and fibre media.

## ACT RELEVANCE

In the later childhood years students will:

- 2.LC.1 recognise different contexts for applying the enquiry process
- 2.LC.10 conduct searches for information and use a range of sources (e.g. information texts, artefacts, maps, images)

- 4.IC.8 find alternatives to practices they consider unfair or unjust
- 4.IC.9 identify what a stereotype is
- 4.IC.10 identify discrimination against people on the basis of theirability, physical or intellectual attributes, gender or race in texts and in actual situations, and suggest counter-measures
- 5.LC.1 identify why people cooperate in groups and consider values that communities share to help them live and work together
- 7.LC.12 interpret and respond to a range of artistic works, identifying some of the skills, elements and techniques used to create meanings and giving reasons for their interpretations and preferences
- 21.LC.3 understand and learn about the ways Australia's Indigenous peoples lived prior to colonisation, including distribution across Australia, diversity of cultures, languages, customs, social organisations, technologies and land uses
- 21.LC.13 explain current and past events using evidence from investigation.

In the early adolescent years students will:

- 4.EA.12 recognise that, when some groups within a society are characterised as different and inferior and are described in stereotypes, this leads to consistently unfair treatment that equates to discrimination
- 21.EA.3 understand Indigenous perspectives of colonisation and how Indigenous peoples' lives were affected (e.g. impact of disease, frontier wars, dispossession and land disputes, differing experiences in different locations, increasing government control)
- 21.EA.5 understand the importance of Country to Australia's Indigenous people (e.g. different ways individuals are related to the land)
- 7.EA.11 research an artist and/or artistic work in a way that informs and deepens their understanding and appreciation of the artist and artwork
- 7.EA.12 interpret some artistic works and/or artists in the context of the society in which they lived and the dominant ideas of the time.

## VICTORIAN RELEVANCE

### Humanities

Level 3 — Students use a range of historical evidence, including oral history, artefacts, narratives and pictures, to retell events and describe historical characters. They develop simple timelines to show events in sequence. They explain some of the differences between different types of historical evidence, and frame questions to further explore historical events. Students draw simple maps and plans of familiar environments observing basic mapping conventions. They identify the location of places on a simple map using an alphanumeric grid and describe direction using the four cardinal compass points. Using atlas maps and a globe, they locate and name the states and territories of Australia.

Level 4 — Students use a range of written, visual, oral and electronic sources to study the past. With support they frame research questions and plan their own enquiries using historical language and concepts such as time, sequence, chronology, continuity, change, culture and tradition. They begin to question sources and make judgments about viewpoints being expressed, the completeness of the evidence, and the values represented. They learn to develop explanations in a range of forms such as timelines, oral presentations, multimedia presentations, reports and narratives.

Level 5 — Students examine the impact of European colonisation of Australia, including representation of that settlement as invasion.

They learn about the struggles and successes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to gain political and social rights, and their campaigns for land rights and self-determination.

### The Arts

Level 3 — Students identify and describe key features of artworks from their own and other cultures, and use arts language to describe and discuss the communication of ideas, feelings and purpose in their own and other people's artworks.

Level 4 — Students interpret and compare key features of artworks made in a range of times, places and cultures. They communicate ideas and understandings about themselves and others, incorporating influences from their own and other cultures and times.

Level 5 — Students compare, analyse, evaluate, and interpret the content, meaning and qualities in artworks created in different social, cultural and historical contexts, offering informed responses and opinions and using appropriate arts language. They describe aspects and requirements of different forms, audiences and traditions, and identify ways that contemporary artworks, including their own, are influenced by cultural and historical contexts.

## QUEENSLAND RELEVANCE

### SOSE

Year 7

Students consider their own opinions, experiences and understandings to develop respect for, and to value Indigenous people and cultures.

Culture and Identity — Students understand that:

Indigenous peoples' diverse social organisation, languages and lifestyles reflect the importance of Country — land, sea and places. Contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures in Australia and in other places have had significant effects on language, culture, land ownership, health and education of Indigenous people. Accessing Indigenous knowledge involves the protocols of consultation with the local Aboriginal community and/or Torres Strait Islander community.

Year 9

Students understand the world views of Indigenous people and their connections to places and other groups, and apply this understanding to their own connections to people and places.

Culture and Identity — Students understand that:

Group identities are influenced by different factors, including family, communities, nationality, socioeconomic factors and religious beliefs. Community perceptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures have resulted in positive and negative responses to Indigenous people. Cultural research involves following protocols and acting sensitively.

### The Arts

Year 7

Students understand that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artworks are expressions of knowledge, complex relationships and diverse perspectives. They use protocols relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artworks.

Respond by analysing and evaluating artworks in social, cultural, historical and spiritual contexts, using arts elements and languages.

Year 9

Students understand that diverse individual and communal expressions of Australia's past, present and future are represented

through artworks, including those created by Indigenous people. They use protocols relating to artworks that represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, peoples, histories and cultures. Ideas are researched to inform visual responses that consider social and cultural issues.

## WESTERN AUSTRALIAN RELEVANCE

### Society and Environment

Year 6 — Students will understand:

- that there are different cultural groups in Australian society
- that cultural groups express their culture through their actions, the production of artefacts and their beliefs and values
- that individuals learn the values, beliefs, practices and rules of a culture from a range of influences
- the ways in which the practices of cultural groups promote cohesion and continuity.

Year 7 — Students will understand:

- the factors that influence the similarities and differences between cultural groups in Australia
- that Australian society is made up of a range of different Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural groups, each of which has its own values, beliefs and practices
- how the culture of a group is influenced by its values, beliefs and practices
- that cultural groups have a range of formal and informal practices that are used to regulate and control members' behaviour
- that culture is not static and is continually evolving
- there are different types of world views and belief systems
- practices and beliefs of cultural groups can be forces for both continuity and change
- national identity can be shaped and expressed by people, events and ideas
- the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in building the Australian national identity was marginalised in the past
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity has been influenced by their pursuit of citizenship rights including representation.

### Visual arts

Years 6–9 students will:

- recognise differences in artwork from different times, cultures and societies
- recognise symbols in artwork
- interpret 2-D, 3-D and 4-D art works
- value artwork from Australia and other societies, cultures and times.

## SOUTH AUSTRALIAN RELEVANCE

### Society and the Environment

Time, Continuity and Change

- 3.1 identifies and explains sequences of change that have occurred in Australia over time, and recognises various perspectives on events
- 3.2 researches and discusses the importance of understanding events and ways of life of some past periods, using primary and secondary sources
- 4.1 suggests and justifies reasons why groups of people in societies, countries or civilisations have undergone changes in wealth and/or their ability to sustain natural resources
- 4.3 interprets people's motives and actions from perspectives of power, and relates this to future possibilities, using a historical or contemporary event or issue
- 5.1 critically analyses different interpretations of events, ideas and issues, including an understanding of the relationship between power and historical representation.

### **Societies and Cultures**

- 3.8 learns from rural and urban Aboriginal peoples and other minorities about their histories and present day experiences, and acts to counter prejudice
- 3.9 demonstrates responsible and respectful participation in group discussion and, in a team, plans and negotiates social action to enhance human rights in community contexts
- 4.8 demonstrates critical understanding of their own cultural practices in comparison to the histories, cultures and present day experiences of rural and urban Aboriginal groups, and acts for reconciliation
- 5.8 identifies and analyses complex social, cultural and environmental issues and strategies, including self-management and land protection, that are important to local and other Indigenous peoples today
- 5.9 analyses and demonstrates critical understanding of prejudice as a social construction, and acts to counter discrimination through individual knowledge, attitudes and actions.

### **The Arts**

- 3.1 uses thought, imagination, research and experimentation to create/re-create artworks within each arts form that convey meaning about issues within their community
- 4.6 uses understanding of changing social and cultural beliefs, values and attitudes on the form, style and purpose of arts works made by artists/performers in different cultural settings, to inform research and practical tasks
- 5.5 understands and explains the powerful influence that political, social, technological and economic factors have on the purposes and function of artworks made in contemporary times.

## **TASMANIAN RELEVANCE**

### **Society and History**

Standard 3 — students will:

- recognise how past societies are valued by Australians
- recognise the need to counter discrimination
- understand that conflicting values can affect decisions about land use
- use different types of evidence to examine the past, present and future
- understand how information can be represented differently in the past and present.

Standard 4 — students will:

- examine values and beliefs of different cultural groups and their influence on identity.
- understand the value of diversity and recognise equity and inequity.
- compare how changing values influence choices and decisions about land use in different places.
- understand that differences in values can cause conflict about land use.
- compare multiple sources of primary and secondary evidence to establish historical fact and opinion.
- understand that some personal views can be biased
- understand that personal views can be modified based on constructive or valid feedback.
- understand how information is influenced by context, values and beliefs.
- understand and synthesise information from varied sources create purposeful communication products.

(front image) Nora Wompi, from Martumili Artists, with her grandson, photo by Gabrielle Sullivan, 2008

### **Visual Arts**

Standard 3

- Traditions — students are interested in the stories behind artworks.
- Making connections — students identify specific works of art as belonging to particular cultures, times and places.

Standard 4

- Communicating ideas — students understand that artists develop personal ways of communicating ideas.
- Understanding art making — students understand that artworks are made for a range of purposes e.g. decoration, to make a statement, express a point of view and understand that art elicits a range of meanings beyond the literal.
- Symbolism — students recognise a range of cultural symbols and icons and reference them in their own work.
- Influences — students demonstrate awareness of the significance of some cultural symbols.
- Intention — students recognise that artworks have multiple meanings according to the context in which they are viewed.
- Diversity — students appreciate diversity and gain some insight into the lives of others through artworks.
- Purpose — students understand that art is made to express a point of view about things the artist finds important.
- Change — students understand that the making of art has evolved over time in response to technological and social change.

## **NORTHERN TERRITORY RELEVANCE**

### **SOSE**

Strand 3

Soc 3.1 — Time, Continuity and Change: Students investigate the past and how events have impacted on individuals and groups.

Soc 3.2 — Indigenous Studies: Students explain what they have learned about the core beliefs of urban and non-urban Indigenous peoples and apply the principles of reconciliation to take action to counter prejudice.

Soc 3.4 — Values, Beliefs and Cultural Diversity: Students describe key elements of culture in groups and communities, how individuals learn and share their culture and the impact of differing values upon individuals and societies.

Env 3.1 — Place, Landforms and Features: Students investigate patterns of use of natural resources and how they have changed over time.

Strand 4

Soc 4.2 — Indigenous Studies: Students analyse their own cultural practices in comparison to the histories and current experiences of all Indigenous groups and actively contribute towards reconciliation.

Soc 4.4

Values, Beliefs and Cultural Diversity: Students research and describe the diverse interpretations and reactions of individuals/groups to the impact of major events in Australia and how this cultural diversity contributes to the identity of a society.

### **ART**

Strand 3

CrA 3.1 — Creating Art

Students create artworks that involve a degree of experimentation with ideas, and present to a range of audiences.

Strand 4 — VA 4.4

Arts in Context: Students identify the purpose and characteristics of artworks that locate them in particular societies, cultures and times.

# Activities for Literacy

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- 1 Have students brainstorm to reveal their knowledge about Aboriginal art and culture. Record this on an interactive white board or in their own visual diaries. They could begin by responding to questions such as: What do you know about Aboriginal art and culture? Why is it important to understand about Aboriginal art and culture? What would you like to learn more about? Ask students to develop a way of recording changes in knowledge and understanding as the unit progresses.
- 2 Show students the painting related to the Seven Sisters and read some of the Aboriginal stories related to this belief. Ask students to do a web search and see how many stories they can find about the Seven Sisters (or Pleiades) from around the world. Have students compile their own book of stories about the Seven Sisters.
- 3 Show students the painting entitled *Kumpupin'tily* and read them (or copy and have them read) the stories about cannibal beings. This story warns people about a dangerous place. Have students research other Indigenous Australian stories and see how many others they can find that warn people not to go near a dangerous place. Have students choose their favourite story to illustrate and tell or read to the class.
- 4 Read (or copy and have students read) the story entitled 'Helicopter's Story' in the theme sheet *Walyja: Family*. Ask students to imagine they are seriously injured near their home, perhaps at school or a sporting venue, and need treatment that is only available at a hospital many miles away. They remain conscious as they are airlifted to this hospital. Have students write a story about their journey and what happened when they arrived at the hospital.
- 5 Show students the image of Dadina Georgina Brown which you will find in the theme sheet *Ngurra Kuju Walyja: Country One Family*. Have students imagine they are a reporter. Have them research this event and write a story for the local paper.
- 6 Have students use the title of this exhibition *Yiwarra Kuju* as the basis for an acrostics poem. The poem should relate to a story or painting in the exhibition or education package.
- 7 Ask students to each develop an identity spiral. Placing themselves at the centre of the spiral they add words to try and recognise all aspects of their lives including relationships, interests and activities. The most important aspects of their lives should be closest to the centre, ones that they consider unimportant or dislike should be on the outer edges. Ask them to consider ways their identity spiral may be similar to Aboriginal people living in the Western Desert and ways it would be different.

# Activities for Visual Arts

## Education at the NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA CANBERRA

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- 1 Many of the paintings in this exhibition were the result of a collaboration between artists. Ask students to think about which is more important in a collaborative work: the final artwork or the process of making the artwork? How can the viewer tell whether a single 'voice' has been used or whether the painting has multiple voices and ideas? Ask students to record their thoughts to these questions.
- Divide the class into groups of 3–6 students and have each group work on a collaborative art project which explores their own environment. Have students use digital media to document the project. Questions they may consider are:
- How did they choose what media to use?
  - How did they arrive at a shared idea or vision of what the artwork would be?
  - How did they divide up the project?
  - Did everyone in the group feel they contributed equally?
- Have students present their artwork and documentation to the class.

- 2 As a class, have students brainstorm about identity and the things that shape identity. Thinking about the class as a community, how do students identify themselves as part of this community? Using an interactive white board and computer software invent visual and sound symbols that relate to this community. Use Google Earth to locate your school. Find other symbols that can be seen from this perspective. Using these symbols ask students to create their own painting showing how they relate to this community. As they create their artwork have them consider composition, visual balance, pattern and repetition and the use of colour.

- 3 Discuss the significance of place with students. Have them think about where they were born, where their grandparents came from and any special places where important activities take place. Ask students to collect photographs of places that are important to them. Have them use these photographs to create a piece of art.
- 4 Have students view the two paintings *Minyipuru* 2007 by Muni Rita Simpson, Rosie Williams and Dulcie Gibbs and *Kumpupirntily* 2008 by Yunkurra Billy Atkins. These stories relate to beliefs held in relation to the Jukurrpa. Have students collect images that show stories that relate to beliefs held by a variety of people around the world. As a class project create an artwork that shows the diversity of beliefs around the world.
- 5 Have students view the two paintings *Canning Stock Route Country* 2007, by Patrick Tjungurrayi and *Tiwa* 2008, by Lily Long. Using the interactive whiteboard look up the Canning Stock Route on Google Earth. Compare the aerial perspective with these paintings. Ask students if they can work out what features of the country are important to these artists. Ask students to construct a collage of their own environment which features things that are important to them.
- 6 Using the Theme Sheet *Juju: Telling our stories through painting, song & dance*, discuss with students the use of visual art other than painting to express identity. Have students make a piece of 3-dimensional art that is an expression of their identity.

# Activities for History

## Education at the NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA CANBERRA

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- 1 Alfred Canning was considered by his contemporaries to be a successful surveyor and explorer and perhaps even a hero. Ask your students whether he would be seen the same way today. Now ask them to discuss why people in history can be viewed in different ways at different times. Have them find out about another person in Australian history who has also been judged differently in different times by either their contemporaries, historians or others.
- 2 Alfred Canning used Aboriginal people to help him find water and survey the stock route. There are many other examples since 1788 where Aboriginal people have helped European explorers and surveyors; sometimes willingly but often against their will. Have students research one example of this type of contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and present their findings to the class.
- 3 Ask students to find out about the rights of Aboriginal people in the different states and territories after 1901. [The National Museum of Australia has a number of resources that can help you with this investigation. Go to [www.nma.gov.au/education/school\\_resources/indigenous](http://www.nma.gov.au/education/school_resources/indigenous)] Create a timeline of important events in history illustrating Indigenous rights in Australia.
- 4 The history of the Canning Stock Route has been written by non Indigenous people, as has much of the story of contact between Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians. Have students research a contact event or incident from their state or territory and ask them to report their findings from an Aboriginal perspective (i.e. from the perspective of how Aboriginal people might view this event or incident). Ask them how this exercise has helped them understand how we learn history and what we need to take into account when we read accounts of history.
- 5 Mission stations were established along the Canning Stock Route following the creation of the stock route. Have students conduct an in-depth investigation about one mission station or government reserve from their state or territory. Have them share their findings with the class and ask the class to compare the living conditions under which Aboriginal people lived.
- 6 Use the Theme Sheets *History of the Canning Stock Route, The legacy of Alfred Canning and Drowsing on the Canning* to initiate a discussion with students about the impact of a settler society on an Indigenous society. Ask students to research and compare the Australian experience with that of another country such as the United States, South Africa or Brazil.
- 7 Have students explore how Aboriginal people were affected by the creation of the Canning Stock Route and how that legacy or history continues to affect their lives today. Now ask them to reflect on whether history is only about the past or whether it is ongoing and of continuing relevance to today's world.

# Activities for Sciences

## Education at the NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA CANBERRA

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### LIFE SCIENCES

#### BIOLOGY

**1 What life is there in an Australian desert?**

- Create a visual representation (e.g. diorama, model, multimedia presentation) of a desert landscape including plants and animals.

Provide a written or spoken description of the scene, identifying those features of the plants and animals which help them to survive in the desert.

**2 How were Aboriginal people able to live successfully in the Western Desert Region?**

- Create a survival guide for living in the Australian desert. Begin with the basic human needs of food, water and shelter. You will need to consider issues such as how water can be found in the desert, what is the difference between a 'soak' and a 'spring', what plants and animals you will be able to use for food and tools, and where and how you can find shelter.

### PHYSICAL SCIENCES

#### GEOSCIENCE

**4 What landforms are found in deserts?**

- Lake Disappointment is an outstanding feature in the Great Sandy Desert. Conduct an investigation into Lake Disappointment. Why was it given that name? Why is the lake salty? Are there others like it in Australia? Provide images to illustrate your report. Why might Aboriginal people tell stories of dangerous beings in the middle of the lake?

**5 What are the Seven Sisters?**

- Track the movement of the stars across the skies. Download star charts for a year for the north-west of Australia. What are the Pleiades? At which times of the year are they visible in the region? What does this tell us about the Earth in relation to Space?

### ARCHAEOLOGY

**3 How have archaeologists provided evidence of human life over time in the deserts of Western Australia?**

- Imagine that you have just finished your archaeology degree and you are assisting

on a 'dig' to find out about human adaptation to environmental change in the Western Desert. Prepare for an expedition. What questions would you like answered in the dig? What tools will you take? Whose books or reports will you read to find out what is already known about the area?

### Engineering Sciences

#### TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN

**6 What is a tool? What makes it useful?**

- Explore the types of tools Aboriginal people needed to live successfully in the Western Desert Region. Each group of students needs to select a tool to research. You need to discover what it is made of, how it was made and what it was used for. From your exploration, what do you think makes a tool successful in the eyes of an Aboriginal person from the Western Desert region?

# Activities for Visual Arts

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- 1 Many of the paintings in this exhibition were the result of a collaboration between artists. Ask students to think about which is more important in a collaborative work: the final artwork or the process of making the artwork? How can the viewer tell whether a single 'voice' has been used or whether the painting has multiple voices and ideas? Ask students to record their thoughts to these questions.

Divide the class into groups of 3–6 students and have each group work on a collaborative art project which explores their own environment. Have students use digital media to document the project. Questions they may consider are:

- How did they choose what media to use?
- How did they arrive at a shared idea or vision of what the artwork would be?
- How did they divide up the project?
- Did everyone in the group feel they contributed equally?

Have students present their artwork and documentation to the class.

- 2 As a class, have students brainstorm about identity and the things that shape identity. Thinking about the class as a community, how do students identify themselves as part of this community? Using an interactive white board and computer software invent visual and sound symbols that relate to this community. Use Google Earth to locate your school. Find other symbols that can be seen from this perspective. Using these symbols ask students to create

their own painting showing how they relate to this community. As they create their artwork have them consider composition, visual balance, pattern and repetition and the use of colour.

- 3 Discuss the significance of place with students. Have them think about where they were born, where their grandparents came from and any special places where important activities take place. Ask students to collect photographs of places that are important to them. Have them use these photographs to create a piece of art.

- 4 Have students view the two paintings *Minyipuru* 2007 by Muni Rita Simpson, Rosie Williams and Dulcie Gibbs and *Kumpupirntily* 2008 by Yunkurra Billy Atkins. These stories relate to beliefs held in relation to the Jukurrpa. Have students collect images that show stories that relate to beliefs held by a variety of people around the world. As a class project create an artwork that shows the diversity of beliefs around the world.

- 5 Have students view the two paintings *Canning Stock Route Country* 2007, by Patrick Tjungurrayi and *Tiwa* 2008, by Lily Long. Using the interactive whiteboard look up the Canning Stock Route on Google Earth. Compare the aerial perspective with these paintings. Ask students if they can work out what features of the country are important to these artists.

Ask students to construct a collage of their own environment which features things that are important to them.

- 6 Using the Theme Sheet *Juju: Telling our stories through painting, song & dance*, discuss with students the use of visual art other than painting to express identity. Have students make a piece of 3-dimensional art that is an expression of their identity.

# Activities for History

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- 1 Alfred Canning was considered by his contemporaries to be a successful surveyor and explorer and perhaps even a hero. Ask your students whether he would be seen the same way today. Now ask them to discuss why people in history can be viewed in different ways at different times. Have them find out about another person in Australian history who has also been judged differently in different times by either their contemporaries, historians or others.
- 2 Alfred Canning used Aboriginal people to help him find water and survey the stock route. There are many other examples since 1788 where Aboriginal people have helped European explorers and surveyors; sometimes willingly but often against their will. Have students research one example of this type of contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and present their findings to the class.
- 3 Ask students to find out about the rights of Aboriginal people in the different states and territories after 1901. [The National Museum of Australia has a number of resources that can help you with this investigation. Go to [www.nma.gov.au/education/school\\_resources/indigenous](http://www.nma.gov.au/education/school_resources/indigenous)] Create a timeline of important events in history illustrating Indigenous rights in Australia.
- 4 The history of the Canning Stock Route has been written by non Indigenous people, as has much of the story of contact between Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians. Have students research a contact event or incident from their state or territory and ask them to report their findings from an Aboriginal perspective (i.e. from the perspective of how Aboriginal people might view this event or incident). Ask them how this exercise has helped them understand how we learn history and what we need to take into account when we read accounts of history.
- 5 Mission stations were established along the Canning Stock Route following the creation of the stock route. Have students conduct an in-depth investigation about one mission station or government reserve from their state or territory. Have them share their findings with the class and ask the class to compare the living conditions under which Aboriginal people lived.
- 6 Use the Theme Sheets *History of the Canning Stock Route, The legacy of Alfred Canning and Drowsing on the Canning* to initiate a discussion with students about the impact of a settler society on an Indigenous society. Ask students to research and compare the Australian experience with that of another country such as the United States, South Africa or Brazil.
- 7 Have students explore how Aboriginal people were affected by the creation of the Canning Stock Route and how that legacy or history continues to affect their lives today. Now ask them to reflect on whether history is only about the past or whether it is ongoing and of continuing relevance to today's world.

# Activities for Sciences

## Education at the NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA CANBERRA

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### LIFE SCIENCES

#### BIOLOGY

**1 What life is there in an Australian desert?**

- Create a visual representation (e.g. diorama, model, multimedia presentation) of a desert landscape including plants and animals.

Provide a written or spoken description of the scene, identifying those features of the plants and animals which help them to survive in the desert.

**2 How were Aboriginal people able to live successfully in the Western Desert Region?**

- Create a survival guide for living in the Australian desert. Begin with the basic human needs of food, water and shelter. You will need to consider issues such as how water can be found in the desert, what is the difference between a 'soak' and a 'spring', what plants and animals you will be able to use for food and tools, and where and how you can find shelter.

### PHYSICAL SCIENCES

#### GEOSCIENCE

**4 What landforms are found in deserts?**

- Lake Disappointment is an outstanding feature in the Great Sandy Desert. Conduct an investigation into Lake Disappointment. Why was it given that name? Why is the lake salty? Are there others like it in Australia? Provide images to illustrate your report. Why might Aboriginal people tell stories of dangerous beings in the middle of the lake?

**5 What are the Seven Sisters?**

- Track the movement of the stars across the skies. Download star charts for a year for the north-west of Australia. What are the Pleiades? At which times of the year are they visible in the region? What does this tell us about the Earth in relation to Space?

### ARCHAEOLOGY

**3 How have archaeologists provided evidence of human life over time in the deserts of Western Australia?**

- Imagine that you have just finished your archaeology degree and you are assisting

on a 'dig' to find out about human adaptation to environmental change in the Western Desert. Prepare for an expedition. What questions would you like answered in the dig? What tools will you take? Whose books or reports will you read to find out what is already known about the area?

### Engineering Sciences

#### TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN

**6 What is a tool? What makes it useful?**

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## Bibliography, Web Resources, Glossary and Acknowledgements



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## WEB RESOURCES

- <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A070563b.htm>  
[http://blogs.crikey.com.au/northern/2009/12/22/arts-centre-of-the-week-  
ngurra-arts-ngumpan-wa/](http://blogs.crikey.com.au/northern/2009/12/22/arts-centre-of-the-week-ngurra-arts-ngumpan-wa/)  
[www.aboriginalartdirectory.com](http://www.aboriginalartdirectory.com)  
[www.artcollector.net.au/files/files/52\\_IndigenousGuide/Tjurkurba.pdf](http://www.artcollector.net.au/files/files/52_IndigenousGuide/Tjurkurba.pdf)  
[www.balgoart.org.au/](http://www.balgoart.org.au/)  
[www.canningstockroutecentenary.com/history-and-heritage/who-was-  
alfred-canning](http://www.canningstockroutecentenary.com/history-and-heritage/who-was-alfred-canning)  
[www.form.net.au/aboriginal-development/canning](http://www.form.net.au/aboriginal-development/canning)  
[www.kayili.com.au/about\\_us.aspx](http://www.kayili.com.au/about_us.aspx)  
[www.mangaja.com/](http://www.mangaja.com/)  
[www.papunyatula.com.au/](http://www.papunyatula.com.au/)

A Google search on 'Canning Stock Route' will result in a wonderful series of images.

## A good general resource

- [www.teachers.ash.org.au/jmresources/history/australian.html](http://www.teachers.ash.org.au/jmresources/history/australian.html)

## Web resources for science

- [www.bom.gov.au/](http://www.bom.gov.au/)  
[www.bom.gov.au/iwk/](http://www.bom.gov.au/iwk/)  
[www.kidsastronomy.com/astroskymap/constellations.htm](http://www.kidsastronomy.com/astroskymap/constellations.htm)  
[www.nma.gov.au/education/school\\_resources/index/](http://www.nma.gov.au/education/school_resources/index/) to find information from the *Extremes – Survival in the Great Deserts of the Southern Hemisphere* exhibition kit.

## GLOSSARY

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Balgo                      | community                                       |
| Bidyadanga                 | place   |
| Billiluna                  | community                                       |
| coolamon                   | traditional carrying dish                       |
| jakuli                     | pearl shell ornaments                           |
| Jigalong (mission)         | former ration depot on rabbit-proof fence       |
| jila                       | spring/ancestral being — snake                  |
| jilji                      | sandhill  |
| juju                       | song + dance                                    |
| Jukurrpa (Tjukurrpa)       | dreaming  |
| jumu                       | ephemeral water                                 |
| Junjuwa                    | community (Fitzroy Crossing)                    |
| Kaninjaku                  | kriol for Canning Stock Route                   |
| kapi                       | water   |
| kapitu                     | water to water                                  |
| kartiya                    | white man                                       |
| Kayili                     | north (also art centre)                         |
| Kintore                    | community                                       |
| kipara                     | bush turkey                                     |
| Kiriwirri                  | place — jila                                    |
| Kiwirrkura                 | community                                       |
| Kumpupirtily               | Lake Disappointment                             |
| Kunawarritji               | Well 33   |
| Kurtal wanyjurla wanyjurla | 'Kurtal where are you' song                     |
| Kurungal                   | community (Wangkatjungka)                       |
| manguri                    | head pad for cushioning heavy loads             |
| manurkunurru               | wasp/helicopter                                 |
| maparn                     | traditional healer                              |
| marlu                      | kangaroo  |
| martamarta                 | person of mixed Aboriginal and European descent |
| Martu                      | language group                                  |
| martuku                    | bush cotton                                     |
| Mindirardi                 | community (Fitzroy crossing)                    |
| Minyipuru                  | Seven Sisters                                   |
| mitutu                     | seed  |
| Mulan                      | community                                       |
| Mungkututu                 | man shot by Tobin                               |
| Murungkurr                 | ancestral beings — little people                |
| Natawalu                   | Well 40   |
| Ngayurnangalku             | ancestral cannibal beings                       |
| Ngumpan                    | community                                       |
| Ngurra                     | Country, home                                   |
| Ngurra kuju walyja         | Country one family                              |
| ngurti                     | coolamon (wooden vessel)                        |
| Pangkapini                 | place between Wells 35–36                       |
| Papunya                    | community                                       |
| Paruku                     | place/lake                                      |
| piti                       | coolamon (wooden vessel)                        |
| puluku                     | kriol — bullocks                                |
| Purrungu                   | rock hole                                       |
| tali                       | sandhills                                       |
| Tapu                       | place — jila                                    |
| Tiwa                       | Well 26   |
| Tungkul                    | hair string                                     |
| walypala                   | kriol — whitefella                              |
| Wangkajunga                | language group                                  |
| Wangkatjungka              | community                                       |
| Warmun                     | community (Turkey Creek)                        |
| Warralong                  | community                                       |
| Wiluna                     | place   |
| yakapiri                   | bush sandals and bark used to make sandals      |
| yiwarra kuju               | one road  |
| Yiyili                     | community                                       |
| yukirri                    | seed  |

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Design by Badjar Oglivy

(front image) Patrick Tjungurrayi, from Papunya Tula Artists, photo by Tim Acker, 2007



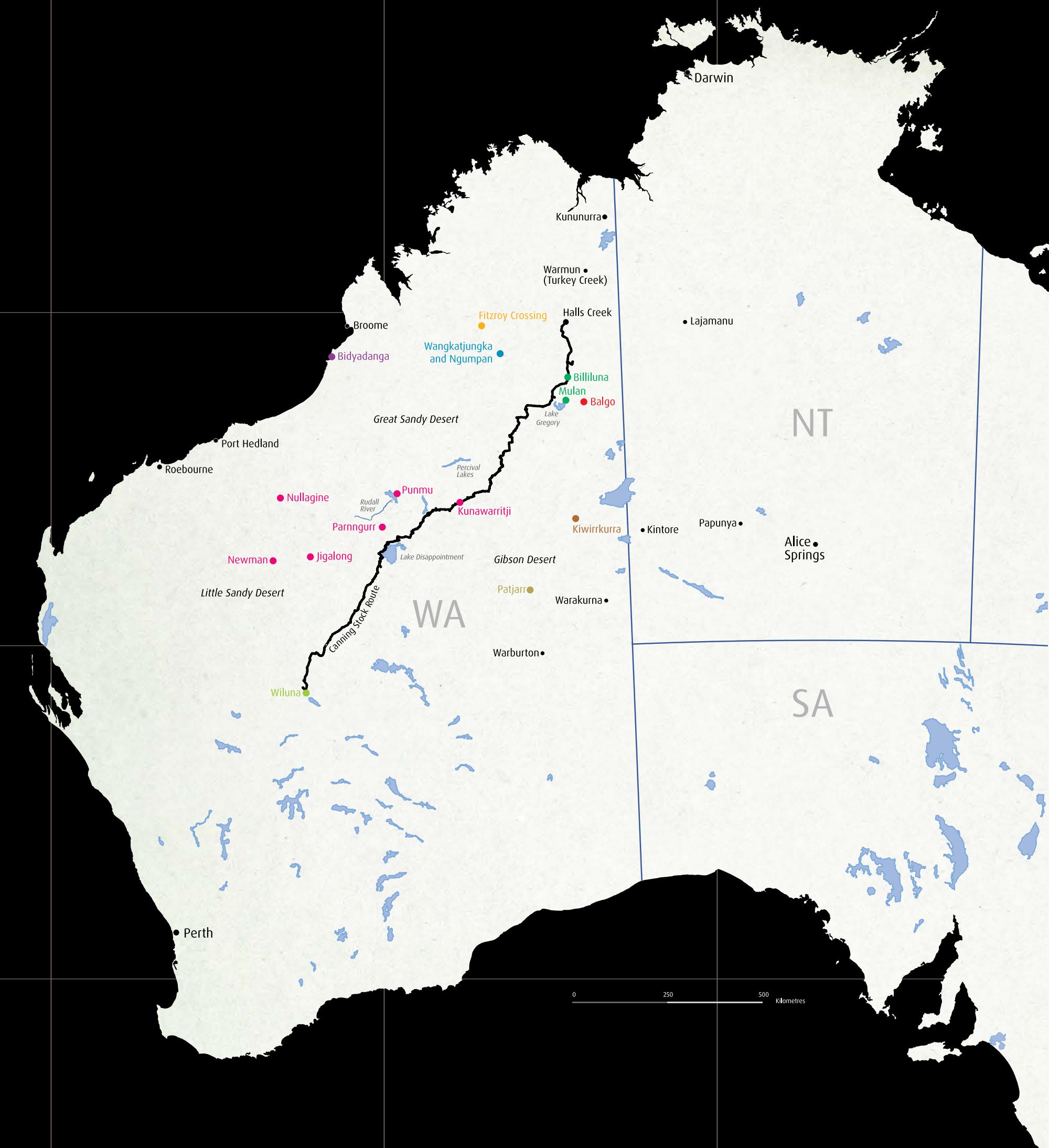
Australian Government  
International Exhibitions  
Insurance Program

# YIWARRA KUJU

## THE CANNING STOCK ROUTE

Art centres and communities surrounding the Canning Stock Route

- Biriliburu Artists (Wiluna)
- Kayili Artists (Patjarr)
- Mangkaja Arts (Fitzroy Crossing)
- Martumili Artists (Jigalong, Kunawarritji, Newman, Nullagine, Parnngurr, Punmu)
- Ngurra Artists (Wangkatjungka and Ngumpan)
- Papunya Tula Artists (Kiwirrkura)
- Paruku Indigenous Protected Area (Billiluna, Mulan)
- Warlayirti Artists (Balgo)



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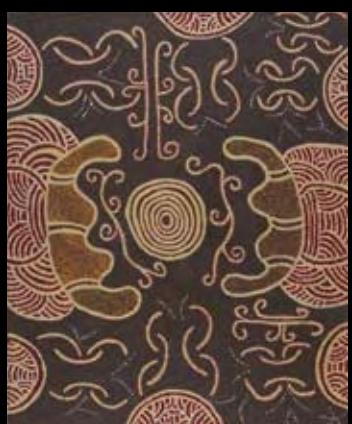
## Ngurra: Country

The desert environment



Home is like your house, but home to us is like our Country. No matter where we go we'll always come back to that tribal Country, where old people used to walk around and used to hunt. That's another way of home. And wherever you go you'll always come back and you'll always have a sense of belonging to that place.

Curtis Taylor, 2009



1 *My Country*, 2007,  
by Georgina Brown, Biriliburu  
Artists, Tjukurba Gallery,  
National Museum of Australia



2 Family in the desert, 1976, photo  
by Harry Leaver from *Born in the  
Desert*, Hesperian Press, 2009



3 *jila*, 2007, by Nyuju Stumpy  
Brown, Mangkaja Arts,  
National Museum of Australia

1

*In this cheerless and waterless region we marched from August 22nd until September 17th seeing no lakes, nor creeks, nor mountains; no hills even prominent enough to deserve a name, excepting on three occasions. Day after day over open, treeless expanses covered only by the never-ending spinifex.*

**David Wynford Carnegie**, 1898

2

Where early explorers saw 'the most dismal heartbreaking country it is possible to travel over' Aboriginal people saw *ngurra* or home. It provided them with food and water and a strong spiritual connection to Country which is maintained today.

#### **What is a desert?**

The term 'desert' has been used to describe many different regions. Generally, it is an area of low rainfall and high evaporation, surface run-off or seepage deep into the soil, resulting in high water loss. A region that receives less than 100 millilitres a year is considered a true desert. Areas receiving 250 millilitres or less are considered arid and areas receiving up to 500 millilitres but with high temperatures and evaporation rates can be considered semi-arid or with arid like conditions.

Deserts do not have to be hot places. Antarctica is considered a desert, even though it is the coldest place on the planet. Some deserts can be found in mountainous regions higher than 4000 feet above sea level. The Great Basin Desert of California is such a desert.

Coastal deserts are found on the west coast of continents and are often called cool deserts, with warm summers and cool winters. The Namib Desert of south-western Africa and the Atacama Desert of South America are examples of cool deserts.

Hot deserts are often located near the equator. Day temperatures can reach up to 38°C but the nights can be very cold. Deserts can form when they are sheltered from the winds that bring the rain clouds from the coast, either by distance from the ocean or by mountains. As clouds that blow in from the ocean rise over a mountain, rain falls. The air that is left is dry with no further rain to release. This is the reason most Australian deserts are dry.

#### **What type of deserts exist in Australia?**

Almost half of Australia is arid country. Within this arid zone are many different regions, each with its own character. Sand dunes dominate the Simpson, Tanami, Great Victorian and Great Sandy deserts. The Nullarbor Plain and Barkly Tableland are flat and smooth while the Gibson Desert and Sturt Stony Desert contain low rocky hills. Much of the Australian desert region is covered in spinifex and acacia shrubs. The western tip of the Tanami, the Great Sandy, the Gibson, the Little Sandy and the western half of the Great Victorian deserts make up what is referred to as the Western Desert. With the exception of the Great Victorian Desert in the south, this is the area that was bisected by the Canning Stock Route.

3

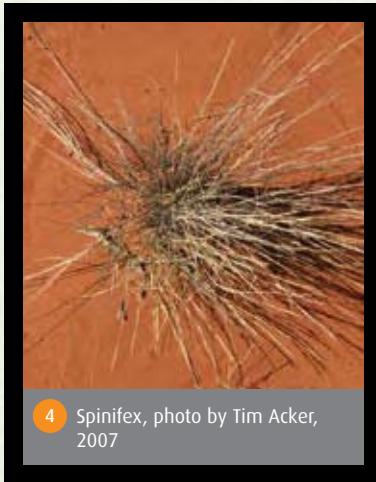
#### **How does water affect life in the Western Desert?**

Desert regions have no continuous flowing supply of water. Irregular rain may be heavy, causing floods, but it is followed by long dry periods. Surface water fills claypans or follows wide flood plains usually ending in salt lakes, such as Lake Disappointment. Underground water sources feed springs and soaks. Permanent springs are considered 'living' waters and are known as *jila* by many of the Aboriginal people of the Great Sandy Desert. While water sources exist they are uncertain and often widely spaced.

In the desert areas surrounding the Canning Stock Route there are distinctly seasonal rainfall patterns. During the summer rains there can be an abundance of water and correspondingly an increase in both plant and animal activity. This is then followed by a long dry period when people rely more on permanent water sources. If the rainfall is sparse during the summer season then the dry period is even more difficult. Water is a scarce resource which must be carefully harvested through long dry periods.

*We walked around in this area and would go to the permanent waterholes. After the surface water dried up, we would go back to the permanent water holes. Later on, after more rain fell, when there was lots of surface water, we would go back to where all the water was lying and hunt around in that area. When the surface water dried up we would go back to the large permanent rock holes.*

**Ngumarnu Norma Giles**, 2008



4 Spinifex, photo by Tim Acker, 2007

An added complication is that salt in desert environments is plentiful. Animals and plants have developed strategies to cope with high temperatures and long hours of sunlight, long periods without rain and water and the large amounts of salt.

### How do plants and animals survive in the Western Desert?

Despite the popular image of deserts as rolling sandhills with little or no vegetation, the Western Desert is well vegetated, many plants having adapted to desert conditions. These plants have evolved ways of conserving water and efficiently using all available water.

**Ephemerals** are short-lived plants appearing when there is abundant moisture following good rains. They germinate, grow, flower and set seed all within a very short time while the desert soil remains moist. After rain in the Australian desert, members of the daisy family, notably the paperdaisies, carpet the landscape.

**Endurers** have adapted to cope with low and infrequent rainfall. They do this by getting as much water as possible from the soil and at the same time they reduce evaporation of water from their leaves by having small openings called stomata. The Australian mulga is one of the most common wattles in the Australian deserts. It has an arrangement of leaves and branches that channel water to the stem and onto the ground where the roots are able to access it. It has a very long taproot. Spinifex is a tussock grass common across much of the Australian desert. The silvery leaves, which are very sharp and spiky, reflect sunlight reducing water loss and its clumping growth creates a cool micro environment which is home to many desert animals.

**Succulents** are plants with fleshy leaves or stems that are able to store water. The boab tree stores water in its trunk giving it a distinctive bottle shape. Saltbush is covered with small succulent leaves that store water and tolerate high levels of salt by secreting salt onto the leaves' surface. This allows it to grow in salty soil conditions that would kill most other plants. It has widespread roots that soak up water over a large area.

People of the Western Desert ate a wide variety of plants. The desert sweet potato, with tubers that could grow to several kilograms was a dependable source of food, as were the tubers of the *yalka* that had a long season of use. Some desert fruits remain edible long after they have fallen from the trees. Desert or rock figs were collected and made into a paste before eating. Seeds from plants such as the nardoo fern and other grasses were ground into flour.

Plants were also used as medicine to treat fever, congestion, headache, skin sores and other conditions. The leaves of the emu-bush (*Eremophila*), large shrubs found in the Western Desert, are used to make a tea which is drunk to relieve stomach disorders, colds and fever.

4 Spinifex leaves and stems are pounded to obtain resin which is used to make glue in the production of spears and adzes. Spinifex resin is also used in medicinal treatments for cold-sickness and stomach ailments. Bark from the bird flower bush (*yakapiri*) is used to make cord and string as well as sandals.

**Desert animals** have evolved in ways that allow them to cope with the problems of desert life. These animals must find enough water to function effectively and prevent dehydration, cope with hot days and cold nights and also find sufficient food. Like desert plants, desert animals have evolved a number of strategies.

**Expiring** during long periods of drought enables some species of desert animals to survive. These animals, like the ephemeral plants, complete their life cycle in very short periods of very good conditions. Before death they produce thousands of eggs which are capable of surviving many years of dryness and heat. Shield shrimps are tiny crustaceans that are found in puddles and lakes on claypans after heavy rains. They hatch, grow to about 3 centimetres long and lay hundreds of eggs all in about 12 days. As the water on the claypan vanishes they die in large numbers. The eggs remain dormant until the next rainfall.

**Evaders** leave when conditions become difficult. Many bird species migrate and return only in good seasons. Many species can change their behaviours to reduce the effects of heat and evaporation. These behaviours may include changing their hunting patterns, flying only during the cool of the morning or afternoon, avoiding fighting with other birds and active elaborate mating rituals.



5 Thorny devil, photo by Tim Acker, 2008

5

**Endurers** live permanently in the desert regions of Australia. The spinifex hopping mouse obtains water by eating succulent green plants, but can also survive extremely dry periods by living off dried spinifex or grass seeds. When the animal breaks down these seeds to produce energy, water is produced. The thorny devil can capture rain and dew drops in the tiny grooves that run between its scales, leading to the corners of its mouth. The thorny devil can suck the water towards its mouth by gulping. In the warm and active months the thorny devil's skin is patterned yellow and red but when cold it turns a dark olive green. It can also change colour very quickly when it's alarmed. Many desert animals avoid the heat of the day by living underground or sheltering in vegetation. At night the desert comes alive as these animals emerge in search of food.

Although animal food was highly desirable and men hunted emu, kangaroo and wallaby, hunting was less predictable and less certain than gathering plants. Women's activities provided most of the food eaten.

### How do Aboriginal people make a living in the desert?

Just as plants and animals have evolved ways of surviving in the desert environment, Aboriginal people living in the Western Desert have developed strategies which have enabled them to live for thousands of years in this harsh environment. In the past they have led a highly mobile existence, leaving some areas in times of prolonged drought and reducing mobility when the climate became wetter.

*When people went hunting hill kangaroo, the first one would be gutted there where it was speared and then the other hill kangaroos would smell the stomach contents and come down from the rocks to investigate. They would think that it was fresh grass that they could smell. Sure enough a couple would come down and also get speared. People speared the hill kangaroos when they came down for water.*

**Katapi Pulpurru Davies, 2008**



6 *Ngapawarla jila*, 2007, by Nyuju Stumpy Brown, Mangkaja Arts, National Museum of Australia

6

Respect for the ancestral beings that inhabit *jila* is still strong today and correct protocols must be followed such as camping at a distance from the spring. Strangers must be respectfully introduced to *jila* otherwise the powerful ancestral beings that inhabit them are said to rise up in anger. Rain-making ceremonies involving song and dance are important to ensure the balance of water is maintained.

*We have to look after this water. If the water go, everything will be finished. Life gone. Spirit gone. People gone. The country will have no meaning.*

**John Dudu Nangkiriny, Country: Visions of Land and People, p. 45**

This deep spiritual belief, an intimate knowledge of their Country and a strict social organisation allowed Aboriginal people to live in an extremely difficult environment. Contact with settlers through such ventures as the Canning Stock Route moved them into fringe settlements and disrupted a way of life that had been successful for more than one hundred generations.

### Questions and activities to share with your students

1. Using an atlas or a map locate the Western Desert Region of Australia.
2. What are the main features of these desert regions? Does the name give you a clue?
3. What towns or rivers are found in or near these desert regions?
4. Choose one town in the region and collect weather data for that town. The data may be collected over a week, month or longer.
5. What is 'adaptation' as it is applied to plants of the Western Desert?
6. What are some of the ways animals prevent water loss when living in the desert?
7. Why were Aboriginal people able to live successfully in the Western Desert region?
8. How would the disruption of their lives by Europeans have affected the way they lived and their capacity to live successfully in this region?

(front image) Young boys dancing at the end-of-bush-trip celebration, photo by Tim Acker, 2007

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*Ngurra kuju walyja:  
Country one family* People of the desert

It's my grandparents' Country,  
then my mother's and father's  
Country, then it's my Country.  
We have to think about the  
behind-people first.

Ngarralja Tommy May, 1994





Kids at the Ngumpan workshop,  
near Fitzroy Crossing, photo by  
Tim Acker, 2008

### **Who were the earliest inhabitants of the Western Desert?**

Archaeologists working in the Western Desert have come to understand that habitation was not uniform over space or time. Using a variety of evidence to track and date human occupation, archaeologists now believe that the Western Desert has been occupied for around 30,000 years. In the region transected by the Canning Stock Route, which has distinctly seasonal rainfall patterns, it is hypothesised that there has been a strong seasonal pattern of land use over a long period of time although there is growing evidence of change in both desert environments and human land use.

Around 14,000 years ago the climate became warmer and moister, possibly leading to a less mobile society. Then about 6000 years ago the climate became drier and more variable, and from about 2000 years ago slightly wetter and more stable. Archaeological evidence is scarce and not conclusive. However, it appears that people lived in the Western Desert during all climatic changes since the Last Glacial Maximum and there is also evidence of changes in the way people exploited those areas. Occupation of the arid areas may have decreased at certain times and then increased again later.

Seasonal land use would have meant that after summer rains people would disperse into small, highly mobile groups taking advantage of ephemeral water and food sources. During winter, longer term camps may have been set up at more reliable water supplies. Typically, Western Desert dwellers had low population density and were very mobile. Evidence, however, has also been found of significant population growth in the region within the past 1500 years as well as decreased mobility and the development of more rigid boundaries between groups.

As with many other parts of Australia, archaeology of the Western Desert indicates that change is a long term characteristic of human occupation in Australia. As archaeologist Peter Hiscock states:

*The existence of different settlement strategies within the Western Desert during the late-Holocene demonstrates that there was not a homogeneous desert adaptation. There is also growing evidence of change over time in desert environments and human economies.*

P Hiscock, *Archaeology of Ancient Australia*, Oxon Routledge, 2008, p. 205

On the contrary, Aboriginal people have always been highly adaptable, able to accommodate, shape and mediate change. Archaeology reveals a dynamic and changing human history in the Western Desert of Australia.

### **How are people related in the Western Desert?**

Aboriginal societies of the central and northern parts of the Western Desert were, and are, to a large degree fairly homogenous. While many languages were spoken in this region they were mutually intelligible and came from a similar linguistic base. Language differences marked each group associated with a particular Country. However most people spoke more than one language and people from different groups often interacted collaboratively for a variety of purposes, such as hunting and food gathering. In the harsh environment, co-operation was necessary for the common good. Subsequently the people of this area shared many features of their culture.

The two major motivators in people's lives were religion and making a living; that is, successful hunting and food collection. The first assured that the second could be achieved. Ceremonies, which included ritual songs and dances, were performed to celebrate ancestors and to increase the abundance of vegetable or animal food associated with that ancestor. To ensure the food supply there was a clear division of labour. The women collected vegetable foods and small animals. The men hunted larger animals. Hunting activities were more irregular and the results less predictable so it is not surprising that women supplied the bulk of the food needed by each group.

People were closely linked to their land through birth and spiritual association. Each person belonged to a group that had rights to a specific Country. With these rights, also came responsibilities. Each Country contained sacred sites and it was the responsibility of the group to look after these. Members of these family groups married outside their own group and so social relations were formed with other groups. The size of the groups varied depending on the seasonal demands of hunting and collecting. At times a group might consist of a single family unit, at other times several related families would join together to exploit abundant food



1 *Kurtal and Kanningarra*, 2007,  
by Ngarralja Tommy May,  
Mangkaja Arts, Private Collection



2 *Pangkapini Minyipuru*,  
2007, by Mulyatingki Marney,  
Martumili Artists,  
National Museum of Australia

sources. People moved over territories which may have been Country they owned or part of Country they were cooperatively sharing with another group. Without this cooperation, making a living would have been difficult in this harsh environment. From their early years, a child learnt that they were dependent upon and had obligations to others. This was not just in a generalised way, but dependent upon and obligated to, particular persons. This relationship was codified in a social system or kinship system. The kinship system allowed everyone to know what expectations one person could have in relation to another, for example, who were acceptable or, more importantly, unacceptable marriage partners.

Desert people cooperated with each other and also worked in harmony with nature. This was achieved through ritual and beliefs that expressed fundamental values that Aboriginal people lived by. In what is known in English as the Dreaming or Dreamtime, creation ancestors moved across the land leaving visible evidence of their travels in the form of hills, rock shelters or water sources.

- 1 *This [is a] story about Dreamtime people before Canning. Before whitefella come with a Camel. Dreamtime people were there. These two blokes, Kurtal and Kanningarra. Before I been born, these two water holes, they been looking after, cleaning all the time. Kurtal mob used to come down to Kanningarra mob, looking after Kanningarra. Keep it clean and sometime make it rain.*

Ngarralja Tommy May, 2007

As well as creating physical features these beings passed on to the people the laws by which they should live and also the rituals needed to care for their Country. For Aboriginal people the Dreaming is not just a creation period in the distant past, but a way of life both present and future.

The spiritual stories and kinship relationships were intertwined through the social life of Western Desert people. Spirit children were the way through which life was transferred from the spiritual world to the human through birth. The child then belonged to the Country in which this took place. As children grew up they learned how to make a living and the correct way to interact with other people. Boys and girls also received formal training so that they could undertake initiation rites. Novices were introduced to secret/sacred events and after various rituals, which differ according to the group (but may have included circumcision, piercing of the nasal septum, tooth removal and body scarring), became fully initiated participants in these rituals. These rituals, including songs, dances and stories, ensure that the tracks travelled and the sites created by the ancestors are always remembered.

- 2 *This is Pangkapini and all the rockholes and soaks that I remember on the western, northern and eastern sides of Karlamilyi. I grew up around that area with my mum and dad. The Seven Sisters sat down and rested [at many of these places]. When I was a child, we camped one night at Natawalu. The Seven Sisters also rested there.*

Mulyatingki Marney, 2007

#### Tools for making a living

The people of the Western Desert used tools which were multi-functional, easy to make from the surrounding environment and extremely adequate for the purpose of hunting and collecting food. Resources to make tools could be scattered and their availability unpredictable. The Western Desert tool kit therefore had a relatively small number of items but these could be used for a variety of purposes, giving great flexibility to the hunters and to the gatherers.

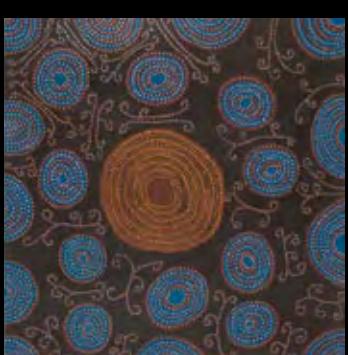
Stone tools such as stone flakes, adzes (hafted flakes) and hand-held axes were used for the manufacture of wooden tools. Grinding stones were used in the preparation of food or for grinding ochre to make paint. Large grindstones were used to grind seeds into flour, which was sometimes made into a cake and baked and sometimes mixed with water and eaten raw. These large grindstones were the exclusive property of women and were handed down from mother to daughter. They were not carried with the group but remained at a particular site in an area near a water supply and where grass seeds were common. The stones were originally obtained by men who travelled to known stone sources. Often they relied on kinship ties to effect possession of the stone. The stones were then handed over to the women and from then on became their exclusive property.



3 Wooden bowl,  
National Museum of Australia



4 Georgina holding her dingo pups,  
1976, photo by Harry Leaver from  
*Born in the Desert*, Hesperian  
Press, 2009



5 *Where I Was Born*, 2007,  
by Georgina Brown, Birriliburu  
Artists, Tjukurpa Gallery,  
National Museum of Australia

**Hunting tools** were made and used by men. These include hunting spears and spear-throwers. The hunting spear was made from a light wooden vine or tree, heated in the fire and straightened. It was usually made in two sections joined together using resin and kangaroo sinew. A barb may have been inserted into the tip and a notch cut into the end to insert the spear-thrower. The spear-thrower was made from a piece of mulga wood cut from the tree using a hand-held axe. This would then be roughly shaped and trimmed before being finally trimmed using an adze. Often a piece of flaked stone was mounted into the handle using resin, making the handle of the spear-thrower an adze in its own right. Sometimes a barb was attached to the front of the spear-thrower using resin and sinew. At other times the wood was carved to enable the spear-thrower to fit the spear.

3 **Collecting tools** were made and used by women. Digging sticks were made by chopping a suitable length of mulga wood from the tree using a hand-held axe. One end was fire-hardened and then rubbed or scraped using a sharp rock into a sharp chisel-like end. The digging stick was used to dig up a variety of root vegetables, obtain small animals from burrows and prise other food such as witchetty grubs from the roots and bark of trees. Wooden bowls called *piti* and *ngurti* were used for carrying food that had been collected, winnowing seeds and removing earth loosened with the digging stick. Large bowls were used for carrying infants and transporting water.

Even before the advent of the Canning Stock Route goods were often exchanged over long distances in the Western Desert. From the west came pearl shells and baler shells used as carrying vessels. From the east finely fluted hunting boomerangs and the *wirlik* or 'number 7' — the hooked boomerang, and from the north ground-edged axes and pressure-flaked spear points. Consequently the people who lived in this Country had access to a wider variety of goods than those that were locally manufactured. With these goods came ideas, stories and relationships that meant the people of this area possessed a vibrant and rich culture that informed every part of their life.

The construction of the Canning Stock Route and the interactions that resulted from it meant that changes in the way people made a living were inevitable for those whose Country was transected by the route. However, despite this disruption, the spiritual links and kinship systems continue to sustain and nurture the people today. The acrylic paintings featured in this exhibition are just the latest expressions of long-held traditions that are displayed within an innovative material culture.

4 Dadina Georgina Brown was just 6 years old when she came in from the desert. When she was found, she was clutching an armful of dingo pups. Georgina was 5 among the last people leading a nomadic life in the Western Desert. She was born in the bush and travelled around with her family in the Country east of the stock route. In 1976 concerned families in Wiluna sent out a patrol to find them and bring them into the settlement. Georgina's parents always longed to return to their desert Country, but worried relatives prevented it. They both passed away in Wiluna. In 2009 Georgina returned to the Country where she had grown up.

#### Questions and activities to share with your students

1. Why do you think it would be important for desert people to be highly adaptable to changes in climate and environment?
2. Desert society was a co-operative society. People needed to cooperate to ensure an adequate food supply for all. Do you think we live in a cooperative society? Why or why not? How does this affect our society? Explain your answer.
3. Think about the tools needed by men and women in the desert to make a living. Choose either a man's tool kit or a woman's tool kit. List the tools contained in the kit. For each tool list all of the tools a person might have to do a similar job today. (e.g. digging stick — spade, fork, trowel, hoe, backhoe, pick, etc.)
4. Research an archaeologist. Find information about one of these eminent archaeologists. Find biographical information, the locations they worked, the methodology they used, the findings and contributions they made to our understanding of Aboriginal people of the Western Desert: Alan Thorne, Tim Flannery, Josephine Flood, Mike Smith, Peter Hiscock and 'John Mulvaney'.

(front image) Kumpaya Girgaba,  
from Martumili Artists, at Kunkun,  
photo by Morika Biljabu, 2008

# YIWARRA KUJU THE CANNING STOCK ROUTE

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## Jukurrpa: The Dreaming or Dreamtime



'They talk about rainbow serpent — snakes — in Dreamtime they were human. They would travel around the countryside making songs and stories where the water is'.

Putuparri Tom Lawford, 2007

### What is Jukurpa?

Jukurra is that concept referred to in English as the Dreaming or Dreamtime. It refers to the time of creation but also transcends time as we know it. During the Jukurra, ancestral beings, both animal and human, moved across the country creating land features, plants and animals; performing ceremonies, singing, marrying and fighting. Their journeys crisscrossed the desert and left lines of travel that marked their activities. At the end of their journeys ancestral beings returned to the earth, where they often still reside. Places where the ancestral beings returned to the earth, such as hills, rocks, waterholes and salt lakes, are special/sacred sites and hold great power. Some beings left the earth to take their place among the stars. But where they were part of significant events at various places throughout the Western Desert, these places are also sacred.

During their journeys the ancestral beings established the moral, practical and spiritual laws that govern all things. The tracks that crisscrossed the physical world of the desert also formed the basis of an intricate network of stories or 'songlines' that contain the laws and rituals on which desert society is based.

These Dreaming lines also articulate the territorial bounds of the Country they cross. These boundaries demarcate the exclusive territories of language groups, and crossing them without the cultural approval of custodians is a contravention that can result in death.

Central to this law is the role humans play in both the maintenance of law and the maintenance of Country. Knowledge of these laws is held collectively by initiated senior people and is often shared by members of several groups. Some of it is restricted and can only be known by those to whom it belongs, and often the knowledge is fragmented with different parts being held by different people. For example, senior men hold men's secret/sacred law and senior women hold women's secret/sacred law. Other stories may be sacred but can be shared as they are laws everyone needs to follow.

Jukurra is also a concept that relates to each individual. It links people to place and provides people with identity and responsibilities towards the place that is part of their Dreaming. When a child is born it is believed to have an association with the ancestral realm. Sometimes this association is symbolised by a 'totem', which could be an animal, plant or physical feature. The 'totem' is an expression of personal ties to Jukurra. As children grew, learning about the Jukurra was as much a part of daily life as learning to locate water and find food. Learning respect for places of significance, how to look after sacred sites and perform rituals, and how to maintain a relationship with the spiritual and natural world, was an essential part of growing up in the Western Desert. It is just as important today.

Jukurra is a lens through which the Aboriginal people of the Western Desert view their world. It encodes the cooperative triangle of ancestral beings, Country and people in social and personal terms.

'After the Dreaming' was (is) an idea that would have been (is) not only irrelevant but unthinkable.

### How does Jukurra relate to places in the Western Desert?

#### jila

- 1 *In living water there is a quiet snake. Sometimes he rises up, but we sing him down. Sometimes he can travel and bring rain.*

Jarran Jan Billycan, 2007

In the Great Sandy Desert permanent springs are 'living waters' known as *jila*. Some are the resting places of powerful ancestral beings and the stories of these sites are recorded in songs and dances across the desert country.

- 2 The ancestral snakes that inhabit *jila* are also called *jila* and *kalpurtu*. In the creation time of the Jukurra *jila* were men who made rain, shaped the features of the land and introduced law and rituals associated with rainmaking to this Country. When the *jila* men finished their journeys they entered the *jila* waters and transformed into snakes. *Jila* sites are of great importance and must be treated with great respect. People do not camp close to the *jila* but keep a respectful distance. Men must ceremonially clean the *jila* before women can approach. People then approach the *jila* with care and respect.



1 *Kiriwirri*, 2008, by Jan Billycan,  
Yulparija Artists,  
National Museum of Australia



2 *Nyilangkurr*, 2007, by Donald  
Moko, Yulparija Artists,  
National Museum of Australia

*When we go in different area people show us, 'This is the main jila [spring], or even jumu [soak]. At night that people gotta sing that song and tell you that story, how that place been come, and then you're in the picture. You can't just go anywhere, we gotta wait for people to show.*

**Joe Brown**, 2008

### The story of Kurtal

*A big rain came. After the rain, grasses started to grow. From the grass Kurtal turned into a man.*

*Kurtal travelled to Jintirripil, a jila near the sea, who asked him to stay for good. Tricking him, Kurtal agreed. Jintirripil told Kurtal to find Paliyarra jila, who had stolen his sacred objects.*

*Paliyarra knew that Kurtal had come to steal back Jintirripil's objects. He told Kurtal he didn't have them, but Kurtal could see the lightning flashing inside him. Paliyarra set his dogs onto Kurtal. Badly bitten, Kurtal tripped over Paliyarra, who spilled the objects on the ground. Kurtal kicked them towards his jila.*

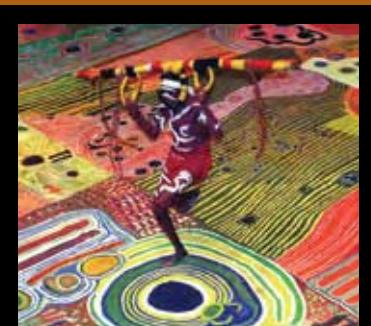
*Kurtal stole more objects from other jila, then went to visit his friend Kanningarra. Kanningarra asked Kurtal to stay with him there forever. Tricking him, Kurtal agreed, saying, 'You lie down over there and I'll lie down here'. Kanningarra went into the ground, turning into a snake, and Kurtal took off for his Country.*

*Getting weak, Kurtal crawled inside his waterhole with all his stolen objects and turned into a snake.*

3

*That's the song Kurtal wanyurla wanyurla we sing. He sent up a kutuktu [rain-bearing cloud] like the ones I made at Kurtal.*

**Ngilpirr Spider Snell**, 2007



3 Spider Snell dances on the Ngurra canvas, 1997

4

### The story of Jarntu

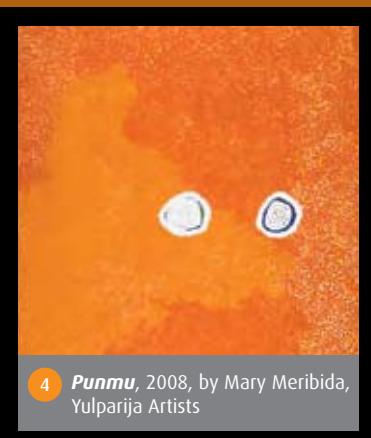
Many Jukurrrpa stories relate to sacred sites. One such site is Jarntu or Well 35 along the Canning Stock Route. Jarntu is a place so sacred that its true name (Kinyu) should only be used by people with close ties to the ancestral being that gives it its common name — Jarntu.

Jarntu is the ancestral mother dingo whose puppies inhabit the surrounding rockholes and soak waters, which are linked by a network of underground tunnels. Jarntu has healing powers, but she is also a fierce protector of her home and people. Aboriginal people enter the site ritually and with great respect, sweeping the ground with branches, announcing strangers and leaving food for Jarntu. Jarntu returns this generosity by ensuring successful hunting for her Countrymen and by protecting them from danger.

Like many sites in this country Jarntu is simultaneously an ancestral being, a story and a place.

*Jarntu is like a guide dog for the old people, a protector. It's the belly button of the Country. Right in the middle. The Canning Stock Route cut the body in half. Jarntu is like the veins of the body.*

**Morika Biljabu**, 2008



4 Punmu, 2008, by Mary Meribida, Yulparija Artists

### Kumpupirntily

Kumpupirntily is a vast dry salt lake known in English as Lake Disappointment. Kumpupirntily is a place to be avoided as it is the home of cannibal beings known as the Ngayurnangalku (the name means 'will eat me'). They look like people except for large fangs and long curved fingernails. They live under the lake in their own world with a sun that never sets. If people come too close to the lake they catch them with their long fingernails and eat them.



5 **Kumpupirntily Cannibal Story**,  
2008, by Yunkurra Billy Atkins,  
Martumili Artists



6 **Minyipuru**, 2007, by Muni Rita  
Simpson, Rosie Williams, Dulcie  
Gibbs, Martumili Artists

## 5 The cannibal Jukurpa

In the Jukurrrpa, when Ngayurnangalku (cannibal beings) were living all over the desert, they came together for a big meeting at Kumpupirntily (Lake Disappointment), and debated whether or not they should stop eating people. Jeffrey James continues the story:

*That night there was a baby born. They asked, 'Are we going to stop eating the people?' And they said, 'Yes, we going to stop,' and they asked the baby, newborn baby, and she said, 'No'. The little kid said, 'No, we can still carry on and continue eating peoples', but this mob said, 'No, we're not going to touch'.*

Jeffrey James, 2007

Following the baby, one group continued to be cannibals, dividing the Ngayurnangalku forever into 'good' and 'bad'. The bad people remained at Kumpupirntily, but the good were kept safe by ancestral 'bodyguards' who became landforms around the lake.

*The bodyguards were saving all the people. Sandhill in the middle of the lake separates good people and bad people.*

Jeffrey James, 2007

## 6 Minyipuru Jukurpa (the Seven Sisters story)

In Aboriginal cultures across Australia, and in other cultures around the world, the Pleiades star cluster is associated with the story of the Seven Sisters.

Minyipuru Jukurra is the Martu version of this story. The Minyipuru began their journey from Roebourne as a big group of sisters and their mothers. At various places along the way, they lost members of their party until eventually only seven sisters remained. At Kalypa (Well 23) the Minyipuru met a group of Jukurra men; it was the first time either group had seen members of the opposite sex. The men tried to grab the women, but the Minyipuru chased them, hitting them with their digging sticks and leaving them lying there.

At Pangkapini the sisters met Yurla, an old man who had followed them from Roebourne. Yurla grabbed one of the women at Pangkapini, but her sisters tricked him and managed to rescue her. At another site further east, he tried to catch five of the sisters, but again they escaped, flying on to Marapinti.

Many of the sites on the Seven Sisters' journey through this country are now wells on the Canning Stock Route.

*Poor old fella, he had a rough time. He was trying and trying and trying.*

Jugarda Dulcie Gibbs, 2007

In Aboriginal communities today cultural knowledge is still owned collectively. Senior custodians for particular sites and rituals may be the keepers of sacred knowledge, but cultural decisions must be collectively negotiated. Young people defer to elders in all matters of culture and law, learning from them the stories and songs that are the basis of their world view.

*They know everything. They know the bush life. They got this knowledge. They know the Dreaming and boundaries, everything. They lived that life.*

Hayley Atkins, 2009

## Questions and activities to share with your students

1. Jukurra refers to important events that happened in the distant past but also to things that are important to Aboriginal people today. Discuss with students how this relates to their own religious beliefs.
2. Why are the journeys of the ancestors important to people today?
3. The creatures who inhabit Lake Disappointment are dangerous so people stay away. Why do you think this story is important for Aboriginal people to know?
4. The story of the Seven Sisters is told in many cultures. Have students do an internet search to see how many different versions of the story they can find.
5. Why do you think it is important that the old people pass these stories on to younger people?

(front image) **Kunkun**, 2008, by Nora Nangapa, Nora Wompi, Bugai Whylouter and Kumpaya Girgaba, Martumili Artists, National Museum of Australia.

Although it is entitled *Kunkun*, there are 57 named sites in this painting, 11 of which are stock route wells. Many of these places are where ancestral beings left their power.

# YIWARRA KUJU THE CANNING STOCK ROUTE

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## Walyja: Family Movement of people



*Before Canning made those lines of wells, it was all family groups — tribes and language groups that were related ... Nowadays we are living [in different places], everybody moved, separated to different part of the Western Desert, to different towns: Fitzroy Crossing, Newman, Jigalong, Balgo, Broome, Bidyadanga. And that connection is still alive today in the heart of the desert ... We all one mob. All one people. Canning Stock Route is another history. It's the European version. But now what we're talking about is how ... daily lives were all connected back through song and dance and Dreaming and the desert.*

**Murungkurr Terry Murray, 2009**

Before the surveying of the Canning Stock Route every aspect of the Country had been mapped. Around 15 different language groups or 'tribes' lived in the area transected by the stock route and other groups were linked to the area through the Dreaming tracks which crossed the Country, forming the basis of ceremonial interactions. The Canning Stock Route is the road that many Aboriginal people followed out of their desert world. Over many years people at different times and for different reasons moved out of their home Country and onto the fringes of a new world that is called Australia.

People moved to places on the edges of the desert. They moved to the outskirts of towns like Halls Creek and Meekatharra, stations such as Ullulla and Billiluna, settlements such as Jigalong and missions such as Warburton and Balgo. People from across the Western Desert, speaking many languages, arrived at these places and established communities. Because of the similarities in language, and because most people spoke several languages, communication was not difficult. Cultural similarities, including the kinship and Dreaming networks as well as a strong tradition of cooperation, meant that people congregating in these communities were able to forge new cultural identities without letting go of the beliefs and understanding which had been their way of life for thousands of years.

People who travelled north to Bidyadanga from their home in the Great Sandy Desert became known by and identified with the name Yulparija, which means 'southerner'. People who travelled east to places such as Papunya became the Pintupi, 'people from the west', and people from the southern stock route collectively became the Martu which means Aboriginal person or 'one of us'.

- 1 *We all go together like one big family, from one area. Even though we come from different language groups, we're all one. And from that 'one' is that one history of all the whole road.*

**Putuparri Tom Lawford, 2009**

The concept of Walyja or family is at the heart of Western Desert society. It is a far broader idea of relatedness than is commonly associated with family in non-Aboriginal societies. Kinship has always been the basis of Aboriginal social relations. It includes all relationships, not only those of blood or marriage. From the outside, kinship systems seem very complex but children learn from a very early age how they are connected to this meaningful network. The system of relationships is referred to as the 'skin system' and was created by the Jukurra ancestors. Skin groups dictate the appropriate behaviour between people and their obligations and responsibilities toward one another. Brothers belong to the same skin group, therefore for a child, a father's brother is also 'father' rather than uncle. Children of brothers belong to their own skin group and refer to each other as brother and sister, not cousin. These relationships were impacted upon but not really changed when communities consisting of various language groups were formed as people travelled along the stock route away from their own Country.

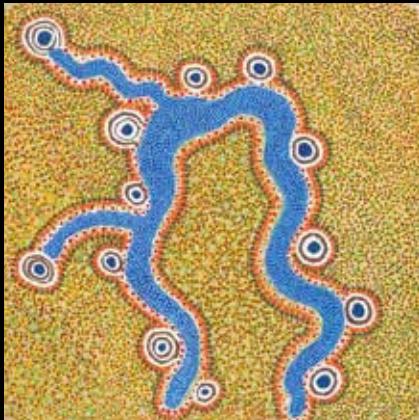
*It's good for whitefellas and young people like us to know the connection ... To know that we all just connected no matter what different language we speak, but we just one family ... We all just connected through our skin colours.*

**Hayley Atkins, 2009**

Aboriginal people often moved in times of drought, especially during the late 1920s, the early 1940s and mid-1950s to places where food was easier to get. Sometimes people moved for cultural or family reasons. Not all followed the stock route. Some strategically avoided it. However, it was the existence of the Canning Stock Route, and the people that it brought into their world, that acted as a catalyst for Aboriginal people to move. The stock route transformed the social and cultural landscape of the desert forever.

### **Jigalong**

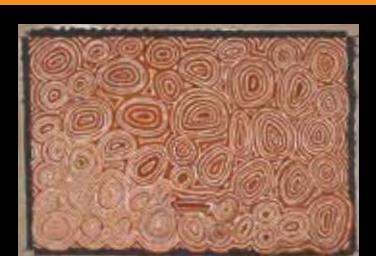
Jigalong is located 165 kilometres east of the town of Newman. It was established in 1907 as the location for a maintenance and rations store for workmen constructing the rabbit-proof fence. In the 1930s it was used as a camel-breeding site and in 1947 the land was granted to the Apostolic Church to set up a Christian mission for the Aboriginal community which had grown up around the site. In the 1920s an extensive drought in the Western Desert caused people to move in search of food and water. Some made their way to Jigalong where they replenished themselves. They returned to their communities and informed others that food was available at the depot. People began to migrate to be near the rations store. These migrations



1 **Paruku and Walmajarri People,**  
2007, by Veronica Lulu,  
Warlayirti Artists,  
National Museum of Australia



2 **Paruku**, 2007, by Veronica Lulu, Anna Johns, Shirley Brown, Lyn Manson, Wendy Wise, Bessie Doonday, Chamia Sammuels, Daisy Kungah and Kim Mahood, collection of Paruku Indigenous Protected Area



3 **Kapitu Kapitu**, 2008, Norma Giles, Kayili Artists

increased in the 1930s with the establishment of the camel-breeding site so that by the time the mission was established there was a ready made congregation.

The land was returned to the Australian government in 1969. Jigalong became an incorporated body in 1973 and in 1974 the land was returned to the Martu people.

Dadda Samson's family moved to old Jigalong, the ration station established on the rabbit proof fence. Dadda was born by the windmill there.

## 2 Billiluna station

Many Aboriginal people left their country to work on cattle stations. In the late 1800s settlers sought to establish cattle stations in north-west Australia. The township of Halls Creek was established in 1885 after gold was found there. After the gold petered out, the few Europeans who remained once again turned to the idea of establishing cattle stations. The first cattle station was established at Gordon Downs in 1887. Others followed at Billiluna and Sturt Creek. Aboriginal people were employed to work on the stations. The development of the Canning Stock Route was to provide a path for these cattle to be transported south to Wiluna. It also meant Aboriginal people found their way to the cattle stations where employment as drovers and stockmen was available. Billiluna was a large cattle station where many Aboriginal men found work as stockmen.

## 3 Warburton mission

In 1933 William Wade from the United Aboriginal Mission journeyed into the Warburton Ranges. He observed several waterholes in the bed of Elder Creek where groups of Aboriginal people congregated. As a result he decided to establish a mission station and returned with his wife and children the following year. The missionaries took orphans into their care and in times of drought and hardship other parents also left their children in the missionaries' care, although they regularly visited, bringing game to trade for tea and sugar. A great number of children attended the school run by the missionaries until the Education Department took over the responsibility. More and more people began to reside at the mission and parents decided to care for children in their own homes. In 1961 the mission dormitories were closed. In the 1960s the government forced people out of the area around the Woomera Rocket range and many moved to Warburton. This, coupled with a severe drought, meant that between 400 and 500 people resided at the mission.

In 1973 an Aboriginal Council was formed. It incorporated and took over the administration of the community from the mission.

## Balgo mission

In 1934 the Pallotines or Society of Catholic Apostolate bought Rockhole Station south-west of Halls Creek and established a mission and sheep run. They applied to the Western Australian Department of Health to set up a hospital and leprosarium, but a medical clinic was set up at the Moola Bulla station instead. During the next few years expeditions were made into the country south of Halls Creek looking for a new mission site. Several sites were tried but found to be unsuitable. In 1942, after success in finding bore water, it was decided the mission would be established at Balgo Hills. Over the next few years a mission house and out-buildings were completed, an airstrip built and a vegetable garden established. In 1947 when visits by the Royal Flying Doctor Service commenced about 150 Aboriginal people were living on the mission.

*From Natawalu I went to Tiru. No kartiya didn't take me, I went on my own, walking. To Kulyayi then to Katajilkarr, Jimpirrinykarra then Jintijinti. Kujuwarri, Kartalapuru, then on to Kuninarra, Kaningarra, Lampu, Jikarn, Kilangkilang, to the old station, then Balgo. I stayed there for a while then [Father] Alphonse told me 'You go back and bring your family back here.' I went back looking for my mob through the same road I came on, following the wells.*

**Brandy Tjungurrayi**, 2008

Many came to the mission as a result of the priests sending people into the bush with flour, sugar and tea to attract Aboriginal people. These in turn invited other groups to join them. Others walked into the mission during drought times and stayed because food was more easily accessible. The interactions however were not always harmonious.

*The Aborigines considered us intruders in their country and considered our sheep their property ... The land was their property and they wanted us to give them food and supplies in return for its use.*

**Brother Frank Nissl**, in Z Dé Ishtar, *Holding Yawulyu*, p. 84



4 **Natawalu**, 2007, by Helicopter Tjungurrayi, Warlayirti Artists, National Museum of Australia

### Questions and activities to share with your students

1. Why do you think Aboriginal people may have moved away from their Country to live on the fringes of the desert?
2. Have students watch the movie *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. What does this movie tell you about life in these settlements? What does it tell you about attitudes of that time to Aboriginal people living in these settlements?
3. Think about the story of 'Helicopter'. What does this story tell you about some relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people?
4. Why do you think it was (is) necessary for Aboriginal people living in small groups in the desert to understand their 'kinship' to everyone else in the group?
5. Think of people in your family. How are these relationships important to you?

(front image) Kids painted up and ready to dance Kurtal at the Ngumpan workshop, near Fitzroy Crossing, photo by Tim Acker, 2008

In 1947 the Daughters of Mary Queen of the Apostles, Australia's first Indigenous nuns, arrived at Balgo. However, as most of them were urban Aboriginal women who were given no preparation for the life at Balgo, they were withdrawn 14 months later. Sisters of St John of God took up residence at Balgo in 1954 and served as nurses and teachers. In 1955 it was discovered that Balgo was actually built on Billiluna land. After much negotiation the government agreed to help the mission move to a new location. In 1965 the mission was reopened as Balgo Hills mission.

From the 1970s into the 1980s Balgo was the centre of a number of disputes between the Catholic Church and the Australian Government. In a new era of self-determination, the government was keen to move communities towards self-management; yet the church was not keen to relinquish control of the community. Eventually in the early 1980s Balgo mission became an Aboriginal community, and the church stayed on to help run the school.

An adult education centre was also developing at Balgo at this time to assist people with literacy and numeracy skills. This was also used to help people who were interested in developing their artistic skills and in 1986 an exhibition of Balgo art was held at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in Perth. In 1987, Warlayirti Artists was established and in 1999 a purpose-built centre was constructed to house the facilities, including a studio and gallery. Since 2002 Warlayirti has been fully self-funded, a success achieved through the continuing commitment and ability of the artists combined with strategic business development. Warlayirti Artists contributes significantly to the social, cultural and economic well being of the Aboriginal community in the area.

### Helicopter's story

Not all people were enticed or chose to walk out of the desert to Balgo. This is the story of Joey 'Helicopter' Tjungurrayi.

In 1957 a mining survey party came across a group of people living near Natawalu (Well 40 on the Canning Stock Route). Some of these people had never seen white men before, none had seen a helicopter. The initial contact was marked by fear and confusion on both sides.

*It landed. We said, 'Mannurkunurrku [wasp] sat down'. We didn't call it helicopter then. We called it mannurkunurrku. 'Well, let's go look for it' we said ... That's when we came down from the sandhill carrying spears.*

Patrick Oloodoodi (Alatutti) Tjungurrayi, 2007

Jim Ferguson, the helicopter pilot recalls:

*Suddenly about half a dozen men appeared from behind these bushes dragging their spears in the sand. Matman [the team surveyor] grabbed the .303 and I pulled out my revolver, but all was OK. They stuck their spears in the ground.*

Charlie Wallabi (Walapayi) Tjungurrayi approached the men:

*My young brother [Helicopter] was so sick; he had sores everywhere and he was helpless, a little boy. I grabbed my little brother and showed them. So kartiya [white people] looked at his sores and said 'OK, we'll take him' because he was so sick.*

*I waited, waited, waited for long and I wondered 'they're not bringing him back!' Nothing. It was getting a bit longer, and I said to myself, I think I will go after him north. From there I kept walking right, long way, all the way to Balgo.*

Helicopter recalls his journey:

*They took us to the old [Balgo] mission. It was the first time they saw a helicopter too; even me, first time they seen me too. They were asking who my parents were. I told them ... then they knew me through my parents. Then I went to Derby [hospital]. After I got better they took me back to Balgo and I'm still here today.*

Over 50 years later an article in the *Weekend Australian* about the Canning Stock Route recounted the story of respected artist 'Helicopter' Tjungurrayi. For 79-year-old retired helicopter pilot Jim Ferguson it was a mystery solved.

*I assumed the boy had died. I'm absolutely thrilled that after all these years, he's still alive and I played a small part in that.*

Mr Ferguson contacted Warlayirti Artists and was told Helicopter wanted to talk to him. Helicopter told Jim:

*Thank you very much for taking me to Balgo, [I'm] happy now.*

Today Helicopter is a very respected Western Desert artist dedicated to painting his Country.

# YIWARRA KUJU THE CANNING STOCK ROUTE

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## History of the Canning Stock Route



'The Route, when finished, would be about the best watered stock route in [the] Colony.'

Alfred Canning, 1907



The Canning Stock Route is a 1850-kilometre long track running between Halls Creek and Wiluna in Western Australia. It is named after Alfred Wernam Canning who surveyed the route in 1906–07. With the assistance of unnamed Aboriginal people from many different language groups who lived along the route, he located water sources approximately one day's distance apart for a team of travelling stock and their drovers. In 1908 he returned to build the wells. There were 54 water sources of which 48 were constructed wells.

**1 The origins of the stock route**

The idea of the stock route began in 1905 in response to a monopoly that had arisen on the beef supply to Perth and the goldfields. This monopoly resulted in such high prices for beef that the government conducted a royal commission to investigate the issue of a 'meat ring'. Cattle from the East Kimberley were afflicted with ticks and were prohibited from travelling through the west of Western Australia in case they carried the ticks to unaffected cattle. The East Kimberley pastoralists were anxious to find a market for their cattle and the government was equally anxious to find competition for the current suppliers to bring prices down. James Isdell, an East Kimberley pastoralist and politician, raised the idea that the cattle tick would be unable to survive a desert crossing and lobbied the government to make a path through the desert. The government approved of this idea as it presented a way out of their meat supply problem, and an expedition was then planned to survey the country between Wiluna and Halls Creek. The country through which the pastoralists and the government proposed to run the stock encompassed parts of the Great Sandy Desert, the Little Sandy Desert and the Gibson Desert. The final route transected the Countries of the Aboriginal people of many different language groups.

**Why the 'Canning' Stock Route?**

Alfred Wernam Canning was the man selected to survey the route. Canning was born in Victoria and been a cadet surveyor in New South Wales. He joined the Western Australian Lands Department in 1893 and proved himself to be a reliable surveyor. In 1901 he successfully surveyed the line for the rabbit-proof fence — a journey of 1822 kilometres which began at Starvation Harbour, west of Esperance, and headed due north to Wallal, a point roughly halfway between Port Hedland and Broome. Canning's new instructions were to find a route from Wiluna to Halls Creek with water supplies one day's bullock journey apart, which could supply water for up to 800 head of cattle.

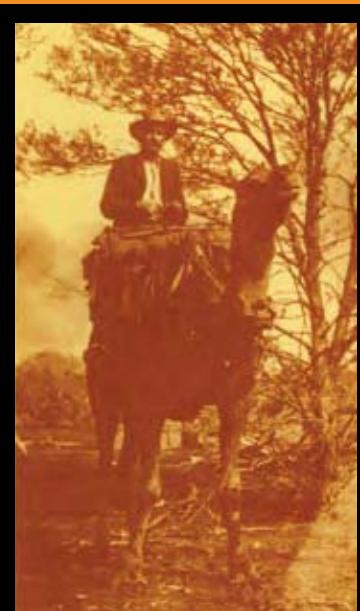
This country had been travelled before by the Calvert Expedition, led by Lawrence Wells, and by explorer David Carnegie in 1896. Wells stated that the country was of no use for anything except spinifex. Carnegie explored the possibility of a stock route between Coolgardie and the Kimberley but his route carried him through the Gibson Desert before arriving in the Great Sandy Desert. Three of his camels died from eating poisonous plants and one of his party accidentally shot himself dead. Carnegie concluded 'that a stock route through the desert is impracticable we have clearly demonstrated'. He called it a 'vast howling wilderness ... so barren and destitute of vegetation ... that one marvels how even camels could pick up a living'. (D Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, pp. 432, 249)

Both Wells and Carnegie created a precedent with their treatment of Aboriginal people. Both Wells and Carnegie used ropes to tie them up so that they would continue to receive their help; in Carnegie's case, finding water; in Wells's case, finding the two lost members of their party. Carnegie also deprived his Aboriginal captives of water or fed them salt beef so that they would lead him to water more quickly, although he was publicly criticised for this at the time. There is evidence to show that Canning had read the accounts of both expeditions and, on his own expedition, explicitly followed Carnegie's example.

1 Plan of stock route exploration, by AW Canning, Western Australian Land Information Authority (Landgate)



2 *Canning Stock Route and Surrounding Country*,  
2008, by Kumpaya Girgaba,  
Ngamaru Bidu, Mabel  
Warkarta, Nola Taylor, Thelma  
Judson, Marjorie Yates, Dulcie  
Gibbs, Yuwali Janice Nixon,  
Rosie Williams, Nora Nangapa,  
Bugai Whylouter, Nora Wompi,  
Jakayu Biljabu and Morika  
Biljabu, Martumili Artists,  
National Museum of Australia



3 Alfred Canning on camel,  
courtesy State Library of Western  
Australia, The Battye Library

### Canning and the Aboriginal guides

From the beginning, Canning planned to use Aboriginal people to lead him to the water, soaks and springs. He took neck chains and handcuffs with him to ensure that his local Aboriginal 'guides' stayed with the party for as long as he needed them. They were chained up overnight, and on one occasion a man's wife was chained in order to lead him to water. It was largely with the help of these Aboriginal people that the expedition was successful in finding the water to supply the route.

- 3 The expedition (a team of 23 camels, two horses, and eight white men) travelled 1850 kilometres. They left Wiluna in April 1906 and on 1 November arrived at Halls Creek from where Canning sent his triumphant telegram.

One of the members of the expedition, camp cook Edward Blake, disapproved of Canning's treatment of the Aboriginal people during the survey expedition especially with regard to the treatment of women. Blake took his concerns to authorities in Perth and Canning's treatment of the 'Natives' became the subject of a royal commission in 1908.

Some of the soaks and springs along the route were both secret and sacred. It is likely that the Aboriginal people led Canning's party away from those, ultimately dictating the shape of the route by their choices.

Canning was ultimately cleared by the Royal Commission both on the strength of his achievement and on the fact that it was only Blake's word against his. He was then commissioned to return to the desert to construct wells where necessary to ensure reliable access to the water. There were originally 48 wells constructed between 1908 and 1910. These wells were constructed either near or on top of Aboriginal soaks and springs. Many of them were deepened and had their sides straightened in the manner of the traditional construction of European wells.

Edward Blake predicted that one of the results of Canning's treatment of the Aboriginal people would be reprisals towards stockmen once they used the route. In fact, the first conflict along the route happened on the survey party's return journey.

Michael Tobin, the well-boring expert, was attacked by an Aboriginal man, Mungkututu. Tobin fired his rifle but Mungkututu had already discharged his spear. Both men died in the encounter. Various reasons were put forward to explain the tragedy, ranging from accusations of theft of women and objects to a simple matter of surprise. Whatever the reason, the conclusion of Hubert Trotman who was 'in charge of handling the natives' on the survey expedition seems most apt:

*There is no doubt that both men had been the victims of fear.*

**Hubert Trotman**, evidence before the 1908 royal commission

### Conflict on the stock route

In 1911 the bodies of the first stockmen to use the route, Shoesmith, Thompson and an Aboriginal man called 'Chinaman', were discovered by Thomas Cole who followed the route a short time after them. Rumours abounded that Cole had taken revenge by shooting Aboriginal people along the route but they were not verified. An expedition led by Sergeant RH Pilmer was sent out in 1911 to bring to justice those considered to be the perpetrators. This expedition was considered a success as some Aboriginal people were killed in a skirmish near the site of the murders.

*Most of the guilty men had reaped their just desserts, and the others were well on the wing.*

**RH Pilmer**, 1911

A later report has it that the police party was poorly led, travelling a set number of miles per day and ignoring the local knowledge of suitable camel camps.

*Consequently, the camels suffered badly and no natives were caught.*

**Len Talbot**, 2008



4 Alfred Wernam Canning,  
courtesy State Library  
of Western Australia,  
The Battye Library

### Using the wells

Despite the police expedition, drovers were afraid to use the route and it was largely unused for the next 20 years. By 1917 most of the wells had been dismantled by Aboriginal people as they reclaimed access to the water. Canning's construction method required the use of camels to pull heavy buckets up from the bottom of the well. When William Snell was commissioned to repair the wells in 1929 one of his personal commitments was to make the wells more accessible to Aboriginal people by the use of ladders:

*Natives cannot draw water from the Canning Stock Route wells ... It takes three strong white men to land a bucket of water ... It is beyond the natives power to land a bucket. They let go the handle some times escape with their life but get an arm and head broken in the attempt to get away ... To heal the wounds so severely inflicted and [as] a safeguard against the natives destroying the wells again I equipped the wells ... so that the native can draw water from the wells without destroying them.*

William Snell, 1930

Snell noticed that where access to water was made easier the wells were undamaged.

William Snell abandoned the venture at Well 35. Various sources report that it became too much for him or that he ran out of materials. Canning himself was recalled at nearly 70 years of age to finish the job over the years 1930–31. Evidence suggests that where Snell had had no trouble in his encounters with Aboriginal people, Canning had trouble straight away.

### Droving along the stock route

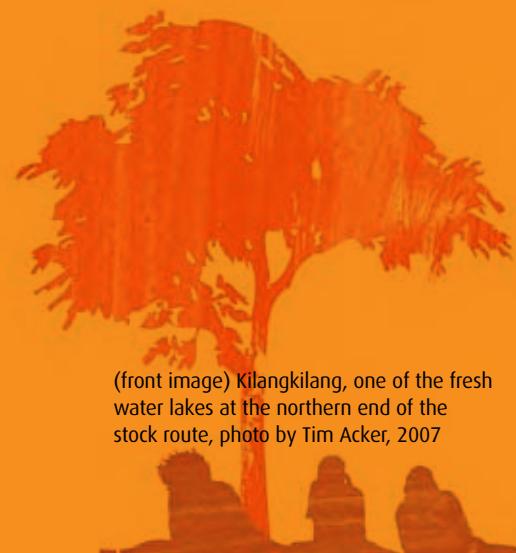
From 1931 until 1959 there was droving activity up and down the route and it was refurbished during the Second World War in case it was needed for emergency evacuation from the north due to a possible invasion. In all there were only about 25 'droves' along the route and it never achieved the potential hoped for by its initiators. According to Talbot, none of the really big Kimberley cattlemen ever sent their cattle down the route and a drover named Ben Taylor estimated that the carrying capacity of stock on the route was only 600 head of cattle — 200 fewer than the initial stipulation. This also undermines Canning's initial assertion upon completing the route in 1907. By contrast, the greatest and most lasting impact of the route was upon the Aboriginal people through whose Country it was built.

Once the stock route was in place it offered a corridor for Aboriginal people to move up and down the Country. There were far more Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal stockmen on the route, and Aboriginal women became stockwomen or camp cooks. Aboriginal people became noted for their outstanding ability in stock-work, even though for most of their droving time they received no cash payment for their work. Others followed their stock-droving families up and down the route as they moved from settlement to settlement, and from station to station where the work was. In consequence, many families were dispersed widely throughout the Western Desert.

The history of the Canning Stock Route has been written by non-Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people have had their own way of telling that history through stories and art, but the opportunity to tell it to a wider audience has not been possible until recently.

### Questions and activities to share with your students

1. What is the Canning Stock Route and why was it given this name?
2. Why did the Western Australian government commission the stock route?
3. Who was Alfred Canning and what was he asked to do?
4. What methods did Canning use to obtain 'cooperation' from Aboriginal people who accompanied his party?
5. What is a royal commission and why was one appointed?
6. Why was Canning found to be innocent by the royal commission? Are you surprised by this finding? Explain your answer.
7. Was the stock route a success in your opinion? Explain your answer.
8. In other parts of this resource you will discover how Aboriginal people who lived in this part of Australia were affected by the stock route. At this stage, what do you think the main impacts may have been? Return to your answer after you have read the material and make any necessary changes.



(front image) Kilangkilang, one of the fresh water lakes at the northern end of the stock route, photo by Tim Acker, 2007

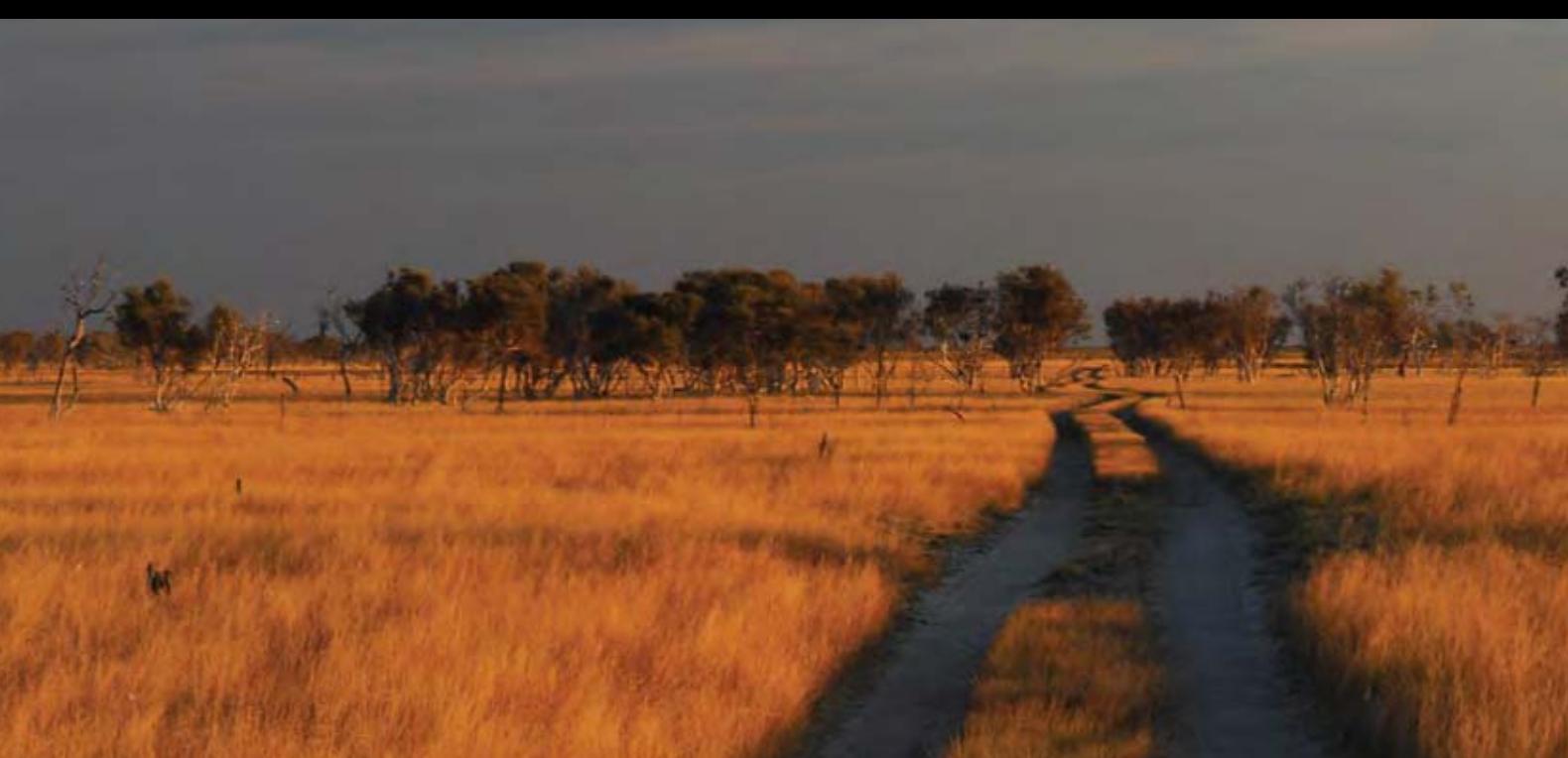
# YIWARRA KUJU THE CANNING STOCK ROUTE

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## The legacy of Alfred Canning



Alfred Canning was chosen to lead the survey of the Canning Stock Route because he was regarded as an excellent surveyor and bushman. Yet when he returned his actions were the subject of a royal commission, set up to enquire into the treatment of the 'Natives' during the expedition.



1 Alfred Wernam Canning,  
courtesy State Library  
of Western Australia,  
The Battye Library



2 Section of Rabbit Proof Fence,  
National Museum of Australia



3 Helen Hill on the Stock Route,  
photo by Tim Acker



4 Aboriginal stockman from  
Billiluna working cattle,  
photo by Joe Mahood,  
about 1969

### 1 Who was Alfred Canning?

Alfred Wernam Canning was born in 1860 in Victoria. He was educated at Carlton College, Melbourne, and went on to become a cadet surveyor in the New South Wales Lands Department. He qualified as a surveyor in 1882 and worked in Bega, Cooma and Bathurst. He married in Sydney in 1884 and he and his wife had one son. In 1893 he moved to Western Australia and quickly established himself as an excellent bushman and a reliable surveyor.

### 2 From 1900 to 1905 Canning surveyed the line for the rabbit-proof fence

(also known as the State Barrier Fence No. 1) which is a pest-exclusion fence constructed between 1901 and 1907 to keep rabbits and other agricultural pests out of Western Australian pastoral areas. The rabbit-proof fence ran straight northwards from Starvation Harbour (166 kilometres west of Esperance) to Wallal (257 kilometres north of Port Hedland). On one occasion, when Canning's camel died under him after 68 km of travel, he had to walk 64 km to the telegraph station at Wallal and the full 129 km back to rejoin his party — exactly where he expected to find them — a round journey of 193 km.

### What were the immediate effects of the rabbit-proof fence?

One of the early results of the rabbit-proof fence was the community of Jigalong in the Little Sandy Desert. Jigalong was initially a ration station supplying workers constructing or maintaining the rabbit-proof fence. During a severe drought in the 1920s Aboriginal people discovered there was food available from the ration station and some moved there to survive the drought. A Protestant mission was built on the site in 1947.

### How did Canning survey the stock route ?

Following the success of Canning's survey for the rabbit-proof fence, he received instructions to find a permanently watered stock route from Wiluna to the Kimberley. Earlier expeditions had passed this way, such as the Calvert Scientific Exploring Expedition and the Carnegie Expedition. Before Canning started his survey for the stock route he read their accounts to find out about the country and the use of Aboriginal people with regard to finding water. Both of them gave accounts of desperately unforgiving and difficult terrain.

### 3 A vast howling wilderness of high, spinifex clad ridges of red sand, so close together that in a days march we crossed from sixty to eighty ridges, so steep that often the camels had to crest them on their knees, and so barren and destitute of vegetation (saving spinifex) that one marvels how even camels could pick up a living.

**David Carnegie**, *Spinifex and Sand*, pp. 249–50

*Pushing on during the afternoon, the natives running ahead and standing in any shade they could find to avoid the hot sand, we crossed over wretched country, consisting of high and steep sandridges, desert gums and porcupine, [spinifex bush] for the whole distance.*

**L Wells**, *Journal of the Calvert Expedition*, 1897

### 4 Carnegie gave an account of how he induced an Aboriginal man to take them to water.

*Guarded on one side by Breaden, I on the other, we plied our new friend with salt beef, both to cement our friendship and promote thirst, in order for that for his own sake he should not play us false. In any case, so long as he was with us, we must some time get water — and we had not intention of letting him escape. With a rope we secured him and watched in turn all through the night.*

**David Carnegie**, *Spinifex and Sand*, p. 189

Before Canning left Perth, he had a telegraph sent to the police station at Wiluna to organise the loan of an:

*ordinary chain ... which they use for natives and also handcuffs.*

**Alfred Canning**, evidence before the 1908 royal commission

Canning had apparently decided to follow Carnegie's lead. The team that left Wiluna to begin the survey consisted of Alfred Canning, Hubert Trotman, Edward Blake, Michael Tobin, Joseph Tobin, Otto Baumgarten, Tom Burke and Robert Moody. Trotman had been Canning's second-in-command on the rabbit-proof fence expedition, and Blake had also been a member of the expedition. Blake and Trotman had had a falling out on that expedition and the pair did not get along. On the return journey Michael Tobin, the water borer, was speared at Natawalu.

Here are two accounts of the incident:

*We saw a native running towards us ... fully armed. He was watching Tobin all the time ... and just as the native moved with his spear Tobin raised his rifle and fired just after the native had discharged his spear which entered Tobin's right breast. The native fell.*

**Alfred Canning**, evidence before the 1908 royal commission

*At Natawalu an Aboriginal man speared a kartiya [white man], then that kartiya got a rifle and shot him. Right [at] Natawalu. Before there was a well there. That's the place I painted now. He was just coming to get water ... then he saw that kartiya. He speared him then, near the water.*

**Mayapu Elsie Thomas**

#### **Why was there a royal commission into the stock route expedition?**

After completing the survey of the proposed stock route Canning faced a royal commission into his treatment of the Aboriginal people during the expedition. On his return to Perth, Edward Blake had written a letter to the Minister for Mines on the recommendation of the Protector of Aborigines, outlining his concerns about the treatment of Aboriginal people by members of the expedition and demanding an inquiry. His principal concerns actually lay more with Trotman, Canning's second-in-command. Blake felt Canning should have curbed bad behaviour by expedition members but did nothing.

*There were certain things which went on in that expedition that in my opinion were not altogether proper.*

**Edward Blake**, letter to the Hon G Gregory, August 1907

The Minister began inquiries but failed to respond either to Blake's first or second letter. As a result, Blake thought the government was not doing anything and took his story to the papers. The stories that ran in the newspapers led Canning to request an enquiry himself so that his name could be cleared.

Issues addressed by the royal commission:

- *Forcing the natives to accompany the party.*
- *Chaining by the neck natives who had done nothing to deserve being deprived of their liberty when a horse guard would have been sufficient.*
- *Unnecessarily depriving natives of their water supply by deepening and squaring their native wells rendering it impossible for old men, women and piccaninnies (children) to reach the water, and causing the water to be polluted by animals falling in.*
- *Hunting native women on foot and horseback, sometimes with rifles, for immoral purposes.*
- *Using threats and giving bribes to native men to induce them to direct their women to have connection with the members of the expedition.* 1908 royal commission, p.3

Every member of the party except Blake denied any wrongdoing, and instead stated that Blake was apt to make up stories. Of the 16 witnesses called to give evidence, only three thought that it was cruel and unnecessary to get help from Aboriginal people by chains and force, and these people were not connected to the expedition.

Only one Aboriginal man was called to give evidence.

Harry (Aboriginal man from Wiluna):

*White man tell Yarry go in bush away from camel to get bardie? — No, Yarry walk close to camel.*

*Yarry (Harry) tied up? — yes (chain produced).*

*How Yarry tied up? — (witness points to his neck).*

#### **What did the royal commission decide?**

Despite the three who thought it cruel, the commissioners ultimately found that Canning had been prudent to use Aboriginal people as he did, as it showed that he was considering the experiences of previous explorers in ensuring the safety of his party and the effectiveness of the expedition.

*Your Commissioners feel that in his natural endeavours to provide against disaster he would consider the wise precautions of preceding explorers, and by so doing, not only ensure the safety of his party but an expeditious performance of the work entrusted to him.*

Final summary, 1908 royal commission

The charges of immorality were found to be inconclusive because of the lack of independent evidence (because none of the survey party agreed with Blake) and because Blake withdrew any charges against Canning personally. The commissioners found that the charges were the result of Blake's imagination coupled with a 'desire of injuring Mr Trotman'.

Thus cleared by the commission of wrongdoing, Alfred Canning returned to the stock route in 1908 to build the wells. Trotman accompanied him on this expedition, but returned to Perth afterwards and stayed on as a land assessor for the state government. Blake retired into obscurity, writing letters every so often to complain of his ill-use at the hands of the government.

Two views of surveying the stockroute:

*As far as I could see they rather looked upon following us along and showing us water as a sort of picnic, because they hunted the whole way and I used to shoot a number of rats and they took the very keenest interest in the hunt. [But] at night time you could not rely on them. If you turned your head away they were gone ... There was one case where a native played a confidence trick on us very quickly ... He drew all the different waters and pointed out the different directions, and then he went ... and made his own breakwind, lit his own fire, and sat down as contentedly as possible ... I was sitting down practically looking straight at him. He was not three yards away and I just took a few notes and then looked up and he had gone without any reason apparently.*

**Alfred Canning**, evidence before the 1908 royal commission

*You're trespassing on other people's Country, other people's land. You know that word you say, 'trespassing'? You can't trespass on other people's property. You're breaking the law. Because we've got our own law and where the boundary ends it's the songlines you follow. That's what the old people showed us. The old people keep it in their head. 'This songline. Ah, that's where my boundary finishes.' And that person in that group where they're having a ceremony, 'Oh, his boundary now, he can sing that area, that's his Country.'*

*Some people might have been forced to go there and when they been get to that 'nothar area, might be they been get frightened two sides: from other tribe — because they been come from 'nothar place — and from kartiya [white man] side same time. That's why kartiya might have been chain them every night time, so they can't get away.*

**Jawuriji Mervyn Street**, 2007



The late Friday Jones  
sitting on Forrest's Fort,  
Well 9, Canning Stock Route,  
photo by Tim Acker, 2007

### Why did Canning use the chains?

*Re the handcuffing of a gin; it was only done with the hope that the buck would return, he having run away with the chain (which was necessary we should get for future use) ... In conclusion I might add that the natives were treated with every consideration throughout, and as far as their wells are concerned they have a much better supply and easier access than if we never visited them.*

Alfred Canning, letter, 1907

It is most probable that the friction that lay between Canning and the Aboriginal people along the stock route was indeed the result of Canning's treatment of them. In Western Australia, the Aboriginal people were controlled by the *Aborigines Act 1905 (WA)*. Under this Act Aboriginal people faced a number of restrictions and were placed under the care of the 'Chief Protector of Aborigines' who was empowered by the Act to manage any property an Aboriginal person might have, and to be the legal guardian of any child of Aboriginal or half-Aboriginal descent until they were 16 years old. At that time in Australia Aboriginal people were seen as being less important than non-Aboriginal people. In Canning's understanding therefore — as well as in the royal commissioners' — chaining the Aboriginal people was necessary to keep them with him and therefore an acceptable thing to do.

### What is the Aboriginal perspective?

Although only one Aboriginal person gave evidence at the royal commission Canning's exploits passed into Aboriginal history.

*They been getting all the black people. They tie him up. One by one they let 'im go. They let him go and they follow him 'til they find that rockhole. They make a well there.*

Billy Patch (Mr P), 2007

*Alfred Canning, grab Martu, hold him days, let him go and follow him up, and dug the well all the way long. [They call Canning] a hero. He was cunning ... tricking [the] Martu. Alright, different history from me. Martu history is straightforward.*

Jeffrey James, 2007

### What became of Alfred Canning?

After finishing the well-building Alfred Canning became district surveyor for Perth in 1912. In 1923 his adult son Robert died and Canning retired from full-time work but continued as a casual surveyor. When William Snell, the man hired to refurbish the wells in 1929, could not continue the work, Alfred Canning was commissioned to finish the contract. He was nearly 70 years old. Five years later, Alfred Canning died as a result of a progressive muscular wasting disease.

### What is Canning's legacy today?

A legacy of Canning's rabbit-proof fence widely known to non-Aboriginal people is its role in guiding three young girls home as they walked to Jigalong from the Moore River Native Settlement near Perth. This became famous in the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. The fence remained as a barrier against rabbits until the introduction of myxomatosis in the 1950s. The legacy of the stock route is more complex. It has become part of Australian frontier folklore although many regard it as a heroic failure.

For Aboriginal people, the legacy is more profound. It is a legacy of conflict and survival, of exodus and return. For the people who belong to this Country, history is never past but lives on in the land today. Aboriginal artists from across Western Australia have returned to their traditional Country to paint and narrate their versions of that history.

### Questions and activities to share with your students

1. Why was Canning chosen to lead the expedition?
2. How did Canning approach the challenge of finding water in the desert?
3. Why was it necessary to convene a royal commission to enquire into the treatment of Aboriginal people during the expedition?
4. What did the royal commission decide? What were the reasons it gave for making this decision? Do you think it was a fair decision? Explain your reasons.  
Why do you think Aboriginal people suddenly left the expedition?
5. Find out about the rights of Aboriginal people in the different states and territories after 1901. [The National Museum of Australia has a number of resources that can help you with this investigation. Go to [www.nma.gov.au/education/school\\_resources/indigenous/](http://www.nma.gov.au/education/school_resources/indigenous/)]
6. What do you think is important about the legacy of Alfred Canning?

# YIWARRA KUJU THE CANNING STOCK ROUTE

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## Droving on the Canning

'I been hearing lotta stories 'bout this droving,  
Wiluna to Billiluna, and I don't even believe  
myself I'm here, halfway in this road.'

Mervyn Street, 2007





The era of droving down the stock route did not begin well. The first drovers to bring cattle down the route in 1910 were killed by desert people at Well 37. A punitive expedition was sent out and several Aboriginal people were killed. Drovers became afraid to use the route and it was rarely used during the next 20 years. During this time many of the wells were destroyed or fell into disrepair. In the early 1930s the reconstruction of the wells along the route led to a new era in droving.

From 1930 to 1959 about one mob a year was driven down the stock route from Halls Creek to Wiluna. The mobs consisted of anything from 300 to 800 head of cattle, mostly from Billiluna or Sturt Creek stations, plus the plant, a team of about 15 camels and 50 workhorses, packhorses and night horses. Camels carried heavy loads and were used to draw water, a huge job given that 800 head of cattle, and a team of horses and camels, could consume over 30,000 litres of water at each well. From the perspective of Aboriginal people who lived in this region, when droving started after the reconstruction of the wells, the white stockmen and their animals were considered to be mysterious new creatures to be treated with fear and dread.

*I thought them camels were bringing bad news. I didn't know what they were.*  
**Nyangkarni Penny K-Lyons**, 2008

At that time, many of the artists in this exhibition were children growing up in the bush. They and their families had to make sense of the strange men and beasts that were appearing more frequently in their Country. In time they did more than make sense of the stock route — they incorporated it into their lives with the result that the stock route was used in ways that Canning and his employers would never have foreseen.

- 1 In the 1930s some Martu came across the tracks of a camel from a droving team. The Martu men believed the camel tracks to be the imprint of 'little fella bums' — small spirit-beings who were 'sitting' their way across the country.

Even after they discovered what made the tracks it would have been a strange sight for the Aboriginal people to see — drovers, camels, horses and hundreds of cattle, with clouds of dust rising under the hooves of the animals and the cries of the stockmen and women as they raced off on their horses to round up straying cattle.

*Bullock chase my mummy. That bullock there nearly kill Mummy now, coming for her. Too big! [The bullocks from] Billiluna, all a big one.*

**Dusty Stevens**, 2007

The cattle could also be a source of nourishment to the Aboriginal people who lived along the route.

*We used to walk until we came to the Canning Stock Road. At the stock road we speared bullocks. That was where they travelled on the Canning Stock Road along the wells to Kulyayi [Well 42] to Katajilkarr [Well 43] from there to Kujuwarri [Well 46]. That's where they used to spear bullocks, my father and Kuji's [Rosie Goodjie's] father.*

**Mayapu Elsie Thomas**, 2007

During this period some of the drovers fostered better relations with desert people, leaving meat and bones for the people they encountered.

*When a killer was prepared, George would always leave behind any meat that was not required for the bush natives when we moved camp.*

**Eileen Lanagan**, in *Canning Stock Route and Travellers Guide*, 2004

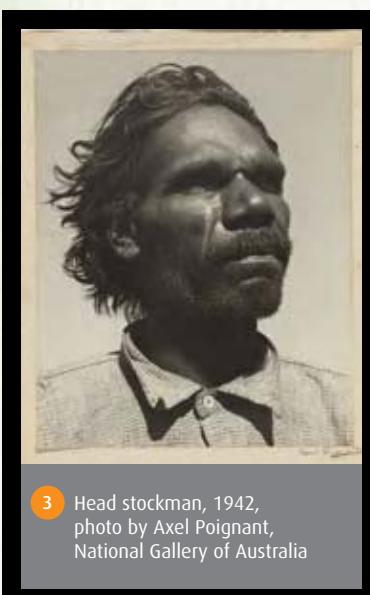
Other drovers were not quite so inclined to care for the desert people.

*My auntie's husband was poisoned by white people. They used to leave bullock leg with poison for people to eat.*

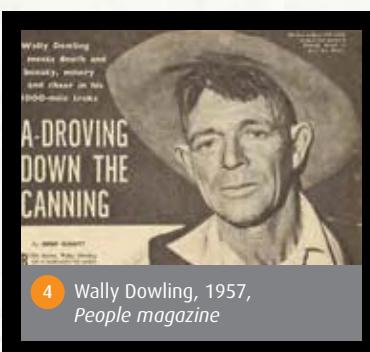
**Jartarr Lily Long**, 2009



2 Aboriginal stockman from Billiluna working cattle, photo by Joe Mahood, about 1969



3 Head stockman, 1942, photo by Axel Poignant, National Gallery of Australia



4 Wally Dowling, 1957, People magazine

### Who were the drovers and stockmen?

For much of the history of the Canning Stock Route there were far more Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal drovers and their skill with stock was legendary. Many of the Aboriginal drovers were women.

*All the women were drover-men on Canning Stock Road.*

**Ngilpirr Spider Snell**, 2008

Women can describe returning to work in the saddle a day after giving birth, their newborns tied to their backs with swaddling.

*Mum went up the Canning Stock Route. She had labour pains one night. I was born at Well 7 and she said, 'Gotta go on the horse tomorrow.' Got straight back on the horse. I was in a little carrying bag so I could get some titty.*

**Lena Long**, 2007

- 2 Despite outnumbering the non-Aboriginal drovers, Aboriginal people were always stock workers, never in charge of the mob. Many were referred to as 'boys' even when adults, and their names are not documented in non-Aboriginal records.

- 3 *A lotta old people telling me 'bout [how] they used to drove from Billiluna straight across to Wiluna. But they're not in the photos, they got no name. Nothing. They got be part of this droving story.*

**Mervyn Street**, 2007

Wally Dowling was possibly the best-known drover along the route and received column inches in newspapers of the time. His lifestyle had caught the imagination of the non-Aboriginal population. For Aboriginal people he evokes strong memories. His death from influenza in 1959 coincided with the end of droving on the Canning Stock Route.

- 4 *That old man Wally Dowling was the boss in Canning Stock Route. He don't use 'em boot, just bare feet. He walked too much, every sandhill on that Wiluna road. Strong man.*

**Yanpiyarti Ned Cox**, 2007

*He had his revolver all the time. No smile on him. He been a rough bloke, and he wanted a black woman.*

**Anga Friday Jones**, 2007

The first white woman to travel the stock route was Eileen Lanagan. She accompanied her husband George on his second drive rather than be left alone at home for four months with no word.

### What effect did droving have on the Aboriginal people?

The opening up of the stock route led to a great movement of Aboriginal people along the country it traversed — as drovers themselves, as relatives of drovers, as travellers to missions, seeking employment on stations, or as children. Not all station managers treated the Aboriginal workers well, however, and some who sought employment under them soon decided to leave.

*The [Christmas Creek] station manager was hitting people, so we ran away. We went back [to the] desert to see if we can find any of our people left, but nothing, only all the dead ones. Police tracked us down and put chains around the men.*

**Wakartu Cory Surprise**, 2007

As droving down the Canning became a regular event, it began to take a place in Aboriginal lives as another seasonal activity and stories began to be added to the oral tradition. Freda Tjama Napanangka was a camp cook on several expeditions down the Canning. Here is her account of the work:

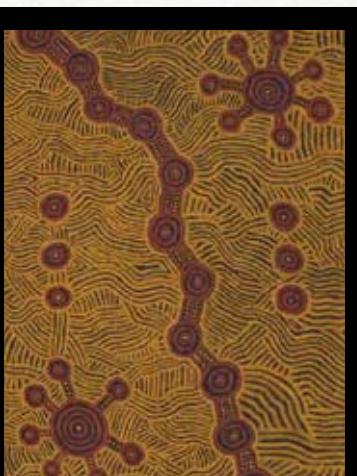
*We been go to all the wells and same way we fillim up water for bullock and camel and start cooking for the ringers. Same way after supper, man watching bullock, change ... change ... and 4 o'clock we wake up. It hard work for cookie.*

From *Footprints across our Land*, Magabala Books, Broome, 2007

Despite their legendary skill, Aboriginal people were paid at best 'two bob (shillings) a week' and most often not in cash but in food, clothing and tobacco. When paying equal wages to Aboriginal people became law, drovers and pastoral companies stopped employing them. Aboriginal people then faced a struggle to survive but ultimately emerged with a thriving arts enterprise movement.



**5** **Canning Stock Route**, 1989,  
by Rover Thomas,  
Holmes à Court Collection



**6** **Canning Stock Route Country**,  
2007, by Clifford Brooks,  
Birriliburu Artists, Tjukurpa Gallery,  
National Museum of Australia

(front image) **Canning Stock Route**,  
2008, by Mervyn Street, Mangkaja  
Arts, National Museum of Australia



### The story of Rover Thomas

- 5** Rover Thomas is one of Australia's most prominent artists and pioneered the East Kimberley school of ochre painting on canvas. Although he is not known principally as a Western Desert artist, his life is closely linked with the stock route.

Rover was born in 1926 at Yalta, a soak just north of Well 33 (Kunawarritji). His parents died when he was about 10 years old, and drover Wally Dowling found Rover at Kunawarritji and took him north to Billiluna station. His brother had been away when their parents died. His nephew remembers:

*[My father] went looking for his young brother Rover ... but nothing, empty. No track. Only track was wagon wheel and yawarta [horse] and bullock, that's all.*

**Clifford Brooks**, 1986

Rover Thomas grew up with relatives, learning traditional Aboriginal skills as well as eventually becoming a stockman himself. He began his artistic career as an adult living at Warmun (Turkey Creek). He composed a song cycle which eventually led him to want to also paint his stories. This started him on the path to being one of Australia's leading artists. He was finally reunited with his brother in the 1980s, a lifetime later, after family recognised the artist's face in a newspaper.

*You have got to come back to your Country. You should have come through the Canning Stock Route; you went away from here through the stock route and you should have come back through the stock route. I've been waiting for you.*

**Charlie Brooks**, Rover's brother (as recalled by Clifford Brooks), 1986

Charlie himself travelled south along the Canning to Jigalong mission. A sister, Nyuju Stumpy Brown also followed the drovers out of the desert. She travelled with her uncle Jamili, a stockman, to Balgo mission. Later Nyuju moved to Fitzroy Crossing where she too became an artist. Another sister, Kupi, travelled to La Grange mission (Bidyadanga) with her daughter Mary Meribida who is also represented in this exhibition. In this family alone, four different schools of contemporary painting are represented.

- 6** In 2007 Clifford travelled the entire Canning Stock Route, retracing the journey of Rover Thomas. Clifford paints his parents' Country along the middle stretches of the stock route, including the story of Rover leaving the Country, and his father's search for his brother. He paints in ochres, following Rover's artistic practice and that of the East Kimberley movement he pioneered.

Because so many Aboriginal people were engaged in droving work between Wiluna and Halls Creek, a major result of the stock route was to foster opportunities for making new family connections.

The story of Billy Patch or 'Mr P' who said of himself, *I'm just a stock route baby ...* demonstrates how the stock route facilitated the growth of family connections between people living along its length. Mr P's mother was crippled and unable to carry him. Following the Aboriginal tradition that everybody in the group is responsible for caring for the children, many people cared for him. One of his uncles, a drover from Fitzroy Crossing, picked him up as a young child and took him to live in Wiluna where he eventually settled down and had a family of his own. For Aboriginal people who live around it, the Canning Stock Route was much more than a line of wells to service cattle.

Nearly all the artists in this exhibition are related one way or another. The Canning Stock Route story is of people, movement, stories and art tied together by Country. In this story, droving, the principal reason for the construction of the route, is a rather insignificant background which can be used to bring into focus the Aboriginal story of contemporary desert life.

### Questions and activities to share with your students

1. On a map of the region, trace the journeys of Rover Thomas, Charlie Brooks, Mary Meribida and Nyuju Stumpy Brown as they travelled out of the desert with the drovers. How far did they travel and how far away were they from each other?
2. Aboriginal stockmen and women were paid mostly in rations for the time the Canning Stock Route was in use. What improvements in Aboriginal rights occurred after 1965 that led to equal wages for Aboriginal stockmen?
3. Find out about cattle droving. What were the duties of a stockman?
4. What effect did droving have on the Aboriginal people? Explain your answer.
5. Research the artists in Rover Thomas's family. Find out about their paintings and the four different schools of contemporary painting they represent.

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Juju: Telling our stories  
through painting, song & dance

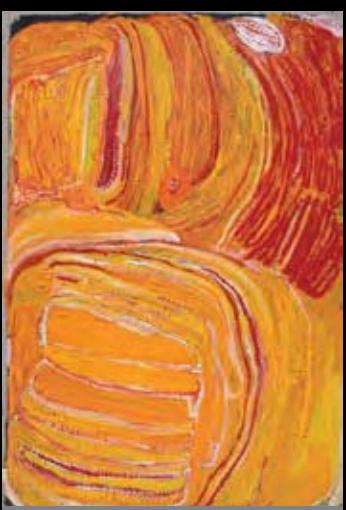


The white man history has been told and it's today in the book. But our history is not there properly. We've got to tell 'em through our paintings.

Clifford Brooks, 2007



1 **Kaninjaku**, 2008, by Kumpaya Girkaba, Martumili Artists, National Museum of Australia



2 **Kinyu**, 2007, by Eubena Nampitjin, Warlayirti Artists, National Museum of Australia



3 **Tapu Country**, 2008, by Jukuna Mona Chuguna, Mangkaja Arts, National Museum of Australia



4 **Kumpupirntily**, 2007, by Jakayu Bilabu and Dadda Samson, Martumili Artists, National Museum of Australia

### Telling our stories through painting, song and dance

Western Desert art is constantly evolving. It has its foundations in long-held traditions of groups from diverse communities and has also incorporated influences from recent history. The art of those groups whose Country has been transected by the Canning Stock Route, or who have been impacted by the changes wrought by the route, reflects the rapid pace of change and the dislocation this has caused, while at the same time retaining connections to Country, family and belief.

### How is painting related to Country?

Maps tell us about the perspective and values of the people who make them. Alfred Canning made a map which detailed in great beauty his route through the desert but which tells nothing of the Aboriginal world it cut through. On either side of the narrow corridor he surveyed the land is seemingly empty, without value. For Aboriginal people this was a rich landscape that held thousands of years of history and proscribed the meaning of their life.

- In the painting, *Kaninjaku* [Canning Stock Route] by Kumpaya Girkaba the road is almost invisible and the canvas is dominated by undulating sandhills or *tali*. Here the artist absorbs the road into her vision of her Country.

- Eubena (Yupinya) Namptjin grew up around Jarntu and Nyirla after the death of her mother. With her first husband and three daughters she travelled north, with drovers, along the Canning Stock Route to Balgo mission. Like many sites in this country, Jarntu (Kinyu) is simultaneously an ancestral being, a story and a place.

Of this painting Eubena says:

*That waterhole I paint is my own Country. Kinyu is the one that grew me up.*

This reflects the intimacy with which Aboriginal people relate both to Country and to the ancestral beings that give these places their power.

- Jukuna Mona Chuguna was born at Kurntumangujarti. As a young girl she fell in love with Kurrrapa Peter Skipper and travelled north with him away from her home. However, she retains strong ties to her Country.

*My feeling for my Country comes from the stories. I paint my mother's Country and father's. It's sad too because my father is buried there. I think about my Country all of the time. I like to paint the desert. It makes me think about my parents.*

**Jukuna Mona Chuguna**, 2007

### How are sacred stories told through painting, song and dance?

Country and Jukurrpa (Dreaming) are inextricably tied. This is shown in many paintings which are like maps of country and which are also important Jukurrpa stories.

- Jakayu Bilabu and Dadda Samson's painting *Kumpupirntily* is both a map and a story of creation ancestors.

*The Ngayurnangalku [ancestral cannibal beings] started around Mundawindi side. They went on their knees and wailed and crawled all the way to Lake Disappointment. Ngayurnangalku travelled all the way to Savory Creek from east to west. They stopped at Jilakurru and near Puntawarri. They travelled from long way, and finally stopped at Kumpupirntily [Lake Disappointment].*

**Jakayu Bilabu**, 2008

- Wirnpa was one of the most powerful of the creation ancestors, the *jila* men. He was the last to travel the desert before entering the *jila* (spring) that bears his name.

*Wirnpa and another man were travelling from the west. When he landed at Wikirri, he spread all the food, mitutu, nyunjin and yukiri seeds ... At Yinyaru, they saw flashing lights and the man found an enormous hailstone pulsating with light. He flew with Wirnpa, holding the hailstone against his belly. He dropped it when it became too heavy, and they picked it up and kept going.*

**Jakayu Bilabu**, 2008

- Nora Wompi was born at Pingakurangu rockhole near Kunawarritji. As a young girl she travelled north with drovers to Billiluna and Balgo.

(front image) Young men dancing at the Ngumpan workshop, near Fitzroy Crossing, photo by Tim Acker, 2008



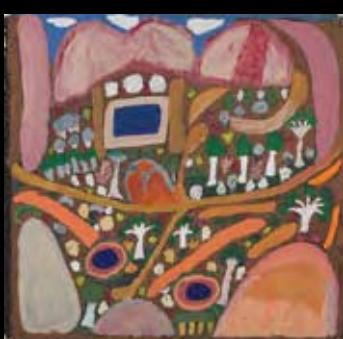
**5** *Wirnpa*, 2004, Harry Bullen,  
Yulparija Artists,  
Laverty Collection



**6** *Kunawarritji*, 2007, by Nora  
Wompi, Martumili Artists,  
National Museum of Australia



**7** *Kulyayi*, 2007, by  
Jewess James, Ngurra Artists,  
National Museum of Australia



**8** *Tiwa*, 2008, by Lily Long,  
Martumili Artists,  
National Museum of Australia

### Song and Dance

*I was a little baby here at the rockholes of Kunawarritji and Nyarruri. I painted all the little hills around that area. In the Jukurpa, they were all squeezed out of the soft earth. People made them.*

**Kunawarritji** (Well 33) and **Nyarruri** (Well 32)

*This is a rockhole that was made in the Jukurpa. These Kanapurta (ancestral beings) are the stars in the sky. The Seven Sisters are standing up as a group of trees between Nyipil and Kunawarritji.*

**Nora Wompi**, 2008

The Minyipuru (Seven Sisters) are Jukurpa women who flew across the desert, visiting and creating waterholes as they travelled.

**Song and dance** are also ways of telling stories. Many of the Jukurpa stories which are painted are also told in songs.

### 'Kurtal wanyjurla wanyjurla?' (Kurtal, where are you?)

This excerpt from the 'Kurtal wanyjurla wanyjurla' song recounts Kurtal's journey from the saltwater Country to Kanningarra:

**In the north-west I saw leaping fish sparkling in the sunlight.  
Carrying the sacred object I wade through the water. The waves carry me down to the depths.**

**In the north-west I saw a seagull. The seagull was speaking.  
I saw lightning flickering in the north; I was the rain cloud.  
I am Kurtal. I bring the game and make the Country fruitful.  
The wind is wild, the lightning flickers above.  
Up there Kanningarra is crying, the wind roars.  
I am Kanningarra, the great rock. Look to the south, that level ground is sloping now.  
Who is that coming after me? I am a *maparn* [magic man] but I'm losing my powers.  
Look to the west. See his headdress.**

### Kanningarra song

*This song bring up big rain.*

**Jukuja Dolly Snell**, 2009

The song for Kanningarra comes from a very old form of Walmajarri, a language no longer spoken:

**I am Kanningarra. Standing in my Country, I look to the south.  
What is this thing chasing me? I'm a *maparn* [magic man] but these devil dogs are frightening me. I hit them with my powers.  
Streaks of lightning are flashing in the distance. A storm is gathering all around.  
Lightning is flashing on top of the hills like fire, I hide underground. A waterhole forms in the earth.**

**A storm cloud is raining in the distance but it is coming closer. Lightning strikes on the hill. Another waterhole is formed from the sky.**

**The storm is approaching from the north-west, sprinkling lightly like mist. It rains a little bit.**

**In the north, a Jangala man looks out, standing on one leg near the sea. He is painted up, carrying a spear and a boomerang. He drinks the rainwater and dances back and forth, bringing the song from the north.**

### Dances from the *jila* Country

Many important dances are performed by the people of the *jila* Country. Some represent Jukurpa stories, like those of the *jila* men Kurtal and Kanningarra and women's ancestral totemic stories like Mangamanga, while others represent historical stories and events.

Majarrka *juju* (song and dance) describes the true story of Wurtuwaya (Yanpiyarti Ned Cox's grandfather) and Wirrali (Mayarn Julia Lawford's grandfather). While travelling near Paruku, they had discovered a group of men performing a ceremony with their stolen Majarrka totem. When the ceremony ended, Wurtuwaya and Wirrali crept in unobserved and retrieved the sacred totem.

### How can painting reveal recent history?

The Canning Stock Route was surveyed and wells constructed between 1906 and 1910. From 1911 to 1931 only eight mobs of cattle were driven from stations such as Billiluna and Sturt Creek to Wiluna. By 1917 half of the wells had been damaged or destroyed. In 1929 a project commenced to rebuild the wells. The years 1932 to 1959 saw a new era of droving along the stock route. Many artists painting today were growing up in the desert during this period.

- 7 At Kulyayi, which became Well 42, history and the Jukurpa collided. During the excavation of the well, either by Canning's original party or by one of the reconditioning teams, the great rainbow serpent Kulyayi was killed.

*[Kartiya] were looking for water ... They dug down and found that snake ... They killed him and ate him just like ordinary meat.*

Milkujung Jewess James, 2007



9 Engraved *jukuli*, about 1930, collected by Alfred Canning's party, South Australian Museum

*People felt empty when he was gone ... They moved away. Animals moved away. People, animals, they're connected. When they took that snake out, they made that place out of balance.*

Lloyd Kwilla, 2009

Jukurpa and history meet in other paintings

- 8 *This is the Canning Stock Route. This is the big hill where a long time ago, my mother, father, my sister Amy and my brother used to live. We would sometimes climb up on that hill and see drovers. They put the government Well [26] next to Tiwa jurnu [soak] when they were building the stock route.*

Jartarr Lily Long, 2008

The hills in this painting relate to a Jukurpa story of an old woman who tried to poison two men, but there are echoes of stock route history as well.

*This used to happen to Aboriginal people on the Canning Stock Route too. My auntie's husband was poisoned by white people. They used to leave bullock leg with poison for people to eat.*

Jartarr Lily Long, 2008

#### What are some other forms of art made in the Western Desert?

9 **Engraving**

In the desert, both men and women used *jakuli* or pearl shells, for ritual and decorative purposes. *Jakuli* were used in rainmaking ceremonies.

10 **Weaving**

Kumpaya Girgaba grew up in the desert around the Canning Stock Route and she moved to Jigalong mission, but she has family in Balgo, Fitzroy Crossing and Patjarr. She first learnt to make baskets through her relatives.

*When I was in Kurungal [Wangkatjungka community] I was learning to make baskets. I learned how to make baskets before I started making painting. It's like weaving manguri [head pads].*

Kumpaya Girgaba, 2008

*We didn't know how to make baskets until Kumpaya brought the idea back.*

Jakayu Biljabu, 2008

11 **Headdresses**

Headdresses made from paperbark are worn by dancers performing the Majarrka *juju*. The headdresses are secured with *tungkul* (hair string).

12 **Sandals**

*Yakapiri* (woven bark sandals) are unique to the peoples of the Western Desert. They are made from the tough inner bark of the *yakapiri* or 'bird plant'.

#### Questions and activities to share with your students

1. Why does Clifford Brooks think it is important for Aboriginal people to tell their stories through their paintings? Do you agree with him? Explain your answer.
2. Have students think about where they live. Ask them to design some symbols that reflect their landscape, for example

▲ or ▲ could represent houses, and ┌ or ┌ could represent roads.

Have students draw or paint a map of their locality using the symbols they have devised.

3. Have students conduct an internet search for paintings that depict events from history. Have each student choose one painting and describe the way the painting depicts the event.
4. Either copy the words of the two songs or read them to your students. Have students use clap sticks to make up a rhythm for one of the songs. Ask groups of students to create a large painting of how they would interpret these words. Using the rhythm and painting have students dance the story of their painting.



11 *Pukurti* (tall Majarrka headdress), 2007, by Ned Cox, Ngurra Artists, National Museum of Australia



12 *Yakapiri* (bark sandals), 2008, by Penny K-Lyons, Mangkaja Arts, National Museum of Australia

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## Natawalu 2007

### FOCUS QUESTIONS:

Before you tell students the story of the painting ask them these questions:

- What do you think this painting is about?
- What sort of emotion do you feel when looking at this painting?
- How do you think the artist feels about this place?

Now tell students the story of the incident at Natawalu and ask the following questions:

- Do you view the painting differently now?
  - What does this painting tell you about what Mayapu feels is important about the story?
  - Do you think Alfred Canning would paint the story differently?
- .....

*We used to walk until we came to the Canning Stock Road. At the stock road we speared bullocks. That was where they travelled on the Canning Stock Road along the wells to Kulyayi [Well 42] to Katajilkarr [Well 43] from there on to Kujuwarri [Well 46]. That's where they used to spear bullocks, my father and Kuji's [Rosie Goodjie's] father.*

*At Natawalu an Aboriginal man speared a kartiya [white man], then that kartiya got a rifle and shot him. Right [at] Natawalu. Before there was a well there. That's the place I painted now. He was just coming to get water... then he saw that kartiya. He speared him then, near the water.*

**Mayapu Elsie Thomas, 2007**



**Mayapu Elsie Thomas**  
born about 1934  
Wangkajunga language group,  
Wangkatjungka community

During Canning's return to Wiluna in 1907, a member of his party, Michael Tobin, was fatally speared at Natawalu (Well 40). In the same moment, Tobin shot and killed Mungkututu, the Aboriginal man who speared him. Whatever the cause, in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal histories, the incident has come to symbolise the clash of cultures that defined the early days of the Canning Stock Route.

*We saw a native running towards us... fully armed. He was watching Tobin all the time... and just as the native moved with his spear Tobin raised his rifle and fired just after the native had discharged his spear which entered Tobin's right breast. The native fell.*

**Alfred Canning**, evidence given to the royal commission, 1908



**Natawalu**, 2007, by Mayapu Elsie Thomas, Mangkaja Arts, National Museum of Australia

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## Puntawarri 2007

### FOCUS QUESTIONS:

- Do you think it is important that Pukarlyi painted this with her granddaughter? Why?
  - What are some things you have learnt from your grandmother?
  - What sort of work do you think Pukarlyi did on the stations?
  - Read the quote. How do you think Puarlyi feels about Puntawarri?
- .....



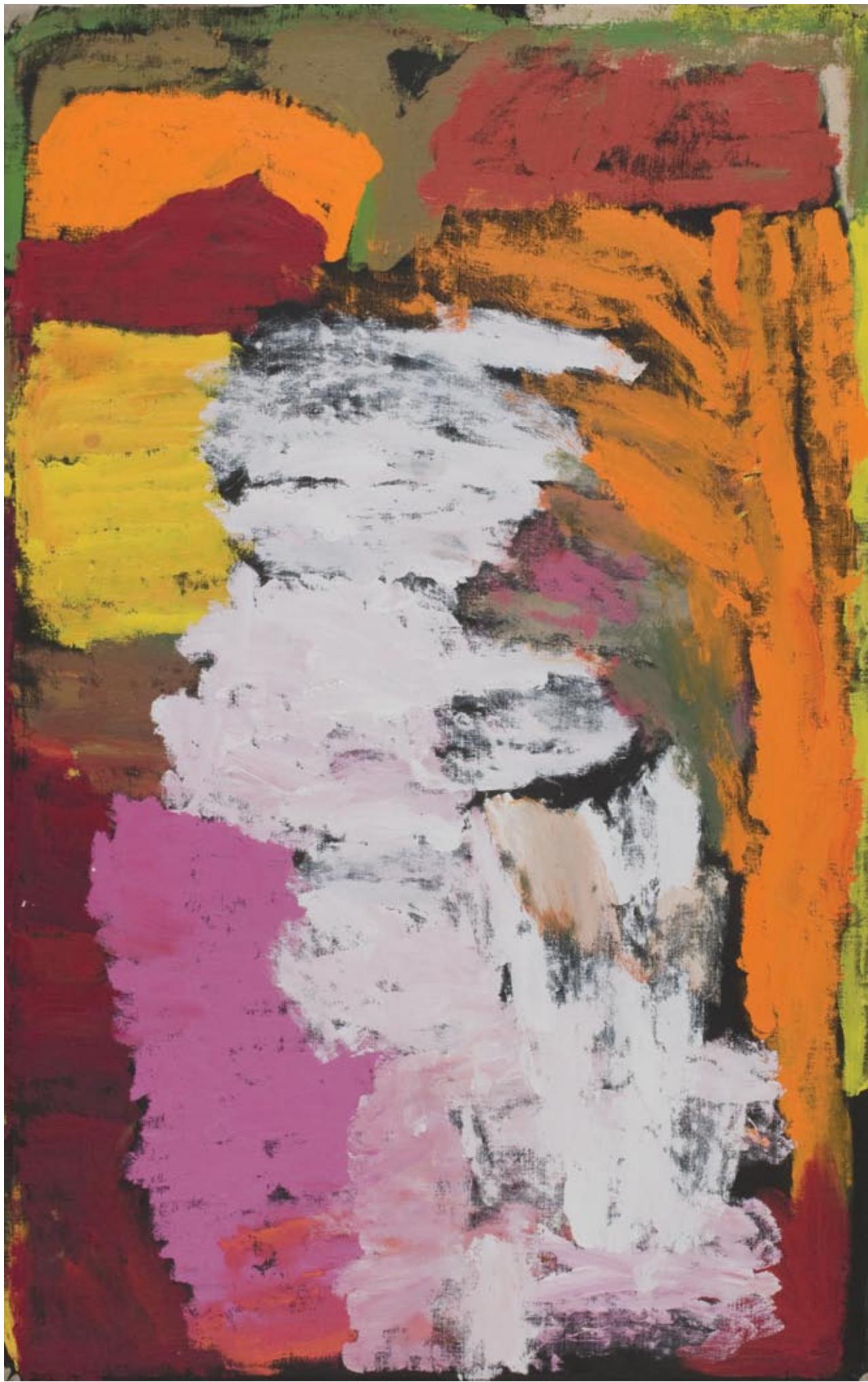
**Pukarlyi Milly Kelly**  
born about 1935  
Putjarrpa language group,  
Jigalong community

Pukarlyi was born at Jilakurru (Well 17). Her father's Country ranged from Jilakurru to Puntawarri, and Pukarlyi walked this Country as a child. Eventually her mother brought her in to the ration station, at old Jigalong on the rabbit-proof fence, to look for their extended family. There Pukarlyi met her husband, Pompey Charlie, and they worked on stations together for many years.

Puntawarri is the Country where Pukarlyi grew up as a young girl. This painting is a collaborative work by Pukarlyi and her granddaughter, Hayley Atkins, one of the curators of this exhibition.

*Puntawarri. My home. I was walking around little naked one!*

**Pukarlyi Milly Kelly**, 2009



**Puntawarri**, 2007, by Pukarlyi Milly Kelly and Hayley Atkins, Martumili Artists, National Museum of Australia

# YIWARRA KUJU THE CANNING STOCK ROUTE

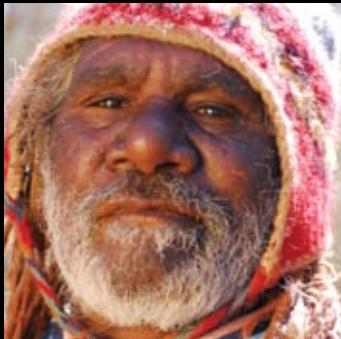
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## Canning Stock Route Country 2007

### FOCUS QUESTIONS:

- Why do you think it is important for Patrick to name the different wells he has painted?
  - Why do you think Patrick has chosen the colours he uses in this painting?
  - What do the wavy lines make you think of?
  - Do you think you would remember a place you had left after many years?
  - Ask your parents or grandparents if they can remember the place of their childhood.
  - Ask them to describe it and then try and paint it.
- .....



Patrick Oloodoo  
(Alatuti) Tjungurrayi  
born about 1935.  
Manyjilyjarra, Kukatja  
language groups,  
Kiwirrkurra community

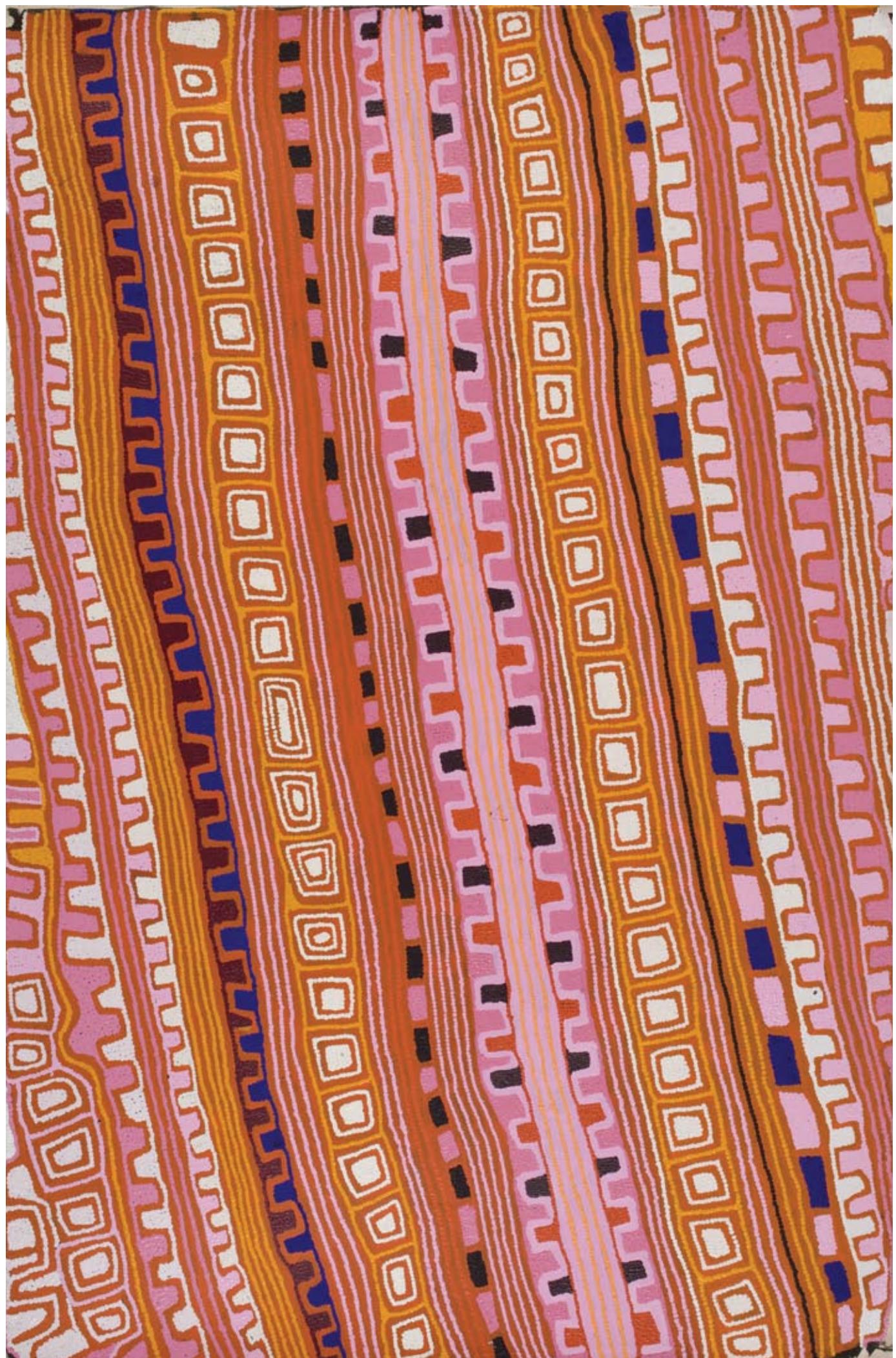
Patrick was born at Mayilli, between Kunawarritji (Well 33) and Kiwirrkurra. When he was young he walked the desert east of the Canning Stock Route with his older brother, Brandy. They regularly crossed the stock route and ultimately, in 1958, Patrick followed the chain of wells north out of the desert. After living many years in Balgo, he returned to live near his Country at Kiwirrkurra.

*This was where our people got together as one, along these wells. Our grandfathers too. They were all as one people, don't matter [that they're from] different tribes.*

In 2007 Patrick returned to the Canning Stock Route to retrace the journey he had made out of the desert 50 years earlier. Along the way he created this painting, which narrates the personal, historical and ancestral stories of his Country. The top line of white squares represents the waters from Kunawarritji north to Billiluna, and the bottom line, the Tingari Dreaming that dominates the artist's Country east of the stock route.

*Kunawarritji [Well 33], Nyipil [34], Kinyu [35], Pangkapini [between 35 and 36], Kilykily [36], Lipuru [37], Wajaparni [38], Kukapanyu [39], Natawalu [40], Tiru [41], Kulyayi [42], Katajilkarr [43], Jimpirrinykarra [44], Jintijinti [45], Kujuwarri [46], Kartalapuru [47], Kurninarra [near 48], Kanningarra [48], Lampu [49], Jikarn [50], Kilangkilang, Kurrungku [Billiluna] ... That long way that I'm travelling.*

Patrick Oloodoo (Alatuti) Tjungurrayi, (upon completion of the painting), 2007



*Canning Stock Route Country*, 2007, by Patrick Tjungurrayi, Papunya Tula Artists, National Museum of Australia

# YIWARRA KUJU THE CANNING STOCK ROUTE

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## Cannibal Story about 2003

### FOCUS QUESTIONS:

Before you tell students the story of the painting ask them these questions:

- What is happening in this painting?
- How does it make you feel?
- Read the quote by Yunkurra, then ask the following question:  
What parts of the painting tell you this is a dangerous place?

Have students find out more of the story surrounding Lake Disappointment and then create either a 2D or 3D artistic representation of this story.

.....



**Yunkurra Billy Atkins**  
born about 1940  
Putijarra language group,  
Jigalong community

Yunkurra is a painter and a carver. He is the most experienced Martu painter, having practised as an independent artist in the early 2000s, before other Martu artists were painting commercially. His work was selected for the 2003 Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, and in 2004 he held his first solo exhibition.

Yunkurra was born at Palarji (Well 9) on the Canning Stock Route. While he avoided being taken away by missionaries as a child, his sister's story of escape from missionaries was told in the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. Yunkurra now lives at Jigalong, close to his home Country, which includes major sites around the stock route, such as Lake Disappointment, Savory Creek and Jilakurru.

*It's dangerous, that Country. I've seen that [cannibal] man, he's there and I know it. I don't know how white people go over there. If they were to run into him he would eat them straight out. Kumpupirntly, that's a no good place... leave it alone and have nothing to do with it at all. Just leave it how it is.*

Yunkurra Billy Atkins, 2008



*Cannibal Story*, about 2003, by Billy Atkins, Martumili Artists, National Museum of Australia

# YIWARRA KUJU THE CANNING STOCK ROUTE

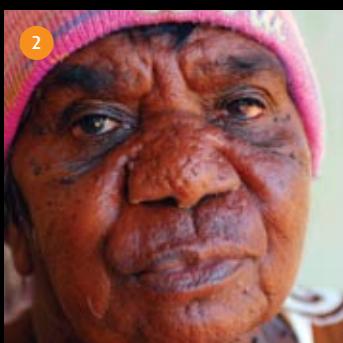
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## Kunkun 2008



1



2



3



4

### FOCUS QUESTIONS:

- Why do you think four women joined together to paint this painting?
- Why do you think it was important for the artists to teach young women the song and dance for this Country?
- Can you think of an event in history that could be told using painting, song and dance?

### Divide students into groups.

- Ask each group to think of an event they can research and then do a presentation using painting, song and dance.
- .....

The central water in this painting is Kunkun, an important women's site belonging to Marlu Jukurrrpa, or 'Kangaroo Dreaming'. This Jukurrrpa is also significant within men's law and contains elements restricted to initiated men and women. After completing this painting, the artists travelled to Kunkun, where they taught young women the song and dance for this Country.

- 1 *I was born near Lipuru. We went from Lipuru to Wajaparni and Kilykily. They looked after me there as I grew. I went east to Nyipil, Kinyu and Pangkapini and kept on going towards Balgo, travelling with the drovers all the way.*

**Nyangapa Nora Nangapa**, born about 1916  
Manyjilyjarra language group, Kunawarritji community

- 2 *I had two mothers. My mother went to Balgo. I was travelling with my mother's sister, but I lost her in Pangkapini. Before I had [my daughter] Gloria, I used to carry another little boy as I travelled. My husband and I found him in the riverbed one day. We looked after him and then gave him to his grandmother.*

**Kumpaya Girgaba**, born about 1945  
Manyjilyjarra language group, Parnngurr community

- 3 *My husband was cheeky. He left me behind and I was still with my mum and dad. At Juntujuntu [Well 30] we joined up with Biljabu and Bidu families, and [with] Kumpaya and her family. We got picked up and went to Jigalong. [Later] I learnt how to paint in Kunawarritji by watching Wompi and Nyangapa.*

**Bugai Whylouter**, born about 1945  
Warnman, Kartujarra language groups, Kunawarritji community

- 4 *I used to cry for my mother to carry me around, but my brother would help look after me. My brother used to carry me, leave me in the shade and wet my hair. [He] would run to our parents to get the meat while I was sitting in the shade waiting.*

**Nora Wompi**, born about 1935  
Manyjilyjarra, Kukatja language groups, Kunawarritji and Balgo communities



*Kunkun*, 2008, by Nora Nangapa, Nora Wompi, Bugai Whylouter and Kumpaya Giirgaba, Martumili Artists, National Museum of Australia

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## Cattle at Durba Springs 2007

### FOCUS QUESTIONS:

- What is happening in this painting?
  - How would you describe this environment?
  - Do you think droving would be easy work?
  - What might be some of the difficulties?
  - Find out more about the role Aboriginal stockmen played in Australia's cattle industry.
- .....



Jawurji Mervyn Street  
born 1950  
Goonlyandi, Walmajarri,  
Jaru language groups,  
Yiyili community

As a young man, Mervyn travelled south to Wiluna and worked as a stockman on Carnegie station. Here he met Martu people who had worked with his family on the stock route and built close relationships with them. He has family members in Wiluna, Billiluna, Balgo, Mulan and Fitzroy Crossing. In 2007, as part of the Canning Stock Route Project, Mervyn travelled the 'old bullocky road' for the first time.

*When I got to Wiluna I just look around and I couldn't believe I was in Wiluna. And I met them old people. They telling me all the droving story, 'We got family back in Wiluna, we got family right back in Fitzroy. We got a nyupa [husband or wife] from this way now. We got family'. And they been start calling their name [and I said], 'Ah! I know them old people.'*

Mervyn Street, 2007



**Cattle at Durba Springs**, 2007, by Mervyn Street, Mangkaja Arts, National Museum of Australia

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**Jugarda Dulcie Gibbs**  
born about 1947



**Muni Rita Simpson**  
about 1941-2008



**Mantararr Rosie Williams**  
born about 1943

Dulce, Muni and Rosie are all Manyjilyjarra language speakers. They live at Punmu and Kunawarritji communities.

## Minyipuru 2007

### FOCUS QUESTIONS:

This story is about the Seven Sisters but the painting is about the Country transected by the Canning Stock Route.

- Can you see the waterholes in the painting?
- Can you see the Canning Stock Route which runs through the centre of the waterholes?
- The story told here takes place in this Country, but there are many stories about the Seven Sisters (the Pleiades).
- Do you know another story about the Seven Sisters?

Ask students to write their own story about the constellation known as the Seven Sisters.

.....

Muni, Rosie and Dulce are sisters who grew up in the Country depicted in this painting. They have described here one of the Martu women's most important Jukurrpa narratives: the story of the Seven Sisters or Minyipuru. In this story, the old man Yurla, who has been pursuing the Sisters, captures one of the women at Pangkapini. The Minyipuru trick him and rescue her.

*Poor old fella, he had a rough time. He was trying and trying and trying.*

**Dulcie Gibbs**, 2007

The Minyipuru promised to stay with the old man Yurla, but when he returned from collecting wood they were floating above his head, teasing him. Yurla made a ladder but the sisters pushed it over and laughed at him. When he collapsed, exhausted, they rescued their sister and flew away.



**Minyipuru**, 2007, by Muni Rita Simpson, Rosie Williams and Dulcie Gibbs, Martumili Artists, National Museum of Australia

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## Tiwa 2008

### FOCUS QUESTIONS:

- Name some of the elements you can see in the painting.
- How does this painting make you feel?
- Do you think this painting is important to Jartarr?
- Imagine you were Jartarr watching the drovers. What would you think of them?

Have students paint a favourite memory from their (early) childhood.

.....



Jartarr Lily Long  
born about 1940  
Warnman language group,  
Nullagine community

Jartarr's father was the famous Kimberley drover, Jamili. He fell in love with Jartarr's mother and tried, unsuccessfully, to steal her away from her husband and return with her to his Country in the Kimberley. Jartarr was born in Karlamilyi (Rudall River) and grew up with her Warnman father.

*This is the Canning Stock Route. This is the big hill where, a long time ago, my mother, father, my sister Amy and my brother used to live. We would sometimes climb up on that hill and see drovers. They put the government well [26] next to Tiwa jurnu [soak] when they were building the stock route.*

*Daddy was from Fitzroy side, droving to Tiwa (Well 26). He was going to steal my mother from my Warnman Daddy and take her [back to] Kimberley.*

Jarter Lily Long, 2008-09



**Tiwa**, 2008, by Lily Long, Martumili Artists, National Museum of Australia

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## Waruwiya 2007

### FOCUS QUESTIONS:

- How did Helicopter get his name?
- Why do you think he may have taken this name?
- Why do you think Helicopter and Kupunyina stayed at Balgo?
- Why do you think their relatives walked to Balgo?

Read more about this story in the Walyja (Family) section.

Ask students to imagine they had to be airlifted out of their own backyard.  
Have them paint a picture of the view from the helicopter.

.....



**Helicopter Joey Tjungurrayi**  
born about 1947  
Manyjilyjarra, Kukatja,  
Wangkajunga language groups,  
Balgo community

Helicopter was born at Nyakin, south of Jupiter Well. As a young boy he fell seriously ill, and in 1957 was flown out of his Country by helicopter to Balgo, and he has lived there ever since, having become a respected maparn (traditional healer) and artist. He returned to his Country for the first time in 2000.

In 1957 a mining survey party landed in a helicopter at Natawalu (Well 40) where a large group of people were living. Helicopter Joey Tjungurrayi and his mother's sister, Kupunyina, were both ill, and the survey party offered to take them to Balgo Mission for medical attention. From that time he became known as 'Helicopter'. When neither Helicopter nor Kupunyina returned, their relatives set off in groups to walk north to Balgo.

*Waruwiya [soak] and Pilalyi rockhole. I lived around here with my mother and father. Nyirla is our Country. I was walking around everywhere in that Country, that was the last time. [Then] we travelled to them waterholes on the Canning Stock Road, until we came closer to Natawalu. That's where we saw a helicopter for the first time.*

**Helicopter Tjungurrayi, 2008**



**Waruwiya**, 2007, by Helicopter Tjungurrayi, Warlayirti Artists, National Museum of Australia

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Girls painted up for dancing  
at the Ngumpan workshop 2008

## FOCUS QUESTIONS:

- Look at the children in the photograph.  
How do you think they feel as they get ready to perform their dance?  
Who do you think is in the background?
  - Do you know a dance or a song with actions that tells a story?
  - Do you think using a story, a painting and a song or dance would be a good way to learn about your culture? Why?
  - Compare ways of using song and dance to tell about your own culture. Think about opera, ballet, folk songs and folk dances, musicals and hip-hop. Why might some people value some of these forms above others? What does this tell us about our culture?
- .....

Ngumpan community is located 90 kilometres south-east of Fitzroy Crossing. Most people living there today belong to the Walmajarri and Wangkajunga language groups.

Song and dance (*juju*) are also ways of telling stories. Many stories that are painted are also told in songs and dances.



Girls painted up for dancing at the Ngumpan workshop in Fitzroy Crossing, photo by Tim Acker, 2008