LEAVING THE SIMPSON DESERT

Luise Hercus

INTRODUCTION

Whenever – as appears to be common these days – people claim they are the *first* to cross the Simpson Desert from south to north or west to east, walking or running, in winter or summer, they forget that others were there before them: the Simpson Desert was home for generations of Aboriginal people. The southern Simpson Desert was the territory of the Wangkangurru. Their only permanent source of water was what they called *mikiri*. These were small soaks: they were described for the first time by David Lindsay in the journal of

The Simpson Desert Area

his expedition into the Simpson Desert in 1886. He visited nine of these soaks with the help of a Wangkangurru man named 'Paddy'. Thanks to brilliant navigation by Dennis Bartell, who had studied Lindsay's journal and worked out distances in camel-time, the prehistorian

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LEAVING THE SIMPSON DESERT

Plate 1: The late Sydney Stuart is the first to have a drink from the Murraburt soak, where his grandfather had lived. Peter Clark is in the background recovering from digging with a hand-auger.

Photo by J. Knight

Peter Clark and I were able to visit these nine soaks in May 1983.¹ It was a unique experience to see the places which I had heard about for many years from Wangkangurru people, and to find exact confirmation of what they had spoken and sung about. For instance there is a deep trench at the *Pirlakaya* soak, there *are* white rocks on the sandhill just north of *Pilpa*,

¹ A brief account of this trip, with strong emphasis on the use of four wheel drive vehicles, appeared in the *Overlander*, August 1983 (pp.30-37). It was written by Tony Love.

Plate 2: At the Pudlowinna soak, Dennis Bartell and Tony Love are using the hand-auger.

Photo by J. Knight

Plate 3: The remains of a humpy at Parlani soak.

Photo by J. Knight

LEAVING THE SIMPSON DESERT

Beelpa soak. The soaks are all different from one another, they have their own special character, but in some ways they are all similar: they are shallow depressions in low-lying areas. Wangkangurru people got down to the water by digging narrow tunnels, in some cases over 20ft deep. There were more of these soaks than the nine visited by Lindsay, at least sixteen that we know of, with water of varying quality. After rains people could move away from the soaks and get water from the many *irpi* 'claypans' and *ikara* 'swamps'. There are accounts of people digging deep channels in the claypans so that water would stay there longer to delay the necessity of having to go back to the soaks. One of the traditional song cycles of Wangkangurru literature deals with the theme of the poor taste of the water of one of the soaks, *Pulupudnunha* (Lindsay's 'Boolaburtinna' soak) and people longed for rain so that they could go out to the swamps, but the soaks were always there when all the surface water had dried out: there was no reason to leave the desert.

There can be no doubt about it, Wangkangurru people lived and died in the desert: the artefacts around the *mikiri* and the burial sites bear witness to that.² They had matrimonial and ceremonial links with lower Southern Aranda people, and trade-links much further afield still: there are accounts of Wangkangurru people going to Anna Creek to get grinding dishes, and to Parachilna in the Flinders Ranges to collect red ochre. This meant that groups of Wangkangurru men visited their neighbours (as did other Aboriginal people) and went on long expeditions, but their home was, and remained, the Simpson Desert. In the summer of 1899-1900, however, lured by tales of plenty, they left the Simpson desert never to return.

By 1965 there were only three Wangkangurru people left who were born in the desert. They were:

Maudie Naylor *Akawiljika*, born about 1885, probably at *Marrapardi*, the Murra-burt soak. She died in Birdsville in 1981.

Mick McLean *Irinjili*, born about 1888 at *Pirlakaya*, the Beelaka soak. He died at Pt Augusta in 1977. His immense store of traditional knowledge made him a legend in his own lifetime.

Topsy McLean *Ikiwiljika*, born in about 1898 at *Puluwani*, the Poolowanna soak, called Pudlowinna by Lindsay. Topsy, who was Mick McLean's sister, was only a small child when she left, and had to be carried. She only had second-hand knowledge about the desert, from her parents and other relatives. She died in 1974.

Both Mick McLean and Maudie Naylor were in 'the *mikiri* country' long enough to regard it as their home and they constantly spoke of it, particularly Mick. The late Graham Hercus and I, and later Bob Ellis (from the Aboriginal Heritage Unit of South Australia) made several attempts to take Mick McLean back to his country, but he was old and ill, and convinced that he would die there, which he very nearly did.

Mick McLean was a brilliant speaker of Southern Aranda as well as Wangkangurru and worked with T.G.H. Strehlow. He naturally wanted to talk about the desert. In his famous 1970 article on 'Totemic Landscape' T.G.H. Strehlow appears to have misunderstood Mick McLean when he used Wangkangurru terms: this is probably one of the very few minor errors he ever made. *ikara* ('jikara') is the Wangkangurru word for 'swamp'. Strehlow thought it meant 'freshwater lake', and then listed under that name most of the Simpson Desert

² We found burial sites in the immediate vicinity of several of the *mikiri*. See Peter Clarke (MS).

soaks. He wrote (p.93):

'Erenjeli had been given the names of the larger freshwater lakes by his male relatives, who had left this area only about the turn of the century'.

In the note referring to this passage (p.135) he listed Pulawini, Marabati, Murkarana, Kalijikana, Jataikna, Palkuru, Palarinuna, Pirbana, Pilakaija, Kalalumba, Parapara, Walbarka, Puruputu, Palani, Madluna.

These places were soaks: this is corroborated by the evidence of the last desert Wangkangurru people, by Lindsay's description, and by all the evidence we gathered on our visit. There was nothing secret-sacred about either the names or the actual soaks, nothing that belonged only to the 'male relatives'. Everybody *had* to know the names, everybody *had* to live at the soaks when the surface water dried out. There were long song cycles and myths centred on the soaks. All these myths had secret-sacred sections, but by sheer necessity the soaks themselves had to be common property. Maudie Naylor knew the names and the places and the greater part of the myths just as well as did Mick McLean.

There were secret-sacred places in the Simpson desert, but they were not soaks: apart from several outcrops of gypsum these were claypans, such as for instance *MaRarru*, the Two Men (Initiation History) ritual centre. Men went there for ceremonies when conditions were suitable. Some women had to be present too, but only on the periphery: they certainly could not visit this site casually when foraging.

In conversations with Mick McLean we usually somehow ended up speaking about 'the *mikiri* country'. In August 1970, he gave a detailed account of how his people left the desert. This account is in Wangkangurru with a few sentences in English, and it is transcribed here in a practical orthography, and with a grammatical gloss: details of the orthography and of the abbreviations used in the gloss are listed at the end of this paper. Some minor changes have been made to the sequence of the story as told by Mick McLean, particularly where we had some interruptions.

LEAVING THE SIMPSON DESERT

Text

- 1 M.**thangka-libarna arni Palkuru- nga.*
 Stay -ANC we (excl) Balcoora³ - LOC.
anthunha apirla, payayi-kunha arluwa
 My cousin⁴, aunt -of child
katha-nangka-ngura Riley⁵-kunha kaku
 walk -CONT S - CONT Riley -of elder sister
katjiwiRi Anpanuwa, ukakunha apayi.
 big Anpanuwa, her younger brother.
- 2 *uka anthunha withiwa anthunha apirla-pula*
 He my male cousin my cousin-two
Palkuru-nga mingka mirpa-rna, mingka
 Balcoora-LOC hole dig out-IMP, hole

Translation

- 1 M. We were all living at Balcoora.³ There was my female cross-cousin, older than me,⁴ daughter of my father's sister, and there were Riley's⁵ big sister Anpanuwa and her younger brother.
- 2 This male cross cousin of mine and the two girl cousins older than me, we all used to dig holes in the loose

*M. refers to Mick McLean. As the whole text is from him the abbreviation is not repeated except where there are a few questions from L. (Luise Hercus).

³ The Balcoora soak is within the Simpson Desert Conservation Park. Lindsay (MS: p.4) describes his visit there in 1886 as follows:

'... top of sandhill at 6.50 - met 5 natives who were friends of our boy - they said water was only a "pickaninny way" travelled on until 8 oclock being tired of the natives "one fellow sandhill then catch him water".

Camped on a good flat - no spinifex today.

Saturday 9th. Unable to get an observation for Latitude. Thermometer 48° at 5.15 a.m. On bearing 45 at 6.45 over a sandhill and at 6.55 came to the well. . . . The well is on the slope of a depression, not in the centre as is the case with the others, it is 20ft deep and sloping. Some large native Miamias are here'.

Subsequently (p.6) he mentions:

'We had brought another native with us from Balcoora, our boy not being very sure about finding these later wells', [he is referring to soaks in the eastern part of the Simpson desert].

⁴ *apirla*. The basic meaning of this kinship term is 'unmarriageable woman of the opposite moiety and of one's own or the alternate generation level'. The shade of meaning intended here is 'older female cross-cousin', and it may refer to Maudie Naylor *Akawilijika*: according to her own account she spent some of her earlier years at the same camp with Mick McLean, and they both jokingly recalled how she could boss him about because she was a big girl while he was only little. She however probably left earlier and was not part of the group that finally left from Balcoora. The term *apirla* is given as 'abila' by Elkin (1938:64). It corresponds to the Adnjamathanha word *ngaparla*, (for the loss of initial *ng* see Hercus 1979 and for details about *ngaparla* see Schebeck, Hercus and White 1973). Interestingly enough the geographically intervening language, Arabana, uses the less closely related term *pilja*.

⁵ Anpanuwa was the second oldest of the Naylor family. She had several brothers; the brother who was close in age to Mick McLean was probably Jimmy Naylor *Arpilintika*, who died in Birdsville in about 1965. His brother Riley Naylor was considerably younger: he was born after the departure from the Simpson Desert. He was a brilliant stockman and horse-breaker (see the illustration 'Riley rides the skewbald colt' in Farwell 1950 p.32). He died in Port Augusta in 1978.

2 (continued)

mirpa-rna pudnu-ruku kutha yatjapara
dig out -IMP, heap - ALL water sparrow⁶

pirda-lhuku kutha pirpa-lhuku kutha
kill -PURP water- pour -HIST water

kudni-lhiku puthu-ru, mingka kutha-
put -HIST dish- INST, hole water-

marna-li -ma -lhuku.
mouth-ADV- make-HIST.

3 *irlina yatjapara mapu thika-rna, partjarna*
Thus sparrow mob come-IMP, all

wila-wila thika-rna mapa -rna -yi
multitude come-IMP assemble- -IMP -ACT

-thika-lhuku, kutha thurru puntha-lhuku
-come-HIST, water inside drink -PURP

kutha-nga mapa -rndu.
water-LOC assemble -PRES.

4 *pula-ru nhatji-nangka-rda mingka*, might be
Two-ERG watch-CONT S -PRES hole,

*murlapara*⁷ too! *pula-ru wilpilpurru*
pigeon Two-Erg branches

punta-yi-kanha, brush'm in.
break-ACT-PERF,

5 *uta kari-nha pirda-lhuku partjarna*
Then they-ACC kill -HIST all

mingka-nga. kathi ngurku, njari-njara, kathi
hole- LOC. Meat good, tiny, meat

mardu, thiki-lhiku, wadni-lhiku.
sweet, take-HIST, cook -HIST.

⁶ *yatjapara* was the Arabana-Wangkangurru name for the orange chat, *Ephthianura aurifrons*. It seems that chats were widely called 'sparrow' in the Lake Eyre basin. Gason 1879:286 mentions a Diyari term for 'sparrow', and Johnston 1943:286 considers that the name 'sparrow' refers to the closely related gibber bird or desert chat *Ashbyia lovensis*, but this does not occur in Arabana country and *yatjapara* certainly does. Although they can exist in a very arid environment all the chats are easily attracted to water. Two important mound-springs in Arabana are called *Yatjaparanha* on account of this. It was usually considered pathetically small as a food item, and this feature is emphasised in several legends, most notably in the Emu History from Mierantana Waterhole on the Macumba, where a grandson feeds his blind grandfather on *yatjapara* 'sparrows', while he himself has lovely feasts of emu down-wind from where the old man is sitting.

⁷ *muriapara* is the top-knot pigeon which was considered a much more desirable item of food than 'sparrows'.

2 (continued)

ground (by the soak) so that
we could kill 'sparrows'.⁶

We used to pour out water
that we got from a wooden
dish and put the water into
the hole, we filled the hole
right up to the rim.

3 Then a mob of 'sparrows'
would come, a huge number
would get together to come
there. They would flock to-
gether to drink the water
inside the hole.

4 Two of us would be watch-
ing that hole all the time,
there might even be a top-
knot pigeon!⁷ We used to
break off branches and
brush the birds into the
hole.

5 Then we killed them all in
the hole. That was good
meat, only a tiny amount
on each, but it was sweet.
We would take them back
(to our humpy) and cook
them.

LEAVING THE SIMPSON DESERT

- 6 L. *thutirla thadlu, karna padni?*
Boy only, man not?

M. *karna katji-nangka-ngura, karna wila-wila,*
Man turn-CONT S CONT, men multitude,
uljurla kari yuka-ka pawa-ku pawa
woman they go -PAST seed -DAT seed
karra-rna ikara-nga, thirthi -pawa.
seek -IMP swamp-LOC, pigface -seed.

- 7 *thutirla mankarra-kari thangka-ngura kutha-nga,*
Boy girl -they sit -CONT water-LOC,
anthunha withiwa katjiwiRi, arluwa
my male cousin big, child
katjiwiRi karuwali kathi-nga katha-ngura
big youth meat-LOC walk -CONT
pirda-lhuku, yatjapara tharni-rna -thu.
kill -PURP, sparrow eat -IMP -EMPH.

- 8 *thutirla-ru -thu pantu -nga warra-rna.*
Boy -ERG-EMPH salt lake -LOC play -IMP.
L. *kultji?*
round stone?
M. No. *mathapurda katjiwiRi irlina warra-rnda*
No. Old man big thus play -PRES
*kultji-ri.*⁸
stone -INST.

- 9 *uta thangka-lhuku walta nguru-nga walta*
Now sit -HIST time other -LOC time
nguru-nga. malka ngurka-rina week malka
other -LOC. Not know -DIST week not
ngurka-rina month malka ngurka-rina year,
know -DIST month not know -DIST year,
malka ngurka-rina irlangkuta
not know -DIST thus
how long we been there,
ngarka nguru ngarka nguru thangka-rda.
evening other evening other stay -PRES.

- 6 L. Was it only the boys who did this, not the men?

M. The men were out, walking about, there were many, many men (at Balcoora). The women went out searching for grass seed in the swamps, and especially the seed of pigweed (*Aizoon quadrifidum*, common on the edges of clay-pans as well as dunes).

- 7 We boys and girls sat by the soak. But my older cross-cousin, he was a big boy, a youth. He was walking about killing meat while we were eating 'sparrows'.

- 8 We boys played on the salt-lake.
L. (That game called) 'round stone'?
M. Only the big grown-up men played that game.⁸

- 9 We stayed at Balcoora time and time again.
We knew nothing of weeks, or months, or years; we had no idea of how long we had been there. We just stayed there one night after another.

⁸ *kultji* means 'round stone' and the term was also used for the game which was played with such a (Footnote 8 continued on next page)

- 10 *madli-ngaru ngurka-rna, madli-ngaru kanjakarla*
Cold -way know -IMP, cold -way heat
nguyu-nga thangka-rda wadnangkani pirda-yi
one -LOC stay -PRES carpet-snake⁹ kill -ACT
-ngura anthunha anja-ru, kathi idni-ngura,
-CONT my father-ERG, meat lay-CONT,
yardu thangka-lhuku.
satisfied stay -HIST.
not worrying about food, not like today, eat every
five minutes!
yardu -thu thangka-rda, arlali...
satisfied-EMPH stay -PRES, in the end...
- 11 L *mikiri tharti witji -ka?*
Soak dry become -PAST?
M No! *kutha katjiwiRi thangka-ngura, nguRa*
No water big stay -CONT, camp
wila-wila-ru kutha nguyu puntha-rna
multitude-ABL water one drink -IMP
mikiri-nganha, nguRa katjiwiRi thangka-ngura.
soak -from, camp big stay -CONT.
- 12 *Marrapardi-nga nguRa katjiwiRi thangka-ngura,*
Murraburt -LOC camp big stay -CONT,
Murkari-nga nguRa katjiwiRi Padlaringu-nga.
Mokari¹⁰ -LOC camp big Padlaringu-LOC.
That's not far from Kallakooah, we come through
there afterwards, when we were getting ready to
leave that country.
- 10 We did know the cold of
winter-time and the heat of
summer. We all lived there
together and my father went
about killing carpet-snakes⁹:
we had meat and were satis-
fied. We weren't really
worrying about food, not
like today when people eat
every five minutes!
In the end...
- 11 L. The soak dried out?
M.No, we had plenty of
water. There were a lot of
humpies there and we all
got water from the soak,
we had a big camp there.
- 12 There was a big camp at
Murraburt (the westernmost
Simpson soak). There was
also a camp at Mokari¹⁰ and
a big camp at Padlarina.
That's not far from the
Kallakooah. We came
through there afterwards,
when we were getting ready
to leave that country.

(Footnote 8 continued)

stone. Mick McLean always stressed that the game was like cricket. It was played in large flat areas such as claypans by grown men as light entertainment after special ceremonial occasions, particularly initiation. There is a song-sequence about the game in the Two Men Initiation History.

- 9 Carpet-snakes were a much sought after item of food throughout the Lake Eyre basin, but they were hard to catch. Men risked their lives digging for them in the sandhills: they dug out the burrows of carpet-snakes and the resulting tunnel could easily cave in.
- 10 Mokari is in the western Simpson desert. It is not one of the main soaks: it is known as a Dog History site. The name Mokari is now used for a well developed air-strip used in oil exploration in the Macurba lease area of the Simpson desert.

LEAVING THE SIMPSON DESERT

- 13 L. *minha-ku mikiri thadna-ka?*
What -DAT soak (country) leave -PAST?
M. *anaku. kari yanhi-lhiku arni yuka-rnda*
I don't know. They say -HIST we go -PRES
kudnangkari karla-ruku ngarrimatha-nga
south creek-ALL flood -LOC
thangka-lhuku.
stay -PURP.
- 13 L. Why did you leave the *mikiri* country?
M. I don't know. They (the adults) started saying: 'We'll go down south to the creek and stay there by the flood-waters'.
- 14 *kutha karla-nga kira-ngura, karla-nga*
water creek-LOC flow-CONT, creek-LOC
thangka-lhuku parru tharni-lhiku.
stay -PURP bream eat -PURP.
kari yanhi-lamintja-rnda thadna-rnda nguRa
They talk -RECIP -PRES leave -PRES camp
arla.
true.
- 14 'There is water flowing in the creek, we can stay by the creek and eat boney bream'. They talked like this amongst themselves and so they left their own country.
- 15 *yuka-rnda Punarani -riku. walipala*
Go -PRES Poönarunna¹¹-ALL. Whitefellow
thangka-ngura, out-station *kari thangka-liparna*,
stay -CONT, they stay -ANC,
but I didn't know that then.
- 15 They were going to Poona-runna.¹¹ There were white-fellows there, living on an out-station, but I didn't know that then.
- 16 My father had seen whitefellows, but my mother and I hadn't. I was a boy then leave me along *Palkuru*. He came up for that red ochre over there at Parachilna.
Parachilna-ruku kari yuka-ngura anha
-ALL they go -CONT me
thadna-rna thutirla njara, arni nguRa-nga
leave -IMP boy small, we EXCL camp -LOC
thangka-ngura.
stay -CONT.
- 16 My father had seen white-fellows, but my mother and I hadn't. I was only a little boy when he left me at Balcoora to go and get red ochre from over there at Parachilna.
They went off to Parachilna, leaving me behind as a small boy. We went on staying in our camp (at Balcoora).

¹¹ The Poönarunna out-station was in use for only a short while, it was already abandoned at the time of Gregory's visit in 1901. When Mick McLean first arrived there it was still inhabited: this dates the events described by Mick McLean in this paper as taking place in 1899-1900. This date coincides with drought conditions over much of southern and central Australia, and good rains in parts of Queensland, which caused floods in the Diamantina and the Kallakoopah which is simply a branch of the Diamantina.

16 (continued)

The end of that railway was along Beltana¹² in that time, *waru yarndi*.
long, long ago.

17 He made a song out of that, my old man,
Wangkangurru song:

v.1. Railway *yarilu' waya'*
tralaa tralaa

Beltana *yarilu' waya'*
tralaa tralaa

yarilu' waya' Beltana *yarilu'*
tralaa tralaa Beltana tralaa.

warritha-ru thupu nhatji-rna:
afar -ABL smoke watch -IMP:

v.2. *kali'ngkrima kayiya'*

kali'ngkrima na' kali'ngkrima yayai'

wandura warritha'
far away

wandurali'ya

That is all song word for *maka-thupu wanka-ngura*.
fire -smoke rise -CONT.

18 *walta nguru-nga antha katjiwiRi-thin-ina* train
Time other-LOC I big -become

nhanhi-lhiku, maka-thupu tharka-ngura, train
see -PURP, fire -smoke stand -CONT, train

maka-thi-ya! maka-thupu nhanhi-lhiku
fire -EMPH! fire -smoke see -PURP

waya-rnda.
wish-PRES.

I did see'm in the end, when I went to Peake,
Warrina.

16 (continued)

The railway line ended at Beltana¹² at that time, long, long ago in the past.

17 He made a song out of that (journey), my old man, a Wangkangurru song:

v.1.

The railway tralaa tralaa,
Beltana tralaa tralaa,
tralaa, tralaa, Beltana tralaa.

He could see the smoke from afar:

v.2.

Smoke rising'

Smoke rising from afar.

Smoke rising.

These are all song words (not ordinary Wangkangurru) for 'smoke rising up from a fire'.

18 Later, as I was growing up, I wanted to see a train. I wanted to see the smoke going up in a continuous column, oh how I wanted to see the fire of a train! I wanted to see the smoke of that fire!

I did see it in the end, when I went to Peake Station, at Warrina (the siding used by people from Peake, see J.W. Gregory 1906:140).

¹² This statement involves a chronological problem. At the time of the exodus from the Simpson desert Mick was about 12 years old, and there are other pieces of evidence which confirm that he was born about 1888. The railway line ended at Beltana in 1881, it was continued to the north after that, reaching Marree in January 1884 (Fuller 1975), so Mick McLean's father *Pintha-Mirri* must have been to Parachilna before Mick was born. It seems likely that Mick telescoped into one the two or more visits to Parachilna that he had heard about as a child. Obviously – and Mick's account makes this very clear – the men who had been on the long and adventurous journey talked and sang about it for years. (For discussions about journeys for red ochre see Gason 1879:280, Horne and Aiston 1924:128, and Elkin 1934:5).

- 19 anthunha *anja*, not proper *anja* but belonging to
My father, father
Finke, he call'm cousin my *anja*, *kari nguyu-nga*
father, they one -LOC
yuka-ka, *uka-ru malaru pantu malaru*
go -PAST he -ERG however salt lake however
kari-nangka-ngura, *pantu katjiwiRi kathi*
see -CONT S-CONT, salt lake big Lake
Thandra.
Eyre.
- 19 My father, not my real
father but a man belonging
to the Finke, who called my
father 'cousin' – they all
went together (down to
Parachilna), he however was
fascinated by the salt lake,
that vast salt lake called
Lake Eyre.
- ' 20 He got a song there too that same time:
Kathi-Thanda' warda'yi yadle'yi ya Kathi-Thanda'
Lake Eyre over there close Lake Eyre
wamara wamara pantjina'nga te'yi ya Kathi Thanda'
Wind wind circle round Lake Eyre
warde'yi warde'yi ya Kathi-Thanda' yala'
there there Lake Eyre.
- 20 So he got a song for Lake
Eyre on that same occasion,
(the journey to Parachilna):
Lake Eyre is just there close
by, Lake Eyre.
The whirlwind circles
around, it circles around
Lake Eyre.
Lake Eyre is just there close
by, Lake Eyre.
- 21 My uncle *Tjangili*, he find this song.
Tjarlpa Parkulu Kinpili. uka-kunha arluwa nguyu,
Trees Two Kinpili. He-POS child one,
mankarra,
girl,
while we at *Palkuru*,
katha-nina puthu-nga
go -DIST dish -LOC.
- 21 My uncle *Tjangili*, he found
this song (i.e. it came to
him as an inspiration).
The song called The Two
Trees was found by *Kinpili*.
He (*Tjangili*) had only one
child, a (baby) girl, and
while we were at Balcoora
they carried her about in a
wooden dish.
- 22 *uka thangka-liparna, muyu nguru muyu nguru*
He stay -ANC, day other day other
thangka-rda
stay -PRES
I might as well give you *Kanti-purrunha*:
Kanti pulpa'ra ya'ra rapinta'nayi
wadlhu 'kanha pulpa- ra marnda, waranga?
Ground him powder-CAUS make, where?
This is *Tjangili*'s song, he made it on the way back
from Parachilna.
- 22 He stayed on, day after day
he stayed.
I might as well give you his
song about the waddy (which
he had lost).
My waddy can smash the
ground to powder,
My waddy, where is it?
This is *Tjangili*'s song. He
composed that too on the
way back from Parachilna.

- 23 *mikiri-nga ngardu thanga-rnda ikara-nga*,
Soak -LOC nardoo remain-PRES swamp-LOC,
widla, pilta, parkilja madli-ngaru.
pear, pigface, parakeelya winter-way.
kanjakarla-nga kari katha-yi-ngura wadla-ra
Heat -LOC they walk-ACT-CONT hunger-CAUS
thangka-ngura warditji-nganha thuruthurda
stay -CONT mulga -from mulga apple
ardakarla tharni-lhiku.
mulga gall eat -HIST.
- 23 Near the soak there was always nardoo in the swamps, native pear (*Cynanchum floribundum*), and also pig-face and parakeelya in the wintertime. In the heat of summer they still foraged to satisfy our hunger and we ate mulga-apples, mulga gall.
- 24 *ngardi-kira. wadlhu kari thadna-ka karla-ruku*
dry root. country they leave -PAST creek-ALL
ngaritji-lhiku.
go down-PURP.
L. *Marna-wiljpa nhanhi-lhiku*;
Mouth-Open¹³ see -PURP?
M. *uka-kunha-ruku wadlhu-ruku yuka-lhuku*,
He -POS -ALL country-ALL go -PURP,
uka-ru kanti-ngura.
he -ERG call -CONT.
- 24 The roots of trees were dry when they left that country to go down to the creek.
L. Was it to see old man *Marna-Wiljpa*?
M. It was to go to his country, he was calling for us.
- 25 *kurdawiRi kari thangka-ngura katjiwiRi*
wild parsnip they stay -CONT big
pudnu-pudnu-nga ngarrimatha-ru kari-nha
loose soil -LOC flood -ERG they-ACC
walji-la -yi-ngura. karla-nga kira-nha-nga.
water-ALT-ACT-CONT. creek-LOC flow-NP-LOC.
- 25 There was a big lot of wild parsnip (*Trachymene glaucifolia*) growing on the loose soil, watered by the flood. The creek was flowing.
- 26 That *karla* been not like this other time we went there.
kalka-walta athu' nha iki -nha ngunta-lhuku
Some-time I you ACC take-NP show -PURP
kari-nha wadlhu.
they-ACC country.
karla wadlhu-ru nhampa-ka.
creek soil -ERG bury -PAST.
- 26 That creek was not like this the time we went there (in August 1969). Some time I'll take you to show you their country, but the creek has been buried and filled in with soil.

¹³ At the turn of the century the ritual leader of the Fish and Crane History was *Marna-Wiljpa* an old man of the *Wangkatjari* group of Wangkangurru who lived in the *Marlupapu* country along the Kalla-koopah and the Diamantina. The name *Marna-Wiljpa* means 'Mouth Open' and refers to the Ancestral Cod.

- 27 *kari arlali, arni yuka-rna, arlarda witji -rna*
They finally, we go -IMP, ready become-IMP
kudnangkari yuka-lhuku. yuka-lhuku kutha
south go -PURP. Go -HIST water
kari-ri wanpa -rda yunga-ru kadnungka
they-ERG carry -PRES bag-INST hare wallaby
patha-nga, mudluwaltu patha-nga kutha
skin -LOC, rat-kangaroo skin -LOC water
iki-lhuku, mikiri-nganha kutha ngurku, madli.
take-PURP, soak -from water good, cool.
You don't want to drink all the time.
- 27 They finally set out, they got ready to travel south. They went carrying water in waterbags made of hare-wallaby (*Lagorchestes*) skin and rat-kangaroo (*Caloprymnus*) skin. They took water from the soak (at Balcoora). It was good, cool water. You don't want to drink all the time.
- 28 *kutha madli idni-nha-nga yakutha-nga, yunga*
water cold lie -NP -LOC bag -LOC, water-bag
-nga arni kilita-rna yunga puthu-nga
-LOC we pull -PRES water-bag dish -LOC
idni-ya -nga uljurla kari-ri wanpa-ngura
lie -PTC-LOC woman they-ERG carry-CONT
kari-kunha kutha, ngampa padni yuka-ka.
they-POS water, nardoo stone nothing go -PAST.
- 28 There was cold water in the bags, the waterbags, and we pulled out the waterbags to pour water into a wooden dish. The women carried the water for everybody, they went without the (heavy) nardoo-stones.
- 29 *Topsy puthi-nga anthunha ama -ru iki-rna,*
Topsy dish -LOC my mother-ERG take-IMP,
antha malaru thutirla yuka-rnda warra-rna.
I however boy go -PRES run -IMP.
My uncle there two, two *anthunha anja njara-pula,*
my father small-two,
one finished along Finnis, one at Macumba.
- 29 My mother carried Topsy in a wooden dish. I was a boy and went running along. My two younger fathers (my father's two younger brothers) were there too. One died at Finnis Springs, the other at Macumba.
- 30 *yuka-lhuku thangka-yiwa-lhuku Pulawani -nga¹⁴*
Go -HIST sit -TR -HIST Pudlowinna-LOC
kudnangkari thangka-yiwa-lhuku muyu parkulu.
south sit -TR -HIST day two.
Pulawani -ri kudnangkari, kutha kalpa-lhuku
Pudlowinna -ABL south water get -PURP
yarda Pulawani thangka-lhuku.
again Pudlowinna sit -HIST.
- 30 We started walking and on our way we stopped at the Pudlowinna¹⁴ soak to the south (of Balcoora). We stayed there for two days before leaving. We headed south from Pudlowinna, but then we came back and stopped again at Pudlowinna to get more water.

¹⁴ Pudlowinna is Lindsay's version of the name of the soak north of the big saltlake named Poolowanna on modern maps. It is not very far from Balcoora to Pudlowinna.

(Footnote 14 continued on next page)

- 31 *kadnhini kumpira witji -rna kadnhini*
Grandmother dead become-IMP grandmother
Urlirda-nganha uljurla katjiwiRi yarndi,
Urlirda-from woman big (old) ancient,
apirla.
paternal grandmother.
*nhampa-rda kanhangarda 'kanha Irlipaltja-nga'*¹⁵
bury -PRES there her Irlipaltja -LOC
kaRu kudnangkari
there south
between *Pulawani* and *Padlaringunha*.

- 31 My grandmother died, my grandmother from Urlirda (an important Southern Aranda site of uncertain location on the lower Finke). She was my paternal grandmother, the grandmother of the opposite moiety, an old, very old woman. They buried her at Irlipaltja, away to the south, between Pudlowinna and Padlaringu.

- 32 *uljurla yarndi padni yuka-rna, kanhangarda*
Woman ancient not go -IMP, there
muthu pudluka uljurla iranja witji -ninaru, padni
like bullock woman skinny become-PLUP, not
panpa-rna-lhuku parda, uka wantja-rda, parda
move -SP -PURP weak, she die -PRES, weak
wapayi-rna-ki;
finish -IMP-EMPH;
Just like old cow,¹⁶ can't walk no more.

- 32 That poor old woman just couldn't walk any further, she was there just like a bullock (that has been over-run). She had become quite emaciated and was so weak that she could not move. She was so weak that she died there. Just like an old cow¹⁶ she just couldn't walk any further.

(Footnote 14 continued)

Lindsay gives the following account (MS:p.11):

'This was a good well with a good supply but some dead thing must have got into the water as it was absolutely rotten and made us sick'.

He also speaks of a 'magnificent flat'.

Pudlowinna is indeed situated in a well vegetated low-lying area. The immediate surrounds of the soak were surprisingly green at the time of our visit to the area in 1983 and on a subsequent occasion in 1984. This was the only soak at which we saw reasonably preserved wooden artefacts, a shield and a spear.

- ¹⁵ *Irlipaltja* is not a soak. It is probably the name of a particularly big sandhill: sandhills of major size or significance all had distinct names in Wangkangurru country.

- ¹⁶ Disrespect was the last thing Mick McLean would have intended by this expression. He loved his paternal grandmother and moreover she represented his main link with the southern Aranda country around the lower Finke. He was simply evoking a pathetic picture, one that he must have witnessed many times while mustering.

On another occasion Mick McLean described to Sally White and me how his father had actually carried the sick woman on that trip over the sandhills for several days until she died.

- 33 L. *kari muyu kulpari thangka-ngura?*

They day three sit -CONT?

M. *anthunha apirla* -nga? ko, muyu
my paternal grandmother-LOC? Yes, day

kulpari thangka-ngura, ukaliri yuka-lhuku arlarda
three sit -CONT, then go -PURP ready

witji -rna kudnangkari yuka-lhuku
become-IMP south go -HIST

(*Padlaringu-ruku*) *kudnangkari yuka-lhuku,*

(*Padlaringu-ALL*) south go -HIST,

going south all the time.

- 34 L. *minha tharni-ka?*

What eat -PAST?

M. *Plenty kathi, thalka, yadluru, kadnungka.*
meat, bilby, lesser bilby, hare wallaby.

L. *pawa padni?*

Flour nothing?

M. *pawa njurdu, wanpa-nguru kardapu-nga.*

Flour too, carry -CONT head -LOC.

L. *ngalta -nga?*

Headband-LOC?

M. *wirinja-nga. wirinja karra-rna kardapu-nga*

Nest -LOC. Nest tie -IMP head -LOC

kudni-lhiku ngalta -nga wanpa-lhuku pawa
put -HIST headband-LOC carry -HIST flour

ipa -yiwa-lhuku, irlana-thu mudlu -nga,
grind -TR -PURP, Thus -EMPH sandhill -LOC,

parra-lhuku mudlu -nga.

travel-HIST sandhill-LOC.

tjarlpa wadni-wa-lhuku, nguRa marra-nga

Food cook -TR-HIST, camp new -LOC

kurda-yiwa-lhuku.

sleep -TR -HIST.

- 33 L. And did they stay there for three days?

M. For my paternal grandmother? Yes. We sat there for three days and then we got ready to travel south to Padlaringu, and then we went south again, travelling south all the time.

- 34 L. What did you eat?

M. There was plenty of meat, there were bilbies (*Macrotis lagotis*), lesser bilbies (*Macrotis leucura*), and hare wallabies (*Lagorchestes leporoides*).

L. Didn't you have any grass seed?

M. We had grass seed too, they used to carry it on their heads.

L. On top of the headband?

M. In a 'nest'. They tied up this nest and put it on their heads on the headband. They carried grass seed so that they could grind flour. This is how they travelled on the sandhills, over sandhill after sandhill. They cooked food on their journey, and they slept in a different camp every night.

35 *uta, wanga-wanga yuka-lhuku wanka-lhuku-thu*
Then, early morning go -HIST rise -HIST-EMPH
mathapurda:
old man:
'*nhayi Thikira, wurru, wurru-kunha mudlu*
'Here *Thikira*, Crane, Crane-POS sandhill
wantarnda katjiwiRi, kaRu thadna-rna.
steep(?) big, there leave -IMP'.
Karla-kupa nhanhangarda
Creek-small (the Kallakoopah) there
katji-rna-ya-rna kudnangkari thika -lhuku
turn-IMP-TR-IMP south return-HIST
kudnangkari witji -lhiku.
south become-HIST.

36 Soakage there, main soakage call'm *Pawa-mingka,*
flour-hole,
karla-nga, mudlu nhararda thangka-ngura
creek-LOC, sandhill there sit -CONT
big high sandhill might be flat now, I don't know,
those big high sandhills we been talking about¹⁷
wabmara-ru partjarna thawi-ka.
wind -ERG all throw-PAST.

37 *nhararda uka wantarndara ularaka-nga kadnha*
There this steep(?) History-LOC stone
nhanhanga . . .
there . . .
L. When did you first see other mob?
M. *nhanhanga karla-nga katjiwiRi -nga*
There creek-LOC big -LOC
nothing on the way.
thangka-ngura kaRu.
sit -CONT there.

35 Then early one morning as
we were walking and going
up (a sandhill) the old man
said:
'This sandhill here is called
Thikira. It (represents) the
Ancestral Crane, it belongs
to the Ancestral Crane. It is
a high and steep sandhill.
This is where the Crane
left (the creek country).'
'It is here that the Kalla-
koopah, 'the Small Creek'
(as opposed to the Diaman-
tina, the Big Creek) bends
and turns straight south, it
goes south altogether then.'

36 There is a soakage here, a
main soakage that is called
Pawa-mingka 'Grass seed
Hole'. It is right in the creek,
and there is a big sandhill
just above.
That high sandhill might be
flat now, I don't know, like
those big high sandhills we
were talking about.¹⁷
The wind might have blown
them away altogether.

37 There (on this steep sand-
hill?) is this stone from the
History Time . . .
L. When did you first see
another mob of people?
M. Over there on the Big
Creek, the Diamantina.
There was nothing, nobody
on the way. They were
living on the Diamantina.

¹⁷ The sandhills in question were on the western side of the Simpson desert in the area around Tuppana waterhole on the lower Macumba. Mick McLean had an uncanny memory for places; he led us to the remains of a cattle-rustler's yard on the lower Diamantina about seventy years after he had last visited that area. Near Tuppana however the sandhills had been eroded and changed so much that even he very nearly got lost.

37 (continued)

Pirlakayanha is further east, most from that country
already gone *karla -nga thangka-ngura*, Marree,
creek-LOC sit -CONT,
Killalpannina.

38 *arni yuka-ka*

We go -PAST

we're not the last, last people my uncle

kaka Imatuwa, kaka arla anthunha, ukakunha
uncle *Imatuwa*, uncle true mine, his

ama kari nhata, nhata kari yuka-rna
mother they behind, behind they go -PRES

arni-nha wampa-rna-rnda, uta ipali
us -ACC chase -SP- PRES, already before

yuka-ka.

go -PAST.¹⁸

39 *arni yuka-rna kutha paka-rna -yangu iltiltji*
We go -PRES water dig -SP -PLUP soakage

anthunha anja -ru kutha ngunta-ka:
my father-ERG water show -PAST:

nhararda kutha iltiltjayi!! uta paka-lhuku!
Here water soakage!! Now dig -PURP!

40 *kathi pirda-lhuku yuka-ngura mudlu-nga*
meat kill -HIST go -CONT sandhill-LOC

mudluwaltu ngadla wadnangkani, kapiirri, kadni
rat-kangaroo many carpet-snake, goanna, frillneck

yadla pirda-yi -ngura
close kill -ACT-CONT

old men kill'm, mob old men, Riley's father,¹⁹

karna partjarna wapayi-ka kari anthunha mapu
man all finish -PAST they my mob

anthunha wathili mapu, partjarna wapayi-ka.
my own mob, all finish -PAST.

37 (continued)

Beelaka is further east (than Balcoora). Most of the people from that country had already gone. They were living by the Diamantina, at Marree and at Killalpannina.

38 We went on. We were not the last people, the last were (those with) my uncle, my proper uncle *Imatuwa*. He came back for his mother and those with her. They came behind, they were behind us. He was chasing people (out of the desert), he had already left before, but came back.¹⁸

39 We went digging a soakage for water, my father showed us.
'Here is soakage water!!
Now dig!'

40 They went to kill meat on the sandhill, they got rat-kangaroos (*Caloprymnus*) and many carpet snakes, goannas and frillneck lizards. They got them quite close by. A mob of old men killed them, Riley's father,¹⁹ and all those old men who are now dead, my mob, my own mob. They are all dead now.

¹⁸ Mick McLean recalled on another occasion how *Imatuwa* had left the desert earlier with a group of people from Beelaka, and how he returned to collect all his relatives.

¹⁹ Riley Naylor's father *Ngunili* was a ritual leader of the grass-seed history.

- 41 You know where you been
*pathara nhanhi-lhiku kadni ularaka-nganha*²⁰
 box-tree see -HIST frillneck History-from
kadnha -nga that's where my cousin *kumpira*
 mountain -LOC dead
Thirili
Thirili
 all come with my mob.
- 42 *kurda-yiwa-lhuku Makaru-thakanili*
 Camp -TR -HIST 'Fire by-striking' (Wild Dog Hole).
(Punarani -nga) pudluka wila-wila, manaputu.
 (Poonarunna-LOC) bullock multitude, don't know.
antili nhanhi-lhiku nhantu, pudluka.
 First time see -HIST horse, bullock.
- 43 *mikiri-nga malka thangka-ka rapiti: thalka,*
 Desert -LOC not sit -PAST rabbit:²¹ bilby,
mudhuwaltu, yadluru, parkaya, kadnungka
 rat-kangaroo, lesser bilby, bettong, hare wallby
njurdu thangka-ngura Pampilta -nga
 also sit -CONT Pompapillinna-LOC
kadnungka thangka-ngura mudlu -nga.
 hare wallaby sit -CONT sandhill -LOC.
- 44 *kari-ri nguni-ri anha damper tharni-lhiku,*
 They-ERG give -NAR me damper eat -PURP,
malka tharni-lhi, madla, pawa athu ngurka-yira
 not eat -HAB, bad, seed I know -PUNC
tharni-ra 'thu.
 eat -PUNC I.
- 41 You know the box trees
 you were looking at, by the
 stony hill belonging to the
 Frillneck Lizard History?²⁰
 That is where my cousin
Thirili died. He and all
 those (others now dead)
 came with my mob.
- 42 On our way we camped at
Makaru-thakanili 'Wild Dog
 Hole'. (Further on at Poona-
 runna) there was a great
 multitude of bullocks. They
 were new to me. That was
 the first time I ever saw a
 horse or a bullock.
- 43 There were no rabbits²¹ in
 in the desert: we had bilbies,
 rat-kangaroos, lesser bilbies,
 bettongs and hare-wallabies.
 At Lake Pompapillina too
 there were hare-wallabies on
 the sandhill.
- 44 They gave me damper to eat
 but I would not eat that
 stuff, it was no good. I
 only knew grass-seed flour
 and that is what I ate.

²⁰ The reference here is to an increase site for frillneck lizards and for witchetty grubs. Box-bark had been used in the ritual and we were looking at the trees from which bark had been stripped long ago. The site is in Arabana country near Mt Coppertop in the Peake and Denison Ranges.

²¹ The soaks in the Simpson desert are surrounded by large deposits of fragments of bones of animals, birds and lizards that had all been cooked and eaten there. The mammal remains were of bettongs and other small marsupials, there was no sign of rabbit remains. The only exception was at Murraburt, the westernmost soak, and we surmised that people must have revisited this soak, coming from Dalhousie at a later period. (Peter Clarke, MS).

LINGUISTIC EFFECTS OF THE MOVE FROM THE DESERT.

The people who lived in the Simpson Desert following the life-style described above by Mick McLean called themselves *Wangkangurru mikiri-nganha* 'Wangkangurru people from the soaks' (the name Wangkangurru is based on *wangka* 'speech', *ngurru* 'strong, hard'). They also called themselves *Wangkangurru Mungathirri-nganha* 'Wangkangurru from the high sand-hill country'. These terms were used to distinguish them from the *Wangkangurru karla-nganha*, the Wangkangurru from the Creek (i.e. the Diamantina and the Kallakoopah). The people 'from the Creek' also called themselves *Marlupapu-nganha* 'from the Marlupapu country', as well as *Wangka-tjaka* and *Wangka-tjari* 'little language'.

Wangkangurru people obviously had an advantage over some of the other groups in the northeast of South Australia: the Yawarawarka for instance were fenced out of their own lands, poisoned food was put out for them and they were hunted down. They had to seek refuge at the mission at Killalpannina (see Farwell 1950:160). Wangkangurru people left their country of their own volition, over a prolonged period, and the exodus described by Mick McLean was the second-last of what was presumably a number of similar events. Wangkangurru people, both 'from the Creek' and 'from the high sandhills' went to a number of different destinations as is evident from the testimony of the people themselves and from all the written sources, particularly Horne and Aiston (1924) and Basedow (MS). They went not only to the mission at Killalpannina but also to Birdsville, to the stations at Andrewilla, Alton Downs, Pandie Pandie, Mt Gason, and Mundowdna, to Marree, Finnis Springs, Anna Creek, Peake, Oodnadatta, Macumba and Dalhousie. The population became completely fragmented although to this day the descendants of Wangkangurru people are aware of their original unity.

The Wangkangurru 'from the high sandhills' were divided into a number of local groups but they spoke one language. This was still evident in the 1960s: the speech of the people born in the Simpson desert showed no more than the ordinary variation one finds between individuals. One or two younger persons who had been brought up by parents who both came from the desert, and people who spent their early years in a similar environment all spoke in the *mikiri* way, down to small details of intonation and emphasis. There are now only two people left, two sisters at Birdsville who speak what one might call the pure Simpson desert form of Wangkangurru. Other people of Wangkangurru descent at Birdsville were brought up among speakers of Yarluyandi, Mithaka and Ngurlupurlu. Their speech is still Wangkangurru, but with a few differences particularly in intonation and emphasis, some minor points of grammar and the use of particles (see Hercus MS). Their singing style is also different: Mick McLean was always intrigued by his friend and distant relative Johnnie Reese, who was born on Alton Downs, singing Wangkangurru songs 'other people's way'. Similarly the descendants of Wangkangurru people who were living far away to the west among speakers of the closely related Arabana language tended to have an Arabana accent and were influenced to varying degrees by Arabana grammar. Two people were said to be 'mixed up' and this indeed seemed to be the case. Another person spoke with a Diyari accent. In 1965 there remained only two Wangka-tjari speakers, whose ancestors had come from the Kallakoopah, and had belonged to the *Karla-nganha* or *Marlupapu-nganha* group. They had spent some time at Killalpannina and knew Diyari well but did not speak with a Diyari accent.

Anyone who has heard the people who were born in the Simpson desert cannot but have been impressed by their strong sense of unity, the sense of 'my own mob' which encompassed

the local groups using the different soaks. This unity was reflected in the language. But by now, over eighty years since the 'Wangkangurru of the high sandhills' left their homes in the Simpson Desert this exodus has had its full effect and there are almost as many variants of Wangkangurru as there are speakers. It seems inevitable that in years to come this fragmentation of the language will continue. Already now members of the younger generation, even siblings, vary considerably as to what and how much, sadly in fact if anything, they have learnt of the Wangkangurru language *mikiri-nganha* 'from the soaks', *Mungathirri-nganha* 'from the high sandhills'.

ORTHOGRAPHY

A practical orthography has been used in this paper.

Plosives have been written as unvoiced, i.e. *k*, *t*, *th*, *p*, except for the retroflex which has been written as *rd*, since it is always voiced in Wangkangurru.

The prestopped nasals and laterals (which are not phonemic) have been written as they are pronounced, as *dnh*, *dn*, *pm*, *dlh*, *dl*.

Retroflex consonants have been indicated by an *r*: *rd*, *rn*, *rl*.

Interdental consonants have been indicated by *h*: *dh*, *nh*, *lh*.

Palatal consonants have been indicated by *j*: *tj*, *nj*, *lj*.

In the case of prestopped consonants and homorganic consonant clusters, retroflex, dental and palatal consonants have been indicated only once, by *r*, *h*, and *j* respectively, *rnd*, not *rnrnd*; *dnh* not *dnhnh*; *ntj*, not *ntjtj*.

The three *r*-sounds of Wangkangurru are represented as follows:

r is a front flap

rr is a front trill

R is retroflex

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used for linguistic terms in the interlinear gloss:

ABL	Ablative case	HIST	historical past
ACC	accusative case	IMP	imperfective
ACT	active stem-forming suffix	LOC	locative case
ADV	adverbial suffix	NAR	narrative past
ALL	allative case	PAST	past tense
ANC	ancient past	PERF	perfect
CAUS	causative case	PLUP	pluperfect
CONT	continuous participle	POS	possessive suffix
CONT S	continuous stem-forming suffix	PRES	present tense
DIST	aspect showing distance in time or space	PUNC	punctiliar present
EMPH	emphatic clitic	PURP	purposive
ERG	ergative case	SP	speed form, indicating action undertaken before departing
EXCL	exclusive pronoun	TR	transitory aspect
HAB	habitual aspect		

LEAVING THE SIMPSON DESERT

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